

The New Era<sup>1</sup>

Earl C. Davis

Pittsfield, MA

September 13, 1914<sup>2</sup>

Second Sunday of September 1914

When we are most securely snuggled in the warm comfortables of our smug complacency on the narrow couch of provincial patriotism, a sudden alarm that arouses us to the world of large things finds us stupefied and sluggish/~~lethargic~~/lethargic. Such is the situation today. When I selected the subject of this sermon before going away on my vacation, we were still, as a people, resting upon the soft couch of Universal Peace, Christian Civilization and modern feelings of goodwill, unwilling to believe that Europe could become embroiled in war. So confident were we that the countries of Europe were too civilized, too thoroughly impregnated with the teachings of International Peace, too keenly conscious of the tremendous cost in life and wealth, to permit themselves to be drawn into war, that up to the very moment of conflict, we seemed to believe that such a war as is now devastating Europe was a thing impossible and unimaginable. But all these soft delusions have been ruthlessly thrust aside. The armed peace of Western Civilization has been broken, and the most brutal war of history is now being staged.

Yet I find that such a calamity as we are now forced to recognize has no material effect upon what I wished to say at the opening service of this year's work in this fellowship. In

---

<sup>1</sup> Two manuscripts for this survive. One is typed on full pages headed with "THE NEW ERA" all caps. The other typed on half pages headed with "The New Era" caps and lower case. The "caps/lower case" version included a small number of hand-written edits, which the "all caps" version did not include. In this transcription I have started with the "all caps" version and added in blue alterations found in the "caps/lower case" version.

<sup>2</sup> A hand-written note on the "caps/lower case" version notes, "Preached at Lancaster October 23, 1921." Obviously, this is in addition to the first preaching on September 13, 1914, at the outbreak of World War I.

fact, this war but makes more pungent, to me at least, but neither more nor less true, the principles which I wished to call to your attention. Quite regardless of personalities and superficial incidents, the present war is the logical, if not the inevitable result of the last century of Christian History. You may have wondered why I have not shown any great interest in the World Peace Movement. It is because I have felt that so long as the stakes in international competition are the bread and butter of the people, developments into open breaches of the peace are inevitable. When People get hungry, they fight. Kaiser William II of Germany, remarkable both for his insight and his frank speaking, stated the essence of modern imperialism, its purposes, its methods, and its spirit, in a sermon delivered to the crew and officers on board the Hohenzollern Sunday, July 29, 1900. This was at the time of the Boxer uprising, which represented a desperate attempt on the part of patriotic Chinamen to resist the encroachments of Imperialistic Christendom upon the integrity of their national life. The Kaiser in this sermon but declares openly what we all know was the real attitude of the nations of the West. He is speaking from the text, "But as long as Moses held up his hands, praying, Israel prevailed; but when he lowered his hands, Amalek prevailed."<sup>3</sup> After recalling the incidents of this story, and vividly picturing the conflict between Moses and Amalek, he goes on to say,

And who today does not understand the lesson it conveys? For again the pagan spirit of Amalek has stirred in far Asia, and with great cunning and power, with fire and murder, they seek to hinder the triumphal march of Christian morals, Christian Faith, of European commerce and education. And again God has ordered, "Choose men; go further and fight against Amalek."<sup>4</sup>

This passage lays bare the entire purpose, method, and spirit of the imperialistic program of Western Civilization. United in their efforts to divide the trade of China, but fighting in their struggle among themselves. The surviving remnants of a nationalistic patriotism, impregnated by the more sordid aspects of industrial expansion, has given birth to this national

---

<sup>3</sup> Exodus 17:11.

<sup>4</sup> This sermon of the Kaiser's is discussed and quoted at length in "The Kaiser," in Arthur Page, ed., *The World's Work: War Series*, Garden City, New Jersey: Doubleday, Page and Co., 1914. This passage is quoted on page 515.

competitor, to this commercial imperialism, loading us down with intolerable standing armies and burdensome navies, and finally plunging Europe into this fratricidal war. Whether it is England in India, or Belgium, England, France, Germany in South Africa, or the United States in the Philippines or Cuba, or all of them together in China, buying the integrity of a nation, it is the expression of the same industrial imperialism, dominated by a spirit of exploitation, self-seeking in purpose, and war-like in method if occasion demands. In fact when stripped of all its verbiage and frills, the militant foreign missionary movement is but an expression of this same imperialistic point of view. Absolutism, authority, and proselyting in religion; exploitation, profits, and Mammonism in industry and commerce; imperialism and armed force in national life; secret alliances, jingo patriotism, leading inevitably to open war in international affairs. These are the forces that have been at work for the past hundred years especially, dressed at times in the soft garments of international friendliness, robed frequently in the white raiments of benevolent protectorates, or a passionate zeal for saving the souls of the heathen, but always and forever backed by the assumption that when this triumphal march of Christian Morals, of Christian Faith, of European Commerce and education is resisted by a poor folk, then we are commanded by God, as the Kaiser declares, to draw the sword. But now the sword is drawn, and the mask is thrown off, and the card-house of international friendliness and Christian religion, so-called, has felled to the ground in a mass of ruins.

