230 Soldier, Military Service, Serving in the Military (*Miles, Militia, Militancium*)

These are of diverse genres. For certain ones are in warfare against us, and certain ones with us make war against us: the flesh, the world, and the devil. The flesh tempts us, now in turn to burn us with the fire of lust fashioning delight, now to lay the foundation with the weight of gluttony pretending necessity, now to starve us by the idleness of sloth pretending quietness, 1 Pet. 2[:11]: “I beseech you to refrain yourselves from carnal desires which war against the soul.” This was signified through Nabuzardan who destroyed the walls with his army of tribulation [4 Kings 25:10], now terrorized the narrows, now tied up the negotiators, now hauled off the community, Job 10[:17]: “And pains war against me.” [2] Tim. 2[:4]: “No man, being a soldier to God, entangles himself with secular businesses.” This is figured by Naaman the prince of the soldiers of Syria, 4 Kings 5[:1]. The devil with his army of iniquity now pretends lofty things in order he may show pride. Now pretending the judgments of God have been destroyed in order that he may command, or now introducing things impossible to be believed in order that he may make an error, Job 6[:4]: “The terrors of the Lord war against me,” that is, the blows of the devil permitted by God.

Second, deeds war for you with the army of virtues, some with the arms of obedience, Matt. 8[:9]: “Having under me soldiers; and I say to this, Go, and he goes, and to another, Come,” etc. Likewise, the vigor of soldiers becomes conspicuous when man makes himself small and defends himself and this is great.

Second, when he subdues his adversary and conquers him and this is great.

Third, when he liberates his people and protects them and this is the greatest. According to these three the can commend any servant, namely, for the defense of his own, the assault of the adversary, and the liberation of the people.

¶ Again, some fight under the arms of patience, as martyrs, Job 14[:14]: “All the days in which I am now in warfare, I expect.” Concerning some under arms of penance as confessors, 2 Cor. 10[:3]: “Though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh.” Others under the arms of wisdom as teachers of sacred matters, [1] Tim. 1[:18-19]: “You war in them a good warfare, having faith.”

Again, concerning the state of all men toward the order of the saints, some are taken up and none excused himself or is hopeless. For no one is only a monk and abbot, no one is only a cleric and pontiff, but also lay and soldiers are called to glory. And just as the earthly king has diverse places, because some of joy and a marriage chamber where he rests with his spouse, some of sadness as a prison where he thrusts those doing evil, some of pain on the gallows where he afflicts the evil, some of fighting as the field of war, some of justice where he decrees judgments. Therefore, the eternal king has a place of joy where he glorifies the elect, namely, paradise, a place of sadness where he tortures the reprobate, namely, hell, a place of fighting where he examines all, namely, the world. Wherefore also joy is the life of man above in heaven, sadness is the life of man under the earth, but “The life of man upon earth is a warfare,” Job 7[:1].

Therefore, the place apt for the fight is the high region. And deservedly in order that they may fight the elements there by doing and suffering morally. Wherefore also according to the number of elements, four kinds of men are found to be fed in the four places, because some are buried in the earth, another is drowned in the waters, some are burned in fire, some are suspended in the air. Wherefore also all rational creatures can be called soldiers of God, but some are enervated as angels, the good and chosen men, some are ordained for the fight. Wherefore also Christ can say that in Matt. 8[:9]: “For I also am a man subject to authority, having under me soldiers; and I say to this, Go,” etc., however much to those fighting and my servant, make as much to those enervated, Job 7[:1]:

¶ “The life of man upon earth is a warfare.” Wherefore the church militant are separated from the triumphant. Wherefore Paul says, [2] Tim. 2[:3-4]: “Labor as a good soldier of Christ.” However, he is not good who does not labor in war or who confederates himself with the enemies of his Lord because of what the Apostle said previously there: “No man, being a soldier to God, entangles himself with secular businesses.” According to Seneca, first book of the *Declamationes* 8,[[1]](#endnote-1) There was a law among the Romans that whoever performed bravely in the military he would be at ease further. So spiritually, whoever performs the three parts of penance can be at ease. The figure for this is in 2 Kings 13[:38], David did not permit Absalom to return to him in Jerusalem until he had waged war for three years in Gessur, so it is necessary for us to make war against our three enemies the world, the flesh, and the devil.

