

THE WORLD CRISIS AND ITS MEANING

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The world crisis and its meaning by Felix Adler

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FELIX ADLER

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BOOKS BY FELIX ADLER

The World Crisis and Its Meaning

Marriage and Divorce

Life and Destiny

The Religion of Duty

The Moral Instruction of Children

THE WORLD CRISIS AND ITS MEANING

BY
FELIX ADLER



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PREFACE

The matter of these chapters was originally couched in the language of public addresses and, with slight revision, the form and arrangement have been left undisturbed.

The author desires to express acknowledgment to Mr. George E. O'Dell, who has kindly read the proof sheets.

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THE WORLD CRISIS AND ITS MEANING

I

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THE feeling that should predominate in America at this time is grief, not wrath. Since the world began there has been no such war. But the things now happening are too vast for spite and ancestral animosities, or even for the indulgence of moral indignation. What is it that has thrown civilization so suddenly out of its reckoning? Why this descent from the levels of culture and broadening brotherhood into the depths of brutality? Why do the peasants leave the harvests ungathered, to be themselves mowed down by a sharp, bloody scythe? Why are the gates of the universities closed? Why do the younger generation of scientists abandon their researches into the secrets of nature, prophetic of a beneficent extension of human knowledge,

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in order to join in the work of destruction? Why do the finest intelligences, the mental élite, fall in line with the dull, equally to lay down their heads on the great block? Why does the musician set aside his instrument on which he was wont to discourse music that touched and uplifted the soul, in order to mingle his voice with the hoarse cries of squadrons advancing to the charge, or with the despairing wail of the wounded? Why do fathers and husbands leave wives and children to slay other fathers and husbands who also have left clinging dear ones across the fatal border? Why do youths reared in all the gentleness of high-bred social intercourse, suddenly take, as if they were beasts of the jungle, to the work of slaughter? The voice of lamentation is heard from Ramah; it is Rachel weeping for her children. It is the mother of humanity weeping for all those dead of many nations.

A great cloud has settled on the world. We are at the center of the darkness. But it behoves us to move from the center and seek to discover a ray of light, a ray of hope. Everyone at this time feels the immense desire to do something; to witness this unspeakable calamity and not stir a finger seems intoler-