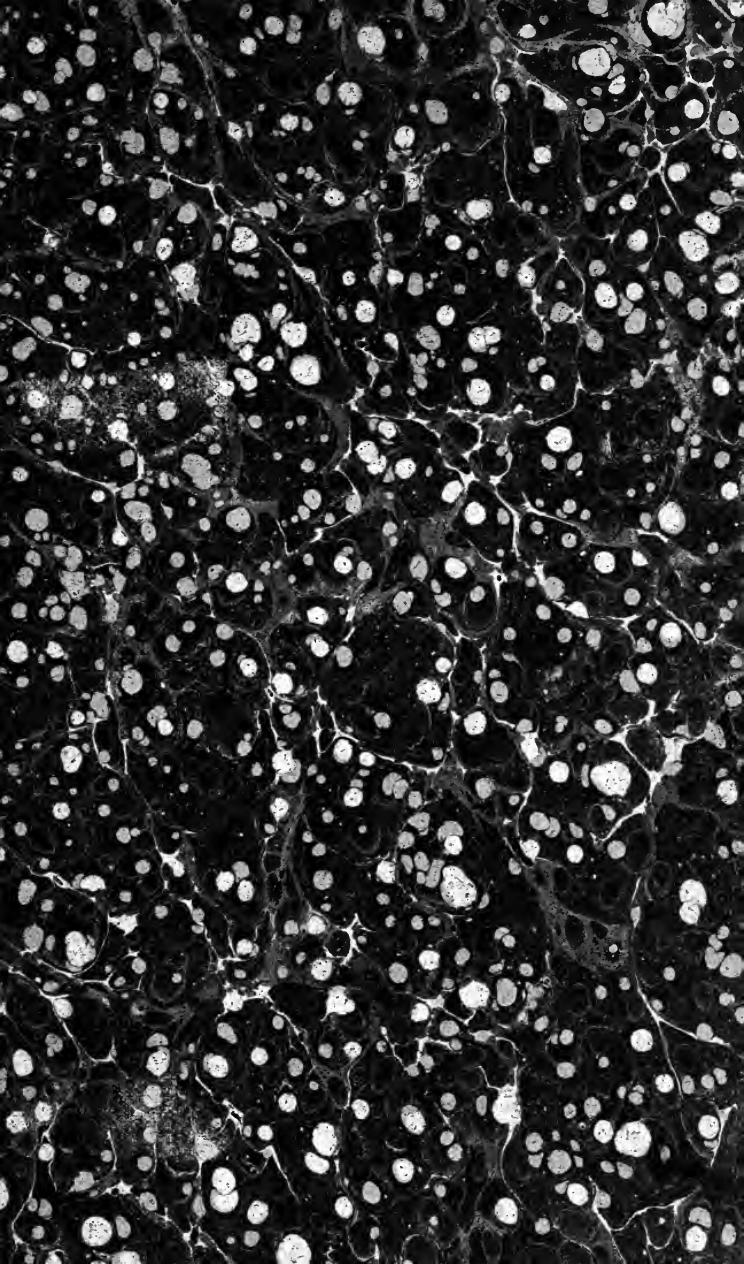


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Letter of Thomas Thrush,

Addressed to the King,

On his Resigning his Commission as
Captain in the Royal Navy, on the Ground of

The Unlawfulness of War.

In the year 1825, Captain Thomas Thrush, R. N., after several years of very serious and prayerful deliberation, came to the conclusion that war was opposed to the precepts of Christianity. Consistently following out this conviction, he resigned the honors and emoluments which he had up to that time enjoyed as a British officer. In a long letter to King George IV, he stated the Scriptural grounds of his conduct. That letter was published at the time, but having been long out of print, the following extracts may be interesting to many readers who have never perused the original;

A letter addressed to the King, by Thos. Thrush, on his resigning his commission as Captain in the Royal Navy, on the ground of the Unlawfulness of War.

“Sire—When a subject presumes publicly to address his sovereign, on a matter which he deems of the very highest importance to the welfare and happiness of mankind, he can not, if his motives are pure, help feeling much anxiety to acquit himself in a way that may best promote his views; that may give no offense to the sovereign he addresses; and that may as much as possible disarm public censure.

