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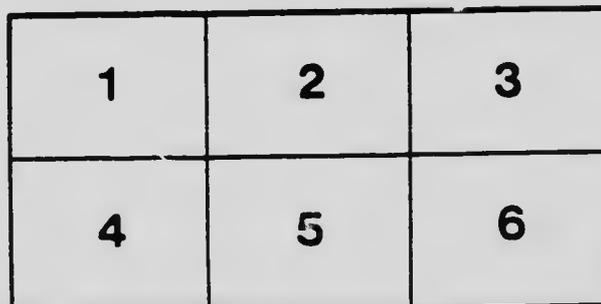
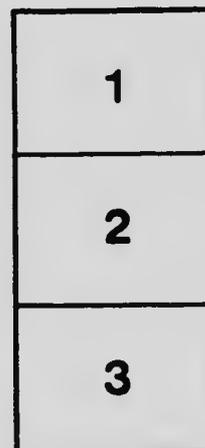
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1914-1915

HOW WE OUGHT TO FEEL
ABOUT THE WAR

BY

A. V. DICEY, D.C.L.

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HOW WE OUGHT TO FEEL ABOUT THE WAR

MY FRIENDS,—It is with the greatest pleasure that after a long silence I again address you. But the joy of meeting you once more is counterbalanced by the gravest sense of responsibility. It is hard to utter a word with regard to this terrible war which will be certain to do good. It is only too easy for any speaker by indiscretion of language to do considerable harm. All I can hope for to-night is, on the one hand, to avoid saying anything which does not represent what I believe to be the truth, and on the other hand to try to express the truth as I see it, with moderation and calmness. Do not in any case expect from me anything strange, astonishing, or paradoxical. I am attempting to put into words, as among friends, the thoughts which constantly occur to me with reference to the way in which Englishmen should look upon the war with Germany, and my thoughts, in so far as they are true, will be found to be, I expect and hope, very much your own thoughts. I am in no position to give authoritative counsel to any one, least of all would I offer it to that noble body of men, taken from all classes of the community, who, rich and poor alike, are risking limb and life in defence of the independence of England and of the British Empire. For such men I have nothing but praise and admiration. They are performing the highest duty of

¹ Lecture delivered at the Working Men's College, Crowndale Road, London, N. W., Nov. 21, 1914.

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citizenship. They have known how to do right, and doubtless will with ease learn, if they have not already learned, the feelings which ought to be cultivated by the self-sacrificing defenders of the greatest and the freest State in the civilized world. My aim to-night is to address friends who, like myself, cannot enlist in the armies of our country, and to press upon them, as indeed upon every Englishman, the necessity of practising at this crisis of England's fortune the duty of justice and also the duty (though you may think the expression 'duty' is a strange one) of hope.

THE DUTY OF JUSTICE

Justice has two senses in each of which it is our strict duty to be just to the Government and the people of Germany.

(1) Justice means fairness of judgement or equity of feeling towards our neighbours, and especially towards our enemies. Now it is manifest that precisely because we are at war with Germany and her allies, because Germany threatens to destroy the prosperity of England, and because (though this may sound a hard saying) the Kaiser, his Government, and his soldiers have committed in the conduct of this war acts of barbarism, of cruelty, and of oppression, it is our clear duty to entertain equitable feelings—I do not say kindly feelings—towards the Kaiser and his subjects. Equity in such a case is part of the desire, which every good and wise man should cherish, to see and know the truth, for we certainly shall not take a true view of the conflict between ourselves and our enemies unless we try hard to consider what it is that may in truth be said in explanation or even in mitigation of the wrong they

