

On War - Effects of War.

by Jonathan Dymond

The speaker argues that war is not justified based on its moral consequences, and that its effects on society are pernicious and destructive.

Scripture: Proverbs 3:30, Isaiah 2:4, Matthew 5:9, Matthew 26:52, Acts 5:29, Romans 12:18, Romans 14:19, 1 Thessalonians 5:15, James 3:18, 1 Peter 3:11

Topics: "Christian Pacifism", "Moral Consequences"

Description

Jonathan Dymond preaches about the devastating effects of war, highlighting the intense sufferings, irreparable deprivations, and moral consequences it brings upon society. He emphasizes the immense loss of human life, the financial distress, and the moral degradation that war inflicts on individuals, particularly soldiers. Dymond condemns the immorality, servility, and slavery inherent in military obedience, urging Christians to refuse to participate in war as it goes against the principles of Christianity. He calls for passive resistance and non-compliance with unjust orders, emphasizing the importance of upholding moral agency and rejecting the iniquity of war.

Transcript

OBSERVATIONS ON THE EFFECTS OF WAR.

War's least horror is th' ensanguin'd field. - Barbauld.

There are few maxims of more unfailing truth than that "A tree is known by its fruits;" and I will acknowledge that if the lawfulness of war were to be determined by a reference to its consequences, I should willingly consign it to this test, in the belief that, if popular impressions were suspended, a good, or a benevolent, or a reasoning man would find little cause to decide in its favor.

In attempting to illustrate some of the effects of war, it is my purpose to inquire not so much into its civil or political, as into its moral consequences; and of the latter, to notice those, chiefly, which commonly obtain little of our inquiry or attention. To speak strictly indeed, civil and political considerations are necessarily involved in the moral tendency: for the happiness of society is always diminished by the diminution of morality; and enlightened policy knows that the greatest support of a state is the virtue of the people.

The reader needs not be reminded of - what nothing but the frequency of the calamity can make him forget - the intense sufferings and irreparable deprivations which a battle inevitably entails upon private life. These are calamities of which the world thinks little, and which, if it thought of them, it could not remove. A father or a husband can seldom be replaced: a void is created in the domestic felicity, which there is little hope that the future will fill. By the slaughter of a war, there are thousands who weep in unpitied and unnoticed secrecy, whom the world does not see; and thousands who retire, in silence, to hopeless poverty, for whom it does not care. To these, the conquest of a kingdom is of little importance. The loss of a protector or a friend is ill repaid by empty glory. An addition of territory may add titles to a king, but the brilliancy of a crown throws but little light upon domestic gloom. It is not my intention to insist upon these calamities, intense, and irreparable, and unnumbered as they are; but those who begin a war without taking them into their estimates of its consequences, must be regarded as, at most, half-seeing politicians. The legitimate object of political measures is the good of the people - and a great sum of good a war must produce, if it outbalances even this portion of its mischiefs.

In the more obvious effects of war, there is, however, a sufficient sum of evil and wretchedness. The most dreadful of these is the destruction of human life. The frequency with which this destruction is represented to our minds has almost extinguished our perception of its awfulness and horror. In the interval between anno 1141 and 1815, our country has been at war with France alone, two hundred and sixty-six years. If to this we add our wars with other countries, probably we shall find that one-half of the last six or seven centuries has been spent by this country in war! A dreadful picture of human violence! There is no means of knowing how many victims have been sacrificed during this lapse of ages. Those who have fallen in battle, and those who have perished "in tents and ships, amidst damps and putrefaction," probably amount to a number greater than the number of men now existing in France and England together. And where is our equivalent good? - "The wars of Europe, for these two hundred years last past, by the confession of all parties, have really ended in the advantage of none, but to the manifest detriment of all." This is the testimony of the celebrated Dr. Josiah Tucker, Dean of Gloucester: and Erasmus has said, "I know not whether ANY WAR ever succeeded so fortunately in all its events, but that the conqueror, if he had a heart to feel or an understanding to judge as he ought to do, repented that he had ever engaged in it at all."

Since the last war, we have heard much of the distresses of the country; and whatever be the opinion whether they have been brought upon us by the peace, none will question whether they have been brought upon us by war. The peace may be the occasion of them, but war has been the cause. I have no wish to declaim upon the amount of our national debt - that it is a great evil, and that it has been brought upon us by successive contests, no one disputes. Such considerations, ought, undoubtedly, to influence the conduct of public men in their disagreements with other states, even if higher considerations do not influence it. They ought to form part of the calculations of the evil of hostility. I believe that a greater mass of human suffering and loss of human enjoyment are occasioned by the pecuniary distresses of a war, than any ordinary advantages of a war, compensate. But this consideration seems too remote to obtain our notice. Anger at offence, or hope of triumph, overpowers the sober calculations of reason, and outbalances the weight of after and long continued calamities. If the happiness of the people were, what it ought to be, the primary and the ultimate object of national measures, I think that the policy which pursued this object would often find that even the pecuniary distresses resulting from a war make a greater deduction from the quantum of felicity, than those evils which the war may have been designed to avoid. At least the distress is certain; the advantage doubtful. It is known that during the past eight years of the present peace, a considerable portion of the community have been in suffering in consequence of war.

