

# AN UNARMED STATE

(From "*Christ Triumphant*," by A. MAUDE ROYDEN)

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New York and London.

There are a very large number of people in all countries who still almost instinctively feel that the right thing to do, when they are involved in some international dispute, is to go to war, and that readiness for war is necessary for national safety.

We are often told that England has to have an enormous navy in order to police the world and keep the peace; and when I was in America I found that America had to have one for precisely the same reason. We are all struggling under a gigantic weight of armaments because a great many of us honestly believe that this is the only way in which we can either defend ourselves or keep the peace of the world.

Let us be honest. Some of this talk has behind it something that is altruistic and fine. There are people who are really prepared to pay the gigantic tax which enables us to keep large military and naval establishments, because they truly believe it is the mission of their country to keep peace in the world; or in the last resort because force is the only way in which one can defend oneself. Not everyone has believed this; but those who do not believe it have rarely had the courage to act on their views. Indeed they have rarely had the opportunity to do so, on a national scale. And so the mass of men—even well-meaning and kindly men—have been discouraged and inclined to think that those who believe in the force of temporal power must be in the right. Yet one instance to the contrary exists, so dramatic and so exalted, that it is strange that the world has not perceived it to be one of the great romances of humanity: it is what is called "the Holy Experiment," in the State of Pennsylvania, America. . . .

In 1682 William Penn received the State of Pennsylvania as payment for an old debt which the Crown owed to him. Just as the Crown might alienate one of its estates in England, so, regarding America as practically its own property, this large piece of America was handed over to William Penn, who became the proprietor-governor of it. It was, in

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fact, his property in the eyes of the English law. Of course, like all English property, it was held under the Crown, and we have to remember that the demands made on Pennsylvania by the British Government at home made the Holy Experiment very hard to carry out. But apart from the claim of the Government itself, this piece of America was the property of William Penn in very much the same sense that a great estate is the property of a landowner in this country.

Penn decided to do in this state what many Quakers had desired to do; that is to say, to make a great experiment in government based on the principles of the Sermon on the Mount. He made his constitution one in which all the inhabitants of Pennsylvania were to be equal, with the exception of the slaves, of whom I shall speak later. All were to have religious freedom. It has been said—quite truly, I am afraid—that those sects which boast that they have never persecuted might also add that they have never had the chance. But one may add “except the Quakers.” They had a chance to persecute and to suppress. They did not take it. They extended religious freedom to all the people of Pennsylvania. They based their national and international policy on absolute and meticulous honesty. They abolished all oaths. And they took up a position of absolute military non-resistance.

It is that last point that I want to speak about to-night. Pennsylvania was to have no soldiers, no forts, no arms. Yet these Quaker men and women lived in a world that believed in force even more than we do. The world in which Penn was born, the world of 1682, seriously believed that it was possible to change people's opinions if you hurt them sufficiently! Most of us have given up that idea. We still hurt each other, but we do not hope to alter each other's opinions by that process. But religious persecution by force, and war between nations, and duelling between individual citizens, were all taken for granted even more completely than they are in civilized countries to-day. The Quakers I speak of left that world, it is true, but into what a world did they go, these “Friends of God”? They did not seek out some uninhabited or almost uninhabited island, where they could be safe, as far as human beings can be safe. They went to America, where there were, indeed, native peoples of a nature most violent, most bloody, most treacherous, and most cruel, who had already been so ill-treated by other white settlers that the atmosphere was charged with hatred and cruelty before the Friends arrived there. . . .

Such was the world in which the Quakers determined to try their Holy Experiment.

William Penn began by an extraordinary piece of honesty. The Crown had given him Pennsylvania. It occurred to him that the Red Indians had a claim to Pennsylvania also! One of the first things he did was to draw up a Treaty with them, telling them that he proposed to pay them for their rights, and only take what they willingly, and with a clear understanding of what they were doing, would give. For his policy of non-resistance was not a policy by itself. It was part of a whole conception of life, based upon the Sermon on the Mount. The first thing that was to be done, said Penn, was to make the Indians understand that if they believed in the grace of God, they believed in something universal; not only for the sins of Christians had Christ died, but for the sins of the whole world. “God hath poured out his spirit on all flesh, and so the Indians must receive God's spirit. . . . And so let them know that they have a day of salvation.”

Having declared these principles, he went on to act upon them. “He knew the character of frontier traders, the valuable bargains to be obtained from a drunken Indian, and the weakness of Indian character in the face of sensual temptations.” He refused to take advantage of any of these things. “I did refuse a great temptation last Second-day, which was £6,000 . . . . to have wholly to myself the Indian trade from south to north between the Susquehanna and Delaware Rivers. . . . I would not abuse the Lord's love, nor act unworthy of his promise and so defile what came to me clean.”

