NON-RESISTANCE AND THE PRESENT WAR—
A REPLY TO MR. RUSSELL.

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MR. RUSSELL'S recent article on "The Ethics of War" is characteristically high-minded and courageous. Admirable for its detachment, dispassionateness and humanity, it may well serve as a model for the philosophical discussion of those great issues of life and death that are now hanging in the balance. Since the article is distinguished by its dispassionateness, and since, I venture to say, that dispassionateness is its principal merit and justification, it is remarkable that the author should refer to it as an expression of his "feelings." Even had the article been no more than this I would nevertheless have read on, from interest in the author himself—having cheerfully resigned my first hope of learning something of "The Ethics of War." But in that case I should certainly not have dreamed of throwing my own feelings into the scales. As a matter of fact, however, Mr. Russell formulates judgments, which he supports by inference and appeal to experience. In questioning the truth of these judgments, I may therefore regard my feelings as no more relevant than they would be if I were questioning Mr. Russell's "Theory of Types." If what I say shall prove worth the saying it will be owing to the facts and truths that have argued for me.

Since I disagree with almost every specific opinion which this article contains, let me first express my agreement with Mr. Russell's general and underlying opinion that "the way of mercy is the way of happiness for all." This opinion is abundantly verified by human experience, past and present, and is rapidly coming to be a common

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premise from which all philosophically-minded persons argue. War is an unmitigated calamity. It is not to be praised, but denounced; it is not even to be tolerated and idealized as a natural necessity, but is rather to be hunted to its sources and eradicated like a loathsome and destructive disease. Granting this, what is the reasonable attitude towards the present war and towards its principal actors? It is here that Mr. Russell seems to me to be mistaken in his facts and in his inferences.

There is in this country, and, I judge, to some extent in England, a disposition to take international treaties and conventions seriously, and to condemn as "lawless" a nation that violates them. Mr. Russell regards this disposition as groundless because treaties are in practice "only observed when it is convenient to do so." They lack the sanction which enforces law, and serve only "to afford the sort of pretext which is considered respectable for engaging in war with another Power." Now I am willing to assume for the sake of the argument the doubtful thesis that nations do in practice universally disregard treaties at the dictate of selfish expediency. There remains the important fact, conceded by Mr. Russell, that such action is judged to be disreputable and "unscrupulous." How is that judgment, which already impels governments to seek a "pretext," to be so strengthened as to act as a deterrent? The analogy of law, to which Mr. Russell appeals, would suggest a resort to force. But the enforcement of international law predicates an international organization resolved to substitute arbitration for war. How is such an international organization to be brought about? Only, it would appear, by the cultivation of opinion and habit. In short, before the present sentiment for the observance of international law shall be convertible into a sanction, it must be strengthened and attain to something like unanimity. To this end it is important that no breach of such conventions as are

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3 Ibid., p. 128.
already in existence should be condoned. It is not by a passive admission of past and present lawlessness, but by a counsel of perfection and a stern condemnation of the common fault, that usage is to be improved. A cynical violation of treaties should to-day be denounced with a severity exceeding any judgment in the past, so that tomorrow this thing may become so damnable that no government shall dare to be found guilty.

The disputes of private citizens are not settled, as Mr. Russell says, "by the force of the police," but by legal process resting on habit and intelligence. The police do not enforce law, but prevent its occasional infraction. The great majority of persons, and all persons for the greater part of their lives are "law-abiding." If international law is to be similarly sanctioned, its observance must likewise rest on habit and intelligence. Nations must become "law-abiding," before any international police can undertake to constrain law-breaking nations. "If the facts were understood," says Mr. Russell, "wars amongst civilized nations would cease, owing to their inherent absurdity." How is such a general understanding to be brought about, and how is the reasonable practice to become the normal practice? Only, it seems to me, by an unflagging effort to promote every instrument such as international law, treaties, courts of arbitration, that provide a substitute for the absurdity of war; and by the emphatic and unambiguous censure of every act that destroys these instrumentalities or renders them ineffective.

To many minds it doubtless seems paradoxical to war for the sake of peace. It is precisely as paradoxical, no more and no less, as it is to labor for the sake of rest, or

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4 Mr. Russell evidently agrees with the view of Mr. Strachey as quoted by Mr. Graham Wallas: "Why do men have recourse to a Court of Law in private quarrels . . . ? Because they are forced to do so and are allowed to use no other arbitrament." To this Mr. Wallas replies: "But, as a matter of historical fact, the irresistible force by which men are now compelled to resort to the law-courts in their private quarrels is the result of custom arising from thousands of free decisions to do so." (The Great Society, p. 169.)

to make sacrifices in order that one may live more abundantly. Indeed I am inclined to go so far as to say that the one cause for which one may properly make war is the cause of peace. To be willing to fight for a thing simply means to be unwilling to give it up, however seriously it may be threatened. The one thing that is certainly worth the price of war is peace. This is simply because war means the destruction, and peace the security of all human values. The only justification of destruction is the hope of safety and preservation. This holds, whatever be one's values, provided only that they be human and earthly values. There is only one philosophy of non-resistance that can be justified, and that is other-worldliness. If no value attaches to the things of this world, then there is no motive for resistance; although in that case it is equally indifferent whether one resists or not, since the enemy's life is worth no more than one's own. The moment any human achievement of body, mind or character is taken to be good, then war of self-preservation is in principle justified. Even though humility be the supreme good, then one should resist the aggression of an enemy who threatens to destroy one's life before one has cultivated that virtue, or proposes after the extermination of the humble to spread a propaganda of pride.

