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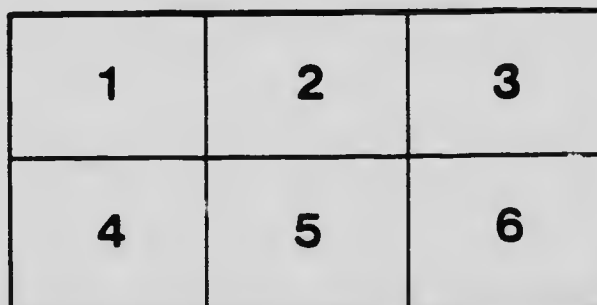
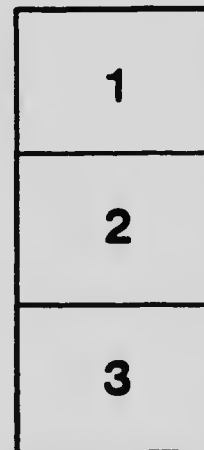
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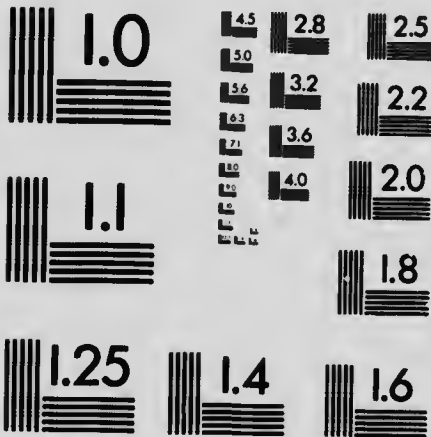
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THE CHRISTIAN ATTITUDE  
TO WAR

BY

A. L. SMITH

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## THE CHRISTIAN ATTITUDE TO WAR

A YOUNG officer who was to give an address to his men on Christmas Eve, and was beginning on a familiar note, 'The greatest event in human history,' was struck by the thought that there might be a doubt whether this meant the War or the birth of Christ, and was led to reflect on the poignant contrast thus implied and the disappointment at such an outcome of nineteen centuries since the advent of the Prince of Peace. Such disappointment shows that we had not realized how little Christianity had taken hold either of the relations between a State and its citizens or of the international relations between States, in comparison with the hold it has taken of the individual conscience and the relations of individual men to each other. The question then arises whether there is any inherent impossibility in the task, however difficult, of Christianizing these wider relationships. This question comprises in itself a number of subordinate questions :

1. What is the relation of Christianity to War ?
2. Does War preclude Christian feeling ?
3. What is the relation of Christianity to Nationality ?
4. Can Christianity be brought into International relations ?
5. What is the duty of national defence ?

### 1. THE RELATION OF CHRISTIANITY TO WAR

'Resist not evil.' There have been, in all Christian times, some who make this text contain the whole duty of a Christian towards war. 'War is organized murder.'

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But the general sense of mankind has decided that things are not so simple as this, and Christian duty not so one-sided. Even the texts make it possible to present the other view. The essential elements of Christianity, as it appears to intelligent non-Christian races, are that it inculcates the sacrifice of everything in a righteous cause, and that its Founder was a man who gave his life for other men; and are not these the two facts which are just the redeeming side of war? It was a great general (Sherman) who said, 'War is Hell,' but a still greater (Moltke) who said, 'War is the most devilish but also the most heroic of human things.' Do not our highest and deepest feelings forbid us to accept 'Peace at any price' as a maxim? Do we not feel already at work among us all the ennobling and the purifying influence of this spirit of sacrifice? Do we not see also how it has brought out in the whole nation the sense of brotherhood, how one month brought us nearer to acting as a true Commonwealth than sixty years preceding? And if we look beyond our shores, could it be a possible conception of Christian duty to look on impassively at the sufferings of Belgium? Would that be loving our neighbours? No, not so simple is the great problem, how to bring both aspects of the Christian spirit to bear upon the facts of modern life; how to interpret the duty of unselfishness without deserting the duty to the oppressed.

