

***DAVID LOW  
DODGE***



***WAR INCONSISTENT  
WITH THE RELIGION  
OF JESUS CHRIST***

**David Low Dodge**

# **War Inconsistent with the Religion of Jesus Christ**

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# INTRODUCTION

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To David Low Dodge of New York belongs the high honor of having written the first pamphlets published in America directed expressly against the war system of nations, and of having founded the first peace society ever organized in America or in the world. His first pamphlet, *The Mediator's Kingdom not of this World*, was published in 1809. His second and more important pamphlet, *War Inconsistent with the Religion of Jesus Christ*, was prepared for the press in 1812. This was two years before the publication of Noah Worcester's *Solemn Review of the Custom of War*, which was issued in Boston on Christmas Day, 1814. Early in 1812 Mr. Dodge and his friends in New York deliberated on the expediency of forming a peace society; but on account of the excitement attending the war with Great Britain this was postponed until 1815. In August of that year the New York Peace Society, the first in the world, was organized, with Mr. Dodge as its president. This was four months before the organization of the Massachusetts Peace Society (December 26, 1815) under the leadership of Noah Worcester, and nearly a year before the English Peace Society, the first in Europe, was formed (June 14, 1816) in London.

The preëminent historical interest attaching to Mr. Dodge's pioneering work in the peace cause in this country would alone justify and indeed seem to command the republication of his pamphlets at this time, when the great ideas for which he so courageously and prophetically stood are at last winning the general recognition of humane and

thoughtful men. But it is not merely historical interest which warrants a revival of attention to these almost forgotten papers. Their intrinsic power and worth are such as make their reading, especially that of the second essay, *War Inconsistent with the Religion of Jesus Christ*, which stands first in the present volume, edifying and inspiring to-day. Marked by few literary graces and cast in a theological mold which the critical thought of the present has in large measure outgrown, there is a force of thought, a moral earnestness, a persevering logic, a common sense, a hatred of inhumanity, a passion for justice, a penetration and a virtue in them, which commends them to the abiding and reverent regard of all who work for the peace and order of the world. Among such workers to-day are men of various political philosophies, and perhaps only a small minority are nonresistants of the extreme type of David L. Dodge; but to that minority, we cannot fail to remark, belongs the greatest and most influential of all the peace prophets of this time, Leo Tolstoi. None can read these old essays without being impressed by the fact that their arguments are essentially the same as those of the great Russian. There is little indeed of the Tolstoian thunder and lightning, the pathos, wrath, and rhetoric, the poetry and prophecy, in these old-fashioned pages; but the doctrine is the same as that of *Bethink Yourselves!* and *Patriotism versus Christianity*. In his central thought and purpose, in his religious trust and reliance upon the Christian principle, the New York merchant was a Tolstoi a hundred years before his time.

David Low Dodge was born June 14, 1774, in that part of Pomfret, Connecticut, now called Brooklyn. This was the

home of Israel Putnam; and David Dodge's father, a farmer and carpenter, was Putnam's neighbor and friend,—may well have been near him when in April, 1775, upon hearing of the battle of Lexington, he left his plow in the furrow and started to join the forces gathering at Cambridge. David Dodge's father, grandfather, and great-grandfather each bore the name of David Dodge. The great-grandfather was a Congregational minister, who was understood to have come from Wales,—a learned and wealthy man, who was for a while settled in the vicinity of Cape Ann in Massachusetts. The grandfather, who also received a liberal education, probably in England, came into the possession of his father's estate, for that day a large one, and we are not informed whether he followed any profession or regular business. He was a man fully six feet tall, of great muscular power, and a lover of good horses, on which he spent much time and money. He married Ann Low, from a wealthy Massachusetts family, and settled in Beverly, where their sons David and Samuel were born, and where the family fortunes became much embarrassed. About 1757 the family removed to Pomfret, Connecticut, and the boys, whose education at the hands of their mother had been but slight, were apprenticed, David to a carpenter and Samuel to a shoemaker. Their father, obtaining at this time a commission in the army invading Canada, met his death in a bateau which attempted to descend the falls of the Oswego and was dashed to pieces on the rocks with the loss of every soul on board.

