

PEACE DAY

[Abstract of Mr. Bryan's address, Sunday, October 4th, 1914, at New York prayer day exercises.]

Responding to petitions from the representatives of all religious faiths the president has, by solemn proclamation, set apart this day as a day of prayer for peace, and we, by assembling on this occasion, indicate approval of his official act while we, in the spirit of worship, plead with the Almighty to so make known His sovereign will as to restore peace, complete and enduring, to the nations now at war.

It is not necessary that we should consider causes that led up to the conflict, or attempt to locate responsibility for the conditions that now exist. It is not only not necessary, but contrary to the natural order. If a friend meets with an accident, we address ourselves first to his immediate needs, and after we have relieved his sufferings, we seek the cause of his misfortune with a view to saving others from a similar fate.

So today, when a number of nations, all our friends, have been drawn into the vortex of war, our first duty is to use such influence as we may have to hasten the return of peace; there will be ample time afterward to devise ways and means for preventing future appeals to arms.

Prayer is a recognition of a power higher than ourselves and a confession that we believe in the existence of a force above and beyond man's control; prayer expresses humility—it is an acknowledgement of man's finiteness in the presence of the Infinite. It proclaims reliance upon a wisdom to which our minds cannot aspire and a willingness to abide by the will of God, made manifest among men.

As each individual life is influenced, even often controlled, by events which man does not foresee and which care can not avoid, so the tide of battle is sometimes turned by unexpected incidents which no precaution can prevent, and which no preparedness can withstand. The believer, however fixed his opinion and however positive his sympathies, should desire the triumph of that which is right above that which may accord either with his seeming interest or his judgment. If this is our attitude toward those overruling events which indicate the pleasure or displeasure of the Heavenly Father, we can with more profit to ourselves consider the elements which enter into the establishment of peace—remembering that we ourselves need enlightenment as to the course that will enable us to be helpful both to our own and to other nations.

In this age our interests are so entwined with the interests of those who reside in other lands that no nation can live or die unto itself alone. If we had no higher reason for encouraging conditions conducive to peace, we should find ample justification in the fact that the burdens of war are no longer borne entirely by those who are direct participants in it. Today every neutral nation finds itself greatly embarrassed by the disturbance which the European war has wrought in every department of human activity; and we, therefore, appreciate more fully than ever before how numerous are the ties that bind us together and how far-reaching are the consequences of war.

We must not be discouraged if this, the greatest of all wars breaks out just when we were most hopeful of the substitution of reason for force in the settlement of international disputes. It may be that the world needed one more awful object-lesson to prove conclusively the fallacy of the doctrine that preparedness for war can give assurance of peace. This assumption is built upon the theory that peace rests upon fear, whereas all history proves the contrary. Love is the only foundation upon which permanent peace can rest; peace is promoted, therefore by anything which promotes good will. Continuous preparation for war presupposes the existence of an enemy who must be hated until he can be overcome; but hatred begets hatred, and revenge is the heaviest load that man or nation can carry. It is only occasionally that one has an opportunity to do hurt to an enemy; but the desire to harm another is a continuing source of injury to ones-self.

And even if one could be completely avenged by the exercise of physical force, he could not escape the influence which the use of this force and the winning of a triumph by means of it are likely to exert upon himself. When the Creator placed man upon the earth He so arranged the restraints intended for the control of his life that he is impotent to escape from

the results of his own wrongdoing. No human court can suspend the decree pronounced in the sentence—"The wages of sin is death." As man's happiness was placed in his own keeping when it was made dependent, not upon what the world does for him, but upon what he does for the world, so his punishments were committed in part to his own hands when the Maker withheld from him the power to protect himself from the punishment which evil-doing inflicts upon the evil-doer.

The commandments that relate to man's conduct toward his fellows were given, not merely for the benefit of those who might without these commandments suffer injury at the hands of others, but for the benefit also of those who without the commandments might, while inflicting injury upon others, bring still greater suffering upon themselves. Likewise the doctrine of forgiveness was not promulgated for the benefit of the forgiveness alone but that man, leaving vengeance to the Lord, might occupy his time to better advantage.

Most of the errors which man commits in international affairs arise from a failure to understand the fundamental truth—that moral principles are as binding upon nations as upon individuals. The commandment: "Thou shalt not steal," covers grand larceny as well as petit larceny; "Thou shalt not kill," applies to nations as well as to individuals. A nation is but a group of individuals, and no group, however numerous, can expunge one syllable of the moral law—though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not be unpunished.

We shall be aided in our efforts to promote peace if we fix in our minds certain propositions which embody pertinent and important truths. Some of these propositions are directed against delusions; others express the conclusions drawn from the world's experience.

First: War is not to be judged by the appearance of soldier on parade. The regiment marching through the streets, with banners flying, keeping time to the strains of inspiring music, is attractive to the eye; but this is not war. War is understood only when one visits the hospital, when disease is ravaging the camp of the battlefield where men meet face to face, grimly determined to sell their lives at the highest possible price, paid in human blood; or when one enters the fatherless home from which the bread-winner has been taken, and measures the value of the protection withdrawn from the children and the added cares imposed upon the mother. Weight must also be given to the aftermath of prejudice and ill-will, for each war sows the seeds of future wars.

