

# 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:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

**PayPal**

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

---

A table of contents for *Journal of the Transactions of the Victoria Institute* can be found here:

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_jtvi-01.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_jtvi-01.php)

JOURNAL OF  
THE TRANSACTIONS  
OF  
The Victoria Institute  
OR  
Philosophical Society of Great Britain

---

VOL. LXX

1938



LONDON:

---

PUBLISHED BY  
THE INSTITUTE, 1, CENTRAL BUILDINGS, WESTMINSTER, W.C.1

---

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

818TH ORDINARY GENERAL MEETING,  
HELD IN COMMITTEE ROOM B, THE CENTRAL HALL,  
WESTMINSTER, S.W.1, ON MONDAY, MARCH 21st, 1938,  
AT 4.30 P.M.

LT.-COL. F. A. MOLONY, O.B.E., IN THE CHAIR.

The Minutes of the previous meeting were read, confirmed and signed and the HON. SECRETARY announced the election of Mrs. C. M. Craig as an Associate.

The CHAIRMAN then called on E. R. Bevan, Esq., O.B.E., D.Litt., LL.D., to read his paper entitled "The Teaching of Jesus about Non-resistance to Evil."

---

*THE TEACHING OF JESUS ABOUT NON-RESISTANCE  
TO EVIL.*

By EDWYN R. BEVAN, ESQ., O.B.E., D.Litt., LL.D.

**I**F one states the bald fact that Christians profess to regard the words of Jesus as words of God, profess that they owe to the Lord absolute obedience, and at the same time never dream of carrying out those utterances of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, which are couched in the imperative mood and have, consequently, the form of commands, it must seem at first sight a strange anomaly. "If thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out and cast it from thee." I believe some intransigent sects in Russia in former days carried this out: some of their members did pluck out their right eyes, but one does not hear of Christians elsewhere doing it. "Resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also." Certainly most Christians, if assaulted by a hooligan in the street, would call a policeman. "If any man will take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also." A Christian master who discovers that his valet has been making depredations in his wardrobe is unlikely to press the man to take also his new overcoat. "Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn thou not away." Rich Christian philanthropists usually

find a pile of begging letters on their breakfast table every morning, and the richest of them, unless he said No to a very large number of the appeals, would soon find himself reduced to beggary.

Yet there the commands of the Lord are, seemingly, plain in meaning. No wonder that opponents of Christianity have often made this apparent want of correspondence between what Christians profess and what Christians do a subject of bitter mockery. Usually the opponent does not himself think the commands of Jesus practicable or salutary ; he will not himself abjure all resistance to evil ; perhaps he is not prepared to say that his country should abolish its army and navy and police force ; but from this safe position of non-committal for himself he will maintain that Christians, if they were true to their professions, would be absolute non-resisters and sneer at them because they are not. The Church, we hear it said over and over again, discredited itself entirely because its ministers, during the Great War, did not proclaim that it was wrong for any Christian to bear arms in battle. Even people who were not themselves conscientious objectors thought it miserably inconsistent of Christians not to be.

But it is not only that opponents of Christianity have made capital out of the anomaly. Some Christians themselves have felt uncomfortable about it. The Society of Friends, as we know, has always maintained that Christians ought to carry out, just as they stand, some of the commands which other Christians do not carry out literally. I never heard of Quakers plucking out their right eye, nor do I think that the rich Quakers, who have certainly been liberal with their money for philanthropic purposes, have ever given to every one, literally every one, who asked of them. But Quakers have followed the command "Resist not evil" with a more literal closeness than the generality of Christians ; they have adhered in profession and practice to the view that a Christian man ought under no circumstances to fight against other men in war. An even closer adherence to the command, literally understood, was made by Tolstoy a principal part of his interpretation of Christianity. He disapproved, I think, not only of all participation in war but even the use of force by governments for the coercion of criminals. The Society of Friends has never denounced the police as an unchristian institution. To all criticisms by other Christians, Quakers and Tolstoyans have replied : " We are just

doing what Jesus said: there the command is in the New Testament: how do you justify your disobedience?"

Various ways have been taken by Christians of justifying the disagreement between their actions and the precepts of the Lord Jesus. I think one must admit that some of these ways are unsatisfactory. One way is to say that the precepts are not meant to be literally carried out, but to illustrate a general principle. This seems very unsatisfactory. How can they possibly illustrate a general principle if they are not meant to be literally carried out? You can illustrate a general principle of conduct, that is, a rule which, for the most part, holds good, if you describe how anyone should normally act in a given set of circumstances. Let us suppose the circumstances to be that a hooligan has assaulted you in the street: if then your turning the other cheek and not calling in the police force is the normal way in which you should act in order to conform to some more comprehensive general rule, you may rightly use the special circumstances of this particular case in order to give an example of what the general rule means in practice. But if your turning the other cheek would *not* be the normal way in which you should act in those particular circumstances, then the supposition of your doing so can no longer serve as a typical exemplification for a general principle of conduct. Let us take an analogy from the rules of the road. We may say: "Supposing your car comes up close behind another at a blind corner or bend you must never overtake." That may be regarded as the illustration of a general principle of conduct, securing safety on the road, because it is what ought literally to be done in certain particular circumstances. But if after having laid down the rule about not overtaking at a corner, you added: "That, you understand, is the illustration of a *principle*, but, in actual *practice*, everyone does overtake at a corner, and does so quite rightly," then to speak of the rule as illustrating a general principle of conduct would be simply absurd. You cannot give an instance of the application of a general principle of conduct in a particular supposed set of circumstances unless you state the line of action with ought literally, in those circumstances, to be followed.

