

Xmas thoughts and wishes

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XMAS THOUGHTS AND WISHES.

When, early in the year of 1945, the church bells were rung to proclaim that an armistice had been concluded, a sigh of immense relief went from one corner of the earth to the other.

True enough the fighting had not come to an end, war was still rampant in the East, but there were no longer anymore doubts as to the ultimate result of the terrible struggle.

After six long years of sacrifices which weighed heavily on millions and millions of human beings, the cessation of hostilities kindled the hope of better days to come. The golden dawn of Peace was in sight, a peace which would allow us poor mortals to work in unity and good will, to repair the damage, and heal the wounds which this greatest of all wars had inflicted on us.

At long last the peoples over the four corners of the globe seemed to have realised the stupidity of settling differences by force; a new charter was proclaimed which should once again bring peace and prosperity to the human family.

Have these expectations been realised, have our hopes materialised? The answer is, to use a parliamentary expression "in the negative."

What do we find to-day?; there's a scramble for power, political and economical unrest in almost every country. Nations which bravely fought side by side to end once for all the tyranny of dictatorship have become suspicious of each other, governments which professed adherence to broad ideals are going the way of all flesh. The economic system in the great nations of the world is paralysed by strikes, black markets are thriving, wages increases are demanded which bring the costs of daily necessities still higher, goods have become scarce and inflation has become a fact.

Not even the biggest optimist expected that conditions would change immediately after fighting had ceased, and that bitter hatred would turn to brotherly love; but what one dared to hope was, that the victorious powers would make a genuine and determined effort to work out a common programme for the salvation of a war torn world.

Four of the biggest powers are at logger-heads and pull on different strings, let alone all the smaller nations which are eager to catch at least an end of each of the strings. The hope that a superhuman patience will succeed in bringing opposite opinions and aspirations under one and the same hat has become to-day more than ever problematical. The Peace Conference hardly deserves its name.

I have recently come across an article in one of the big American Daylies, which I think is worth quoting in parts. In it the author tries to seek a way-out from the insufferable position. Dealing with the present unsatisfactory position, he writes:

... "In all this, the calm, mediating voice of Reason is absent. Some say it would be ineffective and unpersuasive even if the call to Reason were articulated. There is a tendency to despair to throw one's self to the *let-Nature-take-its-course* school of thought. We are, in fact, in an era of cynicism which in effect calls out to everybody to look out for himself and let the devil take the hindmost.

It is a short road from the selflessness of the battlefield to the selfishness of peacetime. It is a longer road back to that exalted mood when men gave their lives for a principle: the emancipation of mankind.

What then, will you ask, is the answer? Is not all this "Human nature" in the raw? Has it not always been that after wars? Are not people instinctively selfish and individualistic, and is it not better to recognise the inevitable and apply the totalitarian controls of man-made law and coercive regulation of the mass by the few? . . . Shall we forsake voluntarism and endorse coercionism?

The real answer lies to-day, as always, in the power of the individual to rise above self. That power can sometimes be stimulated by the organised rituals of the Church and sometimes by the eloquence and exhortations of pastors. But, more often it is stimulated by the sudden realisation by the individual that he stands on the brink of disaster and that his only hope lies in a release of the spiritual instinct which has been intermittently within him. . . .

Individual regeneration will come in time, though it may take more months and perhaps years of suffering to awaken us to the folly of the present-day quest for happiness through the acquisitive side of our natures.

Millions of persons are already suffering. To these we must add the millions who have been suffering through the war. The helpless persons driven from their homes by the bombs of warfare, the broken-down human beings who wander aimlessly now in Europe and Asia, searching for food and shelter — these are not the only unhappy mortals of our times. . . .

There is no use blaming anybody else. We shall not make progress by selecting scapegoats. Each of us must accept responsibility for what has happened and for what is yet to happen. Reform and change will not come overnight. At best it will be a slow process of evolution. But it must follow the inexorable law of human experience which tells us that governments are no better than the men who compose them, and democracies are no better than the peoples who make up their electorates or constituencies.

The responsibility for what is happening throughout the world is mine and yours. It involves an abandonment of indifference. It means a return to the spirit of Divine Providence which bids us be humble and unselfish and to seek the greatest of all compensations, the satisfactions that flow from service to our fellowmen.

