

# On War - Causes of War.

by Jonathan Dymond

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*The sermon argues that war is often caused by refined motives and the influence of habit, and that inquiry, calmness, and moderation can help to prevent war.*

**Scripture:** Psalm 34:14, Proverbs 14:12, Isaiah 2:4, Micah 6:8, Matthew 5:9, Romans 12:18, 2 Corinthians 10:3, Ephesians 6:12, James 4:1, 1 Peter 3:9

**Topics:** "War And Violence", "Christian Pacifism"

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## Description

Jonathan Dymond preaches about the causes of war, highlighting the impure motives and lack of true patriotism that often lead to conflicts. He questions the glorification of military exploits and challenges the notion of dying for one's country, pointing out the mercenary and criminal aspects of war. Dymond urges readers to critically examine the true foundations of military glory and the detrimental effects of promoting war through literature, religion, and public opinion.

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## Transcript

OBSERVATIONS ON THE CAUSES OF WAR.

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Felix, qui potuit rerum cognoscere causas. - Virg.

In the attempt to form an accurate estimate of the moral character of human actions and opinions, it is often of importance to inquire how they have been produced. There is always great reason to doubt the rectitude of that, of which the causes and motives are impure; and if, therefore, it should appear from the observations which follow, that some of the motives to war, and of its causes, are inconsistent with reason or with virtue, I would invite the reader to pursue the inquiry that succeeds them, with suspicion, at least, of the rectitude of our ordinary opinions.

There are some customs which have obtained so generally and so long, that what was originally an effect becomes a cause, and what was a cause becomes an effect, until, by the reciprocal influence of each, the custom is continued by circumstances so multiplied and involved, that it is difficult to detect them in all their ramifications, or to determine those to which it is principally to be referred.

What were once the occasion of wars may be easily supposed - robbery, or the repulsion of robbers, was probably the only motive to hostility, until robbery became refined into ambition, and it was sufficient to

produce a war that a chief was not content with the territory of his fathers. But by the gradually increasing complication of society from age to age, and by the multiplication of remote interests and obscure rights, the motives to war have become so numerous and so technical, that ordinary observation often fails to perceive what they are. They are sometimes known only to a cabinet, which is influenced in its decision by reasonings of which a nation knows little, or by feelings of which it knows nothing: so that of those who personally engage in hostilities, there is, perhaps, not often one in ten who can distinctly tell why he is fighting.

This refinement in the motives of war is no trifling evidence that they are insufficient or bad. When it is considered how tremendous a battle is, how many it hurries in a moment from the world, how much wretchedness and how much guilt it produces, it would surely appear that nothing but obvious necessity should induce us to resort to it. But when, instead of a battle, we have a war with many battles, and of course with multiplied suffering and accumulated guilt, the motives to so dreadful a measure ought to be such as to force themselves upon involuntary observation, and to be written, as it were, in the skies. If, then, a large proportion of a people are often without any distinct perception of the reasons why they are slaughtering mankind, it implies, I think, *prima facie* evidence against the adequacy or the justice of the motives to slaughter.

It would not, perhaps, be affectation to say, that of the reasons why we so readily engage in war, one of the principal is, that we do not inquire into the subject. We have been accustomed, from earliest life, to a familiarity with all its "pomp and circumstance;" soldiers have passed us at every step, and battles and victories have been the topic of every one around us. War, therefore, becomes familiarized to all our thoughts, and interwoven with all our associations. We have never inquired whether these things should be; the question does not even suggest itself. We acquiesce in it, as we acquiesce in the rising of the sun, without any other idea than that it is a part of the ordinary process of the world. And how are we to feel disapprobation of a system that we do not examine, and of the nature of which we do not think? Want of inquiry has been the means by which long continued practices, whatever has been their enormity, have obtained the general concurrence of the world, and by which they have continued to pollute or degrade it, long after the few who inquire into their nature have discovered them to be bad. It was by these means that the slave-trade was so long tolerated by this land of humanity. Men did not think of its iniquity. We were induced to think, and we soon abhorred and then abolished it. In the present moral state of the world, therefore, I believe it is the business of him who would perceive pure morality, to question the purity of that which now obtains.

"The vices of another age," says Robertson, "astonish and shock us; the vices of our own become familiar, and excite little horror." - "The influence of any national custom, both on the understanding, on the heart, and how far it may go towards perverting or extinguishing moral principles of the greatest importance, is remarkable. They who [in 1566] had leisure to reflect and to judge, appear to be no more shocked at the crime of assassination, than the persons who committed it in the heat and impetuosity of passion."<sup>1</sup>

Two hundred and fifty years have added something to our morality. We have learned, at least, to abhor assassination; and I am not afraid to hope that the time will arrive when historians shall think of war what Robertson thinks of murder, and shall endeavor, like him, to account for the ferocity and moral blindness of their forefathers. For I do not think the influence of habit in the perversion or extinction of our moral principles, is in any other thing so conspicuous or deplorable as in the subject before us. They who are shocked at a single murder in the highway, hear with indifference of the murder of a thousand on the field. They whom the idea of a single corpse would thrill with terror, contemplate that of heaps of human

carcasses, mangled by human hands, with frigid indifference. If a murder is committed, the narrative is given in the public newspaper, with many expressions of commiseration, with many adjectives of horror, and many hopes that the perpetrator will be detected. In the next paragraph, the editor, perhaps, tells us that he has hurried a second edition to the press, in order that he may be the first to glad the public with the intelligence, that in an engagement which has just taken place, eight hundred and fifty of the enemy were killed. By war, the natural impulses of the heart seem to be suspended, as if a fiend of blood were privileged to exercise a spell upon our sensibilities, whenever we contemplate his ravages. Amongst all the shocking and all the terrible scenes the world exhibits, the slaughters of war stand pre-eminent; yet these are the scenes of which the compassionate and the ferocious, the good and the bad, alike talk with complacency or exultation.