Another way of explaining the inconsistency between the precepts of the Sermon on the Mount and the practice of Christians is to say: "The commands of the Sermon on the Mount hold up an ideal, the utmost that would be reached by perfect sanctity; the practice of ordinary men may approximate

more or less to them, but ordinary Christians cannot be expected to go such lengths in self-renunciation and submission to evil. The Lord Himself does not expect it of them." Surely this plea will never do. An ideal type of conduct is one which, even if we fall short of it, we ought always to be striving to realise, one which we should feel ourselves blameworthy for not realising. But an ordinary Christian, supposing he is assaulted by a hooligan in the street, does not make an effort to exercise self-restraint and not call the policeman, then yield through the frailty of human nature and call the policeman, then go away feeling guilty for having fallen short of the ideal. He thinks he did quite right to call the policeman. If the precepts of the Sermon on the Mount were an ideal for conduct, however great a demand that conduct might put upon human nature, Christian preachers should be continually holding it up as something we ought to be trying to realise. They ought to tell us: "Perhaps you have been assaulted by a hooligan and called the police. Certainly we know the flesh is weak; but if again such a thing happens to you, you must pray for grace to give you greater self-control and offer the attacker the other cheek. What human nature cannot do in its own strength, it can be enabled to do by the Spirit of God." That is how preachers ought to talk if the precept to turn the other cheek were just a very high ideal which it needs supernatural virtue to attain. But we know that Christian preachers do not talk like that.

Sometimes the line taken in this connection is to say: "The idea of a man turning the other cheek to a hooligan appears impracticable to you because you are thinking only of what ordinary men are, but if you think of the spirit of Jesus, and its power to quell evil by the way of love, you would see a better way of overcoming evil than the use of force." Mr. Gandhi says very much the same thing, but, being a Hindu, he more commonly uses the term "soul-force" than "the spirit of Jesus." Though there is no attempt to resist evil by force, evil must in the long run, we are told, give way to the great force of love (or "soul-force"), and if we ourselves had the spirit of Jesus we should see its being conquered everywhere. And that is the only real conquest of evil, because, while force can only check certain outward actions on the part of the man of evil will, the force of love can change him internally, so that he wills evil no more. We must allow that this line of argument does proceed upon certain great truths. It is true that there is a great power in

love to change the evil will of men. Many cases may be brought forward in which all application of force had left a man's bad heart hard and resolute, but some manifestation of love broke the man down. It is true that if there were more people who had the spirit of Jesus, and if those who have it in some degree had it more, we should see more such cases of the conquest of evil by love than we do. But when the argument implies that whenever evil is encountered by the spirit of Jesus it inevitably gives way, that all resistance is melted, it forgets two things. One is the free will of man, by which men may go on choosing evil persistently in spite of all the power of love bearing upon them. It is absurd to think that if we had more of the spirit of Jesus all evil would melt from our presence, when all evil did not melt from contact with Jesus Himself. When Jesus came into contact with the evil will in Caiaphas and Pilate, Caiaphas and Pilate were not converted by His actual bodily presence and living speech. Among his twelve Apostles one in the end betrayed Him. It is difficult to think of any one who was subjected more intensively to the spirit of Jesus, to the "soul-force" of Jesus, than Judas Iscariot. Some two or three years of close and intimate companionship, seeing Jesus continually, listening to Jesus continually, and at the end of it all the heart of Judas was the heart of a traitor! The other thing that the argument often forgets is that even when the spirit of Jesus, or "soul-force," does conquer, it sometimes takes very long to do so. The most signal instance in history, I suppose, of conquest by "soul-force" is the acceptance of Christianity by the Roman Empire. At the beginning you see the little scattered congregations of believers, poor people for the most part, unarmed and helpless, and on the other side the gigantic power of the Roman Empire with its armies and vast machinery of government. The Empire directs its power to annihilate the Christian Church, and the Christians literally carry out the precept to offer no resistance to this tremendous satanic will; they let themselves be dragged to prison, thrown to the beasts in the amphitheatres, tortured and killed. And in the end the Roman Empire surrenders. The Roman Power at the beginning of the period condemned Jesus to the death of a common criminal, and three hundred years later the Roman Cæsar was doing homage to the instrument of execution, to the Cross. A marvellous conquest by spiritual power without any resort at all to material force! Yes, a marvellous conquest, but it took three hundred years!

Whatever, then, the spirit of love or soul-force may accomplish, one sees that, if no forcible resistance is offered to the evil will, one must expect, for a long time at any rate, the evil will to get its way unchecked. If, in the spirit of Jesus, you offer the other cheek to the striker, you have no ground for confidence that your act of love will melt the heart of the striker and that he will not strike you on the other cheek. If it is a question of protecting someone else from outrage, you can have no ground of confidence, that, if you bring the spirit of Jesus to bear, the outrage will not be perpetrated, whereas in many cases it might be prevented if you used the force at your disposal. We must, then, not attempt to get out of the difficulty by pretending that there is always another way besides force by which the evil will can be overcome here and now. We must clearly envisage the truth that in a large number of cases the operation of the evil will can be prevented by the use of force, and that if, instead of using force, you offer no resistance, the evil will is likely to accomplish its purpose. Supposing, then, you act on the precept laid down by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, you must be prepared to see in all these cases evil prevail, which you might perhaps have prevented.

