

A SOLEMN REVIEW  
OF  
THE CUSTOM OF WAR

SHOWING  
THAT WAR IS THE EFFECT OF POPULAR DELUSION  
AND PROPOSING A REMEDY

BY  
PHILO PACIFICUS  
(Noah Worcester, “the friend of peace”)

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“By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another. – *John 13:35*  
“All they that take the sword shall perish with the sword.” – *Matthew 26:52*”

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## Transcriber's Notes

Noah Worcester lived from 1758 to 1837 and was a self-educated author, editor, peace activist, and Unitarian minister. He spent his early life in New Hampshire and moved to Boston in 1813 to become the editor of a monthly journal called *The Christian Disciple*. He first published *A Solemn Review* the following year and founded the Massachusetts Peace Society a year after that. He continued to write, edit, and publish the Society's quarterly journal, *The Friend of Peace*, until 1828, publishing most of his work under the name Philo Pacificus. *A Solemn Review* was extensively reprinted in America, England, and Europe throughout the 19th century and can be found in most collections of pacifist essays of that period.

Mr. Worcester was highly critical of the customs of the Hindus of his day. I am no historian and cannot verify the accuracy of his descriptions, but I am confident that they do not reflect the common practices of our Hindu brothers and sisters today.

I have made minor changes to grammar, archaic style, sentence structure, and words too far out of modern usage, but I have tried to be careful in all cases to preserve the original sense of the text. Scanning and proofreading are not 100% accurate, so please bring any mistakes to my attention so that I can correct them. This transcription is under no copyright protection. It is my gift to you. You may freely copy, print, and transmit it, but please do not change or sell it.

Tom Lock

## *“Shall the sword devour forever?”*

We regard with horror the custom of the ancient heathens, in offering their children in sacrifice to idols. We are shocked with the customs of the Hindus, in prostrating themselves before the car of an idol to be crushed to death; in burning women alive on the funeral piles of their husbands; in offering a monthly sacrifice by casting living children into the Ganges to be drowned. We read with astonishment of the sacrifices made in the Papal crusades, and in the Muslim and Hindu pilgrimages. We wonder at the blindness of Christian nations, who have esteemed it right and honorable to buy and sell Africans as property, and reduce them to bondage for life. But that which is fashionable and popular in any country is esteemed right and honorable, whatever may be its nature in the views of men who are better informed.

But while we look back, with a mixture of wonder, indignation, and pity, on many of the customs of former ages, are we careful to inquire whether some customs, which we deem honorable, are not the effect of popular delusion, and whether they will not be so regarded by future generations? Isn't it a fact, that one of the most horrid customs of savage men is now popular in every nation in Christendom? What custom of the most barbarous nations is more repugnant to the feelings of piety, humanity, and justice, than that of deciding controversies between nations by the edge of the sword, by powder and ball, or the point of the bayonet? What other savage custom has occasioned half the desolation and misery to the human race? And what, but the grossest infatuation, could render such a custom popular among rational beings?

When we consider how great a part of mankind have perished by the hands of each other, and how large a portion of human calamity has resulted from war, we surely cannot be indifferent as to whether this custom is or is not the effect of delusion. Certainly there is no custom that deserves a more thorough examination than that which has occasioned more slaughter and misery than all the other abominable customs of the heathen world.

War has been so long fashionable among all nations, and its enormity is but little regarded; or when thought of at all, it is usually considered as a necessary and unavoidable evil. But the question to be considered is this: can the state of society and the views of civilized men be so changed as to abolish so barbarous a custom, and render wars unnecessary and avoidable?

If this question may be answered in the affirmative, then we may hope that “the sword will not devour forever.”<sup>1</sup>

Some may be ready to exclaim, “None but God can produce such an effect as the abolition of war, and we must wait for the millennial day.” We admit that only God can produce the necessary change in the state of society and the views of men, but God works by human agency and human means. None but God could have produced such a change in the views of the British nation so as to abolish the slave trade, yet the event was brought about by a long course of persevering and the honorable exertions of benevolent men.

When the thing was first proposed, it probably appeared to the majority of the people as an unavailing and chimerical project. But God raised up powerful advocates, gave them the spirit of perseverance, and finally crowned their efforts with glorious success. It is probable now that thousands of people are wondering how such an abominable traffic ever existed in any nation that had even the least pretensions to Christianity or civilization. God can put an end to war in a similar manner, and fill the world with astonishment that rational beings ever thought of such a mode of settling controversies.

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<sup>1</sup> Transcriber's note – 2 Samuel 2:26.

