

A MEDITATION ON PEACE

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IT is clear that, when St. Paul made his great list of the fruits of the Spirit, he did not arrange them in any casual order. They represent a progressive series of states or graces, which develop in the soul from the single budding-point of Love : that pure, undemanding love of God in Himself, and of His creatures, good and bad, congenial and uncongenial, for His sake, which is the raw material of our blessedness. Such love means a certain share in the Divine generosity, tolerance and patience towards every manifestation of life: "Whoso dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him." Whoever then achieves this state of charity and spreads it, in however small a way, has already made a true contribution to the peace of the world. (We can understand this, even though most of us must spend our lives in learning to practise it.) But next, St. Paul ascends to the very summit of the spiritual life and says, not that this Spirit of Love will bring forth such suitable fruits as helpfulness, self-denial, good social and religious habits, but that the twin signs of its living presence are Joy and Peace. Joy, the spirit of selfless delight, and Peace, the spirit of tranquil acceptance, are the first-fruits of the Eternal Charity received into the soul of man.

It is well to think of this, for during the last months, joy and peace have seemed to retreat further and further from us, and especially from those who care most deeply and work most eagerly for peace. The world grows madder, more frightened, more full of hatred and unrest. All that we read or hear is charged with malicious suggestion, ungenerous suspicion, fear, pessimism, prejudice, all steadily and secretly pushing civilisation towards hell; and those most conscious of this tempest of insanity and lovelessness in which we live, are more and more tempted to despair and rage. The commonest sins of those who work for

peace, are the tendency to take a gloomy and embittered view, and to advocate their principles in a controversial way. In so far as pacifists yield to these sins they defeat themselves, for peace cannot grow apart from joy and love. An embittered pacifist is like a poisoned chalice, he injures the human and defames the divine. The "peace which is from above" means a tranquil and selfless delight in God's splendour, a share in His widely tolerant attitude, and trust in His ultimate triumph, which kills depression and fuss. Every soul in whom these dispositions are alive, who stands firm for charity, joy and gentleness in every situation, is a check on the world's descent towards destruction and thus an agent of the Divine saving power.

A Creative Peace Propaganda

Christians are bound to the belief that all creation is dear to the Creator, and is the object of cherishing care. The violent as well as the peaceful, the dictators as well as their victims, the Blimps as well as the pacifists, the Government as well as the Opposition, the sinners as well as the saints. All are children of the Eternal Perfect. Some inhabitants of this crowded nursery are naughty, some stupid, some wayward, some are beginning to get good. All are immersed in the single tide of creative love which pours out from the heart of the universe and through the souls of self-abandoned men. God loves, not merely tolerates, these wayward, violent, half-grown spirits and seeks without ceasing to draw them into His love. We, then, are called to renounce hostile attitudes and hostile thoughts towards even our most disconcerting fellow sinners; to feel as great a pity for those who do wrong as for their victims, to show an equal generosity to the just and the unjust. This is the only peace-propaganda which has creative quality, and is therefore sure of ultimate success. All

else is a scratching on the surface, more likely to irritate than to heal.

Peace and Joy are permanent characters of a realistic Christianity; the inseparable signs of the Spirit's presence in the soul. They are not achieved at the end of our growth, but are present from the beginning, hidden in the deeps, long before the restless surface mind is able to receive them. One of the German Confessional pastors imprisoned for his faith wrote home saying, "though on the surface it may be rough weather, twenty fathoms down it is quite calm." That's it. There, beyond succession, where the soul's ground touches essential Being, is the inexhaustible fount of peace. There it must be nourished, by contemplation not by negotiation, and thence it must radiate in slowly spreading circles, at last to conquer the unpeaceful world.

Such creative peace, if it is indeed brought forth by the Spirit, will mean an entire and tranquil acquiescence in the action or non-action of God, not merely as regards our own lives but, what is far more difficult, as regards the sufferings, needs and wrongs of the world. A peace and joy which endures in and through the compassion, indignation, helplessness and puzzle of mind with which we see the cruelty and injustice of life, the violence of the strong, the sufferings of the weak and the oppressed. Even this pain and evil, and the world's dark future, we are to realise as enfolded in a deeper, imperishable life: and it is when we see it thus, from God's side, that we deal with its problems best.

The Awful Weight of the World's Bewilderment

Peace is a word which echoes through the New Testament. It was one of the chief gifts offered by Christ to those who followed Him; a peace which came from the Transcendent, which was based on a deep confidence in God and an entire acceptance of the action or non-action

of God. "My peace I give unto you, not as the world giveth . . . let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid . . . He stood among them, and said Peace." If we replace these texts in their New Testament setting, we see that it was when He drew near to the crisis and agony of the Passion, and the tension of His life was great, that Christ more and more emphasised Peace. Peace, not as the world giveth: the inward tranquillity of a mind that looks beyond anxiety, conflict ready for anything, even destruction itself: believing all, hoping all, trust all. A peace which never quite loses the objective unearthly joy in God's action and the privilege of being caught up into that action, whatever the cost may be. That sounds all right, and there are moments when we seem to draw near to it. But the test comes when this peace must be matched against the world's contradictions and cruelties, troubles, evils and assaults: when we must be peaceful, not in contrast to the warlike but with the warlike, showing to their victims a compassion which is without anger and bitterness, and bearing in tranquillity the awful weight of the world's bewilderment, suffering and sin. Then we discover whether our peace is a natural feeling or a supernatural fact. For the peace of God does not mean indifference to those sins and sufferings. It can co-exist with the sharpest pain, utmost agony of compassion. We see this clearly in the Saints, who bore the burden of redemptive suffering with tranquil joy. "O Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world, grant us Thy peace." That is a tremendous prayer to take upon our lips: the prayer of heroic love. It means Peace bought at a great price; the peace of the Cross, of absolute acceptance, utter abandonment to God, a peace inseparable from sacrifice. The true pacifist is a redeemer and must accept with joy the redeemer's lot. He too is self-offered, without conditions, for the peace of the world.