What can we make of these commands that stare at us from the pages of the Gospels? If we have no intention of carrying them out, if we do not even think it desirable that we should carry them out, how can we go on professing to regard the Lord Jesus as an authoritative guide for life? Let me try to state the way in which I myself should answer these questions. I begin by repeating what I said just now, that I do not see how any precepts can be regarded as showing the ideal kind of conduct, or as illustrating a general rule of conduct, unless they mean that the kind of action they enjoin is to be performed literally as they describe it. There are, of course, cases in which a command may be couched in definitely symbolical language, as some of the ancients supposed that the Pythagorean maxims were. The maxim, for instance, *Μαχαίρη πῦρ μὴ σκάλευε* "Poke not the fire with a sword," was explained to mean "Do not provoke by a sharp word a man who is of fiery and irascible temper" (Iamblichus: *Protrepticus*, Teubner, p. 112). It might be held that the language in which Jesus bids men in certain contingencies pluck out their right eyes is of this metaphorical kind. But where Jesus bids men not resist evil or give to everyone who asks of them or invite a thief to take even more than he



had intended, it would seem extravagant to say that this language was metaphorical. It may be possible to understand how a painful renunciation of natural desire is described figuratively by the phrase about plucking out the right eye ; but what possible kind of action other than that stated could be meant by not resisting evil or letting a thief take more than he had intended ? No, I think we must say that if Jesus speaks with authority, when he prescribes that conduct, it must be a kind of action which ought to be done literally, as He describes it. It is, I believe, the right kind of conduct between man and man if you take the two people immediately concerned in isolation. Let A and B be two men : A strikes B on the left cheek ; what, considering these two individuals by themselves, apart from any complications made by their social environment, ought B to do ? He ought to let A strike him on the right cheek also. Let us suppose that there are no social complications, that A and B are two men wrecked on an uninhabited island, without any hope of rescue in a foreseeable future, and let us suppose that B is a Christian, really filled with the spirit of Jesus, and that A is an unregenerate bully. How will B in such circumstances behave ? He will carry out in the most literal way the precepts of the Sermon on the Mount. If A strikes him he will not strike back : if A violently takes away one of the garments B had saved from the wreck, B will not resist, but even allow A to take more : if A compels B to walk a mile to cut wood, B will be ready to walk another mile to fetch water.

What makes the difficulty for us, when we try to apply the precepts of the Sermon on the Mount to our conduct is the social complications. It is not a case simply of A and B, but of C and D and E and all the multitude of other persons who constitute the social environment of A and B. Now the most strictly literal interpreter of the sayings of Jesus would have to admit in many cases circumstances in the social environment which qualified the command. " If any man compel thee to go with him one mile, go with him twain." But supposing you are a doctor hurrying to the bedside of someone gravely ill, and supposing a highwayman compels you to go with him a mile in the opposite direction, will you, in that case, think it right to go with the highwayman another mile, and leave your patient unvisited ? Would you not even think it right to wrench yourself, if you could, out of the highwayman's grasp, before the first mile was completed, and speed to the sick man's side A robber

takes away your cloak. But suppose you are a servant, and the cloak is part of your master's livery, would you in that case invite the robber to take the coat as well, which was also your master's? Even the most extreme Tolstoyan would say, I think, that in such cases the Lord's command was not to be literally carried out. He might indeed say that the social complications in the two cases supposed were exceptional, and that in the great majority of cases there were no social complications to prevent the literal fulfilment of the command. I do not think that would be true. So long as A and B are persons living, as we do, in a social environment, there must always be complicated circumstances of some kind to affect the mutual action and reaction of A and B. If a hooligan assaults you in the street and strikes you in the face, you must, so far as you alone are concerned, be ready to offer the hooligan the other cheek; but such a hooligan left at large is a menace to a much larger number of people than yourself, and, if a policeman is in sight, you call him and give the man in charge. Your valet steals an article of dress from your wardrobe. Would not a Christian really full of the spirit of Christ regard all his clothes as a livery for the Lord's work? We have a plurality of coats for the exercise of different social functions. A man who possessed nothing but one country tweed suit and no dress clothes might find it impossible to carry out the particular role in society which he believes to have been assigned him by God. If in carrying out that role he is doing God's work in the world, as God's servant, the different garbs necessary for the discharge of his social functions may be looked upon as livery. To that extent what applied in the supposed case of a servant whose livery cloak is taken away by a robber applies to the man whose evening coat has been stolen by his valet; he will not press the thief to take the tail-coat he wears at weddings as well. And so on. The actions which we perform in our ordinary lives are throughout actions more or less determined by the social environment, not simply by our mutual relations to one other person.

The precepts of the Sermon on the Mount may thus be compared to the mathematical computation of what the trajectory of a bullet would be, supposing it took place in a vacuum, according simply to the dynamic force of its original propulsion compounded with gravity, no disturbing circumstances such as wind being taken into account. In actuality, there always are some disturbing circumstances, but if you know what the trajectory

of the bullet would be without them, you can allow, more or less precisely, for these circumstances in practice. Similarly the precepts which determine the proper conduct between A and B taken in isolation, may help to indicate our proper conduct in actual life when social complications have to be taken account of.

