

THOU SHALT NOT KILL

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By

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BY H. E. PROFESSOR NICHOLAS ROERICH

Before me lies an imposing volume "The First World War". The publishers of it no doubt desired to show all negative moments of the war and its consequences. Such books are excellent indicators amidst the search and appeals for peace. If we witnessed all these horrors in the age of civilization and great discoveries, it means world culture is greatly shaken.

Besides its text that book horrifies the reader with its pictorial reproductions. Let us not enumerate all such disgrace of humanity. It is sufficient to look into the eyes of a starving child-skeleton, in order to feel into what abyss savagery and bestiality lead. The shameful destructions of majestic creations of human genius also appeal to the hearts which are not yet fossilized.

The meaning of this white book on a table, is similar to our white Banner of Peace, which was discussed at the Washington Convention. The more such books, the more signs of reminder,—the more the human heart will shudder and ponder about the immediate measures for the protection of dignity, for the safe-guarding of the noble seal of the age. For what can be more dishonourable for the seal of the age than the destruction of culture in its deep significance?

We must be thankful to all those, who by one sign or another try to decrease the field of killing and destruction. It is true, we are horrified looking at some of the pages of the book of "the great war," but we exclaim at the same time: "Let the school teacher, when showing such books to the students, say: "This shall not be repeated." So much terror has entered life, destroying the moral and material foundations, that indicators should undeferrably appear on perilous

spots, from which humanity must be saved!—if it is to remain that mankind, to whom the commandments of good were ordained.

But in order that the teacher should have the right not to conceal from the children the past horrors, he must cover every page of horrors with ten volumes of true heroic deeds of humanity. He must know how to speak beautifully about those who are giving the blood of their hearts to defend the best constructive and educational foundations. Therefore, every publisher who shows the horrors, takes upon himself the duty to issue books depicting the best images of heroes and leaders of mankind.

In the days of the world crises the wise commandments should be especially remembered. Amongst them the most outstanding and imperative is—Thou shalt not kill! During the milleniums of bygone ages the spiritual leaders of mankind on all continents repeatedly and patiently reminded of the most imperative basis of life. Precisely this commandment has in view the safe-guarding of life—that greatest gift for self-perfectioning. Again and again this planetary command was sent out, but again the blacksmith of the whole world untiringly forged swords and spears, for slaughter and murders.

Endless volumes were written against the killing of the body. From all sides it has been shown to what an extent this cruel action does not correspond to human dignity. If one could collect all the sayings which accumulated around this conception, then one would behold an amazing wreath, and on every leaf of it would twinkle the tears of humanity of all ages and all nations.

But amidst the confusion of life it has become non-befitting and even shameful to speak about this commandment. And he who dares will be regarded as an impotent pacifist of the most perverted kind. He who speaks of this commandment will be considered if not insane then at least a suspicious character, who upsets the social structure of

contemporary conventionalities. Indeed, if in antiquity murders were counted by thousands, then in our "enlightened, civilized" era the number of killed exceeds many millions. If in the stone age hunters with primitive bows and spears killed some animals, then now in the slaughter houses of Chicago alone within the shortest time some fifty thousand of animals are taken life off. Such is progress!

And if with all scientific data at hand you will try to advocate the advantage of the nutritive value of vegetarian diet, you will again be suspected of some intentions directed against society. Civilized humanity, often reiterating the the word culture, still regards blood as something highly nutritive ; and there still exist ignorant physicians who prescribe raw blood meat. Lamentable dicta, whatever you may say about blood meat, about the cruel pastime of hunting or about the so-much-liked-by-the-mob executions,—all this will be permitted as a befitting conversation in the parlour rooms of the highest society. Tasting a sugar-coated biscuit and dipping their lips in the famous cup of tea, you can smilingly relate how during a certain execution not only was all available space filled with excited onlookers, but even from all windows and roofs of adjoining houses people were staring at such a "rare" sight. If you narrate it without much criticism, the society will enrich such themes by many piquant details.

