

CONSIDERATIONS

Respecting the Lawfulness of War under the Christian Dispensation.

The Apostles foretold that after their decease, a departure from the purity of the Christian faith would take place—that “men would arise speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them,” and that “many would follow their pernicious ways, by reason of whom the way of truth would be evil spoken of.”

That this prediction was strictly fulfilled, will be generally admitted. The falling away from the meek and unresisting spirit which so conspicuously marked the primitive Church, was gradual, keeping pace with the increase of the general profanity, and was doubtless accelerated by the corrupting influence of a union between the Church and the State.

When princes adopted the Christian religion from motives of state policy, it is not just cause of surprise, that courtiers should claim to be converts—nor that a modified and adulterated system of religion should ensue, and ultimately prevail amongst subjects,—nor that war should cease to be regarded as a violation of the spirit and precepts of the Gospel.

It will not be denied, that the precepts and injunctions of our blessed Lord, are binding upon individual believers. It becomes then an inquiry of the utmost importance, and we commend it to the mature and solemn reflection of all. By what human authority—by what human tribunal, can a community be absolved from the observance of those Divine laws and injunctions which are acknowledged to be binding upon its individual members?

If it be said that Christianity exonerates nations from those duties, which she has imposed upon individuals, we ask for the ground upon which the assumption is based. If the plea of expediency be made, does it not imply a distrust of Divine protection? And if expediency be a justification of a violation of one Divine law, it is not perceived why it may not, with equal propriety, be urged in justification of a violation of one Divine Law, it is not perceived why it may not, with equal propriety, be urged in justification of a violation of every other Divine law. If human authority may abrogate, or suspend one law of God, why not the same authority exercise the same power in regard to every other law of the Creator? Again, if the plea of expediency in relation to Christian doctrine and practice be admissible; by it could not the multitude of martyrs have escaped, who offered up their lives rather than deny the Lord that bought them, or violate his holy injunctions?

It may be said—indeed it often is said, that war though a great evil, is an evil that cannot be avoided in the present state of the world; and this conclusion may serve to quiet the consciences of many, whose feelings revolt at the fearful realities of war. Let us examine the correctness of the conclusion, that war is unavoidable—has the trial been made, and found to be impracticable?

It is indeed to be regretted, that no instance of a strictly national character has yet occurred, to test the practicability of the principle for which we plead—an unreasoning reliance upon the Omnipotent Arm for protection and defence. There is, however, a case to which we may refer, of a strong character, and sufficiently national for all the purposes of our argument. Pennsylvania, it is known, was settled by men who believed that Christianity forbade war under any and every pretext. They acted in strict accordance with this belief. They planted themselves in the midst of savages. They were surrounded by men who knew nothing of written treaties, or the obligations of revealed religion; by men who were addicted to war in its most sanguinary and revolting forms; and yet “for more than seventy years,” and up to the time that the government of the Colony passed into other hands, they enjoyed uninterrupted peace.

“The Pennsylvanians,” says Clarkson, “became armed, though without arms; they became strong, though without strength; they became safe, without the ordinary means of safety. For the greater part of a century, and never during the administration of William Penn, or that of his proper successors, was there a quarrel or a war”—“Whatever the quarrels of the Pennsylvania Indians were with others, they uniformly respected, and held sacred, as it were the territories of William Penn.”

The settlers of Pennsylvania, relying upon Divine protection, placed themselves in the midst of savages, without the means of resisting aggression; and even savage magnanimity felt the appeal—suppressed the war-cry—and permitted them to possess the land in undisturbed repose. What a lesson, may we not ask, to Christian nations!

How painfully, how instructively, does the situation of other American colonies contrast with this! We will not attempt to portray it; but refer to the blood-stained pages of colonial history.

Will it be said that the same confiding spirit, and peaceable deportment, if practised in sincerity and truth, towards nations professing the benign religion of the Gospel, would be more dangerous, or less successful? We trust not—such a conclusion would be a libel upon mankind—a denial of the efficacy of the Christian religion—and an inexcusable distrust of the Providence and moral government of God.

It is not unusual to attempt a justification of war under the Gospel dispensation, by referring to the wars of the Jews, under the dispensation of the Law. It is conceded that many of these wars were authorised by the Supreme Ruler of the universe, for purposes of his own inscrutable wisdom; but this high authority cannot be claimed by Christian nations; and it has been shown that the two dispensations are essentially different—that holy men, during the continuance of the legal dispensation, predicted, under the influence of the spirit of prophecy, that the time would come when nation should cease to lift up sword against nation, or to learn war any more. We have seen that the Divine Author and Founder of the existing dispensation, called the attention of his followers to those violent and vindictive passions, the indulgence of which were allowed under the law, for the express purpose of excluding them from the code of morals which it was His purpose to establish; and that His immediate followers, and their successors for nearly two centuries, firmly believed that war was forbidden by their Divine Master. We have shown that the conviction was so solemnly sealed upon their consciences, that when called by the rulers of that day to serve as soldiers, no earthly consideration or suffering could induce them to swerve from this article of primitive Christian faith.

