

## The Spiritual Problems of the Great War.

### III. THE COMMON LIFE OF MEN AND WOMEN.

#### I

THE common life of men and women will become a problem of magnitude directly the war is over, and men released from military duties return to resume those civil pursuits in which women replaced them on account of national exigencies. Certain difficulties were realized when in the first instance it became necessary to substitute the work of women for that of men even as a temporary measure, and though such difficulties have been largely overcome, yet it is recognized that the solution of the problem is merely postponed and that it, together with all the other after-war problems, must break upon us as soon as we are freed from dominating military claims.

Whatever may be the exact nature of the problem when it unfolds to us, and however complicated and confused it may be, one thing at least is certain—there will be no reversion to former conditions, that is to say to conditions precisely as they were before the war. There will at least be modifications of those conditions; some changes made since the war began and now regarded as temporary will be confirmed; some now regarded as assured will be abandoned. Or, if some conditions now prevalent in the new occupations of women should become permanent, other parallel conditions will be correspondingly readjusted so that their new occupations may be pursued without physical and moral detriment to themselves. A curious process of transference has been going on in a dual manner: men for the most part have been pressed into tasks of physical endurance and toil, for shopwalkers and city clerks have gone to the trenches; yet women have not only replaced such in their respective placid occupations but they have also been pressed into strenuous work, both as field labourers and munition workers. In all this transference, with one exception, no clear line has been marked out as to what is and what is not men's and women's work respectively in the needs of the hour. For while men, at any rate for the time being, have vacated work which has not the qualities of manliness inherently in it, women not only have replaced them in the gentler callings but have also assumed tasks

hitherto tacitly regarded as beyond their physical and nerve capacity. The exception referred to, however, is of paramount importance, for beyond a shade of doubt the present conditions indicate that the race considers that women have no place on or near the field of battle save as nurse or comforter, and the unanimity of such a belief proves that a fundamental distinction exists between the permanent occupations of men and women. The instances on record during the last twelve months of women fighting while their country inch by inch was wrested from them, while emphasizing the desperate courage of an abandoned hope, does not nullify the exception. For it is indisputable that however much in other directions their duties in life now interlace and overlap, even if because of sin in the world, men will fight and take life for the sake of all they hold dearest, women have no place as participants in violence. In this respect, without any merit in themselves, and with no journey consciously attempted, they have "arrived" before men at the inheritance of a portion of the Kingdom of Heaven.

It is not only in professional or industrial life that a problem awaits us; the whole subject of the common life of men and women has entered a new phase, and especially is this the case in the primarily higher and all-including plane of Church life. If here the true spirit can be found, if here the true standard can be set and the true unity be exemplified, then from the Church downwards and outwards can a permeating idea be set in motion to secure truth and fellowship. All the relations of men and women are "up for inspection" now (with those that are personal and domestic this article has nothing to do); and the Church which ideally is as young as it is old, as new as it is ancient, has got its witness to deliver.

It is impossible that the swift course of social changes which the war has brought should not touch the subject in all departments of life. For however wearily the war may have dragged by land and sea, and however despairingly the paralysis of hope deferred may have smitten cheering prospects, yet all the while the swiftness of social changes, changes of mind and changes of habit, has been phenomenal. Only the irretrievably prejudiced can refuse to acknowledge this, and while they, the immovables, constitute together with the reactionaries a menace to the solution of any problem, it is our duty now to look beyond them to what has got to be done. There are, of course, numbers of persons who do not trouble them-

selves about any problem one way or the other because they never stay to think, nor can they put into terms the change which has come to themselves and which is affecting their outlook. But, like all others who are heartily grateful when some one else sorts their minds for them with a neighbourly solicitude, directly the changed condition and course of life is expressed for them they respond, and take their place among that mass of persons who, however haltingly, are striving to bring in a better day—a day of the will of Christ in all human relationships.

