

Why I cannot hate

Hitler

**A great peace-lover
explains—and reveals
an unheeded appeal
to a mighty apostle
of war**

BY

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DURING the greater part of a life already longer than most, I have tried to hold firm to one basic belief that has been at the same time a guide and a support. It has been my conviction, growing steadily stronger as the years progressed, that the multitude of ills attacking and separating mankind can none of them be eradicated forever until man vows never to lift his hand against his brother man, never to take up the sword and wet it in the blood of another human being.

My faith is in non-violence; rather, my faith *is* non-violence. I have been attacked by many for it, and from more than one quarter has come criticism that has hurt me deeply. There have been desperate moments when passions were running high and when a thousand difficulties pressed upon our movement, but the result was a strengthening rather than a weakening of our determination. For somewhere some one must make a start with more than talk.

That has been my attempt. I have had some success, and I am proud to think that I have seen men unite for a prized objective and strike not one

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violent blow toward its attainment. Perhaps it was not much, but it was a beginning; and I hope and believe that its significance as a demonstration of the practicability of the golden rule has not been lost on the Western World.

But for the one who believes and trusts in non-violence, in peace on earth and good will toward all men, these last few years have been sad. The present year must be the saddest, surely, in living memory. It must be sadder even than those black years of 1914-18, for now it seems that their great toll of millions of young lives sacrificed was in vain, and that the fresh generations must again be cut down in the very flower of their youth.

For the pace of war is quickening and the field of action spreading, and at any moment now it seems that the threat of "total war" must become a hideous reality, darkening the skies of England, France, and Germany with the roaring tides of warplanes and shattering the proud cities in smoke and fire. How can any living man think of such a scene and not feel his heart weep within him?

With such a storm threatening each morning, when every man knows that the flowers growing outside his window today in the sunlight may tomorrow be ripped up and flung high in spouts of smoking earth, surely he must ask himself, "Who has done this? Who is responsible for the terror that has come over our lives?"

For Englishmen and Frenchmen, indeed for most Europeans, and perhaps for many Germans and most Americans, the answer today takes the person of one man. On July 23 last year I addressed a personal letter to him. The idea was not mine; several people had urged it upon me, in the belief that an appeal to Adolf Hitler from one who had based his public life on the principle of non-violence might conceivably have some effect and certainly could do no harm. I could not share their optimism, but neither, in such a time, could I ignore their entreaty. And so I wrote these words:

"Friends have been urging me to write to you. I have resisted their request because of the feeling that any letter from me would be an impertinence. Something tells me, however, that I must not calculate, and that I must make an appeal for whatever it may be worth.

"It is quite clear that you are today the one person in the world who can prevent a war which may reduce humanity to the savage state. Must you pay that price for any object, however worthy it may appear to you to be? Will you listen to the appeal of one who has deliberately shunned the method of war not without considerable success?

"Anyway, I anticipate your forgiveness, if I have erred in writing to you."

I do not know if Herr Hitler considered that I was impertinent in writing to him. My letter brought no answer; it is unnecessary to add that it had no visible effect.

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It shows my belief that it lay in the decision of one man alone to permit Europe to remain at peace, however uneasily. I know that many other forces contributed to the tense atmosphere between the Great Powers just before war broke out—the tradition of violence and the many old rivalries. But it still seems to me to be true that at the final point this one man had the power, if he willed to use it, to hold humanity back from the brink.

He did not will to use it.

I have been asked where my sympathies lie. From the purely humanitarian viewpoint, certainly they are all with England and France. I do not wish the French and the British to be defeated. But neither do I wish for the defeat of the German people. There will be little worth and happiness in the future for those of us in the rest of the world if whole peoples, no matter what their nationality, lie crushed, humbled, and embittered; for if there is bitterness in the hearts of one people, does it not carry within it the black seed of future wars?

If this war is fought to a finish, however, civilization may perish in the holocaust. God grant, then, that it shall be halted in time. But can it be halted while hatred remains in the breasts of men? And if I bear hatred for one man, will not this hatred spread out its roots and grow insidiously into a hatred for all the people of his country?

Yes, there is every reason for condemning the dictator of the Third Reich. But if I wish the armies to lay down their weapons and stay the slaughter, which is the meaning and message of non-violence, I must be true to my faith: there must be no hatred in my heart for any living man. I deplore his acts, but I cannot hate Adolf Hitler.

Liberty

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