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BERNHARDISM IN
ENGLAND

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BASIS OF PUBLICATION

This series of Papers is issued under the auspices of a Committee drawn from various Christian bodies and political parties and is based on the following convictions :

1. That Great Britain was in August morally bound to declare war and is no less bound to carry the war to a decisive issue ;
2. That the war is none the less an outcome and a revelation of the un-Christian principles which have dominated the life of Western Christendom and of which both the Church and the nations have need to repent ;
3. That followers of Christ, as members of the Church, are linked to one another in a fellowship which transcends all divisions of nationality or race ;
4. That the Christian duties of love and forgiveness are as binding in time of war as in time of peace ;
5. That Christians are bound to recognize the insufficiency of mere compulsion for overcoming evil and to place supreme reliance upon spiritual forces and in particular upon the power and method of the Cross ;
6. That only in proportion as Christian principles dictate the terms of settlement will a real and lasting peace be secured ;
7. That it is the duty of the Church to make an altogether new effort to realize and apply to all the relations of life its own positive ideal of brotherhood and fellowship ;
8. That with God all things are possible.

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GENERAL BERNHARDI is not merely, as many of our newspapers seem to think, a bad man who hates England more even than other Germans. He does not, in his books, show any virulent hatred of England; and his manners, when he speaks of foreign nations, are those of a soldier rather than of a journalist. His doctrine, in fact, is not, as he preaches it, a doctrine of hatred, but rather a doctrine of war. For him conflicts between the nations are inevitable—at least for those nations that are strong enough to fight Germany; and, since they are inevitable, the chief political virtue for him consists in accepting the inevitable, in preparing for it, and in forcing it to happen at the moment most favourable to yourself. There is some excuse for him, since he is a soldier and also a talker. For he talks more easily than he thinks, and, as far as thinking goes, he is satisfied with the proposition that there is nothing like leather, which, for him, means war. He is, in fact, really a kind of Red Indian in a Prussian uniform, but without the Red Indian habit of silence. If he were unique he would be merely a curiosity; but unfortunately he is not, and that is why the word Bernhardtism has been coined, to express not merely what he says but what is said and thought by all those in every country who believe in his doctrine of war.

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Every one in England is shocked by it as he preaches it ; but often it is not the doctrine that shocks them so much as his application of it. When, in England, writers have preached the inevitability of war, they have said that it was inevitable because of the wickedness of Germany ; and so the great mass of Germans have said that it was inevitable because of the wickedness of England. And when their Government put the last article of Bernhardism in practice and forced the inevitable at what seemed a moment favourable to them, these Germans submitted to it because they believed that England would otherwise force it at a moment favourable to herself. So it happened, and seemed to prove that Bernhardi himself and all our Bernhardists were right. It was inevitable because so many people believed that it could not be avoided. But most of the Bernhardists in each country were persuaded to their belief by the Bernhardists in the other.

There is, however, a higher, or lower, degree of Bernhardism than the mere belief that war is inevitable because the other country means to make it ; and that is Bernhardi's own belief, that it is inevitable in the nature of things. This kind of Bernhardism one finds latent in the most unexpected places. Here, for instance, is a passage in Mozley's sermon on war, which Bernhardi himself might quote, if he knew it. 'There is', Mozley says, 'a spring in the very setting and framework of the world ;

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whence movements are always pushing up to the surface—movements for recasting more or less the national distribution of the world ; for establishing fresh centres and forming States into new groups and combinations.' Much of this, he admits, is due to the selfish spirit of conquest ; but, he says, ' there is an instinctive reaching in nations and masses of people after alteration and readjustment, which has justice in it and which rises from real needs.' And then he goes on to speak of ' a real self-correcting process which is part of the constitution of the world, and which is coeval in root with the political structure which it remedies ' and ' of the framework of society forced by an inward impulse upon its own improvement and rectification '. There are also, he says, wars of progress which, ' so far as they are really necessary for the due advantage of mankind and growth of society, have a justification in that reason ' ; and, last of all, he speaks of the judicial character of war, and its lawful place in the world, as a means of obtaining justice, and tells us that ' we should keep clear and distinguished in our minds the moral effects of war and the physical '.

