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THE HORRORS OF WAR.



A

S E R M O N,

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AT THE CELEBRATION OF

INDEPENDENCE.



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The Horrors of War.

A SERMON, &c.

JEREMIAH iv. 19.

My bowels, my bowels ! I am pained at my very heart ; my heart maketh a noise in me : I cannot hold my peace, because thou hast heard, O my soul, the sound of the trumpet, the alarm of war.

THESE words, in the most emphatical manner, express the prophet's sense of *the horrors of war*. And in view of the most deplorable state of our nation, what subject can be more interesting to our feelings, or better adapted to our civil and religious improvement, on the present occasion ? Dear to us as our national independence may be, the delights and the benefits of it are, in a great measure, lost, by "*the sound of the trumpet, the alarm of war.*" If national existence must be supported by the point of the sword, by the annual sacrifice of thousands of lives, and of property immense ; alas ! how long shall we repeat, with exultation, the Declaration of Independence ? Pitiful indeed is the independence of our nation, while environed by sea and land with the most formidable enemy ! and an enemy, not contending for conquest ; but struggling for the support of national existence ; and struggling too, with the fairest prospect of success. Do we calculate on the annihilation of the empire of the enemy ? We make a wild calculation. Do we confide in the friendship of the world, and the alliances of the nations against our enemy, as against a common foe ? "The Lord hath rejected thy confidences," says the context, on a like occasion ; "and thou shalt not prosper in them."

But supposing, by our utmost exertions, by exhausting our blood and treasure, and by the aid of foreign connections, we succeed to break down and destroy the empire of the enemy; what will be the advantage, either to ourselves or to the world? What foundation will then remain for the support of our boasted independence? What new security will then be obtained for the tranquility of the earth, and for the welfare of church and state?

Supreme power must exist somewhere. This is essential to the existence of community. But the inevitable tendency of war and conquest (which are the rage of the present day) is, to transfer the supreme power to a single man. War, my brethren, is the highway to despotism. Without despotic power, it cannot long be supported.

“My bowels, my bowels; I am pained at my very heart; my heart maketh a noise in me: I cannot hold my peace, because” of the hazard of our Independence, and of our most precious liberties—*“because thou hast heard, O my soul, the sound of the trumpet, the alarm of war.”*

Has the pride and folly of mankind become so extravagant, that the minor nations, the weak, defenceless, infant states can hope to support their independence by war and conquest?—by blotting out the ancient, established, and most potent empires of the earth?

But, suppose the thing were possible, and *“with God all things are possible:”* suppose we should annihilate the present empires of the world; what would be the consequence? The immediate consequence would be, that we should become an empire: We should cringe and bow before a despot of our own creating. We should erect a *beast*, after which *“all the world would wonder.”* What then would become of our Independence? Alas! *“Thou hast heard, O my soul, the sound of the trumpet, the alarm of war.”* And, continues the prophet, *“Destruction upon destruction is cried; for the whole land is spoiled. How long shall I see the standard, and hear the sound of the trumpet? For my people is foolish, they have not known me; they are sottish children; and they have no understanding; they are wise to do evil, but to do good they have no knowledge.”* All this lamentation and reproof, by the mouth of Jeremiah, was because the men of Judah madly persisted in *the war*, the presumptuous, fatal war!

Supposing, in itself considered, the cause of the war against

the empire of Babylon was a just cause ; yet it remained a question, whether the war was expedient. And indeed, were it both just and expedient ; yet even this diminished, but in part, from its horrors. In all cases, war is horrible.

In view of the text before us, the design of the present discourse is, to impress on the minds of my respected audience the amazing horrors, and tremendous calamities of war, both in its operations and consequences.

That a state of war should be lamented and deplored as it is in the text, in language peculiar to the bible, language which can never be equalled for emphasis ; implies, that, at all times, it is of all things most deplorable : and that, in almost all cases, it is to be utterly discountenanced and avoided. A just war is a rare thing ; and a war, however just it be, is abhorrent to all but savage hearts. Great is the contrast between the advocates for war, and those who are for peace.

“ Peace is the blessing that I seek,

“ How lovely are its charms !

