

A Suffering and Triumphant God

We see Christ in the world and in the Church—crucified—crucified in every street of our great cities, crucified in every hovel of our slums, crucified on our markets, crucified on our battlefields, but forever rising . . . If our Gospel were only a Gospel of the Crucified, it would be untrue to facts and a Gospel of despair. But the Gospel of the Cross and the Empty Tomb, of the Crucified Risen Christ, always crucified and always rising again, is the Gospel that faces all facts and gives to life a meaning.

There is in the heart of God, and always has been, a Cross and an Empty Tomb.

(1921)

Christ Crucified Everywhere

On June 7th, 1917, I was running to our lines half mad with fright, though running in the right direction, thank God, through what had been once a wooded copse. It was being heavily shelled. As I ran I stumbled and fell over something. I stopped to see what it was. It was an undersized, underfed German boy, with a wound in his stomach and a hole in his head. I remember muttering, "You poor little devil, what had you got to do with it? Not much great blond Prussian about you."

Then there came light. It may have been pure imagination, but that does not mean that it was not also reality, for what is called imagination is often the road to reality. It seemed to me that the boy disappeared and in his place there lay the Christ upon His Cross, and cried, "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto the least of these my little ones ye have done it unto me" (Matthew 25:40). From that moment on I never saw a battlefield as anything but a Crucifix. From that moment on I have never seen the world as anything but a Crucifix. I see the Cross wet up in every slum, in every filthy over-crowded quarter, in every vulgar flaring street that speaks of luxury and waste of life. I see Him staring up at me from the pages of the newspaper that tells of a tortured, lost, bewildered world . . .

But the Vision of Life in the Cross is not a vision of despair, but of confidence and hope, because behind it there is the empty tomb, and the figure with wounded hands outstretched to bless, ascending into glory.

(1925)

After War, Is Faith Possible?

The Christian religion is, and always has been, the simplest thing in all the world—a passionate devotion to Jesus Christ. A passionate devotion to Jesus Christ as a person, not of the past but of the present, not among the dead but among the living . . . All sects and all ages of real Christians, however much their theologies have differed, have really been at one in this, their love of and their devotion to the ever-present Christ . . .

The Christian religion is simple—and always has been. Christian theology is complex and difficult and full of mysteries—and always has been. There always have been a large number of souls in the world to whom Christian theology meant nothing, while the Christian religion meant everything. There are still a large number who could no more follow an argument than they could go to bed without saying their prayers, and they are the salt of the earth. You can count among their number some of the choicest souls in the world—brave men and tender women . . . In their religion there [are] no problems, only a deep and abiding trust in Christ as God: God for the present and God for the future, in whose hands all difficulties [can] be safely left until He [sees] fit to clear the clouds away. These people are God's own people, whom to know is to love . . .

But it is inevitable that the number of people with this peculiar faculty of serene and untroubled power to penetrate the darkness, and find God, should grow less and less, in proportion to the whole, as the process of universal education advances. We have in these last years, for good or ill, embarked upon the colossal task of teaching the world to think, which means that for more and more of the human race, problems and perplexities must creep in to mar the serenity of a childlike faith. And that is why in these days Christian theology is bound to play a larger and larger part in bringing men to God or keeping them from Him.

The Christian religion is the love of Jesus Christ. Christian theology is the interpretation of the universe and of human life in terms of Jesus Christ. That is what Christian theology always has been, the effort of thinking men to express the stars and the stones, the winds and the waves, the laughter and the tears, the pain and the peace of the world in terms of Jesus Christ. That is the real task of the Christian theologian, and it is a tremendous one and enormously complicated. It is a task which men have been always doing and have never done.

We must not on our peril get confused in our minds between theology and religion. There is the faith once and for all delivered to the saints, which never changes; but there is no such thing, and there can be no such thing, as a theology once and for all delivered to the saints, which never changes, unless God were to cease from educating man, and the light which lighteth every man were to cease from coming into the world. Theology can no more stand still than any other branch of thought. It has always been changing, and within the last half-century has changed so rapidly that the minds of many thinking Christians are troubled and confused. But if you will cling fast to this, that the religion is always simple and always the same—which is the love of Jesus—you can face the task of grasping a complex and ever-changing theology without fear. Theology does not interest me, and it does not really interest anybody, unless it be as a hobby, except so far as it helps or hinders religion. Theological questions do not really matter until they become religious questions.

