

The Effect of War on Civilization.

PRIZE ESSAY BY MR. GLEN H. MORRISEY.

WARS, be they international, civil or mere rebellions, are to be deplored. Nevertheless, it behooves one, in examining its several good and evil effects, to exercise a nice discrimination, and to avoid the formation of judgments contrary to the dictates of reason and of religion.

That war is to be condemned as *invariably* unjust, and unnecessary, and that an appeal to arms is absolutely non-permissible for either side, regardless of the issues involved, violated rights and the rest, is a mistaken and untenable theory. So long as men remain men and nations are composed of men, controversies will arise and international crises occur, in which the arbitrament of battle will seem the only practicable or even possible one. This terrible ordeal is necessary to the preservation of the supreme and inalienable rights of nations, to the triumph of supreme righteousness over the domination of unrighteous tyranny. So long as tyranny exists fearful indeed will be the sacrifice exacted of the individual member of the nation ; but as he is only a unit of the general body his personal rights must be subservient to the common good and society will demand of him the sacrifice. When the consciousness of justice dictates, and redress is not possible outside the battle-field, war is honorable, nay even obligatory ; and the soldier in obeying the call of country is acting in conformity with the supreme law of justice and of patriotism, and meriting for himself the approval of earth and of Heaven.

Organized conflict is a result of the distinctive construction of the present social organism, designed perhaps to remedy the evils of the organism and to correct the faults in its constitution ; and, as such, it has been, true to its purpose, instrumental in bringing about many of the higher human developments.

Are wars beneficial to society? Does the preponderance of undoubted evil over unquestionable good, or vice versa, justify their abolition as a menace to human life and property or command their continuance for the preservation of national existence and social ideals?

In order to clear up this apparent anomaly and arrive at a true sense of values, it is necessary to define civilization. The term implies a certain constant effort to lessen the intellectual and moral crudity of the human race by means of education in the industrial and fine arts, science, literature and religion; the quality of civilization evident in a particular country being measured by the degree of perfection to which its people have attained. All this presupposes an organized state, in fact, civilization in this sense is only spoken of in connection with nations, these indeed of the utmost variety in size and power, in national spirit and vigor, in forms and stability of government. This civilization is, perhaps, more or less abstract, and the universal idea of it, abstract if you will, is nothing more than a moral code or understanding which has enveloped the universe, embracing within its superficies all races.

The effect of war on civilization, as I have defined it, would appear to be a beneficial one; for if civilization can be measured by proficiency in agriculture, mining etc., the stimulus in these industries, due entirely to war, is a very considerable one. v. g. The agriculturist at the present time is earnestly devoting his attention to improved methods of agriculture, led on by the greatly increased demand for food-stuffs and by the pecuniary profit which consequent high prices ensure. Incidentally, and independently of his real motive it is true, his increased proficiency has an elevating effect both on himself and on his fellow-citizen, and the standard of civilization in his country is raised. This is equally true of every artisan and every industrial art. The manufacturer works double time in his endeavor to supply the demand for munitions of war, the miner to increase the output of his mine, the shipbuilder to improve the product of his shipyard.

All this activity stimulates the inventive genius of the community, opens avenues of intellectual achievement, in short, becomes a civilizing agent. This is also true of science and the fine arts, because inasmuch as the habit of organized conflict is essentially human, thinking men naturally attempt its ethical justification ; this necessarily implies the acquirement of a considerable knowledge of previous history in order that a clear understanding of existing conditions may be had. War has been the chief inspiration in the art and literature of any people. Man from the south sea islander to the winner of the Nobel prize, in whatever environment he may be found, is invariably a hero-worshipper. It is a habit ingrained in our nature to applaud the triumphant conqueror and, if it be in our power to seek the *perpetuation* of this feeling of admiration ; and as a consequence many of the most famous paintings and sculptures, and the greatest literary achievements of all time are portrayals of military events.

To arrive at a true impression of the ethical bearing of war on civilization, it will suffice to acknowledge that there are certain moral principles which are dearer to man than life itself. It is not "The pride, pomp and circumstance of glorious war" which makes men fight for the preservation of home and country ; but affection, loyalty and a sense of human worth and dignity, motives which betray no retrogression towards savagery.

Owing to the overwhelming weight of logical conclusions on the subject, one must admit a preponderance of good in the effect that war has on civilization ; but to use a colloquial expression, "Is the game worth the candle?" Shakespeare says "When the blast of war blows on our ears, men imitate the actions of the tiger." This is but too true ; and will the ultimate effect compensate the terrible sacrifice of life and property following in the wake of this savagery. Our Divine Saviour said that war would be, but must not the Prince of Peace have desired the cessation of military conflict and the savagery entailed thereby ?

While it is clear that the moral and material effect of war on civilization has proved in the past and may prove in the future an elevating influence, it is none the less obvious that this does not lessen the material disabilities and moral repugnance of actual conflict. The Lord foretold that wars would exist but at the same time he commanded us to love our neighbors as ourselves. The plain inference is that he intended that war should outgrow its usefulness through the progress of Christian sentiment in the minds of men. That the destructive ravages of internecine strife should prove but ephemeral and find its surcease in the Divine "Pax Vobiscum."

Let us hope that the human race may soon reach the promised millennium and that "Bellona's bridegroom wrapp'd in proof" will stalk no longer rampant through the land, when

" The war drum rolls no longer
And the battle flag is furled,
In the parliament of man
The federation of the world."

A man who has nothing to do is the devil's play-fellow.

To be in love and act wisely is scarcely in the power of a god.

A proverb is much matter decocted into few words.

Attempt the end and never stand to doubt ;
Nothing so hard but search will find it out.

At thenty years of age the will reigns ; at thirty the wit ; and at forty the judgment.