And the early writers, Irenæus, Justin Martyr, and Tertullian, affirm as their belief, that the prophecy which declares that men should turn their swords into plough-shares and their spears into pruning-hooks, was then fulfilled.

Dying as we Live.

Probably no one whose eye shall meet these lines thinks himself quite ready to die; or would be willing to quit this earthly scene and stand before God in judgment, precisely as he is at this moment. If death were announced as a near and inevitable event, there would be some conscious guilt to be repented of; some duty neglected, or half-performed, that needs first to be attended to; some prayer to offer, some higher degree and larger measure of holiness, as the crowning fitness for heaven, to seek. Our hearts deceive us if they make us to believe that we are so living as to be in perfect readiness to die any instant, without warning. Whenever we think of death, there is a resolution entertained to seek a higher fitness; there is a felt consciousness of insufficiency; the remembrance of sins not put away, and of duties deferred, instantly arises in the mind. And yet it is a most solemn and instructive thought, that *most men die as they live*; with the same essential character and the same mental habits. If our life is an impenitent life, our death is almost certain to be an impenitent death; if we live unprepared for eternity, we shall (unless our case prove a rare exception) die at last without hope. If we profess to be Christians, and yet are slothful, negligent, prayerless, and confessedly living far away from God, in the daily habit and practice of life, in that same fearful state we shall in all probability die. Whatever duty or service we neglect living, whether it relate to our own soul, to our children, to the church, or to the impenitent, we are almost sure to die and not perform. The character that a man maintains through life, with here and there a solitary exception, he will die with, and carry along up to the judgment. Whatever he may think, or propose, or flatter himself to believe, he will, so to speak, stand before God at last in his everyday dress. There will be no change of raiment when death shall come; the thoughts, and the habits, and the sins of his life will go with him up to the bar of God.

These remarks are borne out by no little observation, and by the nature of things. Men mean to reform, to repent, to prepare for death, to undo what they are now doing, and do what they are now deferring; but alas! the deceitfulness of their own hearts and the providence of God cheat their pious intentions. Not one person in a hundred dies the death he expects to die, or by the disease he expects will end his day. Not one in a hundred dies, when, or where, or in the manner that he expects to die. He may be expecting death long, and yet at last it comes at the hour, or by an avenue unexpected, and he is surprised. We have been astonished often at this fact. There is a marked and warning Providence in it. There is a fearful significance in the Saviour's words, “Watch, therefore, for you know not what hour your Lord doth come.”

God would have us live religion, live heaven, live eternity, if we really mean to dwell with him. If our eternal hopes hang only on our intentions, they are not worth a straw. If we are living as we would be unwilling to die, we shall die condemned by our own judgment. What we are to-day, and what we have been for years past, and shall continue to be in coming years, we shall, in all probability, be in the hour of death, and at the day of judgment. It is a solemn thought. It ought to alarm us, and lead us to self-examination and prayer. “What! am I to die just as I am living—with no other preparation—in my present character—with all my present feelings—with this load of sin upon me—with no habits of holiness—with so little of the spirit of angels and glorified saints! Let me anticipate the solemn hour of my dying, and what I would be then; let me seek Thee now, and every day and hour of my life.”—N. Y. Ev.

Casting Lots on the Bible.

An instructive instance of the effects which may follow a superstitious use of scripture, is recorded in the life of Mr. Lackington. The celebrated bookseller informs us that, when young, he was at one time locked up, to prevent his attending the Methodist meeting in Tauton and that, in a fit of superstition, he opened the Bible for directions what to do, and hit upon these words: “He shall give his angels charge concerning thee, and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone.” “This,” says Mr. Lackington, “was quite enough for me; so, without a moment's hesitation, I ran up two pair of stairs to my own room, and out of the window I leaped, to the terror of my poor mistress.” He was of course, very severely bruised,—so severely indeed, as to be confined to his bed during fourteen days. Mr. Lackington did not see, he could not at the time reflect, that he grossly abused a text of sacred scripture,—that he contorted it to a sense which was imposed on it by Satan,—and that he applied it to the exact purpose for the sake of which the deceiver vainly adduced it to our Lord; and he thus very notably proved to all persons who cast lots upon the bible, that, in superstitiously seeking counsel from the book of God's word, they may not alone reject the teaching of Christ and of the Holy Spirit, but directly yield themselves to the guidance of a foolish imagination and a deceitful heart.—How true is it that the “letter killeth,” while “the spirit giveth life!” “The word of God is quick and powerful!”—it “converts the soul of the simple”—it is “God's hammer” and “God's fire,” the “power of God unto salvation;” but that word is neither paper, ink, nor vocables; nor even is it verses and sentiments addressed to the mere understanding; it is God's testimony—God's testimony to the soul—a testimony which, when understood, is written on the believer's heart, and which no man can appreciate but through the enlightening influence of the Holy Spirit. Whoever would understand and properly use it, let him pray with David—“Open mine eyes, O Lord, that I may behold wondrous things in thy law.”

