

# **SOME NEGLECTED ASPECTS OF WAR**

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Some neglected aspects of war by A. T. Mahan

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**A. T. MAHAN**

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*General A. H. H. H.*

*Dec.*

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NEGLECTED ASPECTS  
OF WAR

By

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## PREFACE

**T**HE cause of Universal Peace, upon which so much of the world's attention has been fixed this summer by the Hague Conference, can progress surely to success only upon the same conditions by which any other movement for good reaches its goal. It will not be advanced, but retarded, by neglecting diligently and calmly to consider facts, to look them straight in the face; to see things as they are, and not merely as one would wish to see them now, or as it is possible that our descendants may be privileged to see in a future happier age.

Among many perversions of thought and resultant exaggerations of statement, by the unconditional advocates of Arbitration, there is one which underlies all others. This is, that War not merely is an evil, which like other evils we should labor to reduce, and ultimately to abolish; but that, having reference to the existing state of things, it is so essentially unreasonable and wicked

that there can be for it no necessity, nor justification. From this point of view War serves no purpose that cannot,—in the existing state of things,—be otherwise and peacefully accomplished. It is merely killing people, a breach of the sixth commandment, by those who call themselves Christians; or, as one very prominent opponent has said, — and I doubt not many have echoed, — It is impossible to reconcile War with the teachings of Jesus Christ.

This all amounts to saying that it is wicked for society to organize and utilize force for the control of evil. It will scarcely be denied that evil in various forms now exists; not evil of thought or word merely, but evil of act; of overt violence, legal as well as extra-legal; evil aggressive, persistent, insolent, and ultimately subversive, if unchecked, of all social order and personal happiness. Nor will it, I imagine, be denied, granted a careful appreciation of conditions, that such tendencies towards violence arise from time to time throughout huge homogeneous masses of mankind, nations and races; tendencies resting, indeed, not upon ordinary criminal impulse, but upon ambitions or necessities incident to their present position, or present wants. Nor, again, can there be



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serious dispute that successful evil, supported by organized force, sits often in peace upon a throne, from which it can be deposed only by force.

The organizations of mankind called nations have established over themselves agencies known to us as governments; the objects of which are the maintenance of internal order and prosperity, and of the external rights and interests of the peoples they represent. Could the people, having made this disposition of the national functions, become thereafter thoroughly neutral and passive as regards the conduct of their affairs, as do most of the stockholders in a corporation; could considerations of administration and relations with other peoples be abandoned with indifference to the governments; it may be conceivable that the proprietors of the big estates thus constituted might agree among themselves to administer in such wise as to avoid quarrelling. Although the experience of history, under absolute rulers, does not bear out this pleasing supposition, corporations, small organized bodies, doubtless can reach agreement more easily than do unorganized masses. As a matter of fact, however, governments do not possess this freedom of action, which, if held, we may presume

they would utilize with pure regard to the welfare of those under them; as despotisms and directorates notoriously do. Behind every government, even the most absolute, lie the masses of the people, with all the stormy impulses and pressing needs that characterize the individual man, multiplied by numbers, and intensified by the interaction of complaint and mutual excitation, in social intercourse and through the press. While a government can in some degree modify and guide the popular passion and interest thus aroused, its powers in these directions are limited. Like all elemental forces, popular pressure may be influenced, but not withstood. | The time comes when Government becomes merely the agency for its exertion. The reins fall from the hands of the ruler. Is it permissible, in such case, for the nation or people threatened to supply that restraint which can no longer be exercised by the native constituted authorities? Is it right to resort to force to withstand force? If so, there is War; or its equivalent.

I do not say that the future may not show happier conditions, for which the present should labor. I speak only of the present. Of this present, an eminent American has been quoted as saying that

there is now no more reason for two nations to go to war, than for himself and another to settle a difficulty with clubs. Says another, similarly eminent, "War settles only which nation is the stronger." Both of these gentlemen had seen, like myself, War free four million slaves, and establish on this continent a united people; a contribution towards the world's peace and the welfare of North America, in sparing the expenses of large standing armies, and the woes of probable collisions, which not a dozen Hague Conferences will effect. "War settles only which is the stronger!" The War of Secession then settled nothing, except that the North was stronger than the South. War, it appears, settled neither the question of slavery nor that of the Union. In the conditions which had previously existed, — present then as our present is now, — in the hardening opinions and feelings of the South, and the growing resolve of the North to restrict slavery, it was, it seems, quite possible to free the slaves and maintain the Union without war. The War did not settle those questions. The assertion will not hold water with those who can remember those antecedent times, or who now will reflectively study the successive stages of the agitation over