

IV.—*The Utility of Standing Armies as a means of defence in an advanced stage of civilization.*—By William H. Jemison, A. B.

[Read February 19th, 1855.]

GENTLEMEN,

That there is no necessary connection between what are called "Peace Principles," and Political Economy, has been pointed out to us this session by Dr. Hancock.* I have thought, however, that the particular notice of the subject of Standing Armies might be opportune. The present unhappy state of our foreign relations, and the erroneous views put forward by some who profess a regard for economic principles, have led me to attempt this notice.

Mr. Cobden has spoken of "standing armies as the standing curse of the present generation."† The curse, however, consists not in them, but in that which renders them necessary. In this respect, there is an analogy between the military and the medical profession. Were it not for the pains and weaknesses of the body, we should not need the aid of the one. Were it not for the violence and evil passions of mankind, we should not require the protection of the other.

As nations have become more intelligent, they have recognised the advantage of making a separation of employments, and have acted on the principle in the matter of national defence. A standing army is a body of men who have military affairs assigned them for their sole occupation, and are for this purpose maintained in times both of peace and war, by the rest of the community. We shall consider such a means of defence in relation to its convenience, its expense, and its efficiency. We shall afterwards see what connection it has with the circumstances of a commercial and cultivated people.

The *convenience* of standing armies in relation to the internal organization of society is obvious. It is a matter of the utmost importance that the community being provided with an efficient and readily available force for external defence, should not disturb the regular routine of civil and commercial employments. The two modes of life, too—the civil and the military—differ so widely in their nature, and in the tastes and acquirements which those who follow them must possess, that we cannot contemplate their union, without also contemplating, as its natural result, a degree of failure in each. The consideration of its unfavorable effects on trade and industry seems, however, to be frequently swallowed up in that of the inferiority that would ensue in military service. Yet the consequences of occasional emigration and immigration on the ranks of commerce, and on the interests of industrial pursuits, and the pouring in on civil life of notions

* Journal, page 36, part 1.

† House of Commons, June 17th, 1851.

and habits that a short campaign would be sufficient for the mass of the military body to contract, could not fail of being productive of derangements and inconveniencies. It is only in proportion as the business of military operations is made the sole business of those who undertake them, that the machinery of the industrial and commercial world can go on without interruption, at the same time that it has its rights effectively protected against the assaults of other communities.

The *expense* of standing armies can be measured in three different ways—either in labour, in time, or in money.

In a state of society where all or nearly all the inhabitants of military age go out against the foe, the defence of the nation is obtained at great cost, for it is at the expense of most of the available labour of the society. To exemplify such costly protection now-a-days, requires us to adduce an extreme case. "Travelers tell us," says Archbishop Whately, "that when a husbandman [in some eastern countries] goes to sow his fields, he takes with him a companion with a sword or a spear, to protect him from being robbed of his seed-corn. This must make the cultivation of the ground very costly; because the work which might be done by one man requires two; one to labour, and the other to fight. And both must have a share of the crop, which would otherwise belong to one."* On precisely the same principle, national defence is more or less costly in proportion as it absorbs a larger or smaller quantity of the labour of the society. Now, the assigning to particular persons a particular class of duties is the surest way of economising human *labor*. It therefore follows that standing armies, in which this principle is farthest carried out, must be in this respect the cheapest means of defence. On looking to this nation, for example, we accordingly find the saving of labor in this particular to be very extensive. The entire population of Great Britain and Ireland is about twenty-eight millions of inhabitants, of whom about the fourth part, or seven millions, are men of military age. The number of soldiers, however, which are found sufficient to defend these may be set down at about 50,000. On these *data* we have but one soldier for more than every 500 persons; or for about every 130 men of military age; or, again, the 560th part of the whole population suffices for the military protection of this wealthy empire.

If we look at the subject in relation to saving of *time*, the case is equally striking. The proper employment of time is, of course, the fundamental condition of the production of wealth. The time, however, that is spent in repelling aggression is, so to speak, lost time; it might have been profitably spent in the arts of peace, had there been no aggression either to repel or to fear. But when such aggression does exist, or may exist, the less time the nation loses thereby the better. Now, the economising of time is the well-known effect of the separation of employments; and how much the separation of that of the soldier from every other has this effect, is deserving of serious attention. Using the figures before

* Money Matters, p. 67.

mentioned, we find every person in the community enjoying military protection at the expense of about three minutes a day each. There is no other means by which this national defence could be secured at less loss of time.