are doing, or have done, to ourselves and to our friends. If you ask me what are the means by which something like a fair view of the conflict between us and Germany may be obtained, my answer is this: We ought to try to form an historical view of the war. We ought, that is to say, to look upon the war from something like the point of view from which it may probably be regarded by a fair-minded historian, writing in A. D. 2000. Let us try, in short, to look upon the events passing before our eyes much in the way in which we now look upon Waterloo and the long war which that battle brought to a close. Of one thing we may be certain. Our historian of A. D. 2000 will cast out of consideration, or at any rate hold of quite secondary importance, matters which at the present moment inevitably increase our detestation of Germany, and take a calm view of German policy—to an Englishman of to-day almost an impossibility. The character of the Kaiser, his boastfulness, his insolence, his recklessness, his tasteless appeals to Heaven, his mailed fist, and his other Imperial follies, may be important to our future historian as explaining the effect in England of the Kaiser's conduct. But as ultimate causes of the war which, according to my friend, Lord Bryce, already affects one-third, or it may be one-half, of the whole population of the world, these irritating circumstances will count for little. Still less will the random abuse of English caricaturists or poetasters greatly affect the permanent judgement of any capable historian. One example will sufficiently illustrate the sort of stuff which will be nothing to an historian, and ought to be nothing to the public of to-day. A gentleman who, as I am told, has some pretensions to be a poet, has published a Funeral March for Kaiser Wilhelm II. It consists of fifty verses and

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more, in which the German Emperor is first sent to hell, and then is elaborately cursed in lines of this quality :

Fashion his bed
Deep, deep :
Earth o'er his head
Heap, heap.
Load upon load
Let him not lack,
Lest his abode
Vomit him back.

Doggerel like this falls far below the rank of effective satire, but in truth a satirist is not the man we need to denounce the pedantic barbarism of Germany. What we lack is a poet who, like Wordsworth, could, with prophetic power, give full expression to English hatred of lawless despotism without by a single word compromising the dignity and the sternness of England's resistance. Our future historian, at any rate, will assuredly occupy himself mainly with the true causes of the determination not only of the Kaiser but of the German people to establish the supremacy of Germany throughout the civilized world. He will say something, no doubt, of the Kaiser's character, and possibly point out how often it has happened that a man who combines some talent with a singular want of sound judgement has lacked both the moral and the intellectual strength needed to support the infinite burden of absolute power. Wilhelm II is not the first ruler for whom a suspicion of madness may be hesitatingly pleaded against the charge of outrageous wickedness. It is, too, even now uncertain whether the Kaiser himself was not at one time inclined to check the desire for war entertained by his military advisers. An historian will certainly dwell on a cir-

cumstance to which neither we nor our enemies are, though for different reasons, inclined to give the prominence which possibly it deserves. The alliance between France and Russia may have struck many Germans with fear. The alliance was amply justifiable. It was necessary to the safety of both the allies. But it contained a menace to Germany. Nor was this latent threat the less terrible because the conquest of Alsace and Lorraine made it impossible for France to forgo lasting hostility to the German Empire. To the mind of an historical investigator it may occur that the Great Powers of Europe ought to have insisted in 1871 that the fate of Frenchmen, who detested the idea of being by force turned into subjects of Germany, should receive careful consideration, and should be determined not by a treaty forced by victorious Germany upon conquered France, but by a European Congress. On this view, the neglected duty of 1871 may be held in part responsible for the worldwide calamity of 1914. The impartial inquirer of 2000 will examine, as we ought even now to consider, how far a distinction should be drawn between the ambition of the German Government, with its Prussian officials, and the wishes of a large number of the Kaiser's peaceable subjects. This is a matter on which few Englishmen can now speak with certainty. My belief, not willingly entertained, is that a vast majority of Germans identify the worldwide predominance of the German Empire with the progress of mankind, and share the delusion that every blow struck at Germany is a deadly blow to the development of civilization. This is not the first time on which kings and people alike have imagined a vain thing. The reflectiveness of Bishop Butler suggested the question whether a whole nation might not go mad. The historical knowledge and

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the analytical subtlety of Tocqueville convinced him that in periods of excitement madmen fit for Bedlam have exerted immense influence on the course of events. The Reign of Terror teaches the lesson that humane and just men may tolerate outrageous injustice when they have become convinced that the overthrow of terrible despotism may cause a reaction fatal to the liberties of their country. This toleration of ill-doing is a ghastly delusion. But it is an error into which some of the most generous of men have now and again fallen. This fact may at least remind Englishmen that the errors generated by a false political as by a false religious creed diminish the moral guilt of good men infected by its errors, and may explain the boldness of eminent professors—most of them far from wicked men—who, in childlike or childish ignorance of the conduct pursued by England and France, have stepped forward as apologists of German policy and crime.

