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**The Effect of War upon Art and
Literature**



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The Effect of War upon Art and Literature

A Lecture

Delivered at the University of Manchester

February 28, 1916

BY

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THE EFFECT OF WAR UPON ART AND LITERATURE.

Before embarking upon the subject of the lecture which I have been invited to give you to-night, I should like to say, by way of preface, that I do not mean to indulge in anything in the nature of a historical disquisition; that I propose not so much to dogmatise as to suggest; and that I intend, in the course of my remarks, to make momentary excursions into one or two by-paths, which, as they lead in the same direction as our main enquiry, will not, I hope, be considered irrelevant.

It might perhaps be interesting to take a historical survey of the effect of war upon art and literature and to illustrate the way in which war has, from the earliest times down to the present day, affected the practice and the appreciation of art and letters amongst the peoples who are engaged in waging it. The rise and decadence of a nation's artistic life would have to be considered in parallel columns, as it were, with the maintenance of peace or war in that nation's political life during the same epoch; and a number of different epochs would have to be taken and the results carefully scrutinised before one could venture to establish causal relations between one column and another—between, that is to say, the existence of peace or war on the one hand and the presence or absence of art on the other.

It might again be interesting to see how war has been depicted by painters and poets from the infancy of the world when the flint was an instrument of design as well as a weapon of defence, when in fact artist and warrior were one, and man could only make life beautiful by first making it inviolate,

down to the present day when ploughshares are once more being treated in biblical fashion and are being beaten by munition workers into swords. In this chapter of pictorial history—leaving literature for the moment aside—we could begin by looking at primitive man's rudimentary efforts to portray, in stone, familiar scenes of tribal warfare; we might then pass to the processions in relief designed by the Assyrians to record the exploits of their kings and chieftains; we might watch the heroes of Greece battling with the Centaurs and Trojans on the metopes of the Parthenon and the pediments of the temple of Ægina; we should then glance at the great battle paintings of Keion and his school in Japan in the 12th and 13th centuries; we should dwell for a while on the hot-blooded Italians of the Renaissance asserting their individuality with the brush and pen as mightily as with the sword and handing on the impulse to their colder cousins in the North; we should pass through the Age of Reason, which did not confine itself to dialectic warfare; until we reached the modern epoch beginning in the 19th century with the vitriolic satire of the Spaniard Goya, and ending with the no less vitriolic but more personal satire of Forain and Raemaeker. Our survey would provide us with a pictorial handbook of the follies and the virtues of mankind.

Historical treatment of the subject on the lines I have suggested would provide abundant material for a lecture. I cannot, however, but feel that for all its interest it would really be more appropriate to the rigid setting of a class of students than to the half-informal atmosphere of such a gathering as this. Instead therefore of giving you an ordered survey of art and war and of attempting to establish on historical grounds some permanent relation between them, I will first of all ask you to consider on general, or, I might say, philosophical grounds what relation, if any, can be posited between those whose business it is to carry on war and those whose lives are spent in the peaceful practice of art and literature; and then, when we have reached a conclusion and taken our stand on a position from which to

survey the two, I will suggest to you, with the help of a few examples, some of the ways in which, when a community is plunged into war, the artist or poet may utilise his experiences and turn his imagination to account.

First of all, it may be as well to be clear about the terms we are using. Art and literature, then, I regard for the purposes of this lecture as different manifestations of what is at root the same creative spirit, the same impulse to æsthetic expression. In dealing with literature I shall almost entirely confine myself to the poet, not because the writer of prose shows qualities in any sense contradictory to those of the poet, but because those qualities in the poet are more fused and more concentrated—more quintessential—and will therefore the better illustrate the points that I wish to make. As to art, I hardly think it necessary to attempt a definition, for it can be defined in exactly as many ways as there are subjects with which it is for the moment being likened or contrasted. I will only say that when I use the word 'art' to-night I shall take it quite generally to include the activities of the painter, the sculptor, and the musician.

The first two, the painter and the sculptor, are of course more closely allied to each other than to the poet or the musician; and therefore the way in which their outlook and their work are affected by war will on the whole be somewhat similar, when due allowance is made for the difference in the media through which they express themselves. On the other hand, the painter and the sculptor have one link with the poet, and that a very important one, which is not shared by any of them with the musician. Painter, sculptor, and poet, all three ultimately depend on the stimulus of external reality for their conceptions, and all three challenge the test of a definite standard of relationship between the results they produce and that reality. But the musician is neither dependent on external reality for his stimulus, nor can what he produces be brought in any essential way into relation with it. He lives and moves in a world of which the very elements are different from those of the actual physical and

mental world in which men live. It is clear, therefore, that so far as the matter of his art is concerned he will not, like the painter, the sculptor, and the poet, be affected by the changes in the condition of the world which war produces. His art will not reflect that world and the human emotions it arouses in him. At any rate we cannot include in the same category the musical results given by the musician and the more general results obtained from the painter, the sculptor, and the poet in their attempt to transcribe reality and to give emotional expression to their ideas about it. I shall have little to say about the musician to-night, for he is a pure idealist, both in the inception and the results of his work; whereas the painter, the sculptor, and the poet ultimately derive their world of ideas from our concrete world of facts. To these facts they are closely knit by ties and bonds the nature of which is to be felt in the character of their art.