What to do? Concretely, it means a response to the call for saving of food that others may live. It means a contribution of self to the solution of the many ills that surround us. It means a subordination of the censure that we heap on others

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and a readiness, instead, in all controversies, to examine ourselves honestly and without prejudice. It means a willingness to recognise that if everybody demands a maximum, there will be no minimum for anybody. It means that the voice of Reason coming from men of character and honesty, must be raised higher and higher and that we must all listen. It means, too, that we must listen every hour of the day, for the voice of God who can tell us what is really worthwhile in this brief span of life, and what is the real purpose of the few years vouchsafed to us.

These years and this life are not meant to be exploited by self for self. They are meant for the highest purpose that human imagination can conceive: to give of ourselves that others, too, may eat and live . . . Thou shalt not kill thy brother, whether he be black or white, or yellow or red, and whether he worships God in your way or his . . . Thou shalt not kill him by famine or degradation, by enslavement or by exploitation . . .

We can destroy civilisation by man-made bombs, or we can rescue it by God-given strength of co-operation and human comradeship. To find that strength, we must recognise the divine spark of goodness which reposes within us, and give the spark a chance to glow in the darkness of human friction, misunderstanding and irresponsible individualism."

These are brave words and should be taken to heart. —

On the eve of a New Year, let us, dear compatriots, turn our thoughts to the country of our birth and to all those dear to us.

Most of us, have been privileged, after a long separation, to meet again our relations and friends, and to admire the beauty of our little country. What a host of treasured memories this contact has awakened in us. Our country has been called a little Paradise, and so it is; after having spent so many years under stringent war conditions it has appeared to us as a haven of rest. This does not mean that the Confederation harbours nothing else but "Angels," there are many things in this little paradise which have no relationship with a celestial environment; although our country has been spared the ravages of war, it has suffered in many ways too, shortage of food, lack of raw material have at times been felt acutely.

We know from experience that Neutrals after any war have a bad Press, and there are surprisingly many people who still hold the conviction that a neutral country is one which is afraid to fight and fattens itself whilst the going is good. Unfortunately some of our countrymen, who have recently returned from their visits, have by their tales, often exaggerated, of a country flowing with milk and honey, done, perhaps unwittingly, a lot of harm, a little more discretion would not have been misplaced.

Self praise and advertising of good deeds are foreign to us Swiss, what services we have rendered to all the belligerents during the last war, and they were manifold, we have willingly and unflinchingly given, from a purely humanitarian point of view, and from a high sense of duty towards those who fought for the rights of mankind. Switzerland has always been a haven of rest for all those who have been persecuted, or who were in dire need of help, the finest example is the splendid work done by the International

Red Cross Committee in Geneva, which has brought relief and succour to millions of our fellow men in the four quarters of the globe. There are many more instances I could quote, where our country has been of paramount help to the nations at war, but we are not asking for thanks nor for cheap glory, but one thing we object to, and that is, to be accused of selfishness or enrichment whilst other peoples had to fight for their existence.

Contrary to statements made at one time or another that Switzerland has benefitted financially through this war, it must be stated emphatically that Switzerland is not, and has never been a rich country, and is emerging from this war considerably poorer, but thank God, so much richer in esteem for its great humanitarian work.

Let us hope that our endeavours and our achievements will be recognised, in a true and unbiased spirit, and that it will not be forgotten that in the tragic hour of need, destruction and misery our country has fulfilled a mission of mercy, a mission which will go down in history as one, if not the only redeeming feature of this world war.

Once again, we Swiss abroad, testify anew our deep attachment to our beloved country, expressing our solemn gratitude to the Federal Government for their incessant and untiring labours for the welfare of our own people and for having guided the ship of State wisely and courageously past the dangerous rocks of a surging sea.

We equally owe this country, which has always extended to us a generous hospitality, and which has given to many of us a second home, deep gratitude.

We have shared in the past, to a great extent, the dangers of its inhabitants, and also in no slight measure a part of its duties, we have done this willingly and wholeheartedly in the knowledge that they not only fought their own battle, but the battle for Freedom and Liberty, ideals which are dear to us and which are the very foundation of our constitution.

Many of the sons, husbands and brothers of our countrymen have fought with H.M.S. forces in the various theatres of the war, some, alas have not returned, but all of them we shall remember in grateful memory for their services given to their adopted country.

"Peace on Earth and Goodwill on Earth," let this be our motto for the year 1947 and let us look into the future with a stout heart, hoping that this future will be purified and sanctified through almost superhuman sacrifices, and that out of the ruins of a horrible past, will emerge a better and happier world, a world in which the great human family can live in peace and happiness.

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