

Correspondence.

DEFENSIVE WAR, &c.

EXTRACT OF A LETTER FROM THE REV. W. M. LEGGETT, WESLEYAN MISSIONARY, TO A FRIEND,—ON THE SUBJECT OF DEFENSIVE WAR, AND CRIMINAL PUNISHMENT.

LAW is the bond of nations, and the badge of rulers. The true spirit of legislation is justice; the design of which is, to protect the innocent and punish the guilty. Unregenerate nature requires some curb, to prevent those fearful ravages which prevail where passion is unrestrained. That desideratum is admirably supplied by British Jurisprudence, whose violation, if permitted with impunity, would soon annihilate all moral obligation, and result in anarchy and superabounding evils. Transgression must therefore be punished, not only on account of its own demerit, but for the general good. Here civilization is distinguished from barbarism. Extinguish the light of law, and men would soon relapse into a savage state, and the weak and defenceless be left exposed to the caprice of the powerful and violent. Hence, the very fact of national existence supposes a moral economy, whose authority must at all hazards be maintained. To talk of order where the judicial arm is paralyzed, were folly in the extreme. Every thing of which we have any notion must either be, or not be; there is no medium.

The Editor of the Colonial Pearl will reply, that the Book of Divine Revelation presents an infallible code, or system of moral government; let men observe this, and this alone.

I answer, first,—That all are not prepared for the reception of the Gospel. Some are infidels, and deny its authenticity; others are carnal, and sold under sin. What avail would it be to preach Christianity to highwaymen, when oaths and imprecations are clamorous for blood?

Again: The laws of the British realm are happily based on principles of equity borrowed from the Bible. They were collected and embodied under the immediate supervision of learned legislators and hoary-headed statesmen. They have long been sanctioned by the aggregate wisdom of an enlightened nation, and are now revered and obeyed by holy men of God.

Furthermore: We live not under a theocracy, subversive of civil law; but under the most refined and equitable government on earth, wherein ecclesiastical and civil polity interfere not but for good.

The sacred oracles command us to honour our rightful sovereign, and to yield obedience to the powers that be. Then, when the crown and dignity of England are assailed by daring interlopers, and the physical energies of the Provinces are summoned into action,—who dare question the integrity of men who rally sword in hand for the defence of their Virgin Queen, whom they are taught by our holy religion to regard as the anointed of heaven?

Aggressive war, it is true, is inimical to Christianity; but a war of righteous defence is not only justifiable, but, in some cases, praiseworthy.

The Editor of the Pearl has insinuated that the legal execution of rebels is murder, and deeply laments the guilt which he supposes to attach itself unto the functionaries of the crown, in consequence thereof.

But such execution is sometimes absolutely necessary; and that which is absolutely necessary cannot be wrong. Furthermore; a hundred rebels had better be shot down or hanged, than that thousands of loyal and peaceable families should be left exposed to the merciless sword of the bandit, and the diabolic torch of treason. It were a strange perversion of the idea of mercy, that could prompt our government to extend unlimited clemency to wolfish bands of blood; while the sighs of the widow and cries of the orphan were unregarded. The sufferings of our fellow-subjects have a voice, that loudly calls upon the throne for protection, and, while they live under the British flag, thank heaven, they have a right to expect it. Mercy was extended unto the guilty, again and again and again, until its perversion became a passport to new levies of American myrmidons, and consequently a crime. British authority therefore resumed its native dignity, shielded its subjects, and solemnly forewarned all future adventurers of their fate, by lamentable but righteous executions. Should foreigners continue to rush upon destruction, their blood will be upon their own heads.

This writer also repudiates defensive war in toto, and urges it as a duty incumbent on men, to submit to every species of insult and wrong.

Now it appears to me that defensive war is sometimes unavoidable; and whatever is unavoidable presents no alternative. A right apprehension of this question involves the well-being and existence of families as well as nations. Suppose then, for instance, one of our quiet farmers seated by the cottage fire, in evening conversation with the partner of his bosom and children of his love:—Suddenly, an assassin rushes in, the murderous blade is uplifted—a moment's hesitation on the part of the husband, and his screaming wife will be the bleeding victim. Quere—Shall he calmly witness the scene; or shall the arm that is nerved with sufficient strength by the God of Justice, protect his beloved, though at the expense of the assassin's life? I should really like to know how ***** would respond to this inquiry.

Again: Suppose you and your congregation were worshipping the Deity in one of your peaceful chapels,—unexpectedly a ferocious banditti crowd the aisles, and, in all the excess of brutality, begin to seize upon your wives and daughters as their prey. Quere—Shall fathers, brothers, or friends content themselves with peace-lectures in the trying extremity? Shall they ingloriously turn away from the heart-rending screams of injured innocence? I should really like to know whether ***** would not justify defensive action in a case so harrowing.

What applies in these cases, applies equally to the defence of nations. In reference to the dispute now pending, it is not only the dubious territory at issue. The sovereignty of Great Britain over the soil that Providence has assigned her, must be preserved inviolate.

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