And yet at the outset it may plausibly be urged that in so far as war may be included in such ties and bonds, it is only by breaking through them that the artist can assert his claim to independent existence as an artist and to the citizenship not merely of the world but of his own world. How, it may be asked, can art be conceived in relation to war at all except as being in direct and fundamental opposition to it? Are not art and war, in fact, in such polar antithesis as to be, for all practical purposes, mutually exclusive?

For consider:—The artist is essentially positive and constructive in his work; with material which is within the reach of everyone, even if only the few have the gifts to use it, he raises the structure preconceived by his imagination, and achieves beauty by the ordered assertion and emphasis of personal expression, which (we may note), cuts across the barriers of national distinctions. War, on the other hand, is essentially negative and destructive, and whatever scope for personal expression it may give to those few individuals in whose power it lies at present to provoke or avert it, in its general methods it remains blindly and hideously imper-

sonal; it is based on the suppression of the individual, on the emphasis of national distinctions, and on the merging of the will of the unit in the collective impulse of the crowd.

Might we not expect then to find, that since war and art are on such entirely different planes, those who move on the one plane will be untouched by events taking place on the other: that as war does not take art into account (except of course in the sense that it may in a few hours destroy the work of whole generations of men), so art in all its activities will continue on its own path, ignoring war as it is ignored by it? The artist on this supposition thinks and feels and acts in an æsthetic world of his own making which he does not, and perhaps cannot share with his fellows; he is, in short, and in some cases must be spiritually isolated from the rest of men.

A good deal could be said in support of such a view, inhuman though at first sight it appears. One might point for instance to the Netherlands in the 17th century fostering a school of painters who spent their time recording the domestic manners of the burgher's house and the peasant's tavern, while the army was struggling against a series of foreign invasions and incidentally sending gunboats up the Medway. The noise these made in the river must have been heard by Isaak Walton as he tranquilly fished and gossiped in the meadows by the Lea, but it seems to have interfered with him as little as with the fishes.

One might point also to English history and show how Hogarth, the satirist of morals, and the great portrait painters in the 18th century preserved the even tenour of their way at a time when the State was being shaken by such events as the founding of our Indian Empire, the taking of Quebec, and the Declaration of Independence on the part of our colonies in North America.

In the reign of Queen Anne the generation that witnessed Marlborough's victories at Ramillies and Malplaquet also saw its poets wrangling over the first principles of literary criticism and elaborating carefully balanced phrases to

commemorate the Rape of a Lock of hair from the head of the adorable Belinda.

A hundred years later two of the greatest landscape painters England has possessed—Constable and Turner—were devoting themselves exclusively to the patient study of what used to be called 'the peaceful haunts of Nature' at a moment when Wellington's strenuous campaigns against Napoleon were about to culminate upon the field of Waterloo. Goethe too, while giving proof of his hostility to the French Revolution in his long narrative poem "Hermann und Dorothea," ignored Napoleon, whose career interested him less than the fortunes of those whom he had himself created—Faust and Wilhelm Meister.

It was during the same eventful period that Charles Lamb was in his most frivolous mood. The wars of the Peninsula meant little to him compared with playhouse gossip, puns, and poor relations. Even when in one of his letters he mentions the death of Nelson, he only gives him a line and hurries on to talk of tea-parties ruined by rain.

So again Théophile Gautier gave his mind during the Franco-Prussian war to chiselling and polishing his "Emaux et Camées"—his literary Enamels and Cameos; and César Franck, Belgium's greatest composer of modern times, lived through the miseries of the siege of Paris and all the horrors of the Commune, and sensitive though he was to the least influence that reached him from anything in the outer world, he continued undisturbed to produce masterpieces of tranquil and serene beauty.

Many other instances might be adduced from other countries and other ages to show that the direction any particular art may happen to take in normal times of peace is not always changed when peace is converted into war. The channel need not be diverted nor the stream contaminated. The few cases I have brought forward to illustrate the detachment of painters, writers, and musicians may serve, at any rate, to put in the balance against such glaring instances to the contrary as Æschylus, who not only fought against

the Persians at Marathon but described in imperishable verse the great sea-fight at Salamis in his play "The Persæ." Then there was Tyrtaeus (to take another poet from ancient Greece), who was employed by the Spartans for much the same purpose as the French employ Théodore Botrel, the Breton poet, or as we use the Scottish pipers—to hearten the soldiers with verse and music. A curious case in our own time of a Government availing itself of the services of a poet for purely political ends is that of Gabriele d'Annunzio, who helped to force the hands of the Interventionist party by rousing the people to frenzy with the trumpet notes of his rhetoric.

Wordsworth is an instance of a poet who was absorbed alternately by his own private occupations and thoughts, and by political events around him. When Europe was reeling under the shock of Napoleon, Wordsworth wrote some of the most famous of his sonnets:—"Two Voices are there"; "It is not to be thought of that the Flood of British freedom"; "Milton thou should'st be living at this hour"; and many others equally striking if less well-known. And in this connexion we have it on record that he told a friend that he had given twelve hours' thought to the conditions and prospects of society for one to poetry. Yet it was the same poet who in 1814 published "The Excursion" in which we are treated to reminiscences of his rambling walks among the Lakes and his desultory conversations with the local clergyman.

But if we owe to the Napoleonic wars some of Wordsworth's finest sonnets and such poems as Campbell's "Battle of the Baltic," and Coleridge's "France" and "Fears in Solitude," what effect of it can we see in the works of Byron, Shelley, Keats, Blake, Crabbe, or Rogers? Practically none at all.

