

A War-Time Missionary Sermon.¹

[BY THE BISHOP OF WINCHESTER.]

"It shall be built again with street and moat, even in troublous times."
—DANIEL ix. 25.

"Enlarge the place of thy tent and let them spread forth the curtains of thine habitations; spare not, lengthen thy cords, and strengthen thy stakes."—ISALAH liv. 2.

AN author of some distinction in the literature of fiction said the other day, speaking for himself and for a friend who is known throughout the English-speaking world, "We feel unable to write now; things are too big for us." There is reverence in the speech; such reverence as was more outspoken in the ancient, holy words "Be still and know that I am God." "Let all the earth keep silence before Him." "Thy way is in the sea and Thy paths in the deep waters, and Thy footsteps are not known." Yet at such a time as this the true attitude of the Church and of her members is, I suppose, that of Habakkuk: "I will stand upon my watch and set me upon the tower, and will look forth to see what He will speak with me."

Nor can this expectancy be wholly silent. There may rightly be some attempt to discern the signs of the times. Least of all can this be wrong if in straining to see new indications of God's purpose we guide ourselves by remembrance of His works and "wonders of old time" and by the knowledge which He has given us of His abiding purposes.

The cause of Missions, the cause of the Gospel, suffers heavily to-day. The auspices may seem against us. But were things brighter, we may well ask, 117 years ago, when your fathers took up, with the gallantry of Christian faith, the forlorn hope of Evangelization? What in those days was the "home base"? What were the instruments and methods available? What were the open doors and highways of communication? The contrast is full of heartening suggestiveness. But, all the same, things are dark to-day. We must not deny it, nor ignore it, nor miss (as the world so strangely does) the signs of God's chastening Hand. Missionaries

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in places are interned or impeded. Communications are poorer and more perilous. Reinforcements must needs be smaller, since many who would have been our volunteers have heard the sterner calls of war ; some will never return to take up the purpose which in others, we hope, will gain depth and simplicity from the experience of earthly chivalry. In the ears of many of our women the call of suffering to be tenderly cherished is too loud to leave opportunity for other voices. If this were all, the heartening statistics of the year might well make you feel that there was much more cause for thankfulness than for fear. Your accepted candidates are only fewer by six, your contributions actually increased by £24,000. Alas ! we know that it is not all. We cannot forget that Europe, the great trustee of the Gospel, has become also Europe the great stumbling-block, or scandal, to it. What must the nations think and say of Christendom ? “ Christian ” nations tearing out each other’s vitals ; Christian spirit, and the Churches which embody it, wholly unable to forbid or to stay the strife ; force worshipped and triumphant ; and, above all, a spirit of hatred, and even a glorification of that spirit, as almost the new commandment of the latest age ; Christian ministers, if we may judge by reports of German pulpits (and are our own entirely free ?) uttering words of deadliest rancour—these things must tell for evil : must perplex and baffle the friendly, must give great occasion to the hostile. The Name of Christ is blasphemed through us. Heathenism may well reply to our missionary call—“ Physician, heal thyself.”

Perhaps there is more yet to be reckoned in. Are our own thoughts absorbed by the reports and anxieties and efforts of war ? Are prayers that might have gone up for the great missionary cause displaced for those which plead for the urgent necessities, and fears, and hopes of this appalling struggle ?

The outlook is clouded ; the hindrances real.

Yet I know that I speak true when I say that to the question “ Are you discouraged ? ” there comes up from your hearts, genuine and unaffected, the answer, “ No.” If that reply were prompted only by the instincts of faith and simple duty, it would be worth much, breathing the spirit and witnessing to the power of the Kingdom whose “ banner, torn yet flying, streams like the thunder-storm against the wind.”

But I would submit to you that it is more than instinctive. In

a time of shaking the things that are not shaken will remain. Can we already see grounds of reason which justify the instinct? My belief is that we can. Let us consider.