It may be that individuals and nations too will find it is not so much their deeds in the heat of war by which they will be judged, as their conduct in cold blood during the long years of peace. Much that goes on in the ordinary life of modern societies is uglier, more fundamentally evil, more anti-Christian than even the cruelty, waste and idiotic folly of war. And it is.



a well-known experience that supreme examples of beauty and sweetness of character and the deepest religious sense have been found among soldiers and sailors.

If we are to take the New Testament literally, we cannot say that in it we find anywhere an express prohibition of war, but what we do find absolute and express, is denunciation of wealth. Of all Dante's tremendous verdicts, that which sounds most the ring of utter scorn is passed on him *che fece per villà lo gran rifiuto*, the young man who went away sorrowful for he had great possessions. Is it not true that the soul of modern societies is exposed to a more constant, a more deadly corruption from the pursuit of wealth than the pursuit of war? Now, it is significant that the first obvious and immediate effect of this war is the total annihilation of at least £5,000,000,000 of capital in one year. This, by itself, makes the war introduce a new economic era. A little thinking will show that this means also a new era in our political and social life. But, a new spiritual era? Yes, this too must be the outcome, in greater or less measure, according to our greater or less sincerity and clear-sightedness. A great national war means the generating and the liberation of a mighty spiritual force. It was so in the Civil War of the seventeenth century, and in our war against Napoleon; but we let the former run to waste in the orgies of the Restoration, and the latter in the orgies of expanding 'Manchesterism'. Even the recent South African War produced a passing phase of humility, of seriousness, of zeal for national amendment; a passing phase, because the politicians soon let it evaporate. But if only we use aright the mighty moral and spiritual force which is now being generated, the war will have

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been worth its cost, not only its cost in millions of pounds, but its cost in killed and wounded, in widowed and orphaned and childless.

### 2. CHRISTIAN FEELING IN WAR

But if war is to be admitted on any terms into Christian ethics, those terms must be high indeed. To love all, to pray for our enemies, these are Christian duties without any doubt. They are hard sayings, but not too hard for human nature even now. Most of us have known soldiers and sailors capable of rising to this noble height; and that doctors and nurses rise to it, goes without saying. Indeed, it is perhaps we who stay at home that are more in danger of being carried away. It is not those who have been at the front who have talked of 'reprisals'; and the Belgian refugees regard the very word with horror. At present we have been saved from falling into that insanity of hatred which has taken possession of men in Germany whom the whole world regarded as religious leaders. But what has saved us? Not a religious motive, not even a mental effort to enter into the German point of view; but probably our dislike of what is undignified or ridiculous. The result is, we rate the manifestation too lightly; we do not realize that 'every man, woman, and child in Germany regards England as the deliberate, jealous, hypocritical enemy, the traitor to kinship'. This is an appalling atmosphere in which to have to plant some seed of better relations for the future, to plant a concert of Europe. Two questions arise:

(i) What can we do to dispel it? After we have taken adequate security against Prussian militarism, some manifestation of good feeling, even generosity

after victory, would be the only thing that might be of some avail.

(ii) When we see a whole nation thus capable of being led astray, in the teeth of what seem to us glaring facts, a whole nation hypnotizing itself into a set of *idola gentis*, national illusions, an uncomfortable doubt comes over us in our insular complacency—can ours be the only people which has no such obsessions or illusions? What of our national habit of making the best of both worlds, by keeping our religion and our daily practice in two watertight compartments? What of the social evils we find it convenient practically to ignore? It is a wholesome corrective for once to see ourselves as others, even Germans, see us.

Does this mean we follow Nietzsche, Treitschke, Bernhardt, in glorifying war? God forbid! When Nietzsche says, 'War has achieved more than was ever achieved by love of one's neighbour,' that is as false an historical proposition as was ever put forth. When Treitschke says, 'War is of God, it is God's dreadful medicine,' the same can be said of cholera, but we do not therefore advocate cholera. When Bernhardt quotes the text, 'I come not to bring peace but a sword,' we know he is making a perversion of its sense; when he calls war 'a biological necessity' we know he misinterprets Darwin; when he says it is 'a survival of the fittest' we know this is false, both of nations and of individuals. In war, as in currency, 'bad money drives out good,' too often. What ultimate theory all this leads to is seen in the ravings about displacing Christ by Odin; what it comes to in practice is seen in this war, which in savagery has gone back three centuries to the Thirty Years' War, and in deliberate terrorism of non-combatants has gone back to pre-Christian times. It is true that even here there is

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heroism of men singing the 'Wacht am Rhein' as they come to certain death in the trenches or refuse to surrender on the sinking *Gneisenau*. But that is because in human affairs you cannot make men non-human, you cannot eliminate the possibility of the heroic element, the Divine. To attempt to combine this with the devilish principle of 'ruthlessness' is an attempt that must defeat itself.

