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THE CHURCH AFTER THE WAR

By WILLIAM OXLEY THOMPSON

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THE CHURCH AFTER THE WAR

An Address before the Ohio
Conference of the Methodist
Episcopal Church, Broad Street
Church, Columbus, Ohio, Sep-
tember 26, 1917 : : : :

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With Introduction

By BISHOP WILLIAM F. ANDERSON



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INTRODUCTION

IT was that distinguished Englishman Lord Brougham who said, "A great mind on a great occasion engaged in the discussion of a great theme is the most impressive and majestic spectacle in human life." Those who were fortunate to be present at the opening session of the Ohio Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, Wednesday morning, September 26, 1917, felt the force of this statement. All these three conditions met in a remarkable degree. It was a great occasion. The old Ohio is the oldest of the Annual Conferences in the State, this being the 106th session. The announcement of the program attracted many people, so that the audience was quite representative of the leading men of Ohio's capital city. It was such an audience as would be a challenge to any public speaker. The subject which had been chosen was one of vital interest—"The Church After the War." The masterful

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mind of Dr. William Oxley Thompson, president of Ohio State University, came upon this great occasion for the discussion of this great theme. The announcement created an expectation which was more than met in the address which follows. The address is characteristic of its author in at least three outstanding particulars.

From the beginning to the end President Thompson dared to call things by their rightful names. Those who know his spirit and the manner of his address know that he is no mere word mincer. He has clear-cut convictions and dares to express them. When the occasion requires it he can call a spade a spade as briefly and as bluntly as any man in the old Buckeye State. His arraignment of the Prussian autocratic government is merciless, and crystallizes not only his own thought upon this subject but likewise that of his fellow countrymen. The question as to the responsibility and the unforgiveableness of this world disaster is a closed book to the people of this country, as it will be to the judgment of history and to all future generations.

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The theme was a congenial one to the taste of President Thompson. His mind takes kindly to the swing of world movements. He sees in the large, thinks in continents, and talks with the reach and range of world-grasp and world-mastery. His mind meets its affinity in the cosmic rather than in the provincial, in the spiritual rather than in the material, in the eternal rather than in the temporal. He moved with the stride of a giant to the heart of his subject and then to its powerful elucidation. The effect upon his hearers was electric, tremendous.

The third characteristic of his address which I wish to note is apparent as we read his strong words. It is the place which President Thompson accords to Jesus Christ and his redemptive program in the world's reconstruction after the war. Christianity is the constructive principle in the progress of human development. In the world which this address portrays as possible for future generations of mankind the divine element must dominate. President Thompson's voice always rings true not only

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for all reform but for righteousness and religion.

I heartily commend this little volume as a sane and constructive statement of world religious conditions. Its wide circulation will clarify our thought upon present-day conditions. It points to Jesus Christ as the only Saviour of mankind and deepens the conviction that there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby the world must be saved.

WILLIAM F. ANDERSON.

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WAR completely overturns all the normal plans and pursuits of the world. Every activity, commercial, manufacturing, or productive as agriculture, is reorganized in the interest of the successful prosecution of the ends of war. The present world contest surpasses the imagination of the wildest military mind. The fact that a thousand millions of the population of the earth are arrayed in this stupendous contest is quite beyond the range of our mathematics. The words sound empty and meaningless. When the war began Serbia with sixteen thousand square miles of territory—less than half of the area of Ohio—had a population of about two and one half millions. Estimates already published indicate the slaughter of about seven millions of men—more than the entire population—men, women and children—of either Serbia, Belgium, or Ohio. The wounded, estimated at fifteen millions of men, average in the hospitals approxi-

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mately five millions of men, a number about equal to the entire population—men, women and children—in the State of Ohio. Of this vast number many return to the trenches after hospital care. There is a great army constantly passing through the hospitals, many of whom are unfitted for further service. No matter what the point of view may be, the magnitude of this contest is quite beyond the comprehension of any save those who are able to think in continents and millions. Unfortunately, most of us think in hundreds and in the terms of our local communities.

