

The Catholic Record

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the meaning of Christmas, even in the midst of war, the heavenly message has its full significance: On earth, peace to men of good-will.

THE PROPOSED PEACE CONFERENCE

"Blatant and arrogant" though it be in tone, the German Chancellor's peace speech cannot obscure the great outstanding fact that Germany and her Allies have made a definite and unconditional offer "to enter forthwith into peace negotiations. It is this great fact that now holds the undivided attention of the world. The boastful and menacing tone of speech and note savors something of puerility. It may have given momentary pleasure to their own people as for the moment it angered ours; but already both the one and the other will have forgotten all about the bravado in thinking of the possibility of just, honorable and permanent peace. The news reached most readers as a proposal by Germany to have peace on condition of the status quo ante bellum with the exception of an independent Poland. Considering the persistence of first impressions it may be well to state that no terms are proposed, no terms, whatever, even hinted at.

Press and people, perhaps quite naturally, were disposed not only to resent the insolent tone of the offer, but to scout the possibility of considering it, as peace in the midst of an inconclusive war must at best be but temporary. No one speaking with authority for any of the Allied nations, however, has thus lightly rejected the proposal, and it seems likely to lead to serious negotiations.

A subject that is engaging the attention and thought of everybody is "one" at any rate, the discussion of which will be interesting if not informative to our readers. It may have been an object, at first we were disposed to think it was the object of Germany to call attention to the impotence, discontent and agitation for peace amongst her own people and those of her allies by making an offer of peace which she hoped would be summarily rejected. Then convinced that their enemies were bent on nothing less than their destruction, there would be resolute unanimity to endure all things, to suffer all things, but at all costs to win the war which then without a shadow of a doubt would be for them a war for very existence. Moreover, in this frame of mind, those who have advocated ruthless and unrestrained submarine warfare would be likely to have their way.

That summary rejection of Germany's offer would play into the hands of the German militarists is clearly seen by the London Daily News: "There is doubtless a certain risk involved in entertaining proposals for negotiations at the present time, but there is no risk involved in a blunt refusal to even consider the possibility of negotiations? Can the allies view with entire indifference the quenching of the last spark of doubt among the Germans that their cause is one of just defense against outrageous aggression, and the establishment in unchallenged predominance in Germany of the brutal logic which made the war? Can they safely take the stand before neutrals convicted, though it be merely technically, of continuing wantonly a struggle which, as Chancellor von Bethmann-Hollweg truly says, threatens to destroy the material and intellectual progress of Europe?"

"It is clearly Germany's aim to place us exactly in that position. If she succeeds there is no doubt she would have done us a very great mischief."

Bonar-Law, in the House of Commons, in the absence of the new Prime Minister, outlined the position of the Entente allies by reiterating Ex Premier Asquith's dictum: "adequate reparation for the past and adequate security for the future."

The pronouncement was cheered in the House, and doubtless would be cheered in the country. Platitudes are popular, and vague pronouncements mean anything you please. But the Evening Star, having little patience with the evasive generalizations of adroit politicians, with characteristic English directness and common sense, asks what precisely is meant by reparation and security?

"We agree that the German overtures must not be dismissed as a mere trick or a trap. Let the people of Germany and her allies know that they are asked to give to this groaning Europe of ours. Reparation is a word that can be defined and security is a word that can be defined. Sometime or later these words must be defined. Why not face the music now?"

The Evening Standard calls for the definition of the Entente policy with

regard to Poland. Neither Germany alone nor Russia alone should settle the fate of Poland; the Poles are anxious that the case of Poland be treated as a European question.

This attitude of leading English papers indicates pretty clearly that, whether they come to successful issue or not, there will be a large and growing body of opinion in England that negotiations should be entered into and carried on until, at least, their futility is demonstrated.

We have been often told that there can be no permanent peace in Europe, no security for the world, until Prussian militarism is destroyed. We have heard this so often that it appears to have about it a definiteness and finality which on consideration it is seen to lack. It is generally taken to mean that absolute, final and crushing defeat for Germany, and that alone, will destroy Prussian militarism. Is there no question about this? Benedict XV. on the first anniversary of the War in his appeal for peace pointed out that "nations do not die; humbled and oppressed they chafe under the yoke imposed upon them, preparing a renewal of the combat, and passing down from generation to generation a mournful heritage of hatred and revenge."

