

THE WAR AND NON-RESISTANCE.

A REJOINDER TO PROFESSOR PERRY.

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PROFESSOR PERRY'S article in the April number of the INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ETHICS calls for a reply both by its temperateness, and by the fact that it expresses objections to my previous article which are likely to be felt by most readers. In part, his objections would have been removed if I had written more fully. On the subject of non-resistance, I have since expanded what I had to say and have, I think, incidentally met some of his charges.¹ But in what follows I wish to reply point by point to his criticisms.

Professor Perry is surprised that I should speak of my own opinions as merely an expression of "feeling." It is true that I formulated judgments and supported them by what was meant to be as like reason as I could make it. But all that can be *proved* in this way is that the opinion one is combating is by no means certainly true, and that the opinion one is advocating has as much in its favor as that of one's opponents. If our views as to what ought to be done were to be truly rational, we ought to have a rational way of ascertaining what things are such as ought to exist on their own account, and by what means such things are to be brought into existence. On the first point, no argument is possible. There can be nothing beyond an appeal to individual tastes. If, for example, one man thinks vindictive punishment desirable in itself, apart from any reformatory or deterrent effects, while another man thinks it undesirable in itself, it is impossible to bring any arguments in support of either side. In regard to means, the difficulty is just

¹ *Atlantic Monthly*, August, 1915.

the opposite: so many arguments can be brought on both sides of the question that no rational decision is possible. Take again the question of punishment. Is punishment reformatory? Obviously sometimes it is, and sometimes it is not. Will it be reformatory on the present occasion? The answer, however supported by a wealth of argument, will turn on whether we feel a vindictive impulse or not. Those who feel such an impulse will persuade themselves that the punishment will be wholesome; those who do not will persuade themselves that it will only produce exasperation.

The subjectivity of men's opinions on political questions is much greater than is generally supposed. Whether a certain course of action will have a certain effect cannot, as a rule, be ascertained, and yet all argument for or against depends upon the effect which is expected. Unavowed and often unconscious desires lead men to feel convinced that a certain effect will result, when they ought to be full of doubt. Many men, before the war, had an unconscious impulse toward war, which led them to advocate, in the name of peace, various measures which seemed, to genuine lovers of peace, ideally calculated to produce war. The few who frankly avowed a desire for war, like Bernhardt, maintained that war leads to moral regeneration. The *Morning Post* maintains this view still, although it is easy to see that war has provoked hatred, brutality, and vice. It is not hypocrisy that promotes positive opinions of this kind, it is merely failure to allow for the influence of passion on thought. In the case of private quarrels, we all know how anger alters men's judgment. And on the other hand pacifism before the war made many of its advocates blind to facts which took them by surprise last August, and led them sometimes to repudiate the convictions of a lifetime. It was the attempt to do justice to such sceptical considerations which led me to speak of my own views as an expression of feeling.

Professor Perry very kindly praises my disinterestedness. But I am willing to admit that disinterestedness itself may

become a passion. When a German is accused of having murdered a baby, and it turns out that he murdered a boy of twelve, I almost forget his crime in the desire to prevent injustice. I am conscious that if I belonged to a neutral nation I should reprobate the spirit of Germany wholeheartedly; but I am restrained by disgust at the orgy of self-righteousness that has swept over the British nation.

This applies especially to treaty-breaking. I recognize at once that treaty-breaking is a crime, since a habit of observing treaties would further the reign of law between nations if it could be established. But all nations sin in this respect. England and France ignored the Act of Algeciras; England and Russia ignored their guarantee of the independence and integrity of Persia; the Tsar broke his coronation oath to respect the liberties of Finland. America was only saved by the personal influence of the President from a breach of treaty as regards the Panama Canal. The nations of Europe have not the right to profess horror when one of their number follows the usual practice—not because the practice is good, but because there is hypocrisy in their horror.

The chief crime of Germany in invading Belgium lies less in the legal fact that a treaty was broken than in the fact that terrible cruelty was inflicted on an unoffending nation.² But the question which England had to consider was, not whether Germany had committed a crime, but whether we should do anything to mitigate the bad consequences of that crime by going to war. If we had not come in, the Belgians would in all likelihood not have resisted the German arms. In return for a free passage and for our neutrality, the Germans would have respected Belgian independence, and Belgium would have been spared almost all that it has suffered.

Professor Perry says: "It is important that no breach of such conventions as are already in existence should be con-

² If, for example, Belgium had first violated its own neutrality (as the Germans pretend), that would not make Belgium as guilty as Germany, because the crime would be only against law, not against humanity.

done" (p. 308). If so, the duty cannot be confined to England, it must apply equally to the United States. Does Professor Perry really hold that the United States ought to have gone to war for Finland or Persia or Morocco? Surely not. The evil of a great war is so stupendous that in itself it outweighs almost any good result that it may achieve. Let us try to induce our own nation to observe treaties, but let us not embark upon a universal crusade against other nations which fail to observe them.

Professor Perry expects (p. 309) that wars will be brought to an end through respect for treaties and international law. I do not myself think that this is likely to be a sufficiently strong force. I think wars will end, if they do end, through a growing realization that they are cruel and irrational, that the supposed conflicts between the interests of nations are illusory, and that co-operation is more likely to promote the happiness of the average citizen than mutual slaughter. The present war is likely to do a great deal to promote this realization, since the losses are unprecedented, and the gains to all parties are likely to be infinitesimal. A mood of unreason swept Europe into the conflict; but the penalty for unreason has proved so great that men are likely to respect reason for some time after the war ends.

