

THE "MOST GREAT PEACE"

A NEW PHASE OF HUMAN THOUGHT

by

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"The world's equilibrium hath been upset through the vibrating influence of this most great, this new World Order. Mankind's ordered life hath been revolutionized through the agency of this unique, this wondrous System — the like of which mortal eyes have never witnessed."

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH

BAHÁ'Í PUBLISHING COMMITTEE
P. O. Box 348 Grand Central Annex
New York, N. Y.

THE BAHÁ'Í FAITH

The Revelation proclaimed by Bahá'u'lláh, His followers believe, is divine in origin, all-embracing in scope, broad in its outlook, scientific in its method, humanitarian in its principles and dynamic in the influence it exerts on the hearts and minds of men.

The Bahá'í Faith recognizes the unity of God and of His Prophets, upholds the principle of an unfettered search after truth, condemns all forms of superstition and prejudice, teaches that the fundamental purpose of religion is to promote concord and harmony, that it must go hand-in-hand with science, and that it constitutes the sole and ultimate basis of a peaceful, and ordered and progressive society. It inculcates the principle of equal opportunity, rights and privileges for both sexes, exalts work performed in the spirit of service to the rank of worship, recommends the adoption of an auxiliary international language, and provides the necessary agencies for the establishment and safeguarding of a permanent and universal peace.

Shoghi Effendi.

“WAR is the most preventable accident!” said ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, the exemplar of the Bahá’í Faith. His words, which even twenty years ago seemed quite improbable, carry to modern ears an inescapable and terrible conviction. We recognize in them no less than a profound indictment of the nations of the world.

The history of these last years has been dominated by two tendencies intimately affecting the future of war. First, there has come such an expansion in the possibilities of human intercourse, such intensification of economic dependence, together with a wider sympathy for the habits and ideals of alien groups, that for the first time the sons of earth are drawn close enough to conceive and aspire after forms of relationship other than violence. To this new-felt need—actually an opportunity to substitute for the cruel and gross processes of war a more civilized inter-action—has been add-

ed, secondly, a fatal necessity in the guise of an "armament revolution." Until the end of the 19th century the methods of war had "remained stagnant and unprogressive for hundreds of years."¹ But the conflict of 1914 brought to perfection new devices for mass murder—poison gas, air raids, tanks, heavy artillery—techniques so efficient that in four years' time, more than twice as many men were killed as in 123 years of warfare preceding 1914. The costs of war are now so staggering that statesmen like Mr. Baldwin are impelled to ask: "Who in Europe does not know that one more war in the West and the civilization of the ages will fall with as great a shock as that of Rome?"² Modern war is not only a preventable accident; it is a dreadful scourge, more to be feared than the Black Death.

This has not been true in every time. The benefits of war have often cancelled out its evils, have actually advanced the course of human evolu-

1—Dalton, Hugh, *Toward the Peace of Nations*, p. 2.

2—Quoted by Dalton, p. 1.

tion. For example, otherwise isolated groups used to meet upon the battle-field; and long after physical combat had ceased, the cultural ferment induced by such contact altered and enriched the customs of the hostile peoples. With the impact of Islam upon Europe during the Crusades, the structure of the Dark Ages was shattered and the western world entered a new phase. By revealing unsuspected horizons, war has undoubtedly speeded the progress of civilization.

Moreover, it has served to breed hardy and vigorous men, inspiring in them the will to enterprise and action. Discipline, cooperation, inventiveness—these, as well as death, sorrow, waste, have been by-products of an activity which the modern world must now condemn. For the costs have finally overtaken the profits. Today, "we see war no longer as a tragic necessity in human life, but as a horrible arrest in development."³

3—Wells, *World of William Clissold*, quoted by Dalton, p. 276.

The figures of losses sustained by the fighting nations in the Great War, appalling as they are—ten million wounded, a total money cost of \$337,846,000,000—actually indicate but a small portion of the destruction. The costs of war, indeed, cannot be estimated, but their significance may be glimpsed when it is remembered that, as a biologist has written, "The war question is essentially a problem in human ecology. Just as the plants and animals in an aquarium, pond, or forest constitute a delicately balanced complex, so human society is a complicated organism. War, therefore, does not affect merely the armies engaged, but the civil populations as well, not only of the belligerent nations but also of remote neutrals."⁴

Thus the Great War distorted every phase of modern life. Six million people were wiped out by Spanish influenza. "Nearly all Polish children under six are said to have died from starvation."⁵ The fatalities

4—Hunt, *Some Biological Aspects of War*, p. 3.

