

Insubordination is one of the worst crimes a military man can commit; it subverts all order, and no dependance can be placed in a body of troops among whom it obtains a footing; but I deny that it exists or ever did exist, unless caused by some great misapprehension, in the British army; one thousand instances of refractory behaviour, growing out of intoxication, fail in establishing to my mind a single act of insubordination; something else is wanting, and that other thing, whatever it may be, has never yet been discovered in the British service. It is unwise therefore, and highly impolitic to retain suspended over the head of a good man, this last fragment of a cruel system, as an emblem of his degradation.

Am I here understood to say that corporal punishment could safely have been abolished, although it unquestionably might have been mitigated and considerably abridged, consistently with the strictest rules of military discipline, thirty or forty years ago; or that any other means could be substituted for repressing licentiousness and disorder among large bodies of troops, should the same circumstances of the service unfortunately return? Certainly not. An army in the field or traversing a friendly territory, where the state of its supplies must depend chiefly upon maintaining a good understanding with the inhabitants, can as safely dismiss its commissariat as do without a Provost Martial.

In the order of Providence we look in vain for anything unreasonable or paradoxical, anything inconsistent or that contradicts itself; a superficial observer, arguing from these principles, might arrive at the conclusion that all warfare is contrary to the will and sanction of the Deity, because here he discovers the apparent anomaly of a relaxation of discipline, while the reins of authority are held more firmly than would be requisite in any other situation in which an army can be placed. Discipline is never relaxed in the field; but some men, ever guided by the ungovernable impulses of their own bad passions, will commit excesses which, if permitted, would soon bring the best conducted campaign to a disastrous conclusion.

Prompt and energetic measures must be adopted for repressing such disorders. In every well disciplined army marauders and stragglers in search of plunder are treated with the greatest rigor. A necessary act involves no cruelty, and any one that condemns it, in this case, would condemn the judge who orders a highway robber for execution. Severity of example is sometimes as indispensable, on service, as food and raiment.

The General Officers are frequently reminded in public orders to hold their divisions and brigades constantly prepared, and as complete as possible, for any movement that may be directed. How can they be expected to give obedience to those orders, if constantly thinning the ranks and reducing