"But" you say, "the United States is different. It is not involved in this struggle. It maintains its position of neutrality. It is at peace with the world." Not so fast. But a few months since we stood upon the brink of war with a neighbor nation, and the forces that were trying with all their might to force the issue were those same imperialistic industrial forces that have driven Europe to her slaughter. We have been imperialistic. Perhaps the war has passed. I hope so. But the fact remains that our neutrality today is not so much the result of a higher ethical standard of the nation as a whole as it is the fact that we are geographically isolated. In common with other nations, we hold dominion over conquered tribes, by power of sword and the fear of sword. To our discredit, be it recalled that our conquests were gained over a weak and impotent nation and people. Our attitude towards the real nature of the

situation is revealed by hopes which we have as to the effect of this war upon our own country. You know as well as I know that we are much more interested in the problem of taking advantage of this European war to further our interests in foreign markets than we are as to the possible results in making way for a more inspired and richer civilization. The government is expected to bend all its energies to promoting our control on foreign markets. To be specific, we are interested right here in Pittsfield, and in this room, to know whether the suspension in Germany may not give our own electrical interests the advantage in competing in South America, and thus enable us to profit by Germany's misfortune. We seek to fatten on another's distress. We are part and parcel of the same scramble for foreign markets, and the complications that this struggle gives rise to, that is in the background of this war. We are fortunate in our isolation, but it is a fortune that we have no right to gloat over.

Still further it is to be noted that the effects of such purposes and methods of national life and civilized development are to be seen not only in the ravages of war, but in the ravages of peace as well. What results can be affected in times of war we are now being shown in a most convincing manner. Even the wildest flight of our imagination cannot grasp the full significance of the loss and devastation involved. Yet I sometimes think that the ravages of national competition in times of peace are quite as brutal and quite as grinding as in times of war. Again, I refer to a significant passage from a letter of instruction by the German Kaiser to the Imperial Chancellor, in which he states clearly the essential burden which national competition throws upon the shoulders of the working classes. This letter refers to an attempt that he was making to bring about an international agreement to better the conditions of the working classes. Under date of Feb. 8, 1890, he instructs the Imperial Chancellor to set in motion the machinery for the purpose of formulating an international agreement with France, Belgium, England, and Switzerland for meeting the desires and requirements "of the laboring classes." Note carefully the language and its implications.

I am resolved to assist, so far as the limitations drawn by the necessity of keeping German industry in condition to compete with the world's markets permit me, in meliorating the condition of German working man. Serious losses, of course, of our home industries

by reason of a decrease in our exports would not only injure the employers, but would also deprive their employees of the means of existence. The difficulties created by international competition when trying to improve the condition of our laboring classes can only be partially overcome by international agreement among these countries most interested in the world's markets.<sup>5</sup>

This is the crux of the whole problem. Commerce and industrial expansion in competition with human life. It is because of the fact of the situation so clearly set forth in the Kaiser's statement that I hold to the opinion that these present wars are but an acute expression, a dramatic clash of forces that, for a hundred years, by a slow process of semi-starvation and excessive toil, [have] been devitalizing the laboring classes of the modern world, and, at the same time, have been brutalizing all society. The pressure of these forces, expressing themselves both in industry and politics, has retarded the development of western civilization, has sent the Irish, the Germans, the English, the Scotch, the Scandinavians, the Italians, and finally the Eastern Europeans to this new western world in search of a chance to live. Finally, their pressure is again manifested in the poverty, the unemployment, the congestion of our own industrial cities today, in our labor troubles, and in our interminable social problems. As the German Kaiser so clearly implies, not only are the ravages of war but the ravages of peace chargeable to the fundamental purposes and methods of this international industrial competition.

The present war is but the logical—not to say the inevitable—culmination of the process that has been going on for decades. It is useless to say that this ruler or that ruler is responsible for this war, and still more absurd to say that it is due to a series of blunders. Its causes are more fundamental. The world moves under the dominion of an inexorable logic. Whatsoever a man or a nation sows, that shall it also reap. We have been sowing the seeds of disruption and conflicts among nations, and we are reaping the fruits thereof today.

---

<sup>5</sup> This passage can be found quoted in James Harvey Robinson and Charles A. Beard, *Readings in Modern European History*, Volume II: Europe Since the Congress of Vienna, Boston: Ginn and Company, 1909, p. 203.

