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THE VISIONS OF YOUTH

BY

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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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FOR the young men and women of to-day the tragic interest of the war must be almost exceeded by that of its issues and sequels. It will fall to them in the following years and decades to deal with these and with the problems which they will create.

I am asked, as an observer from without, and, I trust, a hopeful and sympathetic observer, to say a few words about the spirit in which our younger folk will approach the matter, and will be affected by this portentous inroad and eruption of war into the midst of the world's peaceful and progressive life.

It would never have occurred to me to do such a thing if I had not been asked. The young might more naturally speak for themselves. But one man's thoughts may set others thinking; and I proceed.

I should be disposed to say that the attitude of the generation now growing up towards the consequences of the war will be largely influenced by the mixture in them of drastic and hopeful ways of feeling and thought. By drastic I mean that they are ready not only to face and promote change, but to find that it means a great deal of recast, clearance, and transformation in both thought and things, and especially a recurrence to first principles, with an eagerness to see them carried out. It is this last which

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makes me join the words 'drastic' and 'hopeful' together and avoid any which, like 'cynical' or 'destructive', have negative associations. The young generation is not sceptical, though they may seem detached and indistinct in their beliefs. They have seen too many prospects and vistas open, disclosing possibilities of great developments, not to have a great confidence that something is afoot, and that history has a purpose. They are ready to see the game played on a great scale and with big pieces. Science, with its vast exhibition of potent forces, has contributed to this. Religion, with its recent stress upon what is apocalyptic, tells the same way. And now war has come to corroborate all this. It does so by its colossal proportions and by the novelty and prodigious effects of new forces, appliances, and combinations. But I am thinking more of its power to draw all the world-forces into one huge interplay of communication and collision, and more still of its revelation of the vast effects which may come from ways of teaching and thinking, applied sedulously and working constantly, through the whole of a people's life. The revelation of what may arise, as if 'in an hour that we were not aware of', in the shape of a national self-adulation and ambition, working itself through a rage of envy into a worship of hatred, has been enough to make the generation feel that the stage upon which they are starting to play is not one of small passions or limited forces.

With some, of course, the effect will be to suggest evil

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for evil, force against force ; and, old and young alike, we shall have to be vigilant on this side. But the young knighthood of whom we are thinking will not readily acquiesce in thinking that the reserves of power on the side of good are less than those so vividly displayed by evil. They will look for developments of peace as great as those of war. They will be slow to believe that what hatred can inspire, love cannot surpass. It is here that what I called their drastic tendency will come in. They will recognize that the issues of history have cut down to the quick. The young generation may lack definiteness of Christian profession (though, if I am not mistaken, it will have in its ranks a stiffening of Christian men as intrepid, unselfish, and ready for the call as any generation of the past has been), but it has inherited and embraced the central Christian truth that ' love is best ' and has royal rights. Never, perhaps, have more people believed with a passion of conviction that ' God is Love ' ; and those who are not able to make articulate response to that supreme discovery of the disciple (who had learnt it from his Master's character, teaching, cross and victory), are yet clear enough that love and love alone (in no sensual or passionate sense) is the one power which it is worth while to worship. So, for example, at Christmas-time every kind of voice seizes opportunity to tell us.

The war, if I mistake not, will itself confirm such beliefs. In the new start, the younger generation—German, one may hope, as well as French or British—will recognize

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that such a force as devotion to the Fatherland or 'the old country' must be available in days to come for some nobler call, some higher allegiance. The new will not destroy, but it will transcend the old. With even greater confidence the generation which has poured itself forth to suffer and die for England with such unquestioning simplicity and unreserved devotion, will have been self-taught its own ennobling lesson of what the good in human life can achieve. It has been in years past the distinction of socialism in its best and most generous exponents to ask us to believe not only that we may do a little more good with the forces that we have, but that the moral nature of man is a magazine of latent force which high inspiration, strong conviction, and unfaltering faith can convert into available energy. I expect to see that conviction greatly strengthened in the best of our youth. I do not think they will be content with narrow ideals or will be doubtful of human readiness to meet enlarging demands by enlarging response.