At the outset the war, with no adequate explanation or justification, with an unparalleled disregard for treaty obligations, for the recognized and established rules of war and the rights of noncombatants—especially as represented in innocent women and children—by its very frightfulness and ferocity caused many to cry out that Christianity had failed and the church collapsed. Men in their despair began to think there was no power in religion or among men that could restrain the fury of war-maddened govern-

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ments. Very few in the United States knew what many of us now know as to the long process of education and preparation made for "The Day" confidently expected and anticipated by the ruling class in Germany. What now seems so plain in the light of three years' experience and reading, and especially in the light of recent disclosures as to the conduct of the embassies, was an unbelievable story. A few men well informed on the current war literature prior to 1914 were persuaded to believe that expenditures were made as a preparation against war. We heard that expression in the United States as an argument for defense. We now know that Germany was preparing not against war but for war.

The common mind of the plain people in the United States is open and frank in its democratic simplicity and honest in its processes. Such a mind is utterly incapable of following the devious paths and intrigues of European diplomacy. An honest mind is always amazed at the intrigue of the burglar. We have, therefore, tried to meas-

The
American
Mind

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ure European movements by the ordinary ethical standards current among us and have been disheartened by the results. I think that herein lies the key to the avalanche of doubt and dismay that flooded the world at the opening of the war. Speaking of ourselves only, I should say that the American mind was unable to grasp or conceive the mental processes by which Germany explained and justified her conduct of the war. The appeal made by the German intellectuals and scattered in all the universities of the country in justification of the war by Germany was incomprehensible to American college faculties. It stands out to-day as one of the most pitiable features of the war that well-known German scholars should have been so completely Kaiserized as to lose all their independence and freedom in thinking. That document was the Waterloo of German philosophy and education in its power and influence with the world. A hundred years will not recover what was lost that day by the scholars of Germany.

In other less pronouncedly intellectual

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circles there was the same wonder and amazement. In Christian circles **The German Pulpit** men began to see that the German pulpit had been rationalized for more than a generation. The pulpit had ceased to carry the fervor of evangelism or the conscience-arousing message of the Reformation days. The ethics of German people was no longer undergirded with the sanction of an evangelical and evangelistic gospel. It is easy now to see that the pulpit had lost its power as a spiritual force, and the everyday moral thinking of the people was determined from the political platform rather than from the pulpit. The state rather than the church had come to be the proclaimer of the ethics of the empire. May God graciously protect us against a day when such a state of mind or such a method could be possible in the United States!

Conquest had prevailed in the first days of Prussian ascendancy. Steadily that theory had been advanced until **Supremacy of the State** all the German states were brought under the domination of the Prussian ideal and the German Em-

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pire of 1871 stood forth as the result of the steady application of the ideas of force and conquest.

The economic progress, the industrial efficiency, and the highly organized system of education gave Germany a place in the world and attracted to her the admiration of students and scholars the world around. As we now see, all this wonderful material development occurred while the people were saturated with the idea of superiority and national excellence. The children in the schools were taught that there was to be a great war, and when it came Germany must win. Think, if you will, of the consequences of forty years of instruction in our public schools where every child grew up under such teaching. We may well imagine the supremacy of militarism even in a peace-loving democracy. Germany had thoroughly persuaded herself that her superiority gave her the right to rule. In one form and another the doctrine of might came to the common consciousness. The supremacy of the state, so well illustrated in the everyday life of the people, led them to sacrifice all else to

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efficiency. This was but another name for the supremacy of power and might. Nowhere in the world has there been a better illustration of the full fruit of an underlying theory and philosophy.

The supremacy of the state was interpreted to mean that it was the origin as well as the guardian of whatever liberty and freedom the people enjoyed. Even in this country there were writers on political science—educated in Germany—who became so enamored with this theory of the state and its practical working that they announced it here and sought to set up a theory of the state in sharp contrast with the American theory that governments derive their just powers from the consent of the governed. We were told that the state was the source of all liberty. The theory of the inalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness was consigned to the junk heap, and Americans were told to begin the worship of the state.

This theory of the state was, of course, most welcome to the beneficiaries of hereditary dynasties, but ill suited to any people

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the doctrine that the superior people may absorb or subject the weaker or inferior people. This makes mere physical force the measure of moral conduct. It is the most monstrous paganism that history knows, and no infamy is so dark or wicked as not to find protection under its ascendancy.

Shall I now suggest that as the war proceeds the world is coming to see more and more clearly this great catastrophe to be the contest of the centuries for the supremacy between the forces of Christianity and of paganism? The struggle now is whether a materialistic and pagan system of ethics shall be the foundation upon which the governments of the world shall rest, or whether the spiritual and Christian system of ethics shall abide as the hope of the world and the guaranty of the liberties and freedom of humanity.

