

Second Series

PAPERS FOR WAR TIME. No. 21

THE REMOVING OF
MOUNTAINS



BY THE AUTHOR OF
'PRO CHRISTO ET ECCLESIA'

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BASIS OF PUBLICATION

This series of Papers 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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THE NATURE OF OUR FAILURE

WHILE not questioning the common belief that when the violence of an opponent comes to a head, a sane man or sane nation can only offer battle, it is worth while to focus our attention on the fact that any positive good war may seem to bring about is the result of the spiritual travail that accompanies it. War has in it no element of construction; it may produce quiet, but never peace. Peace is a spiritual, or, we may say, mental, state, and can only be produced in any man or nation by a free, inward response to the stimulus of fellowship. The knock-down blow necessary in an emergency is never, even in training brutes, conducive to a nobler order of things in the future. We well know that the real conquest of any animal, or of any nation, does not consist in leaving it stark upon the field, or in causing it to crouch, tail between legs, but in making it a friend and comrade in the onward march. It is evident, indeed, that it would be immeasurably better to attain any end by such spiritual travail as may induce free response in opponents, rather than by the help of destructive warfare.

Man has spiritual power in so far as he may move his fellow men by an influence upon their inner selves, their conscience and reason; and that power, we believe, is legitimate and enduring only when it works along the line of those qualities we call eternal or divine, because they are always advantageous, not only for some but for all. Justice, goodwill—these are spiritual and eternal; swords and cannon—these are physical and temporal, straws blown by the breeze of the moment. In the appeal to conscience and reason a spiritual force is paramount; in the appeal to arms a merely physical and non-moral force is paramount, for where arms rule

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the day, the forts of Liège fall and ships are sunk, whether they stand for the right or for the wrong.

We recognize this, but we are so weak in the things of the spirit that, not only have we been unable to conquer our enemies and thus keep peace by spiritual power, but the greater number among us do not even desire more of such power, do not even admire the evidence of it when they see it. We may obtain some cessation of war by war, but without a great increase of spiritual power we can never have international peace.

We believe that our Lord suffered, and His nation was scattered abroad, because He could not persuade His people to enter into His life of spiritual power, and that, nevertheless, He looked forward to the development of this life of spiritual power in His Church, teaching us to pray that God's will should be done on earth. Thus it cannot be God who withholds from us spiritual power, our lack must be due to our own misunderstanding or culpability, either individual or corporate. Let us seek to find from the Master's teaching and example what is the cause of our lack and what its remedy.

In that saying concerning the twelve legions of angels that were at His bidding (Matt. xxvi. 53), we have, perhaps, an indication of all that Jesus, or His spiritual interpreters, did not regard as a legitimate or spiritual way of conquering men; for that saying brings vividly to mind those wonderful stories of the Old Testament in which God's people and God's prophets are said to have been miraculously delivered from overwhelming enemies by a power that deluded or damaged those enemies, accomplishing sometimes their cruel destruction. Such is the story of the triumphant choir of Jehoshaphat (2 Chron. xx); of the deliverance of Samaria from the investing Syrians (2 Kings vii); of the deliverance of Hezekiah and of Jerusalem from the armies of Sennacherib (2 Chron. xxxii); and—most beautiful and merciful of all, and apparently appropriate to the case of our Lord—the deliverance of Elisha him-

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self at Dothan from the bands of Syria, in which Elisha's servant shares his master's vision of the encircling legions of angels investing the city with a more numerous host than that of its hostile besiegers (2 Kings vi). In refusing to call angelic legions to His aid, Jesus would seem to have set aside agencies in the spirit world that could coerce with blindness or hallucination or disease. But whether or not the words recorded in Matt. xxvi. 53, define our Lord's attitude to such agencies, it appears certain that He refused to triumph over His opponents either by the mental coercion involved in using signs and portents or by becoming a military leader.

The one Divine, spiritual agency acknowledged in the New Testament—the Spirit of God—does not, according to our Lord's teaching, damage or delude. The result of the Divine influence is mental vision and spiritual wholeness. The Spirit of God converts and restores body and soul. Spiritual powers there are in the universe that delude and confuse the soul and damage the body ; but they are not of God. This truth was the central ray of that light which was brought into the world by Jesus Christ, which struggled then with non-apprehending darkness, and is now only conquering the darkness little by little.

