

Merciful Killing

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IN Austria, if I remember correctly, there was once passed a law which permitted physicians, under certain conditions, to put an end to a patient's life in order to cut short his agony. In China, abortion, the killing of human life in embryo, once absolutely forbidden, is now permitted, in specified cases, to save the parent's life. One of China's historical warriors, Hong Yiu, whose life still provides a fascinating theme for Chinese operas, on the eve of his final defeat, ordered his beloved to slay herself to preserve her virtues. The last emperor of the Ming dynasty, as the vanguards of the Manchu army were breaking down the gates of Peking and before he took his own life, slew his own daughter in order to save her from dishonor in the hands of the enemy. In modern times the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals has always endorsed the killing of stray or wounded or mad dogs to spare them a slow death. The act of killing in all these and other cases may appear heartless, but the end served is merciful.

In the last stage of the Pacific War another type of merciful killing has been discovered. It is achieved by the use of the atomic bomb. It took a host of scientists half a decade to invent this new death-dealing bomb, but it took only two such bombs to bring the war to an end in less than a week. The number of persons killed by the two bombs could not be definitely ascertained, but they could not have been more than 300,000, and this was the last human toll the world, both friends and foes, paid at the altar of Mars. If the two bombs had not been used, the war would have probably lasted another three months, to say the least, in view of the large number of Japanese troops on Chinese soil and elsewhere in Asia and the Southern Pacific. And if the Allied air forces had continued to use other types of bombs till the end of the war, what would have been the number of lives lost? No one could foretell, of course, but it may be permissible to use the last few air raids in Shanghai as a basis for calculation. The number of killed and wounded on July 17 was placed at 30,000, and on July 18 at 10,000 and on July 24 at 2,000, with an average of 10,000 per raid in round figures, and yet the raids were known to be only forerunners of more intensified operations yet to come. In the Allied territories still occupied by the Japanese forces, at least 20 cities, such as Shanghai, Nanking, Hankow, Canton, Peiping, Tientsin, Mukden, Harbin, Hongkong, Singapore, etc., would have been outstanding objectives of bombing. If each of the cities were to be raided no more than 10 times before the surrender of the Japanese, there would be 200 air raids, and on the basis of 10,000 killed and wounded per raid, the total number of victims would be 2,000,000, more than 6 times the number claimed by the two atomic bombs. And these possible victims would mostly be Allied nationals, not enemy subjects!

The foregoing calculation is confined to Allied territories. If we add to the figure reached the number of people who would be killed and wounded in Japan Proper, Korea and Formosa with the continuance of the war, the total would stagger human

imagination. From the standpoint of the human lives saved by an early termination of the war as the result of the use of the atomic bomb, the killing was indeed merciful, not to the victims but to mankind.

It is common knowledge that in cases of serious blood poisoning, amputation of the affected parts is not only desirable but absolutely necessary. The world today, with the improvement of communications, must be viewed as one single political body, of which Japan constitutes a part. By destroying one small island and one coaling port in Japan, like two finger tips on the human body, the atomic bombs saved not only the rest of the world but a large part of Japan herself. Could any other way of operation have been more merciful?

Parlor politicians and pacifists, upon the publication of the news of the atomic bomb and the havoc they wrought, lost no time in having themselves heard. The use of the bomb was denounced as inhuman as though everything else connected with modern warfare was humane. They were overcome by sentiment, they lost their power of reasoning. It is to be admitted that the destructive power of the atomic bomb is horrible, but from all information thus far gained in Shanghai, the injury caused to each individual by an atomic bomb is not unlike that caused by an incendiary bomb: the former by heat and the latter by fire. The real difference lies not so much in kind as in degree. The extent of damage caused by other bombs may cover a radius of a few blocks, that used by the atomic bomb is said to spread over a radius of two and a half miles. In other words, the destructive power of the atomic bomb is said to be equivalent to that of 20,000 tons of T. N. T. What is accomplished by one atomic bomb may be likewise accomplished by 20,000 tons of T. N. T. If the American air force had dropped 40,000 tons of T. N. T. in Japan in two raids instead of the two atomic bombs, would the parlor politicians and pacifists have them hailed the act as humane?

The trouble with politicians and pacifists is that they have made it their business to denounce war and everything new connected with war, without striving to offer any effective way to stop war. Personally I hate wars as much as any sane person would, and I do not talk about the atomic bomb light-heartedly or callously. Yet to me the atomic bomb is up to the moment the most practical means to outlaw war and to restrain any nation from going to war unless that nation can in the meantime invent something to counteract the effectiveness of the bomb. It is perhaps providential that America, twice the champion in arms of democracy, should have succeeded in the invention of the atomic bomb. With an international organization for peace as envisaged at the San Francisco Conference and with an effective weapon like the atomic bomb as the safeguard, mankind may feel at ease once again. Indeed, the atomic bomb has brought peace to the world; it may keep the world in peace.