The church as the spiritual teacher of the world must recognize and deal with this fundamental and most vital issue, whether the *post-bellum* world shall be ruled by materialism or paganism on the one hand, or by the Christian philosophy and ethics on the

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other. This issue goes to the very heart of all the spiritual problems we shall need to face. Have we a generation of preachers now prepared to set forth the issue in commanding form so as to bring the world to recognize the supremacy and superiority of the spiritual over the material?

In a very important sense this raises the question whether Christianity has failed and whether it must continue to fail.

Christianity a Failure? Is Christianity, after all, the final and complete religion? If it is, then the church must arise in her strength and proclaim this glorious gospel as the necessary undergirding of all our systems of morals and practice. We have heard all too much of a system of ethics based on or growing out of expediency and convenience. We need now to hear of a heaven-born ethics undergirded with the gospel of love and carrying with it the supreme obligations and responsibilities of the Christian religion.

You will recall that the peace resolution of the Reichstag last June proclaimed that peace for Germany could not rest on inter-

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national treaties, but upon German might and strength. Here is the obvious dependence—not upon character, nor upon the sacredness of a contract, nor upon righteousness, nor upon honor, nor upon the moral force of public obligation, but upon might and strength.

In the face of such theory, not confined to Germany—for there are those in the United States who openly proclaim physical force as the sanction of all treaties—in the face of such theory the church must seek to set the mind of the world right upon the elementary but fundamental principles of ethics. I presume I do not misrepresent the situation when I say the Christian Church believes in the sufficiency and efficiency of Christianity as the universal and final religion suited to and adequate for all the needs of all the world. If that be our platform, then most assuredly, brethren, we must seek the supremacy of the faith of the Fathers. Moreover, the church must see to it that the world understands the vitality of Christianity in that it demands a perfect

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correspondence between faith and practice. We cannot be Christian in name and fact and be materialistic or pagan in practice. A vital religion demands a life as its best expression. The church after the war will have the opportunity to interpret the life of the world in these dreadful years as a life-and-death struggle in which sin has never been more scarlet, iniquity more hateful, or wrong-headedness a greater calamity. The church will call the world, let us hope, to righteousness—to correct thinking and to right feeling.

I am disposed to suggest that the world will be more ready than ever before to hear just such a message. The nightmare of these years is already upon large areas in Europe. In the United States, when the death roll begins to fill the columns of our papers and families everywhere recognize the names of loved ones, we shall share the feeling of the desolate in other lands. In that hour of retrospect the world, in a thoughtful mood amid its sadness, will welcome the gospel of hope built on the firm foundation of righteousness and furnishing

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a program of conduct that transforms a world of fiendishness into a world of friendliness.

To be ready with such a message it is important that here and now the church catch the inspiration of the heavenly message. We have heard all too much from the easy-going and pleasure-loving church—often grown indifferent to the central truths of the gospel through worldly prosperity. It has been all too easy to assume ease and prosperity as conclusive evidence of acceptable character before God. We have come upon a time of serious thoughtfulness when some among us are making shipwreck of faith because they cannot interpret the current events in the light of the truth. Their perspective has been distorted and the supreme opportunity of the Christian church will be as it now is—to set the world right in its head and heart.

To view this problem from a different angle, let me suggest that the *post-bellum* church will magnify the importance of the moral government of God in the world. A generation ago we heard rather more of

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the doctrine of moral government than we now do. Men felt that under this conception they were individually responsible to God for their conduct, and that in large groups—families and nations—there was a certain solidarity that brought a whole people to the bar of judgment. From the day when the world learned the word “Jehovah”—the revelation of the everliving God—until the day of Jesus, the express image of his person, and for twenty Christian centuries since, the spiritually enlightened have seen the binding force of moral obligation. From this point of view moral integrity is not a matter of option but of obligation. Men are free, but under moral obligation to be men and not mere fools.

In an easygoing, prosperous world, clothed in purple and fine linen, it is easy to substitute ease and luxury for righteousness and integrity. I am not making a plea for poverty or hardness as of necessity a virtue. I am trying to suggest that too many of us have lost our sense of obligation. We take our religion as one of the options of life in-

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stead of one of the obligations of life. In the large sense, then, this nation and all other nations must face the question of moral obligation. We shall need to recognize the binding force of moral law and the logical consequence that in a universe where moral law is supreme its mandates cannot be ignored or disregarded but at our everlasting peril. To that high privilege the church will come as the world's spiritual guide with a new zeal.

