Christianity in Army Life

Vol 7 - No 8
Christianity in Army life.

Undoubtedly the army is not the very best school for commencing, developing, and continuing the distinctive Christian structure. The philosophy appears to be that the ends aimed at are not identical altogether coincident.

If we choose a civil calling, say, that of the merchant; there is not a whit of what he is called to do, that is not strictly consonant with his own spiritual building. In fact, in buying, his safest plan is to conform strictly to the Christian law, for if he deviate from it and it is found out his commercial reputation is lowered and his business will sooner or later be injured. It is worse for him still in buying, for there will be twenty witnesses against false sales to one against his false buying. The Christian rule of hearty care...
for other people's interest while he protects his own can only be arrived at completely by being a "Christian." Of course I mean by "Christian" one who stands in proper normal relation to his Heavenly Father. This takes in every mean, whether consciously or not, whose heart is right with his God.

The profession of the law is eminently fitted to find its best results in the most persistent conformity to Christian ethics. The freethinker and the pettifogger leave no volumes of reference worth consulting. Their triumphs are like those of the spider. Their victims may be tortured and killed, but their gossamer webs are but transient hopes for the memory. No circumstances exist that necessitate the lawyer's departure from Christian living.

The physician occupies, if anything, the highest eminence in this matter, even a higher
vantage ground than the merchant or the lawyer, because of the increased opportunities offered him for applying the second clause of the divine law, viz. "love thy neighbor as thyself." No profession furnishes such multitudinous occasions for benevolent action. The highest skill of science & the tenderest care of the loving nurse compass the range of his province. The pure kindness of heart not only good for him but essential to his best results as a practitioner.

Humbuggery & quackery may get many of the loaves & fishes, but it takes sincere worth permeated with divine help to secure eternal substance.

So we might examine minutely every lawful profession or trade and find the same truth emphasized. Our Heavenly Father is no respecter of persons. He of every nation, name & calling who works righteousness is accepted of him & helped by him.
Then there will be no self-defense—no defense of home and loved ones—no police restrictions—no judicial findings—no executions and no armed host for state protection. That will be the beginning of the millennium. The wolf shall feed with the lamb and the lion shall lie down together, and the lion shall eat straw like the bullock. "And dust shall be the serpent's meat." Every Christian word uttered in sincerity, every Christian effort put forth in honesty and faith, every new soul brought from a bad life to a good one is a step toward the millennium. While men were individually wrong in these, then will be wrong in them collected together wrongly rewarded in the practices of men. Whether they be farmers or merchants, Lawyers or doctors, Ministers or laymen. Our blessed Lord told his remedies to all classes. To the centurion who believed and acted on his belief, he said: I have seen no such faith as not in Israel. Here
By a long experience in the army, both in the instruction at the Academy and in the subsequent practical lessons in peace and in war, I am satisfied that character may be begun, developed, and continued through a lifetime in the army or navy.

This conclusion is based more on long and somewhat careful observation than on any mere theorizing.

Before citing examples, which is rather the purpose of this address, let us first see if there is any satisfying answer to the general inquiry, "Is not war wrong?"

The friends of peace assert as a direct and binding rule: "All war is wrong." They therefore refuse to enter army or navy and endeavor to keep their children from aiding in these means of defense. Still as they pay their taxes, vote for supplies and for the Commander-in-Chief, they contribute largely, perhaps under protest, to our war establishment.
Our New England metaphysicians and statesmen have set down the same theory in their books and speeches. Charles Sumner's greatest, most elaborate, most learned production was a speech against war—endeavoring to show graphically its horrors, its enormous cost, its inadequacy to the settlement of national difficulties and trying to pave the way to a sovereign remedy. Yet Charles Sumner was foremost in the advocacy of war measures against the Southern rebellion; and the educated conscience of New England furnished the best of captains to carry into execution his plans.

Now are these apparent inconsistencies to be accounted for? I believe they arise from the too great strain of minds given to casuistic argument, to generalize over much.