But the number of people who must be more or less theological if they are going to be religious, and to whom some sort of theology is an absolute necessity, is growing rapidly; so rapidly that we must now face the fact that a muddled and confused theology—in which the falsehoods of the past and the half-truths of the present unite to obscure the real truth as it is being revealed to us—a popular theology which is taught in schools, preached from pulpits, talked in the street, and which forms the background of people's minds—is keeping thousands of men from the religion of Jesus Christ . . .

There is no doubt that we clergy are enormously responsible for this. We may have preached the truth but we have not preached the whole truth, and our mental reservations have often made the truth we preached a lie to those who listened. We have been afraid of upsetting people's convictions, and many a golden-hearted parson has shrunk from saying what he really thought of Christ out of respect for dear old Mrs. Brown or Mr. Smith, both of whom clung with equal tenacity to the religion and the theology that they learnt at their mother's knee . . . We have continuously dressed up old lies in modern clothes in order that their ugliness might not shock the children of our generation. The real rulers of our theological seminaries have been Mrs. Brown and Mr. Smith. This would be all very well if we were not really sacrificing hundreds of young souls on the altar of love for these two old ones. Education, poor and limited as it is,

has now brought us to the time when we must speak the truth and the whole truth, and risk Mrs. Brown and Mr. Smith. We have got to take up the task of re-interpreting the world, as we now see it, in the full blaze of our modern light, in terms of Jesus Christ.

We cannot, I am afraid, accomplish that task of reconstruction without doing a great deal of destruction first. We must pull down a good many time-honored but tottering ruins before we can build a new temple worthy of the Prince of Peace. The task of destruction is not, and never ought to be, a happy one. It is never pleasant tearing clinging ivy from old walls and breaking down the homes where many noble people have lived and died content, because time has rendered them not fit for habitation. The man who delights in destruction, who loves tearing down for the sake of tearing down, who delights in shocking, hurting, and paining people, is a bad man in whom Christ does not dwell. But the man who will not tear down what truth itself condemns is a coward and a traitor to the God he serves.

For me and for a good many others this work of destruction was finally accomplished during the past four years in a brutal, cruel, and merciless fashion. To a sensitive spirit these years of War have been a perpetual torture chamber in which he has often had to have his half-beliefs, which were like parts of his body, torn away from him without even being allowed at the time to utter a cry of pain.

The War has not led to any great religious revival. I am not surprised at that. I cannot see anything in War to produce a religious revival. I believe it to be an utter and dangerous falsehood to believe that War of itself uplifts, purges, or sanctifies men's souls. That is a lie which only the devil could believe. It is the heart of that mock-heroic sentimentalism upon which militarism is morally, or rather immorally, founded. People stay at home by the fire, or sit in studies and write books, and imagine War to mean dashing over the parapet in defense of liberty and right, and giving one's life in one supreme act of self-sacrifice for the great cause. War can be made into that by very exceptional souls, but in itself it bears no resemblance to it whatever. You don't go out to give your life; you go out to take the other fellow's. You don't go out to save, you go out to kill; and if you don't, you are no good as a soldier. If non-combatants hide behind the sentimental conception of War they hide behind a lie, and a peculiarly cruel lie, and I think thousands of us have been doing just that.

Once and for all let me state here my conviction that War is pure undiluted, filthy sin. I don't believe that it has ever redeemed a single soul—or ever will. Exceptional souls have found their glory in it and have let it shine before men; but the war only brought it to light; it did not make it. The only power that war possesses is the only power that any evil thing possesses, which is the power to destroy itself. If this world-wide War has done us any good it is because in its flames a certain number of old and soul-killing lies have perished self-destroyed. In the blood, the mud, and the stench of the battlefield they worked themselves out to their final absurdity, while the guns roared laughter from behind. Often and often the 9-inch guns have seemed to me to yell out above the rattle of a barrage, "You fools, you fools!" From the bottom of my heart I believe that this work of destruction, however painful it may be, must be accomplished to the bitter end, to lead the children of our generation to the worship of the true God.

