

The Anarchist Library (Mirror)

Anti-Copyright



A. P. Brown

Why I Am a Non-Resistant

June 5, 1890

[https://www.libertarian-labyrinth.org/non-resistance/
a-p-brown-why-i-am-a-non-resistant-1890/](https://www.libertarian-labyrinth.org/non-resistance/a-p-brown-why-i-am-a-non-resistant-1890/)

Twentieth Century 4 no. 23 (June 5, 1890): 7–9. [not part of
“Economic Seminar”]

usa.anarchistlibraries.net

Why I Am a Non-Resistant

A. P. Brown

June 5, 1890

Well, first, because having been at the trouble to be born into this somewhat interesting world I feel inclined to linger in it as long as may be to learn more in regard to its workings, and I have noticed that those who are ready and prone to fight, who believe in fighting and practice it, are more likely not to die of old age than are those who follow after the things that make for peace.

There is some risk, to be sure, whichever course one takes but observation and reflection assure me that the non-resistant’s risks are on the whole less, and this for many reasons not necessary to enter into here or

Second, not wishing to “lose my head” in a literal sense I am also averse to the figurative loss thereof.

There are many and complex questions shortly coming to the consideration and determination of the American people.

There are subtle and unseen but potent forces at work in society As I believe the epoch of Christianity, *as it has been popularly understood* for fifteen hundred years, is about closing, and only here and there as yet are those who see with any good degree of clearness what is to take its place. Our entire social life is perturbed and anon will boil like a pot. Now, in a state

of war, which is what all fighting means, there is no chance for any question whatever to get considered upon its merits no matter how vital the question may be. So there will be need of those who neither fear, fight, nor run away.

Third, more than fifty years ago I heard Henry C. Wright all one Sunday present the doctrine of nonresistance as few besides were able to do, and although only about twelve years old I was captivated, and now in maturer years the seed then sown is germinating, as indeed why should it not?

Fourth, non-resistance, or more properly speaking, moral resistance, is a matter of sound philosophy. I believe in individual responsibility.

“Ef you take a sword an’ dror it,
An’ go stick a feller thru,
Guv’ment ain’t to answer for it,
God’ll send the bill to you.”

“I have nothing to do about that; you will have to speak with the boss,” was the witty answer of an Alsatian friend of mine when as an apprentice many years ago he was compelled to work on Sunday, and was threatened with perdition by the parish priest for Sabbath breaking. But when the sheep and the goats are assembled for final separation I surmise there will exist a profuse scarcity of “bosses,” industrial, legislative, ecclesiastical, or other, behind whom one can shelter himself for the deeds done in the body. Responsibility carries with it freedom, and freedom repudiates coercion, and I am positively denied the right to resist even what seems to be evil by the strong arm and power of the sword. At least that is the way it seems to me.

Fifth, because repudiation of the use of carnal weapons *on principle* is compensated by an accession and inflow of moral force. As the loss of sight maybe transmitted into an exceeding power and delicacy of touch, so the subjugation of the animal

propensities is followed by a power and dignity that repel encroachment.

I know "A.H.S.," in "Tax Reform Advocate," December 14, '89, speaking of Pentecost's burglar, says non-resistance "if followed to its logical conclusion, would reduce the man who practiced it to the level of a dog— a mongrel cur, with no respect for himself," etc. Did "A. H. S." ever see Garrison or Stephen S. Foster, or will he take one look even at the *portrait* of Henry C. Wright, p. 177, Vol. 3, of the life of Garrison (by his children)? I know the papers from the "Sun" up made merry over "Pentecost's burglar," but what can one expect from those who write of what they cannot comprehend? Their fatal mistake, one and all, lay in the assumption that the net reason, mission, and purpose in life of the man Pentecost was to stand guard and custodian of certain jewelry, Connecticut clocks, and such matters, partly brass, when it is quite possible he might feel himself called and fitted for something else. But I digress.

Allow me right here, however, to suggest to those people who conjure up contingencies little more likely to occur than that one should be struck by a falling aerolite, and who inquire in well assumed anxiety, "What would you do if," etc., or if something else, there is only one answer for it all. I don't know what I should do. I might be paralyzed; might be seized with madness, even with the second power of madness. Human nature has its limits, and he who encroaches on it, and above all on human nature potent enough to believe in non-resistance as a moral principle, incurs a terrific and, to himself, a wholly unknown and altogether not-to-be-calculated risk, the very existence of which should and would make the assailant of the sacredness of the individual mightily cautious.

Oh no! I don't know what I *should* do; I know perfectly well what I *ought* to do. And by trying at all times and under all circumstances to do just that, base fear is banished, the inner light is kept trimmed and burning, and one is constantly open

to that ever present inspiration Jesus alluded to when he said it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak; I will give you a mouth and wisdom that all your adversaries shall not be able to gainsay nor resist.

Ah no good friends; whoso has once stood face to face with death will not thereafter run away from shadows.

Lastly the highest ideal I can conceive, touching the zenith of the moral universe, indeed, is the utterance of Jesus, the Carpenter's Son (I beg you will not confound or even associate His sacred name with the Christ of the creeds and catechisms), as he suffered a cruel death on the cross, "Father, forgive them; they know not what they do."

This ideal of love, even for cruel enemies, stands and shines in deathless splendor through all the ages, as the transcendent sublimation and flowering out of all that was in the man. Man? No conceivable God or quintessence and concentration of all the gods could strike a higher note. I can admire "the hero when his sword has won the battle for the free," but I positively must worship a sentiment like that. That reaches back to ages before the Southern Cross had ceased to shine on Baltic shores, and sweeping forward through ages unnumbered and unknown will one day make the whole world kin. Assail it with all your criticisms, theological, historical, what you will, they are henceforth no more to me than the croaking of a raven to the music of the spheres.

These considerations have force with me; dear reader, what have you to say to them?