



"Today's Christmas"

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Today's Christmas

RICHARD H. McFEELY

"PEACE ON EARTH, good will toward men." What shall teachers think about this beautiful legend of Christmastime? What shall teachers teach about this part of the Christmas story that has represented an unfulfilled hope among men for nearly twenty centuries? Is it a fantastic, utterly unreal hope? Is it futile or unpatriotic to teach these ideals during a period of total war? Or in this legend is there a simple but profound truth revealed which must be taken to heart and taught to our youth to prepare them for their part in this great drama called life?

Slightly more than two decades ago America sent forth her sons to fight a war to "make the world safe for democracy," a "war to end wars." We gave our finest with sacrificial devotion to bring about "peace on earth, good will toward men." We had high hopes that great social achievements would come after an Allied victory. During

the decades which followed, these goals, these ambitions, were not fulfilled. Those of us brought up to believe that progress was inevitable, that the world was forging ahead, that the victory of the Allied powers in World War I would bring about a warless world, have been sobered by the events of these decades.

Many have lost faith, become disillusioned and cynical. Their ideals appeared to be mirages, things without substance. This disillusionment has often revealed an inward spiritual decay. It is at such times that teachers need to appraise their own spiritual, intellectual, and emotional resources, for these will be of tremendous importance in determining what their pupils will learn in the classroom, especially with regard to this dominant problem of creating "peace on earth, good will toward men." The concept of peace and good will is probably the most important thing that we must learn because bringing war under control and eliminating it from the face of the earth is the greatest task facing mankind today.

One frequently hears it said that it is human nature to fight. If this is a fact, if this method of response cannot be controlled and redirected, then a just and permanent peace is a snare and delusion, a vain ideal, and we should have done with it. Perhaps, however, our thinking about facts and ideals needs to be re-examined. Peace, a dura-

This month we will observe Christmas for the third time since our country has been at war. The harshness of war has not obscured the age-old meaning of Christmas as a symbol of peace and good will. Yet idealism is sometimes hard to hold to in the face of war's realities. We believe this lucid, forceful statement by Richard H. McFeely, Director of Studies at George School, Bucks County, Pa., may help readers to clarify their own thoughts about the anomalous state in which we find ourselves at this Christmastime, 1943.

ble, just peace, is an ideal, a goal as yet unattained. So is social progress an ideal, but if we look back at the gains we have made during the past 300 years it is also a fact.

Since the dawn of history, men have resorted to the use of force to try to eliminate the causes of fear and insecurity. With each new war, the cost in terms of men and resources has increased, and, even with the victors, apprehension as to what the future holds, of how the problems created by the war are to be solved, increases. The war method does not seem to offer the security, the freedom from fear and want, that men once believed it would bring. So far-reaching and devastating have modern wars become that it seems now that either mankind must end war, or war will end mankind. War has not and cannot bring "peace on earth, good will toward men" because, as Emerson once said, "The ends pre-exist in the means."

The Alternative to War Is Eternal Good Will

The causes of war, which is a social disease, must be eliminated and social health restored. Our Western civilization has broken the laws of social health and a desperate illness, World War II, has followed. This seems to indicate that the foundation of our world is laid in moral law so that we inevitably reap what we sow. We know what some of these moral laws are; others must be discovered. All must be adhered to if peace on earth is to become a reality.

The alternative to the war method, then, with all of its brutality, destruction, and hatred-breeding activities, is that of undiscourageable good will. The

world-shrinking advances of modern science have laid upon mankind the need for intelligent action guided by the compass of good will. Narrow personal or national selfishness can no longer rule men's action; it can only ruin. A guidepost now and in the post-war world must become these words uttered by Lincoln during the heat of the Civil War, "With malice toward none; with charity for all."

Peace Begins at Home

Each of us, great or small, old or young, of whatever race, religion, political or economic belief, can nail his flag to the mast of faith in good will as the only sound basis for harmonious human relations whether in the home, the community, the nation, or among the peoples of the world. The smallest one of us can thus stand for the greatest things. To a large degree the quality and meaning of our lives is determined by the things we live for, the goals we seek, the values we stand for.

In considering our goal of "peace on earth, good will toward men," let us recognize the importance of establishing this principle at home first. There is a danger that we will concentrate so much on defeating the external enemies of democracy that we will fail to recognize the deeper dangers of a lack of good will existing within our own country. The vast inequalities in our midst, the racial discriminations and persecutions, the blind, emotional political partisanship, and religious intolerances breed fear and hatred that make real democracy impossible. Sound human relationships cannot flow from attitudes of hate and intolerance but are based upon understanding, sympathy,

and a sincere desire to help all people achieve a better life. The making of peace starts with me and the person I don't get along with. Most schools right now can begin to work at improving human relationships.

