
War Clouds

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Published in *Locomotive Firemen's Magazine*, vol. 9, no. 6 (June 1885), pp. 343-346.

About 760 years before Christ, Isaiah, who is styled “prince of all the prophets,” in prophesying the coming of the Messiah, and his reign on the earth, said,

He shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.¹

That sublime declaration of the “prince of all the prophets” was made more than 26 centuries ago. In the meantime the Messiah has come, established his kingdom, delivered his message of peace, and departed, but swords are not beaten into plough-shares, nor spears into pruning-hooks. Nations continue to lift up the sword against nation, and the study of war receives more attention than at any period since the “prince of prophets” proclaimed his prophetic visions to the Jews. Manifestly the “Prince of Peace” does not direct the affairs of nations, particularly Christian nations. It is doubtless true that the sword and the spear are less used now than in the days of Isaiah, but they were laid aside because their death-dealing qualities were not up to the standard required by Christian nations. We would not be irreverent, we would not discredit prophecy, we would not, if we could, detract from the majesty and sublimity of Isaiah’s prophecies, but, if he had been blessed with powers of vision to see Christian nations of the present time preparing for war; if he could have seen the standing armies, the iron clad fleets; if he could have seen the numerous modern inventions constructed with special reference to the greatest possible slaughter, and for the destruction of the monuments of labor, it occurs to us that all his God-like faculties would have been aroused

¹ *Isaiah*, chapter 2, verse 4.

and that thunderbolts of denunciation would have been hurled at the nations, which, professing Christianity, excel savages in devising methods of slaughter and destruction; and yet, these Christian nations, with an impudence which defies hyperbole, mutually implore the Prince of Peace, the Son of God, the Messiah of whom Isaiah prophesied, to bestow upon them heaven's choicest benedictions, assuming, forsooth, that their prayers are answered most fully when their instruments of death have done the largest possible execution. Notwithstanding such reflections, and paradoxical as it may appear, we are of the opinion, there have been, and will continue to be Christian wars, wars which heaven has approved and will continue to approve. When a crushed, enslaved, and cruelly treated people go to war for their liberty, then it may be said that:

Oh! If there be on this earthly sphere
A boon, an offering Heaven holds dear,
'Tis the last libation Liberty draws
From the hearts that bleed and breaks in her cause!²

And he who would like to determine approximately when such wars will cease on the earth, may survey the map of the world, find its dark spots, where despots rule, and say, "until these are made light and bright by the effulgent sun of liberty, wars will not cease."³ When the downtrodden are emancipated, when kings and potentates admit that "all men are created equal, and are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness," then the world may prudently anticipate an era of peace, then it may be that the swords will be beaten into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks; but not till then.

The student of current events finds all Europe preparing for war. England and Italy and Germany are fighting Arabs and negroes in Africa. France proposes to bombard Alexandria, while conducting a war in China. England and Russia are preparing for war in Afghanistan, which, if finally declared, will be felt throughout the civilized world. Chili has not yet relaxed her grasp upon Peru. The relations between Brazil and the Argentine Republic are warlike, Central America is convulsed, and in the far Northwest of the Dominion of Canada, the Indians and half-breeds are on the war path. "Men may

² From *Lalla Rookh* (1817) by **Thomas Moore** (1779-1852).

³ This poetic fragment could not be traced.

cry, peace, peace,” but there is no assured peace on earth.⁴ It is war, or preparation for war. There can be heard no harbinger voice proclaiming universal peace, no ray of light glows along the horizon, betokening the dawn of an era when nations shall learn war no more. Why these war clouds, and what are to be the results of the conflicts they portend? If a laconic reply could be tolerated we might say manifest destiny accounts for the clouds, and final results will demonstrate that the world has been improved by the convulsions of war. In every quarter of the globe civilization confronts savagery, barbarism, and semi-barbarism. A higher type of civilization bears down upon the lower type. Intelligence is in conflict with ignorance, power treads upon weakness. The question is the “survival of the fittest,” and the fittest in war is the strongest. The right, in every conflict does not prevail, the truth is often cloven down; but ultimately, truth and right and liberty are to be enthroned. When this high noon of civilization and progress is reached, when all men are citizens — crowned sovereigns by constitution and law — when education is universal and savagery and barbarism disappear, when the boundary lines of nations are clearly defined and made inviolate by the consent of all, then it may be that swords will be transformed into plowshares, and the nations will be at peace. To accomplish such results may require ten thousand years or ten times ten thousand years. The question of time is of little consequence, but if with all the light before us we are able to determine that the drift of events is in that direction, generations, as they come and go, can afford to be satisfied if they can, in any way, expedite the grand consummation. Taking human nature in the aggregate, as it is, wars are inevitable. To determine with any degree of accuracy the causes which provoke war is of less importance than to contemplate the results. No one except the parties engaged cares particularly why English soldiers are in the Sudan or the French in Tonquin,⁵ but the world looks on with ever increasing solicitude to note results. If El Mahdi is vanquished, then a vast region is redeemed from the thralldom of barbarism; otherwise darkness will continue to overshadow the land. It is difficult to understand why the French are at war with the Chinese, but upon general principles, all Christendom hopes for a triumph of French arms, because the exclusiveness of