David Low Dodge's mother, when a girl, was Mary Stuart, and when she married his father, in 1768, was a widow

bearing the name of Earl. The young husband hired a small farm, the wife by her industry and economy had furniture sufficient to begin housekeeping, and the little home was founded in which David Low Dodge's only sister Mary was born in 1770. Three years later the father hired a more expensive place in the same town, where the boy was born in 1774. "During that year," he writes in his autobiography, "my father became serious, and commenced family prayer. He was educated in the old semi-Arminian views of his mother and the halfway covenant. My mother was a rigid Calvinist of the Whitefield school. Neither of them ever made a public profession of religion, but they were careful to observe external ordinances, catechize their children, and give religious instruction. They were honest, industrious, temperate, kind-hearted people, universally respected and esteemed by all who were acquainted with them."

Such was the atmosphere in which the boy grew up. "The American Revolution at this period was convulsing the whole country, drafting and enlisting soldiers. Wagons were needed for the army, and by the advice of the Putnams, the old general and his son Israel, who was about two years younger than my father, he was induced to engage in the manufacture of continental wagons. He hired a convenient place for carpenters and blacksmiths, took several journeymen into the family, and embarked all his earnings in the business." The boy's half-brothers, William and Jesse Earl, entered the army at the tender ages of fourteen and sixteen, endured battles, sickness, and every privation, and both died towards the close of the war, the event almost wrecking the nervous system of the mother, a woman of

acute sensibility. Thus early were the horrors of war brought personally home to the boy. He remembered hearing the distant cannonading when New London was burned by the British, and the exclamation of the man beside him, "Blood is flowing to-day." "News came the next morning that the forts were stormed, the garrisons put to the sword, New London burnt, and the British were marching upon Norwich, and would proceed up into the country. My mother wrung her hands, and asked my father if we had not better pack up some things to secrete them."

The boy's education was slight and fragmentary. The summer he was six years old he attended the school of a venerable Irish maiden lady about sixty years of age, learning Watts' *Divine Songs*, texts of Scripture, and the *Shorter Catechism*. From the age of seven to fourteen—the family now living on a farm in the neighboring town of Hampton—he attended the district school for two terms each winter, having no access to any other books than the primer, spelling book, arithmetic, and Bible. "I used often, when not at work in the shop evenings, to retire to the old kitchen fireplace, put my lamp into the oven, and, sitting with my back against it, take my arithmetic, slate, and pencil, and try to cipher a little. I often think how I should have been delighted to have had one fifth part of the advantages enjoyed by most of my descendants." Confined to the house for seven weeks a little later as the result of accidents, he turned hungrily to such books as he could secure—Dilworth's *Arithmetic*, Webster's *Abridged Grammar*, and Salmon's *Universal English Geography*. "This opened a new and astonishing field to me for



contemplation. I now obtained the first glimpse of the boundaries of land and water, of the lofty mountains, and of the mighty rivers which had cut their channels through the earth. I read and surveyed the maps and meditated upon them until I began to lecture to my young companions, and was considered quite learned in geography. Having an object in view, I began to thirst for knowledge, and succeeded in borrowing in succession *The Travels of Cyrus*, *Xerxes' Expedition into Greece*, *The History of Alexander the Great*, and *Hannibal's Invasion of Rome*." He proposed and brought about the formation of a society of young men in the town, for the improvement of minds and manners. There were fourteen young men, with an equal number of young women presently added, each furnishing a useful book as the beginning of a library. "We obtained some of the British classics, such as the *Spectator*, *Guardian*, etc., with a few histories; the subjects formed a foundation for conversation when we met together."