As to waiting for the millennium to put an end to war, without any exertions on our own part, it is like the sinner's waiting God's time for conversion, while he pursues his course of vice and impiety. If ever there shall be a millennium in which the sword will cease to devour, it will probably be brought about by the blessing of God on the benevolent exertions of enlightened men. Perhaps no one thing is now a greater obstacle in the way of the wished for state of the church than the spirit and custom of war, which is maintained by Christians themselves. Isn't it, then, time that efforts should be made to enlighten the minds of Christians on a subject of such infinite importance to the happiness of the human race?

That such a state of things is desirable, no enlightened Christian can deny. That it can be produced without expensive and persevering efforts is not imagined. But aren't such efforts to exclude the miseries of war from the world as laudable as those which have for their object the support of such a malignant and desolating custom?

The whole amount of property in the United States is probably of far less value than what has been expended and destroyed within two centuries by wars in Christendom. Suppose, then, that one-fifth of this amount had been judiciously laid out by peace associations in the different states and nations, in cultivating the spirit and art of peace, and in exciting a just abhorrence of war. Wouldn't the other four-fifths have been in a great measure saved, besides many millions of lives, and an immense portion of misery? Had the whole value of what has been expended in wars been appropriated to the purpose of peace, how laudable would have been the appropriation and how blessed the consequences!

In favor of war several pleas will probably be made.

First, some will plead that the Israelites were permitted, and even commanded to make war on the inhabitants of Canaan. To this it may be answered that the Giver and Arbiter of life had a right, if he pleased, to make use of the savage customs of the age for punishing guilty nations. If any government of the present day should receive a commission to make war as the Israelites did, let the order be obeyed. But until they have such a commission, let it not be imagined that they can innocently make war.

As a further answer to this plea, we have to observe that God has given encouragement that, under the reign of the Messiah, there shall be such a time of peace "that nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more." Micah 4:3. If this prediction shall ever be fulfilled, the present delusion in favor of war must be done away with. How, then, are we to expect the way will be prepared for the accomplishment of the prediction? This is probably not to be done by miraculous agency, but by the blessing of God on the benevolent exertions of individuals to open the eyes of their fellow-mortals in respect to the evils and delusions of war, and the blessings of peace. Those who shall be the instruments of producing so important a change in the views of men will be in an eminent sense "peace-makers," and will be entitled to the appellation and privileges of "the sons of God." How much more glorious the achievement will be, to conquer the prejudices and delusions of men on this subject by kindness and reason, than to conquer the world by the edge of the sword.

A second plea in favor of the custom of war may be this: that war is an advantage to a nation, as it usually disposes of many vicious and dangerous characters. But doesn't war make two such characters for every one it removes? Isn't it in fact the greatest school of depravity, and the greatest source of mischievous and dangerous characters that ever existed among men? Doesn't a state of war lower the standard of morality in a nation, so that a vast portion of common vice is scarcely observed as evil?

Besides, isn't it awful to think of sending vicious men beyond the means of reformation and the hope of repentance? When they are sent into the army, what is this but consigning them to a state where they will rapidly fill up the measure of their iniquity, and become "fitted to destruction?"

Thirdly, it will be pleaded that no substitute for war can be devised that will insure to a nation a redress of wrongs. In reply we may ask, is it common for a nation to obtain a redress of wrongs by war? As to redress, don't the wars of nations resemble boxing at a tavern, when both of the combatants receive a terrible bruising, then drink together and make peace; each, however, bearing for a long time the marks of his folly and madness? A redress of wrongs by war is so uncommon that, unless revenge is redress, and multiplied injuries are satisfaction, we should suppose that none but madmen would run the hazard.

But if the eyes of people could be opened in regard to the evils and delusions of war, wouldn't it be easy to form a confederacy of nations and organize a high court of equity to decide national controversies?<sup>2</sup> Why might not such a court be composed of some of the most eminent characters from each nation, and compliance with the decision of the court be made a point of national honor, to prevent the effusion of blood and to preserve the blessings of peace? Can any considerate person say that the probability of obtaining right in such a court would be less than by an appeal to arms? When an individual appeals to a court of justice for the redress of wrongs, it is not always the case that he obtains his right. Still, such an appeal is safer, more honorable, and more certain, as well as more benevolent, than for the individual to attempt to obtain redress by his pistol or his sword. And aren't the reasons for avoiding an appeal to the sword, for the redress of wrongs, always great in proportion to the calamities that such an appeal must naturally involve? If this is a fact, then there is infinitely greater reason, why two nations should avoid an appeal to arms, than usually exists against a bloody combat between two contending individuals.

