

*THE BIBLE AND WAR.*

IN considering the nature of the Bible's teachings on war, as indeed on divers other matters also, it is essential to bear in mind that all these teachings are not of equal value. The Bible is not one book written by a single author in a single age. It is a book of many books, written by many penmen, whose scrolls are spread over many centuries. The early Christians called it not a sacred volume, but a "divine library." And "library" is a better, because more true, title for the Bible than "book"; for book gives a quite wrong impression of what the Bible is; an impression which has done infinite mischief to the world's conception of the Bible and has led to many serious errors in the interpretation of it by the Churches. But "library" is one of its primitive titles and best conveys the right impression both of its character and purpose.

What is a library? It is a collection of books; sometimes on several subjects, sometimes only on one. You may have a library on law, or medicine, or art, or science, or letters, or any combination of these subjects. But no one supposes that all the writings in any of these libraries are of equal value or possess identical authority. Similarly with the Bible. Religion is its special subject; and it is itself the best of all libraries on this subject. But not even in this "divine library" are all the books of equal value. The stories in the Book of Judges cannot be regarded as "written for our learning" in the same sense, or degree, as those of the Acts of the Apostles; or the Mosaic law of retaliation be accorded the same authority as the Christian law of love. This difference in values must always be remembered if we desire rightly to estimate the Bible's teachings concerning war.

Again: the writings of the Bible, unlike other sacred writings, are embedded in history; and not in the history of one age only, but in that of a long succession of ages. Other sacred writings were written, if not by one man, yet from the point of view of a single age. Their contents are all of one type; and that a stereotype. They are a fixed quantity. There is no movement, no progress in their pages. All is uniform and of the same standard. And when a people grows out of the stage of development and thought in which these sacred writings were written, they cease to have spiritual vitality or force for that people. Their interest is then limited to the domain of tradition and archæology. The fate of all such sacred writings is either to arrest the progress of the people, or themselves to be left behind in the people's onward march.

It is altogether otherwise with the writings of the Bible. They make no profession of the barren virtue of uniformity. They are of many types and many patterns. They are full of movement and advance, of progress in ethical and religious conceptions. They are redundant with expanding life; and, therefore, with perpetual inconsistencies. The inconsistencies of the Bible are an evidence of its truth and an element in its growth. Machines are absolutely consistent throughout every part. They are always the same. But the Bible is not a mechanism; nor is its purpose the making of machines. The Bible is a divine life-force. Its great purpose is to give continually more life to the lives of men; higher life, nobler life, whose lowliest and yet loftiest form is the life hid with Christ in God. Hence the obvious and natural inconsistencies of the Bible, which from beginning to end is an ever-growing, ever-expanding revelation. But these inconsistencies affect not the truthfulness of the Bible. They are the inconsistencies inseparable from all life; the inconsistencies between the acorn and the oak, the

egg and the bird, the child and the man. They are an integral part of the consistency of a life of progress. If the Bible were a mechanical or mathematical treatise it would be scientifically consistent and on the same level all through its teachings, even on such subjects as war ; but because it contains a living word it has had its infancy and youth in pre-Christian ages, and in Christ its immortal maturity.

These various stages in the development of Bible teachings are different—different as the seed from the flower and the flower from the fruit, but they are not contrary to each other. One is not false because the other is more true, any more than the prattlings of an infant are false because they are not as profound as the riper thoughts of men.

We may truly say of the Bible as St. Paul said of himself : “ When I was a child I spake as a child, I thought as a child, I understood as a child ; but when I became a man I put away childish things.” In a very real, although limited, sense, each successive writer in the Bible was a child of his age and wrote for his age in terms which his age could appreciate and understand. Suppose he had not so written, what would have been the use to his contemporaries of his writing at all ? They could not have understood him ; and he could have been no help to them. The Bible acts like a good and wise nurse to children. It feeds them with food convenient for them—food which they can assimilate, milk at first to develop their digestion for strong meat. But to feed a babe with the food of men would result in the death of the babe and the destruction of its possibilities for manhood.