Let us start an argument in this way. Is self-defense ever right? Yes; show that a man...
purely in self-defense took the human life, and he is clear under all law. Is it ever right to defend the honor of wife and child even to the destruction of life? Certainly! Shew by the circumstances an absolute necessity and the slayer is justified. A step further: Is it right to have a police so appointed and furnished as to arrest and restrain thieves, burglars, highwaymen, murderers, meddians or any other persons who unlawfully put the community in peril of property or life? Yes, of course. Shall they have the means and the power granted them to capture even if at times the criminal's life is endangered or taken? Certainly! The very existence of our cities depends on the exercise of power.

Again after the judge has pronounced the sentence of the law that certain criminals shall suffer the extreme penalty of death, is it right to have an organized party of men solemnly to execute this sentence? Or even
modern reasoners

you have so exalted human life
into a divine essence, as to object to capital
punishment. It is wrong to have a sheriff and
imperial police and all the apparatus to keep our criminals
within solid walls and prevent their escape from
even to the taking of life itself. Surely
this must be so. Step from the city to the next higher
element in social living, the state. The police of a
state is an army. By the use of it, the chief
officer of the state defends the very existence and
well being of a state. This defense is war.

Now then will we consider this inquiry: is not
worship good? The plain answer is no, not always.
There must be wrong somewhere, there always is
when there is war. Sometimes it is on one side
and sometimes on the other and often on
both sides either in what went before or
what immediately brought it on. And when
human society shall become so perfected in all
its individual members that there shall be no crime,
Then there will be no self-defense - no defense of home and loved ones - no police restrictions - no judicial, criminal findings - no executions and no armed host for state protection. That will be the beginning of the millennium. Then: "The wolf and the lamb shall feed together and the lion shall lie down like the bullock. And the dust shall be the Serpent's meat. Every Christian word uttered in sincerity, every Christian effort put forth in honesty and faith, every new soul born from a bad life to a good one is a step toward the desired consummation. While men have sinned in them individually, there will be wrong in them collected together. Wrong somehow involved in the practices of these men. This will be true, whether they be farmers or merchants, lawyers or doctors, ministers or laymen. Our Blessed Lord said, his remedies to all classes. To the centurion, who believed and acted upon his belief, he said: I have seen no such faith as not in Israel.
is all the demonstration that the soldier needs that he is not excluded on account of his profession from the appreciation of his Lord’s recognition.

The life of a young British officer who had been prior to expedition remarkable in the circle where he moved as a handsome, manly, hearty, social favorite and who showed increased evidences of courage and manhood by becoming a Christian was put into my hands by a faithful friend quite early in my military life. The influence of this young soldier’s life brought me to take the stand I did in the spring of 1857, when I came before the people and made a public profession of religion. He was killed in the Crimea while leading a charge of his regiment.

The evidence of the practicality of Christianity in an army is found in the life of General Harshbarger. His biographer has not told the story very well, probably from want of spiritual sympathy with Harshbarger in his own heart; yet there is quite enough to show how consistently, how—
Faithfully and with what abundant
success an Army officer may undertake to
act the part of a pronounced Christian man.

It will subserve my purpose to select
a few examples that have come under my
own observation in our Army both among
officers of rank, officers of a lesser grade
and also from among the enlisted men
to make of them a practical demonstration
that, unpremeditated as it may appear, the Army
of the United States will bring in its showers
in this great Spiritual harvest of the world.

At the first post to which I was sent after
graduating from the Military Academy there were
two Christian officers. One of them had been a long
time in the Army. It took them fourteen years
To become a captain in the Ordnance Dept. This
officer has been for some years a Major.

Of all the men with whom I have had to
do battle, within or without the Army I think I have none.
Known as more thoroughly conscientious man. He lived a long & useful life, was faithful to our flag in his home of her trial, though born & bred in the south & he was left to the army & to his family the record of a Christian example. The other officer was now a lieutenant & had gained secrets of distinction in the Mexican war. He was a decided Christian in his family, in the church, in his intercourse with us all. Often thought him too particular in his habits & in his observances. But none brighter or pleasanter was the record of his years of increasing, unostentatious Christian living. He would blush &.org out today against the grave mention of his name. Not God knows living with his own fidelity & charity unquestioned & unremittingly.

