

CONSCIENCE AND THE WAR

IN PERHAPS all the armies participating in the present war men have been shot or imprisoned as a penalty for refusing on conscientious grounds to take up arms as soldiers. We are not, therefore, to think of the British course at the present time on this subject as extreme. The fact is that, so far as we are aware, the United States and Great Britain are the only countries which have proposed by their law to recognize conscientious scruples on the part of their citizens as a reasonable basis for being excused from military duty.

Of course, no country forces aliens into the army; and were it recognized that true Christians are aliens as respects earthly governments, the whole question might solve itself. The Bible Students' claim is that the followers of Jesus have their citizenship in Heaven, and that by giving their obedience to the Heavenly Lord they renounce in a degree their allegiance to earthly kings – governments. It is for this reason that we have long advocated that the fully consecrated abstain from voting on political issues. If they so vote, they are identifying themselves with the earthly kingdoms, and might properly enough be called upon to shoot as they vote – to support the government which they helped to create.

On the other hand, the Scriptural proposition is that while our citizenship is in Heaven and we are aliens, strangers and foreigners in the world, with allegiance to the Heavenly King, nevertheless, like all other foreigners, we are to be subject to the powers that be – subject to the laws of the country in which we may be living. But if obedience to the laws does not imply military service on the part of the foreigner, so obedience to the laws on the part of Bible Students does not imply military duty. Similarly with the oath of allegiance required by those who enter the army – they are required to swear

allegiance to the king and obedience to the officers of the king in all things. This oath is not required of aliens, foreigners, and is objected to by Bible Students, not because they are opposed to law and order or unwilling to be regulated by the government under which they live, but because they have already given allegiance to the higher power – the Heavenly Lord. To them His words, His commands, etc., are paramount.

Of course, such aliens could not object to deportation, nor make any stand for personal rights which any other alien of any other government might not request.

PUBLIC SENTIMENT AROUSED

The papers inform us that the matter of conscientious objectors to military service is deeply stirring the British people and has led to several wordy battles in Parliament. The claim made is that the laws of Great Britain provide for the consciences of all British subjects and that while these laws seem to be complied with, by the appointment of commissioners to hear the conscientious objections, nevertheless the laws are really disregarded, because the judges appointed are military judges, whose interests are not judicial but military. Some of those who refused on conscientious grounds were sentenced to prison for two years at hard labor. Others were forced to put on military uniform, and were kicked and bruised by companions in the ranks, either because of their conscientious loyalty to the Word of the great King or because they refused to swear allegiance to the British king and obedience to **[R5928 : page 221]** his officers. Others were sent to the army in France, the threat being made that if they did not do their duty they would be shot forthwith.

All this is arousing British sentiment on this subject – for and against warfare. No doubt the courage, the witness, the martyr spirit on the part of the Lord's consecrated people will exercise a great influence and will lead to a more careful study of the commands of

our King and the rules governing all who are under His banner. Whatever hardships may come to these dear brethren, we believe that a blessing will result in showing forth the praises of Him who has called us out of darkness into His marvelous light.

In the meantime, it is not for us to exert force in opposition, nor to shout loudly about our rights. We are to remember that, in becoming soldiers of the Cross, we voluntarily gave up all earthly rights in order that we might be participators with the Captain of our salvation, who permitted all of His rights to be taken from Him, even unto death. As the followers of Jesus are made a spectacle to the world and to angels, they are also permitted to strengthen and build up one another in the most holy faith by their love and zeal for the Lord and His Message. We may well remember our privilege of praying one for another under such circumstances. We may not pray for the Lord to hinder others or ourselves from having trials or tests along these lines, for it is for the Divine Wisdom to determine what these shall be, but it is our privilege to pray for each other and for ourselves – to pray for that grace to help in every time of need which the Lord has promised He will grant. – Hebrews 4:16.

May a very faithful witness, then, be given with great humility and with great sympathy to those who take a different view from ourselves! They hold that Christ's Kingdom has been set up; and that the present kings of Europe are of Divine appointment, as they claim upon their coins, and that for them to be at war is for God's Kingdom to be at war; and that their soldiers are God's soldiers. Inconsistently they fail to see that if their contentions be true, God's Kingdom is divided and God is fighting against Himself! A little while, and the dawning of the New Dispensation will be clearer. Then all nations will come to see that the need of mankind is the Rule of the Heavenly Lord with all power. By that time the Bride of Christ will have passed beyond the veil. Crowns of glory and palms of victory will have been bestowed, and the time for blessing the world of mankind will have come.