### 3. CHRISTIANITY IN RELATION TO NATIONALITY

Christian duty must sometimes seem to clash with civic duty. 'The powers that be are ordained of God,' but 'obey God rather than man.' This collision of duties is an old problem. It is one that can never be brushed aside; and that is a sound instinct which leads us to pay honest respect to the conscientious objector, though in the anarchical individualism which the eighteenth century made characteristic of England, and which the economists elevated into 'the gospel of self-interest'—truly the strangest form in which a gospel was ever put—we have almost encouraged and invited objectors, whether against vaccination, or education, or sanitation, or taxation. But on the Christian plane itself, as the family is a higher ideal than the individual, so the community is higher than the family.

On the other hand, while it is true that Christianity is a world-force and transcends mere national boundaries, yet that cannot be a true conception of it which would make it in any sense anti-national. It cannot be 'against the State' or 'against nationality' any more than it can be against trade, or art, or learning. Indeed, the development of nationality is itself, the best part of it, a spiritual development; more and more the

higher things in life come to rest on a purified national consciousness ; the history of the unification of Italy of the resurrection of Poland, shows the regenerating power of this spiritual basis in such movements. Is there not a justification and a fundamental reasonableness in the existence of national Churches ? We must beware of letting this great hope of future advance, the spirit of Nationality, become discredited by the aspect it has taken in Germany. Throw aside the sham philosophy and the sham history which have been used to clothe it there, and look at the finer side of their ideal, the wonderful national unity, the single-minded efficiency, the self-sacrificing discipline. Was there unity in England till a threat at our national existence frightened us into it ? Was there efficiency ? Has there ever been discipline ?

#### 4. CHRISTIANITY AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

‘The Christian duty of sacrifice for something higher does not exist for the State, for there is nothing higher than the State.’ ‘Morality has no place in the relations of State to State.’ To this we answer, the common interest of humanity is higher. Christian duty is not a sacrifice, a loss, properly regarded, but a subordination of what is less worth to what is most worth ; ‘What shall it profit a man to gain the whole world and lose his own soul ?’ would apply still more to the soul of a nation. Morality, on the lowest view, has come into being among men because it paid. More slowly between States, because between them there are more complex conditions, it has come into being in the form of International Law ; why ? because it pays. The nation that made indiscriminate war on non-combatants and killed all

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wounded would lose more thereby than any possible military or political gain, as is being rapidly demonstrated in this war. Mankind has come to a general consensus in favour of limiting military destruction and of setting up military hospitals and the Red Cross, more perhaps from a sense of expediency than from Christian charity; but the two motives at any rate agree, as they would always do, if our sight was clear. To the phrase, 'In war nothing is so imbecile as moderation,' the answer is easy; that nothing is so imbecile as immoderateness; extremes are always suicidal, even in war. Else why not poison the wells by cholera germs, and kill all the women under fifty? An instinct tells us this would be 'bad business'; and this instinct revolts against the bomb-dropper who kills a child in an unfortified place being acclaimed as a hero.