It may be said : If there always are, as a matter of fact, social complications which prevent the literal fulfilment of the command, what value is left to the command ? The answer is, I think, in the first place that certain motives which play a great part in human action ought, in accordance with the command, to be completely eliminated. When A and B are considered in isolation and A strikes B the natural reaction of B will be to hit back vindictively. No one can do us a wrong without provoking in us the desire to make him suffer in return. None of us can suppose ourselves free from the liability to be actuated by a vindictive motive. When A and B are considered in isolation, you can see the working of the vindictive motive, should B hit back, or try to restrain A by force. Social considerations being ruled out, such action on B's part can proceed only from a self-regarding motive. If that motive were quite eliminated, B would act just in the way the precept of Jesus described. But if B acts as the member of a society, then, even if the vindictive motive, or the self-regarding motive, has been eliminated, B will perhaps use force, or invoke force, for the restraint of A. His action may thus look externally the same as the action which, if he had taken it in a desert island, could have proceeded only from the self-regarding motive. If the precepts of Jesus were obeyed, the vindictive motive would be entirely eliminated from the actions of His followers. But the quality of an action is determined more by the motive behind it than by its external appearance : thus the actions which Christians do as members of society, even if they look externally the same as actions which proceed from a vindictive or self-regarding motive, may be wholly different in moral quality.

But it is not only that actions externally the same as those which would proceed from a vindictive motive are now done from a social motive ; the complete elimination of the vindictive motive would mean that in many cases the action would be also externally different. For we did not have to wait for the Freudian psychology to know how easily we all deceive ourselves about our motives. Supposing the action which proceeds from the vindictive motive is externally the same as the action which would proceed

from the social motive, it will scarcely be but in many cases where a man professes that his action proceeds from a social motive, where he really believes himself that he is acting purely from a social motive, the vindictive motive, the self-regarding motive has crept in and is that which really determines his action. The man who calls a policeman and gives the hooligan who has struck him in charge may tell himself that he is acting simply in order that society may be protected from a dangerous villain, but it may also give him a keen vindictive joy to see the man who has struck him in the hands of the police, and the desire for that satisfaction would, if the truth were told, have led him to call the police, even if no social considerations had come in. The actions which purport to be determined by social considerations in our environment are no doubt largely determined in reality by self-regarding motives, so that if the self-regarding motives were eliminated many actions now taken would not be taken at all.

Similarly in the case where we do not allow the man who has taken our property to go off with it, and do not invite him to take more, our action may be prompted by the social consideration that the man who takes our property is also likely to prey upon others as a thief, but it may be prompted by the keen sense that we have a right to hold what is our own and resentment that anyone should take what is *mine, mine, mine*. If that is our real motive, we are disobeying in our heart the precept of Jesus, and the elimination of the self-regarding motive would mean that even in regard to a thief our action would often be different—different externally.

We spoke of the case of someone who found his valet stealing articles of his clothing. The vindictive or self-regarding motive would lead the master instantly to prosecute the thief and have him put in prison. Even if the vindictive or self-regarding motive were absent, a master, animated by the spirit of Jesus, might, for social reasons, prosecute the thief and have him put in prison. But if I were animated by the spirit of Jesus, I should never regard the offender simply as a thief to be restrained and punished. I should regard him also as a brother, for whom the heavenly Father cared; I should be concerned to understand how the man had come to yield to the temptation of stealing: I should do what I could to help him, even if he had to be temporarily imprisoned, to recover his standing as an honest man, and make good. I might not indeed invite him to take further articles out

of my wardrobe, but I should be ready to incur expense, if, by so doing, I could set him on his feet again. It really would make a great difference to the action of those who profess to be followers of Jesus, if the vindictive and selfish motive were entirely done away.

I contended just now that, even if Christians were actuated in the fullest sense by the spirit of Jesus, it was a delusion to suppose that the evil will of men would necessarily yield to their influence. There are undoubtedly many cases in which the evil will would not yield to the spirit of love, while it *can* be prevented by force from having its way. But it is unquestionably true that where the evil will *is* overcome by the spirit of love, such overcoming is enormously preferable to forcible restraint. Where there is any hope of the evil will being overcome by the spirit of love, it is a tragic pity that force should be applied, and frustrate the work of love. How often that tragedy occurs! How often the will that might have been won by love is hardened in its evil by the use of force! That is the great truth which is behind pacifism, and is misrepresented by pacifism. Pacifism is right in seeing how greatly preferable it is to overcome by love, but refuses wrongly to see that such overcoming is often impossible, and that the use of force has then to come in as a second-best, a vastly inferior second-best. Even when the use of force produces a better state of things than could have come about if force had not been used, the use of force is hardly separable from a great deal of evil. Perhaps there is a balance of good in the result, but there is pretty sure to be a sad amount of evil to set against the good.

