1814-04-07

A Discourse on the War with England; Delivered in Hallowell on Public Fast, April 7, 1814

Merritt, Timothy

Eddy and Patrick

http://hdl.handle.net/2144/3905

Boston University
Presented to the
Historical Society
by
Rev. S. E. Lurie
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A DISCOURSE

ON

THE WAR WITH ENGLAND;

DELIVERED

IN

H'LOWELL,

ON

PUBLIC FAST,

APRIL 7, 1814.

BY TIMOTHY MERRITT.

WEATHERSFIELD, Vt.
PRINTED BY Eddy and FERCIv. 

Gener
DISCOURSE.

JUDGES V. 15.

Curse ye Meroz, said the angel of the Lord, curse ye bitterly the inhabitants thereof; because they came not to the help of the Lord, to the help of the Lord against the mighty.

To understand these words, we must consider the context. The children of Israel had now been some years under the yoke of Jabin, king of Canaan, who kept them in awe by his military strength; "for he had nine hundred chariots of iron," i.e. had iron scythes fixed to their sides, that, when furiously driven, they might mow down whomsoever stood in the way. "And the children of Israel cried unto the Lord," and he raised them up a deliverer in Deborah, a prophetess, who "judged Israel at that time." This woman called upon Barak, the son of Abinom, to collect an army and remain for the present near mount Tabor: a wise precaution, as, in case his men were afraid, the mountain would defend them from the chariots of iron. Jabin, seeing these hostile preparations, ordered Sisera, his Captain General,
to go and disperse them. The result of all these movements is given in these words—"And the Lord discomfited Sisera, and all his chariots, and all his host, with the edge of the sword, before Barak; so that Sisera lighted down off his chariot and fled away on his feet." He was not, however, able to escape the avenging hand of God; for going into the tent of Jael, the wife of Heber, the Kenite, he fell ingloriously by the hand of a woman.

Upon this most signal overthrow of Sisera and his army, Deborah composed a triumphant song or ode, in which she acknowledges the miraculous interposition of the providence of God, and speaks of those in the highest straits of commendation who volunteered their services on the occasion. "My heart is toward the governors of Israel, who offered themselves willingly among the people. Bless ye the Lord." (v. 9.) She then proceeds to express her disapprobation of those who withheld themselves from the war. In a beautiful manner she apostrophises the Reubenites, (ver. 10) whose unhappy divisions as well as love of ease and rural occupations, kept them from joining their brethren in the common cause. "why abodest thou among the sheep-folds to hear the bleatings of the flock? For the divisions of Reuben, there were great搜ings of heart." Gilead, or the Gadites, (ver. 17) abode inactive beyond Jordan; while the tribes of Dan and Asher, situated upon the sea-shore, meanly abode by their ships, and busied in their several ports and havens, preferred their ease and the gains of commerce, to the glories of the field, and the recovery of their liberty.

It is sufficiently evident that Meron was a city belonging to one of the tribes; but whether it be the Meron mentioned by Eusebius and Jerome, about twelve miles north of Sebaste, we know not. Thus much we know, the inhabitants of this city refused to join Deborah and Barak in the war against Jabin and were on that account devoted to a curse by the angel, probably the uncreated angel of the covenant—the LORD JESUS CHRIST. See Joshua, v. 14, and vi. 24.

What was implied in this curse, or when it was executed we are not told; but it was an execution full of the displeasure and wrath of Almighty God.

From the text thus considered, I shall take occasion to show, First, That under certain circumstances it is the indispensable duty of a nation to wage war. Second, I will apply this to the present war with Great Britain. Third, I will point out the consequences flowing from an opposition to this war. An address shall close the whole.

You can bear me witness, it is not my general practice to treat upon political subjects in this place, especially upon the Lord's day; but I trust on this occasion I can do it without giving offence. Many, both from the pulpit and the press, are denouncing the present war as unjust; and for myself, believing it to be a righteous war, and having a desire to assist my country in the important struggle, I would raise my voice in her cause.

1. It is the indispensable duty of a nation, under certain circumstances, to wage war.

1. God himself, on some occasions, has explicitly enjoined it in his people to make war. Thus when the children of Israel were going into the land of Canaan, they were commanded to make war upon the Hittites, Gergashites, Amorites, &c.; and the order is contained in these words: "Then shalt smite them, and utterly destroy them; thou shalt make
no covenant with them, nor shew them any mercy.” Deut. vii. 21.