This progressive and only wise method of the Bible is sometimes misstyled, with a touch of contempt, as “ accommodation.” In the highest sense, that of ministering to the present for the sake of the future, it is “ accommodation ” ; but in the lower sense, that of being satisfied with the

present and making the present a fixed standard for the future, there is no "accommodation" in the Bible. For in all the writings of the Bible, whereas we find they are addressed to their own age in terms which their age could understand and therefore benefit by, we find they contain also messages for future ages, messages immortal and eternal, messages which, till the end of the ages, will never be wholly comprehended and fully realised. While the writings of the Bible are a historic mirror of the age in which they were written and reflect the transient stage of its morals and religion, they are also mirrors of immutable truths written by the finger of God on tablets seen by the prophets on the Mount of God. This is the greatest of all the distinguishing characteristics of Biblical teachings. The holy men of old who spake by the Holy Ghost were men of their time as far as they were men; but they all were men before their time, and some of them beyond all time, in so far as they spake by the Holy Ghost. Their writings are actual and human so far as they were embedded in history; but they are ideal and divine so far as they are given by inspiration from God. While the Bible addresses itself to the highest consciousness and noblest conceptions of the current time, it also draws gradually forth the progressive consciousness and advancing homage of mankind to its divine ideals for future ages. This is true of all the writings of the Bible from the books of Moses to the Sermon on the Mount. Even amid the imperfect moralities of the Hexateuch we find trails of ethical glory which come from God Who is their home; and in the Sermon on the Mount, whereas some of the teachings were addressed to contemporaries and were understood, and gradually converted into practice, by them, others are still in the ideal stage. They have not yet become actual. Many things in them we do not even yet understand, far less do; but what we know

not now, nor do, the ages hereafter, in the progressive education of the world by God, will not only know, but also do.

It is, I would repeat, most necessary to bear in mind these fundamental facts of the unequal values of Biblical writings and the progressive character of its revelations, if we wish truly to understand its teachings on war. At first sight the Bible's teachings on war appear full of inconsistencies and contradictions. On the one hand we read that the Lord is mighty in battle; He is a man of war, the Lord of Hosts is His name. Not a few Old Testament battles are described as "battles of the Lord." As in the case of the wars against the Canaanites, some wars are said to be directly commanded by Jahweh. One of the lost histories of the Israelites referred to in the Book of Numbers is called "the book of the wars of the Lord." David speaks of his contest with Goliath as "the battle of the Lord," and avouches both in the second book of Samuel and in one of the Psalms that it is "the Lord who teacheth his hands to war and his fingers to fight." It is impossible to read the Old Testament, if we so read as to catch its spirit, without perceiving that its conception of God, especially in the earlier books, was of a warrior deity fighting on behalf of His chosen people to the discomfiture and defeat of other deities and other peoples. And even in the New Testament we read that Our Lord Jesus said, "I came not to bring peace on the earth, but a sword," and bade His disciples, if they had no sword, "to sell their garments and buy one." I say nothing about the eschatological and Apocalyptic sayings of the New Testament concerning wars and rumours of wars, of nation rising against nation, or of the Faithful and True seated upon a white horse and going forth in righteousness to judge and make war, because their meaning is not quite clear. The eschatological sayings may apply to the im-

pending destruction of Jerusalem, and those of the Apocalypse to the final spiritual conflict between the world and God, between Satan and Christ, and may not be intended to teach us anything about the permanence of war upon the earth to the end of time.

But whatever interpretation we accept of these cryptic and recondite utterances in the New Testament, nothing can be more evident and sure than that when we pass from the teachings of the Old Testament concerning war, as indeed on other things also, to the teachings of the New Testament we pass into a new world altogether; a new air, a new light, a new revelation of God, a new conception of man. Old things have passed away. In Christ the whole creation has become new. In the New Testament there is no trace of God as a military general, a resistless commander-in-chief. He is the Father, the Friend, especially of the poor and the weak and the lost. He yearns more for the one lonely wandering sheep than for the whole ninety and nine who are safe in the sheepfold, happy and well fed. His nature and His name are love. He is no longer described as the God of battles, but as the God of peace. The New Testament is an entirely new Covenant of relationship between God and man, man and God, man and man. It is not only an advance on the Old Testament; it is a transformation, as when the silent, motionless egg becomes the soaring, singing bird. It no longer bids or allows an eye for an eye, or a tooth for a tooth. It says, "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them which hate you and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you. Be like your Father in heaven, who maketh His sun to rise on the evil and the good and sendeth rain on the just and the unjust."

