

MILITARISM AND CONSCIENCE

WHILE Christians are enjoined to be subject to the "Powers that be" – the kings, governors, magistrates, etc. – nevertheless this is not to be understood as meaning the renouncement of our fidelity to the King of kings and Lord of lords. He is our Over-Lord. Our allegiance to earthly lords and powers and their commands is merely to the extent that they do not conflict with the commands of our Over-Lord. The Jews in renouncing Jesus cried, "We have no king but Caesar"! The Christian's position is, "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, but unto God the "things that are God's". Whenever Caesar and his laws conflict with the Divine requirements, all true soldiers of the Cross are left no alternative.

It is not for us to set up standards for others. Conscience is an individual matter. It would be as wrong for Bible Students to antagonize earthly governments, and to oppose enlistments in the army and navy under the call of earthly governments, as it would be wrong for others to force their opinions upon Bible Students, contrary to our consciences. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind. Bible Students are to remember that they are citizens of the Heavenly Kingdom and are not to specially insist upon their earthly rights, except such as might be reasonably expected by foreigners. Messiah's Kingdom is not to be established by the sword of Bible Students, nor by their angry declamations against others, nor by their violation of the laws of the land in which they may be residing, nor by any hostility to the governments which undertake to guarantee their lives and happiness. We are to be subject to these governments. We are to appreciate them. But all this will not break our relationship to the Heavenly King and His commands. These come first with Bible Students – each according to his own conscience in respect to the meaning of the Lord's Word.

At the present time in Great Britain many of the dear Brethren are enduring trying experiences with great loyalty. Imprisonment at hard labor is severe punishment for a law-abiding alien who merely refuses to engage in war because his Over-Lord has so commanded. Yet the sufferings of the faithful are, perhaps, still greater in other directions. One is in a very trying position when the finger of scorn is pointed at him; when he is proclaimed a coward; when he is discharged from the employment which brings him daily bread, while others who take to the sword are cheered. Not questioning the valor and courage in the latter, we believe that it requires still more courage to be in the ranks of the former – to stand loyal to the King of kings when opposed by the scorn of our neighbors and friends.

We are sure, nevertheless, that the Lord is bringing a blessing to all who are seeking faithfully to know and to do his will. We believe, moreover, that a witness is thus going out in a great land to a great people – to a God-fearing people as a whole – such as they have not had since the days of persecution. How much the Lord may use present experiences for the finding and ripening of the wheat class of the British people is not for us to say.

The Brethren of the London Office have very properly bestirred themselves to meet the conditions prevailing around them. They have sent out letters to the different Classes advising that the regularly-elected Elders of the Class may properly claim exemption from military duty as ministers of the Gospel, and advising that they so report when called upon and that the Classes report the names of their Elders. A petition signed by about five thousand has been forwarded to the Government as follows:

**A PETITION
TO THE RT. HON. H.H. ASQUITH, M.P.**

SIR: – We, the undersigned Members of the International Bible Students Association, beg to present this Petition on behalf of the

young men, associated with us in Christian fellowship, who are affected by the Military Service Measures now in operation, but whose deep religious convictions prohibit their engaging in such service. Many have already proved their fidelity to conscience by suffering, and their numbers are being augmented daily. We know of none who, were they given the opportunity, would refuse work of National importance under the supervision of the Committee appointed by the Government.

We earnestly petition that those who conscientiously feel bound to refuse military service of any description may be recognized as loyal and law-abiding citizens, and be given an opportunity of effective service for the country apart from the machine of war, and that they be not treated as criminals.

Your good offices and influence to end the present intolerable situation will be ever greatly appreciated by each of the undersigned:

SIGNED BY 5,000.

Accompanying this petition and signatures went the following letter. We have not yet learned the outcome. Our prayer is that the Lord's will shall be done, that His name shall be glorified and that His people shall be sustained [R5930 : page 222] with the necessary strength and grace to meet whatever Divine providence may permit. The situation of our Brethren in Great Britain may possibly find some parallel later amongst the Brethren in Australia and in Canada. And who knows but that the same conditions may ultimately prevail here in the United States? How thankful we are for the Divine promise, "My grace is sufficient for thee; My strength is made perfect in weakness"!

**CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTORS
TO THE RT. HON. H.H. ASQUITH, M.P.**

SIR: – As a British Chartered Association known as The International Bible Students Association, and as law-abiding citizens of the United Kingdom, we desire to petition you, the Head of His Majesty's Government, craving your good offices to secure consideration at the hands of the Government for those members of this Association whose consciences will not permit of their undertaking Military duties of any description, to the intent that they be granted permission to undertake work of National importance as prescribed by the Government Committee, and already granted to some other citizens who are also Conscientious Objectors on similar grounds. We think it right to explain that no pressure of any kind against Militarism is brought to bear upon its members by this Association; all alike are free to act as led by their own conscience, so that their cases are those of genuine personal conviction.

At the present time there are at least 40 of our members in Military Prisons under sentences varying from a few days to two years with hard labor, and we are informed that eight have been sent to France. These men state that nothing can cause them to change their attitude towards Militarism, and their actions, thus far, are in harmony with this statement. Almost every day adds to the number incarcerated, and the extension of the Act to affect married men will increase the number still more in the future. Permit us to submit for consideration the fact that these men are at present an expense to the Country and a trouble to the Authorities, whereas their services are available for the public weal if permitted to undertake work apart from Military control.

We feel it is only proper to state that this Association, which is affiliated in its religious work with the WATCH TOWER BIBLE AND TRACT SOCIETY of America, is not allied with any other body – political or religious – which is opposed to Militarism, and to state further that we have no intention of allying ourselves with any such body.

Accompanying this we send lists containing 5,000 signatures to this Petition; also a list of names of those of our members known to us as being incarcerated, praying the Government to extend to these their clemency by granting them also the desired exemption from Military control.

Yours faithfully,

INT. BIBLE STUDENTS ASS'N.

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