The plain truth is, though this thought is often overlooked, that the equity which demands the careful consideration of every circumstance which explains the conduct of the Kaiser and his subjects, and sometimes may seem to mitigate its deep moral guilt, is a necessary condition for understanding the strength of the cause on behalf of which England and her allies have entered upon the most tremendous war which the world has ever witnessed, and their determination not to lay down their arms until the triumph of justice is complete. Equity does not mean leniency. It has no connexion with that flabby and miscalled 'charity' which assumes that, in every great moral conflict, each side has been partly in the right and partly in the wrong. This doctrine, with its specious appearance of tolerant good nature, can hardly be distinguished from the cynical dogma

sometimes summed up in the expression. ' Rogues all '. Such charity as applied to the present case means that if Germany has violated some obvious rules of international morality, no great European Power can claim that it has never committed acts of injustice. This plea is absolutely untenable. True equity is totally different from moral indifference. True equity is akin to judicial sternness · it has no affinity to that miserable good nature which should be absolutely unknown to a just judge. It forces us then to consider what is the crime which we lay unhesitatingly to the charge of our foes, and why it is that we are determined that it never shall be committed again.

I will try to answer this question, as far as possible, in the words of my friend, Lord Bryce, who possesses the learning of a great historian and the political experience to be gained only from long years of work in the service of his country :

We are fighting against the doctrine that treaties may be broken whenever it is to the interest of the stronger Power to break them ; against the doctrine that whatever is necessary becomes thereby permissible ; against the terrible application of these doctrines which seizes innocent citizens and shoots them or treats them as hostages for the good behaviour of others whom they cannot control ; which destroys towns and works of art precious from their beauty and antiquity ; which, perhaps worst of all, besides levying enormous fines upon the citizens of a country which desires to be neutral, scatters, to the danger of peaceful passengers travelling in neutral ships across the seas, engines of swift and sudden destruction in places far removed from the direct scene of naval operations.

And I add that this false doctrine which tends to annihilate all the mitigations which have been introduced

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into the practices of war by land would also logically justify the commission of further horrors, at which I doubt not every professor and general throughout Germany would now stand aghast. If it be true that a conqueror may add to the effectiveness of war by any cruelties the fear whereof reduces the conquered to submission, it is impossible to see why the slaughter of the besieged who resist their assailants for a longer time than the besiegers think reasonable, why the sale of free citizens into slavery, why the use of torture which the public morality of heathen Greece and Rome reprobated, should not be revived in order to ensure the world-wide propagation of German culture and German civilization.

(2) Justice has a second and most important sense different from fairness of judgement. It may mean the enforcement of just rules upon men or upon nations who violate principles essential to the prosperity of their neighbours. Every one admits that this is so with regard to ordinary criminals, and nations are occasionally called upon to do justice in this sense on any State, great or small, which violates principles the observance whereof is necessary to the peaceful progress of civilization. The deliberate violation of treaties amply justifies England, France, and Russia in their determination to enforce retributive justice upon Germany. But the German Government has, as I have already pointed out, committed an even more heinous offence than the mere technical breach of solemn agreements. Germany is attempting to establish for her own benefit the rule that Might is the same thing as Right. Hence this war, it has been well said, 'Is a conflict of principles of universal application. . . . It has become a collision of Ideals—the ideal of a gigantic military State resolved to

dominate all the neighbouring countries, and to propagate its civilization by the sword, against the ideal of peaceful communities dwelling in tranquillity, the great and the small together under the protection of international obligations solemnly guaranteed'—to which I add that such collisions can be determined by force alone.