England is a land of benevolence, and to human misery she is, of all nations, the most prompt in the extension of relief. The immolations of the Hindoos fill us with compassion or horror, and we are zealously laboring to prevent them. The sacrifices of life by our own criminal executions are the subject of our anxious commiseration, and we are strenuously endeavoring to diminish their number. We feel that the life of a Hindoo or a malefactor is a serious thing, and that nothing but imperious necessity should induce us to destroy the one, or to permit the destruction of the other. Yet what are these sacrifices of life in comparison with the sacrifices of war? In the late campaign in Russia, there fell, during one hundred and seventy-three days in succession, an average of two thousand nine hundred men per day. More than five hundred thousand human beings in less than six months! And most of these victims expired with peculiar intensity of suffering. "Thou that teachest another, teachest thou not thyself?" We are carrying our benevolence to the Indies, but what becomes of it in Russia or at Leipsic? We are laboring to save a few lives from the gallows, but where is our solicitude to save them on the field? Life is life, wheresoever it be sacrificed, and has every where equal claims to our regard. I am not now inquiring whether war is right, but whether we do not regard its calamities with an indifference with which we regard no others, and whether that indifference does not make us acquiesce in evils and in miseries which we should otherwise prevent or condemn.

Amongst the immediate causes of the frequency of war, there is one which is, indisputably, irreconcilable in its nature with the principles of our religion. I speak of the critical sense of national pride, and consequent aptitude of offence, and violence of resentment. National irritability is at once a cause of war, and an effect. It disposes us to resent injuries with bloodshed and destruction; and a war, when it is begun, inflames and perpetuates the passions that produced it. Those who wish a war, endeavor to rouse the spirit of a people by stimulating their passions. They talk of the insult, or the encroachments, or the contempts of the destined enemy, with every artifice of aggravation; they tell us of foreigners who want to trample upon our rights, of rivals who ridicule our power, of foes who will crush, and of tyrants who will enslave us. These men pursue their object, certainly, by efficacious means; they desire a war, and therefore irritate our passions, knowing that when men are angry they are easily persuaded to fight.

In this state of irritability, a nation is continually alive to occasions of offence; and when we seek for offenses, we readily find them. A jealous sensibility sees insults and injuries where sober eyes see nothing; and nations thus surround themselves with a sort of artificial tentacula, which they throw wide in quest of irritation, and by which they are stimulated to revenge, by every touch of accident or inadvertency.

He that is easily offended will also easily offend. The man who is always on the alert to discover trespasses on his honor or his rights, never fails to quarrel with his neighbors. Such a person may be dreaded as a torpedo. We may fear, but we shall not love him; and fear, without love, easily lapses into

enmity. There are, therefore, many feuds and litigations in the life of such a man, that would never have disturbed its quiet, if he had not captiously snarled at the trespasses of accident, and savagely retaliated insignificant injuries. The viper that we chance to molest, we suffer to live if he continue to be quiet, but if he raise himself in menaces of destruction, we knock him on the head.

It is with nations as with men. If, on every offence we fly to arms, and raise the cry of blood, we shall of necessity provoke exasperation; and if we exasperate a people as petulant and bloody as ourselves, we may probably continue to butcher one another, until we cease only from emptiness of exchequers, or weariness of slaughter. To threaten war, is therefore often equivalent to beginning it. In the present state of man's principles, it is not probable that one nation will observe another levying men, and building ships and founding cannon, without providing men and ships and cannon themselves; and when both are thus threatening and defying, what is the hope that there will not be a war?

It will scarcely be disputed that we should not kill one another unless we cannot help it. Since war is an enormous evil, some sacrifices are expedient for the sake of peace; and if we consulted our understandings more and our passions less, we should soberly balance the probabilities of mischief, and inquire whether it be not better to endure some evils that we can estimate, than to engage in a conflict of which we can neither calculate the mischief, nor foresee the event; which may probably conduct us from slaughter to disgrace, and which at last is determined, not by justice, but by power. Pride may declaim against these sentiments; but my business is not with pride, but with reason; and I think reason determines that it would be more wise, and religion that it would be less wicked, to diminish our punctiliousness and irritability. If nations fought only when they could not be at peace, there would be very little fighting in the world. The wars that are waged for "insults to flags," and an endless train of similar motives, are perhaps generally attributable to the irritability of our pride. We are at no pains to appear pacific towards the offender; our remonstrance is a threat; and the nation, which would give satisfaction to an inquiry, will give no other answer to a menace than a menace in return. At length we begin to fight, not because we are aggrieved, but because we are angry.

The object of the haughtiness and petulance which one nation uses towards another, is of course to produce some benefit; to awe into compliance with its demands, or into forbearance from aggression. Now it ought to be distinctly shown, that petulance and haughtiness are more efficacious than calmness and moderation; that an address to the passions of a probable enemy is more likely to avert mischief from ourselves, than an address to their reason and their virtue.