Thus together with the amount of ordainments against killing, there also grows the number of murders of both animals and of human beings. Many wiseacres will state: "such is the law of life". And if you will contradict, quoting authoritative commandments, then your interlocutor will reply: "you are yet too young", as if, according to his opinion, old age is the symbol for bloodthirstiness and cruelty.

Cruel are the deeds of this world. On the one side people try to discover all sorts of remedies to prolong life, and on the other, with still greater speed they invent deadly guns, poisonous gases, which, besides human life, poison the

whole planet and inflict a much greater harm than the civilized modern consciousness wishes to admit. All this refers to the body. But let us not forget that besides the body we should keep in mind the human spirit, consciousness, thought, ideas, which govern the world. Of this a multitude of philosophers of all ages wrote and spoke, and in confirmation of this truth they went into the fire and on the scaffold.

But now the enmity of the world has reached such a state, that to speak of the perversion of violation of the spirit is considered merely bigotry of bad manners. And indeed, where can people now hear about vital ethics, about the purification of consciousness and the discipline of thought? In the churches little is said about it and we all remember how guns were carried for blessing precisely into churches. In schools there is no chair for ethics, and yet this subject in all its historical vividness could be one of the most inspiring. The ethics of the spirit, the teachings of the heart had behind them a most beautiful literature in all epochs. But it is not the custom to read such fundamental chronicles. It is not in our habit to search in the characteristic old expressions something needed even to-day. For us, who are addicted to aimless speeding, to bodily contests, can there be any time to inspire ourselves with the beauty of ancient conceptions and images?

Having transplanted our consciousness into bazaars, into stock exchanges, stadiums, and every possible kind of races and super-races, we simply lose the understanding wherein lies that self-perfectioning, for which we are here on this earth. One may run faster than the neighbour. One may fly faster than birds, but one may also swallow up one's neighbour more blood-thirstily than a tiger. Embitterment has generated that unheard-of negation which destroys the meaning of human achievement. We had opportunity to quote once the most significant statement of a British engineer-inventor who said that humanity is not ready to

accept great discoveries. And H. G. Wells, not because of the triumph of Culture, recently suggested to build a new Noah's Ark.

Verily in home life, in the schools, in social activities many lessons of cruelty are taught, whereas, how meagrely and tiresomely is repeated the withered command: Thou shalt not kill! And in the physical body people have ceased to understand what it means not to kill, what higher meaning this austere commandment has in its brevity.

And when matters reach the killing of the spirit, the murdering of consciousness and heart, then our contemporary dictionary comes into complete disorder and turns out to be altogether useless. But the threatening crisis of the world, we repeat, is not on the bazaar, but in our hearts. Until people understand the meaning of pre-ordained self-perfectioning, they shall not be in a position to value the whole practicability of the command, not to kill, not only the body, but pre-eminently the spirit.

Some dark instigators shout: "to hell with culture", "to hell with heroes, leaders and teachers". But precisely through these firmly instilled conceptions can construction and betterment enter life.

Embitterment, after all, leads to poverty, to perpetual dissatisfaction, in which even wealth appears as poverty. Cruelty makes of the heart that stone, which we try to throw at our neighbour, instead of illumining the near ones with the light of co-operation. In the conception of co-operation no thought of killing will enter, because for co-operation is needed life, and not death. In the difficult days I want to greet the friends upon that blissful co-operation, which will bring us to mutual understanding of the high meaning of self-perfectioning.

Always, when we shall pronounce the great commandment: "thou shalt not kill", let us understand it not only in its physical but mainly in its spiritual sense. This last meaning will direct our attention to the heart and will help

us to understand the great commandment not only in the narrow earthly way, but in the whole magnificence of all higher worlds.

Co-operation, cognizance, strengthening of the spirit will again give to the world those heroes for whom the heart of mankind long.

Himalayas,

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