Again militarism, as President Wilson pointed out, is a spirit Prussian militarism was animated by the lust of conquest, the inordinate ambition for world-dominion, and was kept alive by boundless confidence in the irresistible efficiency of their invincible war organization. The Allied nations have not, it is true, crushed Germany; but they have demonstrated the utter impossibility of her ever realizing her dreams of world-dominion. Never again will Germany have the same opportunity, never again will a discredited Prussian jingoism be able to fool the German peoples. If Germany will now come to terms satisfactory to the Allies, if she is willing to make adequate reparation for the past and give adequate security for the future why should the war go on? We talk of a war of attrition. Germany alone has 600,000 young men arriving at military age every year. What a sickening prospect of carnage does victory by attrition hold out; for be it remembered that the losses on both sides will be about equal. The Somme offensive was a marvel in a marvellous war; but it cost 500,000 British casualties, 100,000 French we don't know, and the gain was 100 square miles of the 20,000 square miles of French territory held by the Germans.

The German note to the Vatican states "that Germany is willing to give peace to the world by setting before the whole world the question whether or not it is possible to find a basis for an understanding."

Just what may be meant by this no one can yet say; but assuming Germany's sincerity it would appear that in some way the whole civilized world, neutral and belligerent, may have a voice in bringing about peace, and in determining what guarantees are adequate to make that peace permanent.

If, as has been intimated in well-informed quarters, the death of the aged Francis Joseph and the accession of the young Emperor Charles means a greater measure of independence for Austria-Hungary, this may contribute largely to the success of peace negotiations.

In any case we may hope and pray that a war-weary world is on the threshold of a just, honorable and lasting peace.

Since the above was written, a press despatch announces that the Russian Duma has unanimously rejected Germany's peace offer. It would be strange if Russia should pronounce on such a matter without consulting her allies. And yet Russia's momentous announcement concerning Constantinople and the Straits has received no public confirmation in London, Paris or Rome.

A WORTHY CHRISTMAS CHARITY

The great fire in Northern Ontario last summer stripped many people of everything they possessed. A correspondent tells the hardships endured by Catholics in the burned district; and with the approval of the pastor, Rev. Father Pelletier, asks for clothing, especially clothing for women and children, who, ill-clad, are suffering from the intense cold of the northern winter. We bespeak for the unfortunate sufferers the active sympathy of Catholics and individuals. Many

we are sure, will consider it a privilege as well as a duty to give in honor of the Christ-child and His Blessed Mother something to these needy mothers and children.

Clothing may be sent to Mrs. J. H. Cole, Matheson Station, who will see to its distribution where needed most.

NATIONAL SERVICE

Whatever may be the outcome of the peace overtures now being made there can be no slackening of the efforts to carry on worthily our part in the War if the struggle for liberty must go on.

The Government of Canada desires during the first week of January, 1917, to secure an inventory of every male between the ages of sixteen and sixty-five residing in Canada. The cards with the questions eliciting the information required by the Government are in the hands of all Postmasters for distribution.

There should be cheerful and ready response to the Government's request for this information. It does not mean conscription or forced service of any kind. But it is of great utility, indeed of prime necessity, that the authorities should have the information sought through these cards.

The Government, of course, might impose a penalty for neglect, or incur the expense of ascertaining the information by sending an agent to each home. Neither course will be necessary if Canadians at home are akin to those who are writing the name of Canada into history abroad.

An indication of the purpose and meaning of the cards may be gathered from the last question: "Are you willing, if your railway fare is paid, to leave where you now live, and go to some other place in Canada to do such work?"

The Government must know the available man-power of the Dominion and how it may best be used if it is to organize the country's resources for the supreme effort in the great struggle in which we are now engaged.