“ I am for peace, but when I speak,

“ They all declare for arms.”

“ What is there,” say the men of the world, the aspiring heroes and conquerors, “ so very odious, so deplorable, so horrible, in a state of war ? War is the road to honor, it gives scope to human talents, and adds to national dignity and renown.” Yes, brethren, we read of the warriors of old, of the seed of Cain, that they were *men of renown*. By them, the earth was filled with violence : by them the world was ripened for the deluge.

War, my brethren, is the most fruitful source of human wickedness, and of human woe ; and for the following reasons.

1. It makes the most terrible inroads on domestic felicity. It rends asunder the most tender connections. Husbands, and sons, and brothers ; and, in many instances, those of the most enterprising and endearing character, and in the midst of life and enjoyment ; are torn away from their firesides, and their dearest connections ; from their wives, and their children, their brethren and sisters, their lovers and friends ; from all the sweets of domestic life ; to enter the field of *Mars*, to dwell in filthy camps, to perform tedious marches, ambuscades,

and midnight watchings; to suffer hunger and thirst, heats and colds, sicknesses, privations, despondencies and death. But if life and health remain, their terrible lot must be, as occasions require, to meet the enemy in the field of battle. Here the horrors baffle all description. "For every battle of the warrior is with confused noise, and garments rolled in blood." Fortifications are to be carried by the point of the bayonet, and before the mouths of thundering cannon. Is it possible to conceive of any thing more deplorable and horrible than this? What a contrast to the serenity and happiness of domestic life! Even the most just and successful war is a source of the most dire calamity, by its inroads on domestic felicity.

2. War produces a derangement of commercial business and intercourse, a most enormous burden of expense, and a most prodigal waste and destruction of property. Nothing impoverishes the world like the expenses and devastations of war. It is at an expense no less than the hunger and nakedness of millions, that wars are supported. Were the human race only in a state of durable peace, all might enjoy an abundance of the comforts of life. But, involved in perpetual war, the greater part are nearly in a state of starvation. Even in our own nation, multitudes of people, who have continually enjoyed a fullness of bread, may be driven to part with the last bushel of corn, to support the expenses of a most disastrous and ruinous war. And even already, does the famine press heavily on those parts of the country which are unfavorable to the production of bread-corn. Poverty and death are the effects of war. The support of armies, with all the apparatus and munitions of war, is but a small part of the consumption of property. Armies spread desolation in the earth. The fire rages with the sword by land; and the sea absorbs its millions. The earth, defrauded of its cultivation, refuses to yield its increase; and the sea, swept of its merchants and fishermen, withholds its wonted aid to the support of mankind. Thus the havock of property, and the human misery occasioned by it, render war a sore and terrible calamity.

3. The unfailing tendency and effect of war is, to destroy the liberty and equality of mankind. It multiplies lucrative offices among ambitious and aspiring men; and greatly increases the burdens and oppressions of the poor, the infirm and

unprosperous. By war, is erected and supported a terrific power, able and disposed to influence the civil concerns of the state ; and every exertion of that power saps the foundation of republicanism. The liberty and independence which we celebrate this day, will be very shortlived blessings, if we persist, like the angry nations of Europe, in a state of perpetual war. Be the flames of war ever so pure and just, yet they will gradually consume republican principles. War measures, as you cannot but observe, are greatly embarrassed by the long debates and tardy operations of a republican government. Nothing but *despotism*, or *enthusiasm*, can ever keep pace with the exigences of war. Hence arose the necessity of an absolute Dictator in the Roman Commonwealth, in times of war.

Determined therefore, as we appear to be, to prosecute the present war ; we must hasten to relinquish our republican principles. We must *amend*, and *amend*, and *amend* the constitution of these United States, until like Achilles' ship, it loses its identity. Liberty and equality, which have so long been the solace of our hearts, and the theme of our sweetest song, must be exchanged for an iron sceptre, unless we consent to sheathe the sword, and cultivate peace.