To be more specific, let me add that the church will have a new opportunity to put some stress upon the fact that our God is a covenant-keeping God, that his word is both sure and steadfast, and that in the last analysis the character of God is the binding force of all his messages to the world. We often revert to the fact that this is an age in which the pulpit proclaims the love of God to the exclusion of what men conceive to be the less welcome or less truthful message.

Surely no man ever preached the love of God with too great fervor or too great an emphasis. Far be it from any of us to lessen

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that emphasis. The beauty here is that this love, like the light, is the perfect blending of all his excellencies, most of which we cannot see and should fail to see if we undertook to analyze his love. We rejoice in the love of God and its wide proclamation.

Nevertheless, a little thought will suggest that love when expressed in character always makes its word good. A godly world will be a covenant-keeping world, and the character of the world will be its greatest asset. No nation can afford to trifle with character.

From the standpoint of society the sacredness of a contract is the binding force of our civilization. In a primitive world contracts were few and not far-reaching in effect. In the world of to-day millions of contracts are made every hour. These often affect the future and will be fulfilled when those who made them are in their graves. Many of our public policies and public enterprises, as well as our personal contracts, are based upon the good faith of the world, upon human integrity, and carry their consequences to the unborn generation. Because of this

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there can be no security, no abiding assurance and happiness in a world where the sacredness of contracts is not adequately recognized. I presume this is why in that terrible arraignment of those who hold the truth in unrighteousness as we find it in the first chapter of Romans, the covenant-breakers are especially named among the vilest of God's creatures.

In a way this great war has that issue clearly before the world. It is essentially righteousness and truth at war with the wickedness of duplicity and false dealing. In times of peace we have been wont to think of these things as old-fashioned morals and virtues. They must now come to the front as the newest demand. I shall speak of it here because we have often heard it said that the church was losing its hold upon men and upon the affairs of the world; that its influence was declining until it had become almost a negligible quantity.

Out of this war the church will, I hope, bring the world to see that these great moral issues are always great issues. Truth is never unimportant. Error may never be

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treated with hospitality. The reassuring feature of the present situation is that the world is passing through a vital religious experience. No longer do we hear the cry that Christianity has failed and the church collapsed. Men are now giving expression to their profound sentiments, and these all indicate a sense of relation to God and dependence upon him that encourages the heart if the church can now come forward with her message in an adequate manner. Rejoice as we may in the genuineness and hopefulness of the religious experience of Mr. Britling when he "sees it through," we are not blind to the fact that the boys in the trenches are not praying to a limited, finite God, but to the God of our fathers—the infinite, eternal, and all-wise God—their gracious, loving heavenly Father.

Passing now to other considerations that suggest the opportunity of the church after the war, let me direct attention to the significance of the present gigantic scale of human cooperation as seen in the war. Viewed as a whole and forgetting for the moment

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the issues of the war, the present voluntary cooperation on the part of governments is the most stupendous work ever undertaken. The spirit in which this is done is truly a marvel. If one can but appreciate the attitudes of men who are making sacrifice, large or small, he will find that this spirit of common service has permeated all industry, all philanthropy, all social service, all business, and even has caught our amusements. Now this is not without tremendous significance. It is demonstrating to the world how much more may be accomplished, how much more endured, and how much wider our experiences than in a method of isolated workers. The enormous development of industry, the development of the inventive genius of men, the power of organization, the intimate acquaintance with the better side of men and of their virtues under the stimulus of cooperative effort, are all bringing to the world a new conception of what can be done if men will only embrace the opportunity. This experience will never be forgotten; and when the war shall have ended, this tremendous energy and efficiency will not lapse

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back into sloth and indifference. The joy of achievement will be fresh in the minds of men. They will be restless for other achievements in the arts of peace. Men who have been engaged in large international service will eagerly grasp at an opportunity for a world service. Here will be a supreme opportunity for the church, the herald of the Kingdom, to show men the largeness of the great issues in the spiritual conquest of the world, to interpret Christianity in world terms. Our motto—"The World for Christ"—will be radiant with significance and will make its appeal to men who have seen the abomination of desolation and the havoc wrought under the influence of a pagan conception of the world.

Out of this war experience in cooperative effort there are several features to which I may refer.

