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"SHALL THE SWORD DEVOUR FOREVER?"

A DISCOURSE

SUGGESTED BY THE DEATH

OF

LIEUT. EDWARD EASTMAN,

OF THE U. S. ARMY,

WHO DIED AT CAMARGO, OCTOBER 26, 1846,

AGED 28.

BY

WILLIAM P. TILDEN,

PASTOR OF THE SECOND CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH, CONCORD, N. H.

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1847.

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"SHALL THE SWORD DEVOUR THE PREACHER?"

A DISCOURSE

SUGGESTED BY THE DEATH

LIEUT. EDWARD EASTMAN,

OF THE U. S. ARMY,

WHO DIED AT CAMBRIDGE, OCTOBER 10, 1862.

BY WILLIAM P. THOMAS,

PASTOR OF THE BAPTIST CHURCH, CAMBRIDGE, MASS.

Published by the Harvard Divinity School.

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WELLES & STEVENSON, PRINTERS.

1862.

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DISCOURSE.

Shall the sword devour forever?—2 Sam. II: 26.

THIS question was asked in that dark period of the world's history when God was regarded as a "mighty man of war," when He was worshipped as the "God of battles." Even then, it seems, the benevolent affections sickened at the havoc of the sword and the higher part of man's nature revolting from the murderous desolation which it wrought, cried out in mingled hope and despair, "Shall the sword devour forever?"

Alas! that the question should still be forced upon us. But so it is. Even while we profess to regard God as a Father, whose name is Love, who has spoken through Christ, telling us to *love our enemies*, to *overcome evil with good*; even while we pray that we may be forgiven of God as we forgive our fellow man, the sword is still devouring—still hewing in pieces humanity—still reveling in its work of death, not upon the body only, but upon the moral and spiritual nature of man.

Oh how faint are our conceptions of the horrible work now being wrought by American and Mexican swords! Far as we are from the scenes of actual conflict and carnage; embosomed in the quiet of our

native hills; in the midst of friends tried and true; in the peaceful enjoyment of home and the sweet pleasures of social and domestic life, with none to molest or make us afraid, it is difficult for us to appreciate the fact, that as a nation we are really engaged in actual war. Much less can we know or conceive even, of the unutterable horrors of the battle field.

But still the war goes on, spreading wretchedness and death as it goes. Almost every day brings intelligence of new victims who have fallen before the sword, the bullet, or the wasting pestilential disease that almost always follows in the track of war. But these accounts fail to move us as they should, because most of those who fall are strangers to us. Few, as yet, have joined the army from the New-England states. Very few from New-Hampshire. Were there but a single company of volunteers from Concord, but fifty of our young men at the seat of war waiting to be used up by the copper bullets of the Mexicans, or if spared by the chances of the fight, still exposed to the fatal diseases of the climate, with what different feelings we should read the news of every battle, however victorious to our arms. With what trembling anxiety would the eye run over the list of killed and wounded, expecting every moment it would rest on the loved name of a son, a brother, or a dear friend. It is only when the desolations of war are brought home to our own firesides and hearts that we can understand what it is—can realize fully its fearful character. But while we give thanks that thus far *our* homes and friends are not immediately exposed to the cruel shafts of war, we surely should not forget that every *Glorious Victory* that is wrought by our advancing army lays waste some, aye many homes dear and sacred as our own, and calls forth the deep wail of lamentation and woe from thousands of grief-stricken hearts.

My mind has been particularly called to this painful subject during the past week by a brief visit from a young friend who but a day or two before had received the melancholy intelligence of the death of a much loved and only brother who had joined the army.

The name of that brother, Edward Eastman, is remembered doubtless by many of you, though several years have elapsed since he left this place for the far West. He was the only son of Phineas and Judith Eastman, of the neighboring town of Franklin. I am told it was here, in Concord, that he served his apprenticeship as a printer, that he constantly attended this place of worship and was a member either as pupil or teacher of the Sabbath School connected with this society.

Those who were intimate with him at this time speak of him as one who from his native talent and studious habits gave good promise for the future. Often I am told by one of his fellow apprentices would he spend nearly the whole of the night after a hard day's work in reading and storing his mind with such information as he deemed most important and useful. Soon after he became of age he left for the west, and being a somewhat earnest politician became the editor of a political paper. Not realizing his hopes in this department of labor, he commenced the study and practice of law. Subsequently, however, for some cause he resumed his former occupation as printer, and was engaged at this work in an office in Nashville, Tennessee, when the requisition was made for volunteers for the army. The southern paper that gives the notice of his death says: "We knew Lieut. Eastman in private life, and knew him to be an honorable, high-minded, upright, conscientious and respectable citizen. He was a worthy son of the old Granite State, but when the bugle called our citizen-

soldiers to arms he was among the first to respond to the call, and was elected 2d Lieutenant of the Nashville Blues."