Equally express were the orders given to Saul, king of Israel, against the Amalekites. “Thus saith the Lord of hosts, I remember that which Amalek did to Israel, how he lay wait for him in the way when he came up from Egypt. Now go, smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not; but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass.” 1 Sam. xv. 1, 3.

The most illustrious personages and eminent saints of antiquity, have been the greatest warriors. When Chedor- lammer, king of Elam, with three other kings, came against the cities of the plain and took Lot, who dwelt in Sodom; Abraham, the father of the faithful and the friend of God, pursued them with three hundred and eighteen men, his own servants, and as the sacred historian relates, “smote” them, and “brought back all.” Gen. xiv. And that he was justified in the sight of Heaven, we learn from Melchizedek’s meeting him on his return, and blessing him in the name of “the Most High God.” Yet this was an offensive war on the part of Abraham.

Moses had many wars in the wilderness. He discomfited the Amalekites. God commanded him to “contend with Sihon, king of Heshbon, to battle;” and Moses gives us this account of the war: “And the Lord our God delivered him before us, and we smote him and his sons, and all his people.” Deut. ii. 34, 35. Og, the king of Bashan, was served in a similar way. It is recorded of Joshua, that he “fully followed the Lord;” and yet he made more wars, and subdued more kingdoms than almost any other man. David was a man “after God’s own heart;” and yet he was a man of war during nearly his whole life. Most of his wars were offensive. His kingdom originally was about one hundred and sixty miles in length, from north to south, and from east to west about eighty. But by conquest he extended it from the river Euphrates on the north east, to the Nile on the south west. To these might be added a long list of judges, kings and maccabees who in obedience to the command of God, and under the auspices of his throne, waged successful wars. War, when it is just, is so far from being incompatible with religion, that the priests, sacred officers in the church, were required to assist in their wars; in many of their wars they carried the ark of the covenant, the symbol of the Divine Presence; and on all occasions consulted God, who condescended to give them the most minute instructions as to the time and means of destroying their enemies. And hence their victories seem far less the effects of their skill and military strength, than of his almighty interposition in their favor.

8. God has at many different times expressed his disapprobation of the too great lenity shown to the enemies of his people. Thus when Ahab had slain an hundred thousand Syrians in one day, and Benhadad their king, was fallen into his hands, he formed a treaty of peace and friendship with the heathen king, and dismissed him. But God was displeased, and said, “because thou hast let go out of thy hand a man whom I appointed to utter destruction; therefore thy life shall go for his life, and thy people for his people.” 1 Kings, xx. 43. And when Saul returned from the war against Amalek, bringing sheep and oxen, and Agag the king; God was displeased and sent Samuel to say to him, “hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better
than sacrifice, and to hearken, than the fat of rams. Because
than last rejected the word of the Lord, he hath also rejected
thee from being king.
1 Sam. xv. 22, 13. “And Samuel hewed Agag in pieces before the Lord, in Gilgal,” ver. 5.

Objection. “These things belong to the Mosaic dispensation; but war is inconsistent with the spirit and temper of
christianity.”

To this I answer: If the objection be confined to the
mode of carrying on war in ancient times, and the severity
with which prisoners of war were treated. I acknowledge the
justness of it; but if it mean any thing more, it cannot be sup-
ported. The Jews were the only nation who had the true
knowledge and worship of God among them; and were sur-
rounded by atheists and idolators. In these circumstances they
were not only hated by the surrounding nations, but were con-
tinually exposed to be drawn away from God and his law.
They were, therefore, permitted to exercise a degree of sever-
ity towards their enemies, which could not be justified in
christian nations under different circumstances.