Evidently there was in our Lord's mind a way by which His world might have been saved the awful and dastardly crime of the Crucifixion, a way by which His people might have entered into a new and higher phase of national life. That way was the conversion of the alien and the enemy to goodwill and brotherhood ; and obviously we, like the Jewish people, have failed to take that way.

To-day we Christians are slaying and torturing one another, not by twos and threes, not by hundreds, not by thousands, but by millions. To-day the flower of Christian manhood is being wiped off the face of Europe, so that the womanhood of the near future must largely wither childless, and childhood must dwindle and pine because of impoverished heredity and lack of food,

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while the marriage tradition that we hold sacred will inevitably be challenged, and the tendency will be to discard and supersede it. To-day we acquiesce when we see the public exalting the brief, war-hypnotized heroism of martial valour at the expense of all the sober, steady, humane heroisms of a whole lifetime. To-day we can only look forward with misgiving to the natural reaction from the heroic mood, when our people realize the miserable aftermath alike of victory and defeat—old antagonisms again raising their heads, old recriminations again heard, as poverty and privation fasten upon the saddened, weary masses of the people. We are in extremity; some of us know it; and for those who are enthusiastic about the moral value of war there is a ghastly awakening:

Slowly comes a hungry people as a lion creeping nigher,
Glares at one that nods and winks behind a slowly
dying fire.

We know, too, that what faces us is no marvellous thing hurled at us from without, but it is the inevitable fruit of our feeble condition. There is a confusion of voices among us too, for many shout that this or that symptom of our blighted condition is its cause—'our unhappy religious divisions', 'our class wars', 'our lack of confidence in our righteous cause', 'our militarism', 'our lack of repentance', and the like. Some would even have us believe that war itself is the supreme evil—as though, having contracted a deadly fever, we should especially deplore its regular delirium.

How can we change disaster and confusion to life and peace? The moving of a mountain is the symbol of the hardest task that may confront us. The mountain confronts us, and ours is not the word of power.

FAITH THE REMEDY

If we could go back two thousand years, and ask our Lord, as He stands proclaiming the kingdom of God, the cause of our present failure, He would use the word we translate 'faith', and tell us that that cause was

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lack of faith. If we asked Him how we might now regenerate our age, He would command us to have faith. Great teachers give richer meaning to the words upon which they lay emphasis. Our Lord, more than others, must have sought to convey the splendour of great thoughts in terms of a coinage minted in eras of smaller thought. What, then, did He mean by 'faith'?

In seeking to understand Christian faith let us first observe that the more we examine the achievements of the human race, the more we perceive that these consist in the discovery, or the bringing into human consciousness, of natural matters which humanity had previously overlooked, and the more the discovery is pursued, the more it is found that the adjustment of human life to the way or habit of nature which it is thought to utilize, is not elaborate but simple, not difficult but easy. Humanity has had a strange tendency to foul the river of life by plunging and stamping in muddy shallows, and carefully acquiring a taste for the impurity of the draught so toilsomely produced, while all that was needed was to walk boldly out into the stream and drink of the full current. How elaborate and confused, for example, are lower forms of art till, here or there along each line of effort, the master genius comes with the cry 'Back to nature', and the laws of beauty are seen to be very simple, although admitting of endless diversity and combination. How elaborate, again, has been the science of healing! From the ancient world, from past centuries of our era, comes the tale of wild and intricate magical liturgies and strange medicinal concoctions. Mother Earth has seen lives and fortunes wasted in the mad mixing of things that were to produce the life-elixir, has seen the sick pine by thousands in fear of air, in fear of water, in fear of simple food, till they heard the glad cry, 'Back to nature'. Our physicians are now gladly teaching that they can do no more than remove obstructions lying in the path of the inflow of healing life always at work. So we might go through all our arts and sciences. The more

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we realize that nature is doing, or ready to do, the work, and the more simple the adjustment by which the human purpose is linked on to the natural process, the greater the human achievement.

