

REFLECTIONS AND
COMMENTS

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BY

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TO
CHARLES ELIOT NORTON
TO WHOM THE FOUNDATION OF "THE NATION" WAS LARGELY
DUE, IN GRATEFUL ACKNOWLEDGMENT
OF A LONG FRIENDSHIP

THE articles in this volume have appeared in the *Nation* during the last thirty years, and are reprinted almost in chronological order. As a rule they treat of the principal non-political topics, both grave and gay, which during that period have attracted the attention of the American public. Some slight changes have been made in the text where lapse of time, or change of circumstances, seemed to obscure the sense. The concluding portion of the notice of John Stuart Mill, containing an appreciation of his philosophy, was written by Chauncey Wright, of Cambridge, whose early death twenty years ago was a severe loss to science as well as to his friends. There is, of course, always a question whether any collection of this sort can have permanent value. This I must leave the reader to answer for himself. I confess that the publishers' estimate of the articles has had more to do with their reproduction than my own.

E. L. G.

October, 1895.

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PEACE

THE horrors of war are just now making a deeper impression than ever on the popular mind, owing to the close contact with the battle-field and the hospital into which the railroad and the telegraph and the newspaper have brought the public of all civilized countries. Wars are fought out now, so to speak, under every man's and woman's eyes; and, what is perhaps of nearly as much importance, the growth of commerce and manufactures, and the increased complication of the social machine, render the smallest derangement of it anywhere a concern and trouble to all nations. The consequence is that the desire for peace was never so deep as it is now, and the eagerness of all good people to find out some other means of deciding international disputes than mutual killing never so intense.

And yet the unconsciousness of the true nature and difficulties of the problem they are trying to solve, which is displayed by most of those who make the advocacy of peace their special work, is

very discouraging. We are far from believing that the incessant and direct appeals to the public conscience on the subject of war are not likely in the long run to produce some effect; but it is very difficult to resist the conclusion that the efforts of the special advocates of peace have thus far helped to spread and strengthen the impression that there is no adequate substitute for the sword as an arbiter between nations, or, in other words, to harden the popular heart on the subject of military slaughter. It is certain that, during the last fifty years, the period in which peace societies have been at work, armies have been growing steadily larger, the means of destruction have been multiplying, and wars have been as frequent and as bloody as ever before; and, what is worse, the popular heart goes into war as it has never done in past ages.

The great reason why the more earnest enemies of war have not made more progress toward doing away with it, has been that, from the very outset of their labors down to the present moment, they have devoted themselves mainly to depicting its horrors and to denouncing its cruelty. In other words, they almost invariably approach it from a side with which nations actually engaged in it are just as familiar as anybody, but which has for the moment assumed in their eyes a

secondary importance. The peace advocates are constantly talking of the guilt of killing, while the combatants only think, and will only think, of the nobleness of dying. To the peace advocates the soldier is always a man going to slaughter his neighbors; to his countrymen he is a man going to lose his life for their sake—that is, to perform the loftiest act of devotion of which a human being is capable. It is not wonderful, then, that the usual effect of appeals for peace made by neutrals is to produce mingled exasperation and amusement among the belligerents. To the great majority of Europeans our civil war was a shocking spectacle, and the persistence of the North in carrying it on a sad proof of ferocity and lust of dominion. To the great majority of those engaged in carrying it on the struggle was a holy one, in which it was a blessing to perish. Probably nothing ever fell more cruelly on human ears than the taunts and execrations which American wives and mothers heard from the other side of the ocean, heaped on the husbands and sons whom they had sent to the battle-field, never thinking at all of their slaying, but thinking solely of their being slain; and very glad indeed that, if death had to come, it should come in such a cause. If we go either to France or Germany to-day, we shall find a precisely similar state of feeling. If

the accounts we hear be true—and we know of no reason to doubt them—there is no more question in the German and French mind that French and German soldiers are doing their highest duty in fighting, than there was in the most patriotic Northern or Southern home during our war; and we may guess, therefore, how a German or French mother, the light of whose life had gone out at Gravelotte or Orleans, and who hugs her sorrow as a great gift of God, would receive an address from New York on the general wickedness and folly of her sacrifice.

The fact is—and it is one of the most suggestive facts we know of—that the very growth of the public conscience has helped to make peace somewhat more difficult, war vastly more terrible. When war was the game of kings and soldiers, the nations went into it in a half-hearted way, and sincerely loathed it; now that war is literally an outburst of popular feeling, the friend of peace finds most of his logic powerless. There is little use in reasoning with a man who is ready to die on the folly or wickedness of dying. When a nation has worked itself up to the point of believing that there are objects within its reach for which life were well surrendered, it has reached a region in which the wise saws and modern instances of the philosopher or lawyer cannot touch

it, and in which pictures of the misery of war only help to make the martyr's crown seem more glorious.