Eight years of suffering to a million of human creatures, is a serious thing! "It is no answer to say, that this universal suffering, and even the desolation that attends it, are the inevitable consequences and events of war, how warrantably soever entered into, but rather an argument that no war can be warrantably entered into, that may produce such intolerable mischiefs."1

There is much of truth, as there is of eloquence, in these observations of one of the most acute intellects that our country has produced: - "It is wonderful with what coolness and indifference the greater part of mankind see war commenced. Those that hear of it at a distance, or read of it in books, but have never presented its evils to their minds, consider it as little more than a splendid game, a proclamation, an army, a battle, and a triumph. Some, indeed, must perish in the most successful field; but they die upon the bed of honor, resign their lives amidst the joys of conquest, and filled with England's glory, smile in death. The life of a modern soldier is ill represented by heroic fiction. War has means of destruction more formidable than the cannon and the sword. Of the thousands and ten thousands that perished in our late contests with France and Spain, a very small part ever felt the stroke of an enemy. The rest languished in tents and ships, amidst damps and putrefaction, gasping and groaning, unpitied amongst men made obdurate by long continuance of hopeless misery; and were at last whelmed in pits, or heaved into the ocean, without notice, and without remembrance. By incommodious encampments and unwholesome stations, where courage is useless and enterprise impracticable, fleets are silently dispeopled, and armies sluggishly melted away.

"Thus is a people gradually exhausted for the most part with little effect. The wars of civilized nations make very slow changes in the system of empire. The public perceives scarcely any alteration but an increase of debt; and the few individuals who are benefited, are not supposed to have the clearest right to their advantages. If he that shared the danger enjoyed the profit, and after bleeding in the battle, grew rich by the victory, he might show his gains without envy. But at the conclusion of a ten years' war, how are we recompensed for the death of multitudes, and the expense of millions, but by contemplating the sudden glories of paymasters and agents, and contractors and commissaries, whose equipages shine like meteors, and whose palaces rise like exhalations?

"These are the men, who without virtue, labor, or hazard, are growing rich as their country is impoverished; they rejoice when obstinacy or ambition adds another year to slaughter and devastation, and laugh from their desks at bravery and science, while they are adding figure to figure, and cipher to cipher, hoping for a new contract from a new armament, and computing the profits of a siege or a tempest."2

Our business, however, is principally with the moral effects of war.

"The tenderness of nature, and the integrity of manners, which are driven away or powerfully discountenanced by the corruption of war, are not quickly recovered - and the weeds which grow up in the shortest war, can hardly be pulled up and extirpated without a long and unsuspected peace." - "War introduces and propagates opinions and practice as much against heaven as against earth; - it lays our natures and manners as waste as our gardens and our habitations; and we can as easily preserve the beauty of the one as the integrity of the other, under the cursed jurisdiction of drums and trumpets."3

"War does more harm to the morals of men than even to their property and persons."4 "It is a temporary repeal of all the principles of virtue."5 "There is not a virtue of Gospel goodness but has its deathblow from war."6

I do not know whether the greater sum of moral evil resulting from war, is suffered by those who are immediately engaged in it, or by the public. The mischief is most extensive upon the community, but upon the profession it is most intense.

Rara fides pietasque viris qui castra sequuntur.

LUCAN.

No one pretends to applaud the morals of an army, and for its religion, few think of it at all. A soldier is depraved even to a proverb. The fact is too notorious to be insisted upon, that thousands who had filled their stations in life with propriety, and been virtuous from principle, have lost, by a military life, both the practice and the regard of morality; and when they have become habituated to the vices of war, have laughed at their honest and plodding brethren who are still spiritless enough for virtue, or stupid enough for piety. The vices which once had shocked them become the subject, not of acquiescence, but of exultation. "Almost all the professions," says Dr. Knox, "have some characteristic manners which the professors seem to adopt with little examination, as necessary and as honorable distinctions. It happens, unfortunately, that profligacy, libertinism, and infidelity are thought, by weaker minds, almost as necessary a part of a soldier's uniform, as his shoulder-knot. To hesitate at an oath, to decline intoxication, to profess a regard for religion, would be almost as ignominious as to refuse a challenge."⁷

It is, however, not necessary to insist upon the immoral influence of war upon the military character, since no one probably will dispute it. Nor is it difficult to discover how the immorality is occasioned. It is obvious that those who are continually engaged in a practice "in which almost all the vices are incorporated," and who promote this practice with individual eagerness, cannot, without the intervention of a miracle, be otherwise than collectively depraved.

If the soldier engages in the destruction of his species he should at least engage in it with reluctance, and abandon it with joy. The slaughter of his fellow men should be dreadful in execution and in thought. But what is his aversion or reluctance? He feels none - it is not even a subject of seriousness to him. He butchers his fellow candidates for heaven, as a woodman fells a coppice; with as little reluctance and as little regret.

Those who will compute the tendency of this familiarity with human destruction, cannot doubt whether it will be pernicious to the moral character. What is the hope, that he who is familiar with murder, who has himself often perpetrated it, and who exults in the perpetration, will retain undepraved the principles of virtue? His moral feelings are blunted: his moral vision is obscured. We say his moral vision is obscured; for we do not think it possible that he should retain even the perception of Christian purity. The soldier, again, who plunders the citizen of another nation without remorse or reflection, and bears away the spoil with triumph, will inevitably lose something of his principles of probity. These principles are shaken; an inroad is made upon their integrity, and it is an inroad that makes after inroads the more easy. Mankind do not generally resist the influence of habit. If we rob and shoot those who are "enemies" to-day, we are in some degree prepared to shoot and rob those who are not enemies to-morrow. The strength of the restraining moral principle is impaired. Law may, indeed, still restrain us from violence; but the power and efficiency of principle is diminished. And this alienation of the mind from the practice, the love, and the perception of Christian purity therefore, of necessity extends its influence to the other circumstances of life; and it is hence, in part, that the general profligacy of armies arises. That which we have not practised in war we are little likely to practice in peace; and there is no hope we shall possess the goodness which

we neither love nor perceive.

