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II

HOW CAN WAR EVER BE RIGHT?

(September, 1914)

I HAVE all my life been an advocate of Peace. I hate war, not merely for its own cruelty and folly, but because it is the enemy of all the causes that I care for most, of social progress and good government and all friendliness and gentleness of life, as well as of art and learning and literature. I have spoken and presided at more meetings than I can remember for peace and arbitration and the promotion of international friendship. I opposed the policy of war in South Africa with all my energies, and have been either outspokenly hostile or inwardly unsympathetic towards almost every war that Great Britain has waged in my lifetime. If I may speak more personally, there is none of my own work into which I have put more intense feeling than into my translation of Euripides' "Trojan Women," the first great denunciation of war in European literature. I do not regret any word that I have spoken or written in the cause of Peace, nor have I changed, so far as I know, any opinion that I have previously held on this subject. Yet I believe firmly that we were right to declare war against Germany on August 4, 1914, and that to have remained neutral in that crisis would have been a failure in public duty.

A heavy responsibility—there is no doubt of it—lies upon Great Britain. Our allies, France and Russia, Belgium and Serbia, had no choice; the war was, in various degrees, forced on all of them. We only, after deliberately surveying the situation, when Germany would have preferred for the moment not to fight us, of our free will declared war. And we were right.

How can such a thing be? It is easy enough to see that our cause is right, and the German cause, by all ordinary human standards, desperately wrong. It is hardly possible to study the official papers issued by the British, the German, and the Russian Governments, without seeing that Germany—or some party in Germany—had plotted this war beforehand; that she chose a moment when she thought her neighbours were at a disadvantage; that she prevented Austria from making a settlement even at the last moment; that in order to get more quickly at France she violated her treaty with Belgium. Evidence too strong to resist seems to show that she has carried out the violation with a purposeful cruelty that has no parallel in the wars of modern and civilized nations. Yet some people may still feel gravely doubtful. Germany's ill-doing is no reason for us to do likewise. We did our best to keep the general peace; there we were right. We failed; the German Government made war in spite of us. There we were unfortunate. It was a war already on an enormous scale, a vast network of calamity ranging over five nations; and we decided to make it larger still. There we were wrong. Could we not have stood aside, as the United States stand, ready to help refugees and sufferers, anxious to heal wounds and not make them, watchful for the first chance of putting an end to this time of horror?

"Try for a moment," an objector to our policy might

say, "to realize the extent of suffering involved in one small corner of a battlefield. You have seen a man here and there badly hurt in an accident; you have seen perhaps a horse with its back broken, and you can remember how dreadful it seemed to you. In that one corner how many men, how many horses, will be lying, hurt far worse and just waiting to die? Indescribable wounds, extreme torment; and all, far further than any eye can see, multiplied and multiplied! And, for all your righteous indignation against Germany, what have these done? The horses are not to blame for anybody's foreign policy. They have only come where their masters took them. And the masters themselves...admitting that certain highly placed Germans, whose names we are not sure of, are as wicked as ever you like, these soldiers—peasants and working-men and shopkeepers and schoolmasters—have really done nothing in particular; at least, perhaps they have now, but they had not up to the time when you, seeing they were involved in war and misery already, decided to make war on them also and increase their sufferings. You say that justice must be done on conspirators and public malefactors. But so far as the rights and wrongs of the war go, you are simply condemning innocent men, by thousands and thousands, to death, or even to mutilation and torture; is that the best way to satisfy your sense of justice? These innocent people,

you will say, are fighting to protect the guilty parties whom you are determined to reach. Well, perhaps, at the end of the war, after millions of innocent people have suffered, you may at last, if all goes well with your arms, get at the 'guilty parties.' You will hold an inquiry, with imperfect evidence and biased judges; you will decide—in all likelihood wrongly—that a dozen very stupid and obstinate Prussians with long titles are the guilty parties, and even then you will not know what to do with them. You will probably try, and almost certainly fail, to make them somehow feel ashamed or humiliated. It is likely enough that you will merely make them into national heroes.

"And after all, this is assuming quite the best sort of war: a war in which one party is wrong and the other right, and the right wins. Suppose both are wrong; or suppose the wrong party wins? It is as likely as not; for, if the right party is helped by his good conscience, the wrong has probably taken pains to have the odds on his side before he began quarrelling. In that case all the wild expenditure of blood and treasure, all the immeasurable suffering of innocent individuals and dumb animals, all the tears of women and children in the background, have taken place not to vindicate the right, but to establish the wrong. To do a little evil that great or certain good may come is all very well; but to do almost infinite evil for a doubtful chance of attaining something which half the people concerned may think good and the other half think bad, and which in no imaginable case can ever be attained in fullness or purity...that is neither good morals nor good sense. Anybody not in a passion must see that it is insanity."

