



1900 Years Ago in Bethlehem of Judæa.



To-day in the Music Halls of London. A Sketch received with rapturous cheers. Dec. 15, 1899.

PEACE SUNDAY (Dec. 24, 1899), IN WAR TIME.

To the Clergy and Ministers of all Denominations.

"And the Word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel."—Ezekiel xxxiv. 1, 2.

As one of the flock over whom you are set as shepherds in our British Israel I feel it borne in upon me to testify unto you this day.

Whether my Message will appeal to you as the word of the Lord, or whether you will fail to recognise in it any trace of Divine authority I know not, nor is that my responsibility.

It is the Word of Truth. I claim for it no higher credential.

This Message is given unto me. Woe be unto me if it is not delivered! Even if you refuse to listen, I shall at least have delivered my soul.

The responsibility lies upon me heavily; the threefold responsibility of Knowledge, Conviction, and Opportunity.

Despise and abuse the Witness as much as you please, but search and see if his testimony be not true!

Last Peace Sunday, fresh from the presence of the Tsar of Russia, I appealed to the Churches of Britain to support the great international crusade in favour of Peace and Arbitration. This Sunday finds Great Britain at War with the Dutch Republics of South Africa, as the direct result of the refusal of Arbitration. Is it surprising that the contrast between this year and last fills me with profound regrets?

Therefore I ask you to consider with searching of heart, whether you have done all that you might have done as Ministers of the Prince of Peace to avert the terrible scourge of War? Are your skirts free from the stain of our brother's blood?

The Church and War.

I am the last man to bring a railing accusation against the Churches or their Ministers. I fear that I am almost the only secular journalist who clings with almost fanatic faith to what most of my colleagues regard as the fond delusion that the Churches can be relied upon to restrain the passions of the people and to serve the cause of Peace.

Max Nordau this month sums up not too severely the almost universal belief of the ordinary politician or statesman as to the influence of the churches on questions of Peace and War. He says:—

Christianity is indeed the religion of Peace. Above the portals of the Church of Christ the Christmas greeting of the angels, "Peace on earth and good will to men," glows as an inscription. This is

theory. The practice of the Church is quite different. She has scarcely ever prevented War, and frequently pressed the sword into the hands of the faithful. In all the centuries of her sway the Church has shed blood like water. In our day the Church has lost the power to set nation against nation, but she does not withhold her blessing from the banners of War; the hosts that march to the front are sped by her pious wishes, and she prays to God that He grant victory to the arms which she has blessed.

Alas! we do not need to go further back than this very year to see that the ministers of the Religion of Peace have not, as a whole, done anything for Peace; while several of the most influential amongst them have done more to bring about the War than any of the laity, with the exception of newspaper editors. The result, little as you may realise it, is to fill the minds of many with a conviction that the Church is an apostate Church; that her Ministers are hiring shepherds; and, in short, your action, or inaction, in the present crisis has done more to induce atheism in the minds of the masses than all the discourses of Mr. Bradlaugh.

These are hard sayings, and I am not defending them as just. I am bearing testimony to the fact, the reality of which you may deny to-day, but which you will have only too much occasion to recognise to-morrow. And if you marvel that this should be so, seeing that in your belief, mayhap, this War is a just War, I will venture to explain to you as clearly as I can why your action, or inaction, has given rise to such scornful contempt of you and your sacred office.

The War Might Have Been Averted.

(1) A War may be just, yet it may also be avoidable.

I shall throughout argue on the supposition that in our quarrel with President Kruger he is altogether in the wrong and we are altogether in the right. Granting, for the sake of argument, that the present War is as just as I am fully persuaded it is absolutely unjust, it does not follow that therefore it might not have been avoided. War is equivalent to justifiable homicide. If you had been exposed to the horrible possibility of having to slay your own brother with your own hands in the justest of all causes; would you not have agonised with God in prayer and exhausted all your energies in despairing effort to deliver you from such fratricide? But when the collective slaughter of thousands loomed as a possibility before this nation, did you stir a finger, preach a sermon, or sign a petition in order to