Another means by which war becomes pernicious to the moral character of the soldier, is the incapacity which the profession occasions for the sober pursuits of life. "The profession of a soldier," says Dr. Paley, "almost always unfits men for the business of regular occupations." On the question, whether it be better that of three inhabitants of a village, one should be a soldier and two husbandmen, or that all should occasionally become both, he says that from the latter arrangement the country receives three raw militia men and three idle and profligate peasants. War cannot be continual. Soldiers must sometimes become citizens: and citizens who are unfit for stated business will be idle; and they who are idle will scarcely be virtuous. A political project, therefore, such as a war, which will eventually pour fifty or a hundred thousand of such men upon the community, must of necessity be an enormous evil to a state. It were an infelicitous defence to say, that soldiers do not become idle until the war is closed or they leave the army. - To keep men out of idleness by employing them in cutting other men's limbs and bodies, is at least an extraordinary economy; and the profligacy still remains; for unhappily if war keeps soldiers busy, it does not keep them good.

By a peculiar and unhappy coincidence, the moral evil attendant upon the profession is perpetuated by the after system of half-pay. We have no concern with this system on political or pecuniary considerations; but it will be obvious that those who return from war, with the principles and habits of war, are little likely to improve either by a life without necessary occupation or express object. By this system, there are thousands of men, in the prime or in the bloom of life, who live without such object or occupation. This would be an evil if it happened to any set of men, but upon men who have been soldiers the evil is peculiarly intense. He whose sense of moral obligation has been impaired by the circumstances of his former life, and whose former life has induced habits of disinclination to regular pursuits, is the man who, above all others, it is unfortunate for the interests of purity should be supported on "half-pay." If war have occasioned "unfitness for regular occupations," he will not pursue them; if it have familiarized him with profligacy, he will be little restrained by virtue. And the consequences of consigning men under such circumstances to society, at a period of life when the mind is busy and restless and the passions are strong, must, of inevitable necessity, be bad. - The officer who leaves the army with the income only which the country allows him, often finds sufficient difficulty in maintaining the character of a gentleman. A gentleman, however, he will be; and he who resolves to appear rich whilst he is poor, who will not increase his fortune by industry, and who has learnt to have few restraints from principle, sometimes easily persuades himself to pursue schemes of but very exceptionable probity. Indeed, by his peculiar law, the "law of honor," honesty is not required.

I do not know whether it be politic that he who has held a commission should not be expected to use a ledger or a yard; but since, by thus becoming a "military gentleman," the number is increased of those who regulate their conduct by the law of honor, the rule is necessarily pernicious in its effects. When it is considered that this law allows of "profaneness, neglect of public worship and private devotion, cruelty to servants, rigorous treatment of tenants or other dependants, want of charity to the poor, injuries to tradesmen by insolvency or delay of payment, with numberless examples of the same kind;" that it is, "in most instances, favorable to the licentious indulgence of the natural passions;" that it allows of "adultery, drunkenness, prodigality, duelling, and of revenge in the extreme"⁸ - when all this is considered, it is manifestly inevitable, that those who regulate their conduct by the maxims of such a law, must become, as a body, reduced to a low station in the scale of morality.⁹

We insist upon these things because they are the consequences of war. We have no concern with "half-pay," or with the "law of honor;" but with war, which extends the evil of the one, and creates the evil of the other. Soldiers may be depraved - and part of their depravity is, undoubtedly, their crime, but part also is their misfortune. The whole evil is imputable to war; and we say that this evil forms a powerful evidence against it, whether we direct that evidence to the abstract question of its lawfulness or to the practical question of its expediency. That can scarcely be lawful which necessarily occasions such enormous depravity. That can scarcely be expedient which is so pernicious to virtue, and therefore to the state.

The economy of war requires of every soldier an implicit submission to his superior; and this submission is required of every gradation of rank to that above it. This system may be necessary to hostile operations, but I think it is unquestionably adverse to intellectual and moral excellence.

The very nature of unconditional obedience implies the relinquishment of the use of the reasoning powers. Little more is required of the soldier than that he be obedient and brave. His obedience is that of an animal, which is moved by a goad or a bit, without judgment or volition of his own; and his bravery is that of a mastiff, which fights whatever mastiff others put before him. - It is obvious that in such agency, the intellect and the understanding have little part. Now I think that this is important. He who, with whatever motive, resigns the direction of his conduct implicitly to another, surely cannot retain that erectness and independence of mind, that manly consciousness of mental freedom, which is one of the highest privileges of our nature. The rational being becomes reduced in the intellectual scale: an encroachment is made upon the integrity of its independence. God has given us, individually, capacities for the regulation of our individual conduct. To resign its direction, therefore, to the despotism of another, appears to be an unmanly and unjustifiable relinquishment of the privileges which He has granted to us. Referring simply to the conclusions of reason, I think those conclusions would be, that military obedience must be pernicious to the mind. And if we proceed from reasoning to facts, I believe that our conclusions will be confirmed. Is the military character distinguished by intellectual eminence? Is it not distinguished by intellectual inferiority? I speak of course of the exercise of intellect, and I believe that if we look around us, we shall find that no class of men, in a parallel rank in society, exercise it less, or less honorably to human nature, than the military profession.¹⁰ I do not, however, attribute the want of intellectual excellence solely to the implicit submissions of a military life. Nor do I say that this want is so much the fault of the soldier, and of the circumstances to which he is subjected. We attribute this evil, also, to its rightful parent. The resignation of our actions to the direction of a foreign will, is made so familiar to us by war, and is mingled with so many associations which reconcile it, that I am afraid lest the reader should not contemplate it with sufficient abstraction. - Let him remember that in nothing but in war do we submit to it.