First of all, the increase of knowledge. The world is becoming acquainted with itself geographically as never before. We are learning about the world conditions socially and industrially as never before. The real spirit of governments has been manifest in

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a marked degree. The realm of history has been traversed anew and the meaning of the past revised in the light of this great war. Science has opened up new fields. Every important laboratory in the country has been active and enough is now known to warrant the statement that the scientific progress of the past year has never been equaled in the history of the world. Especially is this true in the field of applied science.

Moreover, one cannot fail to observe the international character of our thinking. Our foreign-mission enterprises had prepared the way for this experience. In spite of the meager sums spent on foreign missions, and the few men employed, there is no field of Christian activity where money and men have been so effective in widening the vision and the sympathy of the world as in this phase of Christian enterprise.

Now that the eyes of all the world have been turned upon the war-stricken area, it is a happy experience to see that the missionary post, the missionary school, and the Christian hospital are the centers of light

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and of advanced liberal thinking upon many of the world's greatest issues.

The reorganization of industry during this war has been little short of an industrial revolution. Men of large business interests have come to a new estimate of their place and of their activities in the world. All this points to a new world, a readjusted world. We shall never return to the old order. That has passed once and forever. We are now confronted with the order to go forward and win this new world for Christ as the only possible alternative worthy of us. There is a deep significance in the reply of President Wilson to the peace proposals from the Vatican, especially in the suggested changes in economics and all the problems of trade and commerce arising out of international activities. His reply is a clarion call for the world to become a vast neighborhood in which friends and neighbors may live in peace and safety because the essential principles of the kingdom of heaven shall come out of this war with international approval and sanction.

For our purpose this morning I suggest

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two things: First, this *post-bellum* condition will call for a church unity such as the world and the church have not yet experienced. The seventeenth chapter of John (and a few other chapters) is now due for a new reading. The final prayers of our Lord are due for a new study by the church. If the church should fail in the new field of opportunity by not developing a more profound unity than heretofore or by permitting its energies to be spent in useless controversy, unhappy would be the day. The church is the divinely appointed—and shall I say anointed?—agency of God to proclaim the Kingdom. In these great overturnings shall we not see to it that He shall come whose right it is to reign, even Emmanuel?

From the standpoint of the church we are quite prepared for this new movement of unified Christianity. Protestantism has had her days of controversy, happily past, and we have come to know through a valid Christian experience the difference between the essential and the nonessential. The historical significance of our great denomina-

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tional movements may well be recognized and given their proper place, but just now the world and the church are confronted with new phases of the old issues. We are passing into a new order as the world has done before, but never on so large a scale or where the issues were brought to so sharp a focus. In my humble opinion the world is now in the presence of the greatest epoch since the birth of Christ.

John of Runnymede signing the Magna Charta was a thrilling moment. The French Revolution stirred all Europe. The Civil War in the United States lifted this country to a new level. All these, however, were local issues in large degree. They involved directly a relatively small population, although in their later effects each had influenced the whole world. To-day a thousand millions of people, involving all the principal governments and all the most fruitful lands of the world, all the chief centers of Christian activity and influence, are engaged in a contest unparalleled and unprecedented in its magnitude, its finances, its forces of men, its resources of every kind and character. In