We are so accustomed to the sound at least of the New Testament teachings, although as yet we have scarcely

begun to walk in their spirit, that it is impossible for us to realise what a revolutionary revelation, a new way of religion, a new truth about God, a new life for man, these teachings brought into the world. They were a splendid and sublime novelty in religion, both for Jews and Greeks, Barbarians and Scythians, men and women, the slave and his master.

The Jews indeed had received inklings, forecasts, premonitions, of the coming Gospel in their ancient sacred writings. The Old Testament is rich in ideals—ideals which are like gleams of dawn in the reddening sky which heralds the departure of the night. Notably is this the case with war. Side by side with the concept of Jahweh as a war-god stands the declaration that He maketh wars to cease in all the "world"; and Joel proclaims that although the heathen sanctify war, and beat their scythes into spears, yet the Lord will be the hope of His people and the strength of His children. Wonderful, too, and glorious is the prediction of Isaiah that when the house of Jacob walks in the light of Jahweh "they shall beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruninghooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more."

Instances might easily be multiplied in which the ideals of the Old Testament soar into the firmament of blessed contradiction above the historic actual of the age in which they were written. How can we best interpret these contradictions? First, let us beware of attaching too much significance to single texts isolated from their context. Disjointed passages of Scripture can be so wrested as to prove almost anything, however anti-Scriptural. Nearly every false doctrine preached among men has discovered single texts of the Bible wherewith to defend itself. The most powerful instrument in the temptation

of our Blessed Lord was the quotation of texts by the tempter. The devil said, "It is written." How did the Saviour reply? He said, "It is written again." That is the only way of understanding the Bible. It is not enough to know what is written in one place; we must find out what is written in others also. Single texts taken separately may easily lead us into ditches of darkness. There are dark spots even in the sun; and it is only in the light of the whole orb of Scripture that men can see the true light of God. For this reason I could wish that the universal habit of taking texts for sermons were frequently broken. It misleads congregations to attach undue value to texts, and causes them to forget that no revelation from God can be fully unveiled in a single text, whereas the doctrines of devils often have no other leg to stand upon except single texts. If we desire, then, to know what the Bible has to teach about war, we must cease to build our conclusions on disjointed sayings, even the sayings of our Lord Himself. For when we read the context of His saying, "I came not to bring peace on the earth but a sword," it seems more than probable that the saying has no relation to war at all, but to the domestic disputes which would necessarily arise in Jewish families from the introduction of the Christian religion. At any rate it is certainly written again: "Put up thy sword into its sheath; for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword." And still again: "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God."

In endeavouring then to ascertain the true teaching of the Bible on war, we must first rid ourselves of the pernicious habit of breaking texts away from their context. We must interpret each part in the spirit of the whole, and not judge the whole by any single part. We must sacrifice the letter on the altar of the spirit of Scripture. And, next,



we must assign different values to the different stages of Biblical revelation. The four immortal figures in Michael Angelo's Descent from the Cross were in the sculptor's mind before he chiselled them into clearness from the block of marble. The process of chiselling them to perfection was slow and passed through many stages. And we rightly judge the worth of each successive stage by the final completion of the whole.

Similarly with the Bible. Its final standard of moral and religious values is to be found not in the Hexateuch, not in the Historical Books, not even in the Prophets or the Psalms, but only in Christ and His Spirit of Truth. Christ was in the mind of God when He first began to speak through holy men of old at sundry times and in divers manners as the successive eras were able to receive His messages. But it was not until God spake in His Son that the perfect mind and will of God was revealed. Christ, and Christ alone, is the full brightness of God's glorious thoughts for man, the express image of His person, the perfect character of His teachings, the true mirror of His purposes. Whatever, therefore, in the Old Testament seems at variance with, or even contradictory to, the teachings of Christ must be regarded by Christians as temporary, evanescent, and intended to vanish away. It is singularly true of Biblical teachings that the first shall be last, and the last first.