But Mr. Russell bases his claims for non-resistance on no such philosophy of renunciation. It is evident that he holds life, happiness, intellectual contemplation, self-government, and many other things to be good. He suggests nothing better worth struggling for than these characteristic benefits of the secular civilized life. He would propose to secure these things by peaceful means, but he must of course add, "if possible." What, then if some enemy determines to destroy these things, and begins to destroy them? Suppose that enemy to be prompted by the motive of destruction. There are then only two alternatives: To yield, with the expectation that these good things will be destroyed, or to resist in the hope that they may be preserved, albeit at great cost and in
diminished measure. In the former case one's action cannot be justified at all because one can expect no good from it. One cannot even hope to avoid evil, because it may be the determination of the enemy to perpetrate that which one holds to be evil. The latter course alone is then the only course that will be dictated by love of good. To try out this principle of non-resistance one must imagine the greatest conceivable good to be attacked with a deliberate intent to destroy it; or the greatest conceivable evil to be threatened with a deliberate and implacable intent to perpetrate it. One must suppose the success of the enemy to be probable if he is not resisted, and doubtful or capable of being retarded, if he is resisted. To test the principle rigorously one should conceive the good or evil at stake in such terms as to arouse one's deepest sentiments. It is life, or character, or social welfare, or the soul's salvation that is attacked; it is tyranny, or rape, or child-murder, or hell-fire that is threatened. What, then, shall one do? To yield, not to resist to the utmost, is to abandon the best or permit the worst. There is by definition no higher ground, either the promotion of good or the avoidance of evil, on which such a course may be justified. It is true that in any given case one's judgment may be in error. But this proves only that one should be sure that one's fears are well-grounded, that it is a genuine good or evil that is at stake, and that one's enemy is really one's enemy. This argues for the need of light. But it does not in the least argue against the principle of defensive warfare.

So much for the principle. Let us consider his applications. "The Duchy of Luxemburg, which was not in a position to offer resistance, has escaped the fate of the other regions occupied by hostile troops." 6 I am willing to waive

6 Op. cit., p. 139. Mr. Russell does not present evidence that this is the case. The New York Times for February 23, publishes the following extract from a letter written from Luxemburg: "I do not believe that the Belgians can hate the Germans as strongly as the people of this little duchy. Their country is not laid low by cannon fire, neither were they butchered by the Germans, and yet they are not better off than the inhabitants of Belgium. Every able-bodied citizen is being compelled to serve the German Army in one or other
the doubtful considerations of "honor" and "prestige," and stake the argument altogether on other considerations. First, Luxemburg through non-resistance has decreased the respect for the independence of small powers in general, and for her own independence in particular. Secondly, though she may have escaped the fate of the other regions occupied by hostile troops thus far, it is as well to remember that the war is not yet over. If the tide turns, the inhabitants of this Duchy may yet be visited with all the horrors of war, with no friend on either side, and incapable of protecting themselves. Thirdly, if Germany wins, Luxemburg becomes, as she is virtually now, a German dependency. If Germany loses, Luxemburg has small claim for the recognition of her sovereignty even from those who are in this war the champions of the smaller states, on the principle that those deserve political autonomy who care enough for it to defend it. Finally Luxemburg does not in any case offer an analogy from which to argue for the non-resistance of Belgium or England, because she "was not in a position to offer resistance," and therefore was under no such recognized obligation to defend her neutrality as was the case of Belgium.

But Mr. Russell is evidently willing to contemplate, as preferable to warlike resistance, even loss of political independence. He evidently believes that what is valuable in national life may be preserved even though one put oneself utterly at the disposal of the enemy. Here again I prefer to waive the more doubtful matters. Whether humiliating submission to alien arrogance accompanied by a vivid memory of lost freedom, would be a tolerable form of existence, I will not attempt to argue—I should fear that I might lapse into an expression of feeling. Most men would, I think, prefer to die; and they would be entitled to the choice. But Mr. Russell proposes somehow to combine with non-resistance "English civilization, the

form. . . . The laboring classes have lost their occupations, while the well-to-do cannot point to anything and say, 'This is mine.'"

English language, English manufactures, and English constitutionalism or democracy; all this, though the English navy were sunk and London occupied by the Prussians.