What is God like? . . . What do all those wonderful pictures in the Revelation mean—of God sitting on a throne with Christ at His right hand, while millions of angels throng around Him singing gorgeous songs, and bending low in humble worship, singing praises of the triumph and the victory of God—while a German soldier spears a Belgian baby, rapes its mother, and keeps her alive to see the father shot? In God's name, what is the Almighty God like?

That is what the question which has been torturing the minds of millions during this war; making some blaspheme and curse the very name of God; making others turn from the very thought of Him in bitterness and despair; making others still dully and dimly indifferent to religion and all it means; and shutting all alike into a darkness which the love of God has proved powerless to penetrate. To answer them merely as Job's comforters answered the splendid impatience of patient Job with the cry of agnosticism: "It is higher than heaven; what canst thou do? It is deeper than hell; what canst thou know?" (Job 11:7-8) is to produce the same effect upon them as the comforters produced on Job, namely, to make them irritated, sad, and miserable, and to put God farther away and not draw Him nearer.

If a man had come to me on the battlefield and told me that God knew best, and that I must leave it all to Him, he would have made me blaspheme; and the man who comes to me today with the same pious

platitudes upon his lips makes me want to blaspheme more bitterly still. Because, although the horror of the battlefield has faded from my mind, thought and meditation have produced in my soul a dead and settled loathing of it as an evil, and not merely a very painful thing. Thought and meditation have convinced me that War is not only torture but that it is filthy. To tell me that War is evil, and that the problem of evil is insoluble, is, indeed, finally the truth; but it is not enough. I will not be able to understand altogether; I know I cannot; I know, however much I learn and however much I think, there will be mysteries still. But I must know how God looks at it; I must determine what God's attitude towards it is, or else down comes the darkness and Christ is not merely crucified, He is dead . . .

There is no power nor virtue in this travesty of faith, which makes it mean the taking of all things on trust, the folding of the hands and the bowing of the head, the spiritless submission to the lie that whatever is is right. Faith does not mean that we cease from asking questions; it means that we ask and keep on asking until the answer comes; that we seek and keep on seeking until the truth is found; that we knock and keep on knocking until the door is opened and we enter into the palace of God's truth.

It becomes more and more important as years pass by and men's minds grow that we should prove all things, while holding fast to that which is true. Christ calls us to that courage which bids us give up the snug little homes which sloth and prejudice have built for our minds, our pet infallibilities, in which we could rest and cease to think wrapt in peaceful peace . . . We are afraid—of course we are afraid. "If that is not true," we say, "where am I? How can I be sure of anything? If the Bible is not literally true, word for word, if the picture of God which my forefathers had is a false picture, where am I? What is there settled? Where can I live? There is nothing before me but the open sea where I must journey helpless and exposed to every wind that blows."

And that is true! The world is out on the open sea exposed to every wind. And I am out on the open sea with it, but I do not care because there is One walks beside me and before me and behind me, and God, who caused the light to shine out of darkness, has shined into my heart to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. We are called upon, the Church is called upon, to go out onto the

open sea with Christ, leaving behind the snug homes of patent infallibilities which the guns have battered into dust, and follow Him until we find the truth.

