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The Right to Live

J. A. PERRONE, M.D.

When a patient wants to be kept alive as long as possible notwithstanding his suffering, this is his right, and the doctor must use his skill to comply. When the patient would have nature take its course and only extraordinary means will keep him alive, he may refuse such means; this also is his right. Here the responsibility and authority of the physician ends. The physician cannot and should not take it upon himself to be the executioner. The right to life is God-given and anything which affects this right must follow His laws.

There is an anti-God philosophy in the world today which is also anti-human. It is thinking which, if accepted, would impede medical science and turn us backward toward barbarianism. It would destroy our profession, wipe out all we have accomplished in the past and prevent any progress in the future. It is a philosophy which would make us enemies, instead of friends, of mankind, recommending the infliction of death on a person judged to be suffering from a painful and incurable disease.

The advocates of this philosophy have found a delicate name for it. They call it euthanasia. We who prefer truth are not deceived nor does the name conceal the ugliness of the deed. Euthanasia is murder.

We know that it is wrong because it is forbidden by God; because it is an insult to the Creator; because

we, who cannot give life, have not the right to take it away. It is all quite evident to us, because we see with the eyes of faith, and seeing with the eyes of faith, we see with the eyes of God.

However, there are those to whom it is not clear. There are those who do not have the faith. There are those whose understanding is merely human. What shall we say to them? We shall ask them one question: "What would be the state of medicine if euthanasia had been accepted in the past?" And with that question, their whole structure of falsehood crumbles.

They say that they are humanitarians. They are not. Their philosophy is anti-humanitarian. Even from a purely humanitarian standpoint, it is false. For if euthanasia were to be accepted now, there would be few real advances in medicine. And if it had been adopted a thousand years ago, or five thousand years ago, there would be no medical science worthy of the name today.

To understand this thoroughly, we must fix firmly in our minds what euthanasia is. It is scientific murder. It is the suicide of medical science. It is the complete perversion of everything that medicine means. It would turn our profession wrong side out and set it to destroying itself. Rather than healers, we would be killers. Rather than life-bearers, we should become merchants of

death. Rather than saviors, destroyers. No longer harbingers of hope, we would be counsellors of despair.

The thing is so abominable that the normal mind shrinks from plumbing its ugly depths. It would take the very means which we have developed for saving lives and distort them to the service of death.

Your prophet of euthanasia will pose as the friend of man. He will tell you that he speaks only of extreme cases. He will appeal to sentimentality, assuring you that his purpose is to relieve suffering, that his vile philosophy would become operative only in hopeless cases.

Those of us who seriously consider the term are well aware of how far "hopeless" could be extended.

Even humanly speaking, it is wrong. We who have dedicated our lives to the conquest of disease admit no case to be hopeless. The white flag of surrender is no part of our equipment. And it is precisely because of this — because through the ages we have fought the good fight against hopeless odds that we have conquered. Everything that we have accomplished . . . everything we can do to relieve pain . . . all that we know about healing has resulted from this one fact, that we have never lost hope. We have never surrendered. We have never cast down our weapons of mercy and shown the white feather of cowardice. Suppose we had! Suppose that the great men of the past, instead of fighting every inch of

the way against every disease threatening mankind had yielded to the ugly whisper that it is useless?

What if Galen and Paracelsus and Harvey had been infected and paralyzed by this lie? Or Pasteur, or Lister, or Robert Koch, or Walter Reed? Or all the others whose splendid names shine like stars in the flag that has often been tattered, but never lowered?

What if Jenner had believed that his mission in life was not to cure hopeless ailments, but to destroy his victims? Not more than eighty years ago, James Simpson estimated that Jenner's vaccination had saved more lives than the Napoleonic wars had taken — some five or six millions. How many lives would Jenner have saved had he adopted the cowardly device of euthanasia and, like Pilate, washed his hands in the blood of patients?

To come closer home, what could we say to anguished parents today, had Chevalier Jackson shrugged his shoulders hopelessly and, instead of developing bronchoscopy, advised euthanasia for children in whose lungs foreign objects had lodged?

Examples might be multiplied endlessly. Not long ago, diabetes was a "hopeless" affliction. Then came Banting — and insulin. Diphtheria was the scourge of childhood — until conquered by Behring, Kitasato, Schick, and Park. Only recently pneumonia has begun to yield to antibiotics. Because medical men would not cry "Quits!" typhoid, cholera, bubonic plague, smallpox

and a host of other "hopeless" diseases have been brought under control.

The world has recently been ravaged by the most terrible of wars. On every battlefield, doctors and nurses labored night and day to relieve suffering and to heal the wounded. Because of them, how many sons returned to their mothers? How many fathers to their children? How many husbands to their wives? We know not. But because we have turned a deaf ear to the prophets of despair, we can lift up our hearts and reply that none will die who, with the help of God, can be saved.

The history of medicine is bright with the names of brave men and women who have fought for mankind and won — because they would give no quarter to death and no heed to the philosophies of doom.

We are all enlisted in this crusade. We go with God into the thick of the battle. From time to time we hear of new "miracles" of medical science. And we remember that there are no "miracles" without the help of God.

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