The man who offered him the bargain writes in amazement: “He (that is William Penn) is offered great things, £6,000 for a monopoly in trade which he refused. . . . I believe truly he does aim more at justice and righteousness and spreading of truth than at his own particular gain.”

Not only this white man with whom he was bargaining, but the Indians also, recognized this. They were immensely impressed by the fact that Penn neither tempted them to get drunk, nor allowed them to make an agreement when they were drunk. One of them made a most touching statement about those people who, he says, “had no eyes” and could not see that drink was destroying the Indians. But now, he went on, there has come to us “a people who have eyes, and who know that an Indian cannot resist drink, because he is too

weak, and he therefore keeps it from them, and will not let them give away their rights when they are blind and mad and do not know what they are doing."

I said just now that the only people who were not equal with the other citizens of Pennsylvania were the slaves. I mean, of course, the African slaves, whom the Quakers held like other people. But very soon they began to realize that they ought not to hold slaves, and gradually they began to set their slaves free. Other people have done that; but something further which these Quakers did is, I think, unique; at least I have not met it in any other record of the setting free of slaves. The Pennsylvanians were troubled because for all the work their slaves had done for them before they were free they had had no wages!

"The state of the oppressed people who have been held by any of us in captivity and slavery calls for a deep enquiry and close examination how far we are clear of withholding from them what under such an exercise may open to view as their just right."

The matter was placed on a basis of justice, not of charity, and an inquiry was held, and by a voluntary decision owners setting free their slaves gave to their slaves what was estimated as a just payment for past services.

Such was the policy with the Indians, and slaves, and their own people, from which peace was expected, upon which peace was founded.

"Still in thy right hand carry gentle peace  
To silence envious tongues. Be just and fear not."

. . . . They made no motion to defend themselves against enemies. They had no forts, no soldiers, no militia, even no arms. No Quaker carried any weapon of defence.

As I have reminded you, Pennsylvania was still under the British Government, and again and again wars arose, either between neighbouring states and Indians or between England herself and France and Spain; and the French and Spanish settlers in America would be involved, and England would want money and soldiers for her wars. And all the states around Pennsylvania began to urge that this was the one point that was not armed, and that it was a kind of treachery to all the other states that Pennsylvania would not raise any military force, or build forts, or do anything to assist in sustaining the common burden of armaments on

which they depended against the savage and murderous Indians. Yet the Quakers remained unconvinced.

. . . . They refused again and again to make preparation for war, praying that they might "continue humbly to confide in the protection of that Almighty power whose providence has hitherto been as walls and bulwarks round about us."

In consequence, one of their enemies complains the province was "entirely bare to the attacks of the enemies, not a single armed man, nor, at the public expense, a single fortification to shelter the unhappy inhabitants."

Consider the courage of it! With women there, with little children, and all round them poisoned relationships, seething hatred and distrust, the anger of their own white people in the neighbouring states against them, the treachery of the Red Indians! Again and again one hears stories of those Quaker settlers which make one realize that they were clothed with a power which kept them safe. Violet Hodgkin in her book on "Quaker Saints" tells such stories. You may read them elsewhere, too. There are stories of men who rode, as they thought, alone through the forest, surrounded by their enemies, but not attacked, because to their enemies it seemed that they were encompassed by a host: stories of massacre and treachery and outrage among all the neighbouring states, and the state of Pennsylvania untouched. Perhaps one of the most dramatic of all is that wonderful scene when the quiet Friends of God were holding their silent Meeting for Worship in some little outpost of civilization, and as they sat there in their silent worship of God, the Red Indians came to attack them. They came in all their war-paint and array, their bows and arrows on their backs, their tomahawks in their hands, and they found the saints sitting in absolute silence, worshipping God. Not a man, not a woman, not a child stirred. The fierce red men filed in and stood silently looking at them. The power of God came upon them, and they sat down and took their part in that strange meeting for worship. When it was over the Friends, as is their custom shook hands with one another, but first they shook hands with those Red Indians and said, "We have been worshipping the great Father of us all." And the Indians said, "We worshipped him with you."

This is not the creed, these are not the actions, of cowards. To go out armed to the teeth to meet your enemies is a brave thing perhaps; but to go out unarmed, to have

nothing to depend on, among enemies so savage and so treacherous, that is the very heroism of peace, is it not? That is the peace which is power.

For seventy years the Quakers lived in absolute peace. Others were slain, others were massacred, others were murdered, but they were safe. Not a Quaker woman suffered assault, not a Quaker child was slain, not a Quaker man was tortured, and when at last, under pressure, the Quakers gave up the government of the state, and war broke out, and some Pennsylvanians were killed, only three Quakers were killed, and all those had so far fallen from their faith as to carry weapons of defence. What an irony! Only three were armed, and those three alone were slain; because the Indians did not recognize those to be Quakers who carried guns to shoot at other people.