THE POPE AND PEACE

Following are the concluding paragraphs of the German note to Cardinal Gasparri, Papal Secretary of State:

"Since the first day of the Pontifical reign His Holiness the Pope has unwaveringly demonstrated, in the most generous fashion, his solicitude for the innumerable victims of this war. He has alleviated the sufferings and ameliorated the fate of thousands of men injured by this catastrophe. Inspired by the exalted ideas of his ministry, His Holiness has seized every opportunity in the interests of humanity to end so sanguinary a war."

The Imperial Government is firmly confident that the initiative of the four powers will find friendly welcome on the part of His Holiness, and that the work of peace can count upon the precious support of the Holy See."

A despatch to-day says that in response to the peace note of the Central powers to the Vatican the Pope in a few days will issue a Christmas proclamation to all the belligerents. There can be no doubt in the world that the Holy Father's voice will be raised in an appeal for peace. On the occasion of the first anniversary of the Declaration of War he said:

"In the name of God, in the name of the heavenly Father and Lord by the Blessed Blood of Christ, the price of man's redemption, we conjure you whom divine Providence has placed over the nations at war, to put an end at last to this horrible slaughter which for a whole year has dishonored Europe. It is the blood of brothers that is being poured out on land and sea."

On heedless ears fell the reminder of that sublime Christian truth that we are all brothers in Christ. Even yet in the eyes of some it is almost treason to hope that any way out may be found other than the relentless prosecution of savage war until one side or the other is crushed utterly.

"Why not (said the Pope to the rulers of the contending nations) from this moment weigh with serene mind the rights and lawful aspirations of the peoples? Why not initiate with a good will an exchange of views, directly or indirectly, with the object of holding in due account within the limits of possibility, those rights, and aspirations, and thus succeed in putting an end to the monstrous struggle, as has been done in other and similar circumstances? Blessed be he who will first raise the olive-branch, and hold out his right hand to the enemy with reasonable terms of peace. The equilibrium of the world, and the prosperity and assured tranquillity of nations, rest upon mutual benevolence and respect for the rights and dignity of others, much more than upon hosts of armed men and the ring of powerful fortresses."

There is then no doubt that the Holy Father's appeal will be to the Christian conscience of men who acknowledge a common Redeemer, the same God, our Father and Judge, to exhaust every resource of Christian civilization in order to put an end to the savagery of a protracted and ghastly war of attrition. Surely civilization cannot be so bankrupt in resources as to be unable with universal good-will and cooperation to find an alternative.

THE CRIB

A writer in America dealing with the subject of Santa Claus, discusses the advisability of perpetuating a myth when we have "The Word made Flesh" as the central figure of the great festival. "Childish fancy," says he, "has been guided over the empyrean course of the reindeer and sleigh, and into the mystical realms of toyland. Our boys and girls have been shown—well everything!—everything!—but the stable at Bethlehem, the Virgin and the Child." While it is not our purpose to offer any suggestions on this subject, we might mention in passing that we know a lot of little boys and girls who would be sorely disappointed if the venerable, jolly, old gentleman did not appear at a certain store window, or if he did not arrive at the parish hall with his burden of good things during the Christmas season. We must remember that little tots are impressed by material things that appeal to their senses and especially to their appetites. It is fitting, therefore, that Santa Claus should be lavish with his gifts, so as to make the day a memorable one for the children. It would be a great mistake, however, if the whole attention of the child were engrossed in those material things, to the exclusion of the great central event, which gives the feast its spiritual significance. Let us have our Santa Claus if we will, but by all means let us have the crib.

