

What War Is

[A selection from Dr. Charles E. Jefferson's recent volume, *WHAT THE WAR IS TEACHING*, copyrighted 1916, and reprinted by permission of the publishers, Fleming H. Revell Company.]

An extraordinary conflict is raging, and all the world is looking on. Everybody is gazing, but not everybody sees the same thing. Different persons see different things according to the measure of their knowledge, the depth of their insight, and the keenness of their spiritual discernment. What do you see?

Some see nothing but a spectacle. The war to them is a great sight. It is a huge bonfire lighting up the earth and sky, a solemnizing bonfire it is true, but yet nothing more than a bonfire. A conflagration is fascinating in proportion to its size. This one is extraordinarily thrilling. A continent is on fire. You hear such persons exclaiming: "It is wonderful!"

Some see a tragedy, a gruesome and heart-breaking act in a great world drama. "All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players. They have their exits and their entrances," and in the course of a century they play many parts. For forty years the leading nations of Europe have been practising for a great war-tragedy. Billions of dollars were expended on the scenery. Millions of men were drilled in the varied and difficult parts. Numberless dress rehearsals were conducted, and finally, in the years of our Lord 1914, a pistol shot in the streets of Serajevo, gave the signal for the beginning of the play. The curtain went up, and for more than a year and a half the play has gone on, each succeeding scene striking a deeper terror through the heart of the world. To many onlookers the war is a vast tragedy to be cried over and shuddered at. You can hear them saying: "O, it is horrible!"

To others it is a social phenomenon to be studied scientifically. Thousands of observers stand with notebook in hand, studying the interesting experiment, and industriously recording their comments and conclusions. For years the war colleges have been discussing the comparative merits of different styles of instruments of slaughter. Fierce controversies have raged among the experts concerning the methods of waging successfully war on land and sea, and now the instruments are being tried, the methods are being put to the test, and the disputed points are being settled. The military and naval experts and critics are making scientific observations. Just as the sociologist studies alcoholism and tuberculosis and poverty, so do these observers study war, gathering information for the world's guidance when war shall come again. The exclamation on the lips of these students is: "How interesting!"

WAR A MEDIUM OF REVELATION

But is it not possible to look upon this war as a medium of revelation, an organ of the divine mind, a means of communicating the character and purpose of the Eternal to mankind? Why not consider it a Bible, a text book for the instruction of humanity in spiritual things? Let us study it reverently, soberly, and in the fear of God. If the Almighty ever speaks to us through human experience, certainly he is speaking to us now.

This is the Hebrew way of looking at things. It was a cardinal conviction of the Hebrew mind that God spake to the world through historic events. Human experience is the organ through which He makes his will known. Outside of Palestine men tried to find the will of God, sometimes in dreams, sometimes in the flight of birds, sometimes in the entrails of animals, sometimes in the movement of the stars. But in the Holy Land, men sought traces of the divine purpose in the ongoings and developments of national life. To the Hebrew mind events were flashes of the divine intention, experiences were words of the Eternal. The favorite expression on the lips of the men who wrote the Bible is, "and it came to pass." The prophets never grew weary of unrolling the past before the eyes of their countrymen. "See what Jehovah has done," they cried, as they told the story of the things which had happened. It was in the experiences through which Israel had passed, that God had caused His character to be known, and in her triumphs and defeats, her sufferings and joys, her humiliations and agonies and captivities and deliverances that His purpose had been disclosed. The work of the Hebrew prophet then was to interpret social phenomena. He seized upon historic or current

events and out of these he extracted the word of God. To a seer God was always speaking, and His voice came through the things that were happening.

That is the view of the Old Testament, and it is the view of the New Testament also. The New Testament writers contend that God is always speaking, and that He who has an ear to hear can understand what is being said. In the book of the Revelation there comes again and again like a solemn and searching refrain: "He that hath an ear to hear let him hear what the spirit is saying unto the churches." Those words always occur at the end of a paragraph which is descriptive of the church's condition. The writer tells us what the church is experiencing, he portrays in vivid speech the church's character and doings, after which he says: "Now hear what the Spirit is saying." We catch God's message through the things which we suffer.

And so I wish to think with you about the war as though it were a book, a text book, more valuable and informing than any other text book you can take just now in your hands; a sacred book, a Bible on whose pages is written in blood and tears a flaming message from the King of kings. Do not say as certain weak and sentimental people do—"O the war is too horrible to think about! Let us think about something else." Such an attitude would be excusable if the war were only a series of physical experiences, sound and fury, signifying nothing. But if it be true that God speaks to us through human experience, then as this is the most vivid, searching, and agonizing experience through which our race has ever been called to pass, shame on us if we run away, covering our eyes and stopping our ears, crying out—"O let us think of something comfortable and pleasant!"

Look, O Americans! What do you see? Moses looked upon a bush afire and saw God. Look upon a continent ablaze, and behold your Creator. Listen, O Americans! What do you hear? Out of the whirlwind Job heard God. Out of this twentieth-century whirlwind, the fiercest and most destructive whirlwind that ever tore its wild way across our planet, comes a voice which he who hath ear to hear will not miss. Keep silence, and listen to what the Lord God Omnipotent is saying to mankind.