Again when my commission took place in Florida an aged colonel was there. His face was already whitening and his shoes with the marks of increasing years. He was pointed out to me as a man who had in younger days been very
wild. When I first met him I was much pleased
that he noticed me with so much attention. He
often drew me into conversation. One day he
said: "You appear to be of an inquiring mind,
and think you would like to read this." Then he
handed me a list of questions by which
one might test himself whether or not
his Christianity had the true ring. I thanked
him for it, as it was just what I then wanted.

He often spoke in the prayer meetings at the
Methodist church and participated in other services.
Once I recall his fidelity in rebuking me.
I had spoken very boldly and veryBufhatistically
doubters, and afterward in conversation with
the colonel made some remark that
looked like roasting of my Bible acquirements.
"Sir, sir," my friend, you have not settled
faith. no theology yet. I have studied the
Scriptures for years, and how little I know yet.
His Colonel's Christian life from the time I knew him.
in 1859 till his death since his war was
pleased with good deeds. He leaned to influence
young people to enter promptly & thoroughly
upon the Christian journey. I saw him tried
in various ways. He trembled in the presence
of temptation, but he knew in whom he
trusted, and was ever watchful & prayerful.

Christian officers & Christian ladies connected
with the Army had often spoken to me of General
Mansfield. I mean in days before he became a
general. He belonged I think to the Wushuim
department. He used to go from post to post
on our frontiers and besides his professional
duties held religious services with the garrisons.

And it is a little remarkable that I never
heard this spoken of adversely. In 1861 when
duty called me to Washington I found General
Mansfield in command and had great curiosity
to see a man who had the reputation of
being a Christian officer. It was not long
before I met him. He was sitting at a

dining table at Willard's. He was a

large, handsome full-birth man, with a high

brow furrowed, from which his hair a little lengthy

& nearly white was brushed back. I don't think

care ever meets a pleasanter expression of

face! And he could preserve that happy, gentle

demeanor amid the pulling & hauling &

confusions compounded of the capital, where

hosts & hosts of meddlesome masses of men

crowded in & out—before anything like order

could be drilled into the heads of mankind!

I saw this aged man the day of his death while

at Antietam. He led a desperate charge with

his men when shot in the stomach. He fell as

the ground as he fell from his horse, having as his

last words, given to his country, the last full measure

of devotion. No man will deny him the completion

of that rest that already no confusion can disturb.
The rest that remains to the people of God.

Among the junior officers in the service during the war, I had quite a number attached to my staff at different times who were declared Christians. One captain in a military prison was severely wounded by pieces in battle and died after the war from the effect of this wound. His likeness hangs in our parlor; his name is given to one of our children and the memory of his name, courageous Christian life is ever fresh & indelible.

Another is preaching with great success the unsearchable riches of Christ. He stood firm in the army even amid continual trial.

I knew a sergeant before the war, (he writes occasionally, now an aged civilian) who was the most faithful of Christians. He had not much learning, but he gathered the
Children of soldiers into the post Sunday school, distribute their little books & papers and won their love & confidence.
He is well known in the Army by all the older officers and was always trusted as the trust of men.
I am fond of referring to an orderly who was with me a long time during the war of rebellion. Mr. McDonald was a rough Scotch man; given to hard words & fear at times to an otherwise hard life.
He came in 1864 to our tent prayer meetings of a Sunday evening. At first with some reluctance. Soon I noticed he had a Bible. Before long had his life changed. Mr. McDonald, just on the whole armor of the Christian soldier.
He was mortally wounded in Georgia. Standing in his eyes bidding me goodbye with tears he said: "Oh, how glad I am General that I was wounded & not you! Such was his tender devotion!"
That a soldier cannot be a Christian—for
men don't like him—down their work for their country faithfully, well—
have suffered the loss of all things even of life itself; and have preserved the clean
views of Christian men.

There are men whose lives are fragrant
with Christian living and very useful
after a battle. Few men like to go into
eternity without a word of sympathy or
love. One of such times does become a
child again and would like the pressure of a
mother's arms and the gentle tone of her
voice. It takes the Christian heart to be softened
into well modulated tenderness at death's door.
The most source souls are those that
trust God and impart their own cheering
spirit to departing comrades.

As with other men at death's door
so with the soldier. The Christian soldier
answers, this great event.