It may not perhaps be fanciful or irrelevant to see even in futurism, with its crude and irreverent treatment of our human past, a caricature—significant, though misguided—of the inclination to 'begin again and do better' with the rich material of human nature.

Probably there is required, if the full energy of a generation is to be called out, a combination of the fervour of hope with the excitement of attack. It will be the effect of the Great War, and of all its brood of after-evils, to

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awaken in the younger people a great fire of indignation and repugnance against those features and qualities of our international and national life which have made the war necessary and inevitable, and which are the roots of much other bitter fruit. Sometimes it will be the overgrowth of luxury or indulgence in all classes, sometimes the indifference about public welfare which allows things to drift into crisis and disaster, sometimes the misuse or neglect of the great opportunities given by the command of money, sometimes the insolent or indifferent forgetfulness of God and of His righteous judgements; but whatever it be, its bitter meanings have been writ large in the war. We Victorians must be prepared (if yet alive) to see a younger generation more definitely antagonistic than we should like to a period in which we enjoyed so much, learned so much, progressed (as we still believe) so much, and had among us leaders and guides and prophets whose equals our successors will be fortunate if they find. But they will say, pointing to the upshot in the war: 'This is what your world came to, this was the outcome of all your wealth and your optimism, and your competition and your self-confidence. We will fight in thought and deed for some better, larger, nobler thing.' Well, be it so! Let them make short work of our ways if only they can really get each nation and class and interest to exchange the ways of selfishness for the ideal of common welfare and mutual service: if only they can really succeed in being humble and large-hearted,

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mutually respectful, and reverent to the eternal things of righteousness.

(It would, of course, be idle to disguise, and our young generation will mistake to their bitter disappointment the signs of the time if they are unprepared to find, that such a catastrophe as the war stunts the faith and dulls the life of many, leaves them incredulous of spiritual power, and either listlessly or defiantly acquiescent in the empire of force and selfishness. I assume that the coming time will be one when the battle of goodness and progress will be a hard one to fight. I only reckon upon the quickening and gathering of the forces which are to fight it.)

Unquestionably there is a disposition to believe that with love as talisman and key, greater things can be done than heretofore, better social conditions worked out, the scale and power of motives altered for the better.

Such a thing as the movement throughout education to teach by eliciting and stimulating rather than by inculcating and compelling, is one instance of this which is full of promise. Another (though these channels badly want flushing by more spiritual force) is the change of prison methods in the direction of restoration by humanizing influences to manhood and self-respect. But these are only instances. The larger underlying feeling is that of desire to be rid of ways of thought and speech which interfere with a genuine respect for the value of human personality in all, and to see what more and better can

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be done in a world where this is more fully accepted as the foundation or inspiration of all social relations.

My thoughts have run hitherto on general lines. But it is by no abrupt transition that they pass over on to more distinctly Christian ground. There is a marked tendency to disencumber the Christian life and way and inspiration of much that has grown up about it and become a part of its identity. Those of our juniors who share with us the faith that there is a Body as well as a Spirit of Christ, and a certain structure or order securing to His people His Presence and gifts, will yet not be unwilling to 'go forward' and see how far this plastic organism can become more transparent of Christ and more magnetic to humanity.

In the ways of worship, in particular, this tendency may be expected to show itself.

But these, perhaps, are small matters compared with the great dominant thought of the world-wide responsibilities, challenges, and opportunities with which Christianity is faced. 'Christendom', to use the old romantic name for what was practically Europe, has come to its climax in this war, this huge anti-Christian result in which not only is peace shattered and violence organized to perfection, but the nations or their representatives substitute for love, hatred; for mutual honour, contempt; for the sincere and loyal word of mutual assurance, every artifice of mutual deceit. What remains of Christ in Christendom? What gives the nations of the West, it will be asked, any

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freehold in that same name of 'Christendom' which seemed almost a synonym for all that was pure, lovely, and gracious in civilization ?

