

April 14, 1917

THE CHURCHES AND WAR

MILITANCY WAS SEEN again in many New York churches on the day preceding the reassembling of Congress. The Rev. Newell Dwight Hillis declared before the people of Henry Ward Beecher's church that "it is the solemn duty of the people of the United States to send money, soldiers, and guns to France in the same ratio in which France sent them to us to develop the Constitution of the United States," and the son of Beecher, a deacon in the church, read a resolution which frowned on "an affirmation that a state of war exists," but called for "an out-and-out declaration." The resolution, which was passed and dispatched to Washington on the Monday following, declared that "this Republic should protect the rights of small nations and the sanctity of treaties, and, above all, should stand for liberty and humanity." The Baptist preacher, Rev. Dr. Haldeman, as the New York Times reports him, dealt with our state of unpreparedness as follows:

"From the beginning there has been a strange inability on the part of this Government to see the truth." It was officially proclaimed that the people of America were too proud to fight. That phrase, like others of a kindred sort, has sunken indelibly into the page of history; nothing can ever wipe it out.

"To-day, as a nation, we are shamelessly and criminally unprepared; and if to-morrow our sons, our brothers, and the splendid youth of America should be called to war, they would be sent forth as sheep to the slaughter; nor will history forgive or forget the crime of it."

Rabbi Samuel Schulman, of the Temple Beth-El, urged that no impression go abroad that the country is divided, and while advocating universal service, begged for loyal support of the Government. Father John Hughes, of the Paulist Fathers, spoke for the priesthood of his Church in saying:

"We have shown the world that we Catholic priests could work in the trenches alongside of other men, and if this country is forced into war, then we priests are ready, and I say, God bless us. Let every man stand up and fight for his country and for his religion and follow our glorious flag of liberty wherever Congress and the President dictate."

The Billy Sunday tabernacle, prepared for the New York crusade, was dedicated on this day, without the presence of Billy Sunday, however. The patriotic note was sounded by Bishop Luther B. Wilson, of the Methodist Episcopal Church, who was the principal speaker. He said:

"With you to help him and with God above, Mr. Sunday will lift the level of the religious life of this city. People away from this city think of New York as money mad, as pleasure mad; but you have reared this place as a testimonial of your conviction that this city needs God."

"In moments when the great principles of nations are in jeopardy men show whether they are patriots or partizans. If they are patriots they rise above the principles of party and are guided by the welfare of nations. This tabernacle is not adorned

with rich hangings, like that first tabernacle of the Israelites in the wilderness. But here [laying his hand on the flag draped over the pulpit] is an ornament, here is a banner, here is a symbol which is so deep in our lives that we call it a holy thing."

"To-day it is not a question of Jefferson or Hamilton in the nation. It is a question of Washington and Lincoln in the nation; and about those names and about this old flag must Americans gather as Americans never gathered before. In like manner I welcome the cooperation of denominations in this work; I hail gladly the day when it is not a question of Wesley or Calvin, not a question of creeds; when above all the personalities of human history we look into the face of Jesus Christ."

The anti-war note, however, was sounded by the Rev. Dr. John Haynes Holmes, of the Church of the Messiah, who said that more than two years of world-conflict had failed to shake his conviction that strife among God's children was never right and never would be countenanced from his pulpit. He is quoted in the press as uttering these words:

"No man is wise enough, no nation is important enough, no human interest is precious enough, to justify the wholesale destruction and murder which constitute war."

"These words, spoken in this place more than two years ago, I must reaffirm this day. Nothing has happened in this period to change my opinion of war. On the contrary, much has happened to confirm it. If war is right, then Christianity is wrong, false, a lie. If Christianity is right, then war is wrong, false, a lie."

"No order of a President or a Governor will persuade me or force me to this business of killing. So long as I am your minister, the Church of the Messiah will answer no military summons. Other clergymen may pray to God for victory for our arms—I will not. In this church, if nowhere else in all America, the Germans will still be included in the family of God's children. No word of hatred shall be spoken against them, no evil fate shall be desired upon them. I will remember the starving millions of Belgium, Serbia, Poland, and Armenia, whom my countrymen may neglect for the more important business of killing Germans.

"If you say that this is a war of defense against wanton and intolerable aggression, I must reply that every blow which we have endured has been primarily a blow directed, not against ourselves, but against England, and that it has yet to be proved that Germany has any intention or desire of attacking us."

"If you say that this war is a life and death struggle for the preservation of civilization against barbarism, I must ask you why we remained neutral when Belgium was raped, and were at last aroused to action, not by the cries of the stricken abroad, but by our own losses in men and money."

"If you say that this war is a last resort in a situation which every other method, patiently tried, has failed to meet, I must answer that this is not true—that other ways and means of action, tried by experience and justified by success, have been laid before the Administration and wilfully rejected."

"I deny without evasion that anything that I have said, or may say, can be interpreted as traitorous or disloyal. In time of war, as in time of peace; in the hour of sin, as in the hour of glory, I shall love my country and serve her to the end. Nothing that America can do can quench my passion for her beauty or divert my loyalty from her service. In this impending crisis with Germany I believe that she is wrong."