We are not in complete darkness. We are not without a Guide. Theology changes, but religion remains. To fold your hands and say, "God knows best," to take refuge in unreal platitudes, is to cower away from the light that God, through the prayers of the saints, through the courage of the scientists, through the cunning of inventors, and through the tireless patience of the thinkers, has been giving down the ages. The task of the Church and of her children, which is peculiarly her task and peculiarly theirs, is to gather up from every corner of the world all the light that can be found, and set it blazing on this great problem of evil, in order to find the best partial solution for the children of our day, and the one which will provide the surest foundation for the complete solution which the passage of the ages, under God, will bring to light. We must seek for light in every corner of God's universe, never forgetting it is God's universe, and that in it we can find revelation of Himself. We must go down to life's dirtiest and dingiest depths, and up to its fairest and most fearful heights; we must face all the facts—the facts that make us shudder and the facts that make us laugh, the beauty that makes us gasp with wonder and the ugliness that makes us shrink in horror, the good that makes us want to worship and the evil that makes us bow our heads in shame; we must look at them all, face them all, asking always, "What is God like"—the God who is Creator and Ruler of a universe like this? We must not do what we have done, invent a God and then make life to fit Him, blinding our eyes to what does not suit our purpose; creating an absolute by the negative process of subtracting all human limitations from the human being, and choosing what we want to consider limitations, and what we do not. An imaginary God may be very beautiful, but He will not stand the tears and terror, and the fires that are not quenched. We must have Truth.

(1919)

Why Does God Permit War?

The root of the soldier's blasphemy is the same as that of his humor, and that is why they are so often mixed. They are both efforts to solve a felt but unformulated contradiction in life, and they are both essentially Christian, the signs of a lost sheep of the Good Shepherd . . .

Blasphemy and blasphemous humor are both common at the Front because the Front is one vast contradiction.

"I believe in God the Father Almighty, and a trench mortar has just blown my pal, who was a good-living lad, to pieces, and God is Love, and they crucified the sergeant-major, and peace on the earth, good will towards men, and I stuck my bayonet through his belly, and Jesus died to save us from sin, and the Boche has been raping women, and this _____ war never ends" (note the _____, it is important, and would probably be considerably amplified). "Christ, there's the _____ tea up; where's my _____ dixie?"

I have never heard that said because it never was said, but I have heard what was the expression of it hundreds of times, and in a vision I have seen the tears stand bright in Jesus' eyes, and heard Him laugh the grand loving laughter of God.

If the dear old chaps who said it could have seen Him they would have laughed with Him, and would have said, "Sorry, sir, I did not really mean it. As you were, and we will carry on." Why cannot they see Him? Because of the contradiction. The first great difficulty of the private soldier is war.

"Why does not God stop it? Any decent man would stop it tomorrow if he could, and God is Almighty and can do anything, then why does He allow it to go on?"

It is, of course, the old problem of evil in an acute form, and there is no complete and logically perfect solution of it. But can nothing be done to mitigate the mystery of it? Some would reply that in this final mystery reason has no part to play, it is the sphere of faith. Faith in god, and Faith alone, can pierce without dissolving the contradiction and find God good behind. It is, of course, undeniable that Faith has done this again and again, but we must beware of how we play off faith against reason. Faith is super- but not contra-rational. It does not bid us cease from thinking, but rather bids us think the more, strong in faith that there is reason in the ways of God with men, and that God's mysteries are mysteries of the

unknown but not of the unknowable. Faith is a food and a stimulant and not a narcotic. It is meant to quicken, not to kill, the power of thought. I do not think it is right to tell men that they must not think about this question, and it certainly is perfectly useless to tell them, because they will not obey.

What do you mean by the word “Almighty” as an attribute of God? It rolls off our tongues in our creeds and prayers and sermons very easily and glibly, but what does it mean?

Everyone ought to read Mr. H. G. Wells’s great novel, *Mr. Britling Sees It Through*. It is a gallant and illuminating attempt to state the question, and to answer it. His thought has brought him to a very real and living faith in God revealed in Jesus Christ, and has also brought relief to many troubled minds among the officers of the British Army. I know that from conversations I have had. I have met the book everywhere in the trenches. As yet it has not largely reached the private soldier.

But I am sure that no one, not even Mr. Wells himself, having thought so far could stop there. “After all,” says Mr. Wells, “the real God of the Christians is Christ not God Almighty; a poor, mocked, and wounded Christ nailed on a cross of matter . . . Some day He will triumph.”¹ However strange that may sound to Christian ears, there is a lot of truth in it. The center of our worship has always been Christ and Him Crucified. We have always worshipped a suffering God . . . But we cannot think of the Cross apart from the Resurrection.