Therefore, we doubt whether the work of peace is well done by those who, amidst the heat and fury of actual hostilities, dwell upon the folly and cruelty of them, and appeal to the combatants to stop fighting, on the ground that fighting involves suffering and loss of life, and the destruction of property. The principal effect of this on "the average man" has been to produce the impression that the friends of peace are ninnies, and to make him smile over the earnestness with which everybody looks on his own wars as holy and inevitable, and his neighbors' wars as unnecessary and wicked. Any practical movement to put an end to war must begin far away from the battle-field and its horrors. It must take up and deal with the various influences, social and political, which create and perpetuate the state of mind which makes people ready to fight. Preaching up peace and preaching down war generally are very like general homilies in praise of virtue and denunciation of vice. Everybody agrees with them, but nobody is ever ready to admit their applicability to his particular case. War is, in our time, essentially the people's work. Its guilt is theirs, as its losses and sufferings are theirs. All attempts to saddle

emperors, kings, and nobles with the responsibility of it may as well be given up from this time forward.

Now, what are the agencies which operate in producing the frame of mind which makes people ready to go to war on small provocation? It is at these the friends of peace must strike, in time of peace, and not after the cannon has begun to roar and the country has gone mad with patriotism and rage. They are, first of all, the preaching in the press and elsewhere of the false and pernicious doctrine that one nation gains by another's losses, and can be made happy by its misery; that the United States, for instance, profits in the long run by the prostration of French, German, or English industry. One of the first duties of a peace society is to watch this doctrine, and hunt it down wherever they see it, as one of the great promoters of the pride and hardness of heart which make war seem a trifling evil. America can no more gain by French or German ruin than New York can gain by that of Massachusetts. Secondly, there is the mediæval doctrine that the less commercial intercourse nations carry on with each other the better for both, and that markets won or kept by force are means of gain. There has probably been no more fruitful source of war than this. It has for three centuries desolated the world, and

all peace associations should fix on it, wherever they encounter it, the mark of the beast. Thirdly, there is the tendency of the press, which is now the great moulder of public opinion, to take what we may call the pugilist's view of international controversies. The habit of taunting foreign disputants, sneering at the cowardice or weakness of the one who shows any sign of reluctance in drawing the sword, and counting up the possible profit to its own country of one or other being well thrashed, in which it so frequently indulges, has inevitably the effect not only of goading the disputants into hostilities, but of connecting in the popular mind at home the idea of unreadiness or unwillingness to fight with baseness and meanness and material disadvantage. Fourthly, there is the practice, to which the press, orators, and poets in every civilized country steadily adhere, of maintaining, as far as their influence goes, the same notions about national honor which once prevailed about individual "honor"—that is, the notion that it is discreditable to acknowledge one's self in the wrong, and always more becoming to fight than apologize. "The code" has been abandoned in the Northern States and in England in the regulations of the relations of individual men, and a duellist is looked on, if not as a wicked, as a crack-brained person; but in some degree in both of

them, and in a great degree in all other countries, it still regulates the mode in which international quarrels are brought to a conclusion.

Last of all, and most important of all, it is the duty of peace societies to cherish and exalt the idea of *law* as the only true controller of international relations, and discourage and denounce their submission to *sentiment*. The history of civilization is the history of the growth amongst human beings of the habit of submitting their dealings with each other to the direction of rules of universal application, and their withdrawal of them from the domain of personal feeling. The history of "international law" is the history of the efforts of a number of rulers and statesmen to induce nations to submit themselves to a similar régime—that is, to substitute precedents and rules based on general canons of morality and on principles of municipal law, for the dictates of pride, prejudice, and passion, in their mode of seeking redress of injuries, of interpreting contracts, exchanging services, and carrying on commercial dealings. Their success thus far has been only partial. A nation, even the most highly civilized, is still, in its relations with its fellows, in a condition somewhat analogous to that of the individual savage. It chooses its friends from whim or fancy, makes enemies through ignorance or caprice, avenges its wrongs

in a torrent of rage, or through a cold-blooded thirst for plunder, and respects rules and usages only fitfully, and with small attention to the possible effect of its disregard of them on the general welfare. The man or the woman and, let us say, "the mother"—since that is supposed to be, in this discussion, a term of peculiar potency—who tries to exert a good influence on public opinion on all these points, to teach the brotherhood of man as an economical as well as a moral and religious truth; to spread the belief that war between any two nations is a general calamity to the civilized world; that it is as unchristian and inhuman to rouse national combativeness as to rouse individual combativeness, as absurd to associate honor with national wrong-doing as with individual wrong-doing; and that peace among nations, as among individuals, is, and can only be, the product of general reverence for *law* and general distrust of *feeling*—may rest assured that he or she is doing far more to bring war to an end than can be done by the most fervid accounts of the physical suffering it causes. It will be a sorrowful day for any people when their men come to consider death on the battle-field the greatest of evils, and the human heart will certainly have sadly fallen off when those who stay at home have neither gratitude nor admiration for those who shoulder the musket, or