In the fourth place, it may be urged that a spirit of forbearance on the part of a national government would be an invitation to repeated insult and aggression. But is this plea founded on facts and experience? Does it accord with what is well known of human nature? Who are the persons in society that most frequently receive insult and abuse? Are they the meek, the benevolent, and the forbearing? Do these more commonly have reason to complain than persons of quick resentment, who are ready to fight on the least provocation?

There are two sects of professed Christians in this country, which, as sects, are peculiar in their opinions respecting the lawfulness of war, and the right of repelling injury by violence. These are the Quakers and the Shakers. They are remarkably pacific. Now, we ask, does it appear, from experience, that their forbearing spirit brings on them a greater portion of injury and insult than is experienced by people of other sects? Isn't the reverse of this true in fact? There may, indeed, be some instances of such gross depravity as a person's taking advantage of their pacific character, to do them injury, with the hope of impunity. But in general, it is believed, their pacific principles and spirit command the esteem even of the vicious, and operate as a shield from insult and abuse.

The question may be brought home to every society. How seldom do children of a mild, forbearing temper experience insult or injury, compared with the waspish, who will sting if touched? The same inquiry may be made in respect to persons of these opposite descriptions of every age and in every situation of life, and the result will be favorable to the point in question.

Should any deny the applicability of these examples to national rulers, we have the pleasure of being able to produce one example, which is undeniably applicable.

When William Penn took the Government of Pennsylvania, he distinctly avowed to the Indians his forbearing and pacific principles, and his benevolent wishes for uninterrupted peace with them. On these principles the government was administered while it remained in the hands of the Quakers. What, then, was the effect? Did this pacific character in government invite aggression and insult? Let the

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<sup>2</sup> Transcriber's note – Apparently not. The United Nations and the World Court are often powerless to prevent such things.

answer be given in the language of the Edinburgh Review concerning the life of William Penn. Speaking of the treaty made by Penn with the Indians, the reviewer said:

“Such indeed was the spirit in which the negotiation was entered into, and the corresponding settlement conducted, that for the space of more than seventy years – and so long indeed as the Quakers retained the chief power in the government – the peace and amity which had been thus solemnly promised and concluded was never violated; and a large though solitary example was afforded of the facility with which they, who are really sincere and friendly in their views, may live in harmony with those who are supposed to be peculiarly fierce and faithless.”

Shall this solitary but successful example never be imitated? “Shall the sword devour forever?”

Some of the evils of war have already been mentioned, but the field is almost boundless. The demoralizing and depraving effects of war cannot be too seriously considered. We have heard much of the corrupting tendency of some of the rites and customs of the heathen, but what custom of the heathen nations had a greater effect in depraving the human character than the custom of war? What is that feeling usually called a war-spirit, but a deleterious compound of enthusiastic ardor, ambition, malignity, and revenge – a compound which really endangers the soul of the possessor as much as the life of his enemy? Who, but a deranged or deluded person, would think it safe to rush into the presence of his Judge with his heart boiling with enmity, and his brother’s blood dripping from his hands! Yet in time of war, how much care is taken to excite and maintain this bloodthirsty disposition as essential to success!

The profession of a soldier exposes him to sudden and untimely death, and at the same time hardens his heart and renders him regardless of his final account. When a person goes into the army, it is expected of him that he will rise above the fear of death. In doing this he too commonly rises above the fear of God, and all serious concern for his soul. It is not denied that some men sustain virtuous characters amidst the contaminating vapors of a camp, and some may be reformed by a sense of the dangers to which they are exposed, but these are uncommon occurrences.

The depravity occasioned by war is not confined to the army. Every species of vice gains ground in a nation during war. And when a war is brought to a close, seldom, perhaps, does a community return to its former standard of morals. In times of peace, vice and irreligion generally retain the ground they acquired during a war. As every war augments the amount of national depravity, so it proportionally increases the dangers and miseries of society.

Among the evils of war, a wanton undervaluing of human life ought to be mentioned. This effect may appear in various forms. When a war is declared for the redress of some wrong, in regard to property, if nothing but property is taken into consideration, the result is not commonly better than spending five hundred dollars in a lawsuit to recover a debt of ten. But when we come to estimate human lives against dollars and cents, how are we confounded! “A man will give all that he has for his life.”

If rulers learn to undervalue the lives of their own subjects by the custom of war, how much more do they undervalue the lives of their enemies! As they learn to hear of the loss of five hundred or a thousand of their own men, with perhaps less feeling than they would hear of the death of a favorite horse or dog, so they learn to hear of the death of thousands after thousands on the side of the enemy with joy and exultation. If their own men have succeeded in taking an unimportant fortress, or a frigate, with the loss of fifty lives on their own side, and fifty-one on the other, this is a matter of joy and triumph. This time they have won the game. But, alas, at what expense to others! This expense, however, does not interrupt the joy of war-makers. They leave it to the wounded and the friends of the dead to feel and to mourn.