I sympathize with every step of this argument; yet I think it is wrong. It is judging of the war as a profit-and-loss account, and reckoning, moreover, only the immediate material consequences. It leaves out of sight the cardinal fact that in some causes it is better to fight and be broken than to yield peacefully; that sometimes the mere act of resisting to the death is in itself a victory.

Let us try to understand this. The Greeks who fought and died at Thermopylæ had no manner of doubt that they were right so to fight and die, and all posterity has agreed with them. They probably knew they would be defeated. They probably expected that, after their defeat, the Persians would proceed easily to conquer the rest of Greece, and would treat it much more harshly because it had resisted. But such considerations did not affect them. They would not consent to their country's dishonour.

Take again a very clear modern case: the fine story of the French tourist who was captured, together with a priest and some other white people, by Moorish robbers. The Moors gave their prisoners the choice either to trample on the Cross or to be killed. The Frenchman happened to be a Freethinker and an anti-clerical. He disliked Christianity. But he was not going to trample on the Cross at the orders of a robber. He stuck to his companions and died.

This sense of honour and the respect for this sense of honour are very deep instincts in the average man. In the United States there is a rather specially strong feeling against mixture of blood, not only with the blood of coloured people, but with that of the large masses of mankind who are lumped together as "dagoes" or "hunkies." Yet I have noticed that persons with a dash of Red Indian blood are not ashamed but rather proud of it. And if you look for the reason, I suspect it lies in the special reputation which the Indian has acquired, that he would never consent to be a slave. He preferred to fight till he was dead.

A deal of nonsense, no doubt, is talked about "honour" and "dishonour." They are feelings based on sentiment, not on reason; the standards by which they are judged are often conventional or shallow, and sometimes utterly false. Yet honour and dishonour are real things. I will not try to define them; but will only notice that, like religion, their characteristic is that they admit of no bargaining. Indeed, we can almost think of honour as being simply that which a free man values more than life, and dishonour as that which he avoids more than suffering or death. And the important point for us is that there are such things.

There are some people, followers of Tolstoy, who accept this position so far as dying is concerned, but will have nothing to do with killing. Passive resistance, they say, is right; martyrdom is right; but to resist violence by violence is sin.

I was once walking with a friend and disciple of Tolstoy's in a country lane, and a little girl was running in front of us. I put to him the well-known question: "Suppose you saw a man, wicked or drunk or mad, run out and attack that child. You are a big man and carry a big stick: would you not stop him and, if necessary, knock him down?" "No," he said, "why should I commit a sin? I would try to persuade him, I would stand in his way, I would let him kill me, but I would not strike him." Some few people will always be found, less than one in a thousand, to take this view. They will say: "Let the little girl be killed or carried off; let the wicked man commit another wickedness; I, at any rate, will not add to the mass of useless violence that I see all round me."

With such persons one cannot reason, though one can often respect them. Nearly every normal man will feel that the real sin, the real dishonour, lies in allowing an abominable act to be committed under your eyes while you have the strength to prevent it. And the stronger you are, the greater your chance of success, by so much the more are you bound to intervene. If the robbers are overpoweringly strong and there is no chance of beating or baffling them, then and only then should you think of martyrdom. Martyrdom is not the best possibility. It is almost the worst. It is a counsel of despair, the last resort when there is no hope of successful resistance. The best thing—suppose once the robbers are there and intent on crime—the best thing is to overawe them at once; the next best, to defeat them after a hard struggle; the third best, to resist vainly and be martyred; the worst of all, the one evil that need never be endured, is to let them have their will without protest. (As for converting them from their evil ways, that is a process which may be hoped for afterwards.)

We have noticed that in all these cases of honour there is, or at least there seems to be, no counting of cost, no balancing of good and evil. In ordinary conduct, we are always balancing the probable results of this course or that; but when honour or religion comes on the scene all such balancing ceases. If you argued to the Christian martyr: "Suppose you do burn the pinch of incense, what will be the harm? All your friends know you are really a Christian: they will not be misled. The idol will not be any the better for the incense, nor will your own true God be any the worse. Why should you bring misery on yourself and all your family?" Or suppose you pleaded, with the French atheist: "Why in the world should you not trample on the Cross? It is the sign of the clericalism to which you object. Even if trampling somewhat exaggerates your sentiments, the harm is small. Who will be a penny the worse for your trampling? While you will live instead of dying, and all your family be happy instead of wretched." Suppose you said to the Red Indian: "My friend, you are outnumbered by ten to one. If you will submit unconditionally to these pale-faces, and be always civil and obliging, they will probably treat you quite well. If they do not, well, you can reconsider the situation later on. No need to get yourself killed at once."