strengthen the Ministers who were striving for Peace against the pressure of those who, in the Press and on the platform, were clamouring for War? The advocates for War spent money, time, and energy to prevent a peaceful solution of the dispute. What did the ministers of the Prince of Peace to earn the glory of being recognised as the Peacemakers, who are declared to be the Children of God? Here and there a few ministers uttered a passionate protest. Here and there a congregation passed resolutions or signed petitions against the War. But of ministers as a mass, of the organised Church as a whole, can it be said that they exercised any direct perceptible influence in support of the cause of Peace? It is notorious that the agitators for War gloated over the absence of any opposition on the part of the majority, and exulted in the enthusiastic support of some conspicuous ministers, such as Dr. Stewart, the Moderator of the Free Church of Scotland, and the Rev. Hugh Price Hughes, the ex-President of the Wesleyan Conference. Let no one say that there was no opportunity afforded the Churches of bringing their influence to bear in favour of a pacific settlement. There was ample opportunity. Neither can it be said that the War could not have been averted if the Churches had but exerted themselves in the cause of Peace. The one conspicuous and indisputable fact about all the negotiations which preceded War is that President Kruger pressed persistently to be allowed to refer all differences to arbitration, and that Mr. Chamberlain peremptorily refused to accede to his request. But although this fact was perfectly well known, did you or your church say a single word of protest against the refusal of Arbitration? At the Hague Conference all the Governments of the world, our own included, declared that arbitration was specially effective in cases where disputes arose between States as to the interpretation of international conventions. Yet when our Government was asked to allow the dispute as to the interpretation of the Conventions with the Transvaal to be sent to Arbitration they refused. And why? From pride, arrogance, and that haughty spirit that ever goes before a fall. The South African Republic was not, in their eyes, of sufficient status to be permitted to go to arbitration with the British Empire. So the Boers appealed to the arbitrament of the sword, the only other alternative being refused them with disdain. But what did you do to rebuke this spirit of pride which all churches recognise as a deadly sin? Nay, what are you doing now by way of humiliation and penitence now that that sin has brought forth a harvest of Death?

A War for Vengeance is Damnable.

(2) War may be just and War may be unavoidable, but yet it may be waged in a spirit that is absolutely opposed to Christian principles.

It may be your duty to slay your brother, but that mournful duty should never be undertaken save in a spirit of intense sorrow and compassion. Above all it stands damned if it is waged in a spirit of Vengeance. It is this which makes the apathy of the churches so absolutely amazing. The popular sentiment in favour of the War, especially in the Army, is vengeance naked and unashamed. "Remember Majuba!" was the cry that rang from the multitudes who saw our soldiers off at the station. "Remember Majuba!" was the refrain that welcomed General Buller when he arrived at Cape Town and General White when he arrived at Durban. And when our men charged the enemy with lance and bayonet "Majuba" was ever on their lips! Because a small company of British soldiers eighteen years ago were worsted in fair fight by the Boers, this nation has unleashed to day the dogs of War, breathing fury to avenge that single reverse! War may be a sacred duty, but War to avenge Majuba is a damnable crime. War for vengeance is not justifiable homicide, but unjustifiable murder, wholesale and retail. But have you ever said a single word in reproof of this outburst of the passions of the nethermost pit? Nor is revenge the only anti-Christian sentiment to which full rein is given without protest from the Churches.

It may be too much for you to ask your flocks to love their enemies. But it might not be impossible to remind them that they need not lie about their brave foes, and that hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness do not become the first of Christian virtues merely because we are at War. Because a few of us have endeavoured to do to the Boers as we would that the Boers should do to us, we are denounced as traitors, and in this Christian land race hatred and the lust of ascendency have come to be regarded as Christian duties incumbent upon all true patriots. And have you, reverend sir, ever said one word to vindicate the obligations of Christian charity even to your brother, the Boer?

War for Naboth's Vineyard.

(3) War may be just and unavoidable, and it may be begun in a Christian spirit, but it may develop the passions of Hell.