Still, even when artists and poets do not reflect in their work the existence of war going on around them, even when they seem to insist on what I have called their spiritual isolation from the rest of men, we are not justified in assuming that they are really indifferent to war and to the

issues that hang upon it. The absence of references to war may only mean that they are unable or unwilling to translate the emotions aroused in them by war into material to be used for the purposes of their art. Poets have written lyrics and painters have painted landscapes with a concentrated conviction that might have argued complete indifference to anything but love and nature, had we not their letters and the records of their conversation to prove that they were as sensitive as any of their contemporaries to the political and social upheavals of their time. For being aware of something as an artist is not the same thing as being aware of it as a citizen. Moreover, artists who obtain emotion through some experience in life, even when they feel the need of expressing that emotion in their art, do not necessarily make the cause of the emotion the subject-matter of their art. To do so under such conditions involves the passing of a moral judgment either directly or by implication upon what has driven them to treat the subject in question, and with moral judgments art has no concern. It is true that the practice of art has at times carried with it the connotation of secondary moral values; the only thing essential is that it should be primarily concerned with æsthetic values. The artist may, if he chooses, express in his work his moral judgment on war or on anything else; it is not his primary function to do so; it is in fact irrelevant to his business as an artist. His primary function is to give expression to æsthetic emotion.

Man's psychological outfit is not, however, constructed in watertight sections. He cannot hear the news of some event which has taken place in the outer world and then, a few moments after, shut the doors of the compartment of perception and open those of another compartment where he can remain unaffected by what he has just learnt. It is rather as though he had a kind of basement chamber to his mind with which all the compartments are connected and into which all his experiences are poured; so that by whatever channel they have entered and by whatever channel they go out, there has been a time during which all these experiences

have met and blended. An artist need not show in his art the influence of war, but because we see no traces of it, we must not conclude that the influence has not been felt.

It must, indeed, be felt, whatever the immediate evidence, because the artist cannot entirely separate himself from his surroundings. In a sense, of course, the artist does stand apart from the crowd amongst which he moves; often he stands apart from his age. He is sometimes born, as it were, before his time. What he sees is invisible to those around him. When others fix their gaze on something close at hand, he looks over their heads and watches the signs on the horizon. It is this capacity which he possesses for seeing through the present to the distant future that has earned for him the reputation of a prophet, with (I may add) the prophet's unsolicited privilege of being misunderstood. But in another sense the artist is less the prophet than the interpreter and spokesman of his age. His sensibilities being more acute, he catches the meaning of what they only dimly apprehend and gives precise and significant utterance to thoughts which they can only partially formulate or have to clothe in vague and halting phrases.

But apart from this, the artist is closely related to his age by the mere fact of being bound up in the crowd of which he is himself a unit. Being part of the crowd, he is necessarily subject to some extent to the moral and economic influences that affect his fellow men. With the economic influences I shall deal in a moment. The moral influences, as I have already said, need not directly affect his art, because as an artist he deals in æsthetic and not in moral values, but they do affect his attitude towards life in general and towards a particular crisis such as the occurrence of a war. (It has, of course, been strenuously and ably denied that the artist is, or should be, bound by the fetters that social morality imposes on the community, and there is little doubt that in many cases the artistic as well as the social exuberance of certain great artists would have been checked by enforcing conventional restraints. But now that the eighteen-nineties

are fading into the hallowed past of sentimental memories, we can hold, without fear of violent contradiction, that even if many great rogues have been great artists it is not necessary to be a great rogue in order to be a great artist.) Although in his art the artist insists with all the force which he can muster on the assertion of his own individual point of view, and in asserting it transcends his immediate environment, yet even at the crisis of the act of personal expression he cannot help being affected by the character of his past assertions and by the interaction of those assertions and their environment; in other words, he cannot help being affected by those external opinions to which both he and his fellows have contributed, whether he decide eventually to conform or to protest. As a passing illustration of the way in which an individual can feel the moral influences to which his environment is subject and can deliberately reconcile and identify his opinions with those of the crowd, I may point to the case of that pronounced and passionate anti-militarist Anatole France, who recently asked to be allowed to fight for his country after having for more than half a century shot the shafts of his laughing irony at those who disturb the peace.

But besides being affected as a unit in the community by the immediate contact with composite opinion, the artist feels in another and wider sense the gradual growth and change of mental states with which his own mind is brought into contact. He is subject, like everyone else, to the 'psychology of the herd or group,' as it has been called.

Now, the state of mind in which a community finds itself on being plunged into war will vary not only in accordance with the normal condition of mind in which it finds itself during times of peace, but also in accordance with the nature of the particular war in question. Lecky has made an interesting distinction between the effects of foreign and those of civil wars, a distinction which seems to me perfectly valid. "Foreign wars," he says, "which develop with great intensity distinctive national types and divert the

public mind from internal changes, are usually favourable to the conservative spirit; but civil wars are essentially revolutionary, for they overwhelm all class barriers and throw open the highest prizes to energy and genius." This regards war rather in its effects on the social and political machine. From the point of view of its effects on the thoughts and emotions of men regarded simply as human beings, I think a more fundamental distinction must be drawn. I would make the distinction between wars which, either because they are purely aggressive or because they are waged in a trivial or unjust cause, do not carry the conviction of a people behind them, and wars which, by kindling moral enthusiasm, quicken the national conscience and intensify for the moment the life of the individual. It was the latter kind of war that Landor had in mind when in his Imaginary Conversation between William Penn and Lord Peterborough he made Penn say :—

“ Until it is agreed and enforced, that no nation in Europe shall take possession of another, or of any part, international law will be no better than quibble and contradiction.”

