

ARTICLE VIII.

CRITICAL NOTE.

"INVINCIBLE IGNORANCE."

IN the current number of the *Constructive Quarterly* about thirty pages are given to reprints of letters written by the eminent Professor Adolf Deissmann, of the University of Berlin, to his many friends in America, telling of the great religious revival in Germany in connection with the present war. More than twenty of these letters have been sent to his former pupils and friends in America, and they have been manifolded and widely distributed from hand to hand. The extracts from these in the *Constructive Quarterly* represent only about one quarter of the whole. The story which they tell is remarkable and the lessons conveyed are most important and encouraging. A few extracts will suffice to bring the main facts before the public.

On the date of December 6, 1914, he writes:—

" . . . Never in the history of our people have the hymns '*Ein feste Burg*' or '*Nun danket Alle Gott*' and the old Dutch '*Dankgebet*' had such a rhythm and ring as during these months at home as well as out on the battle field; the voices of German warriors, both Catholic and Protestant, have never been united in such a pious and fraternal way before, and the effect of these gigantic choirs singing the Ambrosian Hymn is simply grand."

December 20, 1914:—

" Taken as a whole, our nation has been stirred as perhaps never before. The number of those who, as individuals, have been harmed religiously through the war cannot seriously be compared with the many who have received a spiritual uplift through the same. For never before had individual piety so much revealed its social aspect in the army as well as at home. We are now one big religious commonwealth, whether in the village church, where the peasant folk mass themselves together for prayer in behalf of the soldiers, or

in the field, where the young volunteer, a former student of theology, preaches to his comrades under the open skies before giving the oath of allegiance to their flag, or even yet in the *Dom*, where the minister to the Court, Dr. Dryander, brings his message of the Gospel of Power and Confidence to the thousands of his audience."

February 5, 1915:—

" . . . The strong revival of religious interest that the war has brought about with us, has deeply stirred our Church-life throughout the whole of Evangelical Germany. Quite a number of our clergymen have told me that now it was a pleasure to be a pastor. . . . The most remarkable feature is a new type of service, the so-called '*Kriegsgebetstunde*,' the prayer-meeting on behalf of the country and its soldiers. From the beginning of the great conflict until up to this day these hours for prayer and devotion have been greatly in demand both in our cities and in our rural districts.

" . . . In some churches [in Berlin] both these prayer-meetings and the regular services are so overcrowded, if one wants to get a place, one must be present long before the beginning of the exercises."

April 23, 1915, a quotation given from a distinguished Catholic theologian testifying that,—

" Everywhere, with the soldiers at the front as well as with the non-combatants at home, religion as an inner experience in daily life takes an important place. In every nation the religious forces are gathered and used in a high degree. . . . This conflict shows us that Christianity is by no means a religion for women and children only, for weaklings and effeminate men, but a religion which just enfolds the highest active and passive powers of the soul in courageous and strong men."

Similar testimony is brought concerning the religious revival in France.

These facts are similar to many connected with our civil war fifty years ago, where religious motives were found to animate the contending parties on both sides. At the outset of that war I was a student in Oberlin Theological Seminary, when an appeal was made for the enlistment of a company of students to demonstrate the loyalty to the Government of the strong antislavery element which was specially representative of Oberlin. Company C of the Seventh Regiment of the Ohio Volunteer Infantry, of which I was a mem-

ber, was formed, and it at once entered upon active military service. The captain and first lieutenant were theological students, and a large share of the company were active Christian workers. From the beginning to the end of their three years' service, in which time thirty-nine of their number were killed in battle, daily prayer meetings were maintained. Of the genuineness and uplifting character of this experience incident to our military life there can be no question.

But these ennobling influences were not confined to those on our side of the conflict. It is only recently that we have learned from the *Reminiscences* of Rev. Dr. R. H. McKim, the eminent Episcopal clergyman of Washington, whose scholarly writings have more than once appeared in the pages of the *BIBLIOTHECA SACRA*, that he was, at the outset of the War, a student preparing for the ministry in the University of Virginia, and that he enlisted as a private in the Confederate army, and was as earnest in promoting the religious life of his associates in that army as were the leaders of our company. For a time his company was under command of that stalwart religious champion Stonewall Jackson, when his forces and our regiment, among others, were contending for possession of the Shenandoah Valley in Virginia. Such was young McKim's zeal and efficiency in religious work among his comrades, that, at the end of the second year, he was advised to take orders as an Episcopal clergyman and become chaplain, which he did, serving in that capacity until the end of the war. The story of the manner in which he and his companions spent their time in winter quarters in studying the classics, and of the great revival of religion among Confederate soldiers during the third winter of the war, not only parallels, but exceeds in impressiveness, anything that can be told about the Union army.