No one can deny that danger. Many of the best of Wars have engendered the worst of crimes against humanity. The present War may degenerate into a War of territorial aggression. It looks very much like the old story of Naboth's vineyard. The sons of Belial have borne false witness. Naboth is being slain. Soon we shall hear the cry of our Jezebels: Arise, go up, and take possession of the vineyard of the Rand. Against such a perversion of a War of liberation into a War of plunder, will the Churches make even the feeblest of protests? Avarice used at one time to be classed among the deadly sins. It now, like pride, almost seems to be regarded as entitled to rank among the Christian graces.

Nor is it only in the end of the War that ministers might do good service. In the waging of the War it is the Boers rather than the British who are fighting in Christian fashion, with the solitary exception of the alleged misuse of flags of truce—a fault natural to independent bodies of undisciplined peasants, but one which occasionally occurs in our own ranks. The Boers have given much more practical proof of their Christianity than our men. Round their camp fires they sing psalms and pray to God for His succour in the fight. Our men chant the ditties of the music-hall. The Boers religiously respect Sunday. We habitually attack them on that day—not victoriously. The Boers treat their prisoners of War with much greater humanity than the Britons. We immure them in a hulk moored at sea, keeping them close prisoners without newspapers. They allow our men the utmost freedom and share with them all the scant luxuries at their disposal. We have massacred Boers who have thrown down their arms and were crying for quarter. Our soldiers are accused of having stripped and plundered the dying on the field of battle. None of these charges may be true, but that is yet to be proved. They are alleged by the men who have suffered them, and they cannot be dismissed as antecedently impossible. The minds of our men had been so saturated with infamous calumnies against the Boers that it would not be surprising if they forgot that they were foemen worthy of their steel. But, although you are the keepers of the national conscience, what sign is there that our ministers of religion are concerned about such things?

The Repudiation of Christian Principle.

But now I must carry the matter one step further. What have you done or what are you going to do to arrest the national apostasy which is openly proclaimed on all sides. "The mischief in South Africa," said Mr. T. W. Russell, M.P., Parliamentary Secretary to the Local Government Board, "is that Mr. Gladstone tried to govern the country on Christian principles." Lord Rosebery said much the same thing. Mr. Gladstone had endeavoured to apply the sublime principle of the Gospel after Majuba. The experiment had not succeeded. Never again would the nation repeat the experiment. Christian principles won't work in South African politics. Christianity as a rule of life is therefore publicly branded as an exploded sham. What have the so-called Christian Churches to say to this summary verdict upon the teaching of their Founder? The verdict is not justified by the facts. For ten years the Majuba Settlement, as even Lord Randolph Churchill declared, gave Peace to South Africa, and secured the Imperial position. But that is forgotten or denied. In their haste to relegate the Gospel to the dustheap, the intemperate complaints of offended colonists are treated as conclusive, and Christianity is condemned as having been weighed in the balances and found wanting on evidence that would not suffice to hang a cat. But what have you done to vindicate the principle of the Gospel, so rudely attacked on every side? Do you reply that you have nothing to do with political questions? Then I ask you how long do you expect the citizen to respect the authority of Christianity in his private affairs after he has been publicly taught by his leaders that it is worthless and mischievous as a guide in affairs of State?

"Putting it Through."

Then, again, what have you to say to the doctrine openly professed by many of our public men that even though this War may have been unjust we have no alternative once it has been begun but to "put it through," by fighting it out "to the bitter end"? Is that a Christian principle? Chatham, a century and more ago, protested against prosecuting an unjust War merely because it had been begun. Where is the Christian minister

who dares to take up a position as Christian as that of the eighteenth-century statesman? Where does the appeal to the Lord of Hosts come in if in War the question of right and wrong is not taken into account? "Morally," said one journalistic mentor, "we can never win. Physically we must and shall." But is that a Christian principle? Suppose the French, after we had declared War against them after the Peace of Amiens, precisely as the Boers declared War against us, and for the same reason, had discovered that they had been menacing us with preparations for invasion and that we were really waging a just War for the protection of our threatened independence. What would we have thought if these same Frenchmen had declared that they were very sorry, but now the War had begun they must fight it out until England was conquered? Could we find language adequate to express our indignation at such sophistry? Can we conceive a plainer case in which we should try to do to our enemies what we should expect them to do to us if our positions were reversed?