I find it impossible to read such records as we have of the rise of Christianity without the conviction that if we have any history of its Founder, we have the story either of a religious fanatic who demanded belief in impossible lines of action, or of a religious genius who was convinced that there was a great department of power available to humanity which had been overlooked, and that the adjustment of human purpose to this power was very simple. A number of His sayings at once rise to our minds : ' I tell you truly, if you had faith the size of a grain of mustard seed, you could say to this hill, move from here to there, and remove it would ; nothing would be impossible for you ' (Matt. xvii. 20-1) ; ' I will give you words and wisdom that not one of your opponents will be able to meet or refute ' (Luke xxi. 15) ; ' All that ever you ask in prayer you shall have if you believe ' (Matt. xxi. 21-2) ; ' Anything can be done for one who believes ' (Mark ix. 23) ; ' Whatever you pray for and ask, believe you have got it and you shall have it ' (Mark xi. 24) ; ' Now if God so clothes grass, which blooms to-day in the field and is thrown to-morrow into the furnace, will he not much more clothe you ? O men, how little you trust him ! So do not seek food and drink and be worried ; pagans make food and drink their aim in life, but your father knows quite well you need that ; only seek his Realm, and it will be yours over and above. Fear not, you little flock, for your father delighteth to give you the Realm ' (Luke xii. 28-32) ; ' I tell you truly, that unless you turn and become like children, you will never get into the Realm of heaven at all ' (Matt. xviii. 5).¹ Faith is thus shown as an inner process, a simple instinctive process, by which men are to become administrative for God, big with spiritual power.

¹ Dr. Moffatt's translation.

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THE HINDRANCES TO FAITH

It would seem evident that what Jesus meant by 'faith' was man's correspondence with his Divine environment; and that He regarded this environment as not unnatural, but as being indeed the very fount of nature. Before Jesus lived, for thousands of years large sections of men had been proclaiming a divorce between God and nature. But there had also been a spirit witnessing to a simpler, deeper creed. The Creation story declares that evil is unnatural, that nature, fundamentally and normally, is good; the burden of many of the Psalms is that in all that is fundamental and normal God is very near us; and Paul, a Christian Jew addressing Greeks, could say that in God we all live and move and have our being, and could easily identify his thought with the words of the Greek poet, 'We are also his offspring'.

If, then, faith be correspondence with the natural environment of the soul—that is, with the Divine Spirit—some simple or, we might say, instinctive understanding of the nature or character of God is its first requisite. Because man's spiritual nature is moral, it has evil as well as good possibilities; and certainly there is an evil, as well as a Divine, spiritual environment, ready to correspond with the soul that is not wholly with God. This was the doctrine of Jesus Christ.

Let us, then, consider what may be the difference between what the Master called 'faith' and what we call 'religious belief'. For the sake of clarity let us represent certain attributes of spirit under the figure of light, and certain other attributes of spirit under the figure of darkness. It then becomes obvious that little correspondence between man and his Divine environment is produced by man's belief—be it never so firmly and conscientiously held—in a God who is half darkness. If God be light, if 'in Him is no darkness at all', by worshipping what is half light and half darkness we shut

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out half the light that our souls might contain. Indeed, this figure fails to express what our privation by such worship might be, because darkness is mere negation, and if by correspondence with spiritual evil we let external evil push within our souls, we not only have less of God, but we harbour a warring element which seeks to cancel what is good.

In the Jewish nation, in which Jesus was born, we find the conception of the Divine Spirit as Wisdom—wisdom, as we should say, of all sorts. All knowledge of fact, all perception of truth, the search for truth, and the skill to apply true principles to all that pertained to use and beauty, moral and physical—all this was in God, and every manifestation of it was the manifestation of God. It is self-evident that, in so far as moral grandeur can be discerned, it cannot, in the ideal, be dissociated from truth or from beauty. The conception of God as Creating Wisdom included the holiness which was the central idea of the prophetic literature. There were in Jewish writings more partial interpretations of the Divine nature, but it seems to have been the breadth and height of this great conception of the Divine mediating wisdom that made possible the understanding of the intimate Divine love taught in the Synoptic Gospels and the identification of the Logos with 'Love'.

Here, then, we have the bedrock on which to build some hope that we too may understand what our Lord meant by that faith, or correspondence with the Divine environment, which gives spiritual power, which becomes administrative in the Divine kingdom.

