

89

Price 1d.

# SHOULD A CHRISTIAN FIGHT?

I have just been listening to the delightful and pre-eminently sane Romanes Lecture for this year, and from it I should like to extract a sentence of Sir Donald Tovey's which I would ask every reader of this article to remember when he has forgotten my comments upon it. It is this: "*The normal solution of all conflicts will be mutual service and here alone shall we find perfect freedom.*"

Life is conditioned by conflict. The living organism which would escape from conflict—whether it be a man or a blade of grass—seeks death and can find release from conflict only in death. But the aim of life is not conflict: life seeks its own perfection, which is the continuous resolution of conflict and the manifestation of the organism itself through the process of solving its conflicts. Peace, perfect peace is not an impossible ideal but a condition of things in which the conflicts of organisms are being continually overcome by the perfect service which they render to one another. This service is perfect freedom because by it alone is each organism fully enabled to manifest its own inherent nature. Peace is thus a condition of life—the highest, and not a resultant death.

The question therefore "Should a Christian fight?" may be answered at once. No, he should not fight because by so doing he does not even seek to bring into mutual service those elements of the conflict of which he himself is one. In fighting he endeavours rather to annihilate that with which he has come into conflict, and must therefore perpetuate the conflict until such time as he has succeeded in destroying every opposing element. This he can never do; for energy can never destroy energy, it can only displace it.

The truism "War never solves anything" sums up this argument. That we should take part in war after we have logically and fully realized that the conflict which lies behind it cannot possibly be resolved by war is the matter of difference between militarists and pacifists. But the necessity for finding solution to conflict by overcoming it is laid upon both parties alike, and the pacifism which would retire from the conflict and make no contribution to its solution is not pacifism at all but mere death-acceptance. That is clear to the militarist, but what is not so clear to him is that no conflict can be resolved by anyone who does not pause to consider the essential nature of the elements in conflict. And it is because this pause so often presents itself to the traditional mind (habituated

as it is to the idea that the mere explosion of energy may be useful conflict) as a cowardly retirement from natural conflict, that pacifism is so often rejected by people of the highest moral integrity. They hold that the theory of the Cross is all right, but that in practice it doesn't work.

"Nobody wants war, but under some circumstances, what else can you do?" That is the position of those who seek to justify their persistent preparation for war. And it is a question which the pacifist must answer clearly and without equivocation if he is to commend his doctrine to the minds of reasonable people.

Now the teaching of Jesus Christ is distinctive precisely upon this point. "Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour and hate thine enemy; but I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that despitefully use you and persecute you." Why? "That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven." And what does He do about it? "He maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust."

Loving our enemies, you may say, is a counsel of perfection, and the question before the youth of the world to-day is not one of ideal perfection, but of how to act under very real circumstances. That is quite true; but the question is not whether we shall, at all times and under all circumstances, perfectly fulfil a counsel of perfection; but whether we shall endeavour to follow it at all, or turn our backs upon it as impracticable nonsense and do the opposite. The question is which we shall take of two roads. For the Christian now stands at the cross-roads of human civilization, and at the cross-roads are two sign-posts. One says, TO RECONCILIATION and the other says, TO ANNIHILATION; and the very practical and immediate question before every one of us is: Upon which of these roads are we going to take the next step? In the spirit of 1914 are we going to tread again the road that led to 1914 and demonstrate once more the impossibility of teaching people how to behave by inflicting the greatest possible harm upon them? Or are we going to insist at all costs upon digging out the causes of conflict and thus discovering the more excellent way of mutual service between us and our neighbours? Are we, like Bunyan's "Christian", at the cross-roads, going to decline, in any circumstances whatsoever, to take the road now clearly marked, To the City of Destruction? That is the plain and simple question that faces every Christian in every land to-day.

And anyone who cares to dip into the Gospels for himself can see that Jesus was faced with the same question. He will see that the Jewish patriots of the time were waiting for a leader who would deliver them from tyranny they not merely feared, but felt:

the tyranny of the Roman Empire. And it is clear that, for a time they believed that Jesus might indeed prove himself to be this leader. But before long they discovered that instead of leading and teaching and preaching Jewish nationalism, Jesus was announcing what he described as the Kingdom of God on earth. What was this, from their point of view, but an attempt to convert the historic tradition of Judaism into some sort of super-national religion based, not upon antagonism to Caesar and their Roman enemies, but upon the love and fatherhood of God? and could there be a more obvious and disastrous betrayal of the perfectly justifiable national cause? As soon, therefore, as the patriotic religious leaders realized what Jesus was about, they had little difficulty in persuading the people that this man was not the Messiah at all, but a national renegade before whom any robber was to be preferred. So they very soon got him tried for sedition and hung upon a cross bearing the satirical inscription, "The King of Jews". And if the cause of his country can be made to embrace a man's first and last duty, then there is a very good cause to be made against Jesus for failing of that duty.

But the history of twenty centuries has preferred another interpretation. It has seen in Jesus the man who put the will of God, the love of God, the service of God and the consequent Kingdom of God above every ordinance of state or nation. It has known him as the founder of a religion called Christianity which derives its authority, not from national sanctions or the practices of men as members of nations at all, but from the example of Jesus himself, who, as we say, died for his enemies, and from a cross that has become the everlasting symbol of his religion, said of them, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

Therefore to appeal to men as Christians to fight the wars of nationalism is to appeal to the one order of men which is universal by reason of its faith in, and adherence to, super-national principles. Anyone, in fact, who attempts to subvert the adherence of Christians from the Christian principle of discovering the way of reconciliation with an enemy to the way of fearing him and ultimately killing him, and who does this upon the principle of nationalism, turns a Christian into the exact opposite of what Christ himself was. And if that be Christianity, let it perish as it justly deserves; for a religion which borrows its name from Christ and denies the very principle which led him to the Cross may be the religion of the Scribes and Pharisees, but it is manifestly a religion of hypocrites.

It is impossible in the space at my disposal even to begin to suggest practical ways in which the leaves of the tree of life should now be dispersed for the healing of the nations. It must suffice here to show negatively why Christians should cease for ever from seeking the same resolution of their human conflicts as men sought centuries before Christ appeared. But is it not clear as daylight

that he who rebuked his own disciple for drawing a sword in the best cause of defence a man could ever draw one, will deny to any who pretend to follow him the right to spend their lives making and using bombs and tanks and poison gas in the defence of themselves? If it is not, let us put a picture of the Crucifixion upon every recruiting poster and get ahead.

Should a Christian fight? Should a Christian walk backward and forward at the same time? Should a Christian seek the extension of Christ's Kingdom by sticking bayonets in his enemy's vitals? (I have been a bayonet instructor in the Army.) Or should a Christian give the rough and tumble of war to those whom he regards as social inferiors while he confines himself to the intelligent task of "directing operations", or even of praying for their success in the quiet precincts of a cathedral? For God's sake, let us discover *in action* what a Christian is, and what he can do and what he can not do in the name of Christ. For the belief that we can do evil in order that good may come of it has been taught, alas, by Christians for centuries. Such instruction, however, is contrary to the life and teaching of Jesus, and our present predicaments witness to the appalling muddle and misery begotten by such false doctrine. Life itself now demands of man that he shall obey the most elementary of human principles or revert to a barbarism leading to self-destruction. The false remedy for wrong has only made the disease worse, and Mars now wears the aspect of the Devil himself. That a Christian should, for any consideration whatsoever, put a pinch of incense upon his altar is surely inconceivable.

MAX PLOWMAN.

**Join the**  
**PEACE PLEDGE UNION**  
**96 REGENT STREET, LONDON, W.1**