That, of course, applies specially to war. The evils and horrors of war can hardly be exaggerated. Whether modern war is on the whole worse than war in former ages I do not know. In some ways it is undoubtedly worse; in other ways its horrors have been mitigated, by the ambulance work, for instance, in a modern war, as compared with the horrible treatment of the wounded in less scientific days. It is only when we consider, on the other side, the evils which would in any given case follow from non-resistance to an aggressor that war may appear the lesser evil. I do not myself think that Chiang Kai-shek, as the Christian head of a great state, ought to tell his people to lay down their arms and let the Japanese trample on them as they please. One pacifist argument is, I think, demonstrably unsound. We are commanded, it is said, to love our neighbours, and it

cannot be an act of love to our neighbour if we try to kill him. "No one can say that it is an act of love to stick a bayonet into a man." The fallacy is shown in what has already been said about the difference of considering A and B in isolation, and considering A and B together with the complications of their social environment. My action towards a particular neighbour cannot always be the action which would be right if I considered that particular neighbour by himself in isolation. I have always to consider a vast number of other neighbours, and sometimes what would be an uncharitable action if one particular neighbour, or a few particular neighbours, were considered in isolation, is the action dictated by charity towards a much larger number of neighbours. If I am the driver of a railway engine and see a neighbour of mine standing on the line too near for me to avoid killing him except by wrecking the train and killing a large number of neighbours behind me, charity would prompt me to go straight ahead and kill my neighbour on the line. Supposing I were placed as an armed guard to protect the water supply of a great city against some malignant set of people who wanted to infect it, and saw two or three of them, some way off, creeping to where they could achieve their purpose, charity would prompt me to take the best aim I could with my rifle, so as to kill them all. Thus it is fallacious to test the charity of any action by asking how far it is an act of love towards the particular people immediately affected by it, considered by themselves. In a sense, indeed, if my action was right when I drove the train over my neighbour on the line, or carefully shot two or three of my fellow-men creeping to infect the water-supply, my action was one of love even to them, when the social environment which is theirs as well as mine is brought into consideration. If the man on the line was a perfectly good man he would desire that I should run over him and kill him rather than wreck the train; thus I was doing what he himself, if he chose his highest good, would desire. Similarly, if the men who wanted to infect the water supply ever came to apprehend their own greatest good they would be glad that they had been shot rather than that the city should be ravaged by a plague. They might thank me for it in another world. But in neither case would the action I took be the action which would have been prompted by love to that particular neighbour, or those particular neighbours, considered by themselves. Thus even if a man's trying to kill his fellow-men in war is not an action which would be prompted by love to those

fellow-men considered in isolation, it may still be that his action is that prompted by consideration of the greatest good for mankind. It is not killing which, always and in all circumstances, is unchristian, but hating, and that war is certain to stir up hatred is a thing more terrible, spiritually, about it than the killing. "That," the pacifist says, "is dishonest casuistry, since it is quite plain that killing men in war cannot be separated from hatred of them, and it is just another case where fine moral reasons are found to justify our giving evil tendencies the rein." I do not think the pacifist is right in saying that you cannot kill men without hating them, but it is true that to kill men without hating them is very difficult; nor do I think the pacifist right in saying that you cannot really have a good motive for doing something which the bad elements in human nature might have urged you to do; but it is true that we are all very liable to deceive ourselves and allege fine moral reasons for actions which we really do for bad ones. Thus, although the preceding argument has been directed to show that the pacifist position is a mistake, it may well be a very good thing that the pacifists are always there to challenge our sincerity and compel us to examine ever again, as honestly as we can, the motives from which we act.

#### DISCUSSION.

The CHAIRMAN (Lt.-Col. MOLONY) said: In view of the present state of Europe, this paper is surely timely. But the questions with which it deals are always before us. Every Sunday School teacher has to face them.

I do not think that any of the generals I served under would have liked all they said to be construed as "orders." Many hold that Christ only gave one order, that we should love one another, and that the rest was meant as advice.

There is a passage in St. Luke's gospel which bears on the matter which Mr. Bevan has set before us. Luke xxii, 36, reads: "He that hath none, let him sell his garment and buy a sword." I was once told at a Pacifist meeting that the word "sword" there means "large knife." But I consulted a learned D.D. about it, and he turned up the passages and said: "In some of the passages the word might mean 'large knife,' but in most of them it plainly means weapons. Shortly before, Christ had been speaking of the time of anarchy which He foresaw would shortly come upon Judea,

when all forms of police protection would be withdrawn and when it would be necessary for every man to carry a sword to protect his women from bandits and robbers.

As regards the passages from the Sermon on the Mount, which Mr. Bevan has been talking about, I believe that it is the case that the Romans enforced a by-law which entitled a Roman soldier on his journeys to compel any countryman he met to carry his equipment one mile, but not more.

Certainly the right plan for the countryman would be cheerful compliance. Christ probably meant that His people would be wise to co-operate with the Romans. Is it not likely that our Saviour also had the Romans in mind when He spoke about turning the other cheek? We may be sure that these Roman soldiers were much harsher and freer with the use of their hands than even their officers liked, yet to show resentment would have been futile and dangerous.

Mr. Bevan's analysis of the motives by which we ought to be actuated in these cases is surely most instructive.

Of course our lecturer is right in saying that war is certain to stir up hatred. Towards the end of the South African war of 1899, while there was still great bitterness at Capetown, there was little at the front; because both sides had tried to observe the Geneva Convention, and had performed various kindly acts for the other side. It is possible to obey Christ even in war.

We heartily thank Mr. Bevan for a very instructive paper.

MR SIDNEY COLLETT said: The Sermon on the Mount is a very important subject, for in it we are dealing with words uttered by our Lord Jesus Christ. Hence, we must be careful to avoid anything like an attempt to evade their true and natural meaning.

For while it is true that our Lord did speak in *parables*, and, at times, used language that was evidently *metaphorical*; yet, as the late Dr. Pierson once said: "Whenever it is possible to take a passage of Scripture in its literal sense, it should be so taken." That is a safe rule.

But this subject is a vast one. So I only desire to touch briefly upon one point: "If thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out and cast it from thee" (Matt. v, 29), quoted on the first page of the lecture.