1. We have emerged from a period before the war of easy self-contentedness and apparent stability: one of those times in which men say, "To-morrow shall be as this day, and yet more abundant"; when "all the earth sitteth still and is at rest," a time when our enlightened present felt able to look back with complacency upon the strifes and tragedies of the past; when civilization seems to stand by its own equipoise and solidity. There are no times more dangerous than those. They put statesmen off their guard. They conceal the strength and possibilities of evil. They dispose men to forget God: to leave out of account His Providence. Threatening symptoms here and there, the forebodings of thoughtful and close observers, even a half-acknowledged feeling that things cannot go on long as they are, are not enough to affect greatly the general influence of such a time.

But the explosion comes, the volcanic forces find their outlet, and the lava streams out to deface and scorch the lands. The challenge to patriotism and the stimulus of response at first engross men's thoughts. But the conviction quietly forms that, noble as are the opportunities which the storm time gives for individual or national prowess and patience, we are confronted by what is in its essence an explosion of evil; it changes all the values and credits; we cannot trust what we trusted; we must take stock afresh; we must strike deeper. Against evil rampant we must look round for good. From a world of tumult we look upwards to God. The upward look is, perhaps, at first baffled: God seems silent or powerless; and we are tempted to deny Him, and to turn to the idols of iron and gold. But this is not the main effect. "Amidst all that," said a N.C.O. to me, speaking with quaint thought and expression of the hideous *mêlée* of a charge against machine guns, "you feel that there must be a Supreme Being." The feeling grows that all this must mean something, and something great, else all is moral chaos. It is the very nerve of faith which is touched. Meaning or no meaning for the world's history and for human lip! that and nothing less is the issue. And so it is that through the mists there is half discerned the mighty reality of the just, patient, and loving Will of God. It is at work in judgment, but through judg-

ment for good. God has a meaning through it all. That is one strong reason for courage, strong but indefinite.

2. Dare we go on to ask what He means? Surely we can tell in part by the effects. He compels us to understand again the moral issues. The old struggle of good and evil is revealed; the profound antagonism between them cannot be overlooked nor disguised by a network of refined criticism and appreciations of the better and the worse in all things. We see the evil; we can detect its roots; self and selfishness, individual and corporate; covetous desire; self-worship and self-confidence; the envy and the hatred which selfishness breeds; the trust in visible things; the contempt of the invisible. So far as we see these things avowed and adopted by our enemies, so far as we can conscientiously say that we ourselves and our Allies are against them, so far it is well, and we are at peace with our own conscience and grateful for a noble opportunity. But it is only shallow thought and foolish complacency which can stop there, and not go on to own that we too have had and have our part in things which, full-grown in our enemies, we recognize and detect.

For all the nations, and not least for our own, we have to ask what is the great antagonist force which can hold the field against evil, enduring it, resisting it, overcoming it.

There is no answer but one. That force is the Kingdom of God upon earth, the force which He revealed, and wielded, and wields, Who came, in the power of it, to declare it and to set it up; the force which has its spring in love, coming out from God, Who is love, to find expression in the lip of man. Nothing else will do instead of this: not civilization, nor intelligence, nor culture, for evil may turn each and all of these into its agents and instruments. It is the force of the Kingdom which the Gospel proclaimed.

3. But then there is a third consideration which bears specifically upon our particular work. Forced by the war to face, and not shirk, the fundamental issues, we find, of course, that the scope is world-wide. Far more than Elizabethans we are in "spacious times." To think in Continents as we were lately bidden to do seems, as some one has said, already a belated thing. We can think no other than world thoughts of world issues. The Kingdom is one for all the kingdoms and peoples.

This experience makes us look back. We pick up anew our old

recollections of the way in which the purpose of God has worked. It has gone forward by chosen and prospered instruments—Abraham and his seed, Moses and the nation which he builds, David and Solomon, with the monarchy which grows into an Empire, and becomes for ever the symbol of the ideal Kingdom ; Alexander and Augustus, broadening life out and binding it into wider unities so that thinkers dream of a city in which gods and men are one.