We appeal to the Arbitrament of War. We submit our case to the decision of the God of Battles. If we discover that our cause is unjust, what course can we take as honest men but to seize the first possible opportunity to stop the fighting and to withdraw from the dispute. If we persist in prosecuting the appeal to the Supreme Tribunal, knowing that we have a bad case, do we not show that our professions of belief in the justice of the Lord of Hosts is all hypocrisy?

The Touchstone of Our Faith.

Your flocks are asking these questions. The newspapers are discussing them with an absolutely unanimous bias against recognising any higher right than that of might, or any nobler interest than that of Imperial prestige. What have you to say upon the subject? It is a question that goes to the root of Christian ethics. It is a touchstone of the sincerity of our belief in the invisible things of God. Whoever says that we must put the thing through and crush the Boers, even if our quarrel is unjust, is Atheist in the worst sense of that opprobrious epithet. But this practical Atheism is the accepted creed of nearly everybody to-day. And nobody cares—least of all most of the officially accredited ministers of the Christian Churches.

If you who read these lines have done what in you lies to bear witness for the truth, now that it has been so rudely impugned by the public opinion of our time, my Message is not for you. Nor do I think you will misunderstand my earnestness or resent the faithfulness of my testimony. It is not to you who have spoken and who have acted and are acting in defence of the sublime principle of the Gospel that my remarks are addressed.

A Solemn Remonstrance and Appeal.

It is to those who are at ease in Zion, who have been and who are dumb dogs in this grave crisis, to those faithless shepherds of Israel I address my solemn remonstrance and appeal.

You may resent my action. You ought rather to mourn over the fact that I am the only secular journalist who thinks there is enough vitality left in the Churches to make it worth any one's while to issue such an appeal as this. Now, as in the ancient times, you busy yourselves about the tithe of mint and anise and cummin, about the futilities of incense and the puerilities of ritual while neglecting the weightier matters of the Law. For the moment your path may seem smoother and easier because you pass by on the other side, and take no effective part in the discussion of the grave issues upon which hang our existence as an Empire. But it is only for a season. The nation, left unguided by its Professors of Morality, will indulge to the full the promptings of national vanity and Imperial pride. And when Nemesis overtakes our people, and in pain and humiliation they remember how the loss of their dominion and the overthrow of their Empire was brought about by forgetting God and ignoring the principles of the Gospel, where do you think you will stand in that day?

"Therefore, O ye shepherds, hear the word of the Lord; thus saith the Lord God, behold I am against the shepherds; and I will require My flock at their hand, and cause them to cease from feeding the flock; neither shall the shepherds feed themselves any more; for I will deliver My flock from their mouth that they may not be meat for them."

An Unjust War.

One last word. I have based my appeal to you on the assumption that this War was a just War. But it is not a just

War. It is a War as unjust, as criminal, and as unrighteous as the War which cost us our American colonies, or as the War in which "we backed the wrong horse" in the Crimea. No matter how just may have been the claim which we made for the redress of the grievance of the Outlanders, we have no justification either in the laws of God or man in forcing the Dutch of South Africa into War by the policy which has been pursued by our Government. I need not insult your intelligence by assuming that you have been imposed upon by the pitiful cant that the Boers were the aggressors. They never issued their Ultimatum until after we had called out the Reserves for the purpose of compelling their submission. If we had left them alone and accepted their offer to agree to our demands about the franchise, there would have been no War. Even when they launched their Ultimatum they offered to submit the dispute to arbitration. We rejected their proposal scornfully, as we have refused every offer they made for settlement by arbitration. So it came to pass that they appealed to the God of Battles. Mr. Chamberlain solemnly in his place in Parliament accepted the challenge!

The Answer of the Lord of Hosts.

We went to War. And from that day to this disaster after disaster has crowded upon us. Nor is it to be wondered at.

Thrice is he armed that hath his quarrel just,
And he but naked, though lock'd up in steel,
Whose conscience with injustice is corrupted.

General after general has appealed to the ordeal of battle, and general after general has recoiled defeated from the stricken field. And if we persist on going further we shall fare worse. For we have gone into this War with a lie in our right hand, and if, as the ancients believed, there is a God who judgeth in the earth, there is before us but a terrible looking forward to of judgment to come.