The people concerned would not condescend to meet your arguments. Perhaps they can be met, perhaps not. But it is in the very essence of religion or honour that it must outweigh all material considerations. The point of honour is the point at which a man says to some proposal, "I will not do it. I will rather die."

These things are far easier to see where one man is involved than where it is a whole nation. But they arise with nations too. In the case of a nation the material consequences are much larger, and the point of honour is apt to be less clear. But, in general, whenever one nation in dealing with another relies simply on force or fraud, and denies to its neighbour the common consideration due to human beings, a point of honour must arise.

Austria says suddenly to Serbia: "You are a wicked little State. I have annexed and governed against their will some millions of your countrymen, yet you are still full of anti-Austrian feeling, which I do not intend to allow. You will dismiss from your service all officials, politicians, and soldiers who do not love Austria, and I will further send you from time to time lists of persons whom you are to dismiss or put to death. And if you do not agree to this within forty-eight hours, I, being vastly stronger than you, will make you." As a matter of fact, Serbia did her very best to comply with Austria's demands; she accepted about two thirds of them, and asked for arbitration on the remaining third. But it is clear that she could not accept them all without being dishonoured. That is, Serbia would have given up her freedom at the threat of force; the Serbs would no longer be a free people, and every individual Serb would have been humiliated. He would have confessed himself to be the kind of man who will yield when an Austrian bullies him. And if it is urged that under good Austrian government Serbia would become richer and safer, and the Serbian peasants get better markets, such pleas cannot be listened to. They are a price offered for slavery; and a free man will not accept slavery at a price.

Germany, again, says to Belgium (we leave out for the moment the fact of Germany's special treaty obligations), "We

have no quarrel with you, but we intend for certain reasons to march across your territory and perhaps fight a battle or two there. We know that you are pledged by treaty not to allow any such thing, but we cannot help that. Consent, and we will pay you some compensation afterwards; refuse, and we shall make you wish you had never been born." At that moment Belgium was a free self-governing State. If she had yielded to Germany's demand, she would have ceased to be either. It is possible that, if Germany had been completely victorious and France quite unable to retaliate, Belgium would have suffered no great material injury; but she would have taken orders from a stranger who had no right to give them, simply because he was strong and Belgium dared not face him. Belgium refused. She has had some of her principal towns destroyed, some thousands of her soldiers killed, many more thousands of her women, children, and non-combatants outraged and beggared; but she is still free. She has still her honour.

Let us think this matter out more closely. Our Tolstoyan will say: "We speak of Belgium's honour and Serbia's honour; but who is Serbia and who is Belgium? There is no such person as either. There are only great numbers of people who happen to be Serbians and Belgians, and who mostly have had nothing to do with the questions at issue. Some of them are honourable people, some dishonourable. The honour of each one of them depends very much on whether he pays his debts and tells the truth, but not in the least on whether a number of foreigners walk through his country or interfere with his Government. King Albert and his Ministers might feel humiliated if the German Government compelled them to give way against their will; but would the ordinary population? Would the ordinary peasant or shopkeeper or artisan in the districts of Visé and Liège and Louvain have felt particularly disgraced or ashamed? He would probably have made a little money and been greatly amused by the sight of the troops passing. Who will pretend that he would have suffered any injury that can for a moment be compared with what he has suffered now, in order that his Government may feel proud of itself?"

I will not raise the point that, as a matter of fact, to grant a right of way to Germany would have been equivalent to declaring war against France, so that Belgium would not, by giving up her independence, have been spared the danger of war. I will assume that nothing but honour was involved. In that form, this question goes to the root of our whole conception of citizenship and the position of man in society. And I believe that our Tolstoyan friend is profoundly wrong.

Is it true, in a healthy and well-governed State, that the average citizen is indifferent to the honour of his country? We know that it is not. True, the average citizen may often not understand what is going on, but as soon as he knows he cares. Suppose for a moment that the King, or the Prime Minister, or the President of the United States, were found to be in the pay of a foreign State, as for instance Charles II was in the pay of Louis XIV, can any one pretend that the ordinary citizens of Great Britain or America would take it quietly? that any normal man would be found saying: "Well, the King, or the President, or the Prime Minister, is behaving dishonourably, but that is a matter for him, not for me. I am an honest and honourable man, and my Government can do what it likes." The notion is absurd. The ordinary citizen would feel instantly and without question that his country's honour involved his own. And woe to the society in which it were otherwise! We know of such societies in history. They are the kind which is called "corrupt," and which generally has not long to live. Belgium has proved that she is not that kind of society.