He died at Camargo, where he had been detained to take care of the sick belonging to the first regiment of Tennessee volunteers. Great efforts were made for his recovery by Dr. Wells, his friend and physician, but he had sunk too low before the Dr. was called to his assistance. He passed away Oct. 25 in the flower of early manhood, aged 28 years.

But although he has fallen a victim to the war spirit, yet his friends have the sweet consolation of knowing that he did not die in actual battle seeking the heart's blood of his brother man. He fell before the shaft of disease while seeking not to destroy life but to save. In the notice of his death to which I have alluded, it is said that "Lieut. Eastman by his assiduous attention to the afflicted and suffering soldiers—his unceasing efforts to soothe their spirits and relieve their distresses—and his uniform kindness and goodness of heart had won the universal respect and esteem of all his acquaintances. Perhaps no man either officer or private in the army possessed a stronger hold on the affections and warm and sympathetic feelings of his immediate acquaintances and companions in arms than he did. We have heard the parents and friends of the poor boys who fell victims to the insalubrious climate of Camargo express with deepest sensibility their gratitude to him for his unwearied attention to them while sick, and for his unremitting care in the adjustment of their worldly affairs after death had taken them away."

O how grateful to the aged parents now bowed down in heart-breaking anguish at the untimely death of their dear and only son, and to those fond sisters who mourn the loss of an only brother, will be this

beautiful testimony to the kindness of heart, the beneficence of spirit, the self-sacrificing devotion to others welfare, which that son and brother manifested in those last labors of love which his hands performed. Who cannot sympathize with the feelings of that sister who in a line she wrote me, after having delivered the sad message to her parents and sisters, and mingled her tears with theirs, says, "I think we have reason to be thankful that he was not left to shed man's blood—to bring death upon his fellow man."

They have indeed cause for gratitude that the heart and hand which God made for love and beneficent labor found even in the camp, the work of a ministering, a comforting, not a destroying spirit. They have cause for deep thankfulness that although in an evil hour under the influence of a depraved unchristian public sentiment, that so boldly repudiates as *Utopian folly* the *Forgiving Love* of the gospel, he was led to volunteer his services for the battle-field, that he was still so providentially withheld from the legitimate work of war; that he was permitted to devote all the energies of his active mind and warm heart, not to the infliction, but to the relief of human suffering.

May all the consolation which this fact is fitted to impart be gratefully cherished by the bereaved friends. May their hearts be visited and blessed by the rich influences of the "comforter," in this hour of their sorrows; and may we all be moved by this painful event to more earnest and persevering efforts for the removal of that murderous system before which our young brother fell and which is drenching this fair earth with blood and tears.

Many doubtless there are, who, as they read of the sufferings of the sick and wounded that occasionally reach us are sceptical as to the truth of the statements

made, because the individuals who write are generally unknown to them. Listen then to the testimony of Lieut. Eastman, in a letter which he wrote but a few weeks previous to his death—"Our situation is truly melancholy, and I can see no good reason for concealing it. Many of our companies have dwindled away to a comparatively small number by sickness and death, and many noble, brave, generous sons of Tennessee have breathed their last on the Rio Grande."

Noble, brave, generous sons of Tennessee, I have no doubt many of them were; and that they really thought they were doing God service as well as their country by volunteering for the fight. While the popular religion of the land can enslave, hang and kill by wholesale in the name of Christ, is it strange that young men, *generous* and *brave*, brought up under its influence, should be ready to do the work which Church and State unite in celebrating as *patriotic* and *glorious*? The spirit of heroic self-sacrifice in itself is grand and beautiful. And O how sad to the christian heart that this noble spirit, so deeply needed in the great moral warfare against sin, in redeeming the world from violence, oppression and vice, and blessing it with truth, purity and love, should be thus misdirected and perverted to the destruction of mankind. Oh could we see the same willingness to make sacrifice for Christ and humanity that there is to encounter suffering and death for what is called patriotism and glory, how soon would the angel song of Peace on earth and good will among men again be heard heralding the spiritual advent of all souls to a higher and holier life.

Oh how little we can appreciate the sufferings to which the sick and wounded in the army are exposed, to say nothing of the sweeping desolations of the actual fight. In a letter from Balize, La., under date of Nov. 13, the writer, speaking of the sufferings of

a large number of discharged volunteers who were sent off by the "Virginia," says, "Half these were wounded or sick, some having lost their legs, others their arms, others being wounded in their arms and legs. Will you believe me when I tell you that with all these sick and wounded and dying men, not a surgeon or nurse was sent along to attend upon them, not a particle of medicine furnished, not a patch of linen for dressing wounds. Such is the truth, and such, I understand, is the usual manner in which the men who have been out to fight our battles but who are unfortunate enough to get wounded or become sick, are sent home, like old horses, turned out to die."