Now the young man's ambition turned from farming to school-teaching. He began with district schools, becoming a successful teacher from the start, prosecuting his own studies assiduously in every leisure hour, fired with a desire to improve the schools, which were everywhere as wretched as can well be imagined. For some months in 1795 he left teaching to join other young men in building a bridge at Tiverton, Rhode Island. Then he attended the academy at North Canterbury, Connecticut, under the charge of the eminent teacher, John Adams. "This was the only opportunity I ever enjoyed of attending a good school, and this was abridged to fulfill my engagement to teach the

town school in Mansfield.” In 1796 he opened a private school in Norwich, adding the next year a morning school for young ladies and an evening school for apprentices and clerks, all of which flourished. During this time he was profoundly interested in religious matters, attending many revivals and becoming more and more concerned with moral and social problems. Now, too, he married, his wife being a daughter of Aaron Cleveland of Norwich, a strong character, afterwards a clergyman, “whose name you will find enrolled among the poets of Connecticut,” and who as early as 1775 published a poem on slavery, which, condemning slavery as wholly antichristian, attracted a good deal of notice. He was the first man in Connecticut to arraign slavery publicly. Elected to the General Assembly from Norwich on that issue, he introduced a bill in behalf of emancipation.

With health somewhat impaired and with family cares increasing, David Dodge now turned from teaching to trade. First it was as a clerk in Norwich, then as a partner in a general store, then as head of various dry goods establishments in Hartford and other Connecticut towns, always and everywhere successful. In 1805 Messrs. S. and H. Higginson of Boston, cousins of his wife, a firm of high standing and large capital, made him a proposition to enter into a copartnership with a view to establishing an extensive importing and jobbing store in the city of New York; and he accepted the proposition, going to New York the next year to take charge of the concern in that city. He took a store in Pearl Street, and the year afterwards the family took possession of the house connected with the store, still

reserving the house in Hartford as a retreat in case of yellow fever in New York. From this time until his death, April 23, 1852, New York was, with occasional interruptions, his home and the center of his varied and ever enlarging activities. Just before the outbreak of the war with England his partners became bankrupt through losses in extensive shipping of American produce to Europe. "Bonaparte sprung his trap upon more than a million dollars of their property." Mr. Dodge now established cotton factories in Connecticut, and later commenced anew the dry goods business in New York, his home for years alternating between New York and the Norwich neighborhood; and for the nine years following 1835 he occupied a large farm in Plainfield, New Jersey.

Active as was his business life, and faithful his devotion to his large business affairs,—and he came to rank with the most prominent mercantile men of his day,—his mind was always intent upon social and religious subjects. "During the years of 1808 to 1811 our business became extensive and demanded much thought and attention; yet I think my affections were on the subject of religion." Revivals of religion, the interests of his church in Norwich or New York, the improvement of the lives of his factory operatives, the organization in New York of the Christian Friendly Society for the Promotion of Morals and Religion,—such were the objects which commanded him. Throughout his long residence in New York he was a prominent worker in the Presbyterian church, for many years an elder in the church. He took a leading part in organizing the New York Bible Society and the New York Tract Society, was much engaged in the early missionary movements in New York, and in

promoting the education of young men for the ministry. He was a lover of knowledge, a great reader, and one who thought and wrote as he read. Deeply interested in history, ancient and modern, his chief interest was in theological discussion. He was familiar with the chief theological controversies of the day, and upon many of them committed his views to writing. His knowledge of the Bible was remarkable; he read it through critically in course forty-two times. He held firmly the Calvinistic system of doctrine, and he addressed to his children a series of letters, characterized by great ability and logical force, in defense of the faith, and constituting together a compendious system of theology.

Several of these letters are included in the memorial volume published for the family in 1854 under the editorial supervision of Rev. Matson M. Smith. This volume contains, besides the two essays on war here reprinted, and various verses and letters, the interesting autobiography which he prepared, at the request of his children, a few years before his death, and a supplementary biographical sketch by his pastor, Rev. Asa D. Smith. In the mass of manuscripts which he left behind was an essay upon "The Relation of the Church to the World," and one upon "Retributive Judgment and Capital Punishment,"—to which he was sharply opposed. He was opposed indeed to so much in human governments as now constituted,—“whose ultimate reliance,” he said, “is the sword,” and whose laws he felt to be so often contrary to the laws of Christ to which he gave his sole allegiance,—that he would neither vote nor hold office. Strict and inflexible as he was in his views of political

and religious duty, he was one of the most genial and delightful of men, a Christian in whom there was no guile, fond of the young, affectionate, courteous, "given to hospitality," "careful habitually to make even the conventionalities of life a fitting accompaniment and expression of the inward principle of kindness." A face as strong as it is gentle, and as gentle as it is strong, is that which looks at us in the beautiful portrait preserved in the family treasures, and a copy of which forms the frontispiece of the present volume.