In truth, this stuff is only Machiavelli at second-hand; if Machiavelli, in the favourable atmosphere of sixteenth-century Italy, failed to make it acceptable or even logically watertight, Treitschke is not going to carry the twentieth century with such a doctrine. Even Treitschke does not dare to be as consistent and thorough as the Florentine; 'raze conquered places,' 'do not wound but slay outright,' 'break faith wherever expedient,' 'use religion as a cloak,'—he almost but not quite reaches these heights. Not that Machiavelli was himself an irreligious man; he was a good husband and father, a conscientious Catholic; only he advises you to keep your conscience at home wrapped in a napkin. He tried to set up an abstract non-moral science of politics, as later writers tried to set up an abstract non-moral science of economics. The absolutely non-moral economic man is unreal enough and has done harm enough to be a warning against a similar figment

in the more complex political sphere. In that sphere religion is an inseparable constituent. The fact is that Christianity has made it impossible for the world to acquiesce in war carried on as Julius Caesar made war in Gaul. It has not yet made men act as brothers, but it has at least made them conscious of their kinship and of mutual obligations which are no longer confined within State boundaries. Either the moral law is universal, as Dr. Cairns says, or there is none at all. We owe justice, mercy and truth to all men everywhere, or we do not owe them to any man anywhere, not even to our own fellow countrymen. If a nation acts with violence and deceit towards other nations, the contagion will spread through all its own people. German writers have proposed the repudiation of the German national debt. Apart from the effect on German credit outside, what would be the effect of such a measure on financial morality inside Germany ?

It is curious to see that the very writers who would have the State independent of all law, morality and religion, yet illogically apply these standards in condemning other nations as robber-States, morally decadent hypocrites. The theory does not really satisfy its own exponents. They cannot make it the basis of an appeal against others ; even their own sense of justice feels the theory is inadequate.

We may take it, then, that instead of sweeping away all rules of international law, this war must tend to strengthen them. Some of the Hague Conventions will be reaffirmed under a tremendous double sanction, that is, the unanimous verdict of the civilized world, and the penalty of failure on those who violated them. It is manifest, for example, that the rules against mines in the open sea, and the bombardment of unfortified

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places, as well as those which affirm the trading rights of neutrals, must and will receive clearer definition and more emphatic enunciation. 'Must and will,' because ultimately the only alternative to rights between nations is a condition of rightlessness, that is international anarchy, and this would bring the modern financial and industrial system to a standstill. International finance may be one of the root causes of modern war, but it cannot put up with a chronic state of war, and that a war without limitations. Two new factors which have come into this war, aerial battle and aerial traffic, of themselves demand and ensure a great future development of international law, which began in the controversy over navigation (*Mare Liberum*) and is now facing the greater problem of the air. Again, the new form which a Concert of Europe must henceforth take will evidently have to provide something other than a rigid maintenance of the European *status quo* by a Balance of Power expected to act as a sort of automatic stabilizer. Europe will have to provide for the expansion of nationalities, for the readjustment from time to time of political boundaries on living lines. History is at last enforcing heed to its warnings, vainly repeated through the nineteenth century in the explosions required to make room for the rising spirit of nationality, Belgian, Dutch, Greek, Italian, German. There still remain the potentia' volcanoes of Alsace, Poland, Croatia, Roumania. This war will discredit the policy of preventing explosions by sitting on the safety valve. Another problem which the civilized peoples can no longer leave to be settled by scramble, is the problem of dealing with the undeveloped territories of the world and the yet unexploited races. Already the division of Africa has had to be done by concert. There will have



to be agreement and concert over Mesopotamia, Persia, the rest of Africa, and other lands. The mere fact of such concert will introduce more humanity and justice into future relations. The future would be a very different story from the past. A Chinese student said if the West wants China to listen to Christianity, it must begin by showing it wishes to make amends. It may well be that the future of Christianity as a world-force will turn on our conduct to China.

#### 5. CHRISTIANITY AND NATIONAL DEFENCE

We must not expect an era of disarmament to begin at once on the signing of Peace. German writers have said they would begin at once to build up their army as after Jena. Other nations cannot afford to take the chance of this. Our own people have had a tremendous lesson on unpreparedness and a very narrow escape. Whilst taking pride in the responsiveness of our voluntary system and the fine quality of the men it supplies, it is probable that the nation, though still refusing the German or French form of conscription, will agree now to the universal training which Lord Roberts spent the last ten years of his life in preaching. Would such a universal obligation make for militarism? It does not in Switzerland. And there are higher grounds on which it might even be welcomed. (1) It would be putting national defence on the sound basis of national duty. It would guard us from a danger of the modern State, which was perhaps the chief cause of the decadence of ancient Rome, the dereliction by the individual of his duties of active citizenship. A prosperous society getting all its fighting done for it by professionals is in a soul-destroying condition. 'He was right who said Italy was scourged for her sins, but he should have said the sins were the