Now the question is : Did our Lord really intend these instructions to be taken literally ? I answer most emphatically " Yes " ; and if you will read the whole verse instead of only a part of it, I think you will say so too. Here is the verse :—

29 And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast *it* from thee : for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not *that* thy whole body should be cast into hell.

The importance of these words is marked by three striking facts :

1. Our Lord repeated them almost word for word about a year later in His Ministry (Matt. xviii, 9) and repetition was always an Eastern mode of laying stress upon any subject.

2. Because, in spite of all the objections that may be raised about " mutilating " the body, Christ said " it is better for thee to enter into Life with one eye, rather than, having two eyes, to be cast into Hell fire " (Matt. xviii, 9).

3. Because the Bible furnishes some solemn illustrations of that truth.

In Gen. iii, 6, we read it was " *when the woman saw that the tree was good for food and that it was pleasant to the eyes* " that she took of the fruit thereof and did eat, and gave also to her husband and he did eat. And because of that look the whole world has been cursed for 6,000 years !

Now I ask would it not have been " profitable," to use our Lord's own word, if Eve had plucked out her eye rather than have committed that first act of disobedience with all its age-long consequences ?

For it was thus that " sin entered into the world, and death by sin " (Rom. v, 12).

Or, take the case of David when he *looked* upon Bethsheba, which he should not have done, that look led, not only to his sin with her, but also to the murder of her husband (II Sam. xi, 2). I therefore ask again, would it not have been " profitable " for David to have suffered the loss of his eye rather than have stained his whole life with those terrible sins ?

And to-day the Evil One is working so subtly through the human eye that it is almost impossible to go into a Museum or Art Gallery without seeing much that one has to turn away from ; while the

fashion-plate advertisements from the great West End houses are so indecent that we have to tear them up and throw them away, to prevent our maid seeing them! Also I saw recently a flaming advertisement of a film outside a cinema in North London entitled "The Cult of the Nude"!

So that the real and practical teaching of this part of the Sermon on the Mount is that we should rather lose anything or suffer anything, than allow our eye to lead us into sin, which might prove our eternal ruin!

Mr. PERCY O. RUOFF said: Christians, as Dr. Bevan has said, who "regard the words of Christ as the words of God," owe to the Lord absolute obedience. But the vital question is the true interpretation of these words. It is unfortunate that Dr. Bevan bases much of his argument on the words "If any man will take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also," and omits the qualifying words "will sue thee at the law," which occur after the words "If any man." By the omission of these words, Dr. Bevan entirely misconceives the teaching of the passage, and the graphic illustrations he uses of thieves and valets become irrelevant. Under the Mosaic law, it was illegal to dispossess a man of his cloak. The case which Christ cites is that of an oppressor seeking at law to obtain the under garment: if the claim is pressed, the Christian disciple is urged to forgo his rights, and give up even the essential outer garment which could not have been obtained by legal suit.

Or take the words "Whosoever shall smite thee on the right cheek, turn to him the other also." In this instance there is clear evidence that a literal interpretation is not intended, for, when Christ was smitten on the cheek in the presence of Caiaphas, He said: "If I have done evil, bear witness of the evil; but if well, why smitest thou Me?" It is evident that The Lord desired that justice and truth should prevail.

Consider the question of plucking out the offending eye and cutting off the right hand. Mutilation of the body by a Christian is clearly a wrong act, because his body is a temple of the Holy Spirit. I heard of a Chinaman who gouged out his eye, and recently I observed the case of a man who mutilated his wrist with an axe, with disastrous and bitter consequences. The eye and hand may be vehicles of sin.

A literal interpretation would not deal with the root trouble. It is the imagination and the heart which sin, and Christians are exhorted to mortify these.

With regard to the compulsion to go the second mile, no doubt the reference is to *corvée*, a form of enforced military service. The instance of Simon, the Cyrenian, who was compelled to carry Christ's cross, illustrates the saying.

The principle enunciated in the saying "An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth" is a principle which exists in all jurisprudence. Redress for wrong done can be adjusted in law. Is it not clear that Christ is teaching his disciples not to retaliate by private revenge, but so to act towards wrongdoers that it should be manifest "that ye may be sons of your Father which is in Heaven: for He maketh the sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust."

I caught a boy stealing apples in my garden. The police urged me to prosecute. I might (1) have given him in charge, (2) flogged him, or (3) instructed him. What I did was to warn him of his sin and its consequences, gave him some apples and a penny to buy some sweets. In some circumstances it might have been salutary to put the matter in the hands of the police. In the Epistle to the Romans, it is clearly stated that ordered government is ordained of God, and of a ruler it is said "he is the minister of God to thee for good" . . . "an avenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil" (Romans xiii, 4).

Mr. GEO. BREWER said: In Matt. v, 40 our Lord says: "If any man will sue thee at the law and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also." This would hardly include theft, with or without violence. The Sermon on the Mount, which contains the teaching of our Lord with regard to non-resistance of evil, must not be considered as a code of rules for the establishment of God's kingdom upon earth; but a statement of first principles for the guidance of subjects of His spiritual kingdom, which was soon to be more fully manifested. As Mr. Bevan has so well pointed out, the teaching applies to individuals in their personal capacity only, apart from any responsibility which they might have in relation to others. The failure to observe this distinction has led to extraordinary com-

plications; advocates of extreme pacifism, including responsible statesmen, being prepared to dispense with all force needed for the protection of the country against an aggressor.