¶ For according to Seneca, *Epistula* 88,[[2]](#endnote-2) to be nurtured rudely is worth more to the military than to be nurtured softly. So as far as the first enemy Valerius Maximus says,[[3]](#endnote-3) concerning the emperor Valentius that on the day of his death he gloried most greatly about that victory of his, namely, having conquered the flesh, for he died as a virgin octogenarian. 1 Pet. 2[:11]: “I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, to refrain yourselves from carnal desires which war against the soul.”

¶ Concerning the second enemy, James 4[:1]: “From whence are wars and contentions among you? Are they not hence, from your concupiscences, which war in your members?”

Concerning the third warfare, the devil who made war in heaven and was thrust onto the earth, and thus his warfare is life [1] Tim. 1[:18-19]: “War in them a good warfare, having faith.” Seneca, in the first book of *Declamationes* chap. 8,[[4]](#endnote-4) treats because Themistides forcefully waged war in the Persian war was made the leader of Athens although he blotted out notice of his abdication which previously, he had incurred on account of the vices of his youth. So rejected by God, he can destroy that through following good works.

1. Seneca the Elder, *Controversiae* 1.8 Ter Fortis (LCL 463:176-177): Qui ter fortiter fecerit, militia vacet. Ter fortem pater in aciem quarto volentem exire retinet; nolentem abdicat.

Three Times a Hero

Anyone who has acted heroically three times shall be exempt from military service.

A father tries to stop a man who has acted heroically three times and wants to go to fight a fourth time. The son refuses; he disinherits him. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Seneca, *Epistles* 82.2 (LCL 76:240-241): I, qua ire coepisti et in isto te vitae habitu conpone placide, non molliter. Male mihi esse malo quam molliter; male1 nunc sic excipe, quemadmodum a populo solet dici: dure, aspere, laboriose. Audire solemus sic quorundam vitam laudari, quibus invidetur: “molliter vivit”; hoc dicunt: “mollis est.” Paulatim enim effeminatur animus atque in similitudinem otii sui et pigritiae, in qua iacet, solvitur. Quid ergo? Viro non vel obrigescere satius est? Deinde idem delicati timent, cui vitam suam fecere similem.

Proceed as you have begun, and settle yourself in this way of living, not luxuriously, but calmly. I prefer to be in trouble rather than in luxury; and you had better interpret the term “in trouble” as popular usage is wont to interpret it: living a “hard,” “rough,” “toilsome” life. We are wont to hear the lives of certain men praised as follows, when they are objects of unpopularity: “So-and-So lives luxuriously”; but by this they mean: “He is softened by luxury.” For the soul is made womanish by degrees, and is weakened until it matches the ease and laziness in which it lies. Lo, is it not better for one who is really a man even to become hardened? Next, these same dandies fear that which they have made their own lives resemble. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Valerius Maximus, cf. Walter Map, *De nugis curialium* Dist. 4 cap. 3 (James, p. 150): Valencius imperator octogenarius et adhuc uirgo, cum audisset die fati sui preconia triumphorum suorum recoli, quibus ipse fuerat frequentissimus, ait se trantum una uictoria gloriari, et requisitus ‘Qua?’ respondit ‘Qua inimicorum ne4quissimum domui carnem meam.’ Amice hic imperator inglorius migrasset a seculo, nisi ei fortiter restitisset cum qua tu familiariter assensum pepigisti. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Seneca the Elder, *Controversiae* 1.8 Marulli (LCL 463:184-185): Sine me aliquod meritum in patriam conferre: adhuc militia mea legis munus est. Pugnabo et abdicatus, nec verebor ne inutilis sit opera mea patriae, Athenienses abdicato vicerunt duce: quantum inter me et illum interest! ille abdicationem virtute delevit, ego merui.

Marullus. Allow me to do some service to the state. Up to now my campaigning has been a duty owed to the law.—I will fight even if I am disinherited, without being afraid that my action is profitless to the state. The Athenians conquered with a leader who had been disinherited. What a gulf between him and me! He cancelled disinheritance by his courage, I merited it by mine. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)