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neglect of citizens' military duty and the reliance on mercenaries.' Think what took place in English society of the eighteenth century when the atrocious penal code was left to professionals, and boys of 12 and 13 were hanged in weekly batches. (2) The best advocate of universal training was the great Socialist leader, Jaurès. It will, he argues, give to Democracy, which always of itself inclines to peace, the power of ensuring peace; and meantime it supplies an invaluable factor in education. (3) When we get together the youth of the whole country, with no class exemptions, and can subject them to this potent educational discipline during the most plastic years of life, it will be our own fault if they are not turned out better workers, better citizens, and even better Christians.

It is certain that if we are to effect anything we must not be too unhopeful. For we know this may well be the dawn of a new era. Already there are signs of light in the sky. That great movement, the Student Christian Federation, is itself a wonderful thing, to us of an older generation incredible if we had not seen it. So, too, is the union of the missionary enterprise of the whole world in one great forward advance. In fact, to a student of history there is more reality now in the conception of Christendom, the intellectual and moral community of all Christian men and women, than has been the case since the age of the Crusades.

Or, if we look at the world of Labour, nothing is more significant than the premonitions of change in its attitude to the fundamentals of religion. The very cry so often heard, 'If that is Christianity, then I am not a Christian,' is itself the greatest tribute to Christianity as an ideal standard. Again, capitalism is now far more receptive than ever before to such new ideas as that there

is a duty incumbent on the employer, and that duty may help rather than hinder dividends.

Or if we look still further afield, a higher conception of Nationality is making itself felt, as when the German claim to world supremacy, preposterous as it seems, does at least recognize that such a claim can only be based on a spiritual superiority. Even Internationalism, disappointed as we may be that it could not prevent this war, is all the time coming in like a tide, irresistibly and by many channels ; finance, commerce and industry, law, learning and science, social movements, philanthropy, morality and religion, are all assuming a certain world-character. Any one who is inclined to pessimism should be set to study the condition of Europe in 1814.

Most English people, and especially young English people, soon tire of theorizing, and want 'practical' proposals. They ask, 'Well, what are you going to do about it?' The following are some conclusions which may be suggested :

(1) It is chimerical to expect, and therefore unpractical to preach, a general or even a considerable disarmament in Europe immediately after the war. In our country it is likely to lead to a general agreement in favour of universal military training. Rightly handled, such training may be an instrument of good, and on the highest grounds it ought to be welcomed. The idea that Christian principles mean absolute non-resistance is one not very widely held, and is felt by the ordinary layman to run counter to some of his best instincts of helping against oppression and of wagering life for an ideal.

(2) We need not be afraid of meeting discussion on the ordinary economic and social ground. Christianity, though it is something more, is also certainly nothing less than good sense. We ought to be prepared to

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produce the evidence that it 'pays' to be just, honest, charitable, and even self-sacrificing. It has 'paid' us well in our Empire. Mr. Norman Angell's argument that war never pays, one-sided as the argument is, has been more widely read than if it had been a volume of sermons expounding the sinfulness of war. The moral seems to be that persons conscious of being well-meaning should supplement that quality by some knowledge of social and economic facts. We may feel quite satisfied that some German teaching is bad ethics; but we are none the worse off for being able to prove it to be also bad history and bad economics.

(3) The time has come to meet the old, narrow, exploded form of individualism in English thought by definitely developing that other aspect of life which is conveyed in the words Co-operation, Community, Corporateness. Our literature, our politics, our society, one might say our religion itself, is saturated with the conception of the 'individual'; in spite of the fact that, literally, there is no such thing among human beings as an individual; and that even if there were, it would still be more intelligent and profitable to regard him in his true character of a member of a community. While scholars have been working out the importance of fellowship, corporateness, as the very life and soul of the Teutonic races, educationists have been setting up primary and secondary schools, training-institutions and new universities, in which this essential thing has been wholly neglected. Here is a field of work for men who have been at a Public School or a College.