These are parts of God's ways.

But there is (more to our present purpose) another Divine method even more marked and striking still, sometimes interlacing the other, sometimes contrasted with it. It works by catastrophe ; its way is to release, through outward disappointment and failure, more spiritual hopes. Take the conception of the City of God, of the spiritual Jerusalem : it rises out of the ashes of the town sacked by Nebuchadnezzar. With the final destruction by Titus it shows itself in fuller glory to St. John at Patmos. With the fall of the Eternal City it acquires in Augustine's hands a new concreteness as the dominant reality of history. It stood in the world, but not of it ; at the very time when the invasions seemed to be shattering all unity into fragments it was there, a prophecy and a pledge of human unity in some far-off day.

And now we, who have talked so fondly of our " Christendom " and half identified it in our own thoughts with European civilization, extended into the great English-speaking civilization, now, in presence of Europe's Armageddon, the huge collapse of its security and self-contentedness, do we not look out upon a world which is quite plainly henceforth a single arena on which problems of universal interest are set to be solved, and issues are joined of gain or loss, progress or ruin to—nothing less than the humanity in which all the races have part ?

The surface signs have been abundant : the service of our Indian fellow-subjects tendered and given for an Empire, whether or no it is beloved, is seen with respect, and does justice between its many races and religions : the alliance with Japan ; the strong tension of the best American opinion about the moral issues and the immoral methods of the war ; the transformation of the half-sentimental relation between the Dominions and ourselves into one of conscious and resolute joint service to a cause of lofty principle ; these all are signs on the surface of the increasing unity.

But the matter goes much deeper than this. The world is challenged, by this awful catastrophe, to decide and declare by what principles it will live; to discover what forces it can rally against all too visible bulks and masses of material force and corporate selfishness. It has been fatally but gloriously plain that principles matter; that civilization cannot merely move by its own impetus, or stand by its own stability.

We may, I think, fairly claim that, in regard to all this, the thought that has been ahead of its time has been that which has come from the Mission-field. Such comprehensive survey of world possibilities, world dangers, and world opportunities as, to take a single name, Dr. Mott gave us in the decade before the war went some way to anticipate what has now become palpable. If the Christian Churches failed to make adequate response to such responses, their failure was less complete than that of the nations.

But that is of the past. It is to the future that we turn with straining eyes and beating hearts. What a wonderful opportunity for the faith of Christ! What a call to the barren to bear! What a challenge to enlarge the tent, to lengthen the cords, to strengthen the stakes! A world-wide task and a world-wide conflict.

Evidently there are two great ministries which the wide world needs in the Name of Christ. In both this Society can thankfully and hopefully claim a share.

They both touch closely the work for which we come together in prayer and thought.

1. The first, least easy to define, is that of influence, Christian influence upon the life of the nations, upon which we call their civilization, upon their historical growth, national and international politics, upon the behaviour of the stronger of them to the weaker, and so forth. We believe, with a belief which is stronger than ever now, that Christ is the fountain head from which justice draws its strength and equitableness, and loyalty its self-sacrifice, and patriotism its responsibility and self-restraint, and even war, while war lasts, its chivalry and honour.

If I were asked to name instances where this influence was being exerted (otherwise than by mere contagion of upright character and disinterested service), could I do better than point to what has been done under the auspices of this Society by Alec Fraser at Trinity College, Kandy, by William Holland at Allahabad, and now

at Calcutta—work frankly and intensely Christian, and yet conscientiously fair to other faiths—work which feeds the springs and nourishes the root of civilization and character ; work which does our Lord honour by showing His power to elicit and stimulate and purify the best in India's life. I know the honour which the work has won from the ablest servants of the State in India, not too favourably disposed towards Missions, as such, by what they see to be its character-building results.

It is similar work by different methods and on a different plane that I saw done in Tinnevely, at Palamcotta and Nazareth, by your own and the sister Society in building and purifying village life in India.

It is such work again, in a still more vaguely diffusive form, which is done in such noble Missions of Healing as those of Peshawar and Bannu.