Another writes as follows: "I left our sick at Matamoros yesterday. It makes one's heart bleed to witness the sufferings of these poor fellows. In camp you must know, few of the conveniences considered necessary to the ill at home, can be had. A man gets sick and he is carried to the Hospital with his blanket and his knapsack. Bed and bedding there are none, and as the country is destitute of lumber, bedsteads are not to be had. A blanket and the ground is therefore the couch upon which the Volunteer lies sick, and dies, if he does not recover. If he dies the same blanket forms his winding sheet and coffin—plank is not to be had. The Quarter-Master at Camargo told me in answer to an application for a coffin, that every foot of plank, and old gun boxes that was to be found, had been worked up for the purpose, and that all the money in his department would not command a coffin."

The following from a correspondent of the Louisville Courier writing from Monterey just after the battle, is enough to move the flintiest heart: "While I was stationed with our left wing in one of the forts, on the evening of the 21st, I saw a Mexican woman busily engaged in carrying bread and water to the

wounded men of both armies. I saw this ministering angel raise the head of a wounded man, give him water and food, and then carefully bind up his ghastly wound with a handkerchief which she took from her own head. After having exhausted her supplies, she went back to her house to get more bread and water for others. As she was returning on her mission of mercy, to comfort other wounded persons, I heard the report of a gun, and saw the poor innocent creature fall dead! I think it was an accidental shot that struck her. I would not be willing to believe otherwise. It made me sick at heart, and turning from the scene, I involuntarily raised my eyes towards heaven, and thought, great God! and *is this war?* Passing the spot next day, I saw her body still lying there, with the bread by her side, and the broken gourd, with a few drops of water still in it—emblems of her errand. We buried her, and while we were digging her grave, cannon balls flew around us like hail.”

Is this war? No! This was only a random shot. A little sport after the battle—that was all. A ball tossed in among the dead and wounded not to kill that woman in particular, but just to stir up the dying and let them know the Americans had powder and ball left yet. That was n't *war*. The battle was over. The *glorious victory* was won. If we want to know what war is we must not stop to weep over one poor woman felled by a random shot after the fierce conflict has ended, and the roar of the cannon has given place to the groans of the wounded and dying, but go into the thickest of the fight at Monterey and witness that mortal conflict in which, at the lowest estimate, probably, from nine hundred to a thousand were killed and wounded. Listen to the explosion of those shells sent into the heart of the city, destroying alike young and old, male and female, the innocent and the guilty. Look upon *Tobasco* as our ships of war gather around that doomed city and commence

their legitimate work—the work for which they were built, and armed, and manned, and chaplained too. See the wretched and innocent inhabitants who could not escape, rush into their cellars for protection, while their dwellings over their heads were torn in peices, and their less fortunate neighbors scattered in fragments among the rubbish. See our *gallant officers* skilled in the science of tactics, learned at our national schools, lay their ships at right angles with the principal streets and pour in broad side after broad side from their long guns, sweeping them clean “of every living thing.” This is war, on a small scale to be sure—but still war, or at least a glimpse of it, enough to give us some little idea of the work in which we as a nation are now engaged. No wonder an officer in the artillery of the army should write—“I am satisfied with glory, if it is only to be obtained by butchering my fellow men; and I wish some of our valorous friends at the North could see a little more of the realities of War, and they would not be so anxious to rush into one on every trivial occasion. It makes me sick now when I think of the scenes I witnessed. They were perfectly horrid. On the night of the 23d, as our shells exploded in the city, they were followed by the most terrific cries, perhaps from women and children, which did not cease till morning.”

But, horrible as is this indiscriminate slaughter of human beings, still the physical death and the physical sufferings that war inflicts are by no means its worst feature. Men suffer and die from other causes beside war—causes above and beyond human control. There are a thousand evils to which men are liable worse than death. Nay, in itself death is not an evil but the wise appointment of a God of love. What spreads the pall of everlasting darkness and gloom over the death and suffering of the battle field, is that it is the work of man. *Man*, who armed with implements of death and torture deliberately goes

forth to murder and destroy his fellow man. And yet how much more readily and deeply men are moved by the loss of life from unforeseen casualty, than by the deliberate, premeditated sacrifice of hundreds and thousands on the battle field.

How the sad news of the recent disaster on the Sound made the heart of the community vibrate with painful sympathy. It was indeed a distressing calamity—but O what was it in comparison with a single battle. Suffering and death were indeed there, but how different from the suffering and death of the battle field, where malignant passions rage, and each is seeking the heart's blood of his antagonist.

