

6. *'Patriotism is not enough... I must have no hatred or bitterness towards anyone'*

What are we to make of Edith Cavell's famous words to Rev Gahan in her cell the night before she was shot?

Patriotism – for her this *did* have value – at the execution the last sentence she uttered was *'I die for God and my country'*

For her patriotism, be it German, Belgian or British patriotism, was *'not enough'* – partly because it tends towards xenophobia, hatred and bitterness. Had it not, at least in part, led to the war?

As the Germans occupied her beloved city of Brussels where she'd spent 12 years of the 30 of her adult life she wrote: *'We were divided between pity for these poor fellows, far from their country and their people, suffering the weariness and fatigue of an arduous campaign, and hate of a vindictive foe bringing ruin and desolation on hundreds of happy homes and to a prosperous and peaceful land'*.

She had steeled herself to announce to her nurses as the Germans moved ever deeper into Belgium that they would nurse men from both sides: *'Any wounded soldier must be treated, friend or foe. Each man is a father, husband or son. As nurses you must take no part in the quarrel – our work is for humanity. The profession of nursing knows no frontiers'*.

Her homecoming may have focused onlookers as to reflect whether all the sacrifices by both sides over the four long years were necessary... Was there not a way of learning to live together: to love our enemies, as Jesus had taught? He (and she) had ultimately died living this love out.

As she read her Bible, she will have pondered Jesus's prayer: *'Our Father in Heaven .. Your Kingdom come.. Your will be done. Yours is the kingdom, the power and the glory.'* Any nationalistic patriotism, focused on one nation's interests, was, in a Christian understanding, contrary to God's vision of peace and the flourishing of all men and women.

PHOTOS:

German infantry arriving in Brussels August 20 1914

Source SuperStock 1788 - 1037