There is, of course, one element in time of war which the individual may have to reckon with, whatever the nature of the struggle in which his country is engaged, whether it is the war of a party or of a people, whether it is in a just or an unjust cause; and that is the economic element. This, it is hardly necessary perhaps to observe, is apt to be felt by those who make a livelihood by means of the arts more than by almost any other section of the community. When the money and the energy of a nation are devoted to the prosecution of a war, little may be left for the enjoyment of what is unhappily regarded too often as a luxury. If the public is unwilling or unable to pay for the arts, artists, from finding that it is not worth while to produce, may lose the very desire to do so. A few really great men, on the other hand, in whom the need for self-expression is paramount will not

be hindered even by grinding poverty from doing what their nature impels them to do. The history of art is starred with the names of such men, whether painters, poets, or musicians.

But to leave the question of the immediate economic result of war and to return to its psychological effect on the artist as a member of the community, I think we may say that that effect is likely to vary in proportion as the war carries with it the general consent of the nation. A war which is conducted to gratify the personal caprice of a ruler or the ambition of a military caste will have results which are in the main merely military or political, and will leave the artist untouched. Dissent on the question of war may induce self-expression on the part of the artist, but the expression is likely to be bitter and satirical, being founded on indignation or contempt, so that here too the results will be political or ethical rather than æsthetic.

But a war fought by a nation to save itself from the aggression of a neighbour, or to preserve intact the spirit of liberty; or again, a war in which a country once aggressive at length finds itself faced by a coalition and forced to fight for its own existence—a war of this sort will inevitably impress itself on the imagination of the people. Will it not be the case then that the artist is stirred by it to production? Will he not be subject to that herd-suggestion to which I have already referred, and find nourishment for his work in the fears, the hopes, and the aspirations which he shares with his fellows?

He may indeed feel the stimulus unconsciously, only realizing it himself as a restless desire for expression. On the other hand he may be able calmly to analyse his position and be brought to conclude that the value of art and indeed of all spiritual expression is enhanced and man's need for it increased when nations are engaged in the brute assertion of material strength. Feeling this the artist may consciously strive to counteract the influence of war by emphasizing what he feels to be the real values in life and by contributing, no

matter by how little, to re-establish the spiritual balance and re-create harmony where he can.

France in exhaustion after Waterloo, united in the face of a hostile Europe, produced Victor Hugo, George Sand, Balzac, Lamartine, Musset, Dumas, Ingres, Delacroix, Berlioz and Chopin—who was partly French and partly Polish, belonging at any rate to two crushed countries. So France again after Sedan produced Zola, Anatole France, Maupassant, Massenet, Bizet, Degas, Monet, Manet, Pissaro, Cézanne and Rodin. There are few names to put beside them on the side of victorious Germany. Perhaps a defeated people is more inclined than a victorious to turn its thoughts inwards rather than outwards, and to give expression æsthetically to aspirations which have been thwarted on the field of battle. This plausible theory has often been put forward. I do not myself think that there is very much in it. Single artists, as I have tried to show, are apt to be independent of political events taking place in the great world, and for a community to practise and patronize art, leisure is needed and spaciousness, money and freedom, and, above all, the lives of the men who are to practise and enjoy it.

“I hate war,” writes Gilbert Murray, who is not only one of our most distinguished Grecians but a sensitive poet as well (and has by the way just been selected to represent the British case in the present war to the Universities in Scandinavian countries)—“I hate war,” he writes, “not merely for its own cruelty and folly, but because it is the enemy of all the causes that I care for most, of social progress and good government and all friendliness and gentleness of life, as well as of art and learning and literature.” It is the enemy of art if only for the obvious reasons I have suggested that men’s thoughts, time, and money in war-time are diverted to more immediate needs, and that artists and writers are apt to fall victims of the indiscriminate sacrifice that war entails. So that even those wars that strike the imagination and are supported by a united country

frequently have no effect whatsoever in stimulating the production of art or any kind of creative work needing the detachment and concentration of the individual.

When Ruskin spoke of a 'creative or foundational war' as being *necessary* to the existence of art; when he propounded the paradox that nations are born in war and expire in peace and that no great art ever yet arose on earth but among a nation of soldiers, he fell into the error of assuming that when men both fought and painted pictures, they painted the pictures *because* they fought; a statement which seems to me as logical as saying that they loved and philosophized and took their leisure *because* they fought. Why was it necessary that they should fight in order to produce art, as he maintains it was? Surely they painted as well as fought because it was the natural and obvious thing to do both; because they liked to extract the utmost particle from life; because fighting, painting, drinking, trading, talking and writing were simply different ways they had of expressing themselves and enjoying their heritage in the world. "Under the fighting Kings of France, England, and Spain; and under the fighting dukeships and citizenships of Italy," says Ruskin, "art is born again, and rises to her height in the great valleys of Lombardy and Tuscany, through which there flows not a single stream, from all their Alps and Apennines, that did not once run dark red from battle." Quite so, but not because war was the cause of art, but because Italians had sufficient vitality to carry on both simultaneously in the 15th and 16th centuries, as the Dutchmen did in the 16th and 17th. I think his statement also shows that he has not differentiated between nations which have soldiers to fight their battles (as all nations have had), and nations which consist mainly of soldiers and maintain a militarist ideal. Ancient Rome and Sparta, and modern Germany are notorious instances of nations of soldiers; they are also the most notorious cases of nations without art.