In all this he talks generally just as Bernhardi talks about Germany and the immediate future ; and his phrases have all the dangerous vagueness of Bernhardi. How can war have a judicial character, when there is no judge, unless we assume that victory means right ? And who is to say what wars are justified as the result of an instinctive reaching in nations and masses of people after

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alteration and readjustment. Every nation will feel this instinctive reaching when it wants to go to war, and will be ready to persuade itself that it is right because it is instinctive. This is, in fact, the plea of kleptomania, which may be urged for a criminal as a reason why he should be sent to an asylum rather than to jail, but not for a nation as a reason why it should steal by force whatever it desires. And why this glorification of instinct from the minister of a religion which denies that instinct is either glorious or irresistible ?

It is to be noted that Mozley talks altogether in this passage in a vaguely scientific jargon, just like Bernhardi, and he never gives us any examples of the wars which he would justify with that jargon. They are not wars of self-defence, for he distinguishes them from such wars ; and therefore they are not wars of liberation, which is only defence against an existing oppression. The whole passage, in fact, amounts to a statement that there are some wars which no amount of virtue on both sides would prevent ; and that is the doctrine of Bernhardi, except that he applies it to most wars and to all that Germany chooses to wage.

Now it is true of human beings that they will not try to prevent what they believe to be inevitable. If they think that pestilence is sent by God, they will not try to improve their drains. They will even glorify the pestilence ; and so it is with war : once believe that the virtues of mankind are powerless against it, and there

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will be no attempt to exercise those virtues ; indeed we shall be told that they are not virtues at all, as between nations, but mere cowardice and sentimentality. The essence of Bernhardism is that what are vices in private life are virtues internationally, and vice versa. And it is clear that, in the cases which Mozley speaks of but does not specify, he would agree with Bernhardt's scale of values. This instinctive reaching in nations after alteration and readjustment, he says, has justice in it. It is, therefore, not merely an animal instinct, but an effort to do the will of God, or, to use other language, an effort to fulfil the cosmic process ; and if any other nation stands in the way of the will of God or the cosmic process, as the chosen nation instinctively apprehends them, then of course that chosen nation will virtuously destroy the obstruction. And it will enjoy the process of destruction and nourish its own hatred of the enemy.

From the Christian point of view you cannot wage war decently if you are a Bernhardist ; for, to a Christian, war is never the result of these vague movements and adjustments and what-not. It is always the result of sin, and therefore not to be enjoyed even by a nation that is forced into it by the sin of another nation. Thus when we find people enjoying it and consciously indulging themselves in the feelings of hatred which it naturally produces, then we may be sure that, whatever their professions about that particular war and whatever their moral indignation against the Bernhardism of the enemy,

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they are, consciously or unconsciously, Bernhardists themselves. For those things which are vices as between private people have become virtues to them as between their own nation and the enemy nation. This is not a matter of action so much as of a state of mind. A Christian, who knows that to kill is murder, may yet be a soldier and in war may kill without losing his Christian state of mind. War remains an evil caused by sin, though this particular war seems to him a necessary evil ; and he kills without fury or hatred, seeing in the enemy unfortunate human beings, like himself, who perhaps are driven to this necessity by a sin not their own. But the Bernhardist, not really believing that war is the result of sin, even though he clamours about the wickedness of the enemy, accepts war as a right and natural process, and with it accepts all the feelings which it provokes. He makes no moral effort against them, because they are proper to war, and war is proper to the life of man. It is, in fact, a necessary change from peace, without which men would become cowardly, slothful, and sentimental ; and, when it comes, we ought all to cast off our Christian virtues and our Christian state of mind, and aim at a state of mind quite opposite.

Now the doctrine of Bernhardism is supposed to be abhorred in England, because Bernhardt and other Germans preach it ; and we of course are fighting against everything German. But the symptoms of Bernhardism betray themselves on all sides, and we may be sure that,

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where they are, the doctrine is also, however much it may be suppressed for the moment by the fact that Bernhardi is a German. We, for instance, are shocked at the German hatred of England and at the manner in which they abandon themselves to it with an almost sensual pleasure. But our Bernhardists think that it is wicked only because it is England that they hate. It is, on the other hand, quite right for us to hate Germany, and they feel a German glow of righteousness when they do so. For instance, a German paper, the other day, had good sense enough to protest against the German orgies of hatred, saying that they were 'fundamentally tasteless, and not compatible with the future co-operation between the nations which must come', since peace, at last, is at least as inevitable as war. A Christian would welcome those words as making for peace; but a Bernhardist, writing in one of our daily papers, cries that 'The Hun has not changed his skin'. The *Frankfurter Zeitung* may talk good sense and good morals, but no English Bernhardist will believe that it does so except for a base motive. 'Either the German press is reflecting the uneasy official conviction that the game is up, and that it is time to speak softly to the enemy at the gate; or else that their gentle words may betray our pacifists into response. Either thought is vain. The game has always been up so far as Germany is concerned, but it is not over until she is down—and out.'