The character and influence of the family which he founded in New York, during the three generations which have followed, constitute an impressive witness to David Dodge's force and worth, his religious consecration, and high public spirit. At the junction of Broadway and Sixth Avenue stands the statue of his son, William Earl Dodge, whose life of almost fourscore years ended in 1883. For long years the head of the great house of Phelps, Dodge & Co., the manager of immense railway, lumber, and mining interests, the president of the New York Chamber of Commerce, a representative of New York in Congress, a leader in large work for temperance, for the freedmen, for the Indians, for theological education, for a score of high patriotic and philanthropic interests, New York had in his time no more representative, more useful, or more honored citizen. And what is said of him may be said in almost the same words of William Earl Dodge, his son, who died but yesterday, and who combined broad business and philanthropic activities in the same strong and influential way as his father and grandfather before him. President of

many religious and benevolent associations, he was pre-eminently a patriot and an international man. The logic of his life and of his heritage placed him naturally at the head of the National Arbitration Committee, which was appointed at the great conference on international arbitration held at Washington in the spring of 1896, following the anxiety attendant upon President Cleveland's Venezuelan message, —a committee which, under his chairmanship, and since his death that of Hon. John W. Foster, has during the decade rendered such great service to the peace and arbitration cause in this country. It is to be noted also that the names of his son and daughter, Cleveland H. Dodge and Grace H. Dodge, names so conspicuously associated to-day with charitable, religious, and educational efforts in New York, are associated, too, like his with the commanding cause of the world's peace and better organization; both names stand upon the American Committee of the Thirteenth International Peace Congress, which met in Boston in 1904. Thus have the generations which have followed him well learned and strongly emphasized the lesson taught by David Dodge almost a century ago, that war is "inhuman, unwise, and criminal," and "inconsistent with the religion of Jesus Christ."

It was in 1805 that a startling personal experience prompted the train of thought which soon and forever made David L. Dodge the advocate of the thorough-going peace principles with which his name is chiefly identified, and led him to condemn all violence, even in self-defense, in dealings between men, as between nations. Accustomed to carry pistols when traveling with large sums of money, he

was almost led to shoot his landlord in a tavern at Providence, Rhode Island, who by some blunder had come into his room at night and suddenly waked him. The thought of what his situation and feelings would have been had he taken the man's life shocked him into most searching thinking. For two or three years his mind dwelt on the question. He turned to the teaching and example of Christ, and became persuaded that these were inconsistent with violence and the carrying of deadly weapons, and with war. The common churchman sanctioned such things, but not the early Christians; and he found strong words condemning war in Luther and Erasmus, the Moravians and Quakers. Discussing the matter with many pious and Christian men, he found them generally avoiding the gospel standard. He was shocked by the "general want of faith in the promises"; but he himself laid aside at once his pistols and the fear of robbers. He became absolutely convinced that fighting and warfare were "unlawful for the followers of Christ"; and from now on he began to bear public testimony against the war spirit.

Early in the spring of 1809 he published his essay, *The Mediator's Kingdom not of this World*, which attracted so much attention that in two weeks nearly a thousand copies were sold. Three literary men joined in preparing a spirited and sarcastic criticism of it; and he immediately published a rejoinder. *The Mediator's Kingdom* was republished in Philadelphia and in Providence, and Mr. Dodge writes truly: "These publications gave the first impulse in America, if we except the uniform influence of the Friends, to inquiry into the lawfulness of war by Christians. Some who were

favorable to the doctrines of peace judged that, with a bold hand, I had carried the subject too far; and doubtless, as it was new and had not been much discussed, I wrote too unguardedly, not sufficiently defining my terms. The Rev. Dr. Noah Worcester was one who so judged, and a few years after he published his very spirited and able essay, *The Solemn Review of War.*" This famous essay of Worcester's represents the platform of the great body of American peace workers for a century, the position of men like Channing and Ladd and Jay and Sumner; but to a nonresistant and opponent even of self-defense, like David Dodge, these seemed the exponents of a halfway covenant.

