

The Home Front

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There are many in our midst who are deeply concerned, and often rightly concerned, about what is to be done with Germany and Japan after the war, assuming that we have any opportunity to do anything with these nations. It is widely felt that these are storm centers of human disturbance and that something must be done to avoid new calamities. It must be admitted that a great part of this interest is justified. It is, of course, the sober truth that three times in the memory of living men Germany has rudely disturbed the peace. Fortunately we are somewhat past the rather sentimental white-washing of Germany's actions which was so popular ten or fifteen years ago. It was Germans who invaded Belgium in 1914 and it was Germans who invaded Poland in 1939. Granting all this, however, we are unwise if we concentrate too much on one or two areas of danger in the world. When we consider the patent fact of change in human history, we must be prepared to expect that the next danger to the peace of mankind is something which we now little suspect, coming from a new quarter. It is instructive to remember that in the ancient world the great danger came at one time from Babylonia and another from Assyria and still another from Persia.

Where the new areas of possible danger are it is hard to say, but they could be anywhere. Perhaps our present world tragedy, terrible as it is, is only a prelude to a series of upheavals marking the colored man's challenge to the white man's supremacy or the poor man's challenge to the supremacy of riches. A hundred years ago the present Japanese danger to the world would have seemed the most fantastic of predictions. By the same token, there may be some area of the world, now hardly considered at all, which, through some change in technology or culture, may become a storm center. The other sobering possibility is that future danger may come from ourselves or our friends.

Fanatical Forces of Hatred

All who try to keep their eyes open for signs of the times are bound to be disturbed by many tendencies of thought in our own beloved land, tendencies so disturbing that we dread the day when alleged peace comes. There are many forces in our country which are fanatical in their hatred of the Japanese nation and all things Japanese. It is a foregone conclusion that, when the force of Japanese aggression is broken by our arms, these people will press hard for a wholly vindictive peace and thus prepare the ground for new and terrible calamities in the future. Though there are, as we all know, many persons of high-minded idealism in places of power, it is a sad thing indeed to see the

way in which so many of our people now look upon the war as a prize fight, seeking nothing but the knockout blow. Many dismiss talk of world reconstruction after the war as nothing but idealistic moonshine. Many disclaim any interest in the woes of subject people of Europe or Asia and frankly make their only war aim revenge, because our own territory was attacked fourteen months ago. The difficulty is that this kind of public opinion is likely to grow.

A few days ago we received a searching letter from one of the highest authorities in the Church in America, one of the group of men who has done most to urge American participation in the war and one of the editors of *Christianity and Crisis*. He is representative of the many thoughtful and sensitive men who urged the war because of the terrible evil of the alternative, continuation of tyranny. This man still feels that such a decision was and is in accordance with the mind of Christ, but he is frankly disturbed at so much that he now sees. The following paragraph will be appreciated by our readers:

“. . . Hardly a day passes that one does not read in the papers of proposals and opinions which practically deny everything that we are supposed to be struggling for and certainly express a spirit which is destructive of any real hope for the future. The dreadful narrowness and intolerant racialism of some of the things that are being put forward . . . make one heart-sick. Fortunately we can have no doubt that what we hope for and pray for is nearer to the will of God.”

How do we keep it from happening here? As we become stronger, as we become more aware of the great power which our unparalleled resources give, it will be so easy for our people to become hard. There is even a good chance for genuine hard feeling between ourselves and England when the war is over and an even greater chance of hard feeling between ourselves and Russia. The war is awful, but the peace may be worse. There will be the danger of perfectly understandable vengeance in Europe; there will be awful slaughter in Germany itself; and there will be in the victorious countries the desire to get back to normalcy and comfort and private gain. Only by terrific vigilance in the effort to mold public opinion can these dangers be even partially averted.

The upshot of this way of thinking is the conclusion that the home front is in many ways the major front. In any case it is *our* front. Our task is not to stress the part of the struggle in which we cannot cooperate, since that sounds too much like Pharisaic isolation from the woes of the world, but to stress the part in which we *can* cooperate. We love our country, we are concerned for the human race, and we find our patriotic, as well as our Chris-

tian, task in the effort to build up in our cities and towns and villages a spirit which will avoid those dire developments which we have such reason to fear.

The greatest cross which the more sensitive men in the Civilian Public Service camps now bear is their separation from the home front, where the battle for public opinion is going on. That is where they are needed and the more we can do anything to get them there, the greater service we render not only these men but the public good. Herein lies much of the wisdom of the English plan of exemption, which lets so many conscientious men con-

tinue their patriotic task on the home front. In any case, however, most of us do not have this cross to bear. We are members of clubs; we attend public meetings; we meet strangers as we travel. We have a thousand ways of influencing the thought of our time. This is our magnificent opportunity. In days to come, when people ask, "What did you do when the world was on the edge of the abyss?" we need not be ashamed if we can reply "We did all we could to keep that area of the world, in which we had some modest part, from forgetting, in utter vindictiveness, the vision of the world for which it allegedly struggled."