

THOUGHTS
ON THE
NATURE OF WAR,
AND ITS
REPUGNANCY
TO THE
CHRISTIAN LIFE.

Extracted from a SERMON,
on the 29th November, 1759;
Being the Day of Public THANKSGIVING
for the SUCCESSES obtained in the LATE WAR

WITH
SOME EXTRACTS
From the WRITINGS of WILL LAW and
TH. HARLEY, both Clergymen of the
Church of England, on the NECES-
SITY of SELF-DENIAL, and bearing the
Daily Cross, in order to be TRUE FOL-
LOWERS of CHRIST.

LUKE ix. 23. And he said to them all, If any
Man will come after me, let him deny himself, and
take up his Cross daily, and follow me. For whoso-
ever will save his Life, shall lose it; but whosoever
will lose his Life for my sake, the same shall save it.

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Thoughts on the Nature of War:
A Thanksgiving Sermon (1759)
By Anthony Benezet

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THOUGHTS ON THE NATURE OF WAR

A Thanksgiving Sermon
By Anthony Benezet

THE two general views to which the subject of this day's thanksgiving can only be considered are,

First, As an event that, in the cause and consequences, is connected only with the present life; and being visibly produced by the efforts of human wisdom and human strength, is the ground of human exaltation and triumph. And,

Secondly, as the sole and immediate work of "THE LORD THAT REIGNETH"--a part of the administration of that Merciful Providence, which, through all the revolutions of disordered life, pursues but one invariable purpose, the Redemption and Salvation of man.

It would be needless to propose the subject in the first view, to the consideration of true Christians; who know, with the same certainty as they know their own existence, that human nature, left to itself, has no power but that of producing mere evil; and that every thing with-

in it and without it that is either great or good, is the free gift of Grace, the unmerited bounty of Redeeming Love. But the true Christian Spirit having almost departed from the earth, true Christian knowledge, as its inseparable companion, is departed with it, and men seem to be gone back again to their old animal life: and tho', in speculation and idea, they profess an assent to the truths of Revelation, yet, in heart and practice, they are too apt to consider the course of all things as connected only with temporal good and evil, and themselves at the center and circumference, the first cause and the last end of all; ascribing to human understanding designs which only Infinite Wisdom can form, and to human power events which Omnipotence only can produce.

Lest, therefore, this leaven of darkness, pride, and vanity, should have taken possession and altered the frame and habit of our spirits, it may not be improper to consider the success of War in the first general view, as the visible effect of human power, in which even the professed Christian is so apt to glory in his own work.

If the Christian, however, recollects himself, he will find war to be a sad consequence of the apostasy and fall of man; when he was abandoned to the fury of his own lusts and passions, as the natural and penal effect of breaking loose from the Divine Government, the fundamental law of which is LOVE--"Thou shalt love the LORD thy GOD with all thy heart,

“with all thy soul, with all thy mind, and with all thy strength; and thy FELLOW-CREATURE, as thyself.”

St. James hath answered the question with respect to the cause of War, in so precise and determinate a manner, as to preclude all difficulty and doubt about it: “From whence come wars and fighting among you,” says he? “Come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members? Ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war; yet ye have not, because ye ask not.”--because ye have no respect to the will of “THE LORD THAT REIGNETH;” but, forsaking the SUPREME GOOD, in whom alone your happiness consists, ye follow an earthly and deceitful good, and think only of procuring it by your own power. “To ask and receive not; because ye ask amiss”--from a pretended respect to “THE LORD THAT REIGNETH,” but solely for animal and sensual enjoyment, “that ye may consume it upon your lusts.”

In this very explicit and true account, War, like all other evils, is described as centering in itself; and the end of it, is declared to be the gratification of those very appetites and passions, from which it derives its birth. And this it ever was, and ever will be--for this unhappy circle, which is, indeed, the great circle of the history of man, the fatal mischief proceeds: War is the offspring of the inseparable union between the sensual and malignant passions; War protracted

to a certain period, necessarily compels peace; peace revives and extends trade and commerce; trade and commerce give new life, vigour, and scope, to the sensual and malignant passions; and these naturally tend to generate another War.

But War, considered in itself, is the premeditated and determined destruction of human beings; of creatures originally “formed after the image of God,” and whose preservation, for that reason, is secured by Heaven itself within the fences of this righteous law, that “at the bond [hand?] of every man’s brother, the life of man shall be required.” And tho’ this created image of the Holy Triune God must be owned to have been so wretchedly defaced, as to retain but a very faint resemblance of its Divine original; yet, as the highest enforcement of that heavenly law, which was published for the security of life, it is most graciously renewed by the Incarnation of the Son of God, and the Indwelling of the Holy Ghost.

