

no. 2 Sept. 1914

FELLOWSHIP.

To the Members of the Fellowship,—

At the quarterly meeting of the Fellowship, we pledged ourselves to do all in our power to strengthen the forces which are making for peace and goodwill between the nations. The discussion which preceded the passing of this resolution showed that we are not agreed as to the best means of action at the present time, and also that we consider sincerity more important than agreement. Lest it should be thought that the recognition of this difference of opinion renders us powerless to act as individuals, or that to talk of peace is unseasonable at the present time, I would earnestly recall you to your pledge by reminding you of some things which, though familiar, are likely to be overlooked just now.

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First, let us not forget that the present war, whatever may be its causes, and the merits of the opposing nations, is by no means a full or adequate expression of opinion in any of the countries involved. In every civilised country the majority of the people desire peace as earnestly as we do, and become involved in war only through the same trust in their leaders which we have in ours; their enthusiasm is fired by appeals to the same spirit of patriotism which we applaud in our fellow-countrymen. Even now, when a wave of militarism has passed over the world, we may be sure that in every country at least a small minority are upholding the ideal of peace, in the face of opposition and persecution. We are pledged to help, and not to hinder them.

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Secondly, we should remember the maxim of elementary justice which requires us to "hear the other side" before judging. Our newspapers are fostering the ugly spirit of vindictiveness, and the kindred spirit of self-righteousness, by giving prominence to stories of German brutality. No doubt, a similar spirit is being fostered in the German press by stories of the conduct of Britain and her allies. Can we pretend that one set of stories is more likely to be true than the other? But, even if we were entirely innocent, and our opponents entirely guilty, we must beware of encouraging the animal lust of revenge. Religion teaches us to do to others, not what they do to us, but what we desire they should do to us. Friends of peace and goodwill can do something to check the vindictive spirit.

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Thirdly, let us distinguish patriotism from theatrical and hysterical displays. At a time when the natural feeling of affection which every man has for his native land is being dragged in the mud by all kinds of vulgarity, ostentation and hypocrisy, let us remember that a good man cannot be a bad patriot, nor a bad man a good patriot. We can render far truer service to our country,

and to humanity, by persisting quietly in any good work we have already set our hand to, than by swelling the overcrowded ranks of those whose patriotism is now sounding a trumpet before itself.

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The feeling which is uppermost in the minds of thinking men in all lands to-day, is one of shame and deep humiliation. Let us face the fact that the nations to whom the work of civilisation has been entrusted are fighting, not like wild beasts, but like human beings, who have for years been deliberately preparing for their work in cold blood, who have desecrated to their purpose every scientific discovery, so that each new increase of power over Nature has increased our power to destroy. War means that ten millions of soldiers are doing what they have been trained to do as their duty. Actæon's hounds are let loose upon their master, and civilisation is being destroyed by the forces created to protect it. Is the present war, then, only the culminating achievement of "the wonderful century?" Has progress only provided the civilised world with more effective means of suicide?

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In the midst of progress, something has been lacking—a moral ideal. Our unprecedented accumulation of knowledge, divorced from any clear, moral end, has been readily seized by every anti-social purpose, and is now the instrument of the two arch-enemies of civilisation—militarism and commercialism. We have been infinitely clever and amusing in our criticism of the ideals of the past, but we have failed to discover for ourselves an ideal sufficient to give dignity to our lives, and rescue our culture from the taint of selfishness and frivolousness. In condemning brute force and the self-assertion of the strong, we have no moral principle to which we can appeal with confidence that it will be recognised as valid. We are not even quite sure whether we are Christians or Nietzscheans, or whether, in naming honour and truthfulness, we may not run the risk of being ridiculous. While this state of moral uncertainty lasts, added knowledge means greater confusion, and an increasing tangle of sophistries.

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In working for peace, let us refuse to take any but the highest grounds. Let us rely neither on the increase of intellectual achievement, nor on the appeal to prudence, nor on the methods of politicians, nor on the protection of brute force, but only on moral and spiritual forces, for it is only by recognising these forces and co-operating with them that any real progress can be accomplished.

F. SINCLAIRE.

Inquiries are often received from members and others as to the best version of the Bible to read, or the best books on Biblical criticism. The Authorised Version is an English classic, but it is often inaccurate as a translation, and sometimes (for example, in a great part of Job) unintelligible. At least for reference, the Revised