

## Reverend Mercer Johnston's Letter to His Father During the War, October 12, 1914

October 12th/14

My dear Father:-

Your letter of the 6th inst came this morning, Monday. Thank you very much for it. You are a very much better correspondent than I seem to be able to become, although my good intentions are most serious, and most frequently renewed. I have been at it every moment since our return except on afternoon that I took off for a mild lady-like game of tennis, and the time I managed to steal for Fred and his family during their visit of a week, which ended Friday, and which we enjoyed. Fred has gone on to Atlantic City, and Annie and the children are either with Mrs. Wuelder in New York or else on their way to Texas. They are not decided when they leave here just what their plans were.

I still continue to be absorbed in the War. It is seldom out of my thoughts except when I am asleep. I have expressed my sentiments plainly several times from the pulpit. The congregations as a whole is strongly I favor of the Allies, but one or two members of our choir and several families in the pews are pro German. I am sorry if their feelings are hurt: but it cannot be helped. With me the issue is a life and death one, and I cannot act as though it were not. The German Idea that is now in the saddle is to me absolutely detestable, and I mean to contribute all I possibly can to see that it is unhorsed. It is by chance Germany should win in this struggle, such as I detest militaries, I mean to advocate the quadrupling of our navy and the raising of an army of 5,000,000 men. The German Idea is in violent conflict with the American Idea, and unless the German Idea is unhorsed in this war, the clash between it and the American Idea must come in the very near future. Indeed, in my opinion, it ought to come the moment it looks as if there were a chance of the German Idea triumphing. I am no defender of England right or wrong, but on the lines on which she is now fighting I would sacrifice all I have, including my life, rather than see her defeated. Feeling this way, it is idle to talk to me about neutrality. My neutrality is based solely upon my expectation of the triumph of the Allies. I could no more remain neutral towards the program that the Kaiser and his war party have put forth than I could remain neutral towards the program of this Satanic Majesty. I am willing to believe that the great body of the German people are unaware of the full import of the proposition to which they have been committed by their leaders, and when the day of judgment comes no doubt they will have to have forgiveness meted out to them for their ignorance: but in so far as I can hasten Germany's day of judgment I mean to with all my might. Naturally my attitude is resented by some of my fellow citizens who call themselves German-Americans. One brother of the Lutheran persuasion has hurled railing accusations against me in the press, and I have received several letters from irate citizens, one going so far as to remind me of the "furor teutonicus," over all of which I have smiled sadly. I am not wasting my time answering these gentlemen, though I have been tempted to ask the fellow who hinted at German displeasure to send me a photograph of the first American he found who seemed at all awestruck at the thought of what Germans called "furor teutonicus" and what the world calls crude barbarian masquerading under the amusing name of "culture."

I began this letter this forenoon. I have been interrupted four times since I began. It is now nearly four o'clock. So it goes. And now I must go to keep an engagement.

I am sending you The Illustrated London News, and I also sent you a publication gotten out of The Times of New York containing the English and German White Papers and the Russian Orange Paper. I will send you Bernhardt's "Germany and the New War" if you care to read it. He is a disciple of the Nietzsche and Treitschke, both of whom had absolute contempt for Christianity, regarding it as nothing more than pap for babes. Treitschke is said to have had more influence in molding the present generations of Germans than any single man in Germany, and every sort of honor was heaped on him by scholastic and official Germany.

Of course we observed Peace Sunday, but as you have seen by my sermon I did not indulge in anything like a pipe dream. I faced the situation as I see it. We took up a collection for the Red Cross, and sent it on without any strings tied to it. Katherine is at the head of a movement in the Parish to send on a box of supplies to the Belgians. Personally we expect to contribute what we can each month while the war lasts. Except in the case of the Red Cross, our help will be for the Allies; although in the end, when I see Germany where she richly deserves to be, I will not withhold help from her people.

Katherine joins me in love to you and Aunt Mamie.

Your affectionate son,

Mercer Johnston

*Handwriting left of print, page 1: We did go to [illegible] for a day with the [illegible], but it was a thing we had to do.*

*Handwriting top of print, page 1: My assistant is promising. I have him Sundays and Tuesdays. It was the best I could do. I also have a secretary but she is quite green as yet, and not a stenographer.*

*Handwriting bottom of page, page 3: The argument by which Roosevelt makes out a case for each nation in turn would empty every fail in Christendom. According to his ethics, fear justifies anything and everything. Poor Teddy. He does want to get to the White House again so badly.*