Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:

https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology

https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb

PayPal https://paypal.me/robbradshaw

A table of contents for *Bibliotheca Sacra* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_bib-sacra_01.php

BIBLIOTHECA SACRA

ARTICLE I.

THE PLACE OF FORCE IN SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT.

BY THE REVEREND PHILIP STAFFORD MOXOM, D.D.,
SPRINGFIELD, MASSACHUSETTS.

IN the early summer of 1914 the general state of mind in this country, and to a considerable extent in other countries, especially England and France, though less in France than in England, was one of complacency as to the progress which had been made toward permanent international peace. Two peace conferences had been held at The Hague, the first in 1899 and the second in 1907, and much had been accomplished in the way of formulating principles which, when approved by the various governments represented in the conferences, would attain the quality of international law. Important guarantees of international peace, however, were withheld by certain powers, notably by Germany followed by Austria. Thus these conferences signally failed, though the completeness of the failure appears not to have been fully perceived, save by individual minds. Actually Europe was slumbering over a volcano. Here and there a solitary voice, *vox clamantis in deserto,* uttered a note of warning, but for the most part this was unheeded.

In America peace workers, coöperating with persons of like mind in other countries, were making plans and issuing

Digitized by Google

a call for an ecumenical council, the first in history, the one great object of which was to align all the churches of Christendom in a united effort to promote international good-will. The various Protestant bodies were to send delegates to meet in Constance, Baden, on August 2, 1914, and the Catholic bodies were to send delegates to meet a little later in Liége, Belgium. The former were assembling in Constance when suddenly a war storm unparalleled in history burst forth, and the German army plunged into Belgium and Luxemburg on its ravaging way to France.

The dreamers of peace had a frightful awakening, and the world saw with amazement an irruption of deliberate and malignant barbarism. In the war thus begun every Hague convention was violated, and international law was flung to the winds. Since that fateful day in August, 1914, a score of nations have been involved in a devastating tempest of incredible conflict in which millions of men, women, and children have perished, many millions more have been torn into helplessness by the missiles of war and wasted by disease and famine, and fair and fruitful lands have been turned into deserts, populous only with graves.

With the experience of these past three and a half years oppressing and almost paralyzing the mind, it is difficult to recall the dreams of peace that seemed so promiseful, or to consider with calmness the question concerning the place of force in the social development of mankind. But out of all the confusion rises into absolute clearness the conviction that there can be no permanent and beneficent peace between the nations of the earth which is not solidly based on justice. As long as nations are unjust to one another, so long will war be a menacing possibility and even probability. The doctrine of "peace at any price" is utterly fatuous, be-

Digitized by Google

cause, if the price of peace is unrighteousness, it is an elusive and unreal peace. If ever righteousness and peace are opposed to each other, as they sometimes are and as they surely are to-day, the choice of the rational mind must be for righteousness. When that choice becomes general on the part of the nations, and only then, war will die of inanition.

One psychological effect of the present war is the consolidation of opinion in the conviction that a true and adequate philosophy of history finds a place and use for force in social development. In reflecting on the earnest and increasingly intelligent peace-propaganda which marked the last decade of the nineteenth and the first decade of the twentieth century, it is apparent that many persons engaged in that propaganda failed to keep in mind the truth that force and the deliberate use of force are necessary facts in human experience.

War has filled a very large place in the world because in man's slow struggle up from savagery it was unavoidable and was not without some use in that struggle. Human history illustrates, not human diabolism, but human ignorance, passion, and selfishness, and also human susceptibility to an ideal of heroism and capacity for it. The race being what it was, war was inescapable. This being true, the cause of peace will not be advanced by undiscriminating denunciation of war and warriors.

