Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Essay

Immanuel Kant

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TRANSCRIBER'S NOTE

* Italics are denoted by underscores as in _italics_. * Bold text is denoted by equals as in =bold=. * Small caps are represented in upper case as in SMALL CAPS. * Original spelling was kept, but variant spellings were made consistent when a predominant usage was found. * Obvious printer errors have been silently corrected.

PERPETUAL PEACE

"For I dipt into the future, far as human eye could see, Saw the Vision of the world, and all the wonder that would be; Saw the heavens fill with commerce, argosies of magic sails, Pilots of the purple twilight, dropping down with costly bales; Heard the heavens fill with shouting, and there rain'd a ghastly dew From the nations' airy navies grappling in the central blue; Far along the world-wide whisper of the south-wind rushing warm, With the standards of the peoples plunging thro' the thunder-storm; Till the war-drum throbb'd no longer, and the battle-flags were furl'd In the Parliament of man, the Federation of the world. There the common sense of most shall hold a fretful realm in awe, And the kindly earth shall slumber, lapt in universal law."

TENNYSON: _Locksley Hall_.

PERPETUAL PEACE A PHILOSOPHICAL ESSAY

BY IMMANUEL KANT

1795

TRANSLATED WITH INTRODUCTION
AND NOTES BY
M. CAMPBELL SMITH, M.A.

WITH A PREFACE BY PROFESSOR LATTA

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PREFACE

This translation of Kant’s essay on _Perpetual Peace_ was undertaken by Miss Mary Campbell Smith at the suggestion of the late Professor Ritchie of St. Andrews, who had promised to write for it a preface, indicating the value of Kant’s work in relation to recent discussions regarding the possibility of “making wars to cease.” In view of the general interest which these discussions have aroused and of the vague thinking and aspiration which have too often characterised them, it seemed to Professor Ritchie that a translation of this wise and sagacious essay would be both opportune and valuable.[1] His untimely death has prevented the fulfilment of his promise, and I have been asked, in his stead, to introduce the translator’s work.

[1] Cf. his _Studies in Political and Social Ethics_, pp. 169, 170.

This is, I think, the only complete translation into English of Kant's essay, including all the notes as well as the text, and the translator has added a full historical Introduction, along with numerous notes of her own, so as (in Professor Ritchie's words) "to meet the needs (1) of the student of Political Science who wishes to understand the relation of Kant's theories to those of Grotius, Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau etc., and (2) of the general reader who wishes to understand the significance of Kant's proposals in connection with the ideals of Peace Congresses, and with the development of International Law from the end of the Middle Ages to the Hague Conference."

Although it is more than 100 years since Kant's essay was written, its substantial value is practically unimpaired. Anyone who is acquainted with the general character of the mind of Kant will expect to find in him sound common-sense, clear recognition of the essential facts of the case and a remarkable power of analytically exhibiting the conditions on which the facts necessarily depend. These characteristics are manifest in the essay on _Perpetual Peace_. Kant is not pessimist enough to believe that a perpetual peace is an unrealisable dream or a consummation devoutly to be feared, nor is he optimist enough to fancy that it is an ideal which could easily be realised if men would but turn their hearts to one another. For Kant perpetual peace is an ideal, not merely as a speculative Utopian idea, with which in fancy we may play, but as a moral principle, which ought to be, and therefore can be, realised. Yet he makes it perfectly clear that we cannot hope to approach the realisation of it unless we honestly face political facts and get a firm grasp of the indispensable conditions of a lasting peace. To strive after the ideal in contempt or

in ignorance of these conditions is a labour that must inevitably be either fruitless or destructive of its own ends. Thus Kant demonstrates the hopelessness of any attempt to secure perpetual peace between independent nations. Such nations may make treaties; but these are binding only for so long as it is not to the interest of either party to denounce them. To enforce them is impossible while the nations remain independent. “There is,” as Professor Ritchie put it (_Studies in Political and Social Ethics_, p. 169), “only one way in which war between independent nations can be prevented; and that is by the nations ceasing to be independent.” But this does not necessarily mean the establishment of a despotism, whether autocratic or democratic. On the other hand, Kant maintains that just as peace between individuals within a state can only be permanently secured by the institution of a “republican” (that is to say, a representative) government, so the only real guarantee of a permanent peace between nations is the establishment of a federation of free “republican” states. Such a federation he regards as practically possible. “For if Fortune ordains that a powerful and enlightened people should form a republic—which by its very nature is inclined to perpetual peace—this would serve as a centre of federal union for other states wishing to join, and thus secure conditions of freedom among the states in accordance with the idea of the law of nations. Gradually, through different unions of this kind, the federation would extend further and further.”