One of the most beautiful passages in "My New Catechism" is the description of the Christmas crib: "There, under a rough, rustic roof of pines and shingles, was the Bethlehem of our imaginations in miniature. There was the gentle Joseph, with a reverent, wondering look on his worn features; and there the conscious, self-possessed, but adoring expression on the sweet face of the Child-Mother; and there the helpless form and pleading hands of Him whose omnipotence stretches through infinity, and in whose fingers colossal suns and their systems are but the playthings of this moment in His eternal existence, which we call Time. Three shepherds stood around, dazed at some sudden light that shone from the face of the Infant; one, a boy, leaned forward as if to raise in his arms that sweet, helpless Babe; his hands were stretched toward the manger, and a string held the broad hat that fell between his shoulders. And aloft an angel held in his hand a starry scroll, on which was inscribed "Gloria in excelsis Deo." The fervid Celtic imagination translated these terracotta figures into living and breathing personalities. It was as if God had carried them back over the gulf of nineteen centuries, and brought them to the stable door of Bethlehem that ever memorable night. I think it is the realization of the Incarnation that constitutes the distinguishing feature of Catholicity. It is the Sacred Humanity of our Lord that brings Him so high to us, and makes us so familiar with Him; that makes the Blessed Eucharist a necessity, and makes the hierarchy of Bethlehem, Jerusalem, and Calvary so beloved—beloved above all by the poor, and the humble, and the lowly." Each of us realizes how deep and lasting an impression was made upon his mind by the crib before which, as a little child, he knelt in his parish church. He may since have seen more elaborate ones, he may understand now more of the mystery of the Incarnation as a theological truth; but it was as he listened for the first time to the story of the coming of the Christ-Child, and as he knelt in wondering awe before the rustic manger, that the mysteries that surround it, mysteries of poverty, humility, self-sacrifice and love were engraved on the virgin tablets of his memory, never to be effaced, but to shine out even through the obscuring impressions of subsequent sin and worldliness.

Teaching truth by signs and ceremonies is only a little less important than teaching it by the written or the spoken word. Both should go

hand in hand to produce true religious education in the child. Apropos of this, one of the most touching sermons it has been our pleasure to listen to was the telling, in the admirable verses written by Grace Keon, of the coming of the Christ-Child, by a number of little boys and girls ranged in a semicircle before the crib. In some Catholic countries of the old world the Catechism is neglected, often with serious danger to the faith, especially of emigrants; but it has sometimes occurred to us that we do not appeal as much as we should to the senses and to the emotions. We consider the child well fortified for the battle of life when it knows its "Butler" from cover to cover, forgetful it has other faculties besides the intelligence which also aid in preserving the sacred deposit of faith. The Church has decreed that everything about the altar should speak to us of Calvary, so that in imagination we might kneel at the foot of the cross. It is the same motive that prompts the placing of the crib in our churches on Christmas night.

But there are cribs and cribs, varying in size and magnificence from the little rustic manger with the single figure of the Child cradled on a pallet of straw, to the elaborate panorama of pastoral scenes and Oriental splendor. The latter often fail in their purpose and become for the children, old and young, more a subject of distraction than an object of devotion. The black man from Nubia, the cute little donkey that leads the camel, and the funny-looking sheep engross more of their attention, we fear, than the Mother and Child. Then again the lesson of poverty and self-sacrifice is not taught; for the impression is left that our Lord, who is often represented by an effeminate-looking and expressionless doll, was born in a gorgeous palace in the midst of wealth and luxury. If less attention were given to the setting, or at least better taste displayed in it, and more art employed in perfecting the figures of the central group, the object would be more surely attained. The ideal crib is the one that conveys to the senses that combination of simplicity and poverty, heavenly love and beauty that is so well expressed in the word-picture of St. Luke.

THE GLEANER.

NOTES AND COMMENTS

IN HIS address to the St. Andrew's Society at Toronto Rev. Dr. R. Bruce Taylor, of Montreal, said: "In England the Reformation was led by the monarchy, by King Henry VIII, who was inspired by no religious motive. In Scotland it was led by John Knox, a man on fire for God. With the one there was compromise, with the other none. In Scotland the Reformation had come from the common people; it had raised them from the status of serfs to independent thinking people."

And again: "For over three hundred years Scotland has been a democratic country, not in a narrow political sense, for its men have been encouraged to think for themselves and bow the knee to no self-constituted authority." This is the traditional St. Andrew's Day version of the affair; let us see how it is regarded by independent historians.