But in speaking thus of international competition and exchange, I am by no means blind to the essential constructive character of the process described. Quite apart from the serious limitations which I have thus mentioned and the evils resulting therefrom, we must not overlook the great advantages which have accrued to society through this very process. Not only has the industrial development of the past century, stimulated by national competition, made vast strides in the advancement of the power of man over nature and in the perfection of the tools of production and distribution, but quite as important have been the advantages, resulting from the breaking down of barriers, the elimination of prejudices, the interchange of thought, and the comparative study of ethical and religious standards. The very channels of communication that have carried the products of industry from one people to another, the very methods employed in furthering this industrial competition among nations, have also served as channels of an international comity that in the long run is bound to develop relations as soundly peaceful and as fundamentally constructive as the forces now dominating international relationships are disruptive. For be it recalled that out of this interplay of nations has developed those ideas of democracy and modernism whose rise as working forces in society are almost contemporaneous with the rise of industrial nationalism. Their slow and steady spread in the face of an established opposition into fields not only of politics but of intellect, science, education, and religion is one of the great achievements—it is the great achievement—of the last century. In the midst of the turmoil of war and peace among nations today, in the midst of the pressing problems of the social order, the increasing strength of the appeal of the democratic principles in modern life is the witness for a fairer day in the world's history. This is what I wish to say at this time. You are facing problems and adventures in life at a time when the most interesting developments of known history are taking place. The establishment of the principles of democracy in the organized life of man, making real and effective in the common life and the relations of men those great principles that have been gleaned from the interplay of nations and from the development of industrial society during the past hundred years or more, that is the challenging task to which the times in which we live call us. When President Wilson sent out his call for a day devoted to prayer for peace among the nations of Europe, he was voicing a thought that has sprung again and again into the minds of men since the ravages of the present war began. But how

impotent and helpless men have felt! On the one side, the great hope of international relationships based upon friendliness and good will. On the other side, the cold facts of people of the same great race, or the same religious traditions, engaged in a most brutal war. Is the dream of world peace a sham and a mockery? Is the hope of domestic tranquility a lie? "It is all a sham and a lie," you have said at one moment, and then you have risen to the faith in the substantial integrity of life and the universe in which you have lived. You have settled yourself quietly to fight out within yourself this ever-present antagonism between fact and hope, and you have learned that the hope of today becomes the fact of tomorrow. But just the hope itself is of no avail. The task of men and the task of man is to achieve and establish the reality of hope. This conception of domestic peace and justice, this conception of a just international comity is something new under the sun. Only now are we coming to see that God is not a God of the Christians alone, but of the Buddhist and the Mohammedan as well. Our absolutism has departed. We are giving way to an interchange of values. The trouble is that these new conceptions have not been made flesh in the established relations of men. In the established relations of men, the old order of absolutism, authority, arrogant self-sufficiency backed by brute force, still obtains, and these purposes and methods which have brought on the war of Europe are falling by the weight of their own impotency. Every social development carries within itself the antitoxin that cures its own maladies. The era of industrial imperialism has broken down the barriers of nations, softened the prejudices of races, and paved the way for the emergence of those principles which will bring a new order out of the present chaos. The principles of absolutism, imperialism, arrogant authority, have done their work, and are now showing the impotency of ~~their~~/their decay. Out of their ruins are rising with greater clearness than the world has ever seen, the essential principles of democracy whose purpose is the development, not of states and nations and ecclesiastical organizations, but the development of men, strong, efficient, self-reliant, and free; whose methods are not those of force and competition for the daily bread of men, but the methods of cooperation, fellowship, respect, and integrity.

This is a task worthy of real men and women. To it you are called by the exigencies of the times in which you live. First of all, must we understand its essential purpose. Not the

building of a great nation, but the development of a great free people, whose common interests are accomplished in a common organization; not the building of a great ecclesiastical order, but a simple fellowship for things of the spirit; not a big foreign trade, and a great ~~national/industrial~~/industrial prosperity, but the elimination of hunger and poverty, the inclusive common command over the resources of nature. In short, we seek life in its fullness and its richness, its adventure and its freedom from the pressure of a grinding toil and monotony.

Above all and most difficult is to follow and extend the methods of democracy. Not force, not authority, not bombardment, but the methods which science has adopted applied to all the relations of life, applied in politics, applied in religion, education, and art. The method of patient experiment and careful demonstration with the mind open to every new fact, ready for each new development, with a mind always forward looking, proving all things and holding fast to those that experience shown to be true. Duly grateful for all that the past has done, entirely acknowledging all that we have inherited, but never idolizing the products of the past, whether they be graven images, printed books, or great souls. Great as the past has been, it is incomparable with what the future will be. The great things both in art and religion, both in men and institutions for men, are ahead of us, not behind us. And at this moment we are trimming ourselves for the most enriching era in history. I bid you to have confidence in the integrity of your own souls, in the integrity of ~~the/your~~/your universe in which you live. The dreams of justice, the conceptions of an exalted manhood and womanhood have developed in your minds and are surviving there, because the universal environment demands them, because it nurtures them and is establishing them. The passing drama of the death struggles of the ~~worn/worked~~/worked out principles of an industrial imperialism are as nothing compared to the quiet, persistent spread of the principles and methods of democracy. The former is with the past, the latter lies unfulfilled at your very feet, calling you to a life and a task without parallel in the history of man.