This dreadful depravity of feeling is not confined to rulers in times of war. The army becomes abandoned to such depravity. They learn to undervalue not only the lives of their enemies, but even their own, and will often wantonly rush into the arms of death for the sake of military glory. And more or less of the same want of feeling, and the same undervaluing of human life, extends through the nation in proportion to the frequency of battles, and the duration of war.

If anything is done by the army of one nation that is deemed by the other as contrary to the modern conventions of war, how soon do we hear the exclamation of Goths and Vandals!<sup>3</sup> Yet how are Christians at war better than those barbarous tribes? And how is the war-spirit in them superior to the spirit of Goths and Vandals? When the war-spirit is excited, it is not always to be circumscribed in its operations by the refinements of civilization. It is at best a bloody and desolating spirit.

Of what value is our boast of civilization or Christianization, while we tolerate, as popular and justifiable, the most horrid custom which ever resulted from human wickedness? Should a period arrive when the nations “shall learn war no more,” what will posterity think of our claims, as Christians and civilized men? The custom of sacrificing men by war may appear to them as the blackest of all heathen superstitious. Its present popularity may appear as wonderful to ages to come as the past popularity of any ancient custom now does to us. “What!” they may exclaim. “Could those be Christians, who could sacrifice men by thousands to a point of honor, falsely so called; or to obtain a redress of a trifling wrong in regard to property? If such were the customs of Christians, in what way were they better than the heathens of their own time?”

Perhaps some apologist may rise up in that day, and plead the conclusion from the history of our times that it was supposed necessary to the safety of a nation for its government to be quick to assume a warlike tone and attitude upon every infringement of their rights, that magnanimous forbearance was considered as pusillanimity, and that Christian meekness was thought intolerable in the character of a ruler.

To this others may reply: “Could these professed Christians have imagined that their safety depended on displaying a spirit that was the reverse of their Master’s? Could they have supposed that such a temper was best calculated to insure the protection of Him who held their destiny in his hands? Did they not know that wars are demoralizing, and that the greatest danger of a nation results from its corruption and depravity? Did they not also know that a haughty spirit of resentment in one government was very sure to provoke a similar spirit in another? Did they not know that one war usually paves the way for a repetition of similar calamities by depraving each of the contending parties, and by entrenching enmities and jealousies, which would be ready to break forth on the most frivolous occasions?”

That we may obtain a still clearer view of the delusions of war, let us look back to the origin of society. Suppose a family, like that of Noah, to commence the settlement of a country. They multiply into a number of distinct families. Then, in the course of years, they become so numerous as to form distinct governments. In any stage of their progress, unfortunate disputes might arise by the imprudence, the avarice, or the ambition of individuals.

Now, at what period would it be proper to introduce the custom of deciding controversies by the edge of the sword, or an appeal to arms? Might this be done when the families had increased to ten? Who would not be shocked at the madness of introducing such a custom under such circumstances? Might it with more propriety be done when the families had multiplied to fifty, a hundred, a thousand, or ten thousand? As the number becomes greater, so do the danger, the carnage, and the calamity. Besides, what reason can be given as to why this mode of deciding controversies would not be as proper

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<sup>3</sup> Transcriber’s note – Today we would call them barbarians and terrorists.

when there were but ten families, as when there were ten thousand? And why might not two individuals thus decide disputes, as well as two nations?

Perhaps all will admit that the custom could not be honorably introduced until they separated and formed two or more distinct governments. But would this change of circumstances dissolve their ties as brethren, and their obligations as accountable beings? Would the organization of distinct governments confer a right on rulers to appeal to arms for the settlement of controversies? Isn't it manifest, that no period can be assigned at which the introduction of such a custom would not be absolute murder? And shall a custom, which must have been murderous at its commencement, now be upheld as necessary and honorable?

"But," says the objector, in determining the question of whether war is now the effect of delusion, "we must consider what mankind is, and not what it would have been, had wars never been introduced."

To this we reply: we should consider both; and by what ought to have been the state of society, we may discover the present delusion, and the need of light and reformation. If it would have been to the honor of the human race, had the custom of war never commenced, it must be desirable to dispel the present darkness, and exterminate the desolating scourge. The same objection might have been made to the proposition in the British Parliament for the abolition of the slave trade. The same may now be made against any attempt to abolish the custom of human sacrifices among the Hindus. The same may be urged against every attempt to root out pernicious and immoral customs of long standing.