(4) A similar neglect or as large a scale has been going on in regard to 'the working classes'. In that region there lay all the time unregarded a splendid soil for education of the best kind, that is where the students

work not to make a career but for 'love', where they do not compete with each other but work as a group together, where they answer to that test of the true student, 'gladly would he learn and gladly teach.' It was lucky for this country that the working-men last August were more clear-sighted as well as more public-spirited than their own leaders ; but had they refused to support the war, it would have been a just retribution on the politicians and the capitalists who had neglected first to educate the masses for citizenship, and then to assist them to educate themselves. Here again is a broad field for University men to work in. If we want more Christianity in national politics, we must get the masses of the nation taught politics on a Christian basis.

(5) But suppose we had secured a more definite acceptance of Christian principles both in the Student world and in the Labour world, can anything corresponding be aimed at for the Business world ? Well, many individual business men have been and are not unworthy to be called real Christians. Moreover, it is certain that with the transformation of all business concerns into joint stock companies, the soulless body corporate must have a soul grafted into it somehow, by law if not by gospel, or else Capitalism itself will go down in a great social revolt. And, most of all, if we eliminate Christian principle from that which is six-sevenths of the life of a modern community, if we keep it as it were for use on Sundays alone, we have no right to be shocked at proposals for elimination of Christian principle from war and international relations. Christianity, like its own great virtue Charity, begins at home ; and if we are hoping to christianize the Hague Conference, we must go to it with rather cleaner hands. The business world, then, offers another fair field of work.

## 18 THE CHRISTIAN ATTITUDE TO WAR

(6) Suppose Christianity had made its way into the business sphere and the sphere of internal politics, and was essaying to enter the international sphere. It must do so by agreement on that part of Christian doctrine which is common ground between all Christians, and which may perhaps be described as the Gospel of St. Mark plus the Sermon on the Mount. We certainly cannot defeat *Deutschtum*, which has become a gospel unto itself, by insisting too much on a narrow Anglicanism; but this intolerant insistence on certain sharply defined views as to dogma and hierarchy and ceremonial seems a danger into which some of the best men fall by their very earnestness and intensity. It is a spirit with which laymen otherwise ready to follow them have little sympathy, and which both surprises and disappoints good men in other communions.

(7) The astonishing statement made in some recent writings that 'Christianity has had its day' might with much more truth be put in a directly opposite form. Christianity has hitherto worked mainly by action on individuals; it has yet to show what it can do by way of action on societies and States. It might, for instance, accept the desirability of universal training of a whole community for service, but reject the idea that the only shape that service can take is military. Why should not the whole youth of the country be bound as a part of their education to spend a year in some kind of industrial training? This would supply just the one side now lacking in our higher education. It would make the ruling classes understand the masses, and there would be less heard henceforth of the 'class-war'. This would go some way to supply that 'moral equivalent for war' which we must allow the eulogists of war have some reason to call for. Similarly, is it not practicable

for the various nations, each with its own distinctive 'culture', to focus their joint energies on certain needs and world-tasks, as the laws of aerial navigation, the stamping out of plague, tuberculosis and cancer, the evangelization of heathen countries? This may be said to open out a long vista; but it is short in comparison to the distance which humanity has already travelled from the days of *primaeval man*; and the guiding spirit now, as then, is religion.

(8) In view of some over-sanguine proposals, it is not superfluous to suggest a caution derived from the lesson of the past. During a thousand years of European history, men who were filled with the highest possible ideal, that of producing the kingdom of God upon earth, endeavoured to put that ideal into an actual material form, to organize society accordingly. They forgot the words, 'My kingdom is not of this world'. That which is spiritual cannot be reproduced in machinery without losing its spirituality. We cannot reasonably expect to have our ideals embodied in the legal terms of a treaty of peace, when peace comes. That treaty must needs confine itself to what is immediately attainable and can be stipulated in a legal document. All that we desire and hope must lie outside and beyond, and is left for us to work out gradually in the long years that are to come. Vast as it is, this war is not an Armageddon which will be followed at once by the advent of a new heaven and a new earth. If good is to come out of the evil, it can only be by a new spirit among men and by a new and unexampled output of patient, self-sacrificing, disciplined co-operation.

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