The Gospel of the Cross without the Resurrection would be a Gospel of despair, the revelation of a powerless, pain-racked Deity caught in the grip of creation and held fast. The Gospel of Christ is a Gospel of Hope, a Gospel of all-suffering but all-conquering love faced with an awful and inevitable agony, but patiently and powerfully overcoming it. It is the Gospel of a transcendent God Who makes Himself immanent for Love’s sake, and thereby takes upon Himself a burden and an agony beyond our power to understand. The attribute Almighty must be interpreted in the light of the Cross and the Resurrection, and in that light it is seen to mean, not that God has no difficulties and no sorrows, but that God is able to overcome all difficulties and to rise supreme above all sorrows. Omnipotence does not mean that God can do anything which we imagine He ought to be able to do, but that, faced with awful obstacles and

1. Wells, *Mr. Britling Sees It Through*, 406.

humanly incomprehensible difficulties, He is nevertheless able to grapple with and overcome them. God is *Pator Pantrokrator*. This revelation of God in Christ is the revelation which the story of the growth of the universe as it is laid before us in science and in history would lead us to expect.

As one reads the amazing story of development which evolutionary science has to tell, one seems to catch a glimpse of that ever-struggling but ever-conquering power Who works unceasingly behind it all. We see Him struggling, but victoriously struggling, to bring order and beauty out of chaos. The Spirit of God is seen at war with necessity. We must call it that for lack of a better name. The Catholic Faith simply calls it Satan, the adversary, and puts its origin in the misuse of free will by spirit created before the world was. This is not a solution but a postponement of the problem. But the adversary is there, in nature as in man.

As one reads the story of science and the struggle of nature towards perfection, one sees staring up through the pages of the textbook the face of Christ patient, pain-pierced, and powerful . . .

It is not for nothing that Spring and Easter coincide. A perfect spring day in a smiling land is the victory of God over necessity in nature, as the Resurrection is the victory of God over necessity in man. It is not mere poetry but truth to say that the summer rose is dyed red with the life-blood of God. All good things are the product, not only of God's love and power, but also of His pain. The raiment of the lily was not bought for nothing any more than is the raiment of the saints. With the dawn of history the struggle of God becomes more powerful. History cries out for that prone figure in the Garden sweating great drops of blood, and demands for its interpretation the Cross of Calvary . . .

To meet the difficulty of war honestly, we have to face the facts not only of this war but of history's thousand wars, and all the cruelty, barbarity, and sin that they have produced. Belgium is but the latest of a thousand lands that have had to weep for their children and refuse to be comforted because they were not. Man's history is one long bloody war, with burning homes, dishonored women, tortured children, and all war's usual atrocities repeated like a filthy tale. That fact must be faced, and Christianity faces it in the tortured figure of God incarnate in Whom all history is summed up. History is an intolerable enigma without the Cross of Christ. But again the Cross without the empty Tomb fails to fit

the facts. There is an agony of God in history, but again I would stress the truth that it is a victorious agony. There is progress in history, there is a real development of man, a real development of the individual and of society toward perfection. The Kingdom of God is really coming and has been coming all down the ages. It is on this point that Mr. Wells falls short in his teaching. He does not do justice to the Victory of God. He has temporally swung back to the opposite extreme from the theologians and has allowed the mystery of evil to obscure the mystery of good. Necessity is not really uttermost or ultimate, it is essentially temporary and contingent; it will pass away, and God will be supreme. All this is latent in Mr. Wells's teaching, latent but not yet patent, and it needs to be patent and emphatic. There is no Gospel apart from the Resurrection. "The world is cruel," Mr. Britling's Letty says. "It is just cruel. So it always will be." "It need not be cruel," replies Mr. Britling,² and in that great reply is all the latent power of the Christian Faith. It need not be, it must not be, it shall not be. This is that which overcometh the world, even our faith. "I believe in God the Father Almighty," is an act of faith, not a declaration of demonstrated fact. It is the Christian soldier's declaration of entire trust in the striving, struggling, but insuperable Person who works without and within the universe. It is the Christian Army's oath of allegiance, and its battle cry. It is said standing to attention with our faces turned towards God's altar and the dawn of day whence comes the final victory of Light.