Accepting the war, then, as a Spiritual teacher, let us gather up a few of the many lessons which it is teaching. First in the list, I should place this: "What war is." It is difficult to know what war is. If you go to the dictionary for a definition of it you come away disappointed. All the definitions are pallid and ineffectual things, and convey no meaning to the heart. None of the elemental things can be crammed into the narrow limits of a definition. Who can define light, or music, or life, or love? No one. These are known only through experience. Who can define war? No one. It defies the most clever and ingenious of the dictionary makers.

To whom then shall we go? Not to the artists, for they have constantly hidden from us the nature of war. They have deceived us. They have put on war shining robes. They have embellished it, and given it a glamor and a glory which it does not possess. They have made it something romantic, and poetic, and appealingly picturesque. They have tricked us by playing on the imagination. All of the artists have combined to work this deception. The sculptor has carved the warrior out of the whitest of the marble, the painter has put him in the centre of his canvas, the architect has thrown over him the greatest of his arches, the composer has written for him the most stirring of his marches, the poet has glorified him in the stateliest of his verses, the orator has extolled him in the most eloquent of his periods, art has thrown over war's bloody shoulders a purple and spangled robe. You can not learn from the worshippers of beauty what war is.

HISTORIANS CAN NOT TELL WHAT WAR IS

Nor can the historians tell you. They are interested primarily in the causes of war, and in the results of war. They keep the eyes fixed upon the brilliant chieftain who marches at the head of the army, now Alexander, now Caesar, now Napoleon. They turn your attention away from the rotting corpses of the nameless dead. Moreover, they compel you to look at battle through the transfiguring mists of vanished years. They write of men turned to dust generations or centuries ago. The sufferings of these men are ended. Their tortures and agony

are shadows of the dim long ago. No one can know what war is from rhetorical descriptions of carnage which took place a hundred or a thousand years before he was born. Men who have been dust for centuries make slight appeal to the heart. Their sufferings do not move us, their agonies do not lacerate us. Their groans do not reach us. Time takes away the smell of the blood, and causes flowers to blossom in the desert which war made. The historian lays before us only the picturesque and thrilling features of war. Even when he portrays its horrors, they are nothing more than painted fire. They do not burn us. No one can learn what war is from a war fought in any other generation than his own. To know what war really is, we must feel it, it must scorch us, it must tear our heart strings, and to do this it must take place before our eyes, it must mangle and torture the generation of which we are a part. Never go to the historians to find what war is.

GOD OF WAR ARCH DECEIVER

Do not go to the men who are simply getting ready for war. They will mesmerize you by laying before you war's pomp and circumstance. They will not give you the faintest idea of what war is. Military preparedness makes use of embroidered vells, and with these the visage of war is covered over. The god of war is an arch deceiver. First of all he uses music. Martial music is full of notes which set the corpuscles dancing. Where is the man or woman who does not thrill under the magical notes of fife and drum? But this is the music of military preparedness. It is not the music of war. The music of war is the groans of men, and the sobs of women, and the piteous cries of little children whose fathers will never come home again. The god of war makes use of color. He flaunts all the colors which the eye most revels in—gold and scarlet and purple. See what a play of color in yonder military procession! The black nodding plumes, the golden epaulettes, and the golden braid, and the brass buttons, the glittering bayonets—every bayonet catching the sunbeam and tossing it into the eye—the decorated scabbard, the gorgeous trappings of the horses, the scintillating spurs—a wealth of colors woven together into a tissue of loveliness and flung over the eye. But these are not the colors of war. They are the colors of military preparedness. The colors of war are the hues of mud and grime and filth, the tints of pus and gangrene and clotted blood, the flush of cheeks which are hot with the delirium of pain, and the pallor of faces which are cold in death. Those are the colors of war!

The god of war loves the magic of motion. He plays on the mind the beauty of rhythmic movement. The monotonous tread of marching feet, the swing and sweep of masses of men obedient to a bugle call, the changing formations wrought as if by magic in the wheeling battalions, the organized movement of disciplined ranks of uniformed men, all swinging round the pivot of a single will, this makes the eye glisten and the heart beat. But this is not the procession of war. It is the procession of military preparedness. The procession of war is made up of the scarred and mutilated and mangled wrecks of men. Some of them with an eye out, others with both eyes out; some with an arm off, others with both legs off; some with a nose shot away, others with a jaw torn away, others with an ear missing, other paralyzed and palsied; some led by their children, others hobbling on crutches, others carried on litters, no rhythm, no harmony, no beauty—that is the procession of war! Do not go to the high priests of military preparedness if you wish to learn what war is.

And beware of the philosophers who have never studied in the school of Christ. The world has never known what war really is because of the sophistries of a false philosophy. Art, military preparedness, and philosophy, these three are the great apologists for war, and until we tear away the masks with which they cover the face of war, we shall never know what war is.

The philosophers tell us that war is inevitable, it is a biological necessity, an ineradicable feature of the present world order. The man who says that is a dangerous guide. He is blind, and certain to lead all who follow him into a ditch. War is not like a thunderbolt, or a volcanic eruption, or a tidal wave. These things are inevitable, physical necessities, unchangeable features of the material world. They are not originated by man, and lie beyond human control. War is man made. Man creates war. War comes out of the heart. If man begins war, man can end it. It is his duty to end it. God holds him responsible for not ending it. The man who says that all wars are fated has