Nations are composed of men, and of men with human feelings. Whether with individuals or with communities, "a soft answer turneth away wrath." There is, indeed, something in the calmness of reason - in an endeavor to convince rather than to intimidate - in an honest solicitude for friendliness and peace, which obtains, which commands, which extorts forbearance and esteem. This is the privilege of rectitude and truth. It is an inherent quality of their nature: an evidence of their identity with perfect wisdom. I believe, therefore, that even as it concerns our interests, moderation and forbearance would be the most politic. And let not our duties be forgotten; for forbearance and moderation are duties, absolutely and indispensably imposed upon us by Jesus Christ.

The "balance of power" is a phrase with which we are made sufficiently familiar, as one of the great objects of national policy, that must be attained, at whatever cost of treasure or of blood. The support of this balance, therefore, is one of the great purposes of war, and one of the great occasions of its frequency.

It is, perhaps, not idle to remark, that a balance of power amongst nations, is inherently subject to continual interruption. If all the countries of Europe were placed on an equality to-day, they would of necessity become unequal to-morrow. This is the inevitable tendency of human affairs. Thousands of circumstances which sagacity cannot foresee, will continually operate to destroy an equilibrium. Of men, who enter the world with the same possessions and the same prospects, one becomes rich and the other poor; one harangues in the Senate, and another labors in a mine; one sacrifices his life to intemperance, and another starves in a garret. How accurately soever we may adjust the strength and consequence of nations to each other, the failure of one harvest, the ravages of one tempest, the ambition of one man, may unequalize them in a moment. It is, therefore, not a trifling argument against this anxious endeavor to attain an equipoise of power, to find that no equipoise can be maintained. When negotiation has followed negotiation, and treaty has been piled upon treaty, and war has succeeded to war, the genius of a Napoleon, or the fate of an armada, nullifies our labors without the possibility of prevention. I do not know how much nations have gained by a balance of power, but it is worth remembrance that some of those countries which have been most solicitous to preserve it, have been most frequently fighting with each other. How many wars has a balance of power prevented, in comparison with the number that have been waged to maintain it?

It is, indeed, deplorable enough that such a balance is to be desired; and that the wickedness and violence of mankind are so great, that nothing can prevent them from destroying one another, but an equality of the means of destruction. In such a state of malignity and outrage, it need not be disputed, that, if it could be maintained, an equality of strength is sufficiently desirable; as tigers may be restrained from tearing one another by mutual fear, without any want of savageness. It should be remembered, then, that whatever can be said in favor of a balance of power, can be said only because we are wicked; that it derives all its value from our crimes; and that it is wanted only to restrain the outrage of our violence, and to make us contented to growl when we should otherwise fight.

Wars are often promoted from considerations of interest, as well as from passion. The love of gain adds its influence to our other motives to support them, and without other motives, we know that this love is sufficient to give great obliquity to the moral judgment, and to tempt us to many crimes. During a war of ten years, there will always be many whose income depends on its continuance; and a countless host of commissaries, and purveyors, and agents, and mechanics, commend a war, because it fills their pockets. These men have commonly but one question respecting a war, and that is, - whether they get by it. This is the standard of their decision, and this regulates the measure of their support. If money is in prospect, the desolation of a kingdom is of little concern; destruction and slaughter are not to be put in competition with a hundred a year. In truth, it seems to be the system of the conductors of a war, to give to the sources of gain every possible ramification. The more there are who profit by it, the more numerous will be its supporters; and thus the wishes of the cabinet become united with the avarice of the people, and both are gratified in slaughter and devastation.

A support more systematic and powerful is, however, given to war, because it offers to the higher ranks of society, a profession which unites gentility with profit, and which, without the vulgarity of trade, maintains or enriches them. It is of little consequence to inquire whether the distinction of vulgarity between the toils of war and the toils of commerce, be fictitious. In the abstract, it is fictitious; but of this species of reputation public opinion holds the arbitrium, et jus, et norma - and public opinion is in favor of war.

The army and the navy therefore afford to the middle and higher classes, a most acceptable profession. The profession of arms is like the profession of law or physic - a regular source of employment and profit.

Boys are educated for the army, as they are educated for the bar; and parents appear to have no other idea than that war is part of the business of the world. Of younger sons, whose fathers do not choose to support them at the expense of the heir, the army and the navy are the common resource. They would not know what to do without them. To many of these, the news of a peace becomes a calamity; principle is not powerful enough to cope with interest; they prefer the desolation of the world to the loss of a colonelcy. It is in this manner that much of the rank, the influence, and the wealth of a country become interested in the promotion of wars; and when a custom is promoted by wealth, and influence, and rank, what is the wonder that it should be continued?

Yet it is a dreadful consideration that the destruction of our fellows should become a business by which to live; and that a man can find no other occupation of gain, than that of butchering his neighbors. It is said (if my memory serves me, by Sir Walter Raleigh), "He that taketh up his rest to live by this profession shall hardly be an honest man." "Where there is no obligation to obey," says Lord Clarendon, "it is a wonderful, and an unnatural appetite, that disposes men to be soldiers, that they may know how to live; and what reputation soever it may have in politics, it can have none in religion, to say, that the art and conduct of a soldier is not infused by nature, but by study, experience and observation; and therefore that men are to learn it: - when, in truth, this common argument is made by appetite to excuse, and not by reason to support, an ill custom."<sup>2</sup> People do not often become soldiers in order to serve their country, but to serve themselves. An income is commonly the motive to the great, and idleness to the poor. To plead the love of our country is therefore hypocrisy; and let it be remembered that hypocrisy is itself an evidence, and an acknowledgment that the motive which it would disguise is bad.