So is it with the Bible's teachings on war. Modern treatises written in defence of war, when they refer to the Bible at all, chiefly refer to the Old Testament. But many of these Old Testament teachings were temporary, imperfect, partial; and in so far as they are in conflict with New Testament teachings are not a guide for Christian people. The New Testament, indeed, says very little about war as war. Just as it does not, in precise terms, condemn the institution of slavery, so neither does it

categorically condemn the practice of war. But, as in the case of slavery, by proclaiming that all men, slaves as well as masters, were children of God and therefore brethren, it first ameliorated the condition of the slave, then undermined the institution of slavery, and has now almost completely abolished it ; so by its benedictions upon peace, by denouncing those who are angry with their brothers without a cause, by the prominence which it gives to Christ's last legacy to His disciples of the peace which passeth all understanding, the New Testament is gradually introducing to mankind a new temper, a new point of sight, a new ethic about war. Already we find that Christians no longer delight in war. If they defend it, their defence now takes the form of apology. The militarist spirit is repugnant to them. They hate its lusts and ravages, its barbarities and atrocities. They do all in their power to restrain its ferocity by international conventions, and humanise its horrors by gentle and skilful ministries to the wounded and the sick.

We see not yet all wars put under the feet of Christ ; but these Christ-born humanities in war are signs of the coming day, heralds of a better time. The Christ dwelling in men and societies is developing a nobler conscience about war ; a profounder realisation that the paths of wisdom are the paths of peace. This development of a diviner consciousness of the brutalities of war, their sin against the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of men, contains the promise of a great hope for the future reign of peace. For the moment this sky of hope is darkened with thick and threatening clouds. The strength of might is being arrayed against the ranks of righteousness. Contempt is being poured upon the Gospel of the Prince of Peace. War is proclaimed by German culture as a moral duty, the surest way to national prosperity and imperial power. Valour is declared the chief among virtues, and

self-sacrifice in slaughter a manlier thing than self-sacrifice in sympathy. This recrudescence of a pagan gospel should not affright or dishearten us. In all developments there are periods of reversion. While "evolution is ever climbing after some ideal good, so reversion is ever dragging evolution in the mud." The teachings of Nietzsche and Treitschke and General von Bernhardi have nothing new in them. They are simply reversions to non-Christian systems of morality and religion in which "political or heroic virtues occupy the first place, and the milder virtues a place wholly subordinate; and the virtue of humility no place at all." But as the gentler Christian virtues of peace and love have again and again won the day over the pagan heroisms of might and war in former times, so at the present time will they, under the invincible Cross of the world's Redeemer, win the day again, with results more glorious and far-stretching than have ever been gained before. Nietzsche and Treitschke will go the way of Celsus; and once again the shout, ascribed by Theodoret to Julian the Apostate when he received his fatal wound, will ring throughout the world as in rolls of blessed thunder bursting the clouds of pagan perils and shaking down to earth fresh showers of a righteous and a fruitful peace, "*Νεβίκηκας Γάλιλαιε,*" Galilæan, Thou hast conquered, Let us therefore not quake, though "the earth be removed and though the waters be carried into the midst of the sea." Eighteen centuries ago Christ conquered the Cæsars of the Roman Empire, and He cannot be conquered by the Kaiser of the German Empire to-day. This modern apotheosis of strength and power, which is but a reversion to pagan cults, like them is doomed to destruction and will yet prepare the way for a new furtherance of a new reign of peace under the Prince of Peace.

Nowhere in the Bible, not even in the New Testament,

are we led to expect that wars will cease or peace grow permanent until truth and righteousness guide and rule the governments among men. Peace is promised only as the fruit of righteousness. The anthem first sung by angels over the pastures of Bethlehem was not an anthem of peace at any price, but only of peace among men of good will. We are taught to resist onslaughts of the devil; and when these onslaughts take the form of militaristic pride, of merciless ambition, of the subjugation of free nationalities, of the tyranny of strength in the name of the god of Christless culture, then non-resistance is non-Christian and war a Christian duty. Soldiers in such a war are soldiers of Christ; courage and endurance, even unto death, are Christian virtues. There is nothing contrary to the last and best teachings of the Bible concerning war, when the contest is in behalf of righteousness, freedom and truth, and nothing is claimed as the reward of victory but justice and concord, established on the foundations of national independence and brotherly love. In such a war the meekest and the lowliest of Christ's disciples may honestly and devoutly pray that the God of peace will defend the cause of right against the powers of might, and break the swords of oppression under His own most blessed feet.

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