The war will end in some kind of victory for the United Nations, but the outcomes of the war will not be determined alone by the armistice or the peace treaty. Our actions in the postwar period will determine the real results of the war. The failure of the decades following 1918 which is manifest in another world war can be charged directly and largely to the failure of the Allied Nations to accept fully and unselfishly the obligations which accompanied their victory. That the United States must bear a share of the blame for what is happening now is fully recognized and acknowledged by all informed, intelligent people. We were unwilling to pay some of the costs of maintaining peace; so we must now pay the costs of war.

How Shall We Use the Power of Victory?

It seems likely that civilization, democracy, and Christianity may be doomed unless after this war we and all other nations pay the costs of peace. "Peace on earth" will demand that each nation give up some of its national sovereignty and become a member of an international community, that vested interests in all nations must give up their policies of selfish individualism, that narrow economic nationalism and imperialism must give way to a genuine internationalism, and that all must forego their reliance on force and violence as methods of settling disputes or conflicts. These are the costs of peace.

Victory will bring to the United Nations great power over the destinies of their own people as well as the men and women of the defeated nations. The possession of such power is a tremendous moral burden. Some of the great questions we face are: For what ends or purposes will this power be used? Will it be used to try to force the postwar world back into the prewar mold? Will it be used for the special aggrandizement of the four largest of the United Nations? Or will it be used to eliminate the causes of war and to extend the abundant life which is possible for all to all?

Teachers must teach boys and girls to be willing to try other methods of solving their problems if the first solution does not bring satisfactory results. The narrow, selfish isolationist policy of this nation following the last war did not bring desirable results to us or our neighbors. The times demand that we adopt an alternate method—that of international cooperation and good will, thereby helping to bring about an organized world community of law and order.

One can hear the skeptics laugh, and the so-called realists deride this as idealistic, theoretical, impractical, as they have always laughed at new and saving ideas ever since the beginning of time. We cannot, they say, stop war or build a better, more decent economic order, or educate the world to better racial attitudes. They urge a revengeful peace, a tremendous military force to make people cooperate and be good, a ruthless crushing or extermination of the enemy. The Nazis have outdone anything we would be capable of in ruthlessness, brutality, and the use of force in an

effort to unify people into a "new order." They have failed.

Madame Chiang Kai-shek has pointed out that the peace must be made without any thought of punishment or of revenge against the people with whom we are at war. We can hate the ideas which they have served; we can punish the leaders who misused their power. But let us not copy such leaders and thereby sow the seeds for another war.

Schools Must Help the World to Achieve a Spiritual Awakening

So, the question is not Can we teach during times of total war "peace on earth, good will toward men"? but Can we afford *not* to teach for these ends? The boys and girls in our schools are our reserves for the peace and post-war world. They will carry the torch on after we give it up—on, it is hoped, to these goals in which we believe and for which we are dedicating our lives and efforts today. All schools and educational institutions in the country must redouble their efforts to bring about the moral and spiritual renaissance our nations so badly need.

Boys and girls can and must be helped to see as clearly and objectively as possible the issues involved in the present war and the conditions and forces which caused these issues to arise. They need to face honestly the share of this burden which must be borne by our country.

Our youth should gain a better, clearer understanding of the world picture—of the hopes and aspirations, the problems, fears, and needs of other peoples, of the resources of the world, and of the forces most likely to fight against a new order built upon international understanding and cooperation.

They must be helped to recognize that peace is at best a series of compromises and that one important problem is to see that the settlement is concluded in such a way that changes can be made by peaceful means.

We need to teach them that a just peace is necessary if we would keep the vanquished from teaching their children to hate the victors and hence lay the groundwork for the next war.

We must help them to live their daily lives on the basis of cooperation and good will. Let them experiment with this way of working in the school and community. We must help them to believe in cooperative action and to keep on trying it even when they have hard luck with it.

We need to help them see that the crisis of our civilization is in the last resort a spiritual crisis which is due to the absence of great and compelling convictions; that peace on earth demands a spiritual regeneration in the lives of men and women all over the world so that good will may become a living reality.

Boys and girls must be helped to visualize a peaceful world, with intelligence and energies devoted to constructive activities and the fruits of such labors distributed equitably and with sincere good will among all men. A faith in the desirability and possibility of such a world must be engendered, and the youth of our nation—of the world—must become pioneers in this new life, if civilization is to leave the "valley of the shadow of death" and climb to the pure air and more beautiful vistas of "peace on earth, good will toward men." Such is the task confronting teachers today.

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