Let it be seriously considered, then, how abominably murderous the custom must have been in its origin; how precarious the mode of obtaining redress; how often the aggressor is successful; how small a part even of the successful nation is ever benefited by the war; how a nation is almost uniformly impoverished by the contest; how many individuals are absolutely ruined regarding property, or morals, or both; and what a multitude of fellow creatures are hurried into eternity in an untimely manner and an unprepared state. And who can hesitate for a moment to denounce war as the effect of popular delusion?

Let every Christian seriously consider the malignant nature of that spirit which war-makers evidently wish to excite, and compare it with the temper of Jesus. Where is the Christian who would not shudder at the thought of dying in the exercise of the common war-spirit, and also at the thought of being the instrument of exciting such a spirit in his fellow men? Any custom that cannot be supported except by exciting in men the very temper of the devil ought surely to be banished from the Christian world.

The impression that aggressive war is murderous is general among Christians, if not universal. The justness of the impression seems to be admitted by almost every government in going to war. For this reason each of two governments endeavors to fix on the other the charge of aggression, and to assume to itself the ground of defending some right, or avenging some wrong. Thus each excuses itself, and charges the other with all the blood and misery that result from the contest.

These facts, however, are so far from affording a plea in favor of the custom of war, that they afford a weighty reason for its abolition. If, in the view of conscience, the aggressor is a murderer and answerable for the blood shed in war; if one or the other must be viewed by God as the aggressor; and if such is the delusion attending war, that each party is liable to consider the other as the aggressor; surely there must be serious danger of a nation's being involved in the guilt of murder while they imagine they have a cause which may be justified.

So prone are men to be blinded by their passions, their prejudices, and their interests, that, in most private quarrels, each of two individuals persuades himself that he is in the right and his neighbor is in the wrong. Hence the propriety of arbitrations, references, and appeals to courts of justice, so that persons more disinterested may judge and prevent injustice and desolation, which would result from deciding private disputes by single combats or acts of violence.

But rulers of nations are as liable to be misled by their passions and interests as other men; and when misled, they are very sure to mislead those of their subjects who have confidence in their wisdom and integrity. Hence it is highly important that the custom of war should be abolished, and some other mode adopted to settle disputes between nations. In private disputes there may be cause of complaint on each side, while neither has reason to shed the blood of the other, much less to shed the blood of innocent family connections, neighbors and friends. So, of two nations, each may have cause of complaint, while neither can be justified in making war; and much less in shedding the blood of innocent people, who have had no hand in giving the offence.

It is an awful feature in the character of war, and a strong reason why it should not be countenanced, that it involves the innocent with the guilty in the calamities it inflicts; and often falls with the greatest vengeance on those who have had no concern in the management of national affairs. It surely is not a crime to be born in a country, which is afterwards invaded; yet in how many instances do war-makers punish, or destroy, for no other crime than being a native or resident of an invaded territory! A mode of revenge or redress, which makes no distinction between the innocent and the guilty, ought to be discountenanced by every friend of justice and humanity.

Besides, as the rulers of a nation are as liable as other people to be governed by passion and prejudice, there is as little prospect of justice in permitting war for the decision of national disputes, as there would be in permitting an incensed individual to be complainant, witness, judge, jury, and executioner in his own cause. In what point of view, then, is war not to be regarded with horror?

That wars have been so overruled by God so as to be the occasion of some benefits to mankind, will not be denied; for the same may be said of every fashion or custom that ever was popular among men. War may have been the occasion of advancing useful arts and sciences, and even of the spread of the gospel. But we are not to do evil that good may come, nor to countenance evil because God may overrule it for good.

One advantage of war, which has often been mentioned, is this. It gives opportunity for the display of extraordinary talents – of daring enterprise and intrepidity. But let robbery and piracy become as popular as war has been, and these customs will give as great an opportunity for the display of the same talents and qualities of mind. Shall we therefore encourage robbery and piracy? Indeed it may be asked, do we not encourage these crimes? For what is modern warfare but a popular, refined, and legalized mode of robbery, piracy, and murder, preceded by a proclamation giving notice of the purpose of the war-maker? But whether such a proclamation changes the character of the following enormities is a question to be decided at a higher court than that of any earthly sovereign, and by a law superior to the law of nations.

The answer of a pirate to Alexander the Great was as just as it was severe: “By what right,” asked the King, “do you infest the seas?” The pirate replied, “By the same that you infest the universe. But because I do it in a small ship, I am called a robber; and because you do the same acts with a great fleet, you are called a conqueror!”

Equally just was the language of the Scythian ambassadors to the same deluded monarch: “You boast that the only design of your marches is to extirpate robbers. You yourself are the greatest robber in the world.”