When we see standing armies economising to such an extent the labor and time of society, the cheapness of the system is, of course, clear. Let us, however, also estimate their cost in *money*. It would not here be easy to be exact, as, leaving the extraordinary demands of war out of the question, the expense of our army will fluctuate with many circumstances connected both with ourselves and with our dependencies. Supposing, however, for sake of round numbers, the annual expense of the army, with the ordnance, to be so much as £10,000,000, and the population to be 30,000,000, instead of scarcely 28,000,000, the average expense is at the rate of 6s. 8d. a head per year; or about two pence a week for the whole population. And supposing the yearly revenue of the nation to be £50,000,000, the maintenance of the military service absorbs but four shillings of each pound paid in taxes. I do not mean that £9,000,000, or £10,000,000 a-year is, in itself, any trifling sum. On the contrary, it is the resources of the nation being capable of standing upright under this, and far heavier burdens, that under Providence enables us, in our present struggle, to anticipate with calmness the story of future history. But I submit that our army expenses are small, when compared with what it would cost the community to defend themselves, if it were possible, by any other means. And in all such calculations there is one most important consideration we should never lose sight of, namely, that by making the occupation of the soldier a distinct one, the pursuits of commerce and industry are kept free from interruptions to which they would otherwise be necessarily exposed.

Let us now, in the third place, consider the *efficiency* of standing armies. That they should be efficient, is only what we are to expect from the nature of the case. Adam Smith, in the opening of his great work, mentions as the first of the advantages of a division of labor, "the increase of dexterity in every particular workman." "The improvement," he says, "of the dexterity of the workman, necessarily increases very much the quantity of work he can perform, and the division of labor, by reducing every man's business to some one simple operation, and by making this operation the sole employment of his life, necessarily increases very much the dexterity of the workman."* What is true of "one simple operation" in a workshop, is true also of *classes* of operations, or of the various pursuits of life. That which is a man's "sole employment" is that in which he is most likely to arrive at excellence. When, therefore, a body of men, as in a standing army, are enabled to devote their lives to military concerns, their efficiency as soldiers follows as the natural and necessary result. Accordingly the author from whom I have quoted illustrates the efficiency of standing armies, by referring to them some of the most important events in the great contests of mankind.† The first regular

* *Wealth of Nations*, book I., chapter i.

† *Ibid.* book V., chapter i.

army of this nature, recorded in history, was that of Philip of Macedon; and before it the best militias of the Grecian republics and the Persian empire gave way. When the Roman militias became transformed into a standing army, by long service and strict discipline, they bore down before them all the ablest militias of the ancient world. And we may learn a useful lesson from the fact, that it was when that powerful army was allowed to become relaxed during a long peace, the Roman empire sank before the northern invaders.

I would here, too, observe, that the devotion of the time and thoughts of the soldier to the business of defence, has as useful an effect on his moral nature, as it has in the production of his dexterity and skill. It is a well known fact, and one that has been fully developed by ethical writers,* "that the being accustomed to danger begets intrepidity." The power of guarding against danger becomes more active, at the same time that the painful emotion of fear becomes less easily excited. To produce this effect, the encountering of *actual* danger is not so necessary as we might imagine. The result will be as surely produced through the mutual operation of *thought* and *feeling*. By the soldier being habituated by discipline to thoughts of danger and enterprise, the emotion of fear will be almost as effectively numbed as if he had learned warfare on the battle-field. This is, in a great measure, the true account of the fact noticed by Adam Smith, in his chapter on the Expenses of the Sovereign:—"The soldiers of a standing army," he observes, "though they may never have seen an enemy, yet have frequently appeared to possess all the courage of veteran troops, and the very moment they took the field, to have been fit to face the hardest and most experienced veterans." . . . "In a long peace," he adds, "the generals, perhaps, may sometimes forget their skill; but where a well-regulated standing army has been kept up, the soldiers seem never to forget their valour."† In corroboration of this, he refers to some remarkable instances in history; but it would be idle for me to occupy your time in quoting them, while the transactions of the last few months are fresh in our minds. We may therefore conclude, both *a priori* and from fact, that Standing Armies, besides being the most convenient and the least burdensome, are also the most efficient means of national defence.

The nucleus of our present standing army was the two regiments of guards which Charles II. formed in 1661; but its numbers were long restricted within very narrow limits. The reason of this restriction was the jealousy with which the existence of such a force was regarded by the parliament and people—a jealousy which the temper of the throne too often showed not to have been altogether groundless.‡ Under our present system of things, however, such apprehensions would of course be necessarily out of place; and this as well from the provisions of the Mutiny Act, as from the army itself being

* Bp. Butler:—Analogy, part I, chap. v. Sir J. Mackintosh:—Eth. Phil., p. 394.

† Wealth of Nations, book V., chapter i.