It becomes a subject yet more serious, if military obedience requires the relinquishment of our moral agency, - if it requires us to do, not only what may be opposed to our will, but what is opposed to our consciences. And it does require this; a soldier must obey, how criminal soever the command, and how criminal soever he knows it to be. It is certain that of those who compose armies many commit actions which they believe to be wicked, and which they would not commit but for the obligations of a military life. Although a soldier determinately believes that the war is unjust, although he is convinced that his particular part of the service is atrociously criminal, still he must proceed - he must prosecute the purposes of injustice or robbery; he must participate in the guilt, and be himself a robber. When we have sacrificed thus much of principle, what do we retain? If we abandon all use of our perceptions of good and evil, to what purpose has the capacity of perception been given? It were as well to possess no sense of right and

wrong, as to prevent ourselves from the pursuit or rejection of them. To abandon some of the most exalted privileges which Heaven has granted to mankind, to refuse the acceptance of them, and to throw them back, as it were, upon the Donor, is surely little other than profane. He who hid a talent was of old punished for his wickedness; what then is the offence of him who refuses to receive it? Such a resignation of our moral agency is not contended for or tolerated in any one other circumstance of life. War stands upon this pinnacle of human depravity alone. She, only, in the supremacy of crime, has told us that she has abolished even the obligation to be virtuous.

To what a situation is a rational and responsible being reduced, who commits actions, good or bad, mischievous or beneficial, at the word of another? I can conceive no greater degradation. It is the lowest, the final abjectness of the moral nature. It is this if we abate the glitter of war, and if we add this glitter it is nothing more. Surely the dignity of reason, and the light of revelation, and our responsibility to God, should make us pause before we become the voluntary subjects of this monstrous system.

I do not know, indeed, under what circumstances of responsibility a man supposes himself to be placed, who thus abandons and violates his own sense of rectitude and of his duties. Either he is responsible for his actions or he is not; and the question is a serious one to determine. Christianity has certainly never stated any cases in which personal responsibility ceases. If she admits such cases, she has at least not told us so; but she has told us, explicitly and repeatedly, that she does require individual obedience and impose individual responsibility. She has made no exceptions to the imperativeness of her obligations, whether we are required to neglect them or not; and I can discover in her sanctions, no reasons to suppose that in her final adjudications she admits the plea that another required us to do that which she required us to forbear. - But it may be feared, it may be believed, that how little soever religion will abate of the responsibility of those who obey, she will impose not a little upon those who command. They, at least, are answerable for the enormities of war; unless, indeed, any one shall tell me that responsibility attaches nowhere; that that which would be wickedness in another man, is innocence in a soldier; and that Heaven has granted to the directors of war a privileged immunity, by virtue of which crime incurs no guilt and receives no punishment.

It appears to me that the obedience which war exacts to arbitrary power possesses more of the character of servility and even of slavery, than we are accustomed to suppose; and as I think this consideration may reasonably affect our feeling of independence, how little soever higher considerations may affect our consciences, I would allow myself a few sentences upon the subject. I will acknowledge that when I see a company of men in a stated dress, and of a stated color, ranged, rank and file, in the attitude of obedience, turning or walking at the word of another, now changing the position of a limb and now altering the angle of a foot, I feel humiliation and shame. I feel humiliation and shame when I think of the capacities and the prospects of man, at seeing him thus drilled into obsequiousness and educated into machinery. I do not know whether I shall be charged with indulging in idle sentiment or idler affectation. If I hold unusual language upon the subject, let it be remembered that the subject is itself unusual. I will retract my affectation and sentiment, if the reader will show me any case in life parallel to that to which I have applied it.

No one questions whether military power be arbitrary. That which governs an army, says Paley, is DESPOTISM: and the subjects of despotic power we call slaves. Yet a man may live under an arbitrary prince with only the liability to slavery; he may live and die, unmolested in his person and unrestrained in his freedom. But the despotism of an army is an operative despotism, and a soldier is practically and personally a slave. Submission to arbitrary authority is the business of his life; the will of the despot is his

rule of action.

It is vain to urge that if this be slavery, every one who labors for another is a slave; because there is a difference between the subjection of a soldier and that of all other laborers, in which the essence of slavery consists. If I order my servant to do a given action, he is at liberty, if he think the action improper, or if, from any other cause, he choose not to do it, to refuse his obedience. I can discharge him from my service indeed, but I cannot compel obedience or punish his refusal. The soldier is thus punished or compelled. It matters not whether he have entered the service voluntarily or involuntarily: being there, he is required to do what may be, and what in fact often is, opposed to his will and his judgment. If he refuse obedience, he is dreadfully punished; his flesh is lacerated and torn from his body, and finally, if he persists in his refusal, he may be shot. Neither is he permitted to leave the service. His natural right to go whither he would, of which nothing but his own crimes otherwise deprives him, is denied to him by war. If he attempt to exercise this right, he is pursued as a felon, he is brought back in irons, and is miserably tortured for "desertion." This, therefore, we think is slavery.