By depending upon war for a subsistence, a powerful inducement is given to desire it; and I would submit it to the conscientious part of the profession, that he who desires a war for the sake of its profits has lost something of his virtue; he has, at least enlisted one of the most influential of human propensities against it, and when the prospect of gratification is before him - when the question of war is to be decided - it is to be feared that he will suffer the whispers of interest to prevail, and that humanity and religion, and his conscience will be sacrificed to promote it. But whenever we shall have learned the nature of pure Christianity, and have imbibed its dispositions, we shall not be willing to avail ourselves of such a horrible source of profit; nor to contribute to the misery, and wickedness, and destruction of mankind, in order to avoid a false and foolish shame.

It is frequently in the power of individual statesmen to involve a people in a war. "Their restraints," says Knox, "in the pursuit of political objects, are not those of morality and religion, but solely reasons of state and political caution. Plausible words are used, but they are used to hide the deformity of the real principles. Whenever war is deemed desirable in an interested view, a specious pretext never yet remained unfound;"<sup>3</sup> - and "when they have once said what they think convenient, how untruly soever, they proceed to do what they judge will be profitable, how unjustly soever; and this men very absurdly and unreasonably would have called reason of state, to the discredit of all solid reason, and all rules of probity."<sup>4</sup> Statesmen have two standards of morality - a social and a political standard. Political morality embraces all crimes; except, indeed, that it has that technical virtue which requires that he who may kill a hundred men with bullets, should not kill one with arsenic. And from this double system of morals it happens, that statesmen who have no restraint to political enormities but political expediency, are sufficiently amiable in private life. But "probity," says Bishop Watson, "is an uniform principle; it cannot be put on in our private closet, and put off in the council-chamber or the senate;" and I fear that he who is wicked as a statesman, if he be good as a man, has some other motive to goodness than its love: that he

is decent in private life, because it is not expedient that he should be flagitious. It cannot be hoped that he has much restraint from principle. I believe, however, the time will come, when it will be found that God has instituted but one standard of morality, and that to that standard is required the universal conformity of nations, and of men.

Of the wars of statesmen's ambition, it is not necessary to speak, because no one to whom the world will listen, is willing to defend them.

But statesmen have, besides ambition, many purposes of nice policy which make wars convenient; and when they have such purposes, they are cool speculators in blood. They who have many dependents have much patronage, and they who have much patronage have much power. By a war, thousands become dependent on a minister; and if he be disposed, he can often pursue schemes of guilt, and entrench himself in unpunished wickedness, because the wear enables him to silence the clamor of opposition by an office, and to secure the suffrages of venality by a bribe. He has therefore, many motives to war, in ambition that does not refer to conquest; or, in fear, that extends only to his office or his pocket: and fear or ambition are sometimes more interesting considerations than the happiness and the lives of men. Or perhaps he wants to immortalize his name by a splendid administration; and he thinks no splendor so great as that of conquest and plunder. Cabinets have, in truth, many secret motives of wars of which the people know little. They talk in public of invasions of right, of breaches of treaty, of the support of honor, of the necessity of retaliation, when these motives have no influence on their determination. Some untold purpose of expediency, or the private quarrel of a prince, or the pique or anger of a minister, are often the real motives to a contest, whilst its promoters are loudly talking of the honor or the safety of the country. The motives to war are indeed without end to their number, or their iniquity, or their insignificance. What was the motive of Xerxes in his invasion of Greece?

It is to be feared that the world has sometimes seen the example of a war, begun and prosecuted for the simple purpose of appeasing the clamors of a people by diverting their attention:

"I might well lodge a fear

To be again displaced; which, to avoid

I cut them off, and had a purpose now

To lead out many to the Holy Land,

Lest rest and lying still might make them look

Too near into my state. Therefore, my Harry,

Be it thy course to busy giddy minds

With foreign quarrels; that action hence borne out

May waste the memory of former days."

When the profligacy of a minister, or the unpopularity of his measures, has excited public discontent, he can perhaps find no other way of escaping the resentment of the people, than by thus making them forget it. He therefore discovers a pretext for denouncing war on some convenient country, in order to divert the indignation of the public from himself to their new-made enemies. Such wickedness has existed, and may

exist again. Surely it is nearly the climax of possible iniquity. I know not whether the records of human infamy present another crime of such enormous or such abandoned wickedness. A monstrous profligacy or ferocity that must be, which for the sole purpose of individual interest, enters its closet, and coolly fabricates pretences for slaughter; that quietly contrives the exasperation of the public hatred, and then flings the lighted brands of war amongst the devoted and startling people.

The public, therefore, whenever a war is designed, should diligently inquire into the motives of engaging in it. It should be an inquiry that will not be satisfied with idle declamations on indeterminate dangers, and that is not willing to take anything upon trust. The public should see the danger for themselves; and if they do not see it, should refuse to be led, blindfold, to murder their neighbors. This, we think, is the public duty, as it is certainly the public interest. It implies a forgetfulness of the ends and purposes of government, and of the just degrees and limitations of obedience, to be hurried into so dreadful a measure as a war, without knowing the reason, or asking it. A people have the power of prevention, and they ought to exercise it. Let me not, however, be charged with recommending violence or resistance. The power of preventing war consists in the power of refusing to take part in it. This, is the mode of opposing political evil, which Christianity permits, and, in truth, requires. And as it is the most Christian method, so, as it respects war, it were certainly the most efficacious; for it is obvious that war cannot be carried on without the co-operation of the people.