Too often in the past this first clause of our Creed has been interpreted and preached in such a way as to force men to lay upon God the responsibility for evil as though it were in some mysterious way His Will. God has been represented as sending and willing plague, pestilence, famine, disease and war. All these have been represented as the visitation of God. This has led to a very popular fatalism which is a pernicious travesty of Christian Truth. Fatalism and agnosticism are man's chief enemies, they cause more sin than drink and selfishness. It is this fatalistic Christianity which has no appeal to men, and it is, often through our bad preaching and teaching, and their consequent ignorance, the only Christianity they know. Christian preaching has very often consisted in pious attempts to make evil good in order to save God's face. We have suffered from what Hilary of Poitiers called *irreligiosa sollicitudo pro Deo*, and have been orthodox liars to the glory of God. Passive resignation to

2. *Mr. Britling Sees It Through*, 405.

evil as though it were God's will has been exalted into a virtue, and consequently the Christianity which should have turned the world upside down has been turned into a method of keeping it as it is and meekly accepting its wrong-side-upness as the discipline of Almighty God. The Revolutionary Christ has been disguised as a moral policeman.

Our preaching of the Cross has been stultified in the same way. The murder of Good Friday has been separated from the other murders that stain man's history and represented as in some mysterious way the Will of God, part of God's plan. The spite and hatred of the priests, the treachery of Judas, the cowardice of Pilate, the brutality of the soldiers, the ingratitude of the crowd, part of God's plan, because God willed that Christ should die—what a God, and what a plan! When Christ cried in the Garden "Thy Will be done," He has been represented as submitting to the Cross as the Will of God, and as being a pattern of patient submission. What a travesty of Truth! God's Will was of course the perfect life, the perfect witness to the Truth; for this end was He born and for this end came He into the world. The cry in the Garden was an act, not so much of submission as of aspiration and tremendous resolve. Christianity is not the gospel of the bowed head but the gospel of the set teeth. "Thy Will be done" in the Garden was the supreme majesty of manhood which sent Christ's enemies reeling backwards to the ground, and is the revelation of that supreme majesty of Godhead which shall at last send all evil reeling backward into its native nothingness. "Thy Will be done" is not pathetic, it is powerful, with the power of the suffering but insuperable God.

Here I think is the teaching which will mitigate if it does not destroy the bitterness of the contradiction of Christ in War. We preach a suffering but insuperable God at war with evil in the world, at war with sin, disease and death, and at war with war.

We preach a God ever crucified by evil but ever rising above it, Christ crucified but risen from the dead. Evil is not and never can be the Will of God, it arises from necessities the nature of which we cannot fully understand.

What the necessities were which God had to overcome in the creation of the material world we cannot understand, because our knowledge of them is limited by our knowledge of the ultimate nature of matter, which is nil.

But our knowledge of the necessities arising in the evolution of man toward perfection is greater because they arise out of the nature of consciousness which is the only thing we know about from the inside, and these two necessities when fully realized meet many of the commonest difficulties in the soldier's mind.

Why Does God Allow Evil?

Even when you have made it clear that God does not will war, still the soldier wants to know why God permits it. And we must answer because He cannot help it. Man must be free. An element of independence and spontaneity is an essential factor of personal consciousness. Man would not be man without freedom. The first necessity God had to meet in the creation of self-conscious personality was freedom. God must leave us free to sin or else destroy us. Man cannot, absolutely cannot, be compelled to do right. There is no such thing as compulsory virtue.

Why Does Not God Punish the Right Man?

A soldier in hospital badly wounded, to whom I had explained the necessity of freedom, replied that he understood that man must be free to sin, and that sorrow must follow sin. "But what I can't see," he said, "is why God does not punish the right man. He does not. He seems to knock a wrong 'un every time. The Kaiser and his lot sin, and my old dad is breaking his heart because my brother has lost his legs. Now what sense or justice is there in that?"

