

**DEMOCRACY AND
CHRISTIAN
DOCTRINE: AN ESSAY
IN REINTERPRETATION**

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Democracy and Christian doctrine: an essay in reinterpretation by W. H. Carnegie

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DEMOCRACY AND CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE

AN ESSAY IN REINTERPRETATION

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PREFACE

THE standpoint of this book is individual and local—that of personal experience gained in the heart of a great democratic community. My interest in the main subject discussed in it is predominantly practical. What concerns me is not the solution of an academic problem but the satisfaction of the personal and social needs of living men with whom I have been brought into intimate daily contact. But these men are representative. A presentation of Christianity which they recognise as providing them with the inspiration and guidance they seek is likely to secure similar recognition from the class to which they belong, and thus to establish vital relations with the organised movement to which that class has, as a whole, committed itself. No presentation, however logically coherent and theologically correct,

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which fails to satisfy this condition can meet the requirements of the situation with which we are confronted in twentieth century England.

But it is no longer possible to regard this situation from a local or even a national standpoint. The momentous train of events which has been set in motion since the following pages were written has broadened it out into one in which the whole future of European civilisation is seen to be involved. The war in which we are engaged is a war between principles: between the democratic principle on the one hand, and that of brute force, embodied in an aggressive and unscrupulous system of militarism, on the other. The recognition that this is so accounts for the unprecedented unanimity and determination with which the whole British Empire has embarked upon a struggle which will tax all its resources to bring to a successful conclusion. We have become conscious that far more than material prosperity or race prestige is at stake. That what we are contending for is the right to maintain the spiritual heritage of freedom and justice and humanity which our forefathers have won for us, to pass it on to our children enriched and

enlarged, and gradually to make it the common heritage of the human race.

This consciousness as it becomes clearer will be found, I think, to dispose men towards the recognition of certain facts which have an important bearing on the questions discussed in this book.

In the first place there is the fact that the prevalence of the militarist spirit in the German nation has synchronised with the weakening of the hold of Christianity on its intellectual and social life, and that this spirit has been fostered and justified by teachings which repudiate the whole Christian ideal and the essential principles of Christian morality. No one who has even a superficial acquaintance with the writings of Nietzsche and Treitschke and their school will demur to this statement. Doubtless the name of God is still used in official German documents and royal proclamations, often with unpleasing frequency. But the conception connoted is something quite different from that of the all-righteous, all-merciful Being to whom Christians render allegiance. It seems rather to alternate between that of an obsequious Court Chaplain always

ready to bless the projects of his patrons, and that of the old Teutonic War God, whom Christ dethroned, but who, decked out in modern guise, seems to be reasserting his prerogatives once more. This is a very significant fact. Just in proportion as it forces men to recognise the essential antagonism between Christianity and autocratic militarism, will it dispose them to recognise how closely it is intertwined with all that is best in the modern democratic movement. It provides by implication a striking confirmation of the contention that that movement is not merely compatible with Christian beliefs and standards, but that it is their direct outcome, and cannot maintain itself apart from the intellectual and social background provided by them.

A second fact which arrests attention is the proved incapacity of the German form of Protestantism to withstand a movement subversive not merely of the theological beliefs of the Christian religion, but of its fundamental ethical positions. Doubtless in every European country an anti-Christian movement has arisen, and has attracted a greater or less measure of support. But however great the