That is the real question that underlies all others. Is there a God, a righteous God, to whom deliberate lying, even for Imperial ends, is abhorrent?

If "a proud look, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood," are still an abomination to the Lord, how can we expect Him to go forth with our armies as of old time? Nay, what can we expect but a terrible looking forward to of judgment to come? For is it not written in the Word of God: "The wicked shall be turned into Hell and all the nations that forget God"?

WILLIAM T. STEAD.

MOWBRAY HOUSE, TEMPLE, W.C.
December 18, 1899.

Human Sacrifices a la Mode.

OUR WILLIDGE.

(From the Westminster Gazette.)

Owd Snooks, wot druv the carrier's cart,
'E browt the news from Sat'dy's mart,
In a London piper as 'eld the list
Of kilt an' wounded, lorst an' missed;
So Joey the ploughmin, 'is tears they run,
Fr 'e's seed the last of a gallant son.
(Ard times, this winter.)

Widdy Meguire, in 'er worn plaid shawl,
'Oo scrubs for the Barnet's wife at the 'All,
S'ys she, "Is Willum all sife an' sound?"
We mumbles the answer, in dooty bound,
"Y'r brother were caught by a splintered shell"
She stud like a statoo; then, f'intin', fell,
(Ard times, this winter.)

We 'ung festoons along the way
Wot time they marched to face the fray;
We cheered 'em orf, an' sed to each,
"Now, let not words, but conduck preach,
An' show yew forth, o' the willidge yew own,
The sperrit of Little Muttonbone!"
(Ard times, this winter.)

There's Simon the shepherd, that good owd soul,
'E'll hev to apply for a parish dole;
'Is boy were the pride of our midland dale,
But 'e died with the rest, i' the Transyvale.
They'd death with 'onour, by Glencoe steep,
But alas for the owd 'uns, left to weep!
(Ard times, this winter.)

W. H. B.

SUGGESTED READINGS FOR PEACE SUNDAY, DECEMBER 24, 1899

IN THE THIRD MONTH OF THE WAR IN SOUTH AFRICA.

To be read before the collect of the Day.

HEAR the word of the Lord, ye rulers of Sodom; give ear unto our God, ye people of Gomorrah!

To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the Lord. When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hand to tread my courts?

Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and Sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, even the solemn meeting. Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth; they are a trouble unto me, I am weary to bear them.

And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you. Yea, WHEN YE MAKE MANY PRAYERS I WILL NOT HEAR; YOUR HANDS ARE FULL OF BLOOD.—*Isaiah I. 10-15.*

The total number of officers and men killed and wounded, reported up to December 17, on our side alone is 4,000 men. If the losses of the Boers are estimated at one-half, this gives us 6,000 men killed and wounded in an "absolutely unnecessary" War. And still the carnage is going on.

And the children of Israel cried unto the Lord, saying, We have sinned against Thee. And the Lord said unto the children of Israel, Go and cry unto the gods which ye have chosen, let them deliver you in the time of your tribulation.—*Judges x. 10-14.*

Gospel for the Day.

The following extracts from letters from the front describe how we are carrying the good news of Peace and goodwill to our fellow Christians in South Africa.

Speaking of the pursuit of the Boers after the battle of Eland's Laagte a British officer, whose letter is quoted in *The Times* of November 23, writes:—

"After the enemy were driven out one of our squadrons (not mine) pursued, and got right in among them in the twilight, and the most excellent pig-sticking ensued for about ten minutes, the bag being about sixty. One of our men, seeing two Boers riding away on one horse, stuck his lance through the two, killing both with one thrust. Had it not been getting dark we should have killed many more."