Browning puts into the mouth of Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau these words:—

> **"Understand! — war for war's sake, war for sake**
> **O' the good war gets you as war's sole excuse,**
> **Is damnable and damned shall be.**
>
> . . . . . .
>
> **"Does that mean — no war at all**
> **When just the wickedness I here proscribe**

Digitized by Google

Comes, haply, from the neighbor? Does my speech
Precede the praying that you beat the sword
To ploughshare, and the spear to pruning-hook,
And sit down henceforth under your own vine
And fig-tree through the sleepy summer month,
Letting what hurly-burly please explode
On the other side the mountain-frontier? No,
Beloved! I foresee and I announce
Necessity of warfare in one case,
For one cause: one way, I bid broach the blood
O' the world. For truth and right, and only right
And truth — right, truth, on the absolute scale of God,
No pettiness of man's admeasurement,—
In such case only, and for such one cause,
Fight your hearts out, whatever fate betide
Hands energetic to the uttermost!
Lie not! Endure no lie which needs your heart
And hand to push it out of mankind's path—
No lie that lets the natural forces work
Too long ere lay it plain and pulverized—
Seeing man's life lasts only twenty years!"

The Jewish rabbi, Jochanan Hakkodosh, speaks thus:—

"Moreover there is blessing in the curse
Peace-praisers call war. What so sure evolves
All the capacities of soul, proves nurse

Of that self-sacrifice in men which solves
The riddle — *Wherein differs Man from beast?*
. . . . . .

"Fine sparks, that brood
Confusedly in Man, 't is war bids spurt
Forth into flame."

Lester Ward, in his "Psychic Factors of Civilization," says: "One of the strongest spurs to invention was war. Early man was almost invariably war-like. If he preferred peace he was driven to war as a means of defense. Weapons of war must be devised, and thus while the strategic faculty was being developed the inventive faculty was at the same time stimulated." This is no defense of war as a feature of

Digitized by Google

modern life nor argument for its continuance, and it is far from supporting the German contention that war is necessary to progress, and therefore an actual good. On the contrary, it is such a rational consideration of war, as a fact of human experience, as shall enable us to see the important part which it has played in that very development which ultimately will bring about its extinction.

The history of primeval life on the earth is a history of struggle. The strongest, that is essentially the fittest, survived, and the survivors were a distinct advance over the species that perished. Man inherited the conditions of his animal ancestry. He too had to struggle, not only with a hostile animal environment, but also with his fellow men. Here too the fittest, that is the strongest and therefore essentially the best for the purpose of race building, survived. Physical force, at first predominant, was gradually brought under the rule of intelligence, by which it was sometimes mitigated and sometimes intensified. Struggle reacted on the individual to stimulate his faculties and increase his power. This has been strikingly set forth by Bagehot. Surveying the whole course of human development, he says: "Taken as a whole, and allowing for possible exceptions, the aggregate fighting power of mankind has grown immensely, and has been growing continuously since we knew anything about it."

With the awakening of moral sense in man a new element entered into the struggle, but the struggle continued, stimulating intelligence and making the survivors stronger in all those qualities which mark a superior race. By the rise of moral sense, force was not diminished nor the use of it abolished, but it began to come under control of moral judgment. The moral development went on, not by the disuse of force

Digitized by Google

in human intercourse, but by the wiser and juster use of it. Says Bagehot again: "The military vices of civilization seem to decline just as military strength augments. Somehow or other civilization does not make man effeminate or unwarlike. There is an improvement in our fibre — moral, if not physical [he might have said, "moral as well as physical"]. The breed of ancient times was impaired for war by trade and luxury, but the modern breed is not so impaired."

The development of intellectual life by struggle is indisputable. More than any other activity, for a long time at least, war stimulated invention. I quote Bagehot again: "Every intellectual gain that a nation possessed was in the earliest time made use of — was invested and taken out — in war; all else perished." This writer's contention must not be misunderstood. He is not commending nor even defending war in modern times, but he is showing that the fierce activity of war did stimulate the intellectual activity of men in the primitive stage of civilization. And here is a fact of immense significance which must be taken account of in a total survey of human development. Civilization is not only the expression of increased and more widely diffused intelligence; still more is it the increasing utilization of physical force in subjection to reason and moral purpose. This may be illustrated by the lessening of tyrannical rule of the many by the few; by the abolition of slavery (we should hardly accept the Epistle to Philemon to-day as exemplifying the highest Christian morals); by the increasing humaneness of law; by the diminution of wars and the passing of international strife from a chronic condition into an occasional expedient. That Germany has intensified tyrannical rule, revived slavery in a very brutal form, violated all the principles of international law, systematized cruelty, and plunged the world into a war

Digitized by Google

of which there is no parallel in human experience, is not a contradiction of this feature of human progress save in its own particular case. The most astounding aspect of Germany's conduct is its absolute abnormality.