I have heard it contended that an apprentice is a slave equally with a soldier; but it appears to be forgotten that an apprentice is consigned to the government of another because he is not able to govern himself. But even were apprenticeship to continue through life, it would serve the objection but little. Neither custom nor law allows a master to require his apprentice to do an immoral action. There is nothing in his authority analogous to that which compels a soldier to do what he is persuaded is wicked or unjust. Neither, again, can a master compel the obedience of an apprentice by the punishments of a soldier. Even if his commands be reasonable, he cannot, for refractoriness, torture him into a swoon, and then revive him with stimulants only to torture him again; still less can he take him to a field, and shoot him. And if the command be vicious, he may not punish his disobedience at all. - Bring the despotism that governs an army into the government of the state, and what would Englishmen say? They would say, with one voice, that Englishmen were slaves.

If this view of military subjection fail to affect our pride, we are to attribute the failure to that power of public opinion by which all things seem reconcilable to us; by which situations, that would otherwise be loathsome and revolting, are made not only tolerable but pleasurable. Take away the influence and the gloss of public opinion from the situation of a soldier, and what should we call it? We should call it a state of insufferable degradation; of pitiable slavery. But public opinion, although it may influence notions, cannot alter things. Whatever may be our notion of the soldier's situation, he has indisputably resigned both his moral and his natural liberty to the government of despotic power. He has added to ordinary slavery, the slavery of the conscience; and he is therefore, in a two-fold sense, a slave.

If I be asked why I thus complain of the nature of military obedience, I answer, with Dr. Watson, that all "despotism is an offence against natural justice: it is a degradation of the dignity of man, and ought not, on any occasion, to be either practised or submitted to:" - I answer that the obedience of a soldier does, in point of fact, depress the erectness and independence of his mind; - I answer, again, that it is a sacrifice of his moral agency, which impairs and vitiates his principles, and which our religion emphatically condemns, and, finally and principally I answer, that such obedience is not defended or permitted for any other purpose than the prosecution of war, and that it is therefore a powerful evidence against the solitary system that requires it. I do not question the necessity of despotism to war: it is because I know that it is necessary that I thus refer to it; for I say that whatever makes such despotism and consequent degradation and vice necessary, must itself be bad, and must be utterly incompatible with the principles of Christianity.¹¹

Yet I do not know whether, in its effects on the military character, the greatest moral evil of war is to be sought. Upon the community its effects are indeed less apparent, because they who are the secondary subjects of the immoral influence are less intensely affected by it than the immediate agents of its diffusion. But whatever is deficient in the degree of evil, is probably more than compensated by its extent. The influence is like that of a continual and noxious vapor; we neither regard nor perceive it, but it secretly undermines the moral health.

Every one knows that vice is contagious. The depravity of one man has always a tendency to deprave his neighbors; and it therefore requires no unusual acuteness to discover, that the prodigious mass of immorality and crime, which are accumulated by a war, must have a powerful effect in "demoralizing" the public. But there is one circumstance connected with the injurious influence of war, which makes it peculiarly operative and malignant. It is, that we do not hate or fear the influence, and do not fortify ourselves against it. Other vicious influences insinuate themselves into our minds by stealth; but this we receive with open embrace. If a felon exhibits an example of depravity and outrage, we are little likely to be corrupted by it; because we do not love his conduct or approve it. But from whatever cause it happens, the whole system of war is the subject of our complacency or pleasure; and it is therefore that its mischief is so immense. If the soldier who is familiarized with slaughter and rejoices in it, loses some of his Christian dispositions, the citizen who, without committing the slaughter, unites in the exultation, loses also some of his. If he who ravages a city and plunders its inhabitants, impairs his principles of probity, he who approves and applauds the outrage, loses also something of his integrity or benevolence. We acknowledge these truths when applied to other cases. It is agreed that a frequency of capital punishments has a tendency to make the people callous, to harden them against human suffering, and to deprave their moral principles. And the same effect will necessarily be produced by war, of which the destruction of life is incomparably greater, and of which our abhorrence is incomparably less. - The simple truth is, that we are gratified and delighted with things which are incompatible with Christianity, and that our minds therefore become alienated from its love. Our affections cannot be fully directed to "two masters." If we love and delight in war, we are little likely to love and delight in the dispositions of Christianity. - And the evil is in its own nature of almost universal operation. During a war, a whole people become familiarized with the utmost excesses of enormity - with the utmost intensity of human wickedness - and they rejoice and exult in them; so that there is probably not an individual in a hundred who does not lose something of his Christian principles by a ten years' war.