Can it be said, however, that the common life of men and women is one of the *spiritual* problems arising from the war? Assuredly, and for two reasons. One, because the problem takes its origin in the fact that "In the beginning . . . male and female created He them": the problem has accordingly been submitted to us for solution in the Divine purpose—it has not been sought out by ourselves. The other reason—because in the revelation of God in Jesus Christ lies the solution, and in that revelation alone the evolution of any problem, even of those now arising with new insistence out of the hideousness of war.

If this be so, the whole subject ought to pass from the region of controversy into that of problem, and men and women ought to be at work upon it in the quiet of the divine Presence as serious students, corporately in an exchange of mind, individually in an exhibition of conduct, and flame and prejudice should die down as unworthy of the cause and of the hour. But the problem has got to be so solved—and that quickly; here is no opportunity for intellectual indulgence, for statement and restatement; here is something to be done.

The claim put forward in this article is that whether the problem is set forth in terms of religious or of social life, it must be faced on a basis of common sense, and that at the moment for all concerned temper of mind is more important than definition of view. If puzzled objectors or disputants or investigators—whichever they be—approach the subject, and one another, with the determination that the Kingdom of God demands that the good with good shall not be at cross purposes, a plane will be reached on which movement to solution is possible. Christian temper inevitably produces harmonized problems.

It is true that vexing problems disappear through miracle

sometimes ; it is even possible that the one before us now may do so ; that the ugliness of discussion concerning the highest of relationships may be dispersed as mists or fogs vanish in a freshening wind. There has been too much prayer made by the many to doubt such a possibility ; there is too deep a sense of corporateness abroad to tolerate divisive contentions ; and most of all, the hand of God is on Church and nation alike, pointing to repentance and to hope concerning every trouble that has clogged us. We may, therefore, well be prepared for even our most optimistic anticipations being outstripped by Divine action exceeding in speed and in completeness of effect every hope we may ever have framed. And such a change may come about in ways familiar to us all, as when some great issue, seen unexpectedly from a new angle, takes on another shape and content, and the consent of all is suddenly obtained to what previously was a separating factor. It may be so here again, and we must ever leave space for interposition in all our thinking. Nevertheless, allowing for this, the probability remains that it is through conduct we shall march to destiny, and that it is conduct and temper which will gradually solve the problem before us.

We must not delude ourselves into thinking that a lull in a storm necessarily means that the storm is over, nor that the rise of further complications involves the removal of those previously existing. The previous difficulties remain, to which are added fresh difficulties, and it is as impossible to ignore the past as the present. Indeed, we have all had so much experience of late months in looking at unpleasant facts, individual and national, that we ought to be prepared to look with candour and courage at a delicate question on which so many issues hang.

For there is a common life which men and women have to live, a common task which they have to share, a common past for which they have to atone, and a common future which they must prepare for the younger people amongst them. A common life there has always been, but now former conditions have changed and former standards and measures are now inadequate. The circumstances round men and women have changed, and the problem is one of adaptation to circumstance, not trespass of function. Any theory of adaptation to circumstance might well be dangerous were there not visible elements which indicate plainly the rule of God in the coming of His Kingdom, and so long as that be seen and steadily

obeyed adaptation can proceed without anxiety. Indeed, the trouble largely has been that in this, as in many similar questions, we have noticed a change which we attributed to persons before we observed that it was a change of circumstances which primarily had moved the persons. Hence, without distinguishing between causes and effects, origins and expressions, forces and individuals, we have taken sides and judged vigorously to the confusing of thought and the clouding of truth.

However, we stand on cleared ground—ground clear from prejudice and presupposition alike—when we affirm that it is for conduct we are now asked in solving any of the difficulties which still surround and lie behind the common life of men and women in the world. If this be so, we must reach down to the springs of conduct which find their source in character. Thence we can begin our approach, and we shall not be able to get a better formula to express our purpose than in Tennyson's words—

Self-reverence, self-knowledge, self-control,  
These three alone lead life to sovereign power.

