

The White Ribbon

FOR GOD AND HOME AND HUMANITY

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A SERMON ON THE WAR.

Among God's children everywhere have been deep searchings of heart as to the why and wherefore of the terrible war which is now devastating Europe. We publish below the thoughts of a young soldier, Lieut. E. Guy Melland, an ex-New Zealander. He was the only son of his family who adored him—a very fine young man. He wrote this after he joined the Army in August, 1914. He went to the front in October, and had eight months' service in the trenches with the 1st Battalion, West Yorkshire Regiment, being killed in action in Flanders, 1st July, 1915, aged 26.

Every thinking human being in the world has been challenged, and no one can be at peace with himself again until he has taken up this challenge, thought this matter fairly out, and answered it (even at the cost of the sacrifice of cherished opinions, or of having to remodel his entire philosophy, or of having to find an entirely new base on which to stand). Man has been given a mighty conundrum; he has before ignored such others as the problem of the meaning of life, but this one is most self assertive, and man can hardly dodge it now.

This is the question:—

What is the meaning of it all?

What the sense? What the purpose?

Now, let us think coolly and calmly, and duly clear the ground first, and properly understand this question.

Firstly, some will say that there is no answer—it is fate; but this is opposed to the rules, for it is impossible

to discuss this question without one supreme postulate, and that is: the fact of the existence of God, and of course, of His infinite power and love for man. To those who deny this, I have no more to say. Everyone who is not an atheist, however, must have in his head, at the outset, a clear idea that this world is run for man's good by an all-powerful, all loving God. Once that postulate is granted, we can get on.

But secondly, there are those who say we are not meant to know the answer to the question. They have no divine warrant for saying so, they speak thus from their human intelligence, which is limited. I will answer them from my human will (which is free, and therefore unlimited), that I mean to find out, and that I **will** know.

Well then, what is the justification of the present state of affairs? I know that there is a justification, for that is a sure corollary from our postulate. There is a meaning, and a sensible purpose in it, and the whole thing is not only for our good, but it is the best thing possible for us (if it is not, then is God either not perfectly loving, or not omnipotent).

What is more (though I am not of the school that attributes the death of every sparrow directly to God), this catastrophe may surely be legitimately termed an "act of God." Does man want this war? No! Ninety and nine of every hundred men would have done almost anything they could to have averted it—and yet, here it is. This, to my mind, emphasises the whole matter strangely, and tells me there is some mighty reason, some overwhelming urgency.

Man has a great gift from God. It is (what I shall call) a sense of absolute good. It is not unerring, but we can rely on it as a rule; and it needs no finely balanced sense of good to declare this present war to be, in itself, an evil. Yet—it is the best thing for us, we know; so though not good absolutely (I use the word in a rather technical logical sense) it is yet good empirically, or relatively to some natural law, or set of conditions of which we are ignorant.

What, then, is this unknown factor in the equation? There is some influence which has been at work on the Earth, which has caused this wide divergence between God's will as done in Heaven (let us say, our concept of "absolute good"), and as done at present on Earth.

We pray that God's will be done on Earth, as in Heaven. It is done on Earth always, but as yet in a different way—for man has been allowed to decide on some large questions as to the method of its working; though he cannot frustrate the Will, yet he can turn it into evil channels.

Now how am I to proceed in order to find out God's purpose in making—or allowing—man to suffer, for suffer he will in the coming months as man has seldom suffered before. My God is an efficient God; and when He makes all this pother, He gains His end—which means that man gains something, for is it not all for our sakes? Then I propose to examine the ways in which we shall stand to gain by this war, and to see if amongst them there is not one reason worthy of all this horror.

Well, how shall we gain?