Second: The good that man's ingenuity may be able to extract from war, must not be used to justify recourse to arms. Such advances in civilization as have been credited to war could have been secured in larger measure and at less cost by peaceful means. Man has been rowing upstream and it is necessary to subtract the speed of the war-current before we can estimate the progress which he would have made had he not been compelled to pull against the swift currents of human passion.

Third: Man need not stain his hands with his brother's blood in order to qualify himself for worthy deeds. We could not worship God as we do if we believed that He had so constituted man as to make war necessary to man's elevation. If war were a moral necessity it would be planned for, not deplored. If it were a recognized human need, men would claim credit for it, not deny responsibilities as they do today. One of the encouragements to be drawn from the present European conflict is to be found in the fact that the governments involved vie with each other in refusing to admit that they began it. We have taken a long step in advance when no civilized nation will either admit a desire for war or confess an intention to inaugurate it.

Fourth: Man is normal when he is calm, not when he is angry; and his plans must therefore be perfected and carried out when his conscience and his judgment are free to act. When a man is angry he boasts of what he CAN do; when he is calm he considers what he OUGHT to do.

Our nation not only largely profits by the peace policy which it has pursued, but it has put itself in a position to render a larger service to the world than it otherwise could—and with nations, as with individuals, service is the measure of greatness. By promptly accepting the mediation generously offered by the representatives of three great Republics of South America,

Brazil, Argentina and Chile, President Wilson not only secured a peaceful solution of a situation that threatened war, but he gave a strong impetus to the cause of conciliation. It will be easier than before to preserve peace in the western hemisphere, and more difficult to excite war.

In its dealings with other countries our government has found it wise to discourage the employment of the ultimatum and to substitute a continuation of negotiations, on the theory that nothing is final between friends.

Our government, steadily advancing toward the goal of universal peace, has also found it possible to make more remote the possibility of war by the negotiation of treaties which provide for the investigation of all disputes before the employment of force. Twenty-seven of these treaties have already been signed, and the governments which they represent embrace considerably more than two-thirds of the population of the world. In fact, almost every nation of importance has endorsed the principle, and nearly all have concluded conventions. These treaties leave nothing which can become a cause of war until after an international tribunal has investigated the matter in dispute. The commission provided for is a permanent one, ready to be invoked at a moment's notice, and the period allowed for examination into the differences is a year—long enough to permit passions to subside and questions of honor to be separated from questions of fact. In order to secure the investigation of all questions, without any exception whatever, it is necessary to reserve to the contracting parties the right to act independently upon the subject-matter after the investigation has been made; but this right, while important, is not likely to be exercised since the investigation is quite certain to result in agreement.

Fifth: The plane of existence will not be lowered, neither will the field of endeavor be narrowed when, as foretold in prophecy, the swords shall be beaten into plough-shares and the spears into pruning-hooks—when nation shall not lift up sword against nation and when people shall learn war no more. Man has spent a considerable portion of his time in the work of destruction; in the day that is dawning, he can devote all his efforts to production.

Already we have learned that it is more advantageous to expand the land we have by doubling its productiveness than it would be to add an equal area by conquest; the sacrifices made in altruistic work prove how limitless is the field of noble effort when men rival each other in doing good. There is as much inspiration in a noble life as in a heroic death.

Sixth: "No question is ever settled until it is settled right." Force is important to fasten upon mankind a single falsehood. There is in every righteous cause an inherent power by which it is able to overcome opposition. As the invisible germ of life in the grain of wheat takes from earth and air that which it needs for its growth and perfection, so the invisible germ of truth gathers nourishment from the dead things about it, and grows until it becomes an irresistible force, bringing victory to those who dare to stand for it—One with God shall chase a thousand, and two, put ten thousand to flight.

Seventh: The goal of humanity is universal brotherhood and each individual is destined to find that the commandment "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself," instead of diminishing his share of the proceeds of the general toil of the world, will give the largest assurance of permanent prosperity and advancement. He who impressed upon man His image and who holds in His hand the destinies of nations, has ordained that man's welfare shall be dependent upon obedience to the Divine law, and mankind is drawn together in the indissoluble bonds of common brotherhood as man sees this law with increasing clearness.

At the close of the civil war one of the sad experiences of that great conflict was described in verse. The story runs like this:

"Two brothers, reared at the same fireside, had enlisted, one in the Union army and one in the Confederate ranks. During a battle, one of these thrust his bayonet into the breast of a soldier in the opposing line. When he stooped to withdraw the weapon, he found that he had killed his brother,"—and then the poet in touching words described the sorrow that overwhelmed him.

It is not too much to hope that in the days which are before us we shall feel more and more the binding influence of that tie that links each human being to every other until we shall fully recognize the claim of each upon all. God speed the day!