The effect of the system in preventing the perception, the love, and the operation of Christian principles, in the minds of men who know the nature and obligations of them, needs little illustration. We often see that Christianity cannot accord with the system, but the conviction does not often operate on our minds. In one of the speeches of Bishop Watson in the House of Lords, there occur these words: - "Would to God, my lords, that the spirit of the Christian religion would exert its influence over the hearts of individuals in their public capacity; then would revenge, avarice and ambition, which have fattened the earth with the blood of her children, be banished from the counsels of princes, and there would be no more war. The time will come - the prophet hath said it and I believe it - the time will assuredly come when nation, literally speaking, shall no longer lift up hand against nation. No man will rejoice, my lords, more than I shall, to see the time when peace shall depend on an obedience to the benevolent principles of the Gospel."¹² This is language becoming a Christian. Would it have been believed that this same man voluntarily and studiously added almost one-half to the power of gunpowder, in order that the ball which before would kill but six men, might now kill ten; and that he did this, knowing that this purpose was to spread wider destruction and bloodier slaughter? Above all, would it be believed that he recorded this achievement as

an evidence of his sagacity, and that he recorded it in the book which contains the declaration I have quoted?

The same consequences attach to the influences of the soldier's personal character. Whatever that character be, if it arise out of his profession, we seldom regard it with repulsion. We look upon him as a man whose honor and spirit compensate for "venial errors." If he be spirited and gallant, we ask not for his virtue and care not for his profligacy. We look upon the sailor as a brave and noble fellow, who may reasonably be allowed in droll profaneness, and sailor-like debaucheries - debaucheries, which, in the paid-off crew of a man-of-war, seem sometimes to be animated by

- the dissolutes Spirit that fell,

The fleshliest Incubus.

We are, however, much diverted by them. The sailor's cool and clumsy vices are very amusing to us; and so that he amuses us we are indifferent to his crimes. That some men should be wicked, is bad - that the many should feel complacency in wickedness is, perhaps, worse. We may flatter ourselves with dreams of our own virtue, but that virtue is very questionable - those principles are very unoperative, which permit us to receive pleasure from the contemplation of human depravity, with whatever "honor or spirit" that depravity is connected. Such principles and virtue will oppose, at any rate, little resistance to temptation. An abhorrence of wickedness is more than an outwork of the moral citadel. He that does not hate vice has opened a passage for its entrance.¹³

I do not think that those who feel an interest in the virtue and the happiness of the world will regard the animosity of party and the restlessness of resentment which are produced by a war, as trifling evils. If any thing be opposite to Christianity, it is retaliation and revenge. In the obligation to restrain these dispositions, much of the characteristic placability of Christianity consists. The very essence and spirit of our religion are abhorrent from resentment. - The very essence and spirit of war are promotive of resentment; and what then must be their mutual adverseness? That war excites these passions, needs not be proved. When a war is in contemplation, or when it has been begun, what are the endeavors of its promoters? They animate us by every artifice of excitement to hatred and animosity. Pamphlets, placards, newspapers, caricatures - every agent is in requisition to irritate us into malignity. Nay, dreadful as it is, the pulpit resounds with declamations to stimulate our too sluggish resentment, and to invite us to blood. - And thus the most unchristianlike of all our passions, the passion which it is most the object of our religion to repress, is excited and fostered. Christianity cannot be flourishing under circumstances like these. The more effectually we are animated to war, the more nearly we extinguish the dispositions of our religion. War and Christianity are like the opposite ends of a balance, of which one is depressed by the elevation of the other.

These are the consequences which make war dreadful to a state. Slaughter and devastation are sufficiently terrible, but their collateral evils are their greatest. It is the immoral feeling that war diffuses - it is the deprivation of principle, which forms the mass of its mischief.

There is one mode of hostility that is allowed and encouraged by war, which appears to be distinguished by peculiar atrocity: I mean privateering. If war could be shown to be necessary or right, I think this, at least, were indefensible. It were surely enough that army slaughtered army, and that fleet destroyed fleet, without arming individual avarice for private plunder, and legalizing robbery because it is not of our countrymen. Who are the victims of this plunder, and what are its effects? Does it produce any mischief to

our enemies but the ruin of those who perhaps would gladly have been friends? - of those who are made enemies only by the will of their rulers, and who now conduct their commerce with no other solicitude about the war than how they may escape the rapine which it sanctions? Privateering can scarcely plead even the merit of public mischief in its favor. An empire is little injured by the wretchedness and starvation of a few of its citizens. The robbery man, indeed, be carried to such extent, and such multitudes may be plundered, that the ruin of individuals may impart poverty to a state. But for this mischief the privateer can seldom hope: and what is that practice, of which the only topic of defence is the enormity of its mischief!

There is a yet more dreadful consideration: - The privateer is not only a robber, but a murderer. If he cannot otherwise plunder his victim, human life is no obstacle to his rapine. Robbery is his object, and his object he will attain. Nor has he the ordinary excuses of slaughter in his defence. His government does not require it of him: he makes no pretext of patriotism, but robs and murders of his own choice, and simply for gain. The soldier makes a bad apology when he pleads the command of his superior, but the privateer has no command to plead; and with no object but plunder, he deliberately seeks a set of ruffians who are unprincipled enough for robbery and ferocious enough for murder, and sallies with them upon the ocean, like tigers upon a desert, and like tigers prowling for prey. To talk of Christianity, as permitting these monstrous proceedings, implies deplorable fatuity or more deplorable profaneness. I would, however, hope that he who sends out a privateer has not so little shame as to pretend to conscience or honesty. - If he will be a robber and a murderer, let him at least not be a hypocrite; for it is hypocrisy for such men to pretend to religion or morality. He that thus robs the subjects of another country, wants nothing but impunity to make him rob his neighbor: he has no restraint from principle.