When our Lord stood before Pilate, he declared plainly: "My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would My servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is My kingdom not from hence" (John xviii, 36).

It is, I fear, not sufficiently recognised that the teaching given by our Lord, as recorded in the Gospels, was but partial, and preliminary to further instruction contained in other part of the New Testament. In John xvi, 12, our Lord says to His disciples: "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when He, the Spirit of truth, is come, He will guide you into all truth." In Romans xiii, 1-4, we read: "There is no power, but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Who-soever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God. . . . for rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. For He (the power) is the minister of God for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid: for He beareth not the sword in vain." Again, I Pet. ii, 13-14, tells us that kings and governors are sent by God for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of them that do well.

It is clear, therefore, from God's Word that rulers in the kingdom of men must be prepared to use whatever force is necessary. Any government failing to do this would be unworthy of the name.

Col. A. H. VAN STRAUBENZEE said: The Interpretation of the Sermon on the Mount from which the lecturer has quoted does not fall into the dispensation of grace in which we are now living.

The four Gospels give us four lives of Christ, and each Gospel falls into four heads:—

1. The presentation of the kingdom.
2. The presentation of the King.
3. The rejection of the King.
4. The rejection of the kingdom.

As Matthew's gospel presents Christ's life as a King it is fitting that in presenting the kingdom He should give us the laws of that kingdom in chapters v to vii.

Where, then, does the kingdom come into being in the Divine plan ?

The Scriptures reveal seven such ages or dispensations :—

1. The Edenic state. Man in innocence, ended in expulsion from the garden.
2. Period, man without law. Ended in confusion of tongues.
3. Period, man under law. Ended in rejection of Israel.
4. Dispensation of man under grace will end in rapture of the Church and introduction of Day of the Lord.
5. Dispensation of judgment will end in destruction of Anti-Christ, and in binding of Devil.
6. Dispensation Millennial, will end in destruction of Satan and judgment of white throne.
7. Dispensation of glory will have no end.

All kingdoms have in it three classes of people :—

1. The King and Royal family.
2. An aristocracy or nobility.
3. Subjects to be ruled over by those set to rule.

So will God's earthly Millennial Kingdom be :—

1. The Lord Jesus Christ and the Church of God as joint-sharers. The Royal family.
2. Israel the aristocracy and nobility.
3. Subject Gentiles. [China—India—Africa, etc.]

At the close of the Law period.—Christ's earthly Advent lasted about  $3\frac{1}{2}$  years.

At the close of our dispensation.—Satan will probably come to earth for about  $3\frac{1}{2}$  years—and here it is the laws laid down in the Sermon of the Mount will again apply to Israel. Resist not Evil—the word implies the “ Evil One ”—because the earth given over to him resistance would be useless.

By the figure of speech “ Implication ”—the right eye means our choicest possession.

The word for smiting—is only used here and of our Lord—and means to smite with the palm of the hand—what we call a cuff. He who would take the inner tunic of a man let him also have the outer flowing robe, which is useless without the inner one.

Well, what about ourselves ?

The whole Bible has lessons for us, but our special text-book is probably the "all truth" of God in Ephesians, Colossians and Philippians—in these we do not find the words evil, sin, or resist, except the words Be ye angry and sin not. Righteous indignation is referred to; the anger is to be transitory. Evil-speaking is to be put away. But in Galatians, we are told to have sympathy one with another, called bearing one another's burdens, because (using a different Greek word) every man must bear his *own* burden—if this was followed—each realising he is a fallen being and avoid evil-speaking, even where there is an element of truth—what a much happier community we should be. For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one *point*, he is guilty of all.

As regards pacifism—and war. We have to remember that God is represented as a "man of war" to *all* who are out of Christ. At the present time readiness for war is essential to preserve in some measure the "knowledge of God" and "His truth" upon earth, in view of the Satanic forces gathering round us.

Col. SKINNER invited attention to a helpful explanation and one that might well be read within the lines of Dr. Bevan's admirable paper. The Bible, someone had shown, contained many obvious contradictions, but not by chance; it was of Divine purpose to fit every circumstance in the believer's life and experience. The two proverbs of chap. xxvi, 4 and 5, came readily to mind by way of illustration:—

"Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest thou also be like unto him."

"Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own conceit."

It was as we walked by obedient faith and were led by the Holy Spirit that we were guided to the right action for the particular occasion. Thus what might have been an appropriate line of action to have taken yesterday in one set of circumstances, might be quite unsuited to the new situation in which one found oneself to-day, and only as one sought the guidance of the Holy Spirit could one be sure of doing the right thing at the right time. But the precepts were all there, written beforehand for our admonition, awaiting

the appropriate occasion for use as brought to remembrance at the time.

This he further illustrated by citing known cases in which non-resistance on the one hand, and vigorous resistance on the other, had alike been justified and owned of God.

#### WRITTEN COMMUNICATIONS.

DR. R. E. D. CLARK wrote : It is impossible within a few sentences to take up all the issues raised by Dr. Bevan's interesting paper. I should like, however, to make three brief comments.

Firstly, has not Dr. Bevan ignored the fact that Jesus Himself did not live on a desert island ? Did not just the same complications arise in His day as in ours ? Was not Israel under a cruel foreign yoke ? Why, then, did Jesus teach pacifism if it was as inappropriate to His time as it is to ours ?