Readers who are acquainted with the general philosophy of Kant will find many traces of its influence in the essay on _Perpetual Peace_. Those who have no knowledge of his philosophy may find some of his forms of statement rather difficult to understand, and it may

therefore not be out of place for me to indicate very briefly the meaning of some terms which he frequently uses, especially in the Supplements and Appendices. Thus at the beginning of the First Supplement, Kant draws a distinction between the mechanical and the teleological view of things, between “nature” and “Providence”, which depends upon his main philosophical position. According to Kant, pure reason has two aspects, theoretical and practical. As concerning knowledge, strictly so called, the _a priori_ principles of reason (_e.g._ substance and attribute, cause and effect etc.) are valid only within the realm of possible sense-experience. Such ideas, for instance, cannot be extended to God, since He is not a possible object of sense-experience. They are limited to the world of phenomena. This world of phenomena (“nature” or the world of sense-experience) is a purely mechanical system. But in order to understand fully the phenomenal world, the pure theoretical reason must postulate certain ideas (the ideas of the soul, the world and God), the objects of which transcend sense-experience. These ideas are not theoretically valid, but their validity is practically established by the pure practical reason, which does not yield speculative truth, but prescribes its principles “dogmatically” in the form of imperatives to the will. The will is itself practical reason, and thus it imposes its imperatives upon itself. The fundamental imperative of the practical reason is stated by Kant in Appendix I. (p. 175):—“Act so that thou canst will that thy maxim should be a universal law, be the end of thy action what it will.” If the end of perpetual peace is a duty, it must be necessarily deduced from this general law. And Kant does regard it as a duty. “We must desire perpetual peace not only as a material good, but also as a state of things resulting from our recognition of the precepts of

duty" (_loc. cit._). This is further expressed in the maxim (p. 177):—"Seek ye first the kingdom of pure practical reason and its righteousness, and the object of your endeavour, the blessing of perpetual peace, will be added unto you." The distinction between the moral politician and the political moralist, which is developed in Appendix I., is an application of the general distinction between duty and expediency, which is a prominent feature of the Kantian ethics. Methods of expediency, omitting all reference to the pure practical reason, can only bring about re-arrangements of circumstances in the mechanical course of nature. They can never guarantee the attainment of their end: they can never make it more than a speculative ideal, which may or may not be practicable. But if the end can be shown to be a duty, we have, from Kant's point of view, the only reasonable ground for a conviction that it is realisable. We cannot, indeed, theoretically _know_ that it is realisable. "Reason is not sufficiently enlightened to survey the series of predetermining causes which would make it possible for us to predict with certainty the good or bad results of human action, as they follow from the mechanical laws of nature; although we may hope that things will turn out as we should desire" (p. 163). On the other hand, since the idea of perpetual peace is a moral ideal, an "idea of duty", we are entitled to believe that it is practicable. "Nature guarantees the coming of perpetual peace, through the natural course of human propensities; not indeed with sufficient certainty to enable us to prophesy the future of this ideal theoretically, but yet clearly enough for practical purposes" (p. 157). One might extend this discussion indefinitely; but what has been said may suffice for general guidance.

The "wise and sagacious" thought of Kant is not expressed in a

simple style, and the translation has consequently been a very difficult piece of work. But the translator has shown great skill in manipulating the involutions, parentheses and prodigious sentences of the original. In this she has had the valuable help of Mr. David Morrison, M.A., who revised the whole translation with the greatest care and to whom she owes the solution of a number of difficulties. Her work will have its fitting reward if it succeeds in familiarising the English-speaking student of politics with a political essay of enduring value, written by one of the master thinkers of modern times.

R. LATTA.

University of Glasgow, May 1903.

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TRANSLATOR'S INTRODUCTION

This is an age of unions. Not merely in the economic sphere, in the working world of unworthy ends and few ideals do we find great practical organizations; but law, medicine, science, art, trade, commerce, politics and political economy—we might add

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