5—Ibid., p. 2.

among Armenians, Syrians, Jews, Greeks, Roumanians, Austrians, Serbians, Russians, Belgians, due to starvation and disease, were enormous. Nations jeopardized even their future health to feed this terror which coveted only the fittest human specimens. In the United States, "about 83 per cent of the drafted men who possessed defects of a probably more or less hereditary character were rejected," to return to their homes and father a generation.⁶

AT the same time, the economic equilibrium of the world collapsed. Factories and industries, growing up to fulfill war needs, caused dislocation and overproduction after the war. Political instability interfered with trade. High and oppressive taxation cut down the purchasing power of the public and lowered the standard of living by ten per cent. In the light of subsequent developments, it is interesting to read a post-war prophecy that "the

6—Ibid., p. 83

very breakdown of modern economic society might be the price exacted.”⁷

Yet the physical consequences—biologic and economic, together with the political disturbances created by the Versailles Treaty—were overshadowed, if possible, by the havoc worked upon the character of public ethics and private morals. No appraisal could exaggerate these factors, which in their totality form the damning evidence of “man’s inhumanity to man,” and predict in grim accents the terms upon which another war shall be fought. One of the strangest attitudes of our day is the nonchalance with which the common man watches his government prepare for suicidal conflict. Like blithe children the nations of the world seek arms for a tourney with Death, apparently unconscious of the merciless intent of their opponent.

There are, to be sure, thousands of persons who, through the bitter years of the Great War, acquired an aching thirst for peace, and many

7—Bogart, *Direct and Indirect Costs of the Great World War*, p. 299.

of these have since devoted their lives to this ideal. Moreover, it is now the opinion of an imposing number of statesmen and leaders that war and human society have come to the parting of the ways. Diverse projects exist for the consummation of this process, sustained by as many explanations of the causes and cures of war as there are fields of human activity. After fifteen years of faithful application, however, some people are questioning whether success does not wait upon the coordination of these separate enterprises.

Now no plan, it is safe to say, so unites every contributory movement, so richly harmonizes the impulses and efforts of men towards the superb goal—world peace—as does the Bahá'í Faith. 'Abdu'l-Bahá wrote, "The scope of Universal Peace must be such that all the communities and religions may find their highest wish realized in it."⁸ Comprehensive in analysis, all-embracing in

scope, inviting the cooperation of every forward-looking individual and group, the Bahá'í Faith not only conforms with fact, but is enabled to enlist and conserve every authentic interest in the quest for that "durable peace" which, as President Roosevelt has said, "is the only goal worthy of our best efforts."

Perhaps the primary and most stimulating contribution of Bahá'u'lláh (Father of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Founder of this Cause) was an affirmation in unequivocal terms that the case for peace would prosper. "Yet so it shall be; these fruitless strifes, these ruinous wars shall pass away, and the 'Most Great Peace' shall come."⁹ His words challenge at the outset the threadbare theory that war is inevitable because human nature does not change, a brand of illogic which is both untenable and futile. Failing as it does to distinguish between the instincts of individuals and social institutions, it is unable to recognize that whereas

9—Quoted in Esslemont, *Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era*, p. 48.

human impulses may not change, their expression-forms can certainly be shaped and guided. Happily, the opinion of an eminent body of psychologists has been recorded: "War is not instinctive and ineradicable. By a vote of 346 to 10 the members of the American Psychological Association have registered their opposition to the doctrine that war is a part of human nature and cannot be stopped."¹⁰

War, actually more akin to politics than to biology, might be defined as "a contest by force between political groups."¹¹ Arising from the struggle for existence, it is not therefore a necessary conclusion, but rather the most obvious and brute-like solution of this competition for life. Men—who are endowed with intellect—have often replaced natural processes with reasoned ones, especially when their very existence has been found to depend upon the latter. As one Bahá'í writer says, "Disillusion would only be justified if human

10—Science News Letter, August 6, 1932.

11—Davie, *The Evolution of War*, p. 46.

society could be successfully established on the war principle.”¹² Those who are alert to historic necessities know that war is doomed; at the same time they are prepared for a sharp and long-drawn struggle to eradicate the principle which so intimately penetrates the fabric of modern life.

‘ABDU’L-BAHÁ has said: “War is not limited to one cause. There are many kinds of war and conflict going on: political war, commercial war, patriotic war and racial war. This is the very civilization of war.”¹³ Today economic causes seem the most significant, with our world a seething mass of economic stresses and strains. Unemployment, “the cancer of the body economic,” was estimated in 1932 as affecting some fifty millions of the world’s population, unquestionably a conservative figure. Another critical question is that of population pressure and it is said that whereas “in 1800 there were

12—Holley, *The World Economy of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 7.

13—*Compilation*, etc., concerning the Most Great Peace, p. 41.

probably 600,000,000 or 700,000,000 people in the world, today the number is perhaps 1,800,000,000.”¹⁴ Increasing complexity of economic life together with a breakdown of the system of production and distribution, (both of them problems grossly complicated by the Great War), these are the factors leading to friction and rivalries.