Has Jesus Christ ever told us that all wars under the gos-
pel dispensation, are unjust? He certainly has not; and what
was once just and lawful must remain so still, unless made
void by the same authority which at first established it. We
are indeed told that “wars and fightings come from our lust
that war in our members?” (James iv. 1.) and if we under-
stand the apostle to speak of “wars” in the common accet-
pliation of the term, his words imply that there is always one
wrong side in all wars. But it is much more likely that the
apostle here speaks of the private quarrels and disputes of in-
dividual men. The writers of the New Testament recog-

nize the “powers that be,” and enjoin it upon christians to
submit to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake (2
Pet ii. 13. St. Paul’s words are much to the purpose—
6 Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers; for
there is no power but of God: the powers that be, are ordin-
ed of God. Whosoever, therefore, resisteth the power res-
isteth the ordinance of God, and they that resist shall re-
 receive to themselves damnation. For rulers are not a terror
to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid
of the power? Do that which is good, and thou shalt have
praise of the same: for he is the minister of God to thee
for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for
he beareth not the sword in vain; for he is the minister of God,
a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil.”
Rom. xiii. 1—4. John the Baptist had the most inviting
occasion to disapprove of war, if all wars be wrong, when
the soldiers came to him and said, “and what shall we do?”
But instead of that he evidently approves their profession in
his answer, “Be content with your wages, and do violence
to no man.” Luke iii. 14. And I might add, that all chris-
tians, in every age, with the exception of a single small de-
nomination of recent origin, have held the lawfulness of war in
the sense I now contend for.

II. I will apply this doctrine to the present war with Great
Britain.

I An unjust seizure of persons and property has ever
been considered a just cause for war.

Suppose a foreign nation should send an armed force to
some accessible point in our country, and should carry off
our cattle, pillage our houses, and kidnap our children and
friends, and this practice should be persevered in, would not every one believe it a just cause for war? And where is the mighty difference when these depredations are committed upon the high seas? The seas are the highway of nations; and every one has an equal right. A vessel owned in this country and sailing under the flag of the United States, must be considered in some sense, as under the jurisdiction and within the territory of the United States. The reason is evident. The laws of the country extend to her, and she is bound to obey them. Therefore, the seizure of persons or property on the sea is as criminal as on the land.

1. The principle in this business is what we chiefly look at, and that is the same whether the instances of spoliation and impressment be many or few. Suppose there had been but two instances of impressment. The government which had it in its power to prevent the second and did it not, is accessory to the crime, and shares in the guilt.

But the practice of impressment has been dreadfully aggravated. The forbearance of this government seems only to have provoked aggression. At an early period of our national existence the practice of impressment became the subject of complaint; and although it has been the subject of constant remonstrance and negotiation, and our government have made all the reasonable overtures in their power, for an adjustment, it has been persevered in to the present day.—The number of real Americans impressed amounts to many thousands. Seamen in many instances have been impressed who had protections, and their protections torn to pieces before their eyes, that they might not be produced, afterwards, as evidence of the guilt of the impressing officer, and to show their contempt for our government. When taken on board

his Majesty's ships they have been compelled to enter his service. Some more unyielding, have been put into confinement, kept on allowance of bread and water, and at certain stated periods have been brought to the gang-way and abused and otherwise shamefully treated. It is a common thing to hand them from ship to ship, and send them to foreign stations, to prevent all communication between them and their friends and that the officers of this government might not have it in their power to represent their cases. In some instances they have impressed Swedes, Danes, Portuguese and even Frenchmen. The impressment of foreigners is in some respects a greater insult than the impressment of our own subjects; as in such cases they could not even pretend that we had given protections to their men.

And are not these things a sufficient cause for war? What nation under heaven ever bore so much without declaring war? And if, as I think all are agreed, allegiance and protection are reciprocal obligations of government and subject, this government, having tried all other means in vain, ought to have declared war for the protection of its subjects.

2. Whatever some may think, we have the best precedents for this war. The illustrious patriarch Abraham made war upon four kings for the recovery of Lot, his family and effects; and that too when there was no such obligation subsisting between him and Lot, as that between government and subject. God gave his blessing to the arms of Abraham, and he brought back all; and I have no doubt that he approves of this war, and will also give it his blessing. Another example we have in David. He certainly believed that the unjust seizure of persons and property was a cause that would justify war. The Amalekites came upon Ziklag, burnt the
city, took the people captive, and carried off their goods. David was greatly distressed, and "inquired of the Lord," saying, "Shall I pursue after this troop?"—shall I go to war with them?—"Shall I overtake them?" And he answered him "pursue"—declare war; "for thou shalt surely overtake them, and without fail recover all." David obeyed, and "smote them from the twilight even unto the evening of the next day; and there escaped not a man of them, save four hundred young men which rode upon camels and fled." 

