

**PERPETUAL PEACE;
A PHILOSOPHICAL
ESSAY, 1795**

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Perpetual peace; a philosophical essay, 1795 by Immanuel Kant

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IMMANUEL KANT

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PERPETUAL PEACE

"For I dip't into the future, far as human eye could see,
Saw the Vision of the world, and all the wonder that would be;
Saw the heavens fill with commerce, arg'ies of magic sails,
Pilots of the purple twilight, dropping down with costly bales;
Heard the heavens fill with shouting, and there rain'd a ghastly dew
From the nations' wily cavies grappling in the central blue;
Far along the world-wide whisper of the south-wind rushing warm,
With the standards of the peoples plunging thro' the thunder-storm;
Till the war-drum throbb'd no longer, and the battle-flags were fur'd
In the Parliament of man, the Federation of the world.
There the common sense of most shall hold a fretful realm in awe,
And the kindly earth shall slumber, lapt in universal law."

Traveller: Lockley Hall.

PERPETUAL PEACE

A PHILOSOPHICAL ESSAY

BY
IMMANUEL KANT

1795

TRANSLATED WITH INTRODUCTION AND NOTES

BY
M. CAMPBELL SMITH, M.A.

WITH A PREFACE BY PROFESSOR LATTA



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P R E F A C E

THIS translation of Kant's essay on *Perpetual Peace* was undertaken by Miss Mary Campbell Smith at the suggestion of the late Professor Ritchie of St. Andrews, who had promised to write for it a preface, indicating the value of Kant's work in relation to recent discussions regarding the possibility of "making wars to cease." In view of the general interest which these discussions have aroused and of the vague thinking and aspiration which have too often characterised them, it seemed to Professor Ritchie that a translation of this wise and sagacious essay would be both opportune and valuable.* His untimely death has prevented the fulfilment of his promise, and I have been asked, in his stead, to introduce the translator's work.

This is, I think, the only complete translation into English of Kant's essay, including all the notes as well as the text, and the translator has added a full historical Introduction, along with numerous notes of her own, so as (in Professor Ritchie's words) "to meet the needs (1) of the student of Political

* Cf. his *Studies in Political and Social Ethics*, pp. 169. 170.

Science who wishes to understand the relation of Kant's theories to those of Grotius, Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau etc., and (2) of the general reader who wishes to understand the significance of Kant's proposals in connection with the ideals of Peace Congresses, and with the development of International Law from the end of the Middle Ages to the Hague Conference."

Although it is more than 100 years since Kant's essay was written, its substantial value is practically unimpaired. Anyone who is acquainted with the general character of the mind of Kant will expect to find in him sound common-sense, clear recognition of the essential facts of the case and a remarkable power of analytically exhibiting the conditions on which the facts necessarily depend. These characteristics are manifest in the essay on *Perpetual Peace*. Kant is not pessimist enough to believe that a perpetual peace is an unrealisable dream or a consummation devoutly to be feared, nor is he optimist enough to fancy that it is an ideal which could easily be realised if men would but turn their hearts to one another. For Kant perpetual peace is an ideal, not merely as a speculative Utopian idea, with which in fancy we may play, but as a moral principle, which ought to be, and therefore can be, realised. Yet he makes it perfectly clear that we cannot hope to approach the realisation

of it unless we honestly face political facts and get a firm grasp of the indispensable conditions of a lasting peace. To strive after the ideal in contempt or in ignorance of these conditions is a labour that must inevitably be either fruitless or destructive of its own ends. Thus Kant demonstrates the hopelessness of any attempt to secure perpetual peace between independent nations. Such nations may make treaties; but these are binding only for so long as it is not to the interest of either party to denounce them. To enforce them is impossible while the nations remain independent. "There is," as Professor Ritchie put it (*Studies in Political and Social Ethics*, p. 169), "only one way in which war between independent nations can be prevented; and that is by the nations ceasing to be independent." But this does not necessarily mean the establishment of a despotism, whether autocratic or democratic. On the other hand, Kant maintains that just as peace between individuals within a state can only be permanently secured by the institution of a "republican" (that is to say, a representative) government, so the only real guarantee of a permanent peace between nations is the establishment of a federation of free "republican" states. Such a federation he regards as practically possible. "For if Fortune ordains that a powerful and enlightened people should form a republic—

which by its very nature is inclined to perpetual peace—this would serve as a centre of federal union for other states wishing to join, and thus secure conditions of freedom among the states in accordance with the idea of the law of nations. Gradually, through different unions of this kind, the federation would extend further and further."

Readers who are acquainted with the general philosophy of Kant will find many traces of its influence in the essay on *Perpetual Peace*. Those who have no knowledge of his philosophy may find some of his forms of statement rather difficult to understand, and it may therefore not be out of place for me to indicate very briefly the meaning of some terms which he frequently uses, especially in the Supplements and Appendices. Thus at the beginning of the First Supplement, Kant draws a distinction between the mechanical and the teleological view of things, between "nature" and "Providence", which depends upon his main philosophical position. According to Kant, pure reason has two aspects, theoretical and practical. As concerning knowledge, strictly so called, the a priori principles of reason (*e.g.* substance and attribute, cause and effect etc.) are valid only within the realm of possible sense-experience. Such ideas, for instance, cannot be extended to God, since He is not a possible object of sense-experience. They are limited