It has indeed proved to be the case that when a nation has been stirred to give the fullest and most complete expression

of itself, this expression has been both warlike and æsthetic in character. But war and art are not here dependent on each other; war is not the cause of art. Both art and war are caused by something else; and that something is human energy and enterprise that are not content with a single channel of expression. Art and war can, in fact, be different kinds of expression of the same vitality needing outlet and ~~may~~ ^{war} sometimes help art by breaking through the bonds of self-consciousness and self-expression artificially imposed on men by peace.

Egypt and Assyria at the height of their periods of civilization are commemorated by imperishable sculptures. In Greece, where every citizen was a soldier, the age of Pericles was also the age of Phidias. The reign of Elizabeth, when Englishmen were seeking the highways of the world on which to find a field for their adventure, was the golden age of English drama and English song; and I have already referred to the great paintings which were produced in this country when Marlborough and Wellington were making English history in Europe.

War, then, I think we can maintain, may in the case of strong and vigorous peoples, coincide with the expression of artistic energy; but generally speaking war is the enemy of art. In those cases where individual artists have been stimulated by war to expression, the subject-matter of their work will often contain no reference whatever to war, of the stimulus of which the artist may be quite unconscious. War, that is to say, even when it is the immediate cause of expression, need not be included in the contents of expression. On the other hand many artists and poets *have* found in it their subject, and we have now to consider a few of the ways in which they have utilized it for their own purposes.

If it were the case that a good subject makes a good picture, we might expect to find, scattered up and down the world, a number of masterpieces dealing with the various aspects of war and all that war connotes. Unfortunately,

art is not conducted on quite such simple lines. Nothing is more common than for the greatest themes of all to be treated with the fumbling technique of a weak hand and the dull prose of a commonplace mind. Public picture galleries and private collections alike are full of simpering reflexions on the sawdust sentimentalities of love and on those hackneyed catchwords—the mysteries of Life and Death. We may note in passing the pathetic tendency of works of this sort to expand in size in proportion to the magnitude of the subject. As to those which deal with war we are doubtless all familiar with the leviathans that spread their yards of coloured canvas across the walls. Through the clouds of woolly smoke we catch glimpses of the brave lay-figure decked out in the carefully brushed regimentals of the costumier; the cannons roar like sucking-doves; the well-groomed horses (all four hoofs cleaving the air together) fly across the studio floor. Seeing them how often have we wished that the authors of these works could have been contented with a few square inches like Meissonier!

It is the same in verse. War has often proved a useful subject; the variations on the theme are infinite; the material lies ready to hand. Think of the blank verse, the heroic couplets, the sonnets that have been written in its name by those who, through the exercise of self-restraint, might have remained if mute, at any rate no less inglorious. These things are not alive; they were always stillborn; they express no personal conviction and often barely state a second-hand opinion.

Where painter and poet have some conviction of their own to express, where they look upon the world through the windows of imagination, we shall naturally expect to find really vital emotion aroused in them when their theme is as pregnant of emotion as war must be. We shall expect to discover in the painting and poem the personal and individual note of protest or assent. To come now to some of these.

I have already alluded to Goya's series of etchings called "The Disasters of War," which were commenced during

the occupation of Spain by the Napoleonic troops. Of this series Mr. Will Rothenstein has remarked :—" It is not so much the patriotism of a Spaniard, but the outraged sense of a thinking man, that one feels underlying them ; there is none of the stirring kettledrum note of a Kipling, but a stern desire to show the equally appalling savagery of conquest or defeat."

Another painter who expressed himself with passionate conviction upon the horrors of war and indeed devoted the greater part of his life to doing so, was the great Russian, Vereschagin, who perished, it will be remembered, on board Admiral Makarov's flagship in 1904—those distant days when Russia was at war with her and our present ally, Japan. War in Turkestan and India he painted, war in the Crimea and in France, and in all his pictures he tried to express and succeeded in expressing his loathing of the cruelties and the suffering it involves. It was not merely because he had lost a brother in the Russo-Turkish campaign that he hated war ; hatred of it was in his nature. He considered it his mission to show others why war was hateful ; he was even a competitor in his old age for the Nobel peace prize ; and it is interesting now to recall the fact that when his pictures were shown in Berlin in 1882, the Kaiser forbade the Guards to visit the exhibition for fear lest they should be converted to his views. Zola in his " *Débâcle* " and Tolstoy in his " *War and Peace* " preached, each in his different way, much the same homily on war.

For examples of painters who have aimed at depicting the heroics rather than the terrors of war, Lady Butler in England and Edouard Detaille in France may be taken as fairly typical of a large school of painters, all of whom resemble each other in so far as, though they may feel deeply themselves, they do not succeed in carrying conviction to us. The reason is that though they may feel, they do not express their feeling in their pictures. They give us incidents of warfare and expect us to fill in the feeling by what we infer from the incidents represented. The paintings are, in fact,

illustrations, not art; just as poems which describe war and use the words of emotion, without making us feel the emotion by means of the verse, are not literature but journalism.