But what about Great Britain herself? At the present moment a very clear case has arisen, and we can test our own feelings. Great Britain had, by a solemn treaty more than once renewed, pledged herself to maintain the neutrality of Belgium. Belgium is a little State lying between two very strong States, France and Germany, and in danger of being overrun or maltreated by one of them unless the Great Powers guarantee her safety. The treaty, signed by Prussia, Russia, Austria, France, and Great Britain, bound all these Powers not to attack Belgium, move troops into her territory, or annex any part of it; and further, to resist by armed force any Power which should try to do any of these things. Belgium, on her part, was bound to maintain her own neutrality to the best of her power, and not to side with any State which was at war with another.

At the end of last July the exact case arose in which we had pledged ourselves to act. Germany suddenly and without excuse invaded Belgium, and Belgium appealed to us and France to defend her. Meantime she fought alone, desperately, against overwhelming odds. The issue was clear, and free from any complications. The German Chancellor, Herr von

Bethmann-Hollweg, in his speech of August 6, admitted that Germany had no grievance against Belgium, and no excuse except "necessity." She could not get to France quick enough by the direct road. Germany put her case to us, roughly, on these grounds. "True, you did sign a treaty, but what is a treaty? We ourselves signed the same treaty, and see what we are doing! Anyhow, treaty or no treaty, we have Belgium absolutely in our power. If she had done what we wanted, we would have treated her kindly; as it is we shall show her no mercy. If you will now do what we want and stay quiet, later on, at our convenience, we will consider a friendly deal with you. If you interfere, you must take the consequences. We trust you will not be so insane as to plunge your whole Empire into danger for the sake of 'a scrap of paper.'" Our answer was: "Evacuate Belgium within twelve hours or we fight you."

I think that answer was right. Consider the situation carefully. No question arises of overhaste or lack of patience on our part. From the first moment of the crisis, we had laboured night and day in every Court of Europe for any possible means of conciliation and peace. We had carefully and sincerely explained to Germany beforehand what attitude she might expect from us. We did not send our ultimatum till Belgium was already invaded. It is just the plain question put to the British Government, and, I think, to every one who feels himself a British citizen: "The exact case contemplated in your treaty has arisen: the people you swore to protect is being massacred; will you keep your word at a gigantic cost, or will you break it at the bidding of Germany?" For my own part, weighing the whole question soberly and without undue passion, I feel that in this case I would rather die than submit; and I believe that the Government, in deciding to keep its word at the cost of war, has rightly interpreted the feeling of the average British citizen.

So much for the question of honour, pure and simple; honour without regard for consequences. But, of course, situations in real political life are never so simple as that; they have many different aspects and ramifications. And in the present case, though the point of honour happens to be quite clear, it seems probable that even without it there were compelling reasons for war. I do not, of course, for a moment mean that war was going to be "profitable" to Great Britain; such a calculation would be infamous. I mean that, terrible as the consequences of our taking part in the war were sure to be, the consequences of our not doing so were likely to be even more profoundly and widely evil.

Let us leave aside, then, the definite treaty binding us to Belgium. Apart from that, we were faced with a complicated question of statesmanship, of prudence, of patriotism towards our own country and towards humanity.

Germany has for years presented a problem to Europe. Since her defeat of France in 1870, she has been extraordinarily successful, and the success seems to have intoxicated her. This is a complicated subject, which calls for far deeper knowledge than I possess. I will merely try to state, as fairly as I can, the impression that has been forced on me by a certain amount of reading and observation. From the point of view of one who really believes that great nations ought to behave to one another as scrupulously and honourably as ordinary, law-abiding men, no Power in Europe, or out of it, is quite blameless. They all have ambitions; they all, to some extent, use spies; they all, within limits, try to outwit each other; in their diplomatic dealings they rely not only on the claims of good sense and justice, but ultimately, no doubt, on the threat of possible force. But, as a matter of degree, Germany does all these things more than other Powers. In her diplomacy, force comes at once to the front; international justice is hardly mentioned. She spends colossal sums on her secret service, so that German spies are become a by-word and a joke. In the recognized sport of international treachery, she goes frequently beyond the rules of the game. Her Emperor, her Imperial Chancellor, and other people in the highest positions of responsibility, expound her ambitions and her schemes in language which would only be used by an irresponsible journalist in England or France. They discuss, for instance, whether the time has come for conquering France once more, and how best they can "bleed her white" and reduce her to impotence. They explain that Bismarck and his generation have made Germany the strongest Power on the Continent. "The will of Germany is now respected" in Europe; it rests with the present Emperor to make it similarly respected throughout the world. "Germany's world-future lies on the sea." They discuss whether they can build up a fleet strong enough to fight and beat the British fleet without Great Britain interfering. They discuss in public how many colonies, and which, they will leave to Great Britain when the great "Day" comes. They express regret, combined, so far as one can make out, with a little genuine surprise, that the "brutal egoism of Great Britain" should raise any objection to this plan and they hope—openly and publicly—that her well-known weakness and cowardice will make her afraid to act. Since Great Britain has a vast number of Mohammedan subjects, who may possibly be stirred to disaffection, the German Emperor proclaims to "the three hundred million Mohammedans who live scattered over the globe" that whenever they need him, the German Emperor