To such questions not a few cynical or disappointed answers may be given. But it happens that they are confronted by the developments of a decade which has brought home to thoughtful people with overpowering surprise the opportunity and urgent demand for a Christendom as wide as humanity, embracing all the races, limited by no lines of colour, the world-wide embodiment of the one religion for men. The spirit of the younger men and women has been rising to the great enterprise which the vision suggests. Many of them after this horrible war may, one would hope, realize that here is the noblest outlet for that chivalry of sacrifice which it has been the glory of the war both to discover and quicken among us. The vision is not only that of great fields hitherto explored or closely barred upon which souls may be won for the Master. It is directed to the influence of the kingdom of the King of kings upon the kingdoms of the earth. Great forces of civilization are shaping, developing, and being transformed. They will combine into a united life of man upon this earth such as has never been seen before in its coherence and interdependence.

What these several constructions of racial and national life become, such will the whole be. To the young chivalry of Christ it cannot be doubtful what secret of energy, what salt of wholesomeness, what strong force

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of cohesion will be needed to bring to their best these surging forces of human life. Thus it is that just when Europe has dishonoured Christ, eager hearts looking out on the world-field find fresh and more confident assurance than ever that Christ is the world's need, that in the great reshapings and upspringings of nationality Christ will be the only sure foundation.

They will recognize that even now the 'day' of opportunity for the West is not so wholly past, but that from the West the seeds of this Christianity must come, though the soils and climates of India, China, and the rest must influence their growth. And in the work of building abroad we may get clearer vision of what is needed to rebuild at home.

It remains to be seen whether the unhappy divisions which in the purely religious sphere our sons may find as inevitable as ourselves are to forbid a unity of Christian action in upholding the standard, in instilling the principles, in laying the foundations on which national and international life in the future in East and West alike must depend for its freedom, harmony, virility and capacity for loyalty and sacrifice.

Without being too sanguine we may rightly discern favourable omens. For it has been a notable feature of younger Christian life among us that, whereas formerly men of different conviction either stood aloof from one another, or came together through some sort of laxity or indifference, it has been latterly found by the juniors

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(and taught by them in a degree to elders) that there is a better way by which in a divided Christendom we may meet as Christians without compromise, to know each other, to speak and confer with each other, to seek God together. Often it has happened that men have got far upon some common topic of religious experience and inquiry before they found out each other's denominational position. Yet each will recognize that in that position were the roots of his own life and convictions. This is a development of immense promise. The intercourse so experienced, and the atmosphere so created may indeed in the long run be destructive of differences. But if so, it will be in the right and hopeful way, not by jettison of the precious things of revelation or of spiritual conviction and inheritance, but by making them more and more ready for fusion in the one Truth and one Church of our faith and of our far-off hope. Meanwhile this habit of mutual intercourse will do much to focus upon our moral and social tasks a disciplined and deepened spiritual force.

There is in this direction great cause for hope. For undoubtedly there has been a sense amongst us that Christian opinion and conscience have not had the influence that they should have upon national and international life, and it is doubtful whether a more active interference of 'the Churches' or organized Christian bodies would be the right remedy. Such interference is apt to be resented. It easily becomes interested or political. It may produce a recoil of discord and recrimination in the Church that

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is concerned. But far more hopeful is the creation in some such way as I have just described of warm forces of comparatively unorganized Christian opinion. They would fuse with what is best in ordinary citizen opinion. They would work, as far as we can judge, as our Lord meant when He spoke of the Kingdom of Heaven as leaven hid in the dough. To some extent at least, and in a direction of first-rate moral importance, the ruinous effects of our divisions would be lessened and their disappearance forestalled. I may express the hope that the hesitation of Roman Catholics to bear their part, or the discouragement offered by their authorities for their doing so, may gradually give way; they would be very cordially welcomed.