Further: the consequences of War, when impartially examined, will be found big, not only with outward and temporal distress, but with an evil that extends where in the darkness and tumult of passions it is neither expected nor conceived to reach. That property is confounded, scattered, and destroyed; that laws are trampled under foot; government despised, and the ties of all civil and domestic order broken into pieces; that fruitful countries are made deserts, and stately cities a heap of ruins; that

matrons and virgins are violated; and neither the innocence of unoffending infancy, nor the impotence of decrepit age, a protection from the rage and thirst for blood--is but the mortal progeny and teeming womb of mischief. The worst is still behind--and tho' remote from those senses and passions that are exercised only by present good and evil, and, therefore, not the object of common concern, must yet, upon the least recollection, impress with horror every mind that believes there is a Righteous God, and a state of retribution that is to last for ever. But what must the Christian feel?--he, who knows that the fall of man is a fall from meekness, purity, and love, into sensuality, pride, and wrath; that the Son of God became incarnate, and suffered and died, to restore that first life of meekness, purity, and love; and that for those, in whom the restoration of that life is not begun in the present state, the Son of God incarnate has, it is not to be dreaded, suffered and died in vain--what, I say, must he feel for those immortal spirits, that, in the earliest dawn of their day of purification, are by hundreds and thousands driven into eternity, in the bitterness of enmity and wrath--some inflamed with drunkenness; some fired with lust; and all stained with blood? In those direful conflicts, which are maintained with so much rage, that when the Vanquished at last retreats with the loss of TWENTY-THOUSAND HUMAN BEINGS, the Victor finds he has purchased some little advantage at the expense of

MORE THAN HALF THAT NUMBER * -- Heaven and earth! what a possibility is hope of a sacrifice made to the prince of darkness, the first and chief apostate! who rejoices in beholding men thro' the abuse of those benefits which undeserved Mercy has conferred upon them, transformed into enmity and hatred of God and their brethren; forsaken by God, and destroying one another: and thus hastening once more into his horrid society; that having been accomplices in his rebellion; they may become partakers of his misery and torment.

Now, if the man of valour, whom consenting nations have dignified with the title of HERO, and the man devoted to the world, are asked, from whence this immortal mischief, that may thus extend its influence into the region of eternity, can proceed; what must they answer?--indeed, what can they answer, but that it is engendered by the love of human glory--as vain a phantom

* SMOLLETT, in his Continuation of the History of England, speaking of the battle of Conersdorf [?] where the Prussians attacked the Muscovites in the year 1759, says, "The carnage was truly horrible; above twenty thousand Prussians lay dead in the field. The loss of the Russians amounted to ten-thousand. It must be owned, that if the King was prodigal of his own person, he was likewise very free with the lives of his subjects." He adds: "That at no time since the days of ignorance and barbarity, have the lives of men been squandered away with such profusion as in the case of this [?] German war. They have not only been unnecessarily sacrificed in various exploits of no consequence, but they have been lavishly exposed to all the rigour and distemper of winter-campsites,--in despite of nature, and in contempt of humanity."

as ever play'd before a madman's eye! by the lust of dominion; the avarice of wealth; and the infamous ambition of being dreaded as the conquerors and tyrants of mankind? Heaven preserve Britain from these, "earthly, sensual, devilish" motives--so repugnant to the generous, compassionate, and forgiving temper, with which Redeeming Mercy has blest it, in union with the purer beams of heavenly light; that light which is intended to remove all the darkness of human corruption, and transform selfish, sensual, proud, and malignant spirits, into Angels of patience, humility, meekness, purity, and love; the "children and heirs of God, the brethren and just heirs of Christ!"

But Britain, in the midst of those outward advantages in which she is so apt to place her confidence, must not forget, that there is no possibility of being preserved from such principles, dreadful and detestable as they are, but by the most humble, affectionate, and constant application to and dependence upon "THE LORD THAT REIGNETH," that Gracious Power which first plucked them from her breast. It is, indeed, a standing observation among the prattlers of human philosophy, "that the mind must be very weak, that cannot bear a prosperous condition," but where is the mind strong enough to bear it, that is not blest from ABOVE with something better than prosperity itself? That is no blessedness, which is something that can be separated from the mind; much less that, which

may leave it miserable to all eternity; and least of all that, which may tend to make it thus miserable, by degenerating into a curse. And this is the case of all external things that are called blessings; which, in their own nature, are temporary and changeable, and in their use and application may be perverted to the most dangerous and lasting evils: "If ye will not lay it to heart, to give glory unto my name, saith the Lord of Hosts; I will even sent a curse upon you, and I will CURSE YOUR BLESSINGS." All external blessings, whether national or personal, are curses, when they become the fuel of the sensual and malignant fire in corrupt nature; when they not only alienate the mind from "the LORD THAT REIGNETH," but madden it to impious rebellion and defiance against him.