I know not how it happens that men make pretensions to Christianity whilst they sanction or promote such prodigious wickedness. It is sufficiently certain, that whatever be their pretensions to it, it is not operative upon their conduct. Such men may talk of religion, but they neither possess nor regard it: and although I would not embrace in such censure those who, without immediate or remote participation in the crime, look upon it with secret approbation because it injures their "enemies," I would nevertheless suggest to their consideration whether their moral principles are at that point in the scale of purity and benevolence which religion enjoins.

We often hear, during a war, of subsidies from one nation to another for the loan of an army; and we hear of this without any emotion, except perhaps of joy at the greater probability of triumph, or of anger that our money is expended, yet, surely, if we contemplate such a bargain for a moment, we shall perceive that our first and greatest emotion ought to be abhorrence. - To borrow ten thousand men who know nothing of our quarrel, and care nothing for it, to help us to slaughter their fellows! To pay for their help in guineas to their sovereign! Well has it been exclaimed,

War is a game, that were their subjects wise,

Kings would not play at.

A king sells his subjects as a farmer sells his cattle; and sends them to destroy a people, whom, if they had been higher bidders, he would perhaps have sent them to defend. That kings should do this may grieve, but it cannot surprise us: avarice has been as unprincipled in humbler life; the possible malignity of individual wickedness is perhaps without any limit. But that a large number of persons, with the feelings and reason of men, should coolly listen to the bargain of their sale, should compute the guineas that will pay for their blood, and should then quietly be led to a place where they are to kill people towards whom

they have no animosity, is simply wonderful. To what has inveteracy of habit reconciled mankind! I have no capacity of supposing a case of slavery, if slavery be denied in this. Men have been sold in another continent, and England has been shocked and aroused to interference; yet these men were sold, not to be slaughtered, but to work: but of the purchases and sales of the world's political butchers, England cares nothing and thinks nothing; nay, she is a participator in the bargains. There is no reason to doubt that upon other subjects of horror, similar familiarity of habit would produce similar effects; or that he who heedlessly contemplates the purchase of an army, wants nothing but this familiarity to make him heedlessly look on at the commission of parricide. If we could for one moment emancipate ourselves from this power of habit, how would it change the scene that is before us! Little would remain to war of splendor or glory, but we should be left with one wide waste of iniquity and wretchedness.

It is the custom, during the continuance of a war, to offer public prayers for the success of our arms; and our enemies pray also for the success of theirs. I will acknowledge that this practice appears to me to be eminently shocking and profane. The idea of two communities of Christians, separated perhaps by a creek, at the same moment begging their common Father to assist them in reciprocal destruction, is an idea of horror to which I know no parallel. Lord, assist us to slaughter our enemies: This is our petition. - "Father, forgive them; they know not what they do." This is the petition of Christ.

It is certain that of two contending communities, both cannot be in the right. Yet both appeal to Heaven to avouch the justice of their cause, and both mingle with their petitions for the increase, perhaps, of Christian dispositions, importunities to the God of mercy to assist them in the destruction of one another. Taking into account the ferocity of the request - the solemnity of its circumstances - the falsehood of its representations - the fact that both parties are Christians, and that their importunities are simultaneous to their common Lord, I do not think that the world exhibits another example of such irreverent and shocking iniquity. Surely it were enough that we slaughter one another alone in our pygmy quarrels, without soliciting the Father of the universe to be concerned in them: surely it were enough that each reviles the other with the iniquity of his cause, without each assuring Heaven that he only is in the right - an assurance that is false, probably in both, and certainly in one.

To attempt to pursue the consequences of war through all her ramifications of evil, were, however, both endless and vain. It is a moral gangrene which diffuses its humors through the whole political and social system. To expose its mischief is to exhibit all evil; for there is no evil which it does not occasion, and it has much that is peculiar to itself.

That, together with its multiplied evils, war produces some good, I have no wish to deny. I know that it sometimes elicits valuable qualities which had otherwise been concealed, and that it often produces collateral and adventitious, and sometimes immediate advantages. If all this could be denied, it would be needless to deny it, for it is of no consequence to the question whether it be proved. That any wide extended system should not produce some benefits, can never happen. In such a system, it were an unheard of purity of evil, which was evil without any mixture of good. But, to compare the ascertained advantages of war with its ascertained mischiefs, or with the ascertained advantages of a system of peace, and to maintain a question as to the preponderance of good, implies not ignorance, but guilt - not incapacity of determination, but voluntary falsehood.

But I rejoice in the conviction that the hour is approaching, when Christians shall cease to be the murderers of one another. Christian light is certainly spreading, and there is scarcely a country in Europe, in which the arguments for unconditional peace have not recently produced conviction. This conviction is

extending in our own country, in such a degree, and upon such minds, that it makes the charge of enthusiasm or folly, vain and idle. The friends of peace, if we choose to despise their opinions, cannot themselves be despised; and every year is adding to their number, and to the sum of their learning and their intellect.

