

War is Murder in Uniform (March 27, 1909)

Douglas Jerrold once said that “war is murder in uniform.”¹ That it should survive to the nineteenth century would be an inexplicable mystery, if it were not for the knowledge that it is a mere adjunct to wholesale and persistent robbery committed under the organization falsely called civilization. There has never been a war, save wars of rebellion and revolution, that had not robbery for its motive.

In the olden days the warrior was frankly a freebooter, and his victim was the man of wealth, the merchant and capitalist. But since capitalism has come into dominance, the victim is not the merchant, unless he is a foreigner, but the farmer and factory worker, who produced the wealth that was taken.

In the old days the conquered was deprived of all and reduced to open slavery. Of late years the victim is despoiled of hope in life and of freedom, just as of old, only now he is mad to believe that he is free and is flattered with the hope that someday he himself may become a robber.

In olden days they slaughtered with sword and battle-axe, in contests which involved some risk, but now they kill at a distance, and bribe the worker at \$13 a month to murder his brother worker.

In olden days war was a matter of battles and sudden spoliation, but now they not only slaughter with the finest machinery that human ingenuity can devise, but after the battle is over, they tie both the victim and the conquering worker to other machines that evermore squeeze money from their bodies.

Oh, the horrors and terrors of war! When Sherman, who knew of it from having burned a road sixty miles wide through a prosperous region, was asked what war is, he faltered for a word to describe it and then answered, “It is hell.” It *is* hell, and the profit-mongers for whom it exists and for whose aid armies and navies are maintained are devilish.

I never look on brook or river, stealing through fertile lands, but that I fancy they do not run with wholesome water, but with blood and sweat and tears. I never look on a great city, that wonder-picture of man’s creative power, but that I see its wall masoned with human bones. When I would express my horror of war, my hatred of war, I am silent, because

words can not tell it. But I wonder how long the workers will continue to march up to the yoke, how long they will let the masters inflame them with hatred toward each other, how long they will go out to red slaughter for the glory of others and their own enslavement.

Are we not all brothers? Then why should some ride others, and why should some have all and others naught?

Are we not of one blood? Then why should we kill each other, making wives widows and children orphans, that we may enable the rulers of men to feast the more?

Oh, unspeakable barbarism! Oh, needless suffering and foolish burden-bearing! Awake, men of the world, brothers of the world, from the old madness, and stand with the light of a better day glorifying the foreheads that have learned to think and kindling the hearts that have at last learned to love in deed and in truth, and then war shall be no more; for if the workers shall cease to kill each other for others' gain, the monstrosity of war will pass away like a horror of the troubled night.

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¹ Adapted from "The Folly of the Sword" (1843) by Douglas William Jerrold (1803-1857). The original quote is: "What a fine-looking thing is war! Yet, dress it as we may, dress and feather it, daub it with gold, huzza it, and sing swaggering songs about it — what it is, nine times out of ten, but murder in uniform? Cain, taking the sergeant's shilling?"