“This, Sire, is my case; and when I inform your Majesty that the purport of this letter is to announce my resignation of the commission and rank I hold in your Majesty’s naval service, from a conviction that my retaining them is incompatible with my Christian profession, it will be obvious that my situation, if not one of great difficulty, is at least one of peculiar delicacy. It will be equally obvious that it is no easy matter for me to avoid giving offense, or even to escape censure.

“The difficulties of my situation are increased by the consideration that I have no precedent for my guidance, either as to the letter I am addressing to your Majesty, or to the important and unusual act to which this letter relates. In both cases I am acting—and I feel the weighty responsibility—solely on my own judgment, and without the aid of precedent or example. This consideration ought to make me both humble and circumspect, that I may neither do nor say anything of which I may hereafter see just cause to repent. I trust, Sire, this will not be my case; for on the subject of these pages I have not thought lightly or casually, but seriously and intensely; and this not merely during a week, a month, or even a year; but almost daily for the last three years. After endeavouring to gain the best information on a subject continually becoming more interesting to me, and after imploring the guidance of that Being who alone can direct the hearts of men to what is right, my scruples concerning the accordancy of the military profession with the precepts of the Christian religion have ended in the conviction that the duties of this profession are altogether irreconcilable with the plain fundamental principles of our holy religion.

“When a man, by many years of assiduity and active exertion, has gained a highly respectable rank in his profession—when, indeed, he has nearly arrived at the goal of his wishes—it may be expected that he will thankfully enjoy this rank and its emoluments. But when, instead of doing so, he, in advanced life, resigns these, he is likely to be taxed with something beyond mere imbecility,—the remark of Festus to St. Paul will scarcely be thought too severe for a person acting thus at variance with common feelings and practice. As this remark may possibly be applied to me, I hope, though I have no pretensions to the learning of the apostle, that I may be permitted to answer in his

words, that "I am not mad, but speak forth the words of truth and soberness."

"With much zeal and sincerity I entered into the naval service of your Majesty's revered father, and swore allegiance to him. This allegiance is now of course due to your Majesty, as his lawful successor. When I entered into this solemn contract I entertained no apprehension that I was acting in opposition to the principles of the Christian religion; nor did any apprehension of this kind ever arise in my mind during the time I was actively employed in the service of my country. Nay, so far from suspecting that I was departing from Christian rectitude, it appeared to me almost certain, if I should lose my life in the service of my king and my country, that this would serve as a kind of passport to the favour and acceptance of God. This opinion, which has been frequently inculcated by ministers of the Gospel of Peace, as well as by pagan writers, is, I believe, generally entertained by those who think at all when they enter the naval or military profession.

"Those, Siré, who live much in the world are imperceptibly led to think and act upon the principles of those with whom they associate. Though, in the busy scenes of naval service, I never entertained an idea of my profession being irreconcilable with the religion of Christ; yet, after passing several years in a retirement bordering on seclusion, and after more closely inspecting the Christian precepts, and reviewing my past life, it appears to me that while I have been serving my king and my country, if not brilliantly, yet faithfully, I have been acting in open disobedience to the plain and positive commands of another and a superior Master—a master whose claims upon my allegiance are prior and paramount to those of your Majesty, or any other earthly sovereign.

"In camps and fleets, and in the busy scenes of public life, the awful threats and the cheering hopes of the Gospel do not receive the serious consideration they deserve. Withdrawn from those scenes, my mind has become more and more impressed with the clearest conviction, that for men to devote themselves to the military profession, and to assemble by thousands for the avowed purpose of deliberately shedding human blood, is as clearly contrary to the plain and positive precepts of Jesus, as it is ab-

horent to those natural feelings of humanity that, till blunted or perverted by education, are in mercy impressed on our hearts by our wise and benevolent Creator. Entertaining these opinions; believing that they will be approved by my future Judge; and as a Christian determined never to draw a sword or pull a trigger for the purpose of shedding human blood; nor yet to return a blow for a blow, or an insult for an insult; I feel myself perfectly unfit for your Majesty's naval service, and I think I should not act either honestly or consistently in retaining my commission."

