

NOTES OF TWO PAPERS.

Read Before the Conference of the Wellington District Congregational Union.

On Wednesday evening, August 16th, were delivered before the Congregational Conference, sitting in Wellington, two papers dealing with the effect of the war on present social conditions.

The first paper, on "Our Empire's Unique Opportunity," was read by Rev. A. M. Aspland, of Palmerston North. After pointing out that the work of reconstructing must always follow that of breaking down, he said the unique opportunity of the Empire would be to lead in establishing a great European partnership of nations, a world league for the maintaining of peace, and an international law court for the discussion and settlement of disputes. If the nations did not learn from this war how to avoid war, the awful suffering and sacrifice entailed by the war would have been all in vain. Other results that were being achieved were the strengthening of the family tie, and the strengthening of the belief in the spirit and power of prayer. Men would realise that the only forces that really count are spiritual forces.

We should have to turn our attention to our national evils and weaknesses, which this war had shown up in their true light. Drunkenness, impurity, disease, must be put an end to, no matter at what cost. Social reforms must be brought about; the relations between employers and employees must be drawn closer, and must be made to rest on a Christian basis.

The elevation of women was another result that must surely come, for the part played by women in this crisis was beyond all expectation, and had done more to establish their claim to equal rights than all the zeal—often misdirected—of the Suffragettes. Women had everywhere responded to the call of sacrifice, giving their best loved ones for their country, and ministering, with no thought of self, to the sick and the dying.

The war of racial distinction could never again be so bitter, and men would learn to recognise that the principles by which life is directed, and not the colour of the skin, constituted the real difference between man and man.

The Church would have a unique opportunity for showing in action the

spirit of the Good Samaritan, in its sympathy and care for the widow and the fatherless, and for proving that religion is not the mere acceptance of intellectual truths, but the cultivation of the Spirit of Christ.

In the past the Church had always emphasised duty to King and country; but at the end of the war there would be a glorious opportunity for insisting on the duty of loyalty to the King of kings. God's legitimate claim on man's love and devotion must be pressed on the people, and also the fact that any violation of the moral and spiritual law must bring its punishment, as Germany was already finding out, for her violation of the sacredness of treaties and pledges. So men would be more ready to accept and live out the eternal principles for which the Church stands.

The reverend gentleman said he believed that while the barrier between the sacerdotal and the evangelical churches would be more decided, union among the Free Churches would be rendered more possible, and such union would be absolutely necessary in order to carry out needed reforms. The sectarian spirit would cease to count, and the practical presentation of Christianity would have to be given, lifting up Christ, not creeds; life, not rites and ceremonies; internal reality rather than external ordinances. To the Churches the Empire would look for the mighty forces that could carry the reforms that must come. A great spiritual revival would be needed both for the Empire and for the Church; a revival not emotional as in the past, but ethical, appealing to the consciences of men. And this revival must begin in the Church, in order to check the materialistic tendencies so rife at present, and to enable men to discern the righteousness that "exalteth a nation."

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