Mr. H. W. Nevinson, special War correspondent of *The Daily Chronicle*, in his account of the battle of Eland's Laagte, published November 20, adds some details to the officer's narrative of the "pig-sticking." He says:—

"The 'Cease Fire!' had sounded several times on the summit, but the firing did not cease. I don't know why it was. Perhaps the Boers were still resisting in parts. Certainly many of our men were drunk with excitement. 'Wipe out Majuba!' was a constant cry. But the Boers had gone. The remnants of them were struggling to get away in the twilight over a bit of rocky plain on our left. Then the Dragoon Guards got them and three times went through. A Dragoon Guards corporal who was there tells me the Boers fell off their horses and rolled among the rocks, hiding their heads in their arms and calling for mercy—calling to be shot, anything to escape the stab of those terrible lances through their backs and bowels. But not many escaped. 'We just gave them a good dig as they lay,' were the corporal's words. Next day most of the lances were bloody."

The Times of Natal says:—

"The Kaffirs say that the Lancers 'went through and through the Boers like water, wiping them all off.' From the Kaffirs' description the slaughter and wounding must have been terrific. The Boers 'howled,' say the Kaffirs, for mercy, and never was such a killing

and cutting. While the cavalry were cutting and slashing and lancing the infantry were at work like furies with their cold steel in between the horses. The field was covered with bodies."

As one of the results of this Christian work may be read the following narrative taken from the letter of an English soldier employed in one of the bearer companies.

"We were out looking after the wounded at night when the fight was over, when I came across an old, white-bearded Boer. He was lying behind a bit of rock supporting himself on his elbows. I was a bit wary of the old fellow at first. Some of these wounded Boers, we've found, are snakes in the grass. You go up to them with the best intentions, and the next thing you know is that the man you were going to succour is blazing at you with his gun.

"So," the letter goes on, "I kept my eye on the old chap. But when I got near I saw that he was too far gone to raise his rifle. He was gasping hard for breath, and I saw he was not long for this world. He motioned to me that he wanted to speak, and I bent over him. He asked me to go and find his son—a boy of thirteen, who had been fighting by his side when he fell.

"Well, I did as he asked me," continues the writer, "and under a heap of wounded I found the poor lad, stone dead, and I carried him back to his father. Well, you know I'm not a chicken-hearted sort of a fellow. I have seen a bit of fighting in my time, and that sort of thing knocks all the soft out of a chap.

"But," this correspondent confesses, "I had to turn away when the old Boer saw his dead lad. He hugged the body to him and moaned over it, and carried on in a way that fetched a big lump in my throat. Until that very moment I never thought how horrible War is. I never wanted to see another shot fired. And when I looked round again the old Boer was dead, clasping the cold hand of his dead boy."

Reading from the Prophets.

The prophetic words of Coleridge never had a truer ring than now:—

Thankless too for Peace
(Peace long preserved by fleets and perilous seas),
Secure from actual warfare, we have loved
To swell the war-whoop, passionate for war!
Alas! for ages ignorant of all
Its ghastlier workings (famine or blue plague,
Battle, or siege, or flight through wintry snows),
We, this whole people, have been clamorous
For War and bloodshed; animating sports,
The which we pay for as a thing to talk of,
Spectators, and not combatants! No guess
Anticipative of a wrong unfelt,
No speculation or contingency,
However dim and vague, too vague and dim
To yield a justifying cause and forth
(Stuffed out with big preamble, holy names,
And adjurations of the God in Heaven)
We send our mandates for the certain death
Of thousands and ten thousands! Boys and girls,
And women that would groan to see a child
Pull off an insect's leg, all read of War,
The best amusement for our morning meal!
The poor wretch who has learnt his only prayers
From curses, who knows scarcely words enough
To ask a blessing from his heavenly Father,
Becomes a fluent phraseman, absolute
And technical in victories and defeats,
And all our dainty terms for fratricide—
Terms which we trundle smoothly o'er our tongues
Like mere abstractions, empty sounds to which
We join no feeling and attach no form!
As if the soldier died without a wound;
As if the fibres of this god-like frame
Were gored without a pang; as if the wretch
Who fell in battle doing bloody deeds
Passed off to Heaven, translated, and not killed;
As though he had no wife to pine for him,
No God to judge him! Therefore evil days,
Are coming on us, O my countrymen!
And what if all-avenging Providence,
Strong and retributive should make us know
The meaning of our words, force us to feel
The desolation and the agony
Of our fierce doings?

If so, the tribulation will not be undeserved.