## II

As a spring of conduct self-reverence differs fundamentally from self-esteem or self-complacency. It is both original and ultimate, for it can in its turn rise only from that image of God in which we are made—"the inalienable right of every man"—and it must last to the end, for the value of a human personality has been placed beyond computation. Self-reverence, then, is the recognition of what God intended men and women to be, of what they are potentially, and of the inward standard by which they must live, and it exacts precisely the same toll from a man as from a woman. If men and women are self-reverencing they will never lend themselves to one another, spirit, soul, or body, for any other purpose than the true purpose of God. Self-reverence does not permit spiritual indulgence, moral weakness, mental abdication, and it forsakes at once those who decline from the level of Divine intention. The Rev. H. J. C. Knight says in one of his books: "When once we grasp that for us the highest and best we know alone is open to us, life resolves itself into a series of struggles to be absolutely and

inflexibly true to that highest and best." This is the life of self-reverence, for it is that higher life which witnesses both to our origin and our destiny.

Dull-souled mortals no doubt would say that such a standard is unattainable. But this is not so, either for the few individuals with aspirations or for the bulk of men and women as a working principle, and since working principles are more popular and better understood by our nation than lofty aspirations, it is in this latter classification that we must test our theories. Self-reverence becomes a working principle when it governs men and women who, in co-operation as to obtaining a solution, are approaching their problem from opposite sides. It is not to be confused with an expressed reverence each for the other—indeed, this is the point where we have missed our way—but rather is it of each for each, for himself, for herself. Without pausing to give reasons or analyse causes, the reverence of men for women, from the bygone days of pedantic and unreal forms of chivalry to the protectiveness of the supposedly weak by the supposedly strong, has passed or is rapidly passing away. And the reverence of women for men on a basis of their greater intellectual qualities or social status has passed or is passing also. Since, however, no relationship can be sound which has not respect and reverence for its basis, what substitute can be found for that which changing days has radically changed? Surely, the same thing essentially, but purged of dross, a reverence which because it dignifies and enhances self-personality reverences other persons.

It would be easy to say that such a type of person would be intolerably priggish, that men and women would pass through the world as wooden and unresponsive as the dolls of our childhood, and many a plain issue has been obscured by a cheap laugh. But we are here talking of living men and women, thrust into competition or its equivalents in effect, whose common life must henceforth be spent in association which will be largely of the nature of experiment; thrown on new levels of comradeship with new expanses of liberty not yet "pegged out," a common life in which it will be needful to discipline contiguity of all kinds, mental, moral, and spiritual. The tone of the corporateness at which we all aim will be set by the pitch of our individual self-reverence.

This common life has come to us. It is not to be fussed over

nor to be perpetually theorized about. It will contain at least as many comic as pathetic incidents. It will have to be lived very simply and very straightforwardly. But in the end, the measure of success will be the measure of conviction that self-reverence, mutually existent, producing common-sense thinking and common-sense action, will lead to "sovereign power."

Self-knowledge has been much increased through the war, and has shown up unsuspected strength and weakness of character. Therefore the hour is good for common life to begin on a larger scale. It is difficult, if not wholly impossible, to get any related view of what is happening in the character of human beings. The pessimist can paint his picture true in thin washes of decadence and despair; the optimist can deify human sacrifice and endurance; the "moderate man"—the much-despised middle man of bartered thought—will be pessimist and optimist in turn, or whenever he is not thoroughly muddled in an attempted reconciliation of contradictory facts. But whether they can be related now or not, streaks of character hitherto unknown in certain persons are manifest everywhere, and the Day which is declaring many things declares also that we are more or less than we previously thought ourselves to be. Self-knowledge has grown by bounds as men and women have been hurried at a giddy speed from one experience to another, and have discovered new capacities and flaws in their own "make up." This growth is of course a great gain if men and women are going to be thrown together in board-room and workshop, in Church and State, in profession and trade, and are yet going to preserve all that is best in their original relations as men and women. Without fuller self-knowledge contiguity might have had many dangers, but with it there need be no fear.