But I believe the greatest cause of the popularity of war, and of the facility with which we engage in it, consists in this: that an idea of glory is attached to military exploits, and of honor to the military profession. Something of elevation is supposed to belong to the character of the soldier; whether it be that we involuntarily presume his personal courage; or that he who makes it his business to defend the rest of the community, acquires the superiority of a protector; or that the profession implies an exemption from the laborious and the "meaner" occupations of life. There is something in war, whether phantom or reality, which glitters and allures; and the allurements are powerful, since we see that it induces us to endure hardships and injuries, and expose life to a continual danger. Men do not become soldiers because life is indifferent to them, but because of some extrinsic circumstances which attach to the profession; and some of the most influential of these circumstances are the fame, the spirit, the honor, the glory, which mankind agree to belong to the warrior. The glories of battle, and of those who perish in it, or who return in triumph to their country, are favorite topics of declamation with the historian, the biographer, and the poet. They have told us a thousand times of dying heroes, who "resign their lives amidst the joys of conquest, and filled with England's glory, smile in death;" and thus every excitement that eloquence and genius can command is employed to arouse that ambition of fame which can be gratified only at the expense of blood.

There are many ways in which a soldier derives pleasure from his profession. A military officer,<sup>5</sup> when he walks the street, is an object of notice; he is a man of spirit, of honor, of gallantry; wherever he be, he is distinguished from ordinary men; he is an acknowledged gentleman. If he engage in battle, he is brave, and noble, and magnanimous: If he be killed, he has died for his country; he has closed his career with glory. Now, all this is agreeable to the mind; it flatters some of its strongest and most pervading passions; and the gratification which these passions derive from war, is one of the great reasons why men so willingly engage in it.

Now we ask the question of a man of reason, what is the foundation of this fame and glory? We profess, that, according to the best of our powers of discovery, no solid foundation can be found. Upon the foundation, whatever it be, an immense structure is, however, raised - a structure so vast, so brilliant, so attractive, that the greater portion of mankind are content to gaze in admiration, without any inquiry into its

basis, or any solicitude for its durability. If, however, it should be, that the gorgeous temple will be able to stand only till Christian truth and light become predominant, it surely will be wise of those who seek a niche in its apartments as their paramount and final good, to pause ere they proceed. If they desire a reputation that shall outlive guilt and fiction, let them look to the basis of military fame. If this fame should one day sink into oblivion and contempt, it would not be the first instance in which wide-spread glory has been found to be a glittering bubble, that has burst, and been forgotten. Look at the days of chivalry! Of the ten thousand Quixotes of the middle ages, where is now the honor or the name? Yet poets once sang their praises, and the chronicler of their achievements believed he was recording an everlasting fame. Where are now the glories of the tournament? Glories

"Of which all Europe rang from side to side."

Where is the champion whom princes caressed, and nobles envied? Where are now the triumphs of Duns Scotus, and where are the folios that perpetuated his fame? The glories of war have indeed outlived these. Human passions are less mutable than human follies; but I am willing to avow my conviction that these glories are alike destined to sink into forgetfulness; and that the time is approaching, when the applauses of heroism, and the splendors of conquest, will be remembered only as follies and iniquities that are past. Let him who seeks for fame, other than that which an era of Christian purity will allow, make haste; for every hour that he delays its acquisition will shorten its duration. This is certain, if there be certainty in the promises of heaven.

In inquiring into the foundation of military glory, it will be borne in mind, that it is acknowledged by our adversaries, that this glory is not recognized by Christianity. No part of the heroic character, says one of the great advocates of war, is the subject of the "commendation or precepts, or example" of Christ; but the character and dispositions most opposite to the heroic are the subject of them all.<sup>6</sup> This is a great concession; and it surely is the business of Christians, who are sincere in their profession, to doubt the purity of that "glory" and the rectitude of that "heroic character," which it is acknowledged that their Great Instructor never in any shape countenanced, and often obliquely condemned.<sup>7</sup>

If it be attempted to define why glory is allotted to the soldier, we suppose that we shall be referred to his skill, or his bravery, or his patriotism.

Of skill it is not necessary to speak, since very few have the opportunity of displaying it. The business of the great majority is only obedience; and obedience of that sort which almost precludes the exercise of talent.

The rational and immortal being, who raises the edifice of his fame on simple bravery, has chosen but an unworthy and a frail foundation. Separate bravery from motives and purposes, and what will remain but that which is possessed by a mastiff or a gamecock? All just, all rational, and we will venture to affirm, all permanent reputation, refers to the mind or to virtue; and what connection has animal power or animal hardihood with intellect or goodness? I do not decry courage. I know that He who was better acquainted than we are with the nature and worth of human actions, attached much value to courage; but he attached none to bravery. Courage He recommended by his precepts, and enforced by his example: bravery He never recommended at all. The wisdom of this distinction, and its accordancy with the principles of his religion, are plain. Bravery requires the existence of many of those dispositions which He disallowed. Animosity, resentment, the desire of retaliation, the disposition to injure and destroy - all this is necessary to bravery; but all this is incompatible with Christianity. The courage which Christianity requires is to

bravery what fortitude is to daring - an effort of the mind rather than of the spirits. It is a calm, steady determinateness of purpose, that will not be diverted by solicitation, or awed by fear. "Behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there, save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying, that bonds and afflictions abide me. But none of these things move me; neither count I my life dear unto myself."<sup>8</sup> What resemblance has bravery to courage like this? This courage is a virtue, and a virtue which it is difficult to acquire or to practice; and we have, therefore, heedlessly or ingeniously, transferred its praise to another quality, which is inferior in its nature, and easier to acquire, in order that we may obtain the reputation of virtue at a cheap rate. That simple bravery implies much merit, it will be difficult to show - at least, if it be meritorious, we think it will not always be easy, in awarding the honors of a battle, to determine the preponderance of virtue between the soldier and the horse which carries him.

