

SOME ASPECTS OF THE WAR

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Some aspects of the war by S. Pérez Triana

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S. PÉREZ TRIANA

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BY

S. PÉREZ TRIANA

FORMERLY OF THE PERMANENT COURT OF
ARBITRATION AT THE HAGUE

UNIV. OF
CALIFORNIA

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Some Aspects of the War

I

THE NAME OF GOD AND THE WAR

ON the 15th of August of this tragic year of 1914, his Majesty the Kaiser telegraphed to the General in command of the troops that had been fighting at Mülhausen :

“I thank God Almighty who was with us. I thank you and your gallant soldiers for this our first victory.”

In his address to the German people at the very beginning of the war, the Kaiser exclaimed in accents thrilling with patriotism :

“Since the foundation of the Empire it has been for forty-three years the object of the efforts of myself and my ancestors to preserve the peace of the world and

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to advance by peaceful means our vigorous development. But our adversaries were jealous of the successes of our work. There has been latent hostility on the east and on the west and beyond the sea. It was borne by us till now, as we were aware of our responsibility and power. Now, however, these adversaries wish to humiliate us, asking that we should look on with crossed arms and watch our enemies preparing themselves for a coming attack. They will not suffer that we maintain resolute fidelity to our ally who is fighting for its position as a Great Power, and with whose humiliation our power and honour would equally be lost. So the sword must decide.

“In the midst of perfect peace the enemy surprises us. Therefore to arms! Any dallying, any temporising would be to betray the Fatherland. To be or not to be is the question for the Empire which our fathers founded. To be or not to be German power and German existence. We shall resist to the last breath of man and horse, and shall fight out the struggle even against a world of enemies. Never has Germany been subdued when

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it was united. Forward with God, who will be with us as He was with our ancestors!

WILHELM.

"BERLIN, Aug. 6."

His Majesty the Tsar, when calling his people to arms, said that

"The God of the Russians is a great God and He shall give us victory."

The French Presidential Manifesto on the 10th of August calls the people to the defence of France, "eternal, peaceful, resolute, the Fatherland united, watchful and serenely dignified." There is no mention of the Almighty in that document. None is made in the British announcement of the war issued by the Foreign Office, and which reads as follows:

"Owing to the summary rejection by the German Government of the request made by his Majesty's Government for assurances that the neutrality of Belgium will be respected, his Majesty's Ambassador at Berlin has received his passports and his Majesty's Government have declared to the German Government that

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a state of war exists between Great Britain and Germany as from 11 P.M. on August 4th."

The method adopted in France and in Great Britain would seem to be the most decorous one. It is one thing to implore the Divine mercy. To declare that a given cause is the cause of God, and to do so at the precise moment when every notion of pity and of justice is suppressed, when cruelty is established as the supreme law of life, and when iniquity and infamy are consecrated as patriotism, provided they do harm to the enemy, is something quite different. The practice of associating God with our miserable follies, seeking to turn Him into an accomplice of our acts when those acts reach their maximum degree of atrocity, may be an inveterate one, but it is no less objectionable on that account. The God of Israel may have been called the "God of Battles," it may have been maintained that He fought for the "chosen people," it may be that "the Russian God will fight for His people." Notwithstanding all that, to associate God with the fury of man in the performance of acts which are fundamentally criminal, such as

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killing, pillaging, and the destruction of property (all of which are allowed within the practices of honest men by a pitiable convention, and even then only in accordance with an honesty that is itself conventional), has never been, and never can be, aught else than the most audacious and glaring form of blasphemy.

Doubtless the Imperial invocations of the Almighty as an ally are sincere utterances; to be sincere is not to possess the truth, but to believe that one possesses the truth. The cause of God for the Kaiser signifies his own absolute rule over Germany, culminating and manifest in the Imperial crown; it signifies relentless military discipline throughout the Empire, inside and outside the barracks; it signifies Socialism trodden under the iron heel of Junkerdom; it means the workman and labourer groaning under the yoke of taxation and yielding the sweat of their brow for the Empire in time of peace, and the blood of their veins to defend the Empire in war time; it means a France subjugated and despoiled of her colonies; it means a humiliated England, thrust back into the arms of reaction, and a universe trembling with terror at the slightest thrill of anger of the reigning