But—and it is a consideration fraught with importance and hope—economic causes in themselves do not result in war. Conflict springs up only when political groups, in an effort “to support the economic interests of their citizens,”¹⁵ clash and resort to violence. With immigration laws, tariffs, harsh trade policies, raw material monopolies, and protection of foreign investments, governments attempt to underwrite prosperity, ever guided by the unhappy notion that one nation can prosper independently of other nations, even at their expense. As a matter of fact, the World Economic Conference of 1927

14—Patterson, *The World's Economic Dilemma*, p. 23.

15—Lamb, *Economic Causes of War*, p. 6.

disposed of this creed: "Any strictly nationalistic policy is harmful not only to the nation which practices it, but also to the others and therefore defeats its own ends."¹⁶ This twentieth-century truth, still not universally known, stands as one of the basic premises of the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh.

Economic irritants are not, however, the sole instigators of a war spirit, and seldom if ever are they formally acknowledged. It is far easier to address popular fury in terms of its emotional antipathies. In other words, human prejudices form the most fertile ground for the seeds of war—prejudices national, racial, religious, class and cultural. How carefully through the ages these provincialisms have been fostered, despite the fact that "the most important step from savagery to culture is the emancipation of the individual man from complete or temporary segregation or isolation."¹⁷ How tenaciously group-egotisms

16—Quoted in Lamb, p. 60.

17—Davie, p. 16, quoting Ratzel, History of Mankind.

have been transferred from the first primitive tribal unit, exalting itself with the name "Men" as if other tribes were not men, to the succeeding feudal, state and national organizations.

Ethnocentrism, that loyalty which does good service in stabilizing each newly-created society, always in the end projects the social body into armed conflict. Today, disguised as nationalism, it is arousing passions which inevitably must hurtle us into another desperate struggle. Perhaps in no other school will men finally learn that: "All prejudices whether of religion, race, politics or nation, must be renounced, for these prejudices have caused the world's sickness. It is a grave malady which, unless arrested, is capable of causing the destruction of the whole human race. Every ruinous war with its terrible bloodshed and misery has been caused by one or another of these prejudices."¹⁸

These and many others are the

18—'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Bahá'í Magazine*, February, 1934.

true causes of wars. But we must distinguish between causes and that basic condition of world society which makes war actually possible. For war is itself nothing but one method for settling disputes. It has already been dispensed with in the relations of individuals, families, states; only between nations does it remain the honored arbiter. Only between nations are there no effective definitions of law and government, no restraints to violence, no alternative courts of last appeal.

INTERNATIONAL relations, up to the Great War, were in a state of complete anarchy. Even today, after the efforts of the Versailles Treaty to establish a League of Nations, and in spite of subsequent pacts and agreements and the organized work of millions of interested people, international relations are still too chaotic to prevent the catastrophe which tempts us like a lurid shadow. Definitely, at least

five institutions and processes for the prevention of war have been established: the League of Nations, the International Labor Office, the Permanent Court of International Justice at The Hague, the Locarno treaties and similar insurance treaties, and the Kellogg-Briand Pact. Actually, "every nation in the world has become signatory to some kind of a solemn pledge that it will settle its future difficulties by pacific means."¹⁹

Yet in 1935 we stand in more danger of war than at any time since 1914. The League of Nations, once seen as the hope of the world, has in the last year proved itself ineffectual. Indeed, it is in no true sense a League of Nations, since the United States, Germany and Japan—to name the most important—do not belong. And the League is powerless to stop them, it is powerless to interfere if Japan wishes to quarrel with China, it is wholly inadequate to prevent the next great conflict for which all

19—Tuttle, *Alternatives to War*, p. 2.

countries are preparing with ill-disguised haste. The armaments race has at last been entered upon frankly although six years ago war was renounced "as an instrument of national policy."²⁰ It is a fact that the world spends enough on armaments in one year to support the total cost of the League for more than six centuries!

In a world so enslaved by selfishness, so bestial in many of its impulses, so intent upon destroying the few world institutions which have been laboriously erected, what remains to a lover of peace? In what consolation may his soul find patience and what assurance will sustain him through the coming darkness? There is only one answer. Those who cling to the bright vision of a New World Order, whose thoughts continuously encircle it and whose actions faithfully contribute to its consummation—they shall wrest sanity from the world's insanity and peace from its bloodthirstiness.

20—Kellogg-Briand Pact, quoted in Tuttle, p. 152.

Shoghi Effendi, Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith, has written: "That the forces of a world catastrophe can alone precipitate such a new phase of human thought is, alas, becoming increasingly apparent. That nothing short of the fire of a severe ordeal, unparalleled in its intensity, can fuse and weld the discordant entities that constitute the elements of present-day civilization, into the integral components of the world commonwealth of the future, is a truth which future events will increasingly demonstrate."²¹

The outlawry of war waits upon the awakening of man's intelligence and will. May humanity emerge at last from its blindness into the profound conviction that no less a foundation than that of undivided loyalty to a world society can ever support the structure of an enduring peace.

21—Goal of a New World Order, p. 26.