O the miseries and calamities of war ! “ *My bowels, my bowels ! I am pained at my very heart.*”

4. War cherishes the pride of the human heart, and begets the most absurd notions of virtue and honor. By the baneful influence of war, duelling, with all its horrid train of evils, is not only sanctioned, but rendered peculiarly honorable. To be esteemed a hero, and a man of honor, the warrior becomes a savage, fired with the most deadly resentment, by every slight affront. O how hostile to the maxims of the holy Saviour is the war spirit ! It “ breathes out threatenings and slaughter.” It sports with human life ; and is regardless of a future state, and a final judgment. Such are the horrors of war !

5. War excites and cherishes the animosities of whole nations against each other. Millions of ignorant souls, who know nothing what to alledge against a neighboring and kindred people, are fired with malice and enmity, to prepare them for scenes of blood and carnage. Unless men are inspired with malice and enmity, they are unprepared for war.

It will hardly be pretended by the advocates for war, that they are actuated by any better principle than national animos-

ity. Do armies of veterans rush furiously and desperately on each other, in the day of battle, actuated by mutual love, and kind affection? Do they, on either part, act on the principle of pure benevolence? "From whence come wars and fightings among you? Come they not hence, even of your lusts which war in your members?" It is the lust of power, the lust of honor, the lust of conquest, and the lust of empire, by which nations are inspired to wage war. And having waged war, even on the most slender ground, the way is prepared to blow up the latent sparks of enmity into an inextinguishable flame. Nations and their armies are never found cordial to each other, after they have begun wantonly to shed each other's blood. How great are the horrors of war, which enkindles and enflames the groundless animosities of millions and millions of hearts!

6. War exceeds every thing to corrupt the minds, and demoralize the conduct of mankind. Camps are the nurseries of indolence, of intemperance, of lewdness, of profanity, of contention and violence. War places men very much out of the reach of the means of grace, and the motives to morality. It separates them from the ordinances and institutions of the gospel. It leads them to forget and profane the holy sabbath; and in short, to *forget God*. Long standing armies decline rapidly to a state of barbarism. Armies of a shorter duration having presently imbibed the libertine principles, and peculiar vices of the camp, mingle again with their natural connections, and diffuse the deadly poison. How fatal to the moral character of men are the effects and consequences of war! "*I cannot hold my peace, because thou hast heard, O my soul, the sound of the trumpet, the alarm of war.*"

7. Another of the horrors of war is, that "they who take the sword, shall perish with the sword." To this position, there are some exceptions; but in general it is realized. The peculiar judgments of heaven generally sweep off the advocates for war. The prayer of the Psalmist, "Scatter thou the people who delight in war," is often heard and answered. The common lot of warriors is, to die an untimely death, and to die in sin and stupidity. "They die without instruction, and in the greatness of their folly, they go astray."

Thus in every view, war is calamitous and horrible. It is the greatest and most terrible of all divine judgments. King

David, renowned as he was in the art of war, wisely preferred the pestilence. War was the abhorrence of his heart ; and he submitted to it, only as an act of obedience to God ; only as the executioner of his indignation against the enemies of his holy kingdom.

IMPROVEMENT.

1. From the view which we have taken of the horrors of war, we are taught, under present circumstances, to celebrate our national independence, with fear and trembling.

This precious blessing is, as yet, continued to us ; for which unfeigned gratitude is due to God. But, feeble and defenceless as we are, and devoted to martial enterprises, which directly lead to despotism ; it will be a miracle of divine protection, if our liberty and independence be much longer supported. The advocates for war must very soon be nonplussed, unless some way be invented, to invade the liberties of the people.

In that happy state of honest neutrality, proclaimed and established by the wise and venerable WASHINGTON, our peace and prosperity had no parallel. Our prospects were unclouded. Liberty and independence seemed guaranteed to us, and to our posterity. We could celebrate the birth-day, and the *birth-right* of our nation, without a gloomy apprehension.

Far removed from the land of despotism, and firmly established on neutral ground, with a commerce inviting the friendship of all the nations ; what could there be to provoke a war, or to endanger our liberty and independence ?

But alas, how soon, and how fatally are the tables turned ! How are our ears, and our hearts pained with the din of arms ! with "*the sound of the trumpet, the alarm of war !*" It begins now to be with hesitancy, that we can pronounce our nation a free and independent republic. Most fervently do we hope and pray for the lengthening out of our tranquility. But so long as we experience the horrors of a disastrous war, our case is almost hopeless. If we, therefore, celebrate our national independence, let us do it with humility, meekness and fear.