Mr. Dodge entered into private correspondence on the lawfulness of war with Rev. Lyman Beecher, Rev. Aaron Cleveland, his father-in-law, Rev. John B. Romeyn, and Rev. Walter King. He preserved among his manuscripts letters of twenty-five pages from Dr. Romeyn and Mr. Cleveland, and copies of his reply to Dr. Romeyn (one hundred and thirty-two pages) and to Dr. Beecher (forty-four pages). Important letters from Dr. Beecher and Governor Jay he had lost. All these took the position of Dr. Worcester, sanctioning strictly defensive war in extreme cases,—all except Mr. Cleveland, who finally came into complete accord with Mr. Dodge, and published two able sermons on "The Life of Man Inviolable by the Laws of Christ."

Early in 1812 the friends of peace whom Mr. Dodge had gathered about him in New York conferred upon the forming of a peace society, "wholly confined to decided evangelical Christians, with a view to diffusing peace principles in the churches, avoiding all party questions." There being at this



juncture, however, intense political feeling over the threatened war with Great Britain, they feared their motives would be misapprehended, and decided for the moment simply to act individually in diffusing information. Mr. Dodge was appointed to prepare an essay on the subject of war, stating and answering objections; and, removing at this time to Norwich, he there, in a period of great business perplexity, completed his remarkable paper on "War Inconsistent with the Christian Religion," which was published in the very midst of the war with England.

Upon his return to New York, the friends of peace there had two or three meetings relative to the organization of a society; and in August, 1815, they formed the New York Peace Society, of between thirty and forty members, their strict articles of association condemning all war, offensive and defensive, as wholly opposed to the example and spirit and precepts of Christ. The peace societies formed immediately afterwards in Massachusetts, Ohio, Rhode Island, and London were organized, according to Mr. Dodge, without any knowledge of each other, the movements being the simultaneous separate results of a common impulse. Of the New York society Mr. Dodge was unanimously elected president. Monthly meetings were arranged, and at the first of these Mr. Dodge read an address upon "The Kingdom of Peace under the Benign Reign of Messiah," of which a thousand copies were at once printed and circulated. Within two years the society had increased to sixty members, men active not only against war—which the society regarded as "the greatest temporal evil, as almost every immorality is generated in its prosecution, and poverty, distress, famine,

and pestilence follow in its train”—but in all the benevolent enterprises of that day. “Several respectable clergymen united with the society,—Rev. Drs. E. D. Griffin and M. L. Parvine, Rev. E. W. Baldwin (to whose pen we were much indebted), Rev. Samuel Whelpley, and his son, Rev. Melancthon Whelpley, Rev. H. G. Ufford, and Rev. S. H. Cox. Dr. Cox, however, afterwards entertained different views on the subject.”

The New York Peace Society had friendly correspondence with all the other peace societies, and for several years took two hundred copies of Dr. Worcester’s *Friend of Peace*. This seems finally to have contributed to divide the society, some relinquishing the nonresistant views of Mr. Dodge and adopting Worcester’s less extreme position. But our brave Tolstoian was a “thorough,” and never wavered. “If it was morally wrong for individuals to quarrel and fight, instead of returning good for evil,”—these are his last words on the subject in his autobiography,—“it was much more criminal for communities and nations to return evil for evil, and not strive to overcome evil with good. In fact, the great barrier to our progress was the example of our fathers in the American Revolution. That they were generally true patriots, in the political sense of the term, and many hopefully pious, I would not call in question, while I consider them as ill directed by education as St. Paul was when on his way to Damascus.”

The New York Peace Society maintained its existence and work for many years. In 1828 it united with other societies in the creation of the American Peace Society, which was organized in New York on May 8 of that year on the initiative