Mr. Thrush, in considering his pay not only as a reward for past services, but as a retainer for future services, adds:

"Being unwilling to comply with the terms, I feel that I am not entitled to the fee; and that I ought not to receive it. Did I, on the other hand, regard my half-pay as exclusively a reward for past services; having earned it by what I now consider as a transgression of Christian duty, or as a desertion of my allegiance to God, it appears to me in receiving it that I virtually renew or continue my disobedience. If I may be allowed to apply to myself the figurative and emphatic language of St. Paul, 'I crucify afresh the Lord Jesus Christ' (the Prince of Peace), 'and put him and his religion to an open shame.'"

The prophecies of the Old Testament, when taken in connection with the precepts of the Gospel, are viewed as decisive against the practice of war, and the following is an illustration of this:

"I am not, Sire, so great a visionary as to expect that the example of any individual, much less of one so little known to the world as myself, will have the least influence with others; yet I confidently anticipate that a time will arrive when not only isolated individuals, but when men in great numbers—when *the nations*—when *many people* will act on the same principles that I have done. I do not entertain this belief, merely because I think the divine precepts of the Christian religion are admirably calculated to produce so glorious an event, or because the 'signs of the times' lead reflecting persons to expect it; but chiefly because I am a believer in those prophecies of the Old Testament which speak of this devoutly-to-be-wished-for event as a certainty.

These prophecies give evidence concerning this triumph of Christianity with as much precision and clearness as they testify the truth of Christianity itself. Their accomplishment, indeed, seems to form a necessary connecting link in the grand chain of the prophecies concerning Christianity; this link wanting, the fortress of Christian truth is rendered assailable, and is exposed to the attacks of Jews and sceptics, who taunt Christians with the remark that their religion can not be true, inasmuch as the Prince of Peace is not yet come into the world. As it was, Sire, the practice of our Saviour and his apostles to appeal to the prophecies of the Old Testament, it seems wise that Christians of the present day, in examining a disputed point, such as the lawfulness of war, should follow the example of these infallible guides."

Having quoted at length from the prophetic part of the Scriptures, and employed very appropriate reasoning upon the prophecies which foretell a state of entire and universal peace, our author makes the following excellent observations :

"So long as nations professing Christianity shall make a trade of war, the superstructure of Christianity must and will be assailable through these prophecies; but its foundations are imperishable. When Christians shall cease from war, which, on the true word of prophecy, they will do; then may we hope that Christianity 'will cover the earth,' and that 'all the kingdoms of this world *will* become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ.' Till then, warriors must be considered as the foes of Christianity."

He next asserts, that as the prophecies never can be fulfilled so long as Christians shall engage in war, so neither can the precepts of the Gospel be complied with by nations or individuals engaging in warfare. Having exhibited to our view several passages from the New Testament of a most decidedly pacific requirement, he presents to us a very singular but striking supposition.

"What a strange anomaly, Sire, would be exhibited, were these truly noble and characteristic precepts of the Christian religion placed at the head of every naval or military officer's commission, and at the head of every warlike order issued from the Admiralty or War-office, or at the head of every regimental orderly-

book! No incongruity could appear greater than such a mixture of war and Gospel—no impossibility more evident than the impossibility of obedience in both cases—no truth more clear than that war and Christianity are utterly irreconcilable. When the Christian and military duties are thus contrasted, the discrepancy is so glaring, that it has rather the appearance of burlesque than sober truth. But surely this striking contrariety affords no mean argument that the duties of a Christian and a warrior can never be faithfully discharged by the same individual.