Let us note that we have, perhaps rather recently, become psychologically wise, and we know that the judgments formed in the temper of wrath and indignation are not good. They are not wise or consistent with what we call love. We know that if we tenderly and truly loved some one who had done a dastardly or a cruel thing, our abhorrence of the sin would be tenfold greater than if his character were a matter of comparative indifference to us, and it would produce in us an emotion

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very different from what we commonly call indignation. We should at once identify ourself with the beloved culprit, nor should we identify the culprit with what might be called our own lower self—an abject abstraction on which we are often instructed by the religious to wreak our wrath ; rather, we should find that the passion of love raised us above all thought of abstract sin ; the concrete object of our love would stand revealed as in need of our compassion. We should be eager to understand how the deed had become possible ; and it is only the superficial who imagine that this effort to sympathize as far as possible would not be a greater force for righteousness than easy blame. We should know instinctively that not by abuse or coercion or vengeance could the necessary change be effected, that something more costly than any of these would be needed to bring about the regenerative process that our love would inexorably require. This attitude of ours would not be thus analysed by us ; we should take it instinctively or, as is often said, blindly ; but we all know that, in such a case, just in so far as we were wise and loving our impulse would have behind it the power of social regeneration, which anger has not.

There was a good man whose son, mature and earnest-minded, one with him in friendship and labour, committed a crime. The magistrate, in condemning him, was filled with ' righteous indignation '. Do any of us think that the heartstricken father's state of mind would bear the same description ? Which of them, magistrate or father, felt most keenly the sin and shame ? Which was ready to do most to regenerate the criminal ? Which most nearly symbolized God ?

Among the sayings attributed to the Master, quite a large proportion tell us that the human soul can have no correspondence with its Divine environment while it is angry. Judging, condemning, or being angry—if these attitudes of mind make correspondence between the soul and God impossible, we cannot in such attitudes be imitating the Divine goodness. We are told to be perfect

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as God is perfect ; and we are also told that condemnation of the brother shuts us off from God.

There are, of course, passages in the Gospel records as we have them, and in other parts of the New Testament, which appear to exalt wrath and vengeance as righteous, as Divine. There are, however, many more passages that are inconsistent with the worship of what we call anger or indignation as a Divine attribute. This contradiction exists ; in recognizing it we must always remember the certainty that older ideas of God's character would to some degree influence the evangelistic writers. The distinctive and preponderating element in our Lord's teaching, as reported, is the clear-cut conception of God as dissociated from all agencies of destruction, enfeeblement, blindness or disease. Of such great importance did the distinction between manifestations of the Divine Spirit and manifestations of the diabolical spirit appear to Him that He spoke of confusion in this matter as a condition of soul that could frustrate salvation.

Then, again, there is the Cross. If the suffering of the Cross is the truest symbol of the protest of Deity against man's sin, are we wise to worship what we call ' righteous anger ' as a part of God, and imitate its functioning, or to suppose that sin is so slight a thing that anger or retribution could right the wrong ? In this age we have become conscious as never before of the unwisdom and inadequacy of the mood of indignation in dealing with sinners. If, then, we are wrong in attributing this mood to God, we lay ourselves open to a greater spiritual danger in worshipping and serving wrath as a Divine attribute.

At bottom it is a man's conception of God that is the most practical, the most vital, thing in his life. All else springs from it. And it is the conception of God that comes to us in Jesus Christ that is our salvation.

We stand to-day, assured by the holy annals of our religion that, had we faith, we should have been powerful enough to convert our world, not to one opinion or another, not to one practice or another, but to God.

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We ask what ails us ? We are holding hard to God with one hand—of that we assure ourselves with passionate tears. But if—and it seems possible—we are holding as hard with the other hand to some Satanic influence, can God save us ? The corporate worship and service of an Eternal Love in which wrath has no place would work great change. Would it not be worth trying ? It would render our adjustment to the Divine environment more simple. As it is now, we regard God as opposed to half our nature, and imagine a long course of discipline necessary before spiritual power can begin. Or we regard God as opposed to all our enemies and religious opponents, and we must perforce turn our swords and our denunciations against them also. But if God desires to bless all things and all men with blessing of recreative power, and only awaits our co-operation for the blessing to become operative, all the adjustment that is needed is that we turn from our idolatry of wrath and hostility and, with grateful recognition of His true nature, take our stand with God and with all those who bless and curse not. If we truly worship a true God will He not naturally regenerate all our activities of thought and deed, our imaginations and our judgements ?