I agree with Professor Perry that it is legitimate to make war in order to end war. But there is no reason to think that this war has any such purpose. As the *Morning Post* said (leading article, October 20, 1914): "The absurd talk about this being a war against militarism has now subsided. . . . After all the British Empire is built up on good fighting by its army and its navy; the spirit of war is native to the British race." This is the honest truth. All honor to the *Morning Post* for having the courage to proclaim it.

Professor Perry, in his argument against non-resistance, ignores the limitations which I had suggested to the doctrine. A war of principle, I had admitted, is sometimes justified. If some principle is at stake which we honestly believe to be of great importance to the human race, and

if there is reason to think that that principle will survive by our victory but not otherwise, I hold that war may be justified. But in the present war, all the alleged principles seem to me in the nature of pretexts. As *The Times* has repeatedly pointed out, this is a war for the Balance of Power. It follows the tradition of the wars between Francis I and Charles V, between Louis XIV and Marlborough, between revolutionary France and legitimist Europe. These wars, in retrospect, have none of that glamour and importance that people endeavour to attach to the present war. And the present war, in retrospect, will shrink as they have shrunk.

The doctrine of non-resistance, as I hold it, is only applicable to wars between civilized states. It rests upon the belief that what is valuable in a European nation is more likely to be destroyed by war—even successful war—than by anything that another nation is likely to do if it is not resisted. A nation sufficiently numerous and strong to resist successfully by force of arms will also be able, if it chooses, to resist by the method of the strike, by mere refusal to obey. No one seriously supposes that the Germans would undertake to govern England, even if we had no army or navy. The mere political difficulties would be insuperable. And if ordinary peaceful citizens in Germany could not be incited by fear of England, there would be no such public opinion in Germany as would sanction an invasion of England.

As regards Luxembourg, I have no reason to doubt that its condition is deplorable. But surely it is impossible to compare its sufferings with the devastation, murder, and rapine that have been inflicted on Belgium. And if the Allies succeed in reconquering Belgium, Belgium will suffer in the process all the destruction that may possibly be in store for Luxembourg.

I have answered elsewhere most of Professor Perry's arguments on the subject of non-resistance. But I should like to say that non-resistance, as I conceive it, involves no lack of spirit or pride; on the contrary, it involves a

greater and firmer pride than any other policy, and as great a readiness to die rather than yield as can be shown on a battlefield. The case of the Jews, alleged by Professor Perry, is ruled out by the very fact that they are, as he says, "obsequious." But the chief difference lies in the fact that the Jews are not a geographically compact nation, being almost everywhere a minority. They could not, in fact, secure their ends by armed resistance. Much the same conditions—large population, public spirit, power of organization—are required for preserving liberty by passive non-obedience as are required for success in an armed conflict.

With what Professor Perry says in conclusion as to the relative merits of the combatants, I am largely in agreement. I think a victory for the Allies is much more desirable than a victory for Germany. I agree that "Germany and Austria are the principal offenders," but it is not clear to me that on them "may justly be visited whatever penalty be appropriate to the crime of war." American sympathizers with the cause of the Allies, under the impression that they are showing friendship, are very willing to urge us to go on pouring out our best blood on the plains of Belgium. But, though none of the combatants remember it, there is at stake in this war something which all equally are endangering—the civilization of Europe, as it has come down to us from the Renaissance. If the war lasts much longer, almost all the men in Europe between 20 and 40 will be dead or disabled; the ones who return from the war will, especially if they are sensitive and highly civilized, have lost energy and initiative, and will drift through life helpless and listless. The next generation will be educated by those who are no longer vigorous, and the continuity upon which civilization depends will be broken. It is likely that pestilences will carry off a large proportion of the civil population. It is certain that poverty and popular discontent will interfere with the work of art and science and literature, and threaten to submerge the higher mental life that has made

Europe important to mankind. Horrors will have grown familiar, and will have ceased to horrify. A large proportion of those who return from the war will become criminal or drunken. All this must be obvious to any one who has observed the men returning from the front, and who has reflected upon the economic condition of Europe after the war. For these reasons, the cost of punishment may well be greater than any good that punishment can do. And is it likely that punishment will weaken the hold of the military party in Germany? Is it not clear that their hold on the ordinary citizen depends upon fear, upon the feeling that the constant invasions which Germany suffered down to 1813 can only be prevented by a strong army? Will not the Germans argue, if they are invaded, that their army has not been strong enough, and that they have not paid enough respect to their militarists? M. Chéradame, a noted and patriotic French writer, points the moral which the Germans would probably point, when he says:

“La si dure leçon de 1870 aurait du vous préserver pour bien longtemps de l'antimilitarisme, des théories pacifistes et des illusions dangereuses sur la fraternité des nations. Au point de vue de l'influence des enseignements de l'histoire sur la vie publique, la supériorité des Allemands sur nous n'est pas contestable. Pendant soixante-quatre ans, ils ont préparé la revanche d'Jéna et leur victoire de Sedan ne les a ni grisés, ni endormis.”³

I fear that Professor Perry's advice, if it is followed by the Allies, will only cause a new Jena to be the prelude to a new Sedan, and so on in an endless chain of victory and defeat to the end of time. Unless we are to believe in vindictive punishment for its own sake, even the worst wrong-doers ought not to be punished unless the punishment is likely to have good effects. In this case, it is likely, on the contrary, to perpetuate and extend the very evils for which it is sought to inflict punishment. In spite of the *Morning Post*, I believe the least aggressive of Eu-

³ La Crise Française (1912), p. 208.

ropean powers is England, which has only suffered defeat once, in the American war of independence. The United States, which has never been defeated, is even less aggressive than England. It is not defeat and punishment that makes nations peaceful, but security. We all know this as regards our own nation, but we are too contemptuous of other nations to judge them by ourselves. In this we are wrong, and the hope of the world must lie in a peace in which there are no victors and no vanquished.

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