But patriotism is the great foundation of the soldier's glory. Patriotism is the universal theme. To "fight nobly for our country," - to "fall, covered with glory, in our country's cause;" to "sacrifice our lives for the liberties, and laws, and religion of our country" - are phrases in the mouth of every man. What do they mean, and to whom do they apply?

We contend that to say generally of those who perish in war, that "they have died for their country," is simply untrue; and for this simple reason, that they did not fight for it. To impugn the notion of ages, is perhaps a hardy task; but we wish to employ, not dogmatism, but argument: and we maintain that men have commonly no such purity of motive, that they have no such patriotism. What is the officer's motive to entering the army? We appeal to himself. Is it not that he may obtain an income? And what is the motive of the private? Is it not that he prefers a life of idleness to industry, or that he had no wish but the wish for change? Having entered the army, what, again, is the soldier's motive to fight? Is it not that fighting is a part of his business - that it is one of the conditions of his servitude? We are not now saying that these motives are bad, but we are saying that they are the motives, and that patriotism is not. Of those who fall in battle, is there one in a hundred who even thinks of his country's good? He thinks, perhaps, of its glory, and of the honor of his regiment, but for his country's advantage or welfare, he has no care and no thought. He fights, because fighting is a matter of course to a soldier, or because his personal reputation is at stake, or because he is compelled to fight, or because he thinks nothing at all of the matter; but seldom, indeed, because he wishes to benefit his country. He fights in battle, as a horse draws in a carriage, because he is compelled to do it, or because he has done it before; but he seldom thinks more of his country's good, than the same horse, if he were carrying corn to a granary would think he was providing for the comforts of his master.

And, indeed, if the soldier speculated on his country's good, he often cannot tell how it is affected by the quarrel. Nor is it to be expected of him that he should know this. When there is a rumor of a war, there is an endless diversity of opinions as to its expediency, and endless oppositions of conclusion, whether it will tend more to the good of the country, to prosecute or avoid it. If senators and statesmen cannot calculate the good or evil of a war, - if one promises advantages and another predicts ruin - how is the soldier to decide? And without deciding and promoting the good, how is he to be patriotic? Nor will much be gained by saying, that questions of policy form no part of his business, and that he has no other duty than obedience; since this is to reduce his agency to the agency of a machine; and moreover, by this rule, his arms might be directed, indifferently, to the annoyance of another country, or to the oppression of his own. The truth is, that we give to the soldier that of which we are wont to be sufficiently sparing - a gratuitous concession of merit. In ordinary life, an individual maintains his individual opinions, and pursues

correspondent conduct, with the approbation of one set of men, and the censures of another. One party says, he is benefiting his country, and another maintains that he is ruining it. But the soldier, for whatever he fights, and whether really in promotion of his country's good, or in opposition to it, is always a patriot, and is always secure of his praise. If the war is a national calamity, and was foreseen to be such, still he fights for his country. If his judgment has decided against the war, and against its justice or expediency, still he fights for his country. He is always virtuous. If he but uses a bayonet, he is always a patriot.

To sacrifice our lives for the liberties, and laws, and religion of our native land, are undoubtedly high-sounding words: - but who are they that will do it? Who is it that will sacrifice his life for his country? Will the senator who supports a war? Will the writer who declaims upon patriotism? Will the minister of religion who recommends the sacrifice? Take away glory - take away war, and there is not a man of them who will do it. Will you sacrifice your life at home? If the loss of your life in London or at York, would procure just so much benefit to your country, as the loss of one soldier in the field, would you be willing to lay your head upon the block? Are you willing to die without notice and without remembrance; and for the sake of this little undiscoverable contribution to your country's good. You would, perhaps, die to save your country; but this is not the question. A soldier's death does not save his country. The question is, whether, without any of the circumstances of war, without any of its glory or its pomp, you are willing to resign yourself to the executioner. If you are not, you are not willing to die for your country. And there is not an individual amongst the thousands who declaim upon patriotism, who is willing to do it. He will lay down his life, indeed - but it must be in war; he is willing to die - but it is not for patriotism, but for glory.

The argument we think is clear - that patriotism is NOT the motive; and that in no rational use of language can it be said that the soldier "dies for his country." Men will not sacrifice their lives at all, unless it be in war, and they do not sacrifice them in war from motives of patriotism.<sup>9</sup>

What, then, is the foundation of military fame? Is it bravery? Bravery has little connection with reason, and less with religion. Intellect may despise, and Christianity condemns it. Is it patriotism? Do we refer to the soldier's motives and purposes? If we do, he is not, necessarily or often, a patriot. It was a common expression amongst sailors, and, perhaps, may be so still - "I hate the French, because they are slaves, and wear wooden shoes." This was the sum of their reasonings and their patriotism; and I do not think the mass of those who fight on land, possess a greater.