Now what can Mr. Russell mean? He knows better than I that not only manufactures, but bare existence in England depends on commerce. They depend not only on the actual freedom of the sea, but on the guarantee of that freedom. He knows that if the Prussians occupied London and it suited their purpose they could undertake the suppression of the English language as they have undertaken the suppression of the Polish language. He knows that should the German monarchy fear the effect of the example of English democracy, it would have a strong motive for emulating the policy of the "Holy Alliance" of 1815. Having the motive there is on the principle of non-resistance not the least reason why Germany should not accomplish these things. Mr. Russell thinks that England may nevertheless be saved from oppression by "public opinion in Germany," which is somehow suddenly to be inspired with magnanimity by the spectacle of the voluntary submission of its rival. Germany's treatment of a non-resistant China would afford small encouragement for this desperate hope, even were it not a general fact that arrogance is only inflated and encouraged by submission. The last remaining vestige of hope would then be based on Mr. Russell's contention that England herself has not found it possible to refuse self-government to her colonies. But England has found it necessary or politic to concede self-government to her colonies because they were English colonies, composed of high-spirited men of English blood who could be counted upon sooner or later to assert their independence, and to make it respected if necessary by force. England has not found it necessary to grant self-government to conquered races. An England

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8 Ibid., p. 139.

9 History abounds in examples of this. Cf., e.g., the habitual insolence of the European races toward non-resistant or obsequious Jews.
occupied by Prussians would not be a colony, but a conquered race. And by the express terms of a philosophy of non-resistance such an England would have lost its high spirit, and would have renounced forever any ultimate appeal to force.

Mr. Russell holds "that no single one of the combatants is justified in the present war." What he means is not perfectly clear. That no nation whatsoever has clean hands and an unblemished record is doubtless true. But at least two of the warring nations, Servia and Belgium, were wantonly attacked. It is now generally admitted that Austria’s ultimatum to Servia was intended to provoke war in order that Servia might be "chastised." Belgium was deliberately sacrificed to Germany’s military convenience. So far as these nations are concerned, there was no alternative to war save non-resistance. Both of these nations belong to the side of the Allies. The other allied nations were at least in part moved by a desire to save these two smaller nations from subjection. They may be said therefore to be fighting for the principle of national security, and for the principle of adjudicating international disputes by conference, agreement and treaty. They were or are now doubtless actuated by other and less commendable motives. But that does not in the least annul their justification on the first ground. For a man may rightly save a weak neighbor from assault, even though the assailant be one's private enemy, and even though his punishment afford one private satisfaction or advantage.

Even were one to grant that Russia and France should have permitted the subjection of Servia by Austria, and that England should have permitted the subjection of Belgium by Germany, there remains an independent and much less debatable question. Which of the warring parties is most deserving of censure, and whose victory is more desirable? In other words whom should one’s moral judgment most severely condemn, and what outcome would be most conducive to the general good? This is a question which no lover of mankind, however detached and dis-
passionate, can ignore. The present war is an event of prodigious human significance, and its consequences will be lasting and far-reaching. If there be any just decision or verdict in these matters, it is important to reach it, lest one lapse into helpless and confused passivity, and play no part now that the hour of trial has come. There is a widespread conviction among those who have observed the war at some distance from the heat of action, that Germany and Austria are chiefly culpable and that their defeat is desirable. It seems probable, more from what Mr. Russell has omitted to say than from what he has said, that he does not share that conviction. His independence and honesty of opinion are to be respected. But I believe his opinion to be mistaken.

Mr. Russell himself acknowledges that "democracy in the western nations would suffer from the victory of Germany." He protests, however, that democracy can never be "imposed" on Germany; overlooking the fact that a decline of Prussian military prestige would not only remove a threat that seriously retards the natural growth of democracy in England and France, but might put new heart into the millions of German Social-democrats who (contrary to Mr. Russell's assertion) do not enjoy "the form of government which they desire." Nothing that has developed during the last month of the war, and nothing that Mr. Russell has said, has tended to disprove the verdict that Germany and Austria are the principal offenders on whom may justly be visited whatever penalty be appropriate to the crime of war. The paramount fact is that one of these powers, abetted by the other, first made war. Germany, at least thus far, has practised war least humanely, has done least to mitigate its horrors, and has shown least respect for the conventions which have been intended to regulate and limit war. The dominant party in Germany, the Prussian military class, most perfectly embodies the aggrandizing and arrogant

10 Ibid., p. 137.
11 Ibid., p. 138.
spirit of aggressive war, and constitutes the greatest obstacle in the way of the achievement of future and perpetual peace. If these judgments be well founded it is essential that they should be made and that they should not readily be forgotten. They may only too easily be confused by an over-scrupulous regard for the guilt of the less guilty. There is a curious inversion of emphasis in Mr. Russell’s article. It is not impossible that a distrust of vulgar opinion should lead a nicely analytical and cautiously reflective mind to exaggerate whatever is contrary to the general prejudice. It may even lead one to dwell at length upon the immoderate indignation of the victim, while the fury of the assailant rages unrebuked. It is doubtless the principal task of the philosopher to offset the bias of the multitude and resist the current that sweeps by him. But it sometimes happens that the common opinion is correct, and that even such blind passions as patriotism and righteous indignation will be found working for the general good.

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