Turn your thoughts for a moment from the heart sickening scenes of Monterey and Tabasco, to the steamer Atlantic as she is driven slowly but surely towards that fatal point where she was dashed in pieces, and some fifty fellow beings found a watery grave. Mark the contrast, the *moral* contrast, between the casualty and the battle. The shipwrecked sufferers see and know the imminent peril they are in. The experienced commander tells them frankly in answer to their anxious and oft repeated enquiries, "If the anchors hold we are safe—if they do not—there is little chance for us." The gale increases. The anchors break their hold and drag. Their fate is inevitable. But no malignant passions are called into exercise. Oh no! There is a heartfelt sympathy, profound and beautiful, such as is only awakened by a sense of common want and common danger. All, even the most thoughtless, are made to feel their dependence upon a power above them. Their spiritual nature is aroused. The religious affections are moved. They assemble for prayer. They read the precious promises of God's love. They commit their spirits to their Heavenly Father, and calmly wait the trial hour. Kindest words of en-

couragement are spoken—words of hope, immortal hope that look beyond the frowning reef and the dashing wave to where the storm blast never comes. What disinterested love is manifested. The gallant commander thinks not of himself but of his charge. 'Tis for their safety he is anxious more than for his own. 'Tis for them he labors preparing plank and life-preservers, forgetting the need of any for his own person. Officers of the army too, are there, men trained in the art of destroying life, but laboring now with noblest courage and heroism to *save*. The helpless are the special objects of care. Their heads are bound around with clothes to protect from the piercing cold and the sharp rocks,—planks are lashed together and put by their sides, and every effort that the very *spirit* of humanity could make was put forth. She strikes. A few moments more and her giant form is dashed in pieces, scattering her crew and passengers among the rocks and broken fragments of the wreck. A wave of mercy sends some few ashore unharmed. What then? Do they rejoice in their own safety forgetful of those still in the waves? Oh no! Again and again they peril their own safety in the hope of saving others; and not until the last groan is hushed, and nought heard but the raging storm and the dashing wave—nought seen but the scattered fragments of the wreck, do they leave the fatal spot to attend to their own wants. Oh, is there not something morally sublime in this noble self-sacrificing heroism to *save life*. Is it not a beautiful revelation of the divine, the immortal in man? Death and suffering are there, but O how far removed in its moral aspect from the death and suffering of the battle field. Here the noblest faculties of the mind and heart are brought into exercise to *save life*. *There* the perverted animal passions are all goaded to demoniac fury to slay and to destroy. Truly does Dr. Channing say, “the chief evil of war is moral.” If it only

slew man it would do little, it turns man into a beast of prey. War is the concentration of all human crimes. Here is its distinguishing, accursed brand; here is the chief evil of war; that man made to be the brother, becomes the deadly foe of his kind; that man, whose duty it is to mitigate suffering, makes the infliction of suffering his study and aim; that man, whose office it is to avert and heal the wounds which come from nature's powers, makes research into nature's laws and arms himself with her most awful forces, that he may become the destroyer of his race."

And yet so blinded are we to the enormities of war that while the loss of life by fatal casualty spreads sadness and gloom all around, and is made the theme of solemn admonition and warning in our churches, the news of a "*glorious victory*," in which a thousand men have been killed and wounded—deliberately shot down and cut down in mangled heaps, by man's own hand, by order of the government, not only fails to shock the community by its awfulness, but is absolutely hailed with rejoicing—celebrated as a brave achievement, an act of christian heroism, for which thanksgiving should be offered in the churches.

Oh heavens! what is it that so closes the common heart against the truth as it is in Jesus? What is it that so blinds the reason and corrupts the affections that men will persist, even under the bright beams of the sun of righteousness, in calling "evil good and good evil?" Is the law of violence never to be superceded by the law of love. "Shall the sword devour forever?" The answer is with man. It is he who forges the sword and wields it against his brother. It is he alone who is answerable for its bloody work. No believer in christianity as taught by Christ will dare I think to charge the horrors of the battle field upon God. It is man's work and he alone is responsible for it.

My friends, it is for you and I to say whether, as far as we are concerned, the sword shall continue to devour or be sheathed forever. We may not answer the question for the world, but we may answer it for ourselves. We are answering it each day by the sentiments we utter upon this subject, by the spirit we breathe, by the influence we exert upon the circle in which we move. Is it "*an answer of Peace?*" Are we faithful in bearing our christian testimony in word and life against all war and all the spirit and manifestation of war, and in behalf of love and brotherhood. If so, let us not despair, though our word be feeble—our influence limited, and the world opposed. "If God be for us who shall be against us." Let us labor on in trusting faith, remembering who it is that can give strength to our weakness, and power to our humblest efforts. And though we may not live to see the day when "swords shall be beat into ploughshares and spears into pruning hooks, and the art of war no longer learned," it will be a sweet reflection to us as we lay our heads upon our dying pillow that we have contributed something to stay the ravages of war, to sheathe the murderous sword of violence, and to establish on earth the *Heavenly kingdom of Love and Peace.*