will be their friend. And this in 1898, in the middle of profound peace! Professors in German Universities lecture on the best way of destroying the British Empire, and the officers' messes in the German Navy regularly drink the toast of "The Day." There is no need to explain what Day. The curious thing is that these plans are all expounded in public speeches and books—strange books, in which the average civilized sense of international justice or common honesty seems to have been left out of account, as well as the sense of common political prudence; in which the schemes of an accomplished burglar are expounded with the candour of a child.

And all through this period, in which she plots against her neighbours and tells them she is plotting, Germany lives in a state of alarm. Her neighbours are so unfriendly! Their attitude may be correct, but it is not trustful and cordial. The Imperial Chancellor, Von Bülow, explains in his book that there was only one time when he really breathed freely. It was in 1909, when Austria, his ally, annexed by violence and against her pledges the two Slav provinces of Bosnia and Herzegovina. All Europe was indignant, especially Russia, the natural protector of the Slavs, and England, the habitual champion of small nationalities. But Germany put down her foot. The Kaiser "appeared in shining armour beside his ally," and no Power dared to intervene. Germany was in the wrong. Every one knew she was in the wrong. It was just that fact that was so comforting. Her army was big enough, her navy was big enough, and for the moment the timid creature felt secure.

Lastly, we must remember that it is Germany who started the race for armaments; and that while Russia has pressed again and again for a general limitation of armies, and England made proposal after proposal for a general limitation of navies, Germany has steadily refused to entertain any such idea.

Now, for some time it was possible to minimize all these danger-signals, and, for my own part, I have always tried to minimize them. There are militarists and Jingoism in every country; our own have often been bad enough. The German sort seemed unusually blatant, but it did not follow that they carried their country with them. The Kaiser, always impulsive, said on the whole more friendly things than unfriendly things. At any rate, it seemed wiser and more statesmanlike to meet provocation with good temper, and to try by persistent friendliness to encourage all the more liberal and reasonable elements in German public life. This policy seemed possible until the July of the present year. Then certain facts were forced upon us. They are all detailed in the White Paper and the other diplomatic correspondence.

We suddenly found that Germany and Austria, or some conspiring parties in Germany and Austria, had arranged for a great stroke, like that of 1909 on a larger scale. It was so obviously aggressive in its nature that their ally, Italy, the third Power in the Triple Alliance, formally refused to act with them. The Alliance only applied to a defensive war. The time had been carefully chosen. England was supposed to be on the verge of a civil war in Ireland and a new mutiny in India. France had just been through a military scandal, in which it appeared that the army was short of boots and ammunition. Russia, besides a general strike and internal troubles, was re-arming her troops with a new weapon, and the process was only half through. Even the day was chosen. It was in a week when nearly all the ambassadors were away from their posts, taking their summer holiday—the English Ambassador at Berlin, the Russian Ambassadors at Berlin and Vienna, the Austrian Foreign Minister, the French Prime Minister, the Serbian Prime Minister, the Kaiser himself, and others who might have used a restraining influence on the schemes of the war party. Suddenly, without a word to any outside Power, Austria issued an ultimatum to Serbia, to be answered in forty-eight hours. Seventeen of these hours had elapsed before the other Powers were informed, and war was declared on Serbia before all the ambassadors could get back to their posts. The leading statesmen of Europe sat up all night trying for conciliation, for arbitration, even for bare delay. At the last moment, when the Austrian Foreign Minister had returned, and had consented to a basis for conversations with Russia, there seemed to be a good chance that peace might be preserved; but at that moment Germany launched her ultimatum at Russia and France, and Austria was already invading Serbia. In twenty-four hours, six European Powers were at war.

Now, the secret history of this strange intrigue is not yet known. It will not be known for fifty years or so. It is impossible to believe that the German nation would have backed up the plot, if they had understood it. It is difficult to think that the Kaiser would; and the Austrian Foreign Minister, when once he returned, tried to undo the work of his subordinates. But somehow the war parties in Germany and Austria got the upper hand for one fatal week, and have managed to drag their countries after them.

We saw, as Italy had seen, that Germany had pre-arranged the war. We saw her breaking her treaties and overrunning little Belgium, as her ally was trampling on little Serbia. We remembered her threats against ourselves. And at this very time, as if to deepen our suspicions, she made us what has been justly termed an "infamous proposal," that if we would condone her treaty-breaking now, she would have an "understanding" with us afterwards.