Notice that, to this writer, 'pacifist' is a term of abuse,

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and the very thought of peace is so repulsive that he begins to protest, ungrammatically, against it before it is even mentioned. If any Germans talk decently, it is because they are afraid. Whatever they do is wrong, because they are Germans, and however vulgarly an Englishman may bully and threaten, he is right because England is right in her war with Germany. But sometimes the Bernhardist mixes up his own doctrine with a little incongruous cant. 'Nothing is more exasperating', says a popular provincial paper, 'than the spreading tendency in this country to mealy-mouthedness about Germany and the Germans. If allowed to go unchecked it would become a menace not only to our present interests but to the future interests of international peace and international good life—by creating among us an atmosphere of spurious sentiment towards Germany, from which the only one to benefit would be the country against which all wells of sentiment must be closed for a long time to come.' Here you have the Bernhardist exulting in the thought that he will be able to enjoy the virtuous feelings proper to war even after peace is proclaimed. 'Every right British instinct', he cries, 'is, or ought to be, in unmistakable revolt against some of the windy platitudes that are being insisted upon in the name of the Christian spirit.' No Christian spirit for him, while we are in the blessed state of war. The sayings of the Sermon on the Mount have become windy platitudes; and, if he has his way, they will remain

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so as long as possible after peace has become an unfortunate necessity.

The Archbishop of Canterbury said last month that Christians in every land ought to be humbled at the thought that Christendom had been unable to prevent this war, and that they should be on their knees asking for inspiration to make the recurrence of such a catastrophe impossible. Whereupon a Bernhardist, in the press, almost repeats the words of Bernhardi himself in protesting that war is a necessary part of Christianity. Like some one else, he quotes Scripture for his own purpose—'I come not to send peace but a sword'—forgetting that, if we read the Bible at all, there is a moral obligation upon us to use our brains while we read it. 'Under present circumstances', he says, 'in earth as in heaven force is the final remedy.' But even General Bernhardi, much as he knew about this world, has never laid down the law about the other, or claimed God as a Bernhardist. He would merely confine God to His heaven; not subjecting Him to the law of man there, provided no effort is made to impose His heavenly laws upon our earth, which knows best how to manage itself. Our Bernhardist is less moderate. For him there is no room for sentimentality either above or below; and, according to his doctrine, God enjoys the spectacle of the British Empire behaving as He Himself would behave in a like case.

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But all this Bernhardism of ours is imitative and the result of a belief that Bernhardism in Germany can only be opposed by Bernhardism in England. If the Germans make themselves ridiculous with their hymns of hatred, we must do our best to equal them in folly. One of our papers talks about this hatred of theirs 'which sings our cheek, like a blast from Hell across these narrow seas'. That would please the German haters, if they could read it; it would make them believe that we take their melodrama seriously enough to become melodramatic ourselves. But the same writer goes on to talk Bernhardism as no Englishman could, unless he were possessed by the belief that the Prussian view of international morals is right and our old English view wrong. 'The British Empire is built up on good fighting by its army and its navy; the spirit of war is native to the British race.' 'War will never end as long as human nature continues to be human nature. And war with all its evils teaches us much good. It reminds us of the value of nationality which in peace is apt to be forgotten. There has been in the recent past a horrid disease of internationalism which has weakened us considerably,' and so on. It is all just what Bernhardi says, just what has made the German Government behave as it has behaved. There could not be a greater triumph for German Kultur and the German doctrine that war has its right to exist like peace, that the passion for destruction is as spiritual as the passion for construction; that hate is as divine as