Still the utilization of force in social development continues. Government, from one point of view, is organized force for the repression of wrong and the protection of the common weal; in other words, for the execution of laws which safeguard and promote the good, both of the individual and of society. The police power of the nation is identical with its capability of self-preservation. This involves the exercise of force within its own bounds. It involves, also, the use of force for defense from danger without. The right of war is the right of self-preservation.

This does not exhaust the right of war, for there is the right, not only of self-defense, but also the right of defending another who is being subjected to wrong. Social development is identical with increase of freedom in the exercise of all proper human functions. This involves the overcoming of obstructions which do not yield to reason. In an imperfect society there is always a limit to the efficiency of the appeal to reason. In the family the appeal to reason is limited by the irrationality of the child. There is need of an authority that is efficient. The reaction from the stern methods of our fathers has carried many parents into a mushy and mischievous sentimentalism, with the result that their children are deficient in proper respect for authority and regard for the rights of others. Indulgent yielding to the caprices and passions of children is a bad schooling for them. There is a wholesomeness in wise parental authority, expressed on occasion with unmistakable force, which justifies itself in the characters disciplined by it.

Digitized by Google

There is also a limit to the appeal to reason in the community and the state. In every community there are elements which are not susceptible to moral suasion. We do not argue with a burglar or a would-be murderer. The fact that force is exercised in orderly ways, and in accordance with law, does not make it any less force. If men commit crime against liberty or property, the law intervenes without softness and takes away the liberty of the criminal. The police as well as the church represents the conscience of the community. No greater wrong could be done to the public than to abolish the police or take from it all power and license to strike. One respects the policeman's billy, not because he is afraid of a club, but because it represents the force of the municipality to protect weakness and resist lawlessness.

Sometimes there is a limit to the appeal to reason in international relations. The individual is sovereign within the sphere of his private action, subject to the well-being of the family. The family is sovereign within itself, subject to the well-being of neighbor and community. The community — the town or municipality — is sovereign within itself, subject to the well-being of the state or province. The state or province is sovereign within itself, subject to the well-being of the nation. May we pause here? No. Social development on a world scale arrives at a world consciousness, creating a larger unity than that of the nation. Inevitably this world consciousness becomes a world conscience, before which arise the ideas of national responsibility and obligation with reference to other nations. May a nation do as it pleases? Once the answer would have been prompt and emphatic: Yes, a nation may do what it pleases. This is quite in accord with the Prussian theory of the state. But the modern world an-

Digitized by Google

swers: No; if it pleases to do that which is a damage or a menace to the well-being of other nations, it may not do it.

The Hague Conferences and The Hague Tribunal were expressions of the larger perception of human corporate obligation. Among nations and tribes there are still some which, like certain individuals in the community, are not amenable to reason nor immediately susceptible to moral influence. Such, for example Turkey, are the actual or possible outlaws of civilization. In dealing with cases of this kind the final resort in a critical emergency must be force. Repeatedly the most elementary justice has been secured from the Sublime Porte only by placing a battleship significantly near an important Turkish harbor. In such a case the battleship is the policeman of civilization. To the amazement of mankind the German people, under their Hohenzollern Kaiser, have put themselves in the category of world outlaws and run amuck through Europe. Not amenable to reason or moral suasion, they must be resisted by force, and the United States is at war because compelled by a supreme moral obligation to protect humanity from ruthless despotism.