“When the first impressions, Sire, were formed in my mind concerning the unlawfulness of Christians entering into or remaining in the military profession, I can not exactly recollect. To my shame I may, I believe, say, that I never thought seriously on the subject till within the last four years. Whenever I heard feelings of disapprobation expressed concerning war, I was led to regard them, as Bishop Horsley did, as a species of Puritanical cant; so fully was I satisfied that war, and consequently my profession, was perfectly consonant with the precepts of Christianity. About the time I have mentioned, owing to circumstances which I need not state, I began to entertain doubts on this subject. These doubts gradually gained strength; and early in the year 1822, I came to the resolution to investigate the subject more closely than I had hitherto done; and if, after such investigation, it should appear to me that my profession was irreconcilable with the precepts of Christ, I determined to resign my naval rank and half-pay, although I placed a high value upon the former, and the latter forms a large portion of a very limited income; and I was thereby subjecting myself, and not myself alone, to a very considerable change in my mode of living, and this at an advanced period of life, when its comforts and conveniences are most wanted.

“I felt much difficulty as to the manner in which I should withdraw myself from my profession. It appeared to me (though it may savour of vanity thus to express myself), that the measure I contemplated was one of very great importance both in a political and religious point of view.

“Under these perplexing circumstances, I came to the resolution to retain my half-pay three years longer, should my life be so long spared, and to dedicate that time to a serious inquiry on

a subject constantly pressing upon my mind. This delay I considered as likely to cure me of any false notions that either ignorance, fanaticism, or vanity might generate. It has, Sire, pleased the Divine Disposer of events to grant me these years; and I hope they have not been passed unprofitably. After every inquiry and consideration on one of the most important subjects that can occupy the human mind, as far as my abilities and opportunities have enabled me, and after frequent and earnest prayer to that Being who alone has power over the minds of men, that I might do nothing dishonorable to Christianity nor injurious to society, I have seen no reason to regret the resolution I then formed.

“Politicians consider the being ready for war as the surest means of avoiding it, and as proof of true wisdom. This is mere assertion: and history and experience admonish us, that if one nation arms by way of precaution and self-defense, another and another will do the same; and these defensive armaments, it is more than probable, will produce offensive operations. Defensive armaments may secure temporary safety, but they are calculated to create jealousy and provoke hostility and to verify the remark of Him who ‘spake as never man spake;’ viz: that ‘they that take the sword shall perish with the sword.’ We are told, on the sure testimony of prophecy, that wars will cease; but we have not the slightest intimation that this will be effected by defensive armaments: on the contrary, we have abundant reason to believe that the spread of Christianity (or ‘the knowledge of the Lord’) will produce this. (Isaiah xi: 9.)

“A meek and unresisting spirit seems to be the key-stone of Christianity; it appears to be regarded by our Saviour as a kind of celestial panoply, not merely securing to its possessor the approbation of God, but also protecting him from wrong and insult. The same remark may be applied to families, and also to nations. Its effects with these latter, it is true, remain to be fully tried; but in, I believe, the only instance in which this spirit has been put in practice upon an extended scale, it succeeded. It will succeed with Christian nations, unless Christianity and civilization render men more ungovernable and unprincipled than the untutored Indians with whom William Penn had to deal; these were completely won and subdued by this defensive and truly Christian armour; and, when its use shall be better understood, Christian

nations will cease to learn war ; and there will be 'nothing to hurt or destroy.'

"I think it incumbent upon me, Sire, before I conclude this letter, to assure your Majesty, that in retiring from your naval service, I am solely actuated by those motives which I have set forth: and that I have not been led to take this step by any man or body of men. To one friend only has my intention been known from the first; and I have the happiness to know that this friend (who will be a fellow-sufferer from the act) most cordially approves of what I have done. Nor, Sire, have I, till very near the time of sending these pages to the press, read any of the valuable publications of Peace Societies in this and other countries. The recent perusal of some of their works has afforded me the most heartfelt satisfaction, together with the pleasure of knowing, that these pages may excite feelings of pity and contempt in many, yet that they are in accordance with the opinions of numbers of pious Christians of distinguished rank and literary attainments in different parts of the world. Believing, Sire, that the publications of the Peace Societies have not only a tendency to annihilate war, but also to promote religion, and with it obedience to sovereigns, I sincerely wish they may be more extensively read than they have hitherto been."

NEW VIENNA, O.

PEACE ASSOCIATION OF FRIENDS IN AMERICA.

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