The Spirit of Trade.

A religion is exemplified in trade, and all business relations, is yet to bless the world more than ever before. John Angell James, in his “Earnest Church,” just published, thus speaks of a necessity which is laid upon the Christianity of our times:—The spirit of trade, as it is now carried on, is no less adverse to a high state of religion, than the spirit of amusement; and like that, is all the more dangerous because of the impossibility of assigning limits within which the indulgence of it is lawful, and beyond which it becomes an infringement of the law of God. Our chief danger lies in those things which become sin only by the degree in which an affection or pursuit, not wrong in itself, is carried,—such as covetousness, pleasure-taking, and attention to the business of life; these all originate in things lawful in themselves, and which are sinful only by excess. Fornication, adultery, falsehood, robbery, and other vices, are all so marked out and so marked off from the region of what is lawful, that the line of division is distinctly perceptible, and we can see at once when we are approaching the point of prohibition, and when we have stepped over it. But we cannot say this of worldly-mindedness. The love of acquisition and appropriation is one of the instinctive principles of our nature, planted in it by the hand of God, and intended to subserve the wisest and most beneficent purposes. The whole fabric of society is founded upon it, and all social organization is regulated by it. Trade may be said to be of God's appointment, if not directly,

yet by the law of labor under which we are placed; and we cannot do without it. But then, like every other good, it may be abused and become an evil.—It may exert so engrossing an influence over the mind as to absorb it, and exclude from it the consideration of every other subject. It must never be forgotten that the rule is binding upon us all, to “seek first the Kingdom of God, and His righteousness;” to overcome the world by faith; to set our affections on things above, and not on things on the earth. All this is as truly law now, as it ever was; and no attention to things seen and temporal, no labor even to provide things abundant and luxurious for ourselves, can release us from the obligation of a supreme regard to things “unseen and eternal.”

THE SAILOR'S FRIEND.

The following we copy from the Sailor's Magazine for August.

The Value of a Tract.

Four Sundays since, according to our usual custom, we were visiting the ships in the Second Municipality, New Orleans. On board of the English ship Loodianah, we found a drunken sailor, and left for him a tract called “Reformation of Drunkards,” written by Rev. John Marsh, Secretary of the American Temperance Union. He read it, and on the following Sunday came to the Bethel and signed the Temperance pledge. Last Sunday he brought to the Bethel a shipmate, who came near dying the past week in consequence of his intemperate habits, and induced him also to sign. About to leave this port, he addressed to us the following letter which we are sure will be read with much interest; coming as it does from a man of more than ordinary attainments, who has been reduced by intemperance to the position of a common sailor. His statements are undoubtedly true; for a portion of them had already been communicated to us by one who had known him and his parents in their native land. B.

New Orleans, May 24 1848.

DEAR SIR:—I take the liberty of writing to you these few lines as a token of my sincere gratitude and respect for the interest you take in behalf of poor sailors and other sinners, and I hope God in his own good time will reward you, for I cannot. I am going away in the good ship Loodianah, and I shall leave New Orleans and you with a grateful sense of the deep and lasting obligations I am under to you for the work of charity and great service you have done me.

To give you a detailed account of what intemperance has brought me to, would fill a volume. Suffice it to say, it has reduced me from chief officer of a fine East India ship, to a common sailor. I have squandered away the portion which was left me by my parents, which they suffered many years of trouble and vexation in accumulating. I have turned my brothers and friends, who are very respectable, against me by my disgusting habits of intemperance. It has led me to the commission of all those crimes which generally beset the drunkard; but I thank God I have never committed an act of dishonesty or injured any but myself. But amidst all my intoxication, conscience, that faithful monitor, told me I was doing wrong. I have railed much and to some purpose against taking the pledge, on the plea that a man ought to know what will do him good. But I say here, that a man will go gradually from one glass to another till he forms that appetite or craving for drink, so he cannot well do without it. I speak from experience, for in three months I squandered £250, and knew not where I was until I found myself an inmate of the London Hospital, having been brought there mad with delirium tremens, which nearly cost me my life, and the Doctors told me if I ever had them again it would carry me off, I was so violent in my fits of insanity. From that time I have been making resolutions in my own mind, for I was ashamed to take the pledge, having railed so much against it, and I am sorry to say those resolutions were broken as soon as formed. I have for some time sailed in nothing else but temperance ships, on purpose to avoid drink and am always happy without it, but no sooner am I on shore than I am as bad as ever. I am miserable and cross when in liquor, and rise in the morning disgusted with my own beastly conduct in drinking to that excess as to deprive me of the reason God has given me above the brute creation.

I would advise all to take the pledge, for it is an excuse if asked to drink. They may then