It will perhaps be asked, what then are the duties of a subject who believes that all war is incompatible with his religion, but whose governors engage in a war and demand his service? We answer explicitly, It is his duty, mildly and temperately, yet firmly, to refuse to serve. - There are some persons, who, without any determinate process of reasoning, appear to conclude that responsibility for national measures attaches solely to those who direct them; that it is the business of governments to consider what is good for the community, and that, in these cases, the duty of the subject is merged in the will of the sovereign. Considerations like these are, I believe, often voluntarily permitted to become opiates of the conscience. I have no part, it is said, in the counsels of the government, and am not therefore responsible for its crimes. We are, indeed, not responsible for the crimes of our rulers, but we are responsible for our own; and the crimes of our rulers are our own; if, whilst we believe them to be crimes, we promote them by our co-operation. "It is at all times," says Gisborne, "the duty of an Englishman, steadfastly to decline obeying any orders of his superiors, which his conscience should tell him were in any degree impious or unjust."¹⁴ The apostles, who instructed their converts to be subject to every ordinance of man for conscience' sake, and to submit themselves to those who were in authority, and who taught them, that whoever resisted the power, resisted the ordinance of God, made one necessary and uniform provision - that the magistrate did not command them to do what God had commanded them to forbear. With the regulations which the government of a country thought fit to establish, the apostles complied, whatever they might think of their wisdom or expediency, provided, and only provided, they did not, by this compliance, abandon their allegiance to the Governor of the world. It is scarcely necessary to observe in how many cases they refused to obey the commands of the governments under which they were placed, or how openly they maintained the duty of refusal, whenever these commands interfered with their higher obligations. It is narrated very early in "the Acts," that one of their number was imprisoned for preaching, that he was commanded to preach no more, and was then released. Soon afterwards all the apostles were imprisoned. "Did we not straitly command you," said the rulers, "that ye should not teach in this name?" The answer which they made is in point: - "We ought to obey God rather than men."¹⁵ And this system they continued to pursue. If Caesar had ordered one of the apostles to be enrolled in his legions, does any one believe that he would have served?

But those who suppose that obedience in all things is required, or that responsibility in political affairs is transferred from the subject to the sovereign, reduce themselves to a great dilemma. It is to say that we must resign our conduct and our consciences to the will of others, and act wickedly or well, as their good or evil may preponderate, without merit for virtue or responsibility for crime. If the government direct you to fire your neighbor's property, or to throw him over a precipice, will you obey? If you will not, there is an end of the argument; for if you may reject its authority in one instance, where is the limit to rejection? There is no rational limit but that which is assigned by Christianity, and that is both rational and practicable. If any one should ask the meaning of the words, "whoso resisteth the power resisteth the ordinance of God" - we answer, that it refers to active resistance; passive resistance, or non-compliance, the apostles themselves practised. On this point we should be distinctly understood. We are not so inconsistent as to recommend a civil war, in order to avoid a foreign one - Refusal to obey is the final duty of Christians.

We think, then, that it is the business of every man, who believes that war is inconsistent with our religion, respectfully, but steadfastly, to refuse to engage in it. Let such as these remember that an honorable and an awful duty is laid upon them. It is upon their fidelity, so far as human agency is concerned, that the cause of peace is suspended. Let them then be willing to avow their opinions and to defend them. Neither let them be contented with words, if more than words, if suffering also, is required. It is only by the unyielding perseverance of good that corruption can be extirpated. If you believe that Jesus Christ has prohibited slaughter, let not the opinion or the commands of a world induce you to join it. By this "steady and determinate pursuit of virtue," the benediction which attaches to those who hear the sayings of God and do them, will rest upon you, and the time will come when even the world will honor you, as contributors to the work of human reformation.

[< prev](#) | [contents](#) |

Notes

1. Lord Clarendon - who, however, excepts those wars which are likely "to introduce as much benefit to the world, as damage and inconvenience to a part of it." The morality of this celebrated man, also, seems thus to have been wrecked upon the rock of expediency.
2. Johnson - Falkland's Islands.
3. Lord Clarendon's Essays.
4. Erasmus.
5. Hall.
6. William Law, A.M.
7. Essays. - No. 19. Knox justly makes much exception to the applicability of these censures.
8. Dr. Paley.
9. There is something very unmanly and cowardly in some of the maxims of this law of honor. How unlike the fortitude, the manliness of real courage, are the motives of him who fights a duel! He accepts a challenge, commonly, because he is afraid to refuse it. The question with him is, whether he fears more, a pistol or the world's dread frown; and his conduct is determined by the preponderating influence of one of these objects of fear. If I am told that he probably feels no fear of death; I answer, that if he fears not the death of a duelist, his principles have sunk to that abyss of depravity, whence nothing but the interposition of Omnipotence is likely to reclaim them.
10. This inferiority will probably be found less conspicuous in the private than in his superiors. Employment in different situations, or in foreign countries, and the consequent acquisition of information, often make the private soldier superior in intelligence to laborers and mechanics; a cause of superiority which, of course, does not similarly operate amongst men of education.

We would here beg the reader to bear in his recollection, the limitations which are stated in the preface, respecting the application of any apparent severity in our remarks.

11. I would scarcely refer to the monstrous practice of impressing seamen, because there are many who deplore and many who condemn it. Whether this also be necessary to war, I know not: - probably it is necessary; and if it be, I would ask no other evidence against the system that requires it. Such an invasion of the natural rights of man, such a monstrous assumption of arbitrary power, such a violation of every principle of justice, cannot possibly be necessary to any system of which Christianity approves.

12. Life of Bishop Watson.

13. All sober men allow this to be true in relation to the influence of those Novels which decorate a profligate character with objects of attraction. They allow that our complacency with these subjects abates our hatred of the accompanying vices. And the same also is true in relation to war; with the difference, indeed, which is likely to exist between the influence of the vices of fiction and that of the vices of real life.

14. Duties of Men in Society.

15. Acts v.29.

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