Suppose we had not been bound by our treaty to Belgium, or even our natural and informal friendship with France: what could we have done? I wish to take no low ground; I wish to face the question from the point of view of a statesman who owes a duty to his own country and a duty to Europe.

The one thing which we could not have done, in my opinion, was to repudiate our responsibility. We are a very strong Power, one of the strongest in the world, and here, under our eyes and within range of our guns, a thing was being done which menaced every living creature in Europe. The one thing that no statesman could possibly do was to say: "This is no concern of ours. We will go our ways as usual." It was perfectly possible to stand aside and proclaim our neutrality. But—apart from questions of honour—to proclaim neutrality was quite as grave a step as to proclaim war. Let no man imagine that he can escape blood-guiltiness by standing still while murder is committed before his eyes.

I will not argue here what the right decision would have been. It depends, unlike the point of honour, on a careful balancing of evidence and consequences, and scarcely any one in the country except the Government has sufficient knowledge to make the balance. For my own part, I should have started with a strong predilection for peace, even a fragmentary peace, but should ultimately have been guided chiefly by the public men whom I most trust. But, as things fell out, our Government was not forced to make a decision on this difficult ground at all, because Germany took a further step which made the whole situation clear. Her treatment of Belgium not only roused our passionate indignation, but compelled us either to declare war or to break our pledged word. I incline, however, to think that our whole welfare is so vitally dependent on the observance of public law and the rights of nations, and would have been so terribly endangered by the presence of Germany in a conqueror's mood at Ostend and Zeebrugge, not to speak of Dunkirk and Calais, that in this case mere self-preservation called us to fight. I do not venture to lay any stress on the hopes which we may entertain for the building up of a better Europe after the war, a Europe which shall have settled its old feuds and devised some great machinery for dealing with new difficulties as they arise, on a basis of justice and concord, not of intrigue and force. By all means let us hope, let us work, for that rebuilding; but it will be a task essentially difficult when it comes; and the very beginning of it lies far away, separated from the present time and the immediate task by many terrific hazards. We have no right to soothe our consciences concerning the war with professions of the fine and generous things that we are going to do afterwards. Doubtless Germany was going to make us all good and happy when she was once sure of our obedience. For the moment we can think only of our duty, and need of self-preservation. And I believe that in this matter the two run together: our interest coincides with our honour.

It is curious how often this is the case. It is one of the old optimistic beliefs of nineteenth-century Liberalism, and one which is often ridiculed, that a nation's duty generally does coincide with its interest. No doubt one can find abundant exceptions, but I believe that in the main, for nations as for individuals, real palpable conscious dishonesty or wickedness is exceedingly unprofitable. This is a more interesting fact than it looks at first sight.

There are many poisons which are simply so nasty that, undisguised, they cannot be swallowed. No power could induce a man or dog to sip or lap a tablespoonful of nicotine or prussic acid. You might coax the dog with future bones, you might persuade the man that the medicine was just what his health needed; but their swallowing muscles would refuse to act. Doubtless, in the scheme of nature, the disgust is a provision which saves the race. Now I cannot help suspecting that, much more faintly and more fallibly, the vehement and invincible refusal with which man's sense of honour or religion meets certain classes of proposal, which look profitable enough on the surface, is just such another warning of nature against poison. In all these cases discussed above, the Christian's martyrdom, the honourable man's refusal to desert his companions, it was not true to say, as we seemed to say, that advantage was on one side and honour on the other. Dishonour would have brought with it a subtler and more lasting disadvantage, greater in its sum than immediate death. If the Christian had sacrificed to the idol, what would his life have been afterwards? Perhaps his