Before passing to the poets I will pause only to point out that sculptors, from those of Assyria and Greece through the masters of the Italian Renaissance down to Rodin, have given us many instances of warlike subjects charged with personal emotion. And I may remind you that Rodin, whose "Head of Bellona" is included in the collection of his work which he recently presented to the British nation, has indicated his intention of dedicating a monument in homage to Belgium.

To come now to the poets—of all those who have treated war I know of none who has done so with such deep conviction, such intense individual feeling as Walt Whitman. I am thinking of course of the series of poems called "Drum-Taps," which were written to commemorate the war of North and South in America, in which he played the part of a dresser and hospital orderly, though his medical help to the wounded was little compared with the comfort and inspiration his words and presence gave to countless youthful comrades. The Drum-Taps are written consistently on a very high level, and it is not therefore easy to select one for quotation where so many others could plead to be heard. But even bearing in mind "By the bivouac's flame," "A march in the ranks hard-pressed," "The wound-dresser," "Beat! beat! drums!" and "Vigil strange I kept on the field one night," I think the "Dirge for two veterans" is perhaps on the whole the most striking of the series. *I should like to read it to you:—

The last sunbeam
Lightly falls from the finish'd Sabbath,
On the pavement here, and there beyond it is looking,
Down a new-made double grave.

*This quotation and also those on pp. 28, 29 were omitted when the lecture was delivered.

Lo, the moon ascending,
Up from the east the silvery round moon,
Beautiful over the house-tops, ghastly, phantom moon,
Immense and silent moon.

I see a sad procession,
And I hear the sound of coming full-key'd bugles,
All the channels of the city streets they're flooding,
As with voices and with tears.

I hear the great drums pounding,
And the small drums steady whirring,
And every blow of the great convulsive drums,
Strikes me through and through.

For the son is brought with the father,
(In the foremost ranks of the fierce assault they fell,
Two veterans son and father dropt together,
And the double grave awaits them).

Now nearer blow the bugles,
And the drums strike more convulsive,
And the daylight o'er the pavement quite has faded,
And the strong dead-march enwraps me.

In the eastern sky up-buoying,
The sorrowful vast phantoms moves illumin'd,
('Tis some mother's large transparent face,
In heaven brighter growing.)

O strong dead-march you please me!
O moon immense with your silvery face you soothe me!
O my soldiers twain! O my veterans passing to burial!
What I have I also give you.

The moon gives you light,
And the bugles and the drums give you music,
And my heart, O my soldiers, my veterans,
My heart gives you love.

In these poems Whitman has freed himself from the excrescences, the student repetitions and the tedious catalogues which mark much of his work; the dross has been purged away and the residue is the fine gold of his ardent and passionate nature.

Many poets who have made war their subject have treated it not so much from the point of view of one who has experienced it as from the more remote aspect of the patriot. Patriotism is fed and nourished by individual action, but it is based on communal or 'group' feeling—on the attraction of men not as individuals but as a body towards the composite unit of men and actions called the country. The personal note which we meet with in Henley's "What have I done for you, England, my England?" and in Browning's "Here and here did England help me; how can I help England?" is rare.

The painter, the sculptor, and the musician with their intensive culture and concentrated expression cannot command the universal range which is open to the poet. Occasionally we may find pictures like Géricault's "Passage of the Ravine" with its vivid glimpse of Napoleon's artillery, or Franz Stuck's "War" (a grim figure on horseback wading through a sea of corpses), or again Turner's picture of the Victory bringing back the body of Nelson, which do seem to express something more than the artist's personal attitude—something national in essence; just as such works as Jean François Millet's "Angelus" or Meunier's figures of Belgian miners seem to interpret the collective soul of the peasant and the industrial worker. But this is partly due to association of ideas. Painter and sculptor, unlike the poet, cannot in their work speak for others and so cannot give expression to patriotism with its basis of communal emotion. And even the poet, it must be remembered, will not extract poetry from his experience unless, when he is speaking for others, he is also speaking for himself; unless, that is to say, his æsthetic emotion is produced by the urgent need of self-expression.

Monuments or paintings, which attempt to express the idea of patriotism, are for this reason either purely individual and personal in treatment, like Rude's group of the Marseillaise on the Arc de Triomphe, or like Walter Sickert's pictures of the soldiers of King Albert, or else they degenerate into the vague formulas with empty rhetoric which are to be found in every capital of Europe. Think of the innumerable Bismarck monuments in Germany, or—to go to music for a moment—think of Beethoven's "Battle of Vittoria" or Brahms's "Triumphlied" (in which the Kaiser of 1870 is compared to the Rider on the White Horse in the Apocalypse), and see how all these works fall short of the normal standard.

Patriotism, we must also remember, is temporary and local as well as communal; it is vague rather than precise, mystical rather than human. Generally, indeed, it is only when it takes on a human aspect that it will move the poet to expression. "Public affairs," said Charles Lamb, "except as they touch upon me, and so turn into private—I cannot whip up my mind to feel any interest in." In other words patriotism, if it is to be a stimulus to the creative instinct, must be converted into some of the simpler of its component elements—into sorrow, suffering, joy or pride; often into tragedy. If it is not it will hardly be a stimulus. It will only be an excuse.