War had been declared by neighbouring states, and the defeat of General Braddock aroused a storm of anger against the people of Pennsylvania. The Quakers, pressed at every point, at last took what seemed to them the only possible course, and resigned their seats in the Assembly. What could they have done? A great tide of immigration was coming in. By a paradox indeed, the very triumph of the Holy Experiment brought about its ruin. Because this was the only peaceful state, because it prospered beyond measure, because **there** was seen in action our Lord's saying, "Seek ye first the Kingdom of Heaven, and all these things shall be added unto you"—because it was so, people came to live in Pennsylvania who were not Quakers, and gradually there came to be a majority of those who absolutely disagreed with the non-resisting principle of the Friends, and did not see that it was the very cause of all the things that they desired and had. And yet they had such trust in these Quakers that they persisted in re-electing them again and again, often against their will, so that at the very last there were twenty-eight Quakers out of thirty-six members in the Assembly, elected there by people who did not care for their policy or believe in their creed, but who had so profound a trust in their wisdom and their integrity that they could not be persuaded not to elect them.

The Quaker was too heroic for the world, too sublime for human nature—so it seems. And the poor Friends tried this way and that to govern on their own lines, but at last war broke out, and the cry for Pennsylvania to join in became too strong. So the Quakers took what seemed to them the

only possible way, and resigned all offices and all seats in the Government.

So ended the Holy Experiment. Did it fail? No. It never failed. It was abandoned. The world was not heroic enough for such a peace. But as long as there were people brave enough for it, its success was absolute. It is a small matter—you will say—one little state against all the history of the world! Yes, but what then? What does the history of the world show but that all the heroism, all the courage that is in war, cannot defend the non-combatant? That there has never been a war in which women and children have not suffered the tortures of the damned? All the love and courage and devotion of soldiers has not been able to prevent this. Even the triumphant country suffers something, and suffers in the person of those non-combatants, for whose sake it has gone to war. This is indeed a tiny example. Yet it was carried out under singularly severe and difficult conditions, and as long as the Quakers held to their great principle, no woman or child, no, and no man, suffered. Read it for yourself. I have said it was unreadable. You will not find it so now, will you? It is too great a story to be neglected. Read for yourself, and you will see that what I have said is true. As long as this government was based on the Sermon on the Mount, all that our Lord promised was exactly and literally fulfilled.

But peace is not a virtue by itself. Peace must be based on justice and right doing. William Penn did not dream that he could cheat and oppress and betray the Indians, and then by throwing up his hands and saying, "I am unarmed," be safe. His policy was a whole, as our Lord's teaching is a whole. It was his belief that the Indians would treat him fairly if he first treated them fairly, and our Lord's warning that if you break one part of the law you are guilty of all was taken very seriously by William Penn. He knew that we must begin with justice and righteousness, and then we can trust to that power of God which defends us from hurt. . . . What is needed for the peace of God which passes understanding is something more than honesty—more than washing your hands of the world or leaving politics to politicians. It is something more heroic than that. It is that sublime spirit in which the first members of the Society of Friends went out to Pennsylvania, into a world of cruelty and hate, armed only with the peace of God and His righteousness. Thus they found power. They were the only

people whose women and children were safe in all that country. They alone were untouched by war.

We call that "peace." Yes, but it is an active peace—a peace full of power. These Quakers were armed with that power which enabled Christ to say, "I have overcome the world." You have heard two great passages, one (which is always quoted by militarists) showing that our Lord used force when He cleansed the Temple. Force, but—physical force? Why, there were scores of men buying and selling in that great temple, and we are told that our Lord went there holding a little scourge in His hands and drove them out by physical force! Who can be so blind as not see what happened? It was the mighty indignation of His spirit that drove the sellers from the temple, and it is that power that Christlike people wield. It was the same power which He exercised in a way less dramatic, but not less real when they brought to Him a woman taken in adultery, and set her in the midst, and asked their cruel, obscene questions, as she stood there alone. And He again with indignation at their prurient minds, would not so much as look at them, but said, "He that is without sin among you, let him cast the first stone." and they, "being convicted in their conscience, went out, beginning with the eldest even to the last."

The same power which drove them out drove out the money-changers in the temple, and it is in that power that we who believe in peace must look for peace. We must know a heroism not less but greater than the heroism of soldiers, for unless we do so the soldier is the better man. A pacifist who is not a pacifist of power will never overcome the world. But when we have the heart for such an adventure, God will give us the power that we need. He does not waste His power on people who do not want it for any great end, but those who set out, as did those Quaker people, to govern a state in a world of war, upon the principles of the Sermon on the Mount, find that our Lord's words are fulfilled to them to the last letter.

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