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love. Notice that this writer enjoys telling us that war will never end so long as human nature continues to be human nature ; that is to say, so long as we continue to be no better than we are at present. For him, too, internationalism is a horrid disease of peace ; which means really that peace itself is a horrid disease. It is healthier to be conscious of the difference and hostility between nations than of their likeness and friendliness. Insist upon the fact that you are an Englishman and that a German is a German, rather than upon the fact that both are human beings ; and welcome war because, during war, the enemy is an enemy, and there can no longer be any nonsense about trying to treat him as a friend. All the hollow politeness and artificial restraint of peace are at an end. You can now tell the German what you think of him. You can exult in the failure of the sentimentalists and their deputations of friendship, in the end of that dreary time during which it was necessary to behave to Germans like a civilized human being. Now you can shake your fist in their faces. If any of them, by industry and ability, have won good places in England, you can clamour to turn them out and feel that your jealousy is patriotism. There is, too, an end of all that nonsense which we used to talk about desiring peace. Now it can be said openly that ' the spirit of war is native to the British race ' ; as indeed it is to every race and to every human being who would like to have more than he has got. But in time of peace there is a peace-convention

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by which we are restrained from calling the spirit of war a virtue ; indeed, we never call it a virtue in the individual if he shows it by knocking another individual down and taking his watch ; and not often if he shows it merely by hitting another individual in the eye because he dislikes the look of him. And this restraint is irksome to us, or to some of us, like the restraints of decency. So, when war comes, we delight in the chance to escape from it, just as men used to delight in the sanctification of indecency at heathen festivals. Bernhardism, in fact, is a kind of Paganism. It is the glorification of what is commonly called the natural man, that is to say of the man to whom the spirit is merely a thorn in the flesh which he would pluck out if he could. And the essence of Bernhardism is a delight in the state of war because it gives an excuse for worshipping this human nature, rather than some remote God towards whom human nature must painfully aspire. In time of peace this human nature is a nuisance and a shame, and the Christian hates war just because it does give a use and a sanction to all our unregenerate qualities. But the Bernhardist, being a Pagan, loves it for that very reason ; and you can tell him at once by the relief and joy which he betrays when he can abandon himself to the chartered Paganism of war.

It may be thought that I have made too much of the passages I have quoted. From their very language

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any one can see that they are written by men ignorant and tired, who therefore, since writing is their trade, take the line of least resistance when they write and say what it needs no thought to say, and what no violent patriot can call pro-German. The newspapers are very much afraid just now lest any one should accuse them of discouraging recruiting. It is as much as a writer's place is worth to have that charge brought against him, and it is freely brought by those who believe that Englishmen will not fight like Germans, unless they are worked up into a state of German virulence. Therefore, it might be said, one should ignore those things as part of the inevitable folly produced by war and the necessity to write about it when you have nothing to say. But there is more in it than that ; for, as we are all more or less ignorant and often tired, we are all apt to take the line of least resistance both in thought and in action. And Bernhardism is the line of least resistance, like all kinds of Paganism. We need a constant effort, both moral and intellectual, to believe that human nature is not merely human nature, or that, when it is, it is not admirable. There always has been for all men an allurements, not only in the passions themselves, but also in a glorification of them. That is the allurements of Paganism ; and it appeals to us all, like soft turf when we are climbing a mountain. In war, too, we have to make great material efforts, and have therefore the less energy left for spiritual efforts. We are tired and a little

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afraid. Deprived of many physical luxuries, we want some mental luxury, and we get it in Bernhardism, in a sensuous reaction from all the spiritual effort and the spiritual ideas that trouble us in time of peace. Just as a soldier is most apt to pillage after a hard battle or siege, so we are apt in war-time to free ourselves from arduous hopes and responsibilities, and to enjoy the thought that war gives us that freedom as a perquisite. Then we listen to those who talk most basely and foolishly, as soldiers, when they are out of hand, will follow the worst ruffian among them. The leader of thought is the man who thinks least, the popular prophet is the one who cannot see an inch in front of his nose; the extremest patriot is the most ignorant, the most tired, the most frightened, among us. For Bernhardism, at bottom, is fear—fear lest there should, after all, be no meaning in the universe, no sense in the spiritual efforts of man. The Bernhardist calls this fear facing the facts, but his facts are really a timid theory, the theory that faith either in God or in man is a very dangerous thing. So it is, or it would not be faith. It is the Christian who obeys Nietzsche's command to live dangerously. It is the Bernhardist who grows angry at the spectacle of his rashness.