The Kingdom of God is as leaven ; and at home and on the world-field alike we must do our part to help the leavening, and recognize and help without jealousy the work of the leaven wherever we see it ; to own it as His Who redeemed the world, that the power of His redemption might win the world to be such as He from the first made and designed it to be, in light, and goodness, and truth.

2. But the Kingdom of which the breath is the Spirit Who breatheth where He will and of which every man who anywhere feareth God and doeth righteousness is in a measure a servant, has yet for its appointed organ and instrument the society, company, body, and Church of the Redeemer. He founded it upon the Rock of His own acknowledged Messiahship, self-revealed and Spirit-witnessed in its supernatural and Divine fullness, and He built and builds it of those who, one by one, with heart and lips make confession of His Name. It was the work of the devoted Christians whose tradition of faith and piety you inherit to witness, in times when the truth was almost forgotten among we English folk, for that to which now war and peace alike testify—namely, that this Kingdom, this City of God, cannot be less than world-wide, must have its gates open day and night, must gather into it the desirable things of all nations, must recognize among its citizens no distinctions (except of varying kinds of honour and use) of colour, and race, and sex, and kind.

It is easy enough, when looking back, to see the crudeness of

the early efforts. They were like those of children, feeling their way, finding their strength. We can see how they lent themselves to irony such as that of the honest and genial Thackeray ; and that there was a certain truth in the charge that they went after blacks abroad, forgetting the abject intensity of white needs at their doors.

But with childlike dutifulness and simplicity they held to their principle—or rather to their faith. They were out for the salvation of souls. They stood for the equal value of every human soul, not because all are equally insignificant, but because each was precious in His eyes Who clothes with glory the single flower. But, in doing this, they stood implicitly for the inclusion of every race in the City of God.

The amazing century which has passed since then has opened out for seeing eyes the magnificent possibilities which this implied, the enormous range of its meaning, and the inevitable necessity of it, if faith in a world Redeemer was to endure at all. But, if we do not mistake, the confusions and destructions of the war bring a new and stern compulsion to face the truth. If there are indeed world-wide issues of truth and right and freedom, there must be everywhere the witness of Him Who alone is Truth and Righteousness, Who alone makes free. Words of half-prophetic sort were spoken two years before the war by Dr. Vandycke, and are quoted by my noble and missionary hearted friend and colleague, Dr. Arthur Brown, of New York : “ It may be that disaster and humiliation and weakness must befall the Christian forces, and they must be driven to some dreadful battlefield of Armageddon to make them stand together against the united powers of darkness and unbelief.”

How passionately this must make us long for what is not within any human foresight of possibility—the world-wide witness of a world-wide Church. We cannot accelerate it otherwise than by our fervent prayers, and by the cultivation of the Spirit and temper (thank God, so much more common) which across divisions owns brotherhood, by which we can converge even if the meeting-point be far beyond the horizon. To do more might only shatter what we have. But let us, together where we can, apart where it must be so, keep doing the work of the Kingdom, keep bearing witness to the King, keep gathering in what the native races and the natives have to bring, keep building the walls of the City with the open gates.

Hold on, then, with your beautiful and Christ-blest work. Keep your anniversary in thankfulness and hope. Go out from it to persevere. You do not need for this such large and ranging thoughts as we have dwelt upon together to-night. The lives of the children whom you rescue from the pollutions and cruelties of heathenism into the innocence and happiness of Christian life; the women whom you build up into the purity of womanhood; the men to whom Christ through you teaches manhood, self-mastery, and patience, or who become in their turn His Evangelists and witnesses: these are your reward, and it is rich; these are also your evidence, and it is sufficient of the necessity and beauty of what you do.

But God fulfils Himself in many ways; and I have desired, in a time of confusion of face and perplexity, to ask you to descry indistinctly I know, but not uncertainly, that even out of the darkness the light breaks, and out of our narrowing troubles comes some fresh largeness of hope.