War, in fact, in any of its aspects does not provide the artist with easy material to handle; but the difficulties diminish in proportion as it is treated in the spirit of decoration. When treating a subject decoratively the artist detaches himself from the world of reality and regards it simply as composed of such and such colours, masses, and lines from which, by a process of selection and emphasis, he will extract a pictorial design. He may detach himself completely from reality so that questions concerning his own relation to what the design represents are not raised; just as the dramatist detaches himself from his characters and leaves them to work out their destiny undisturbed by any prejudices of his

own concerning them. Or he may detach himself only partially; he may, that is to say, still emphasize pictorial design but he will express his interest in what the design represents, and by doing so will make the design significant of that interest and of his mood at the moment of expression.

One of the most famous of all decorative representations of an episode in war which has ever been known is Michael Angelo's cartoon for "The Battle of Pisa." The actual work, like Titian's "Battle of Cadore," no longer exists; we know it only by studies for it and by engravings of certain portions. It was designed as a pendant to Leonardo's "Battle of the Standard," which has also been destroyed, though it has partially survived in a copy of it sketched by Rubens. Benvenuto Cellini says that these two battle cartoons, while they lasted, formed the school of the whole world. Leonardo had hitherto held undisputed sway as the master painter of his age, but Michael Angelo was considered in this cartoon to have surpassed him. The merit of the work, which represented soldiers surprised as they were bathing in the Arno, lay not so much in the depiction of a dramatic incident as in the concentration of the artist's interest in the human body as a body and in the skill with which that interest was expressed in pure draughtsmanship and pattern.

Fifty years before Michael Angelo had startled Florence with his cartoon, Mantegna in Padua painted with tempera on canvas the famous frieze of the Triumph of Julius Cæsar which, after many journeys and much buffeting has found a home in one of the galleries of the Palace at Hampton Court. A portion of the cartoon was copied by Rubens when he visited Italy, and this copy is to be seen in one of the rooms of the National Gallery. In both works we have a subject inspired by war treated in a purely impersonal and dramatic manner with certain distinctions which I cannot indicate better than by quoting John Addington Symonds's description of them in his "Renaissance in Italy." Writing first of the frieze by Mantegna he says :—

"The processional pomp of legionaries bowed beneath their trophied arms, the monumental majesty of robed citizens, the gravity of stoled and veiled priests, the beauty of young slaves, and all the paraphernalia of spoils and wreaths and elephants and ensigns are massed together with the self-restraint of noble art subordinating pageantry to rules of lofty composition."

Of Rubens's transcript he says:—

"The Flemish painter strives to add richness to the scene by Bacchanalian riot and the sensuality of imperial Rome. His elephants twist their trunks, and trumpet to the din of cymbals; negroes feed the flaming candelabra with scattered frankincense; the white oxen of Clitumnus are loaded with gaudy flowers, and the dancing maidens are dishevelled Mænads."

Rubens's original picture of the "Battle of the Amazons" and Velásquez's "Surrender of Breda" are also superb instances of war treated in a purely decorative spirit, and in Japanese pictures and prints of war decoration is of course predominant.

If we wish to see how poets have treated war in the same spirit I do not think we can do better than turn to the famous passages in the sixth book of "Paradise Lost," where Milton describes the gathering of the heavenly host to the sound of the Archangel Michael's trumpet, and goes on to depict their fierce encounter with Satan's massed battalions when

"Arms on armour clashing bray'd
Horrible discord, and the madding wheels
Of brazen chariots raged"

until eventually the rebel army was driven headlong from the verge of heaven to the depths of the bottomless pit. Milton's battles are inspired with not a little of the same dignity, the same grave Dorian mood as we find in Mantegna.

For a poet's description of an imaginary battle which bears much the same relation to Milton's as Rubens's triumphal procession does to Mantegna's, I should like to read you a passage from the seventh section of Blake's prophetic book

“Vala,” and another from the last of the great lyrical choruses in Swinburne’s “Erectheus.”

This is how Blake treats his theme :—

Loud sounds the war-song round red Orc in his resistless
fury,

And round the nameless shadowy female in her howling
terror,

When all the elemental gods joined in the wondrous song.
Sound the war-trumpet terrific, souls clad in attractive
steel!

Sound the shrill fife, serpents of war! I hear the northern
drum

Awake! I hear the flapping of the folding banners . . .

The dragons of the north put on their armour . . .

Upon the eastern sea . . . they take their course . . .

The glittering of their horses and trapping stains the vault
of night.

Stop we the rising of the glorious king,—spur, spur your
steeds,

Oh, northern drum! awake—oh, hand of iron, sound
The northern drum. Now give the charge! Bravely
obscured

With darts of wintry hail. Again the black bow draw :

Again the elemental strings to your right breasts draw,

And let the shadowy drum speed on the arrows black.

The arrows flew from cloudy bow all day, till blood

From east to west flowed like the human victims in rivers

Of life upon the plains of death and valleys of despair . . .

The sun was black and the moon rolled, a useless globe
through heaven.

The passage from Swinburne’s “Erectheus” ends with these
superb lines :—

From the roots of the hills to the plain’s dim verge and
the dark loud shore,

Air shudders with shrill spears crossing, and hurtling
of wheels that roar.