What is it that, by the example and teaching of Jesus of Nazareth, we find ourselves bidden to do ? Is it not to wash in the river of God's loving-kindness until the leprosy of our selfishness and separatism passes from us, and the normal, fundamental life of the spiritual man flows through us again in abounding health, till our vision is clear and our hand steady, and our feet swift, and our word the word of power ? In our land of Damascus there run two rivers—the Abana of ascetic practices, of disillusionment, of separation and obedience to external authority, and the Pharpar—the majestic Pharpar—of Jahweh worship, of hostility to sinners, of righteous wrath and indignation. Do we prefer to wash in these ? Well ! we have perfect liberty to do so ; God has given us the great gift of freedom, and, being God, He will not take back what He has given. He does not, as some

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would have us suppose, ceaselessly reproach us for trying our own experiments. The only trouble is that we remain leprous and impotent, and in all our afflictions God is suffering too. Is it not time to give the river of God's all-purifying kindness a fair trial ?

THE SURE REWARD

Just as we all know that we ought to do right and not wrong, so we all know, instinctively and simply, that in any line of action man is invincible if God is with him. Old battle-cries bear witness to this belief. It has filled every missionary who has carried his religion into dark places. When we call God by the names of Beauty or Truth or Love, we find the same instinctive belief in the servants of art or knowledge or political reform. That all things are possible to him that understands God, or gets into line with nature, is both a primitive and a modern notion. It is not difficult, but easy, to make it the central thought of our religion. What is required of the Christian is to understand God as the world does not understand, to get into line with human nature as the world cannot. This will bring about such a revival in Christianity as has come in the department of physical science with the understanding of the right method of learning. We all know, if we look into our hearts, what the result of such understanding of God and man would be. Within us all there is some impulse that bids us rise and greet as true all those splendid forecasts of social regeneration which come ringing down the ages.

Consider the intimate story of a man who, having been carefully trained in that version of the Christian doctrines current in the last generation, renounced them one by one as he came to maturity, and drifted, professedly godless, far out upon the sea of irreligious thoughts and activities, until, dissatisfied, he came, by circumstances I need not detail, to devote a few minutes every morning to the contemplation of a spiritual power

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upholding the universe under the aspects of Life and Beauty, of Joy and Wisdom and Love. After a short time there came to him—what he at first regarded as a delusion—the sense of a response from the Unseen. So attractive were the momentary flashes of this experience that he cherished them, but for months only as one might cherish a delightful dream; and it was his friends, not he, who first observed that his pessimisms were turning into optimisms, the callosities of his heart into sympathies. Roused by this observation, he began to allow himself to address the Divine Being, always under the names of those attributes which embodied his conception of the Highest. Devotion remained with him a fleeting experience, never conventional, never prolonged; but before long he was to the front in his locality in pressing every reasonable reform, and men in trouble or in doubt liked to work shoulder to shoulder with him, and felt their faith in humanity revive and also their hope in God. Perhaps the most salient characteristic he came to possess was a certain ingenuity or inventiveness in beneficent enterprise. If this could be the effect on a life professedly godless of the effort to correspond with the Divine environment, may we not believe that lives steeped in prayer might be raised to a much higher power by an enlarged and purified conception of the Divine activity?

The pantheist says that God is manifest in all; the Christian, that God is manifest in the good. In the degree in which we understand the Divine activity we know what the good is and how to attain it. The knowledge may be wordless, but the attainment declares it. In so far as we work with God we go forward to the highest good—in all statecraft, in all art, in all labour, in all play, in all prayer. The converse is true, if in any aspect of life we are on the wrong track and arrive at what is evil, it is because we do not understand the good and how to attain it—do not understand God.

Let us try to realize what it would be to look out upon the world in the light of Divine love in which there

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was no anger at all. Sin in the neighbour would be a signal to us that love was required—gracious, self-giving, patient, and wise; and we should know this to be the sure medium of the Divine, recreative power. There could be no question in this certainty, no divorce between the human impulse to help and the Divine outflow of help; for if God is love, then love is God in manifestation, and we should perceive, in all that is most normal and fundamental in our earthly relations, the in-dwelling God. With eyes thus cleared we should perceive the Divine agony and patience companioning every human sorrow, every tragedy of soul; we should know that we could not minister to the least of His creatures without ministering to God.

In so far as we limit God, and conceive of the Divine holiness as negative, or as something that only runs in the track of our conventional pieties, we are ourselves limited, attaining little. When we can lift our pieties and our conventions into harmony with the knowledge of God, the world shall be ours. Just in so far as we can do this to-day, to-morrow and this year, shall we remove the mountains of international antipathy and bring peace to a warring world.