

**THE EARLY CHRISTIAN
ATTITUDE TO WAR : A
CONTRIBUTION TO THE
HISTORY OF CHRISTIAN ETHICS**

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The Early Christian Attitude to War : A Contribution to the History of Christian Ethics by C. John Cadoux & W. E. Orchard

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A CONTRIBUTION TO THE
HISTORY OF CHRISTIAN ETHICS

BY

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WITH A FOREWORD BY THE
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**TO
MY WIFE**

O glorious Will of God, unfold
The splendour of Thy Way,
And all shall love as they behold
And loving shall obey,
Consumed each meaner care and claim
In the new passion's holy flame.

O speed the hours when o'er the world
The vision's fire shall run ;
Night from his ancient throne is hurled,
Uprisen is Christ the Sun ;
Through human wills by Thee controlled,
Spreads o'er the earth the Age of Gold.

REV. G. DARLASTON.

FOREWORD

THIS is a book which stands in need of no introduction ; it will make its own way by the demand for such a work, and by the exact and patient scholarship with which that demand has here been met. For we have no work in this country which effectively covers this subject ; Harnack's *Militia Christi* has not been translated, but it will probably be found that the present work fills its place.

But it is not only the need for this work (of which scholars will be aware), but the serious importance of the subject, which will make the book welcome. Argument for and against the Christian sanction of war has had to be conducted in the past few years in an atmosphere in which the truth has had small chance of emerging. Dr. Cadoux has his own convictions on this subject, which he makes no attempt to conceal ; he believes that he is supported by the early uncorrupted instincts of Christianity, which here he sets out before us ; but his personal conviction has never been allowed to conceal facts or make them out to be other than they are. He not only gives all the evidence on the opposite side, but he everywhere allows for influences and motives which might weaken the force of the facts which seem to support his own position. The work is impartial in the only way such a work ever can be, not because the

author is without convictions, but because he has a profound reverence for truth and possesses a keen scholarly conscience.

Here, then, is a survey of the early Christian attitude towards war which must be read and pondered. It takes us back to a time when life seems, at least to us, less complicated; it shows us faith working largely through instinct, often reinforced by crude thinking and poor reasoning, and yet faith which was prepared to pay the price of life itself, and an instinct which is deeply planted in our humanity, namely the instinct against bloodshed, unsophisticated by argument. Few will be able to read the story without feeling that here as on other subjects the Christian faith was acting more purely and powerfully than ever since. We need not hold that Christendom has been one long story of relapse and apostasy to be able to recognize the essentially supernatural gift not only in Christ our Lord, but in the classical prime of Christianity, with its glorious apostles, saints, and martyrs. Those early days will ever speak to us, however much farther we may progress; to them we must return again and again, not necessarily to discover a final and fixed standard, either for thought or practice, but certainly whenever we want to renew our faith and see again the vision of what Christianity was meant to be.

Whether the evidence of the early Christian attitude can provide any guidance for Christians in the twentieth century is a question into which other considerations have to enter. Dr. Cadoux has effectually shown that the false apocalyptic hopes of those times did not determine the attitude taken up; he has not shown, as I think he might, how a translation of that apocalyptic

hope into the belief in the swift possibility of great moral change and spiritual advance, is one sanctioned by modern thought, and provides again that atmosphere of expectation and faith in which alone great adventures can be made ; he has preferred to keep the whole subject free from any such entanglement. But he has shown how an uncritical view of the Old Testament revelation tended to embarrass and corrupt the pure Christian instinct on the subject of war. This view, save for one or two recent examples of adoption for war emergencies, has now almost totally disappeared ; and since a humaner belief concerning God's methods of purgation in another world is demanded by the enlightened conscience, we are left with that first Christian instinct about war only further supported by modern belief ; and this, it should be noted, without reducing God's love to mere leniency and sentimentality. God has His ways of punishing, but they are as different from man's as the heavens are higher than the earth ; and where man's most conspicuously fail, there is ground for hope that God's will in the end succeed.

The only real objection which can be urged against the revival of the early Christian attitude is that Christianity has accepted the State, and that this carries with it the necessity for coercive discipline within and the waging of war without ; in which disagreeable duties Christians must as citizens take their part. To refuse this will expose civilization to disaster. It may perhaps serve to provoke reflection to notice in passing that this was the argument of Celsus and is the general attitude which determines German thought on this subject. The truth is that the way of war, if persisted in, is going to destroy civilization anyhow, and the continual demand