Crimes should be traced to their causes; and guilt should be fixed upon those who occasion, although they may not perpetrate them. And to whom are the frequency and the crimes of war to be principally attributed? To the directors of public opinion, to the declaimers upon glory - to men who sit quietly at home in their studies and at their desks; to the historian, and the biographer, and the poet, and the moral philosopher; to the pamphleteer; to the editor of the newspaper; to the teacher of religion. One example of declamation from the pulpit I would offer to the reader: - "Go then, ye defenders of your country; advance, with alacrity, into the field, where God himself musters the hosts to war. Religion is too much interested in your success, not to lend you her aid. She will shed over this enterprise her selectest influence. I cannot but imagine, the virtuous heroes, legislators and patriots, of every age and country, are bending from their elevated seats to witness this contest, as if they were incapable, till it be brought to a favorable issue, of enjoying their eternal repose. Enjoy that repose, illustrious immortals! Your mantle fell when you ascended, and thousands, inflamed with spirit, and impatient to tread in your steps, are ready to swear by Him that sitteth upon the throne, and liveth for ever and ever, they will protect freedom in her last asylum, and never desert that cause which you sustained by your labors, and cemented with your blood. And thou, sole Ruler among the children of men, to whom the shields of the earth belong. Gird on thy sword, thou

most Mighty. Go forth with our hosts in the day of battle! Impart, in addition to their hereditary valor, that confidence of success which springs from thy presence! Pour into their hearts the spirit of departed heroes! Inspire them with thine own; and while led by thine hand, and fighting under thy banners, open thou their eyes to behold in every valley, and in every plain, what the prophet beheld by the same illumination - chariots of fire and horses of fire. Then shall the strong man be as tow, and the maker of it as a spark; and they shall both burn together, and none shall quench them!"<sup>10</sup> Of such irreverence of language, employed to convey such violence of sentiment, the world, I hope, has had few examples. Oh! how unlike another exhortation "Put on mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering, forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any."<sup>11</sup>

"As long as mankind," says Gibbon, "shall continue to bestow more liberal applause on their destroyers than on their benefactors, the thirst of military glory will ever be the vice of the most exalted characters."<sup>12</sup> "'Tis strange to imagine," says the Earl of Shaftesbury, "that war, which of all things appears the most savage, should be the passion of the most heroic spirits." - But he gives us the reason. - "By a small misguidance of the affection, a lover of mankind becomes a ravager; a hero and deliverer becomes an oppressor and destroyer."<sup>13</sup> This is the "vice," and this is the "misguidance," which we say, that a large proportion of the writers of every civilized country are continually occasioning and promoting; and thus, without, perhaps any purpose of mischief, they contribute more to the destruction of mankind than rapine or ambition. A writer thinks, perhaps, that it is not much harm to applaud bravery. The divergency from virtue may, indeed, be small in its beginning, but the effect of his applauses proceeds in the line of obliquity, until it conducts at last, to every excess of outrage, to every variety of crime, to every mode of human destruction.

There is one species of declamation on the glories of those who die in battle, to which I would beg the notice of the reader. We are told that when the last breath of exultation and defiance is departed, the intrepid spirit rises triumphantly from the field of glory to its kindred heavens. What the hero has been on earth, it matters not: if he dies by a musket ball, he enters heaven in his own right. All men like to suppose that they shall attain felicity at last; and to find that they can attain it without goodness and in spite of vice, is doubtless peculiarly solacing. The history of the hero's achievements wants, indeed, a completeness without it; and this gratuitous transfer of his soul to heaven, forms an agreeable conclusion to his story.

I would be far from "dealing damnation round the land," and undoubtingly believe that of those who fall in battle, many have found an everlasting resting-place. But an indiscriminate consignment of the brave to felicity, is certainly unwarranted; and if wickedness consists in the promotion of wickedness, it is wicked too.

If we say in positive and glowing language, of men indiscriminately, and therefore of the bad, that they rise on the wings of ecstasy to heaven, we do all that language can do in the encouragement of profligacy. The terrors of religion may still be dreaded; but we have, at least to the utmost of our power, diminished their influence. The mind willingly accepts the assurance, or acquiesces in the falsehood which it wishes to be true; and in spite of all their better knowledge, it may be feared that some continue in profligacy, in the doubting hope that what poets and historians tell them may not be a fiction.

Perhaps the most operative encouragement which these declamations give to the soldier's vices, is contained in this circumstance - that they manifest that public opinion does not hold them in abhorrence. Public opinion is one of the most efficacious regulators of the passions of mankind; and upon the soldier this rein is peculiarly influential. His profession and his personal conduct derive almost all their value and

their reputation from the opinion of the world, and from that alone. If, therefore, the public voice does not censure his vices - if, in spite of his vices, it awards him everlasting happiness, what restraint remains upon his passions, or what is the wonder if they be not restrained?

The peculiar application of the subject to our purpose is, however, that these and similar representations are motives to the profession of arms. The military life is made a privileged profession, in which a man may indulge vices with impunity. His occupation is an apology for his crimes, and shields them from punishment. And what greater motive to the military life can be given? Or what can be more atrocious than the crime of those who give it? I know not, indeed, whether the guilt predominates, or the folly. Pitiably imbecility surely it is, that can persuade itself to sacrifice all the beauties of virtue, and all the realities and terrors of religion, to the love of the flowing imagery of spirits ascending to heaven. Whether writers shall do this is a question, not of choice, but of duty: if we would not be the abettors of crime, and the sharers of its guilt, it is imperative that we refrain.