We may go further upon the same lines. The group of Student Christian Movements joined together as the World's Student Christian Federation, bears witness to the strong desire or (more truly) the native instinct among the younger people to see such fellowship of a really Christian sort extend itself across national and continental limits. When it is realized that in 2,500 universities and colleges throughout the world, with a united personnel of 700,000 students, 180,000 are members of this Movement, its significance for the future will be unmistakable. There is no lack of national feeling among these; no sacrifice of patriotism to some vague humanitarian feeling. Among the British students I believe that 65 per cent. of the members of the Student Movement have joined the

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colours as against 55 per cent. of the whole body of British students. In Germany we hear of the most active and affectionate support by the Movement to its many members at the front. But in each country members are doing a like work, are conscious of the unity of spirit, motive and method, which when the war passes will make them ready for fresh contact with one another. 'The World's Federation', says a Swiss writer after a visit to France, 'has given a new proof of its usefulness in these days when everything is tested, and we all have faith that it is to be one of the most important factors in the rebuilding of the world after the war is over.' Even at the present time of deadly strain upon all such relations, the links that have been formed by these younger folk have not altogether given way; and they find in the friendly action of their neutral-country members some means of touch and mutual knowledge. Thus it is that without the faintest disloyalty to their respective allegiances, Christians are able to recognize the reality of a unity deeper than even the acutest of temporary antagonisms. I believe we have here the earnest of a force which will grow.

These are great matters, about which it is possible to have eager hopes, or anxious misgivings.

But will the younger generation really face up to the two things which are essential in any progress to a better Europe, a better Christendom of the world? Both are elementary, yet they are the very hardest lessons to learn and to apply.

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The first is the need of personal character. The general corruptibility of officers in one country, the accepted debauchery of the young in another, the general taint of fraud in the commerce of a third, or those combinations of such evils in some degree which all must acknowledge : these must be treated as giants in whom our young chivalry must recognize the true enemy. And these have behind them the softness, the lack of restraint, the impatience of hardness, the ' looseness ' of living (to use a word in something larger than its ordinary sense) of which we have had too much reason to be conscious. Will the discipline of the war and the hard times for all which will follow it start a life less unworthy of the Christian name, and shall we say, more true to the nobility of human nature than to its self-indulgence and self-will ?

' He went forth unto the spring of the waters, and cast salt in there, and said, Thus saith the Lord, I have healed these waters.'

The second thing is the significance of Christ. Never, perhaps, has there been a more resolute, various, and truly questing search for this than in the last two generations. Nor upon a matter so inexhaustible can we afford to be too critical of each other's ways of inquiry. Much of the quest, orthodox or unorthodox, has gone but a little way, has acquiesced too readily in some shallow or in some mechanically accepted solution. Meanwhile, how many have passed by, not only without searching the problem, but without knowing that there was a problem to search ?

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Thinking and unthinking, orthodox or independent, how many men to-day realize that Christ makes light in a dark world, is a rock of foundation on which to build, has the keys of human problems?

But now a stinging shock has awakened us. For we have witnessed the rise of a spirit embodying itself in certain actions and uttering itself in certain principles, bidding for the kingdoms of the earth and the glory of them. The contrast with all that is Christian is perhaps the most dramatic thing in history.

It must, we think, arouse and startle and challenge the generation that enters the field, and recognizes what is at stake. We hope and we must pray that 'out of the eater will come forth meat' and 'out of the' violent 'sweetness', and that such a demonstration of what is anti-Christian may send men back to Christ. Militarism as understood by dominant German opinion is a conspicuous aberration from His principles. But it is not the only one; and Englishmen, we trust, may be less occupied in denouncing it (though denounce it we must) than in searching their own hearts for the kindred mischiefs in their own lives and that of our nation and community, which threaten to 'materialize' life and to substitute the selfishness of 'nature' for the generosity and the devotion to love and duty, which are of Christ.