It is probably fair to say that in all this subject one side has much to unlearn and the other much to learn, and that this is the price to be paid for a harmonized common life. It is easy still—and very frequent—for a man to talk in a broad-chested way of "what a man thinks" when he is in the midst of a common task. It is equally easy, and very frequent, for a woman to introduce the insistent note of "and women also." Either is fretting and both should be needless. A little more self-knowledge and a little fuller acceptance of the doctrine of "like passions" would make it plain that no one delights either in usurpation or in invasion, and however

little we care to be drawn into definitions, these are the two terms which in the minds of many describe the present situation. Self-knowledge is an antidote to antagonisms, since knowing ourselves better than before we know equally our resemblances to others, and from such a base can at least be reasonable about them.

As Christian persons with—it is to be hoped—a hatred of evil we shall in our desire for self-knowledge tend to lay emphasis on the evil to be dreaded rather than on the good to be appreciated. And self-knowledge must include a sense of sin and of the horror of falling into it. Equally also must emphasis fall on pure endeavour, not only nor chiefly on the negative of fear and dread, but on the positive of holiness, the pursuit of which needs perfecting in the fear of God. And it is inconceivable that men and women each taking up their call to common life, each self-knowing in a new degree, should not with courageous humility stand and work together, each alive to the sources of weakness and of strength.

When self-reverence and self-knowledge are called to action they appear as self-control, and this not in the sense of negation or suppression, but of that highest and best for which we strive. It is a virtue which does not consist in restraint, and it may as readily drive the timid who would run away back into the hottest part of battle as it would curb the lip or limb of the veriest fighter that was ever born. It is disciplined activity, that is all.

Poise means much in delicate situations, and though honours may not outwardly fall to the self-controlled, they become in reality the umpires of the world. Possibly life would be somewhat tame if all were to this extent self-controlled, and it would be as cruel to them as hurtful to the race if men and women might not break out in venture and prospect and plead for newer, better things. But in the end, "sovereign power" rests with self-control, for when the storm is dying down for very exhaustion, the steady voice will be able to be heard and the strength will be fresh still to arbitrate and judge. The self-controlled do not spurt nor falter; only when their work is done, then they are gone.

If not in its highest form in the few, the measure of self-control in the many, arising in part from the new moral and social responsibilities which the war has brought, will be a great asset in the solution of our problems, for it will enable us without sulking at non-appreciation or jibbing at delay to press on with steady purpose,



ready for "the thorn-road" if only the "mount of vision" can be won.

It would be of little use to write at this moment in our history as a Church and a nation of any virtues or qualities in the abstract. We are up against hard facts and realities of life, with consciences aroused, and neither sermon nor message that is not in terms of life and of human experience has any value for us. The National Mission is focusing for us as Churchpeople the bitter lessons of the war. The old moral and social problems challenge us freshly, even while we are strained under the burden of a great national load. New problems rise thickly to make their claim upon our energies and faith. Through them all, whether old or new, we know that a voice is calling, and that it is the voice of the Lord in the heat of the day. And we begin to learn that what we are listening to, whether here at home or on the fields or seas of battle, is the call to subordination of personal to general good. It is France which so largely has helped us to hear this call. "Yes, one suffers," said a French war widow in September, 1914, "but it may be the little ones coming after us will suffer less." And only the other day the parched French gunners at Verdun emptied their water-bottles to cool their guns rather than risk the issue of the battle by satisfying their own thirst. For once—and perhaps for ever amongst us—the cause of common good is seen to be greater than the sacrifice which purchases it, and the opportunity of vindicating this great principle is before us again in working out the common life of men and women.

It is easy to see just now that all that is implied in the term is no abstraction, but a call to service, to work, to conflict, and all for *the sake of others*. The blots and stains, the barriers and obstacles which men and women could not remove alone, they must in contrition cleanse and assail together, making the religion of Jesus Christ the secret and the open power of a purified nation. It is in a common life of Christian dimension that they must fulfil their task, and in the last resort it is a thing not to talk about, but quietly to do.

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\*\* Previous articles in this series have appeared as follows:—

- I. *The Call of the War*. By the Rev. L. George Buchanan (February).
- II. *The Cross Among the Ruins*. By the Rev. E. A. Burroughs (April).