

Christmas Peace

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MME. BLAVATSKY asks me to try to write a short article for the Christmas number of "Lucifer". "Something pretty for Christmas", she said. I do not know whether I am capable of producing anything worthy of this description; but I will do the best I can.

And surely if it is to be in harmony with the Spirit of the Season, it must be a word of peace and not of controversy. An old prophet declared "Woe" to such as say "Peace, peace, where there is no peace", but is it not almost more woeful to say "War, war", where there is no war? Religious controversialists have ever been in greater danger of erring on this side than on the former, not discerning what manner of spirit they professed to be of.

If a man will look earnestly into himself, he will see that his real danger is to cry "Peace" for himself, and "War" for others. It was entirely against this spirit that the Prophet's "woe" was directed. It is, recorded, I believe, of Father Benson, of Cowley, that, travelling in a railway carriage once, a Salvation Army captain entered into conversation [Page 16] with him regarding the state of his soul. "Have you found, peace, brother?" said the Salvationist. Whereon Mr. Benson laconically replied. "No! War!" The strong and fiery controversialist, who threatens and denounces, is not he looking for peace where he should look for war, for war where he should look for peace. He is in himself, as he thinks, at peace. His whole effort is not to set himself right, to judge, to weigh, to criticise himself but to set others right and criticise them: he has believed; he is saved. Alas, he sees not the self-righteous pride, the ignorance of his own ignorance, the too easy satisfaction with his own very poor standard of attainment of the practical virtues such as self-sacrifice and humility. He sees himself only as he believes himself to be. But of those who do not agree with him in all he sees, or thinks he sees, their wilful obstinacy; their perverse shutting of their eyes to the truth. It is not to be denied that he is strangely devoted in a mistaken way. He will labour with these erring ones, as he thinks them; he will argue with them, pray for them: *but* — if they do not submit he will then treat them as unworthy of any consideration; will assume all means which may bring them into disrepute as lawful to him, and think that in so doing he is doing service to the Prince of Peace!

Thank God we are many of us growing wiser now. We are beginning to understand that the conflict we are called to is a conflict not with the sins of others but with our own. A wise man once said to me: "I know more evil about myself than about anyone else", and it is true: for the evil we mark in ourselves is surely there, whereas the evil we think we see in others may not be there at all: and even if it were, until we are quite sure that we are quite perfect it is no part of ours to be angry with others.

It is impossible to discover by anything that a man can say to us whether he is on the true side or not. Neither are isolated deeds a true criterion. The only sure test is one that only God can use. It is to know the whole trend and spirit of the man's life. You may see his sins, and not see the frightful source of temptation before which he has fallen; or the agonies of self-humiliation and repentance with which he himself regards his fall. Not to know *some* of his acts, but to know *all* his acts, this alone is sufficient; and you cannot know all fully without knowing the opposing force he has had to resist, and the estimate he himself forms of his act when it is done.

But indeed our own Christian Scriptures cut the ground entirely away from under the feet of the man who sets himself up to judge and condemn his fellows. "Judge not that ye be not judged". "Judge yourselves", for the same reason "that ye be not judged of the Lord". [Page 17]

"Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? To his own master he standeth or falleth". Fine words, these last: and all the finer when we remember that they are the words of one who said of himself, "After the way that men call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers".

But it will be replied: "Perhaps it may be true that Christians ought to emphasize less rather than more the differences of view that exist among themselves, but it is quite another thing when you come to consider other religions. How can a Christian ever be at peace with a Mohammedan, a Brahman, or a Buddhist? Do not our Scriptures themselves denounce false religions and say 'their Gods are Devils'?"

To this I answer: No religion is ever called false on account of its name merely. Every tree must be judged by its fruit. The false religions denounced by the prophets were very different things from the great book-religions of the East. They were generally Phallic: their worship consisted in the sanctifying of lust, and the practice of every abomination. Now, although it is true that the fruit alone is the true test, yet it must ever be borne in mind that "fruit" does not mean unripe fruit: or fruit spoiled by the presence of some hidden worm, which effects the one particular apple alone, and for which the parent tree is in no sense responsible. What Christian, for instance, would like to offer his whole public and private life to most searching examination as an exemplification of what Christianity is? So in judging of all religions we must remember this. We cannot, from the condition of the case, fully and accurately estimate the exact value of the fruit borne by the wide-reaching trees of these great religions; what we ought to endeavour to estimate is the sort of fruit that these systems themselves declare they are aimed at producing. There are a hundred points on which we should go wrong if we begin definitively setting side by side the acts and spirit (as far as we can know it) of those who belong to some other religion and those of our own. First of all we shall probably begin by assuming our own spirit to be perfect because it professes to be Christian, and conversely the others to be imperfect because they are not Christian. But, in truth, our own spirit is very far below true Christ-likeness. Our social system is heathen to the core. I say it in all serious earnestness. Our charity is a cold dead lay figure, tricked out to seem to represent the warm living truth. While Christ denounced competition and bade us not be careful about the things of the bodily life, we entirely reverse his teaching. Well, if the like allowances must be made for the professed disciples of other masters (and we surely shall not submit to the humiliation of confessing that these other masters are more faithfully obeyed than ours is), then it may surely quite possibly be that, unprogressive and childish as much that we hear of them may be, that is rather, as with [Page 18] us to be credited to the feebleness of the professors than to the falseness of the truth taught by that master.

Of course I am not going to say that I personally think any teacher a better revealer of truth than Christ, because I do not. But I do say that the best way to prove this truth is not to get angry with those who think otherwise. Far better, far stronger, would be our case if we would seek to support it by that demonstration which can never fail to hit its mark and convince, even the demonstration of the power of our Master to raise and ennoble and sanctify the lives of those who call him Lord. Sympathy, love, self-sacrifice, truth, manifested in all departments of life; at home and abroad; when it makes for our present interest and when it does not: in, Church and in the market; to friend and to stranger, and even to foe — this is the most powerful argument, and when this spirit is enshrined in the hearts of all Christians, and shines out in their daily acts and their whole national spirit and policy, that will be the finest missionary effort ever made. No need to shout and clamour and argue. No soul of man at all raised above savagery, be he black, or yellow, or white, but will at once feel and respond to this best experiment. When Christians are Christ-like, the world will believe in Christ.

Meanwhile, for my part, I will have war in myself against my own limitations and shortcomings, but peace with all mankind who are earnestly following out the highest that they know. War I must declare against those misguided brothers who are themselves warring against, or rather plundering, their poor brethren, utterly unable to help themselves. War is legitimate, and in God's name let us declare it, against self-worship wherever it is found. That is the one idolatry never to be tolerated; but I have nothing but peace and God speed to say to those who worship any idea that points them away from themselves to the universal truths of righteousness and love.