



FOR *I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. 7 I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: 8 Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.* (2 Tim 4:6-8)

The meat of this hymn is that which fed the heart of youthful Christians at the time of its writing. Today, one would be hard pressed to come up with similar sentiments in most youth of our day. The first verse was discovered in a fragment from the writings of Henry K. White upon his death in 1806. White was twenty-one years of age at the time of his death, and the verse was written just prior to his passing. He also wrote much poetry and one piece, *CLIFTON GROVE*, which rivals Thomas Gray's *Ellegy Written in a Country Kirkyard*. Three additional verses were added in 1827 by Miss Frances Sarah Fuller-Maitland who was only fourteen years of age at the time of her revision of the hymn. What a beautiful, innocent and youthful heart with which Miss Fuller-Maitland must have been blessed by our Lord.

The tune to this hymn in the 1940 Hymnal is *UNIVERSITY COLLEGE* (1852) by Henry J. Gauntlett. There is an alternate tune which is more youthful (as were the writers of the hymn) which I prefer, *EIGHMEY*, by William H. Pontius (1886).

Oft in Danger, Oft in Woe

Oft in sorrow, oft in woe,
Onward, Christian, onward go:
Fight the fight, maintain the strife
Strengthened with the Bread of life.

Onward Christians, onward go,
Join the war, and face the foe;
Faint not: Much does yet remain,
Dreary is the long campaign.

Shrink not, Christians will ye yield?
Will ye quit the painful field?
Will ye flee in danger's hour?
Know ye not your Captain's pow'r?

Let your drooping hearts be glad:
March in heavenly armor clad:

Fight, nor think the battle long,
Victory soon shall be your song.

Let not sorrow dim your eye,
Soon shall every tear be dry;
Let not fears your course impede,
Great your strength, if great your need.

Onward then in battle move,
More than conquerors ye shall prove;
Though opposed by many a foe,
Christian soldiers onward go.

Oft in sorrow, oft in woe, Onward, Christian, onward go: Fight the fight, maintain the strife Strengthened with the Bread of life. The youthful heart, when early instructed in the Gospel Truth, is brave and hardy to battle for righteousness. Such a heart recognizes that the Christian witness is as much a soldier on the battlefield of life as is the armed knight on his mighty charger at Nottingham's (White's birthplace) Plain. The author of this first verse recognizes that in every war, there are reverses in combat. Some engagements may be lost, but the ultimate victory is all that matters – and we know to Whom that victory belongs. Just as the soldier on the line of battle needs sustenance of bread and provender to keep up his exertions, so does the Christian need His Daily Bread of God's Word daily to sustain his strength in battle.

Onward Christians, onward go, Join the war, and face the foe; Faint not: Much does yet remain, Dreary is the long campaign. The station of the soldier is on the line of battle. So is the duty-station of the Christian soldier. We wear our uniform of faith, and march under the Banner of Love, so that the enemy will know from whence we come; but also in order that those who are non-combatants on the side-lines will recognize from whence their help comes – and their help comes from the Lord who made Heaven and earth. No war has ever been won by entrenching behind earthen mounds, ramparts, and abatis. Battles are won by offensive measures taken against an enemy who has taken the mal-appropriated estate. We must emerge from our trenches and carry the battle to the very dining room of the enemy (which is Satan and his forces for the Christian). The enemy cannot hide in sanctuaries, or behind imaginary lines. He must be met at the very walls of the kindergarten, the school, the legislature, business, society, and even the Church itself (he is there as much as any other place). We grow not tired because it is not OUR spirit, but the Holy Spirit that prevails and moves us.

Shrink not, Christians will ye yield? Will ye quit the painful field? Will ye flee in danger's hour? Know ye not your Captain's pow'r? The coward, in the heat of battle, knows not there is greater danger in retreat than in advancing against the source of our danger. If he exposes his back to the enemy, he will perish at last. General Robert E. Lee prevailed in many battles in which his force was far outnumbered by the enemy; yet, his Army knew their commander and had confidence in his proven competence and character. Likewise, the Christian should know His Commander and trust in His leadership as a proven Victor – the only One to both defeat death and hell at once.

Let your drooping hearts be glad: March in heavenly armor clad: Fight, nor think the battle long, Victory soon shall be your song. Battle is a life or death situation. As General MacArthur has told us, *There is no substitute for victory.* That was true in the Pacific Theater during World War II, and it is true for the Christian of today. The substitute for victory for the Christian is infamy and eternal darkness. In fact, victory is already won, we need only claim it.

Let not sorrow dim your eye, Soon shall every tear be dry; Let not fears your course impede, Great your strength, if great your need. When agreeing with another on matters of profound importance, it is important to look the other straight in the eyes. The eyes reveal hidden motive and subterfuge – or a pure and sincere soul. The eye of the Christian should be bright and clear. As President Roosevelt has said in his inaugural address of 1933: *So, first of all, let me assert my firm belief that the only thing we have to fear is...fear itself – nameless, unreasoning, unjustified terror which paralyzes needed efforts to convert retreat into advance.* The hungrier the soul for truth, the greater valor is evidenced in the pursuit of it.

Onward then in battle move, More than conquerors ye shall prove; Though opposed by many a foe, Christian soldiers onward go. We have a superb Operations Order, and Order of Battle, in the Gospel of Christ. There is no such term as retreat in the Army of God – His Order is *Go ye* - it is only FORWARD. The Army of God will surrender not an inch of forbidden territory to the enemy; but more than this, that Army always presses the battle ONWARD. The superior numbers of the enemy (and they will always have superior numbers) cannot impact the outcome of the battle since the battle is already won and the enemy has capitulated. His pockets of resistance in public places are only dying embers in the aftermath of the battle. *36 As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. 37 Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.* (Romans 8:36-37) It is often easier to win a war than to win the peace; but we are both conquerors and peace-makers in God's Army. Shall we don the uniform and raise the Ensign of our faith now, and press on to the far lines of the enemy?