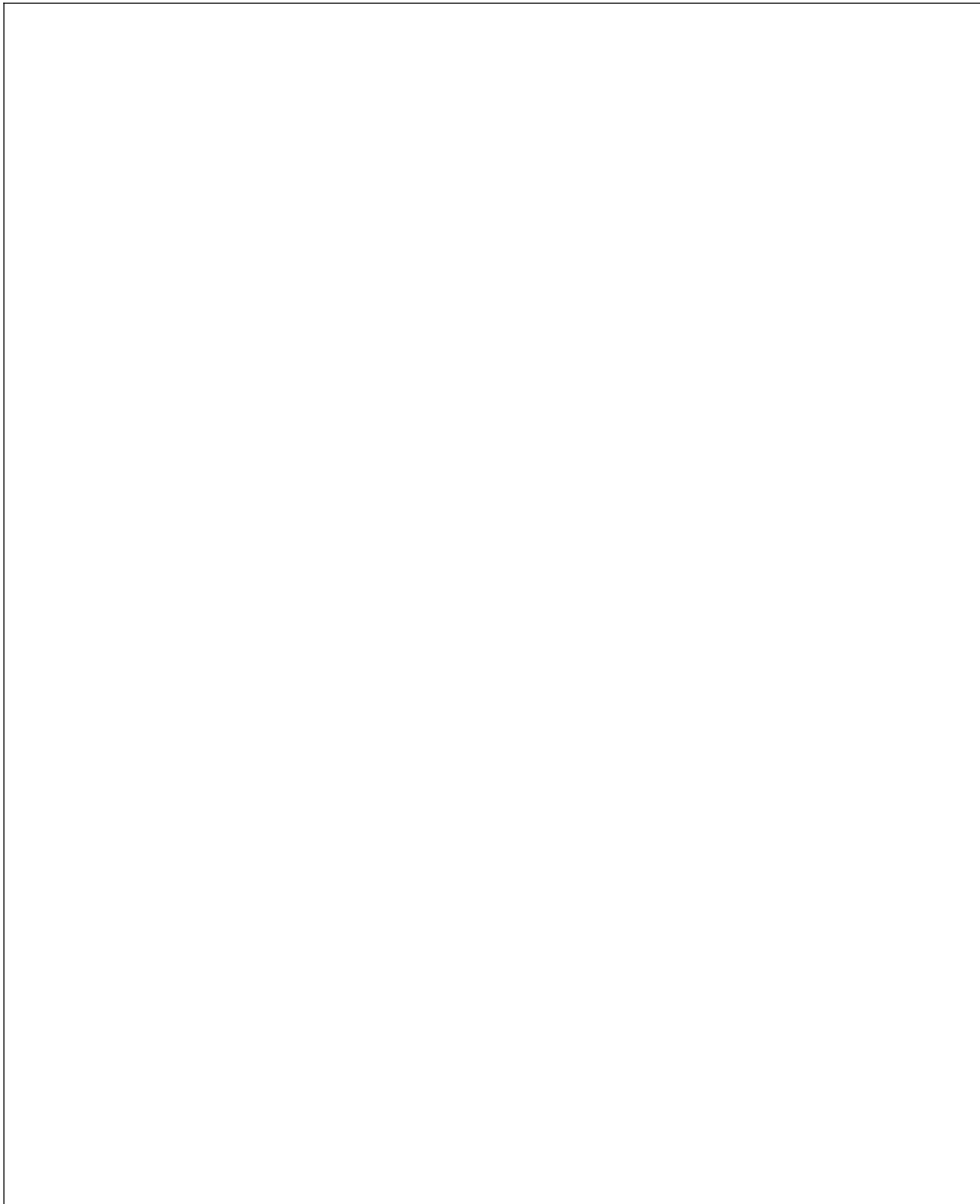
friends would have rejected his example and been martyred; he would be alone in his shame. Perhaps they would have followed his example, and through him the whole band of the "faithful" have betrayed Christ. Not a very enviable choice either way. Without any tall talk or high professions, would it not quite certainly be better for the whole Church and probably for the man himself that he should defy his persecutors and die? And does not the same now hold for any patriotic Belgian or Serbian who has had a voice in his country's action? The choice was not on the one hand honour and misery, on the other dishonour and a happy life. It was on the one hand honour and great physical suffering, on the other hand dishonour and a life subtly affected by that dishonour in a thousand unforeseen ways. I do not underrate the tremendous importance of mere physical suffering; I do not underrate the advantage of living as long a life as is conveniently possible. But men must die some time, and, if we dare really to confess the truth, the thing that most of us in our hearts long for, the thing which either means ultimate happiness or else is greater and dearer to men than happiness, is the power to do our duty and, when we die, to have done it. The behaviour of our soldiers and sailors proves it. *"The last I saw of him was on the after bridge, doing well."* The words come in the official report made by the captain of one of our lost cruisers. But that is the kind of epitaph nearly all men crave for themselves, and the wisest men, I think, even for their nation.

And if we accept this there will follow further consequences. War is not all evil. It is a true tragedy, which must have nobleness and triumph in it as well as disaster.... This is dangerous ground. The subject lends itself to foolish bombast, especially when accompanied by a lack of true imagination. We must not begin to praise war without stopping to reflect on the hundreds of thousands of human beings involved in such horrors of pain and indignity that, if here in our ordinary hours we saw one man so treated, the memory would sicken us to the end of our lives; we must remember the horses, remember the gentle natures brutalized by hardship and filth, and the once decent persons transformed by rage and fear into devils of cruelty. But, when we have realized that, we may venture to see in this wilderness of evil some oases of extraordinary good.