‡ Hume's History of England, vol. VIII., page 430.

under the command of men as vitally interested as any citizen in the preservation of civil liberty.

Hitherto we have been treating the system of standing armies as if its adoption by us were solely a matter of choice. But there are two circumstances referred to in the "*Wealth of Nations*," which show not only the policy but the absolute necessity of such a means of defence in an advanced stage of civilization. The first is the fact of trade and manufactures engrossing so large a share of the time and labor of the people. The second is the improved and more complicated nature of modern warfare. The opposition between these two powers must give standing armies as their result. Recent discoveries and inventions, along with having rendered the instruments of war more costly, have also rendered military operations more exacting on the time and study of those who would practise them. The progress of trade and manufactures, on the other hand, leaves those who would follow them neither time nor fitness for military service. "When commerce and manufactures begin to flourish," to use the words of Mr. Macaulay, "a great change takes place. The sedentary habits of the desk and the loom render the exertions and hardships of war insupportable. The business of traders and artisans requires their constant presence and attention. In such a community there is little superfluous time; but there is generally much superfluous money. Some members of the society are therefore hired, to relieve the rest from a task inconsistent with their habits and engagements."*

And this seems the proper place to observe the fallacy that lurks in the proposition of a mutual reduction of fleets and armies by different nations. If two nations, it has been urged,† were each to reduce their armies to one man, their relative strength would be preserved the same at less cost. But whether such would be the case or not depends upon a condition which has been kept out of sight, namely, that the tastes and occupations of the people of each nation should be the same. Were they not so, the community that was more devoted to trade and commerce ("the desk and the loom") would for that very reason be the more helpless, as well as being the one more likely to be attacked. The proposition in question, therefore, is not merely Utopian, but, being founded on a superficial view of society, is essentially fallacious.

Let us now see what are the conclusions to which, I submit, the foregoing considerations irresistibly lead. They are, that we should scrupulously maintain a distinct military class, and that we should regard with extreme distrust any suggestions made for lowering its condition or its strength. We should feel, too, that as the military body, like the naval, discharges one of the most important services for society, everything connected with its efficiency and well-being is matter for anxious public solicitude: that, in time of war, particularly when our armies go forth in behalf of our national interests, their progress and circumstances should be the objects of special concern: that the intelligence and wisdom of the country should

* *Essays*.—Machiavelli.

† Mr. Cobden's motion on International Arbitration, House of Commons, June 17th, 1851.

be strained to forward their exertions, and terminate them speedily with success; and that for this purpose our wealth should place at their disposal all that science, and patriotism, and benevolence can suggest. Again, on the return of peace, when the danger has been overcome and the national burdens lightened, we should let no re-action carry us too far. Instead of aiming at perilous retrenchments in our military expenditure, which some are "busied about" as if it were "the one thing needful," we should turn our attention to improvements in the internal organization of our military system: to see how its condition and efficiency could be improved by a better distribution and adjustment of its different functions; by the encouragement and timely adoption of the results of scientific research; and, in fine, by the cultivation of worth, ability, and intelligence, and by a proper recognition of them beyond every other consideration. It is thus, by turning the contributions of the public to the best account, that unnecessary demands on the capital of the country will be most safely obviated and the likelihood of war decreased. By our presenting an impenetrable front, other communities, if actuated by no better motives, will recognise the hopelessness of any attack on ourselves; while the weight with which the indignation of the people can back their remonstrance in behalf of the rights of others, will so far tend to forward the peaceful negotiation of differences, and so realise the wish of every well-disposed and prudent man.

War is in every respect the enemy of the interests of mankind. It wastes the wealth that peace has accumulated; it disturbs trade, and imbitters international feelings; and, which is far more serious, it shows a disregard, in some quarter, of the spirit of Christianity.

We should take heed, then, that we engage in no war that is not both necessary and just. But we should remember, on the other hand, that if we allow our wealth and our commercial prosperity to invite or tempt attack by a show of indifference, inefficiency, or neglect, we also are responsible for the consequences; we are morally partakers in the folly and guilt of the after-conflict, as surely as there is truth in morality.

The need for national defence will lessen only with the spread of enlightened and philanthropic views throughout the world. Such "were a consummation devoutly to be wished." But till it have arrived, we are bound, by necessity and by duty, to use the best means we can command for our protection from assault; and that Standing Armies are such a means I have now endeavoured to prove.

V.—*Factory Education.*—By P. J. M'Kenna, Esq.

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The tendency of the present age is evidently to consult for the amelioration of the condition of the humbler classes. Men are now awakening to a sense of their duties, and begin to bear in mind