Secondly, does not Dr. Bevan's view presuppose that *we* are the arbiters of justice ? According to the New Testament we are all sinners, but God, in Christ, does not now treat sinners according to their deserts. God makes His sun shine on the just and the unjust alike and we, in this respect, are told to be perfect as our Heavenly Father is perfect and to *despair of no man* (Luke vi, 35). Far, then, from seeking to make the world a better place by means of force when other methods fail, we must say to the evildoer : " I, too, am a sinner and have no right to judge you." Is not this the consistent teaching of the Gospels ?

Thirdly, Dr. Bevan rightly points out that it is *very* difficult to kill without hating. But this being so, how does he think it right for a man to promise to obey his officers when he knows that these men are not as a rule actuated by Christian principles ? If a man deliberately makes himself a cog in the wheels of a system that works by lying and hatred, is he much the better just because he manages to remove hatred from his own soul ? Have we, in short, no moral responsibility for the hatred of *others* if we deliberately assist them in what they do, even though we do not ourselves hate ? This is an important question and it would be interesting to know how it can be answered.

Brig.-General H. BIDDULPH wrote: The paper undoubtedly brings out a great truth, viz., that our duty toward our *neighbour* is embraced by a wider circle, our duty toward our *neighbours*, and that the lesser may have to yield to the greater. There is, however, another factor: governmental rule is ordained by God (Rom. xiii, 1), and this rule expressly includes the punishment of evildoers even unto death. The state is made up of individuals, and it is contrary to our duty toward the state (our neighbours in bulk) to become an accessory to crime or to assist in the shielding of criminals, where we ourselves are not the sole or principal sufferers. Reasoning to the contrary would justify standing passive while a crime of violence was being committed under our eyes, without attempting with all the force in our power to protect the victim. Such conduct would not only be callous indifference and selfishness, but would exhibit a lack of love in the highest degree toward our neighbour, the victim, and dereliction of duty toward the state (our neighbours in bulk), the peaceful government of which is a duty imposed by God Himself.

Rev. Principal H. S. CURR wrote:—In common with all who have heard or read Dr. Bevan's paper, I have thoroughly enjoyed it. Its simplicity and lucidity are only possible on the basis of great erudition and a profound grasp of the subject. This discussion has put the problem of non-resistance to evil in a new and illuminating context.

It is not my purpose to argue regarding any particular interpretation of the words, but rather to draw attention to an aspect which may clarify the problem indirectly. Our Lord knew what He was about. All possible difficulties were present to His mind when He spoke as He did regarding the duty of His disciples to behave in a way which represented the reverse of the vicious and vindictive spirit which pervaded all classes of Palestinian Jewry in that distant age, fully realising the intricacy of the questions involved, and yet He expressed Himself in the way which seems so cryptic. The general drift of His counsels is perfectly clear. He is proscribing revenge in any form, revenge which Bacon described as a kind of wild justice. But the point on which I wish to lay special stress is the extraordinary effect which these challenging sentences in the Sermon on the Mount have had on human history. They have



ameliorated conditions in a wonderful way, not so much by the letter as by the spirit. It is true that present achievement falls far short of the ideal, depicted in our Lord's words, and yet their effect in subduing and sanctifying the passions of men has been extraordinary. Modern warfare is harsh, but it is mild and humanitarian compared with the Roman methods during the Apostolic Age, as the siege and sack of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 abundantly prove. The same observations can be made regarding private life. It has been restrained and constrained by the teaching of our Lord in a way which is simply marvellous. I am fully aware of all the difficulties implied in these sentences, but it seems to me to be indubitable that these bewildering commands of Christ were not uttered in vain by any manner of means.

The best commentary on the words is the Cross, when their author became obedient unto death. The New Testament itself puts this truth in the familiar words: "For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example that ye should follow His steps: Who did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth: Who, when He was reviled, reviled not again; when He suffered, He threatened not; but committed Himself to Him that judgeth righteously: Who His own self bare our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sin, should live unto righteousness: by Whose stripes ye were healed" (I Peter ii, 21-24).

Major R. B. WITHERS wrote: The latter part of this paper is a fine exposition of the proper Christian attitude to various modern problems; but Dr. Bevan burdens his argument by his references to literal obedience to the Sermon on the Mount. He overlooks the fact that the Lord Jesus did not intend it to apply to all Christians. For instance, Matt. v, 22 (the sanhedrin and Gehenna), v, 23 (offering an oblation on the altar) cannot literally be applied to us. The whole atmosphere is redolent of Judaism and the Kingdom of the Heavens promised in the Hebrew prophets. These promises, now in abeyance, must yet be fulfilled (Matt. v, 17, 18; Rom. xi, 25-29).

The Epistle to the Galatians is a complete answer to any who would fasten upon us the yoke of literal observance of these precepts.

It seems to be forgotten that the earthly portion of the ministry

of the Lord Jesus was but a fraction of the whole. There were many things beyond the horizon of His disciples (John xvi, 12, 13). For our guidance we have the epistles of the Apostle Paul, which are as much the words of the Lord Jesus as those He spoke on earth.

It is astonishing that so eminent a theologian should be able to discuss this subject without indicating that he is aware of the important researches of recent years into the relation between the various Divine Economies.

#### AUTHOR'S REPLY.

Dr. BEVAN writes :—" I do not think it would be desirable for me to attempt to enter into controversy on all the points, covering a wide field, raised by the comments. Readers of my paper and of the comments will be able to form their own judgment how far the comments are cogent."