It is, however, the necessary calamity of warfare that States which enforce international justice occupy the position at once of plaintiff and of judge. Hence England and her allies, precisely because they are the champions of justice, must abstain from two errors: They must refuse to confound retaliation with retribution. Let Germany pay amply for the wrong she has wrought, and give security that the wrong shall not be repeated. But let no one fancy that the destruction of the University of Louvain or the burning down of the Cathedral of Rheims should be punished by the destruction of the Cathedral of Cologne. A judge punishes but never imitates the atrocities of a criminal. The Allies, in the second place, must continue the campaign against the new barbarism until complete retribution has been obtained by satisfying the claims of the victims of German oppression, and, in so far as it is possible, by obtaining security that the crime of Germany shall never be repeated. How these ends shall be attained it is for statesmen to decide, and to decide with reference to the state of things when the war shall have come to an end. Compensation must be paid to Belgium for the outrageous wrongs inflicted upon a perfectly innocent State. France should, in the judgement of most Englishmen, at least recover all the territory she lost in 1871. Europe generally should, if possible, be relieved from the necessity for armaments, which make

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the burdens of an armed peace almost as heavy, and certainly more permanent, than the burdens of warfare. It is for no man to predict the means by which these ends are to be obtained ; all that a prudent observer can now say is that until they are obtained this gigantic war will have been carried on in vain by the defenders of international justice. The task before the Allies is of tremendous difficulty. Its performance is impossible without the cultivation of every manly virtue, and above all of hope.

THE DUTY OF HOPE

In a well-known sonnet Wordsworth terms hope ' the paramount duty that Heaven lays for its own honour on man's suffering heart '. The idea of hope as a duty is strange to modern England, for we confound with hope the sort of hopefulness which is quite as often a folly as a moral obligation. But the two things are utterly different. The hopefulness which makes a man expect that things will always go as he wishes them to go is the sign of a silly and feeble character. The Micawbers of ordinary life always expect that ' something will turn up ' for their own advantage. They in general come themselves to little good, and they constantly do much harm to their neighbours ; their hopefulness at the best is only a little less noxious than the dispiriting pessimism which depresses all energetic action, and sometimes all vigorous thought, but Micawberish hopefulness has little connexion with serious and solemn hope. Such hope really means that a man, after the proper steps have been taken for securing a good end, does not waste his energy by meditating upon all the possible or even all the probable accidents which may bring to failure

the most reasonable and best-laid plans. This is the kind of hope which in reality is essential, with most persons, for the performance of any great task, and certainly for the achievement of any of those great strokes of statesmanship or of generalship on which is grounded the fame of such men as Chatham, Pitt, Wolfe, Nelson, or Wellington. This is the hope which every patriot ought to entertain at any great crisis of his country's history. In nothing is the statesmanlike foresight or insight of Wordsworth more clearly seen than in the energy with which he preached the paramount duty of hope throughout all the terrible years between 1802 and 1814, when England was engaged in what seemed to many the forlorn or desperate struggle against the power, the fortune, and the genius of Napoleon.

During that era, which forms one of the historical glories of England, many Englishmen were for the most part oppressed by hopelessness. We cannot realize this fact, for we see the condition of England between 1802 and 1811 in the glorious light cast upon it by the triumph of Trafalgar, by the victories of Wellington in Spain, by the defeat of Napoleon in Russia, and by the final triumph of England at Waterloo. Nor was the hopelessness of many Englishmen in itself unreasonable. It was the simple fact that for the success in the conflict with Napoleonic despotism the cultivation of hope was the most difficult and yet the paramount duty of Englishmen. It is my firm conviction that at any moment the difficulties, the expenditure, the sufferings, and generally the effort, involved in this Holy War against the pedantic barbarism and oppression of Germany may again make hope the supreme duty of every patriot. For the purpose of the present address allow me to

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illustrate rather than prove my position, as the very inadequate but perfectly sincere preacher of hope, by a comparison between the state of England and of English opinion during 'the great war' (as we used to call it) against the tyranny of the French Empire, and the state of England and of English opinion during this far greater war against the despotism of the German Empire.