2. While we contemplate the horrors of war, into which we are so deeply plunged, whatever we may think of the agents and instruments of the calamity, let us, by no means, overlook the hand of a holy and all controlling Providence. " Shall

there be evil in a city, and the Lord hath not done it?" Surely, the God of truth and righteousness is testifying against us. It certainly becomes us to say, "It is the Lord; let him do what seemeth him good." Let us, my brethren, most solemnly realize, that the frowns of heaven are as visible in the horrors of war, as in the famine or pestilence. It was by the overruling providence of God, that the Jews were involved in a wicked and desperate war with the empire of Assyria. "O Assyrian, the rod of mine anger, and the staff in their hand is mine indignation: I will send him against an hypocritical nation," saith the Lord. God also sends against us a very powerful nation, to chastize us for our pride and impiety; and for our abuse of the richest privileges.

Let us, therefore, while we disapprove of all who may be the wicked advocates for war, and conquest, and despotism; adore and reverence the holy hand of God, in all our national and individual calamities.

3. The subject before us, contemplating our dear country, as deeply involved in the horrors of war, excites the anxious enquiry, what shall be the remedy?

Efforts for this important purpose are not neglected. Whether the efforts are, in general, wise or unwise, is submitted to your sober and candid judgment. Those that consist in the clamor and declamation of furious partizans, are doubtless unwise, and will prove to be unsuccessful.

To lie still and do nothing, under the pressure of a tremendous, if not a needless war, must be very unbecoming. The case is alarming; and can hardly justify a state of indifference, or inactivity. Our dearest interests, our precious liberties, civil and religious, our republicanism, our national independence, as we have found, are all at stake. For we are entangled in **THE GREAT WARFARE**, the anti-christian struggle, which, according to scripture prophecy, is to endure and rage, in various forms and degrees, more than half a century. More than fifty years in prospect, present to our view a scene of war and revolution—a scene of the most terrible calamity!

What then is the remedy? How shall the calamity be averted? If this be impossible; how shall it be mitigated? How shall it be sustained?

Pressed with anxiety on this subject, a great association of the friends of peace has been formed for the professed purposes

of candid deliberation, and the discussion of subjects moral and political ; and for the promotion of harmony and peace.

This association is denominated **THE WASHINGTON BENEVOLENT SOCIETY**. This society has taken a leading part in proposing the religious solemnities of the present occasion. We hope and trust, so far as we can judge of their objects, from what is visible in their proceedings, that they meditate neither attachment nor hostility to any party : but endeavor to “ follow peace with all men !” That this *ought* to be their endeavor, is clear : that it really *is so*, is hopeful.

The profession is no less than that of *benevolence* : and this, put in steady and uniform practice, is the best of all remedies for the horrors of war. Benevolence, my brethren, is the essence of pure religion. It is highly pleasing to the Lord : And “ when a man’s ways please the Lord, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him.” Had there been, generally in our nation, a spirit of true benevolence ; we should not have been involved in the horrors of war. Benevolence is condescending and pacific. “ It suffers long, and is kind. It is not easily provoked, seeketh not its own.” It is frank and honest. It is unassuming, un aspiring, undissimbling, disinterested. It is holy affection of heart. Act on this principle, and you will be humble and penitent : you will embrace the Redeemer, and be the children of Abraham, the citizens of Zion. War will cease to rage, and will flee before you. “ One of you,” armed with benevolence, “ shall chace a thousand, and two put ten thousand to flight.” The weapons of your warfare, which is spiritual, will be, not carnal, but mighty, through God, to the pulling down of strong holds. “ No weapon that is formed against you shall prosper.” Yea, in the exercise and practice of true benevolence, you shall communicate peace, as far as your influence extends. And your influence, like that of **WASHINGTON**, shall be irresistible, and ever increasing. Actuated by true benevolence, you shall, in the scripture sense, *inherit the earth*, as well as heaven. You “ shall delight yourselves in the abundance of peace.”

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God. **AMEN.**