May we therefore plead for the custom of war, because it produces such mighty robbers as Alexander? Or if once in an age it should produce such a character as Washington, will this make amends for the slaughter of twenty million human beings, and all the other concomitant evils of war?

If the characters of such men as Alexander had been held in deserved abhorrence by mankind, this single circumstance would probably have saved many millions from untimely death. But the celebrity

that delusion has given to that desolating robber, and the renown attached to his splendid crimes, have excited the ambition of others in every succeeding age, and filled the world with misery and blood.

Isn't it time, then, for Christians to learn not to attach glory to guilt, or to praise actions that God will condemn? That Alexander possessed talents worthy of admiration will be admitted. But when such talents are prostituted to the vile purposes of military fame by spreading destruction and misery through the world, a character is formed which should be branded with everlasting infamy. And nothing, perhaps, short of the commission of such atrocious deeds can more endanger the welfare of a community more than the applause given to successful military desperadoes. Murder and robbery are not the less criminal for being perpetrated by a king, or a mighty warrior.

Dr. Prideaux states that in fifty battles fought by Caesar, he slew one million, one hundred and ninety-two thousand of his enemies. If to this number we add the loss of troops on his own side, and the slaughter of women and children on both sides, we shall probably have a total of two million human beings, sacrificed to the ambition of one man!

If we assign an equal number to Alexander, and the same to Napoleon, which we probably may do with justice, then to three military butchers we may ascribe the untimely death of six million of the human family<sup>4</sup> – a number equal to the whole population of the United States in the year 1800. Isn't it reasonable to believe that a greater number of human beings have been slain by the murderous custom of war than the whole amount of the present population of the world? To what heathen deity was there ever offered such a multitude of human sacrifices as have been offered to human ambition?

Shall the Christian world remain silent in regard to the enormity of this custom, and even applaud the deeds of men who were a curse to the age in which they lived – men, whose talents were employed, not in advancing the happiness of the human race, but in spreading desolation and misery through the world? On the same principle that such men were applauded, we may applaud the chief of a band of robbers and pirates in proportion to his ingenuity, intrepidity, and skill in doing mischief. If the chief displays these energies of mind in a high degree in a successful course of plundering and murder, then he is a "mighty hunter," a man of great renown.

But if we attach glory to such exploits, don't we encourage others to adopt the same road to fame? Besides, wouldn't such applause betray a most depraved taste; a taste which makes no proper distinction between virtue and vice, or doing good and doing mischief; a taste to be captivated with the glare of bold exploits, but regardless of the end to which they were directed, the means by which they were accomplished, the misery which they occasioned to others, and the light in which they must be viewed by a benevolent God?

An important question now occurs. Isn't it possible to produce such a change in the state of society, and the views of Christian nations, that every ruler shall feel that his honor, safety, and happiness depend on his displaying a pacific spirit, and forbearing to engage in offensive wars? Can't peace societies be extended to every nation of Christendom, to support governments and make the nations safe from war?

In these societies we may hope to engage every true minister of the Prince of Peace, and every Christian who possesses the temper of his Master. In this number will be included a large portion of important civil characters.

In the societies formed for this purpose, let the contributions be liberal, in some measure corresponding with the magnitude and importance of the object. Let these be judiciously appropriated to the purpose of diffusing the light and spirit of peace in every direction, and for exciting a just abhorrence of war in every breast.

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<sup>4</sup> Transcriber's note – About 50 to 60 million people were killed as a result of World War II.

Let printing presses be established in sufficient numbers to fill every land with newspapers, tracts, and periodical works, adapted to the pacific design of the societies. Let these all be calculated for the support and encouragement of good rulers, and for the cultivation of a mild and pacific temper among every class of citizens.

The object is so perfectly harmonious with the spirit, the design, and the glory of the gospel, that it might be frequently the subject of discussion in the pulpit, the subject of Sabbath and everyday conversation, and be introduced into our daily prayers to God, whether in public or private.

Another means of advancing the object deserves particular consideration: namely, early education. This grand object should have a place in every plan of education, in families, common schools, academies, and universities.

“Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it.” The power of education has been tried, to make children of a ferocious, bloodthirsty character. Let it now have a fair chance, to see what it will do towards making mild, friendly, and peaceful citizens.

As there is an aversion to war in the breast of a large majority of people in every civilized community. Since its evils have been recently felt in every Christian nation, is there not ground to hope that it will be as easy to excite a disposition for peace, as a disposition for war? If peace societies should be increased, and such means be put in operation, as has been suggested, then isn't it very certain that the most beneficial effects will result? Wouldn't they gradually produce an important change in the views and state of society, and give a new character to Christian nations? What institution or project would more naturally unite all pious and virtuous men? And on what effort could we more reasonably hope for the blessing of the God of Peace?