From this view of war, begun from human passions, and carried on for human purposes, for honour, domination, trade, or some other end that centers in the present life; it is evident, that the Christian can have no interest in it; he cannot derive blessing from its success, nor triumph and exult when to the short-sighted view of the human mind that appearance of success presents itself; he knows, that the means are infinitely disproportionate to the end; and his Redeemer himself has declared, that "all they that take the sword," inflamed by malignity, and seeking some earthly and temporal good, "shall perish with the sword." But, without any circumstances of limitation, the same Redeemer, in the

Revelation of his future judgments upon a fallen and obstinately evil world, has further declared, that “he that leadeth into captivity, shall go into captivity; and he that killeth with the sword, must be killed with the sword: Here is the trial of the faith and the patience of the saints,” who, being called to a state of suffering, and treading in the footsteps of their great Exemplar, “when they are reviled, revile not again; when they suffer, threaten not; but commit themselves to THE LORD THAT REIGNETH, to him that judgeth righteously.” And to this solemn declaration of righteous judgment, the penman of that awful book calls upon all mankind to attend, and says, “If any man have an ear,” an ear that is not totally deafened by the tumultuous passions of nature, separated from God, and turned wholly to itself, “let him now hear;” let him now repent, and forsaking his own sensual and malignant will, seek after the GOD OF PEACE and LOVE, and live.

We will, therefore, turn our attention to the only light in which Success in War can properly be considered by us, namely, As the sole work of “THE LORD THAT REIGNETH”--a part of the administration of that Merciful Providence, which, thro’ all the revolutions of disordered nature and disordered life, pursues but one invariable purpose, the Redemption and Salvation of man.

The disorders of nature and of life are wholly

the effects of sin; of a voluntary aversion and alienation from the life, light, and love of God, in perfect union with which, perfect purity, peace, and happiness are only to be found. Hence that discordancy of the outward elements, which brings forth pestilence, famine, inundation, earthquakes, storms, and tempests: hence, in the corporal part of the human frame, pain, sickness, and death; in the mental, sensuality, pride, and malignity, including all the selfish and wrathful passions, that, between individuals, engender envy, hatred, injury, resentment and revenge, and between nations a peculiar kind of enmity and wrong that issues in war. In the elements strife and evil will subsist, 'till they are purified and united by the last renovating fire; in man, 'till all the designs of Grace are fully accomplished; but surrounded with evil as men are, and full of evil themselves, what would become of the whole wretched race at any given instant of time, at this very moment for example, if the effects of that evil were not continually suspended and directed by Infinite Power, so as to become continually subservient to the purposes of Infinite Wisdom, Righteousness and Love, in Universal Redemption.

The nature of that Redemption it would be needless to mention, if in this age of levity we were not so apt to forget it. It is, in general, a full restoration of the life of God in the soul; that Life of Father Son and Holy Spirit, which was once the life and perfection of fallen angels

and fallen man; which is and only can be the life and perfection of all holy angels; and which the Son of God has been restoring to human nature from the time in which Adam fell.

When the Son of God became incarnate, what was implied in the Redemption as the effect of its influence upon man, was fully evident from His doctrine and His life; namely, the conquest and renunciation of the world, and the death of the will and all the appetites and passions of fallen animal nature, thro' faith in HIS NAME--not an historical and speculative faith, a meer rational assent to the truth of a well-attended history of facts and doctrines; but a full, ardent, continual desire of the LIFE OF CHRIST, as begotten and formed in the soul by the continual operation of the Holy Ghost. Thus, what was at first the Personal duties of single Christians, when they were scattered over the face of the earth, and were only parts of different nations; became afterwards National duties, when whole nations became Christians. If, therefore, "to love an enemy, to forgive him, do him good, and pray for him"--if to "overcome the world," whose power consists in "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life,"--are Christian Personal duties; if "to love the Lord our God with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our mind, and with all our strength, and [?] fellow creatures as ourselves,"--is the purity and perfection of the Christian Personal life; the same must also be true of Christian National life and

duty: for a Christian nation differs no otherwise from a Christian person, than as the whole differs from one of the parts of which it essentially consists; and is only the aggregated body of those single persons, on whom universally such perfection is required.

But, to this perfect and heavenly life and duty, War is repugnant, in its cause, in itself, and in its consequences; it can be best comparatively irrepugnant, with respect to the degrees of its own evil; and the more or less it partakes of the malignity of animal passions, and the sensuality of animal views, the more or less obnoxious must it render a people to the severe judgments of "THE LORD THAT REIGNETH."

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