

PEACE: A Speech by John Charles Black

How beautiful and how desirable is peace! It once existed on earth, and God called the place of its dominion Paradise.

In peace the farmer tills the earth and gathers his grain and watches his herds, and thanks God for his beneficence. His children growing about him, stretch up their hands, which are filled with the bounty that rewards the father's labor and the mother's frugality. To them, in their youth and helplessness, comes education and fills their minds from her ample volumes of experience with the things that are to benefit them through all their lives. In peace the Sabbath bells ring, and, all secular pursuits abandoned, men are given over to the quietude of that day, during which there is rest for body and mind, with opportunity for the contemplation of those greater things that contribute to the uplift of the race. In peace science expands; art multiplies her beauties; labor receives its full and due reward; and without armed guard the stranger lays his head to rest, under the protection of the law, in safety and seeks repose whose weariness overtakes him. In peace, nature, conquered and opulent, gives from her storehouses, from the vast reservoirs of the elements, and from the earth and the mines the rewards of toil; industry is encouraged, lawlessness is suppressed; the roads are made smooth for the passage of commerce; the struggle for the dominion of earth and sea progresses; the care of man for his fellows grows and charity seeks dominion over all mankind. In peace, the mighty monuments are built by human genius to human sacrifice and achievement, and the labors of the multitudes are devoted to the good of the race.

Peace has been styled by the smile of God. It is the overflow of the spirit of heaven descending upon man; and under its great opportunities the world grows stronger, cleaner, fitter to be at last the Holy Mountain which seers have seen and prophets have foretold.

In peace, age is the happy tutor of youth, and youth the blessed recipients of the wisdom of the old; and manhood finds its proudest occupation in the guardianship, support and comfort of them both.

In peace stood the American Republic in 1860. For fourteen years there had been no war, save with the savage, sullenly retiring before the front of our civilization. The white sails of our fleets were upon every ocean, bearing the wealth of commerce and the product of manufacture. Now and then the great war ships themselves were turned into caravans that bore relief to starving and unfortunate peoples in less favored lands. The missionaries pushed out and on with the glad news and doctrines of the Prince of Peace, the great movement of our civilization, resistless as a rising tide, was building railroads, establishing industries, adding new fields to the control of agriculture, adding new posts for the occupation of our hosts of toil; State after State, a mighty train, was being carved from the wilderness possessions that stretched to the sunset sea; over all our wide dominion the splendid flag was pouring radiance from its mingled stars, and its brave colors were the blazon of the progress of man.

Over this majestic scene of sunshine and of contentment there spread the clouds of war. The storm, scarcely comprehended, rising from the Southern horizon, grew black and ominous, and in its shadow the accomplishments of peace were dimmed, or disappeared. A great paralysis fell upon industry; the looms became quiet; the music of the forge grew still; the crash in half the land desolation abounds; ruin took the place of progress; torch and sword distinguished the accumulations of ages; the highways of travel were given over to the troops of armed hosts;

schools and churches, lit with their blazing this path of destruction; children everywhere were taught to hate and to fight; they were given and sword and the gun and swiftly formed into the ranks of war, and soon American brothers stood face to face upon a line drawn by the issues of the time, on one side of which were those who would destroy the Union, and on the other those who would save it.

The clouds grew thicker, the storm more ominous; the hosts of destruction gathered faster and faster; soon there rained a bloody mist upon all the land; where a few months before there had been triumphant hosannas to the Prince of Peace, there were now the armed men who sought each other's lives; the streams were running red with brothers' blood; the land was heaped with brothers' graves.

"War is hell." So said a master of the art of destruction. So, echoing him, said the pallid lips of millions of the bereft of America, the women and the children and the maimed men who stretched sad hands up through that gloom and prayed for restoration of the old union and the old peace.

And thus, for four years the face of the American world was changed, almost beyond recognition; and all the dreadful passions which had been summoned from the human breasts of the combatants and the participants long raged unchecked after the bloody fields had been lost and won, and after the peace of death had fallen between the struggling hosts.

Shall we therefore not learn war? Shall we therefore devote ourselves only to the softness of life; shall we therefore trust wholly to the better influences of nature, and no longer rear armed men nor fit forth mighty fleets, nor fill our arsenals with the prepared thunders of war; shall we cease to forge the sword and the gun? Desirable as such a result would be, the experience of mankind, the teachings of philosophy, the lessons of history, make an affirmative

answer possible only upon condition that evil shall first disarm; that evil shall first cease its preparations; for while evil exists it will combine; while evil exists it will struggle for supremacy; while evil exists it will seek with all the craft of demoniacal genius to make its empire complete. So until the coming in of the Millennium the righteous man must go forth, as his fathers did, his rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, in one hand and his trusted weapons in the other, to hold his place in freedom's holy march.