Should prudent, vigorous, and well-conducted efforts be made, then in a century from this time, the nations of Christendom may consider human sacrifices, made by war, in the same light they now view the ancient sacrifices to Moloch, or in the light of wanton and deliberate murder. And such a change in the views of men must lead to the security and stability of human governments, and to the felicity of the world. As soon as Christian nations are impressed with the importance of this change, they may find access to the heathen. But while Christians indulge the custom of war, which is in truth the very worst custom in the world, with what face can they reprove the heathen, or assume among them the office of instructors? “Physician, heal thyself.”

The Bible Societies already formed in various parts of the world must naturally, and even necessarily, aid the object now proposed. Indeed, the two objects are so congenial that whatever promotes the one will aid the other. The same may be said of all Missionary Societies, and Societies for Propagating the Gospel. Should these all cordially co-operate, they must form a most powerful association.

But our hopes and expectations are not limited here. The societies of Friends and Shakers will come in of course, and cordially contribute to the glorious object. May we not also expect a ready acquiescence from the particular churches of every denomination in the land? And why may we not look to the various literary and political societies, for aid in a plan that has the security, the peace, and the happiness of the world for its object?

That there are obstacles and objections to be encountered, we cannot deny; but it is confidently believed that none are insurmountable, because God will aid in such a cause, and the time is at hand when this prediction shall be fulfilled.

The object is not of a party nature, and party distinctions and party purposes have been excluded from the discussion. The supposed delusion in respect to war is confined to no nation, nor to any particular sect in any country. What has been said on the subject has not been designed for the purpose of reproach against any class of men, but with a desire to befriend and benefit all who have not

examined the subject, and to arouse Christians to one united and vigorous effort to bless the world with peace.

An eloquent speech delivered by Mr. Wilberforce in the British Parliament in favor of propagating Christianity in India, with a view to abolish human sacrifices in that country, contains some observations that we hope he will repeat in the same house on the present subject.

“It was,” said he, “formerly my task to plead the cause of a people whose woes affected every heart, and who were finally rescued from the situation in which they groaned by the abolition of the slave trade. That cause was doubtless the cause of suffering humanity; but I declare, that if we entirely exclude the consideration of religion, humanity appears to me to be still more concerned in the cause I am now pleading than in that for which I was formerly the advocate... I, for my part, consider it as absolute blasphemy to believe that that great Being, to whom we owe our existence, has doomed so large a portion of mankind to remain forever in that state in which we see the natives of India at this day. I am confident his providence has furnished remedies fitted to the case, and I hold it to be our duty to apply them. And I am satisfied that not only may this be safely attempted, but also that its accomplishment will be, in the highest degree, beneficial.”

May God grant that this powerful advocate for “suffering humanity” may have his heart fervently engaged for the abolition of the war trade. Here he may find a new and ample field for the display of his piety, his philanthropy, and his eloquence. With the greatest propriety, he may state that the miseries occasioned by the universal custom of war are far more dreadful than those occasioned by either of the limited customs, for the abolition of which he has so honorably and successfully contended.

If it would be blasphemy to believe that God has doomed so great a portion of his creatures as the natives of India to remain forever the subjects of their present delusions respecting human sacrifices, can it be less than blasphemy to believe that he has doomed, not only all Christendom, but all the nations of the earth, to be forever so deluded as to support the most desolating custom which ever resulted from human depravity, or which ever afflicted the race of Adam? Here, with sincerity, I can adopt the words of Mr. Wilberforce: “I am confident that his providence has furnished remedies fitted to the case, and I hold it to be our duty to apply them.”

Christians of every sect may find here an object worthy of their attention, and in which they may cordially unite. For this object they may, with propriety, leave behind all party zeal and party distinctions, and bury their animosities in one united effort to give peace to the world.

Let lawyers, politicians and divines, and men of every class who can write or speak, consecrate their talents to the diffusion of light, and love, and peace. Should there be an effort such as the object demands, God will grant his blessing, posterity will be grateful, heaven will be filled with joy and praise, and “the sword shall not devour forever.”

