

**THE RECORD OF A QUAKER
CONSCIENCE: CYRUS PRINGLE'S
DIARY. WITH AN INTRODUCTION
BY RUFUS M. JONES**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649687756

The Record of a Quaker Conscience: Cyrus Pringle's Diary. With an Introduction by Rufus M. Jones by Cyrus G. Pringle & Rufus M. Jones

Except for use in any review, the reproduction or utilisation of this work in whole or in part in any form by any electronic, mechanical or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including xerography, photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, is forbidden without the permission of the publisher, Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd, PO Box 1576 Collingwood, Victoria 3066 Australia.

All rights reserved.

Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form or binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

www.triestepublishing.com

CYRUS G. PRINGLE & RUFUS M. JONES

**THE RECORD OF A QUAKER
CONSCIENCE: CYRUS PRINGLE'S
DIARY. WITH AN INTRODUCTION
BY RUFUS M. JONES**

THE RECORD OF A QUAKER CONSCIENCE

CYRUS PRINGLE'S DIARY

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
RUFUS M. JONES

New York
THE MACMILLAN COMPANY
1918

All rights reserved

INTRODUCTION

THE body of this little book consists of the personal diary of a young Quaker named Cyrus Guernsey Pringle of Charlotte, Vermont. He was drafted for service in the Union Army, July 13th, 1863. Under the existing draft law a person who had religious scruples against engaging in war was given the privilege of paying a commutation fine of three hundred dollars. This commutation money Pringle's conscience would not allow him to pay. A prosperous uncle proposed to pay it surreptitiously for him, but the honest-minded youth discovered the plan and refused to accept the well meant kindness, since he believed, no doubt rightly, that this money would be used to pay for an army

substitute in his place. The Diary relates in simple, naïve style the experiences which befell the narrator as he followed his hard path of duty, and incidentally it reveals a fine and sensitive type of character, not unlike that which comes so beautifully to light in the Journal of John Woolman.

This is plainly not the psychological moment to study the highly complex and delicate problem of conscience. The strain and tension of world issues disturb our judgment. We cannot if we would turn away from the events and movements that affect the destiny of nations to dwell calmly and securely upon our own inner, private actions. It is never easy, even when the world is most normal and peaceful, to mark off with sharp lines the area of individual freedom. No person ever lives unto himself or is sufficient to himself. He is inextricably woven into the tissue of the social group. His privileges, his

responsibilities, his obligations are forever over-individual and come from beyond his narrow isolated life. If he is to be a rational being at all he must *relate* his life to others and share in some measure their triumphs and their tragedies.

But at the same time the most precious thing in the universe is that mysterious thing we call individual liberty and which even God himself guards and respects. Up to some point, difficult certainly to delimit, a man must be captain of his soul. He cannot be a *person* if he does not have a sphere of power over his own act. To treat him as a puppet of external forces, or a mere cog in a vast social mechanism, is to wipe out the unique distinction between person and thing. Somewhere the free spirit must take its stand and claim its God-given distinction. If life is to be at all worth while there must be some boundary within which the soul holds its own

august and ultimate tribunal. That Sanctuary domain within the soul the Quakers, ever since their origin in the period of the English Commonwealth, have always guarded as the most sacred possession a man can have.

No grave difficulty, at least in the modern world, is involved in this faith, until it suddenly comes into conflict with the urgent requirements of social efficiency. When the social group is fused with emotion and moves almost as an undivided unit toward some end, then the claim of a right, on the ground of conscience, for the individual to deviate from the group and to pursue another or an opposite course appears serious if not positively insufferable. The abstract principle of individual liberty all modern persons grant; the strain comes when some one proposes to insist upon a concrete instance of it which involves implications that may

endanger the ends which the intensified group is pursuing. A situation of this type confronts the Quakers whenever their country engages in war, since as a people they feel that they cannot fight or take any part in military operations.

They do not find it an easy thing to give a completely rational ground for their opposition to war. Nor, as a matter of fact, is it any more easy for the militarist to rationalize his method of solving world difficulties. Both are evidently actuated by instinctive forces which lie far beneath the level of pure reason.

The roots of the Quakers' opposition to war go deep down into the soil of the past. They are the outgrowth and culmination of a long spiritual movement. They carry along, in their ideas, emotions, habits and attitudes, tendencies which have been unconsciously sucked in with their mother's milk,

and which, therefore, cannot be held up and analysed. The mystics, the humanists, the anabaptists, the spiritual reformers, are forerunners of the Quaker. They are a necessary part of his pedigree,—and they were all profoundly opposed to war. This attitude has become an integral part of the vital stock of truth by which the Quaker lives his spiritual life, and to violate it is for him to stop living “the way of truth,” as the early Quakers quaintly called their religious faith.

But the Quakers have never been champions of the negative. They do not take kindly to the rôle of being “antis.” Their negations grow out of their insistent affirmations. If they are *against* an established institution or custom it is because they are *for* some other way of life which seems to them divinely right, and their first obligation is to incarnate that way of life. They cannot,