Such facts as these are difficult of explanation until we penetrate deeply into the motives that govern human action. The ultimate righteous choice does not have a free field in action. After one has committed himself to the promotion of the highest good of being, he has still the puzzling prob-

lem, "What in the present condition of things will promote the glory of God and the highest well-being of mankind?" The infirmities of man's intellectual powers prevent an absolute settlement of this question. Each one has to follow the best light which he has. In general it is best for the citizen to uphold his government, believing that those in authority have reasons for their actions which he does not have. There can be no doubt that the majority of the soldiers in the Civil War on both sides thought they were fighting for principles of the greatest value to mankind, and so of those engaged in deadly conflict in Europe at the present time. However mistaken they may be in their analysis of the facts, the sincerity of the masses is not open to question. No animosity need be cherished on the part of the soldiers against one another. The soldiers do not hate each other, but they fight for the establishment of principles which they deem to be of the highest value. Even Catholics admit the possible salvation of unbelievers on the ground of "invincible ignorance." So "cabined, cribbed, confined," is the intellect of the individual man, that the widest allowance must be made for his sincerity in specific choices of action.

The question is often raised, whether in universal benevolence there is room for patriotism. With equal plausibility the question is sometimes raised, whether one should love his own family more than he loves families in general. The answer is found in the limitation of our ability to serve others, which varies in inverse ratio to our distance from them. The nearness to us of the members of our own household and of our fellow citizens in the same country throws special obligation upon us. It is good scripture that "if any provide not for his own, and especially for those of his own house, he has denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel" (1 Tim. v. 8). Scripture is no less insistent in commanding us to respect "the powers that be," for they "are ordained of God." The evils of a government have to be very flagrant, and the ability of revolutionists to succeed very clear, before one is justified in overt efforts to overthrow it. As the early Chris-

tians were warned against premature efforts at revolution in the Roman governments under which they lived, so our missionaries at the present time have had to use special care not to become entangled with revolutionists, even in the Turkish Empire. A bad government is infinitely better than no government.

The masses of the people, therefore, may be pardoned for patriotic support of the governments under which they live. It is not possible for them to understand all the reasons for which they are drawn into conflict with peoples whose interests are seemingly inimical to their own. Our civil war fifty years ago was not waged on a clear-cut issue between slavery and freedom, but upon the general question of the extent of the principle of home rule; and so Lincoln insisted that it was his business to save the Union in whatever way he could, whether with slavery or without slavery. It was for the determination of this question that the armies were marshaled on both sides.

So in Europe at the present time there can be no question that the masses of the German people believe they are resisting the aggressions of surrounding nations which are unjustifiably limiting the expansion of their own country. The nations profoundly distrust each other. In main, the people themselves are not responsible in the matter. They are made to believe that the cause of their country is just, and they do not have such access to the facts in the case that they can form an opinion independent from that of their leaders. The real responsibility lies with those who are higher up, especially with the educated classes who have formed public opinion by their persistent misrepresentations, or one-sided representations, of the facts in the case.

"Invincible ignorance" is the saving consideration respecting the armies on both sides; and so there is nothing to hinder the free working of Divine Grace in inspiring the heroic actions, and in softening the hearts, of the individual soldiers. After fifty years the survivors of the Oberlin Company who contended with the ardent religious soldiers under

Stonewall Jackson in the Shenandoah Valley can now shake hands with their former enemies, and each can credit the other with acting from the purest motives, however misguided they may have been at the time. We wish we could hope that, after another fifty years, the contending hosts in Europe might accept the new conditions which will follow their war as heartily as the North and South have done since our great conflict. Thanks be to God that we are to be judged by the intents of our hearts, and not by our outward acts!

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