

Christmas Hope and New Year Faith

THE "simple folk" of the world have not failed to catch the significance of Christmas. From their hearts have sprung the fancies that have woven about the birth of one of their own—a true son of the people—the loveliest stories that we know. Angels sing; a star leads; shepherds and wise men kneel; immortal hymns fall from the lips of Virgin Mother, of aged saints; and heaven and earth acknowledge the glory of the Day. As at the beginning, so down through the ages the simple folk have dreamed. The capon crows; the cherry tree bows; the oxen kneel; the northern tree and the southern saint gladden the hearts of the children; the waifs sing; the boar's head and the wassail bowl. All the inconsistencies of the human spirit—its child-like fancies, its hopes, its crudities and its noblest faiths come crowding before us as we listen, ears strained, for the heavenly song:

"Glory to God in the highest"

It is true that in these scientific and sceptical years "so fair a fancy few would weave." These wonders we can no longer create, and yet on Christmas Day there are few of us who would not, like Thomas Hardy, if one of the simple folk summoned us to see the miracle:

"Go with him in the gloom
Hoping it might be so."

For something marvelous has come to pass. A child is born who changes the course of history, whose domination of the Western world for fifteen hundred years was scarcely questioned, who is the very spring and fountain of those deep principles of human living which, challenged today, have called a hundred million men to arms.

Two of those principles stand out vividly in the hopes which cluster about Christmas. The first is freedom. The dignity and beauty of the common life demand it. They refuse oppression, defy want, deny fear. Here in this child of the people is what men are, what they mean to God. Will you enslave

Him, manacle Him, starve Him? You crucified Him once, but in vain. The common folk have seen aright. Here is their destiny. God "hath exalted them of low degree."

And the common folk have seen too that this freedom, this dignity and beauty belong to all men. Not peace in America, but peace on earth; not to men of good will who are white, Aryan, or exclusively American, but just men of good will. The wise men were no Jews. The legends take no thought of color. Race and nation erect no barriers. Each year at Christmas men dream of this one family of God. Each year the Church proclaims it. Each year every man of good will longs and prays that the angels' song may, as the children say, come true.

And now the New Year comes on apace. We must leave the dreams of Christmas whether we will or not. We must face the reality of a world at war. What are we Christians to do about it? The answer seems clear enough. We must transmute dreams into realities. We must transmute hope into faith. We must let the dreams drive us with the dynamic force of faith into action. Because being Christians we are realists; we shall not expect too much. But because being Christians we are idealists, we shall expect everything. That is what faith means.

Now the reason for all this exhortation lies at hand. The war finds its only justification for a Christian in two complementary facts: It is a war of liberation on the one hand and thus, on the other, opens the way to a peace which shall express the fundamental unity of men—"a worker's peace, a league of sober folk." It is these two things which Christians have to keep hammering into the consciousness of the "world." It is these two things which so many Christians keep forgetting all the time. "Remember Pearl Harbor," they shout; but "remember Pearl Harbor" means revenge, and revenge is no Christian motive. Pearl Harbor jolted us into the war but it is not the cause of the war.

It has little relation, save as a symbol, to the great issues for which we fight. In similar fashion the American way of life, an American Century, a free commerce, unhampered trade, or simply 'defending America' have meaning in the struggle but none of them expresses the issue. It is our business as Christians to think clearly and to think radically about it, to see clearly the great issues and the great goal. In some fashion the league of sober folk, that is, of honest, clear-thinking, unselfish people, must be created. Some sort of world order is essential or again the common man will have to wait to see his century dawn. Such order alone can realize even in the slightest degree the hopes which spring to life at Christmas time.

But thinking and hoping are not enough. All of us are ready to hope. A goodly number are ready to think (or are we?). Our business now is to act in faith, driven by faith, eager to give all that we can to the task.

It is no easy task. It is no matter of fancies. The problems of a durable peace are appallingly vast. They reach far beyond anything which faced the victors of 1918. The making of peace was then concerned almost entirely with European problems. It was for the most part in the hands of nations which shared a common culture. It was to be worked out within a familiar framework, that body of international tradition which brought together, in precarious equilibrium it is true, vague survivals of a Christendom which men hardly knew was lost, a recognition of self-interest as after all the dominating motive in diplomacy and an acceptance, fatal to the future, of absolute national sovereignty. Within that framework by which alone we must judge them, they did a good job. They did not see that they were trying to merge irreconcilables. We see that today. It is just one of the factors which accentuates the problem. No familiar framework like that of 1919 exists today. Every culture, every stage in what we call progress from African Congo to the Thames, the Potomac, the Indus, the Yangtse presents its claims. Global war means global peace. Freedom for Americans means freedom for Chinese and Malays and Indians,—and what about those dwellers by the Congo? What common standard is there over this vast world? The voice of God is so easily unheard. The light that lighteth every man is so easily screened from sight. The task is appalling.

All the more, therefore, it calls upon the faith of Christians, the faith which drives to thinking and to working. The Churches have officially been

doing well—Malvern, Delaware, the World Alliance, the Commission to study the organization of Peace, a host of statements from leaders, British, American and others. These all supplement the steady work which is being done under the auspices of the government along lines laid down by Wallace, Welles and others in the spirit of the Atlantic Charter, and the work of secular organizations like the League of Nations Association, the Council for Democracy, the more far-sighted labor groups and the like.

That is all to the good. All to the good are the pledges of the leaders of the United Nations. But the problems are vast and novel. The opposition to any such world order will grow more plausible, more vehement and *more insidious* as the end of the war draws near. Latent imperialism, relics of isolationism, the industrial interests which see only short term profits and the kind of dull inertia, the slipping back from high aspirations such as we knew in 1919 and 1920—these in America alone constitute formidable threats.

The Churches officially see pretty clearly. But the summons is to all of us to do something about it, to make our Christianity count in the definition of goals, to crusade for the common man, the simple folk. In the long run success depends upon us and people like us, men and women who are ready to transmute their Christmas hope into a dynamic and world-moving faith.

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