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Excerpts from the Letters of

Elder Guy Dail

To Elder O. A. Tait (Church leader and editor of the  
Signs of the Times)

October 6, 1914

It may appear a bit strange to you and to the American brethren that their fellow-believers in Europe have entered these various armies, but were you here it would not appear strange to you at all, for in Germany every able-bodied man is a soldier, and we have asked our young men to remain in the country, and stay by the army, rather than all to run away from the military service, for had they run off, just think how many workers we would have lost. It is because they staid in the army and served, that they had freedom thereafter to serve the Lord as soul-winners, and it is because we had so many good young men as soul-winners that we have seen through the blessing of the Lord, the progress of the message in Germany greater than in any other European field.

The question of the Sabbath in time of peace was never decided upon by the brethren in council, but each young man was left to settle that himself before God. We had young men who served on the Sabbath, and they were never in any way disciplined by the church. In time of war, where the enemies of the country were mobilizing against the Fatherland and threatening to invade her east and west frontiers, the Hamburg church had a special meeting, in which the brethren of that church who had to bear arms, sought God for wisdom, and decided that it would be impossible for them to expect exemption from military service in time of war, when they were right at the front.

However I am glad to tell you that even in time of war, some of the brethren who have not had to be at the front, but were kept at home in office work, and some other kinds of service, have been able to secure the Sabbath free. I rejoice at this.

In Holland all our boys have the Sabbath free--but as yet there is no actual war in Holland.

This position of the Hamburg church, I drew up, had it printed, and sent out among our brethren. Most of the churches were satisfied with it, and yet some felt that we had done wrong--that it would be better for all the hundreds and perhaps thousands of our brethren in the armies of Europe simply to decline to carry arms at all, and especially to decline to do any service on the Sabbath, even though they might be shot.

In Austrai there were a number of the Nazarenes, who refused to take up arms--they were merely shot, that's all. I have felt that it is much wiser to go to the field of battle, trusting in God, with the whole soul surrendered to Him, being true to the government, than to tell the government that while we expect protection from the government to hold her advancing foes at bay, and as a people be sent over the border as exiles and traitors to the empire.

True the time will come when we will be treated as traitors, perhaps, because of our religious integrity and uprightness in obeying the commandments of God, but that will not be because of our having failed in any of our civil duties.

This question of the military service is one that has not received very much attention at the hands of our denomination, because we have been generally living in a time of peace, or because those countries which are concerned, have been such as did not have the stringent conscription laws, such as exist in these strong military nations of Europe. But the present war brings the matter to our notice in a very practical way, and we have really had to assume a position.

To Elder Spicer (Secretary of the General Conference) and

Knox (Treasurer of the General Conference)

Nov. 6, 1914

The great point those who are opposed to taking up arms seek to make is: War is murder, and therefore the violation of the commandment, Thou shalt not kill. But this cannot hold, that war is murder, for it would then turn out that the Jews were the greatest murderers of their day, possibly. I notice that even Brother Wilcox in his Question Corner of SIGNS OF THE TIMES for Oct. 20, p. 651, has overlooked one very important statement of the narrative, in that he says: "All that God called upon His children to do in the taking of Jericho was to march around the city and blow trumpets, for the army of heaven threw down the walls, and conquered the people."

By reading the 20th and 21st verses, however, I see that the army on earth, which was undoubtedly composed of men whose citizenship was in heaven, co-operated with their compatriots of the heavenly armies, and that "the people went up into the city, every man straight before him, and they took the city. And they utterly destroyed all that was in the city, both man and woman, young and old, and ox, and sheep, and ass, with the edge of the sword."

It is certainly true that God, the Commander of the heavenly armies, never made any mistake, and when He commanded the total devastation of any land, it was high time that the inhabitants be rooted out. But it seems to me equally clear that, so long as the civil government confines itself to merely civil affairs, we are bound to be subject to civil government and render her all her dues. We pay taxes, and this is for the sake of the reciprocal protection we receive--we do not pay taxes that the government may render us no protection. But how does a government protect, but by bearing "not the sword in vain"? We as a people ought to be best citizens of any civil government, because of our citizenship in heaven leading us to obey the commands of God and all the commands of our civil government so long as they are not of a nature to cause us to transgress the law of God.