As the grinding of teeth in the jaws of a lion that foam
as they gnash,
Is the shriek of the axles that loosen, the shock of the pole
as they crash.
The dense manes darken and glitter, the mouths of the
mad steeds champ,
Their heads flash blind through the battle, and death's
foot rings in their tramp . . .
White frontlet is dashed upon frontlet, and horse against
horse reels hurled,
And the gorge of the gulfs of the battle is wide for the
spoil of the world.

And here, in conclusion, I will allude to one very striking work, "The Dynasts" (the masterpiece, in my opinion, of Thomas Hardy), because it illustrates both the personal and the decorative treatment of war by combining in a remarkable way the intensely human attitude of the writer both to the horrors and to the glories of a campaign, and also his attitude as an unconcerned and ironic spectator of the issues mechanically enacted before his eyes. The death of Nelson, the burial of Sir John Moore, the retreat from Moscow, and numberless other incidents stand out with a vividness which makes them rank with the most imaginative and emotional passages in English literature; the phases of Napoleon's later career and the changes made in the map of Europe as he moved across it are shown in birdseye view with an aloofness and detachment that are within the reach of only the great poets.

We have now seen that whereas the majority of poets and artists are apt to be crushed by war, or are left indifferent as it passes them by, a few may recover from the shock and even be stimulated by it to æsthetic expression. We have seen that when poets and artists are so stimulated war sometimes becomes the actual subject matter of their work but just as frequently does not.

What we have found in the past we may expect to find again in the future. There is no reason for supposing that the present war will differ from others in its effects and will give birth to masterpieces as some are expecting it to do. It is much more likely to nip them in the bud by bringing about conditions unfavourable to the artist and his work and by killing those who might have produced them.

Even if any masterpieces are to come out of the war, we are hardly likely to see signs of them at present. Poetry is swifter both in inception and execution than painting and sculpture, but even poetry is not to be looked for when a nation is still reeling from the first shocks of assault. A distinguished living writer when asked for a poem on the war replied that he was not writing war poetry but was reading Wordsworth, and that he recommended everyone else to do the same. Wordsworth himself maintained that poetry takes its origin from emotion remembered in tranquillity and cannot therefore rise to the height of great events while in the thick of them, and he illustrated this thesis by his own behaviour during the crisis of the Napoleonic wars, when he was to be found in the quiet seclusion of the hills and dales round Rydal and Grasmere, cutting wood, planting scarlet-runners, gossiping at tea-tables with elderly spinsters, and doing what his sister Dorothy called "wasting his mind in the magazines." The result of this isolation was the sonnets which we all know, with their wide vision and the deep voice of passion resounding in their periods without the strident notes of personal feeling. For all imaginative work distance is needed, that the mind may see things in perspective; tranquillity is needed too if the feelings roused by real events are to be transmuted and recalled in terms of æsthetic emotion. The poet, that is to say, must not be mastered by events but must make himself the master of them.

Even those outbursts of art which I have mentioned as synchronizing with great wars could not have happened if the whole nation had been entirely absorbed in the struggle,

or if the rate of mortality had even distantly approximated to what it is to-day. Italy and Holland in the 16th and 17th centuries had their mercenary armies which left a portion of the nation free to carry on their ordinary pursuits, and even the Peloponnesian and Persian wars in the fifth century before Christ only numbered their dead by thousands.

In the present war huge and small nations alike are struggling for their very existence. To-day the truism that "all the world's a stage" is really true. The skeins of international thought are so widely spread and so closely woven that not even neutral countries can remain untouched. For all the world this war is an appalling experience, and for those who are more immediately concerned the experience is one which is bound to remove many mental landmarks, a few of which perhaps were only stumbling-blocks.

At the same time we must remember that war will never produce art where no instinct for art has already been implanted. If a man is a good poet to start with he may continue to write good poems in war-time (whether their subject is war or not), but you will never find good war-poems coming from an indifferent writer. The theory that war will suddenly bring out new powers in men as it reveals to them new emotions shows little appreciation either of the working of the artist's mind or of the real character of modern warfare. The artist will draw his emotions from the world as he finds it; he can master the reading of Earth without asking that her beauty should first be spoilt; he can learn to understand his fellow men before the flower of their youth has been sacrificed. Moreover the idea that contact with warfare ('the baptism of fire' as it is called by those who have only learnt to play with it) is likely to engender the large heroic emotions rather than anger and bitterness at so much human waste and stupidity, is based on the romantic view of war—the view that it is a heaven-sent blessing in disguise, ordained to chasten sinful man and by chastening to improve him. That is not precisely the view which is held by the combatants on either side to-day. War

is no longer, if it ever really was, a romantic adventure; leaves little room nowadays for make-believe, except in so far as it leads to the lowering of standards. For under the strain of great emotion man is apt to accept the second best for the best and to take the symbols for reality. His balance is upset; he can no longer judge dispassionately. When he finds out the truth a reaction follows, and the reaction, which deep feeling underlies it, is likely to lead to passionate determined efforts to refashion the things that are really valuable in life, to re-create a world of beauty where intellect and the senses alike shall have scope for their full and freest development.

Prophecy is waste of time even in other men's countries but after glancing at the history of the past and analysing the psychological effects of war and art on individuals and nations, as we have briefly done this evening, we may perhaps be justified not in feeling confident but in hoping wistfully that some genuine art may possibly appear on a distant horizon, when all the welter of the present war, the bitterness and the courage, the folly and the waste have been gathered into perspective and shrouded by the softening veil of time.