This is a question that worries soldiers as much as any, the apparent injustice of the suffering of the innocent. The reply seems to me to lie in the demonstration of the second necessity that God has to meet in the development of the human race, viz., the necessity of unity. Conscious personality must be in a measure independent, and cannot be completely isolated. A completely isolated human personality is an absolute impossibility. We are human, and we progress as human beings because we are one family, and share our evil and our good. Speech, writing, and the reason which invented and can use them are the hallmarks of humanity, and they are the means of our unity. We share the good that others win, the product of their hands and brains, and so, and only so, do we progress. We reap in joy what others sow in bitter tears, and garner into

our treasury of blessings the fruit their labors bear. That is the very law of Love, the Love that makes us one. Rightly used, this power of unity is the greatest blessing we possess, it is the very source of all our highest joy. It is the source from which all knowledge comes. It is the meaning of the mystery of Music and Art. The music that sings in a great musician's brain, the glory of form and color that burns in fire of ecstasy in the soul of the great artist, flow out to bless the brains and hearts of lesser men.

But when by virtue of his freedom man uses his powers wrongly, the evil that he does, the vicious product of his hand and brain, flows out to curse the human family through those very channels which were meant to convey the highest blessings. These two necessary properties of freedom and unity when wrongly used make the suffering of the innocent for the guilty inevitable. That boy soldier's dad and the Kaiser are one in the unity of the human race, and so the evil results of Germany's wrong choice of ideals, her substitution of Mars for Christ, come upon him and upon his children, and they suffer, the innocent for the guilty.

What Is God Doing?

"He is out of it," a man said to me. "Christ suffered once and for all, and then ascended into Heaven to wait until the world comes round, and it seems a long time coming. Christ died once in pain to save us from our sins, but it does not seem to have saved us much, when all this comes as the result of sin after two thousand years."

This is a very real difficulty. There is no one for whom the soldier has such supreme contempt as a bad staff officer who wears red tabs and spurs and never sees the trenches. And to him that is how God appears. Christ was splendid while He was on earth, but He has gone into Heaven. He has retired to the security of Corps Headquarters well behind the line, and from there He directs operations. All the glory with which we invest the glorified Christ, the throne, the host of waiting angels, the triumphal entry into Heaven, all this means just "Red tabs and spurs," and they do not evoke worship or even respect. The pageantry of Courts and thrones which supplied past ages with the symbols wherein to express the glory of God has lost its glamour for the man of today, he is too deeply Christian. Only the Cross is eternal, it is the only real throne. The only crown the modern man respects is the Crown of Thorns.

A muddy, bloody, suffering but unbeaten Christ he can be made to love and follow, but a supreme, transcendent potentate is to him as contemptible as the Kaiser. We need to reinterpret the Resurrection and Ascension if they are to grip the mind of the soldier of today or the citizen of tomorrow. We are witnessing the passing of the monarch absolute from the world in a flood of blood and tears, and all the metaphors supplied from absolute monarchy must pass too. The Ascension needs to be connected with the coming of the Spirit, the coming of God to embark upon another and more terrible course of victorious suffering in the Church and in humanity. God comes again in the Spirit to lead His army, and to suffer with it. God suffers now, and is crucified afresh every day. God suffers in every man that suffers. God, the God we love and worship, is no far-off God of Power, but the comrade God of Love: He is on no far-off heavenly throne, He is up in the trenches, under the guns: for every wound a man receives there is pain in the heart of God, and every cry of agony finds echo in God's soul. God is not a bad Staff Officer, but a gallant and fatherly Colonel who goes over the top with His men. God is leading the world at cost of awful agony to its perfection. The truth of the indwelling of the Spirit of Jesus Christ and the suffering of God in man must be the keystone of our preaching. The Church is God's army, in which He dwells and suffers, and we must preach the Church, and the call to its warfare under the leadership of God.

(1919)