I Sam. xxx. 8, 17. Here we have the will and approbation of God as clearly expressed as we could desire; and as our case is similar, and full as just, we have no reason to doubt his approbation and blessing.

4. As this subject, though clear in itself, has been involved in doubt and uncertainty by the disputes among ourselves, it may be edifying to some to know what was the doctrine held upon this subject by the first administration under the federal constitution.

In 1791 our great and beloved Washington said, by his secretary, "No law forbids the seamen of any country to engage in time of peace on board a foreign vessel: no law authorizes such seamen to break their contract, or the armed vessels of their nation to interpose force for their rescue."—His sentiments are more fully expressed in the following words of the same year. "We entirely reject the proposed mode of certifying our seamen: this is a condition never yet submitted to by any nation: one with which seamen would never have the precaution to comply: the casualties of their sailing would expose them to the constant destruction or loss of this paper evidence, and thus the British government would be armed with legal authority to impress the whole of our seamen." Once more, 1796. "It will be an important point gained if, on the high seas, our flag can protect all of whatever nation, who sail under it. And for this humanity, as well as interest, powerfully pleads."

By these extracts from public documents it appears, that our government are contending for nothing but what was claimed as our right, at the beginning of the federal government. And if, that it would have been better for this country if Congress had never agreed, to "certify" our seamen; because the measure did "arm the British government with legal authority to impress all" our seamen who had not certificates of citizenship, and seemed to concede that they had a right to search our vessels for men. But notwithstanding, it affords us some consolation at the present day, as it is full proof of the earnest desire of this government, for an assurance upon the head of imprisonment, and that no concession which comes short of the whole iniquitous pretensions of Great Britain, will ever satisfy that government.

I will now attend to the objections which are made to this war, and if they can be fairly answered, an important step will be taken towards a union in support of it.

1. It is objected that "we ought not to have declared war." This objection means one of two things: either that we ought to have borne the insults and aggressions of England without resistance, or that we should have resisted without declaring war. But can any candid person suppose we ought to have borne any longer? Did not our country bear the grievances heaped upon us by our enemy, "till the last drop of the cup of consternation was exhausted?" Did not our country "hold fast the olive branch 'till it withered in her hands?" Did not this country bear the wrongs of Britain more than twenty
The sufferings of thousands of our fellow citizens called for relief, and their blood cried from the sea. The tears of many widows and bereaved parents remained upon their faces, and their groans pierced our hearts. If the whole scene of distress, and wretchedness occasioned by the impressment of seamen could be presented at one view, it would be a weight insupportable! Under these circumstances, if the government did not employ more vigorous means to protect their seamen, the blood of the slain, and the sufferings of surviving relations would be required at their hands. To use the language of the good Washington, "humanity, as well as interest, powerfully pleads for this war."

Well, if longer forbearance would have been a fault, ought we not to have made resistance without declaring war? Or in other words, ought we not to have guarded our coasts, armed and defended our merchantmen, without a declaration of war? I conceive not. It had been war on the part of Great Britain for many years; and had we armed merely to defend our trade and protect our coasts, we should have been at war without being able to accomplish our objects, and the case of seamen would have been out of sight and out of dispute. In such a case we should have spoken this disgraceful language to the world, "we value commerce more than the lives of our citizens." Besides, who can suppose that such a measure would have conciliated those men who have denounced every principal measure of the government for more than twelve years past? Would it not rather have furnished them with just ground of complaint? They would doubtless have said, "The government have involved the country in war without a declaration, merely because their reasons and motives for doing so would not bear the light." They therefore chose the wiser course, and made their appeal to the world.

It is said, "we ought not to carry the war into Canada against our brethren." This language is employed to make an impression on the minds of the public, as though to carry the war into Canada were unnatural and cruel; either on account of some relation subsisting between us and the Canadians, or because it is wrong to take from her the colonies of our enemy. I acknowledge the same relation to the Canadians as I do to other descendants of Adam; and on account of their neighborhood to us, and a few emigrations from the United States, especially into the upper province, I really allow them a peculiar share in our affectionate regards; and if they be not found in arms against us, they will be treated as brethren. The object of the war is the subversion of the British government in that quarter, and not the destruction of individuals or their property. If these suffer, their sufferings flow from accidental causes, and not from any enmity in the government toward them.

