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TRIAL BY COMBAT

It was a step towards civilization when the trial by combat was substituted for unrestrained private feuds.

Savages, who before were left to fight over a weapon or a field as wolves over a bone, were brought into court where they fought under the eye of the law. This was some gain, although judges were little more than the referees of prize fights, and the law assumed, absurdly enough, that justice must be on the side of the victor. Such contests, of course, could throw no light on the boundary of a field or the ownership of a weapon, and were decisive of nothing except who had the sharpest sword or hardest fists.

It was an important advance, therefore, when in the thirteenth century St. Louis of France decreed: "We forbid all persons throughout our dominions the trial by battle—and instead of battles we establish proof by witnesses. And these battles we abolish in our dominions forever."

Now war is an international trial by combat. It applies to disputes of nations a rule which in individual affairs was abolished six hundred years ago. It is as absurd as the practice of ancient soothsayers who ripped open the stomachs of unoffending goats to learn the will of God.

War disembowels humanity to find omens of victory. War puts the murderer on the seat of justice, substitutes rage for reason, assassination for equity and truth.

As individuals we have a measure of Christianity. As neighbors we are fairly decent. As citizens we are civilized to a degree. But, internationally, we are still savages.

Civil society comes into existence when men agree to arbitrate their private quarrels. We shall not be civilized in the international sense until nations learn to do the same.

Soon we shall look upon two nations going to war as we look now upon two ruffians who rain blows and curses upon each other in the street. We shall send

our international police to arrest these belligerents on the charge of breaking the peace of the world, and we shall bring them before the tribunal of all nations and decide their dispute for them.

Russia and Japan spent three thousand millions, mortgaged themselves for a billion and a half, and sacrificed a half million lives.

"But what they fought each other for I could not well make out. But everybody said, quoth he, That 'twas a famous victory."

It is monstrous to do through the agency of government deeds for which individuals would be hung. The blood that is shed by the soldier is on the hands of the citizen. Congress cannot repeal the moral law. Yet men with fine moral perceptions sometimes think and act in national and international affairs as though the ten commandments were abrogated and there were no rule but the whim of the fellow with the biggest navy or the most votes.

Peace, however, is in the nature of things. Through strife to brotherhood—that is the divine order. Creation begins with the war of atoms and ends with souls at peace with the eternal.

Herbert S. Bigelow,
Pastor Vine Street Congregational Church, Cincinnati, O., October 29, 1905.

The Time Will Come

When it will be a disgrace not to work when one is able.

When everybody will know that selfishness always defeats itself.

When the churches will not be closed as long as the saloons are open.

When to get rich by making others poorer will be considered a disgrace.

When the golden rule will be regarded as the soundest business philosophy.

When the same standard of morality will be demanded of men as of women.

When all true happiness will be found in doing the right, and only the good will be found to be real.

When the business man will find that his best interests will be the best interests of the man at the other end of the bargain.

When all hatred, revenge, and jealousy will be regarded as boomerangs which inflict upon the thrower the injury intended for others.

When a man who seeks amusement by causing pain or taking the life of innocent, dumb creatures will be considered a barbarian.

When every man will be his own physician, and will carry his own remedy with him—when mind, not medicine, will be the great panacea.

When men will realize that there can be no real pleasure in wrongdoing because the sting and pain that follow more than outweigh the apparent pleasure.

When the world will have everything to sell and nothing to give, and the price it demands will be the best service the purchaser can render the species.

When it will be found that repression and punishment are not reformative, and our prisons will be transformed into great educative and character building institutions.

When it will be found that physical and chemical forces were intended to release man from all physical drudgery, and so free his mind from the burden of living-getting that he can make a life.

When no man will be allowed to say that the world owes him a living, since the world owes him nothing that he could not pay for; it owes a living only to cripples, invalids, and all others who cannot, through some misfortune, help themselves.

When the "grafter" who fattens upon an unsuspecting public wears purple and fine linen and lives in luxury, will be meted out the same measure of justice as the vulgar footpad receives who knocks a man down and picks his pockets.

When the "best society" will consist of men and women of brains, culture and achievement, rather than those whose chief merit and distinction lie in the possession of unearned fortunes which they make it the business of their lives to squander.