Let not the universality of the custom be regarded as an objection to making the attempt. If the custom is wicked and destructive, its reformation is the more urgent and important. If war is ever to be set aside, an effort must some time be made; and why not now, as well as at any future day? What objection can now be stated, which may not be brought forward at any other period? If men must have objects for the display of heroism, let their intrepidity be shown in firmly meeting the formidable prejudices of a world in favor of war. Here is an opportunity for the display of such heroism as will occasion no remorse on a deathbed, and such as God will approve at the final reckoning. In this cause, ardent zeal, genuine patriotism, undaunted fortitude, the spirit of enterprise, and every quality of mind worthy of a hero may be gloriously displayed. Who ever displayed a more heroic spirit than Saint Paul? For such heroism and love of country as he displayed, the object now proposed will open the most ample field at home and abroad.

That there is nothing in the nature of mankind that renders war necessary and unavoidable – nothing that inclines them to it that may not be overcome by the power of education – may appear from what is discoverable in the sects already mentioned. The Quakers, Shakers, and Moravians are of the same nature as other people, “men of like passions” with those who uphold the custom of war. All the difference between them and others results from education and habit. The principles of their teachers are diffused through their societies, impressed on the minds of old and young; and an aversion to war and violence is excited which becomes habitual, and has a governing influence in their hearts, their passions, and their lives.

If it has been proved to be possible, by the force of education, to produce such an aversion to war that people will not even defend their own lives by acts of violence, then shall it be thought impossible, by similar means, to destroy the popularity of offensive war and exclude the deadly custom from the abodes of men?

The following things will, perhaps, be generally admitted: that the Christian religion has abolished the practice of enslaving captives, and in several respects mitigated the evils of war by introducing milder usages; that wars must cease to the ends of the earth if the temper of our Savior should universally prevail among men; and that the scriptures give reason to hope that such a time of peace will result from the influence of the Christian religion.

If these views and expectations are well founded, doesn't it follow, of course, that the spirit and custom of war are directly opposed to the principles and spirit of the gospel; that in proportion as the gospel has its proper effect on the minds of men, an aversion to war must be excited; and that it is the duty of every Christian to do all in his power to bring the custom into disrepute, and to effect its abolition!

Can it be consistent with due regard to the gospel for Christians to hold their peace, while they see a custom prevailing which annually sweeps off myriads of their brethren, hurrying them into eternity by violence and murder? Can they forbear to exert themselves to put an end to this voluntary plague? Can we feel a conviction that war is, in its nature, opposed to the principles and spirit of our religion, and that it is the purpose of God to put an end to this scourge by the influence of the gospel – and still sleep on without any effort to produce the effect which we believe is intended by our heavenly Father?

If the Christian religion is to put an end to war, it must be by the efforts of those who are under its influence. So long, therefore, as Christians acquiesce in the custom, the desirable event will be delayed.

Christianity itself is not a powerful intelligent agent. It is not a God, an angel, or a man. It is only a system of divine instructions relating to duty and happiness, to be used by men for their own benefit, the benefit of each other, and the honor of its Author. Like all other instructions, they are of no use any further than they are regarded and reduced to practice.

In what way, then, is it possible that Christianity should put an end to war, but by enlightening the minds of men as to the evil of the custom, and exciting them to an opposite course of conduct? Is it possible that the custom of war should be abolished by the influence of religion, while Christians themselves are its advocates?

If God has appointed that men shall be saved by the preaching of the gospel, the gospel must be preached, or the end will never be accomplished. So if he has appointed that by the same gospel this world shall be delivered from war, this also must be achieved by similar means. The tendency of the gospel to this effect must be illustrated and enforced, its opposition to war must be displayed in the lives of Christians, and men must be influenced by gospel motives to cease from destroying one another.

There are other effects that we expect will be produced by Christianity: namely, the abolition of heathen idolatry and the various modes of offering human sacrifices. But how are these events to be brought about? Do we expect that our Bibles will spread their covers for wings, fly through the world,

and convert the nations without the agency of Christians? Should we expect the gospel would ever convert the heathen from their idolatry, if those who profess to be its friends should themselves generally encourage idolaters in their present courses by a compliance with their customs? It would be just as reasonable to expect that the gospel will occasion wars to cease without the exertions of Christians, and while they countenance the custom by their own examples.

It will, perhaps, be pleaded that mankind is not yet sufficiently enlightened to apply the principles of the gospel for the abolition of war, and that we must wait for a more improved state of society. Improved in what? In its ability to shed blood? Are such improvements to prepare the way for peace? Why not wait a few centuries, until the natives of India become more improved in their idolatrous customs, before we attempt to convert them to Christianity? Do we expect that by continuing in the practice of idolatry, their minds will be prepared to receive the gospel? If not, let us be consistent; and while we use means for the conversion of heathens, let means also be used for the conversion of Christians. For war is, in fact, a heathen and savage custom of the most malignant, most desolating, and most horrible character. It is the greatest curse, and results from the grossest delusions that ever afflicted a guilty world.