As to the other part of the objection it is scarcely worthy of the least notice. If it be wrong to carry the war into the colonies of our enemy, it must be wrong to fight her ships at sea and for the same reason: because neither have done us any harm." Or if they have, they have only executed the orders of their government. They are not the authors of our sufferings. So then we must have war, but we must not fight. Nay, but in every age of the world it has been accounted lawful to strike the enemy where he shall feel the most pain, and the soonest be compelled to cease his aggressions.

To these objections one argument is added. "The war is unjust because it has been unsuccessful." This argument...
is so manifestly absurd that it is surprising it should ever be
or unrighteous cause, we can easily prove that the same cause
has been righteous one day and unrighteous the next. The
Israelites was good when they went against Jer-
stroyed Jericho, but fled before the men of Ai. This is not
the age to look for consistency in the conduct of men. The
very people who make use of this argument have always de-
mounced, as most unjust, the wars of the "Crisian usurped,"
as the French Emperor is called, though he has been success-
full until within a few months; and they have considered the
cause of his enemies just, though unsuccessful. There were
times in the revolutionary war in this country when our cause
appeared desperate. Men and money were hard to be obtained.
We gained some victories experiences some defeats and lost
many posts; yet we persevered, and obtained our object at last.
But it is not true that this war has been unsuccessful. We
have done more with the mere remnant of a few, than Great
Britain has done, in the same time, with her "thousand" ships of war.
We have taken from the enemy several of this
strong posts, one entire fleet, and nearly the whole of one
army. These with other successes, and some defeats, are cer-
tainly more than we had any reason to expect in so short a
time, when war was declared. For many years the people of
this country had turned their attention wholly to the arts of
peace, and neglected those of war. We had, therefore, to be
in our preparation after war was declared. The want of
preparation has often been made an objection to the war; but
it results from the very nature of our government, and could
not be otherwise. The people of this country will never go
to the expense of preparing for war until their enemy is design-
med, and war becomes unavoidable.

11. I come now in the third place to consider what may
be the consequence of refusing to take a part in this war, and
of opposing our own government. I say consequence; be-
cause I would not apply the strong imprecatory language of
the text to my countrymen. I dare not curse any man or
body of men. I leave that part to inspired, infallible prophets
and apostles. A curse is not the object of my wishes, but I
must confess it is the subject of my fears.

1. Our divisions and the opposition among ourselves have
a natural tendency to prolong our difficulties. What good
can possibly arise from the opposition to this war? It appears
to have for its object to coerce the government into a peace
upon the conditions of our enemy. But would that be right
in the sight of God? It is as manifestly wrong as it would be
for the minority in any corporation whatever, to undertake to
force the majority into their own views, from any legal meas-
ures they had taken. Besides, it ought to be considered that
our rulers are men—men of like passions with ourselves; and
therefore such indirect opposition is more likely to excite
revenge than produce peace.

But what effect, is this opposition likely to have upon our
enemy? If we advocate his doctrine, justify his conduct, and
condemn our own government, is it likely to abate any thing
of his iniquitous claims and pretensions, or dispose him to a
peace upon just and reasonable terms?

1. It has a tendency to paralyze the energies of the nation,
and therefore weaken and exhaust our resources. Humani-
ty and interest require that every war should be brought to
as speedy a conclusion as possible; because the longer any
war is protracted the more lives and property are destroyed, and the greater the amount of the necessary expenses.

3. Our opposition will bring us into disgrace in the eyes of foreign nations. History, both ancient and modern, informs us of the fall of states and empires, and their causes; and shall we be so stupid as not to avoid the danger when it is placed before our eyes? It is as true now, as it ever was, that a "kingdom divided against itself, cannot stand."

Ours is not only the best tempered republic that ever existed, but the only one remaining upon earth; and can we wish to see the last blotted out from under heaven! The great objection to republican governments is, that "they are destitute of energy." But we know, that they may possess as much energy as is consistent with rational liberty. It is not surprising that those whose interest it is should plead for despotic governments; but is it not singular that we should say to the world, "we are tired of a free government, and of liberty, and sigh to return to the prison-house of despotism and bondage!"

