

being unconstitutional, as the Governor suggests, would, it seems to us, only be a provision to carry out the great principle set forth in the Virginia Bill of Rights, section 16, viz: "That religion, or the duty which we owe to our Creator, and the manner of discharging it, can be directed only by reason and conviction, not by force or violence; and therefore all men are equally entitled to the free exercise of religion, according to the dictates of conscience; and that it is the mutual duty of all to practice Christian forbearance, love, and charity towards each other;" and we have come to ask Christian charity at your hands, because, while we judge not for others, for ourselves we believe, that by taking up the weapons of carnal warfare, even in the defence of our dearest rights, or life itself, we would endanger the welfare of our immortal souls. That belief is not original with us, as the following extracts will show:

The Bible, rather than any human authority, should be our guide; but, since the early Christians learned its meaning from the apostles themselves, or their immediate successors, we naturally wish to ascertain how they regarded the custom of war. Of their general views and practice on this point, there now remains little, if any doubt; for it is undeniable that, for a considerable period, so long indeed as the lamp of Christianity burnt pure and bright, they held it unlawful to bear arms, and actually abstained from war at the hazard of their lives; nor was it till the Church became corrupt, that her members began, without remorse or rebuke, to be soldiers. "It would be as easy," says a learned writer of the seventeenth century, "to obscure the sun at mid-day, as to deny that the primitive Christians renounced all revenge and war."

Justin Martyr, Tatian, Clemens of Alexandria, Tertullian, Cyprian, Lactantius, and a multitude of others among the early fathers, declared it unlawful for Christians to engage in war. It seems to have been for nearly three centuries the common sentiment, avowed and defended by the great champions of Christianity. Justin Martyr and Tatian spoke of soldiers and Christians as distinct characters; and Tatian says that the Christians declined even military compounds.

Clemens of Alexandria calls his Christian contemporaries the "followers of peace," and expressly tells us "that the followers of peace used none of the implements of war." Lactantius says expressly, "It can never be lawful for a righteous man to go to war." About the end of the second century, Celsus, one of the opponents of Christianity, charged the Christians with refusing to bear arms even in cases of necessity. Origen, their defender, does not deny the fact; he admits the refusal, and justifies it on the ground that war is unlawful for Christians. Even after Christianity had spread over almost the whole known world, Tertullian, in speaking of a part of the Roman armies,

including more than one-third of the standing legions of Rome, distinctly informs us that "not a Christian could be found among them."

All this is explicit; but the following facts are still more decisive: Some of the arguments which are now brought against the advocates of peace, were then urged against those early Christians; and these arguments they examined and repelled. This indicates investigation, and manifests that their belief of the unlawfulness of war was not a vague opinion, hastily admitted, and loosely floating amongst them, but was the result of deliberate examination, and a consequent firm conviction that Christ had forbidden it. The very same arguments that are brought in defence of war at the present day, were brought against Christians sixteen hundred years ago, and were promptly repelled by them. It is remarkable, too, that Tertullian appeals to the precept from the Mount, as proving that the dispositions which these principles inculcate are not compatible with war, and that the custom, therefore, is irreconcilable with Christianity.

If it be possible, a still stronger evidence of the primitive belief is contained in the circumstance, that some of the Christian authors regarded the refusal of the Christians to bear arms, as a fulfillment of ancient prophecy. The peculiar strength of this evidence consists in this, that the fact of a refusal to bear arms is assumed as notorious and unquestioned. Irenaeus, who lived about the year 180, affirms that the prophecy of Isaiah, which declares that men shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks, had been fulfilled in his time; "for the Christians," says he, "have changed their swords and lances into instruments of peace, and they know not how to fight." In Martin's history of the church, we read "that the prophecy is fulfilled, you have good reason to believe; for we who in former times killed one another, do now no longer fight with our enemies." Tertullian, who lived later, says: "You can confess that the prophecy has been accomplished, as far as the practice of every individual is concerned to whom it is applicable."

Martin, addressing the Emperor Julian, (A. D. 360) declared that it was not lawful for him to fight, because he was a Christian; and even so late as the middle of the fifth century, Leo the Pope declared it to be "contrary to the rules of the Church" for persons, after the action of penance, (persons then considered to be pre-eminently bound to obey the law of Christ,) should revert to the warfare of the world."

Judson, the missionary of Burmah, says: "Since war has been universally advocated and applauded, it appears to me that it is not optional with any to remain neutral or silent on this great question; since, thus remaining, they must be considered