A world court for the adjudication of international disputes is the latest achievement of civilization. It is a very great achievement, but it does not abolish, it only limits and humanely regulates, the use of force. A league to enforce peace will not banish the use of force, but it will put force under the rule of law. Battleships and armies do not represent simply the truculent temper and bloodthirstiness of mankind: they incarnate at times its moral judgment. They are meant to be the instruments of justice, and their wise use promotes the stability and advance of civilization. The bludgeon in the hand of a savage had its use in enforcing or protecting individual or tribal rights in a savage time. Intellectual and

Digitized by Google

moral progress has refined the bludgeon into the policeman's billy, which is the symbol of law and order. Before the Great War it was thought that battleships and armies might be greatly reduced with immense advantage to the peoples, but they can no more be abolished with safety than the police can be abolished with safety to the peace and security of cities. To many it seemed a gross anachronism ten years ago to increase land and naval forces, and at the close of the war every consideration for the well-being of peoples will call for a reduction of military and naval armaments to a police footing. The hour will surely come when the nations in mutual council will jointly begin the process of mutual reduction of military equipment, to the great relief of the overburdened peoples; but entire safety will lie in concerted action by all the powers.

In seeking to promote the permanent peace of the world it is not necessary to fall into the sentimentalism which, ostensibly acting in the interests of civilization, seriously imperils civilization. The doctrines of absolute non-resistance to evil and of peace at any price are not practicable nor, in the present state of the world, reasonable. When righteousness and peace are not identical, as sometimes they are not, hesitation to take the side of righteousness, even at the cost of treasure and life, is criminal. When the slave power in the United States threatened the life of the nation, men who loved their country and believed in justice did not hesitate to take musket and march to the field of dreadful war. War was then only less dreadful than a supine peace purchased by loss of honor. Let the lips be paralyzed which would defame the men who in the hour of supreme trial, chose righteousness rather than peace, and struck home till peace could come to rest on established justice.

Digitized by Google

Socrates in the "Apology" and the "Crito" taught that it is better to suffer evil than to do evil, and the best judgment of Christendom to-day approves his teaching; but he did not impugn the right of the state to use force in carrying out its decrees or in protecting itself from invasion. Jesus is credited with the doctrine of absolute non-resistance, but his actual teaching has been dislocated from its setting and even caricatured. He set forth the kingdom of God as the ideal of human society, but he did not pronounce on the abstract question of the use of force in human government; rather he tacitly recognized its place in the world as it then was. "Render unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's." When all men are ruled by reason and righteousness, force as a means of social betterment will be superseded. That is self-evident. In a perfect moral world, physical force as a means of repression — indeed, all force of restraint or compulsion — will disappear; it will have use only as an energy directed to the accomplishment of ends which all seek.

We are considering not an ideal state, but the world as it has been and is. In the past even brute force has been instrumental to human advancement; and, in the world to-day, force is the recognized sanction of law supporting the highest reason, and achieving the ends which it seeks for the good of society as a whole. The moral sanity of the great poets like Tennyson and Browning appears in this, that their loftiest flights in the realms of imagination never take them away from the solid realities of life. While urging us on to a clearer understanding of truth and a nobler aspiration to merge the real life in the ideal, they hold fast the continuity of man's growth and the truths which have emerged throughout his long battle towards perfect self-possession and free self-subjection to the eternal beauty and justice and love.

Digitized by Google

There is one aspect of this question which has a special appeal. It is that of man's capacity to rise on great occasions to the loftiest heights of self-sacrifice. This, brought out by the fierce heat of struggle in humanity's onward march, has mixed with the coarsest and most brutal actualities the gold of the purest ideal. Man is learning to live; and he learns, not by self-coddling, but by discovering that sometimes to lose is to gain. The death of a multitude in a great battle for a soul-stirring cause is not so tragic as the death of multitudes by the selfish and criminal carelessness of sordid commerce. Besides, the death of the unnumbered thousands who have perished on the world's battlefields is not mere fruitless slaughter: the dying generations fertilize the soil of the world, and later generations reap the richer harvests. And these, according to the daring and splendid hint of the writer of Hebrews, will not be perfected without the others. There is a divine solidarity of human life. To all comes in some form the cost, and to all in some divine consummation will come the enduring good.

As the world grows older the opportunities for heroism in the common walks of life increase. More life is wasted in other ways than by war. The slaughter and wounding of men, women, and children in railroading and other industrial occupations in our country is greater annually than in any year of the Civil War. It is true in a broader sense than Milton knew that

"Peace hath her victories no less renowned than war."

Social injustice is more fruitful of misery than is even international strife. In this realm, also, there can be no peace without justice, and justice is inseparable from the triumph of good will.

Digitized by Google