The condition and feeling in England is best and most accurately recorded in this sonnet of Wordsworth, written in 1806 :

Another year!—another deadly blow!
Another mighty Empire overthrown!
And we are left, or shall be left, alone;
The last that dare to struggle with the Foe.
'Tis well! from this day forward we shall know
That in ourselves our safety must be sought;
That by our own right hands it must be wrought,
That we must stand unpropped, or be laid low.
O Dastard whom such foretaste does not cheer!
We shall exult, if they who rule the land
Be men who hold its many blessings dear,
Wise, upright, valiant.

You will never read a more important and more accurate historical document. England, though still full of latent energy, was also nearly driven to despair. Nor was this lack of hope at all unnatural. The United Kingdom contained then a population of from 18,000,000 to 20,000,000. An insurrection was at any moment possible in Ireland. The bloody insurrection of 1798 was well within the memory of all men. As to the war, the sympathies of Englishmen were divided. The vast majority of the electors who took any real share in political life supported the war with varying degrees of enthusiasm. But the Whigs as a party were, with

some brilliant exceptions, vehemently opposed to the war with France, and had many of them come, by the strange perversity of partizanship, to regard Napoleon—who detested parliamentary government, and who had reduced the greater number of European States to something like vassals of his Empire—as the representative of freedom. The economic conditions of the time were trying. The poor suffered greatly from taxation. The working of the Poor Law, which warded off immediate discontent as it banished the fear of starvation, was undermining the independence of the country labourer. The poorer classes in London, even in 1803, longed for peace, applauded the French minister who came to negotiate the Treaty of Amiens, and dragged his carriage in triumph to his house. England stood all but alone; no colony aided her with troops or money; the United States were unfriendly; Russia was the ally of France. Large portions of Europe formed technically part of the French Empire, so that it was possible to go from Paris to Hamburg without leaving the dominions subject to Napoleon. Germany, Switzerland, almost every continental State, was in truth subject to his will; fortune favoured him. Wherever he fought on land he gained new victories. The belief prevailed in England that, except on the sea, he was invincible. The maintenance of hope was not only a paramount duty, but a duty hard to perform.

Contrast the state of things in 1914. The whole of the United Kingdom is unanimous in support of the war. England is full of resources. The population of the United Kingdom has risen to more than 45,000,000. The United Kingdom has been transformed into the British Empire. We are waging our first great Imperial war. The most powerful of the British dominions,

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great and free States as they are, Canada, the Australian Commonwealth, New Zealand, British India itself, send regiment after regiment to swell the British armies. France and Russia are both our cordial and active allies. The army sent forth by Great Britain to wage war with Germany exceeds 200,000 men ; it is far greater than any army sent forth either by England or by the United Kingdom during the whole of the great war with France. In every respect but one the British Empire is incomparably stronger than the Great Britain which gave force to the attack on Napoleon and, when he had aroused against him every nation in Europe, struck at Waterloo a final blow to his power. Add to all this that the vast hosts of Germany and of Austria have not produced to the knowledge of the world any general of Napoleonic genius, nor are the Germans in 1914 guided by a man who rivals in his control of scientific warfare the Moltke of 1870-1.

Yet there is one feature in the war of to-day which gives to it an element of danger to England and her allies which did not exist during the great conflict with Napoleon. As that conflict went on it became more and more apparent that it was a war between England and the allies she gradually acquired on the one hand, and one general of transcendent genius on the other. It was a contest between a powerful nation and one man. In this it resembled the conflict between Rome and Hannibal, probably the greatest commander whose achievements are recorded by undoubted history. In such a conflict the chances are ultimately in favour of the strong nation. We now know that after Waterloo Napoleon had only five years of life. The Imperial war of 1914 is a war between Great Britain and her allies on one side, and on the other, not one man, but Germany