⁴ From “Speech to the Virginia Provincial Convention” (1775) by **Patrick Henry** (1736-1799). The original lines are “Gentlemen may cry, peace, peace! but there is no peace. The war has actually begun!”

⁵ Today's Vietnam.

the Chinese is not in consonance with the civilization of the age, and will not be tolerated. But such struggles are dwarfed to comparative insignificance when contemplating the impending conflict between England and Russia; causes are lost sight of, and only results are discussed. Treating the question negatively, it cannot be said that the resort to arms between the two nations will be in the interest of others than those who are ambitious of power and dominion.

It will not be unprofitable in this connection to state, with some degree of definiteness, facts relating to the extent and power of the two mighty empires, whose belligerent attitude startles Christendom. The British Empire embraces with its colonies and dependencies about one-third of the terrestrial surface of the globe, and nearly one-fourth of its population. Such a vast extent of territory naturally suggested Daniel Webster's figure of speech, "drumbeat" and "martial airs" "following the sun and keeping company with the hours."⁶ In Europe the British Empire includes: Great Britain and Ireland, Gibraltar, Malta, and Heligoland;⁷ area, 121,000 square miles and 32 million population.

In Asia: British and Farther India, Hong Kong, Aden, Straits Settlements, Labuan, Ceylon, etc.; area, 1,600,000 square miles and 200 million population.

In Africa: Cape of Good Hope, Natal, Gold Coast, Gambia, Sierra Leone, Mauritius, and St. Helena; area, 250,000 square miles and 1.5 million population.

In North America: The British Possessions from Newfoundland to Vancouver's Island; area, 3,800,000 square miles, and 4 million population.

In the West Indies and Central America: Honduras and 15 islands and groups of islands; area, 28,000 square miles and 900,000 population.

In South America: British Guinea and Falkland Islands; area, 80,000 square miles, and 150,000 population.

⁶ From a speech to the United States Senate, "The Presidential Protest" (1834), by **Daniel Webster** (1782-1852). Webster called Great Britain "a power which has dotted over the surface of the whole globe with her possessions and military posts, whose morning drum-beat, following the sun, and keeping company with the hours, circles the earth with one continuous and unbroken strain of the martial airs of England."

⁷ Heligoland is a small chain of islands in the North Sea, currently held by Germany.

Australia: New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia, West Australia, Tasmania, Queensland, and New Zealand; area, 2,550,000 square miles and 2 million population.

Making a grand total of 8,427,000 square miles and 240,550,000 population.

The Russian Empire includes 8,088,331 square miles, having a population of 78,732,000. Of this territory, 2,226,982 square miles are in Europe, with 70,880,000 population, and 5,861,348 square miles in Asia, with a population of 7,924,000. It will be observed that the Russian possessions are in Europe and Asia, while the possessions of England are scattered over the whole earth. A glance at the map of Asia will help materially in revealing the cause of the war cloud which now portends a terrific struggle. British India extends northward until it touches the southern boundary of Afghanistan, while the Russian possessions extend southward until they touch the northern limits of Afghanistan. If Russia invades and conquers Afghanistan, then Russia comes down to the British India boundary. To prevent this occasions England's hostile attitude. Russia is looking for a pathway to the sea. She has maritime ambitions. With such facts in full view the intelligent reader will be able to form conclusions more or less satisfactory until the war begins, or the threatening cloud is dispersed by the triumph of reason over pride and passion. The nations to be engaged have staying qualities and vast resources. Both are Christian nations, boasting of established churches. They civilize with catechisms and cutlasses, bombard with bibles and bombs, reform with rituals and rifles, and canonize with cannon. The missionaries in Asia are making poor headway. In all of its 15,000,000 square miles there is not now an inch of "Holy Land" left, unless Siberia and India may lay claim to the title. There is idolatry, ignorance, and idleness, requiring the gospel of gunpowder, and the baptism of fire. Such, at least, is the view that Russia and England take of the situation. As we write the war cloud hanging about Afghanistan grows darker. What the outcome will be the Infinite Disposer of Events only knows, but it may be gratifying to believe Asia cannot be injured.

Edited with footnotes by Tim Davenport

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First Edition.