The reader will, perhaps, have observed that some of those writers who are liberal contributors to the military passion, occasionally, in moments when truth and nature seem to have burst the influence of habit, emphatically condemn the system which they have so often contributed to support. There are not many books of which the tendency is more warlike, or which are more likely to stimulate the passion for martial glory, than the *Life of Nelson*, by Southey; a work, in the composition of which, it probably never suggested itself to the author to inquire whether he were not contributing to the destruction of mankind. A contributor, however, as he has been, we find in another of his works, this extraordinary and memorable passage: "There is but one community of Christians in the world, and that, unhappily, of all communities one of the smallest, enlightened enough to understand the prohibition of war by our Divine Master, in its plain, literal, and undeniable sense; and conscientious enough to obey it, subduing the very instinct of nature to obedience."<sup>14</sup> Of these voluntary or involuntary testimonies of the mind against the principles which it habitually possesses, and habitually inculcates, many examples might be given;<sup>15</sup> and they are valuable testimonies, because they appear to be elicited by the influence of simple nature and unclouded truth. This, I think, is their obvious character. They will commonly be found to have been written when the mind has become sobered by reason, or tranquillized by religion; when the feelings are not excited by external stimulants, and when conquest and honor and glory are reduced to that station of importance to which truth assigns them.

But whether such testimonies have much tendency to give conviction to a reader, I know not. Surrounded as they are with a general contrariety of sentiment, it is possible that those who read them may pass them by as the speculations of impracticable morality. I cannot, however, avoid recommending the reader, whenever he meets with passages like these, seriously to examine into their meaning and their force: to inquire whether they be not accordant with the purity of truth, and whether they do not possess the greater authority, because they have forced themselves from the mind when least likely to be deceived, and in opposition to all its habits and all its associations.

Such, then, are amongst the principal of the causes of war. Some consist in want of thought, and some in delusion; some are mercenary, and some simply criminal. Whether any or all of them form a motive to the desolation of empires and to human destruction, such as a good or a reasoning man, who abstracts himself from habitual feelings, can contemplate with approbation, is a question which every one should ask and determine for himself. A conflict of nations is a serious thing: no motive arising from our passions should occasion it, or have any influence in occasioning it: supposing the question of lawfulness to be superseded, war should be imposed only by stern, inevitable, unyielding necessity. That such a necessity

is contained in these motives, I think cannot be shown. We may, therefore, reasonably question the defensibility of the custom, which is continued by such causes, and supported with such motives. If a tree is known by its fruits, we may also judge the fruit by the tree: "Men do not gather grapes of thorns." If the motives to war and its causes are impure, war itself cannot be virtuous; and I would, therefore, solemnly invite the reader to give, to the succeeding Inquiry, his sober and Christian attention.

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## Notes

1. History of Scotland.
2. Lord Clarendon's Essays.
3. Knox's Essays.
4. Lord Clarendon's Essays.
5. These observations apply also to the naval profession; but I have in this passage, as in some other parts of the Essay, mentioned only soldiers, to prevent circumlocution.
6. Dr. Paley.
7. "Christianity quite annihilates the disposition for martial glory." Bishop Watson.
8. Acts xx.22.
9. We know that there may be, and have been, cases in which the soldier possesses purer motives. An invasion may rouse the national patriotism and arm a people for the unmingled purpose of defending themselves. Here is a definite purpose, a purpose which every individual understands and is interested in: and if he die under such circumstances, we do not deny that his motives are patriotic. The actions to which they prompt, are, however, a separate consideration, and depend for their qualities on the rectitude of war itself. Motives may be patriotic, when actions are bad. I might, perhaps, benefit my country by blowing up a fleet, of which the cargo would injure our commerce. My motive may be patriotic, but my action is vicious. It is not sufficiently borne in mind, that patriotism, even much purer than this, is not necessarily a virtue. "Christianity," says Bishop Watson, "does not encourage particular patriotism, in opposition to general benignity." And the reason is easy of discovery. Christianity is designed to benefit, not a community, but the world. If it unconditionally encouraged particular patriotism, the duties of a subject of one state would often be in opposition to those of a subject of another. Christianity, however, knows no such inconsistencies; and whatever patriotism, therefore, is opposed, in its exercise, to the general welfare of mankind, is, in no degree, a virtue.
10. "The Sentiments Proper to the Crisis." - A Sermon, preached October 19th, 1803, by Robert Hall, A.M.
11. Nor is the preacher inconsistent with Apostles alone. He is also inconsistent with himself. In another discourse, delivered in the preceding year, he says: "The safety of nations is not to be sought in arts or in arms. War reverses, with respect to its objects, all the rules of morality. It is nothing less than a temporary repeal of all the principles of virtue. It is a system, out of which almost all the virtues are excluded, and in

which nearly all the vices are incorporated. In instructing us to consider a portion of our fellow-creatures as the proper objects of enmity, it removes, as far as they are concerned, the basis of all society, of all civilization and virtue; for the basis of these, is the good will due to every individual of the species." - "Religion," then, we are told, "sheds its selectest influence over that which repeals all the principles of virtue" - over that "in which nearly all the vices are incorporated!" What "religion" it is which does this, I do not know - but I know that it is not the religion of Christ. TRUTH never led into contradictions like these. Well was it said that we cannot serve two masters. The quotations which we have given, are evidence sufficient that he who holds with the one neglects the other.

12. Decline and Fall.

13. Essay on the Freedom of Wit and Humor.

14. History of Brazil.

15. See "the Inquiry," &c.

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