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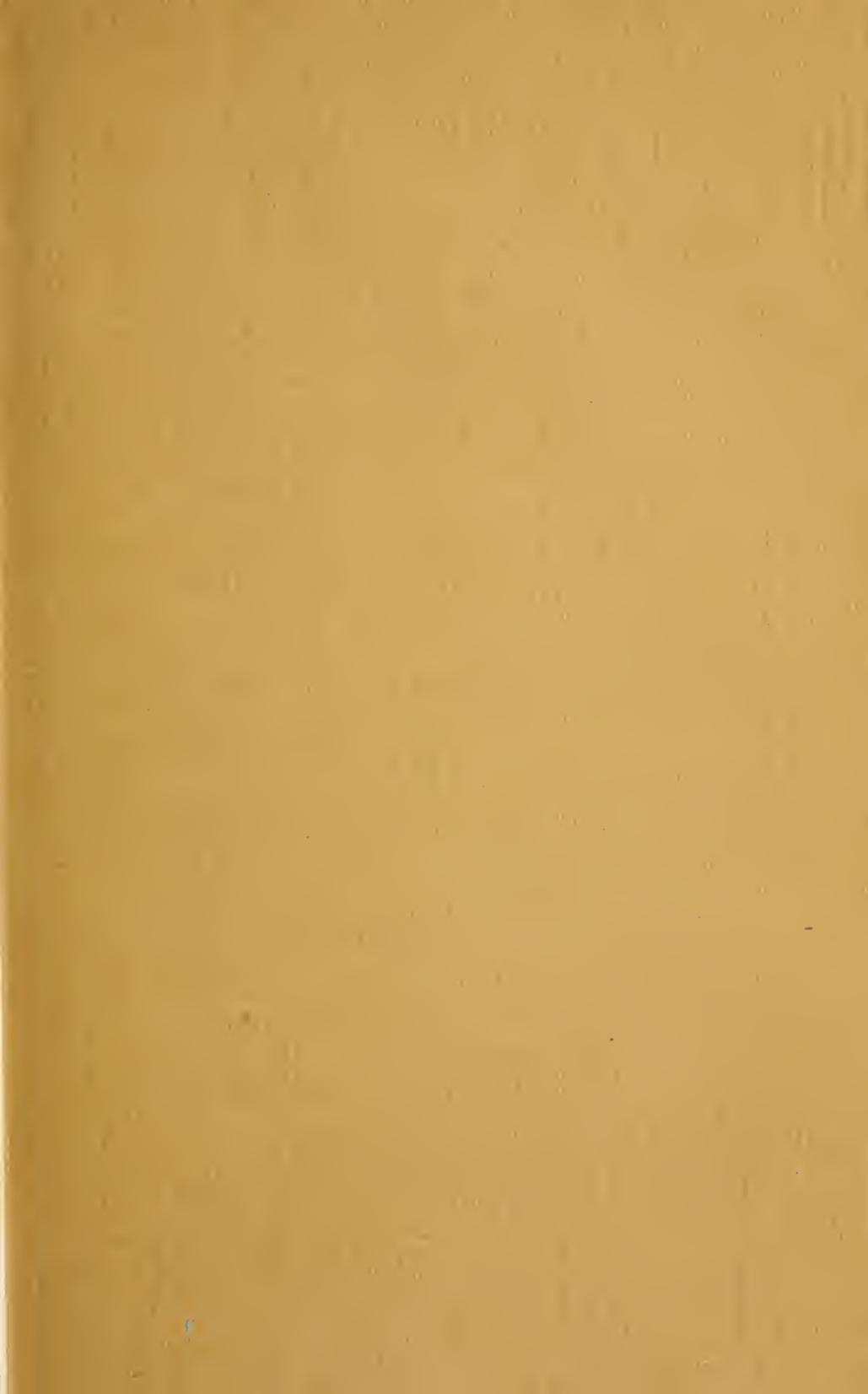
this great contest the most fundamental issues of life and civilization are involved. What shall we say of the opportunity of the church and what shall men not say if we should fail in this critical hour? No parleying or ecclesiastical fencing or harking back to the contests of the Dark Ages or the Middle Ages will win and redeem the world of to-morrow to Christ and crown him Lord of all. When the world by cooperative methods shall have won the greatest triumph of history in the name of righteousness, truth and humanity, and when the death knell shall have been sounded to militarism, might and physical force as the basis of governments, then will come the hour of supreme opportunity to the church. In that hour she will face the great issue of working together in a spirit of cooperative unity equal to the demands of the world, or men will turn from her as unworthy and unequal to the task.

Second, this is not an hour of doubt. In this critical hour I may properly appeal to a great church, founded in large measure upon the vitality and validity of Christian expe-

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rience, to stand forth in the light and history
An Hour of that experience and say with
for Faith Paul, "I know whom I have be-
lieved." The Methodist Church
can never be true to her historic experience
and stand in doubt and uncertainty as to
the ability of the Captain of our salvation
to lead the innumerable hosts of the unified
church on to the spiritual conquest of the
world and the spread of the Kingdom until
it shall cover the whole earth as the waters
cover the great deep.

Out of the darkness of these days of the
most dreadful and inhuman war ever waged
among men, and in the presence of unspeak-
able atrocities, the voice of humanity is call-
ing from the depths. Here as never before
the voice of the people is the voice of God.
To that call the church as with one voice and
with one mind should respond to the great
commission when our Lord said, "All
authority hath been given unto me in heaven
and on earth. Go ye therefore, and make
disciples of all the nations, . . . and lo,
I am with you always, even unto the end of
the world."



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