These men who are engaged in what seems like a vast public crime ought, one would think, to fall to something below their average selves, below the ordinary standard of common folk. But do they? Day after day come streams of letters from the front, odd stories, fragments of diaries, and the like, full of the small, intimate facts which reveal character; and almost with one accord they show that these men have not fallen, but risen. No doubt there has been some selection in the letters; to some extent the writers repeat what they wish to have remembered, and say nothing of what they wish to forget. But, when all allowances are made, one cannot read the letters and the dispatches without a feeling of almost passionate admiration for the men about whom they tell. They were not originally a set of men chosen for their peculiar qualities. They were just our ordinary fellow citizens, the men you meet on a crowded pavement. There was nothing to suggest that their conduct in common life was better than that of their neighbours. Yet now, under the stress of war, having a duty before them that is clear and unquestioned and terrible, they are daily doing nobler things than we most of us have ever had the chance of doing, things which we hardly dare hope that we might be able to do. I am not thinking of the rare achievements that win a V.C. or a Cross of the Legion of Honour, but of the common necessary heroism of the average men: the long endurance, the devoted obedience, the close-banded life in which self-sacrifice is the normal rule, and all men may be forgiven except the man who saves himself at the expense of his comrade. I think of the men who share their last biscuits with a starving peasant, who help wounded comrades through days and nights of horrible retreat, who give their lives to save mates or officers. ^[1] Or I think again of the expressions on faces that I have seen or read about, something alert and glad and self-respecting in the eyes of those who are going to the front, and even of the wounded who are returning. "Never once," writes one correspondent, "not once since I came to France have I seen among the soldiers an angry face or heard an angry word.... They are always quiet, orderly, and wonderfully cheerful." And no one who has followed the war need be told of their heroism. I do not forget the thousands left on the battlefield to die, or the groaning of the wounded sounding all day between the crashes of the guns. But there is a strange deep gladness as well. "One feels an extraordinary freedom," says a young Russian officer, "in the midst of death, with the bullets whistling round. The same with all the soldiers. The wounded all want to get well and return to the fight. They fight with tears of joy in their eyes."

Human nature is a mysterious thing, and man finds his weal and woe not in the obvious places. To have something before you, clearly seen, which you know you must do, and can do, and will spend your utmost strength and perhaps your life in doing, that is one form at least of very high happiness, and one that appeals—the facts prove it—not only to saints

and heroes, but to average men. Doubtless the few who are wise enough and have enough imagination may find opportunity for that same happiness in everyday life, but in war ordinary men find it. This is the inward triumph which lies at the heart of the great tragedy.



FOOTNOTES:

[1] For example, to take two stories out of a score:—

1. Relating his experiences to a pressman, Lance-Corporal Edmondson, of the Royal Irish Lancers, said: "There is absolutely no doubt that our men are still animated by the spirit of old. I came on a couple of men of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders who had been cut off at Mons. One was badly wounded, but his companion had stuck by him all the time in a country swarming with Germans, and though they had only a few biscuits between them they managed to pull through until we picked them up. I pressed the unwounded man to tell me how they managed to get through the four days on six biscuits, but he always got angry and told me to shut up. I fancy he went without anything, and gave the biscuits to the wounded man. They were offered shelter many times by French peasants, but they were so afraid of bringing trouble on these kind folk that they would never accept shelter. One night they lay out in the open all through a heavy downpour, though there was a house at hand where they could have had shelter. Uhlans were on the prowl, and they would not think of compromising the French people, who would have been glad to help them."

2. The following story of an unidentified private of the Royal Irish Regiment, who deliberately threw away his life in order to warn his comrades of an ambush, is told by a wounded corporal of the West Yorkshire Regiment now in hospital in Woolwich:—

"The fight in which I got hit was in a little village near to Rheims. We were working in touch with the French corps on our left, and early one morning we were sent ahead to this village, which we had reason to believe was clear of the enemy. On the outskirts we questioned a French lad, but he seemed scared and ran away. We went on through the long, narrow street, and just as we were in sight of the end the figure of a man dashed out from a farmhouse on the right. Immediately the rifles began to crack in front, and the poor chap fell dead before he reached us.

"He was one of our men, a private of the Royal Irish Regiment. We learned that he had been captured the previous day by a marauding party of German cavalry, and had been held a prisoner at the farm where the Germans were in ambush for us. He tumbled to their game, and though he knew that if he made the slightest sound they would kill him, he decided to make a dash to warn us of what was in store. He had more than a dozen bullets in him, and there was not the slightest hope for him. We carried him into a house until the fight was over, and then we buried him next day with military honours. His identification disk and everything else was missing, so that we could only put over his grave the tribute that was paid to a greater: 'He saved others; himself he could not save.' There wasn't a dry eye among us when we laid him to rest in that little village."

[End of *How can War ever be Right?*, by Gilbert Murray]