4. We may defeat the object of the war and bring upon ourselves the curses of future ages. Those who oppose the present war take upon themselves responsibility which may become very inconvenient to them in a future day. Should this government be compelled to settle a peace, without obtaining security for our seamen, (which I pray God they may not do) what will be the consequences? Why, certainly, that impressions will be multiplied with reiterated and increased aggravations. The haughty Britons will become more insolent; and we may expect that hundreds for tens, and thousands for hundreds of native Americans will be impressed and forced into their "sea service," a condition beyond all comparison worse than Egyptian bondage. And in such an event where will the guilt fall? On whose heads will the curses of the miserable sufferers come down? Certainly not on the government; they have done all in their power to obtain security for this class of men. The responsibility rests on those who have opposed the war, and defeated its end. This reminds me of those Jews who clamored against the life of our Saviour, and said, "His blood be on us, and on our children."

—"Father forgive them for they know not what they do."

Lastly, we shall provoke heaven by lightly esteemed real national character and blessings. These are the gifts of God, though we obtained them by a long and distressing war. This consideration alone should make them dear to us. They cost us much blood and treasure. The ingratitude of the Israelites is recorded to their eternal disgrace. "In their hearts they turned back to Egypt," and would have parted with their independence and liberty, rather than encounter the dangers of war, and the hardships of a march through the wilderness. And shall we do worse than they? We have given up, and prohibited the African slave trade; and shall we sit down quietly and see our citizens, our sons and our brothers, treated worse than African slaves? God has given us independence, and vested us with the attribute of sovereignty—and for what? No doubt that we might contend for the blessings of his grace, and hand them, unimpaired, to our children. If then we prefer our ease, and the "filthy lucre" of commerce, to the lives and liberty of our citizens, will He look down well-pleased?
We have felt the tokens of the divine displeasure, and do actually now labor under them; and shall we say that the President and Congress, and the friends of the war, have alone procured these? Have our ingratitude and love of the world had no share in them? Have our disputes, and our contempt for the cause and authority of our country had no hand in procuring them? Are we then innocent when we misrepresent every measure of our own government, and without the least shadow of evidence ascribe to our rulers the influence of motives the most unworthy? Is it well done when we exaggerate the errors and faults of our own government, and palliate, or justify, the wrongs and injustice of our enemy? These are questions, the candid consideration of which, would humble us into the dust, wring our hearts with sorrow for our unhappy divisions, unite us all in the common cause, and dissipate the portentous cloud that has so long hung over our heads. And how infinitely desirable is such an event!

The subject of the foregoing discourse is susceptible of the most easy application to those who have just entered into the service of their country—a number of whom are present. Your cause is just. Of this you can have no doubt, after attending to what has been said. It is necessary you should be satisfied of this; for this will give firmness to your nerves, and fortitude to your minds, in the day of battle. When you come to the fight you will remember that Abraham and David, Moses and Joshua, fought before you. Did they contend for national character and independance? So do you. Did they contend for the lives and liberty of their brethren? So do you. Did they contend under the favor and approba-

* A body of new Recruits for Col. Loring's Regiment.

...
cessary to the performance of those duties. Shun those vices which are so common among men of your profession, especially profaneness and intemperance: and let it never be said that the honor of the country is committed into the hands of those "who fear not God, nor regard man."

Finally. Be assured that you carry with you the affectionate regards and best wishes of your friends. I speak not merely of wives, which some of you may have left behind; nor of the parents and sisters from whom others of you are separated for a while; but I speak of the great body of the people who know the cause to be just, and wish you success. Whole congregations will commend you to the great all-wise and powerful Preserver and Saviour of men. The ministers of the gospel will publicly bear you to the throne of grace; while thousands of pious souls will daily implore the protection and favor of a mighty God for you. Therefore, go forth trusting in the Lord. And may you soon return, with honor and victory, to receive the praises, and share in the gratitude of your insulted and injured country; and at last hear the judge of all the earth say, "Well done, good and faithful servants, enter ye into the joy of your Lord." AMEN.