I would not have you, my friends, believe that I think that evil is quiescent in times of peace, nor that it is always overborne. There is less to be dreaded by humanity in the shock of open arms than from the deadly and secret machinations of cunning and perfidy and greed. Human nature with its temptations of ambition and its lust for gain is not made angelic by peace; nor does the separation of nations by seas compel peace; nor can lifted mountains barricade justice, nor does the majestic potentiality of an unarmed Republic insure it from wrong and spoliation. It must be prepared to support itself in the rudest contests that may befall. And therefore it seems to me that while advocating peace, while urging its acceptance, while demonstrating the advantages of disarmament, while showing how lovely it is for nations to dwell together in amity, it is nonetheless the bound duty of a great people, to whom has been given, if God ever did give a mission and errand to one section of the human race, the guardianship of liberty and the protection of the rights of man, it is wise for that nation while so in good faith advocating every step that looks toward peace, still to maintain its fighting men, still to maintain its armaments, still to inculcate the rights of existence, and without encroachments and without anger, to stand serene, prepared for all the assaults of passion and of discontent; and while praying fervently and sincerely for the coming of the rule of the Master of Men, to gird himself for whatever may be required if in the struggles between right and wrong.

I believe that the world is advancing toward the high, desired era; I believe that every treaty of arbitration hastens that time; I believe that every reciprocal agreement that removes a cause of discontent smooths the way for the coming and the control of peace.

Among all the wars that men have waged, the war of the rebellion was greatest; greatest in the number of men engaged; greatest in its cost in money; greatest in the number of its dead and wounded within a four-year period; greatest in the desolation wrought; greatest in its results, by which States were overturned and ancient and hoary civilization destroyed; for under the sword slavery, which was the cause of wrath, was destroyed. The wide and wasting desolation was immeasurable and covered the areas of states, and at the end the restored Union rose, bleeding in every pore, from the awful struggle, but safe in all of its borders and unshaken in all of its rights. That Constitution framed from the wisdom of the centuries, in the heated hour of its delivery unaltered in its great purposes, still held every member of the union in its adamant bond. The war was the greatest in the extent of the territory over which it was carried; greatest in the extent and character of its armies; greatest in the numbers engaged, and greatest in the skirmishes, the campaigns and the battles that marked it; greatest in its continuance; for during the later years of the struggle the drum was never silent; the bugle was always calling to combat, and night and day the ceaseless movements of the armies progressed; the siege lines were constantly being strengthened here and there, and such splendid victories were won as marked forever the high-water mark of human valor and determination. And in this last test of its greatness all the honors do not belong to either side in the contest, for back and forth through many degrees of latitude the struggle rose as though compelled by shifting storm-winds in their altering courses.

I have stood beside a great field where the grain ripening for the harvest, and where now the light wind, and now the heavy blast bowed the bearded heads. Back and forth, tossed in tempest, the lines moved with the spirit of the storm; sometimes broken, sometimes tossing themselves on high, until the calm would come. This is not an unapt figure of that great struggle, where the winds were of destruction and the reaper was the angel of death.

No man so dreads was as him who has shared its hardships and its perils, and no man knows its awfulness and its magnificence, its terrors and its attractions, its wide woes and its magnificent enthusiasms, as him who has passed through such an epoch as that of which we are speaking.

When I sit soberly down to recount the story of the war, that which has preceded is forced upon me by a remorseless judgement; and yet there is no man to whom the sight of marching armies and the sound of martial music has more attraction than for me. I love the splendid sight of battle; I love the uplifted splendors of the Flag; I love to recall the rolling musketry and the deafening artillery; I love to think of the magnificent charge, the rush of the cavalry, the solemn and determined pose and resistance of the hosts. All of these are dear to me, and out of the far-gathering of the past there come to me battle scenes, those that I have witnessed and those of which my comrades have told me, and all of which history will keep in high record; and they fill me with pride that I was one of the great army which fought for the Union. I love to call the list of the battles; I love to recall the faces of the heroic leaders, now laid to rest in Glory's field. Again, I can hear the far-away guns at Bull Run; again, I can see the sheeted lightnings that rolled around the yellow walls at Vicksburg; again, I catch the tumult and the shouting among the Ozarks, where Pea Ridge and Prairie Grove were fought; again, I see the long lines of blue marching away through the woods, trailing over the hills and through the valleys on to the

contest. I know how unselfish and fearless were the young fellows who stood beneath the Flag; I know how unmeasured was their devotion to the cause of the country.

If I shut my eyes the past rises before me, with its splendors; if I close my ears to the sounds of the modern world I can hear the thunder of the captains, and the shouting; I can note again how in the long battle lines that stretched from ocean to river and down to the Gulf went the resistless hosts of the people, now hesitating, now advancing, gaining ground year by year and month by month, until the inevitable came and the Flag rose supreme.

And like some stars that shine distinct in all the blended radiance of the Milky Way, so there come to my memory the tales of some of the battles and some of the heroes of the long ago; and if you will listen, I will tell you some of them.

(Here follow with a list and description of battles, list and description of men.)

If this was awful, if it was matchless in its proportions, if it was measureless in its destruction, still it was God's war if ever he wanted one on earth by the hands of his children; and you today have only to look about you to see what those results are, and only to give loose line to reason to know how great the results will be that must follow.

(Here sketch the present situation of the Republic; its freedom from war; its intense activities in peace; its enormous achievements of a material kind as well as those of a spiritual description; the broad effects politically upon other nations and other peoples that have resulted; and close with the declaration that if the war was costly, it was worth all that it cost, and with a vision of the Flag as it is today and as it will be when lifted higher into the heavens.)