with a population of over 65,000,000, whose manhood has for years been militarized—a nation in arms. Nor must it be forgotten that the 65,000,000 of Germany can command the support of the more than 45,000,000 of the Austrian Empire. Let us confine ourselves, however, to Germany. Great Britain and her allies are called upon to vanquish, not one man of genius, but the whole German nation, trained to the belief that the greatness, the glory, and the existence of the Empire depends upon the triumph of German arms. We have to vanquish the bravest and the best armed of nations, and to overcome not only its armies but its belief that every patriotic German must die gladly to ensure the victory of Germany. In plain truth we are at war with a nation not only of soldiers but of fanatics inflamed with ardent faith in a military creed. The resources of the United Kingdom and her allies are infinitely greater than was the power of the United Kingdom when in 1803 it defied the despotism and the armies of Napoleon. But the task laid upon England and her allies in 1914 is in itself far more arduous than the burden laid upon Great Britain in 1803.

This thought does not afford the least excuse either for indolence or for fear, but it does impose on every man throughout the United Kingdom the paramount duty of hope. No speaker can hope that his own language or thought will rise to the greatness of this supreme contest, but I wish to ensure that this address shall not conclude without your hearing from me words well worth the most serious and the most solemn attention. Let me quote to you the language on great occasions of three of the most illustrious of England's worthies. Take first the words of the most eloquent, the most patriotic, the most English of English historians when

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summing up the career of the noblest among England's statesmen :

Chatham sleeps near the northern door of the church, in a spot which has ever since been appropriated to statesmen, as the other end of the same transept has long been to poets. Mansfield rests there, and the second William Pitt, and Fox, and Grattan, and Canning, and Wilberforce. In no other cemetery do so many great citizens lie within so narrow a space. High over those venerable graves towers the stately monument of Chatham, and from above, his effigy, graven by a cunning hand, seems still, with eagle face and outstretched arm, to bid England be of good cheer and to hurl defiance at her foes. The generation which reared that memorial of him has disappeared. The time has come when the rash and indiscriminate judgements which his contemporaries passed on his character may be calmly revised by history. And History, while, for the warning of vehemence, high, and daring natures, she notes his many errors, will yet deliberately pronounce that, among the eminent men whose bones lie near his, scarcely one has left a more stainless, and none a more splendid name.¹

Hear again the most English of England's poets when insisting both upon the duty of hope and upon the meanness of admiration excited by the triumphs of ruthless tyranny :

Here pause : the poet claims at least this praise,
That virtuous Liberty hath been the scope
Of his pure song, which did not shrink from hope
In the worst moment of these evil days ;
From hope, the paramount *duty* that Heaven lays,
For its own honour, on man's suffering heart.
Never may from our souls one truth depart,

¹ Macaulay, *Critical and Historical Essays*, p. 791. (A new edition, 1870.)

That an accursèd thing it is to gaze
On prosperous Tyrants with a dazzled eye ;
Nor, touched with due abhorrence of their guilt
For whose dire ends tears flow, and blood is spilt,
And justice labours in extremity,
Forget thy weakness, upon which is built,
O wretched Man, the throne of Tyranny !¹

Listen, lastly, to the prayer of Nelson, written down
by himself for no eye but his own immediately before
the battle of Trafalgar. You will at least understand
why

England loves thee well, thou famous man,
Thou greatest sailor since the world began.

‘ May the great God whom I worship grant to my
country and for the benefit of Europe in general a
great and glorious victory ; and may no misconduct
of any one tarnish it ! And may humanity after
victory be the predominant feature in the British
Fleet ! For myself individually, I commit my life to
Him who made me ; and may His blessing light upon
my endeavours for serving my country faithfully. To
Him I resign myself, and the just cause which is en-
trusted to me. Amen. Amen. Amen.’

¹ Wordsworth.

WHY WE ARE AT WAR

GREAT BRITAIN'S CASE

BY MEMBERS OF THE OXFORD FACULTY
OF MODERN HISTORY

E. BARKER.

C. R. L. FLETCHER.

L. G. WICKHAM LEGG.

H. W. C. DAVIS.

ARTHUR HASSALL.

F. MORGAN.

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