There is another very hard point for some of our brethren here: The service in the army before the enemy on the Sabbath day. They would have us believe that such things as the children of Israel when they were under arms the forty days that Goliath withstood them, and as recorded in 2 Kings 11, are not permissible today.

You may wonder, my brethren, why I take the pains to go into the details as I do--it is merely that you may get a view of our situation, and if you have any suggestions to make, as to the strength of the statement that the European brethren are in opposition to the general body, let it be seen clearly that such is not the case--that we as a people have always been law-abiding citizens, and that there is no thought on the part of the American brethren to seek to support the false notion obtaining among some of our members that in obeying the law of conscription, our dear brethren, whose blood has already been shed upon the altar of their countries, have done anything wrong. Or if you do not want to state anything publicly, if you would make a statement to us in writing, that we over here could use, I think it would help many persons, who are now very strongly urging that there is in our denominational attitude, a great break between us and the American brethren.

G. Dail to "Dear Brother"

Nov. 13, 1914

This morning I enclose to you copy of a reply I mailed Bro. Raft late last night to his letter in which he says we have taken altogether the wrong position in the church meeting, September 2, and the attitude of our body in the minority meeting at its last sitting, cannot be endorsed, or he hopes will not be endorsed, by our people. I have started a discussion which threatens to divide our whole denomination, he fears, and it would have been much wiser for us never to have touched the question at all. However, the future developments will have to determine that.

G. Dail to W. A. Spicer

Oct. 17, 1915

One of the things that hurts me most keenly is the attitude some are taking in their efforts to show that the denomination is divided, that the European brethren who have all these years encouraged our young men to remain true to their duties to their respective states in which conscription is law, absolute law, are acting in opposition to leaders in America. Abstracts from letters and papers originating in America would almost seem at times to prove these opponents of the organized work we have sought to build up all these years to be in the right. But yet I feel very sure that this cannot be the case, for there is really nothing at all new in our attitude over here--during the Russ-Japanese war we had just lots of brethren engaged, as well as in the Balkan Turkish war, and not a voice was ever heard in remonstrance of it, so far as I know. I do not know why there should be made so much fuss about the matter now, I am sure, unless it be the attempt of the Devil to split up our work, and to estrange the brethren.

It is true that the opposition is small, that there are not such a large number who have fallen away and are ill-inclined toward the attitude of our people in these conscript lands, and that the very large majority of our people in all these countries have no trouble at all. However, there certainly have been things written in some of our papers in other lands that give at least some coloring to these charges now put forth by those who are trying to build up a counter movement, and to tear down what they once sought to uphold. It is the pain and anguish I suffer at the doings of these disaffected believers that is so hard, Brother Spicer, and yet I suppose other shepherds of the flock in the past have been compelled to go through just such experiences. . . .

I believe that a large number of our brethren are as true as any that we can find on the face of the whole earth. Those who have entered the service of their fatherland have not done it because they were prompted by patriotism or the spirit of war, but

because they felt that as servants of God they were called upon to so conduct themselves that they may remain in their native lands, and bear witness for the Lord Jesus--and they knew well enough that those who seek to avoid the military duties placed on them by these strong conscript states would make themselves a political impossibility in their own countries, and if they must leave their fatherland for merely political reasons, then they would be cut off from bearing that witness that God desires them to bear. This is why they stay [out] in obedience to the laws of the land they fulfil their civil and military duties because that is the way the child of God ought to do. I hope that you and the other American brethren of the G. C. Committee may appreciate fully our situation in this respect. . . .

It is planned that Brother Conradi will be with you soon, and then he will tell you by word of mouth many things that I cannot write. I hope it may be possible for you to have a good meeting, and that the conference out there will take an action that will forever stop the mouths of the enemies of our organization over here, so far as the military question is concerned. This is the request of the German Union Presidents--that you deal with this matter, advancing as a Committee that which will stop these disturbers of the peace in the churches on the Continent, that we as a people are one, still, and that they are altogether wrong when they seek to prove the contrary. A simple recognition of the principle on which we have been acting in Europe since Sr. White said, "Circumstances alter cases," leaving each man subject to the merely civil requirements of his own land, is all that we really need. It is merely a formal statement of that which we have been practicing all these years in all these strong military conscript lands, that we might keep our young men here at home instead of losing them by their fleeing to America in order to get rid of rather an unpleasant duty.