IN REGARD to Knox and his admirers we have seen how effectively deep-rooted religious prejudice can distort the vision of even "thinkers," and we have also seen by what unlovely methods the great emancipation of which Dr. Taylor boasts was accomplished. If we are to believe these panegyrics of the Reformation it was the ushering in of a golden age, in which men cast off completely the grave clothes of iniquity and slavery and entered into the inheritance of the saints and the glorious liberty of the children of God. Such indeed is the power of this obsession, that under its influence men of intelligence and education can shut their eyes to the indubitable facts of history, as chronicled even by writers of their own school, and by some process of intellectual conjuring unrevealed to the outside world, persuade themselves that the black is white; that the sun rises where it sets; or that virtue stalks abroad in the habiliments of the miscreant.

IN VIEW of this it becomes important to enquire what Knox himself thought of the results of his life's work in Scotland. Towards the end of his tempestuous career he was constrained to admit that "only the outside of the plaster had been made

clean;" that, as Andrew Lang has paraphrased him, "the new creed had failed in its essential purpose—the introduction of the reign of righteousness." "Nothing less righteous," continues Lang, "could possibly be found than the condition of Scotland after the Reformation, and men and women were not purer than before it." And the General Assembly of 1587, fifteen years only after the death of Knox, had to lament "the great dissoluteness of life and manners, with the ugly heaps of all kinds of sins lying in every nook and corner of the land."

"FOR IN what part of this land is there," continues this instructive delirium, "that is not with a spait (spate—inundation, overflow) overwhelmed with abusing the holy name of God, with swearing, perjuries and lies, profaning of the Sabbath Day with mercats (revellies), gluttonies, drunkenness (sic), fighting, playing, dancing, etc., with rebelling against magistrates and laws of the country, with incest, fornication, adulteries, sacrilege, theft and oppression, with false witness, and, finally, with all kinds of impiety and wrong." Is this the sort of new life which Dr. Bruce Taylor had in mind when he glorified Knox as the "creator of the common people in religious, political and social life, as the discoverer of a new creed, and the founder of a new vital power?"

NOR IS THE General Assembly of 1687 the only witness as to the depravity of post-Reformaton Scotland. Some apologists for the Kirk, confronted with the necessity of explaining away the morally chaotic state of the first years of the "reformed" regime, have had the unkindness to charge it all to the influence of the old Church which, they hypothesize, had not altogether spent itself. But, did matters improve as time went on? We have seen what Prof. York Powell and the Saturday Review have to say of the seventeenth century, but they, it may be objected, are prejudiced and not contemporary witnesses. But there are contemporary witnesses in abundance at hand. John Lamont of Newton, a devout adherent of the Kirk, whose Diary, covering the years 1649-1671, has been published, asserts that the preachers of his time only plunged the people into the extreme of vice, impurity and degradation. And George Nichol, of about the same period, who is described as "a man of extensive knowledge," asserts that "as for every sort of uncleanness and filthiness they did never more abound in Scotland than at this period." "Under heaven," he continues, "there was not greater falsehood, oppression, division, hatred, pride, malice and envy than was at this time, and divers and sundry years before. So that, instead of one religion, Scotland at this time had many, and confusion reigned." Such was the compensation offered to the people of Scotland, after a hundred years of dominant Presbyterianism, in exchange for the one religion of their fathers.

BUT IF Scotland paid the penalty in the degradation of morals for the "glorious emancipation of the Reformation," she at least, asserts Rev. Dr. Taylor, became enlightened and free. "Men were encouraged to think for themselves and to bow the knee to no self-constituted authority." We can imagine we hear the loud and prolonged applause which this sally brought forth. "Ever since the Reformation," the orator went on, "this power and individuality of the common people has persisted in Scotland, and this more than anything else explains the distinctiveness of the Scottish people"—a proud boast, if it could be maintained and went hand in hand with fidelity to the rule of conscience!

BUT, UNHAPPILY, contemporary historians and modern investigators draw a rather less roseate picture. "The old Scots Calvinism," says the writer in the Saturday Review whom we have before quoted, "was, if anything, more incompatible with civilized government than was even the French under Calvin himself. The claims put forward on behalf of the Kirk by extreme preachers like Andrew Melville went far beyond anything that the most extreme Ultramontane had ever demanded for Church against State. Not only did this fanaticism assert that it was the right of the Kirk to dictate its duty to the civil power; it also laid down and acted on the principle that every church or congregation was a court of religion and morality in which the

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