

## ARTICLE VIII.

## CAN WAR, UNDER ANY CIRCUMSTANCES, BE JUSTIFIED ON THE PRINCIPLES OF THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION ?

WAR has ever been the scourge of the human race. The history of the past is little else than a chronicle of deadly feuds, irreconcilable hate, and exterminating warfare. The extension of empire, the love of glory, and thirst for fame, have been more fatal to men than famine or pestilence, or the fiercest elements of nature. The trappings and tinsel of war, martial prowess, and military heroism, have, in all ages, been venerated and lauded to the skies.

And what is more sad and painful, many of the wars whose desolating surges have deluged the earth, have been carried on in the name and under the sanction of those who profess the name of Christ. Obedient to the mandate of the Catholic Church, the millions of Europe rise and arm themselves for the conquest of the Holy Land. Emboldened by the emblem of the cross, streaming from a thousand banners, that ferocious multitude, thirsting for revenge, waged against the Infidel a cruel, unrelenting, and exterminating warfare. "Friends, let us follow the cross," was the battle-cry of Cortez, to rouse the flagging courage of his desperate followers in the conquest of Mexico. It has not been till recently, that the disciples of Christ have been conscious of the enormous wickedness of war as it usually exists. And even now, there are many who do not frown upon it with that disapprobation and abhorrence, which an evil of such magnitude as an unjust war deserves.

Regarded in this light, the inquiry at the head of this article demands our serious thought; it is a question of deep interest and vital importance. It demands an impartial, dispassionate, and candid investigation. What is the truth? we sincerely and devoutly ask. It is with the earnest desire of maintaining and establishing the truth,

on a great moral question, that we proceed to the inquiry before us: "Can war, under any circumstances, be justified on the principles of the Christian religion?"

Wars of every kind may be included under two classes—offensive and defensive. Concerning the former we shall say nothing. We need not delay a moment to discuss a question so directly at variance with the dictates of conscience, and the principles of revealed religion.

The inquiry is then reduced to this,—Can DEFENSIVE war, under any circumstances, be justified on the principles of the Christian religion? What are we to understand by war? It is a contest between two parties, wherein one or both attempt to disarm, overpower, or destroy the other. These parties may be two distinct nations, or they may be both of one nation, the one arrayed against the other. The former is an international war; the latter, a civil war. Can either of these or both, when strictly defensive, be justified on the principles of the revealed will of God?

And here we must define what is truly a defensive war. It is said by a biographer of Napoleon, that he frequently asserted that he never waged any other war than defensive. Such a declaration is an outrage on reason and common sense. It is very easy to point out the characteristics of a defensive war. For instance, a rupture with France, because she neglected or refused to pay the five millions which she justly owed us, would not have been a war of self-defence; nor could an appeal to arms for the purpose of establishing a claim to a disputed territory, be considered a defensive war. Such a question was at issue in the late treaty with Great Britain concerning Oregon. Had we taken up arms to settle that dispute, the God of heaven would have frowned upon us. The same principle is involved in our unhappy contest with our sister Republic of Mexico. Much is said about a nation's glory and honor; but an appeal to arms to vindicate these would not be a war of self-defence. These are won by other deeds than martial exploits on the field of battle. But under what circumstances is war truly defensive? We reply, when its object is to repel an invasion; when there is no alternative but to submit to bondage and death, or to resist. Were a hostile army landed on our shores, to burn our cities and desolate our homes, to overthrow

our institutions and doom us to bondage and death, a war to repel such an outrage would be defensive. And so also when society arms itself to suppress a domestic insurrection, or put down a lawless mob, it then contends in self-defence. The inquiry now is, can war under any circumstances, in defence of life, be justified on the principles of the Christian religion?

But it may be said that no such wars can ever happen. We reply, that in every age of the world there have been such, and we know of nothing to prevent such from occurring again. If like causes produce like effects, and human nature remains unchanged, then war in defence of life must happen. While the world is filled with men whose passions and rage no love or moral restraint can check; while there are multitudes, whose lusts and desire of gain are ever breaking forth in deeds of wrong and violence, occasions for taking arms in defence of life will arise. So long as there are military heroes, whose insatiable ambition aspires to universal conquest, tramples on all that is dear and sacred, and scorns every principle of justice and humanity, so long there is every reason to believe that wars in self-defence will occur.

Our views of truth and convictions of duty compel us to maintain that war, in the sense in which we have defined it, can, under some circumstances, be justified on the principles of the Christian religion. There may, however, be wars in self-defence, unjust and wrong. Such, for instance, when every means have not been tried to secure peace by negotiation or arbitration; or when one party violates the rights of another and refuses to make restitution. It will then be remembered, that in this discussion we maintain the right of self-defence with this limitation.

I. The right of self-defence, if man can claim that right, is first given by our Creator to the individual. Society has no rights which have not been delegated to it, directly or indirectly, by those who compose that compact. Let us first consider those facts which seem to show that the individual has the right of self-defence.

1. This seems to us an original suggestion of the mind. That is, constituted as we are, we cannot help believing that we have the right of self-defence. In the declaration of our national independence there is this memorable sen-

tence: "We hold these truths to be self-evident—that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." This sentiment finds a response in the bosom of every man. It is not till every noble aspiration of the soul has long been crushed, and its high destiny forgotten, that this feeling is stifled and paralyzed. But is not the feeling that I have the right to preserve my life as deep, as strong and as universal, as the feeling that I have a right to live? No one denies the latter; why deny the former?

Besides, it is almost universally admitted by those who deny the right to take life, that we may, when attacked, inflict injury in self-defence. But whence comes this feeling that we may inflict any harm in self-preservation? Why, it is a law of our nature; we feel that this is a right given us by our Creator. But if we are so constituted as to feel that we may use any force to preserve our lives, is it not equally clear that we are so constituted as to feel that we may use all in our power, even to taking the life of the assailant? It seems impossible to make any distinction between the two; if one is a law of nature, so is the other. And hence, if we deny one, we must the other.

2. The right of self-defence is confirmed by a higher and more imperative law of my being. God has given me my life; it is the most sacred and by far the most precious gift which he has ever entrusted to my care. It is worth inconceivably more to me, than all the wealth of this globe. Still further, I am the father of a family; a bosom companion confides in my protection; innocent and helpless children are entrusted to my paternal care. Here is an individual who has been so long under the dominion of malignant passions, that his heart is steeled and conscience seared. To gratify his depraved desires and fiendish hate, he attempts to burn my dwelling, murder my family, and destroy my life. Now may I not justly resist that murderous attack; and, if there were no alternative, kill the assassin, to preserve my life and the lives of those innocent and helpless ones who look to me for protection? Does not that inward consciousness of right which the Creator has implanted in the bosom of every man, tell me that I not only may, but ought to repel this