

ARTICLE VII.

THE IDEA OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD:

ITS INFLUENCE UPON THE HISTORY OF THE ENGLISH-SPEAKING PEOPLES IN THE PRESENT CENTURY.

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OPPORTUNISM has always been the rule of most lives, and the policy of most would-be leaders of men. We naturally are time-servers, taking short views of that which has been and that which will be, and striving to adapt ourselves as comfortably as possible to our immediate surroundings without overmuch thought as to the source or issue of them. Our efforts, our policies, and even our philosophies are scrappy. We have little time and less patience with the laying of deep foundations and the toilsome search after great principles.

In saying this, I am not bringing a railing accusation against the times. I am simply stating what is natural to us, as short-lived men of little faith, who are very conscious that the night cometh when no man can work. We are ever looking to see if we cannot cut our college courses down from four to three years; we insist upon a common-school education that shall be "practical," that is to say, that shall aim as directly as possible at the getting of a dollar. We do this quite conscientiously often, and it is with a similar conscientiousness, that our historians devote a lifetime to delving among records, our scientists to the minutest specialization of research, our grammarians to a single case of the Greek article. But the result of it all is a

sort of mental and spiritual shortsightedness or strabismus. We lose our taste and desire for the large and comprehensive view, or, when we attempt it, our squinting vision distorts it woefully.

I should like to speak of the danger that threatens us in the sphere of statecraft from the influence of little, prejudiced, ignorant, and sometimes debauched men who are ever putting politics in the place of statesmanship. But in this connection I can allude only to the almost boastful contempt in which the average politician holds the teaching and authority of history, and pass hurriedly on to mention the singular vogue of a certain class of historico-philosophical writing to-day. It is lugubrious, not to say pessimistic, in tone. It is sometimes quite sensational in its suggestions, if not in its definite conclusions; and its depressing influences reach a circle far wider than that of the mere readers of the volumes themselves.

The three instances that first present themselves are Nordau's "Degeneration," Pearson's "National Life and Character," and Brooks Adams' "Law of Civilization and Decay." It seems sometimes as though it were only necessary for a man to proclaim himself a pelican of the wilderness, or a watching sparrow on the housetop, to win a following of eager disciples who vie with each other in their presages of impending doom. It must be said, upon the other hand, that the world is full of an opposition chorus of chatterers who are just as shortsighted, just as strabismic, just as vociferous, but infinitely more cheerful, inasmuch as they are ever hymning the praises of the best of all possible worlds, which needs only to be let alone to develop into heaven. The man of poise and balance listening to these contending voices may well cry to each, with King Lear,

"O, that way madness lies; let me shun that";

though at the same time, if he be convinced that madness

is his doom, his choice of the more cheerful company can easily be understood.

It is because I believe that faith in certain great and eternal verities is the most efficient conservator of sanity among men, and ministers more directly than anything else to the clearness of their vision and the justness of their ultimate conclusions; and further, it is because the large, calm, austere yet sympathetic, view of the struggle of three consecutive generations after better conditions of life, seems to give a measure of encouragement and assurance to such faith, that I venture to propose this rather pretentious theme. I cannot help but think that even to-day a man whose work must necessarily be among the brick and mortar, may be a little cheered if, in a moment's respite, his upward glance suggest to him that there is an Architect, and that some day after he is dust there will be a building—just what he does not know, but still a building, wrought out according to a greater plan than his mind can compass.

At this point it becomes necessary to define the theme a little more exactly and to say just what is meant by the Idea of the Kingdom of God. Of course the word "idea" is used in its Platonic rather than its Cartesian sense, and designates that type or pattern which, though immaterial, has often one of the realest of existences. Here it is considered as a partial and incomplete thing, present before men's eyes and making appeal to their consciences, but undeveloped as yet. It is not regarded as synonymous with the Christian church, however much correspondence might be shown between the two. But wherever a man has caught something of St. Paul's meaning when he wrote to the Romans that the Kingdom of God was not meat and drink, but righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost, and has attempted to work the meaning out in life, there the idea of the Kingdom of God is being realized. Wherever

one man has recognized the cogency of those three great possible blessings, *δικαιοσύνη*, righteousness or just dealing, *εἰρήνη*, the state of peace with one another which should characterize Christians, and *χαρά*, not the mere crackling of the fool's laughter, but the joy and blessedness that come of the indwelling of the Spirit of God, there the Idea of the Kingdom of God has exerted an influence upon history.

And, furthermore, the theme is to be limited to the English-speaking peoples, because they have been so preëminently the peoples that during the past century have put their stamp upon the world's activities; and especially, because they represent the race with which, during this period, ethical considerations have had the largest place and exerted the widest influence. Materialistic, shallow, boastful, and self-complacent though the tone of public feeling in England and America is, still England and America are the two great nations most quickly, or, if you please, least slowly, responsive to ethical appeals, and to considerations of human need. The theme is further limited approximately to this century, because this century furnishes us abundant material for suggestion and inference, if scarcely enough for the construction of elaborate argument.

There are, of course, certain most vital questions that need the far longer view. For instance, when we hear men bewailing the tyranny of the commercial spirit that would make gain of their fellows at whatever cost of suffering, and the apparent impotence of the Christ spirit of humanity and service to make head against it, it were well to recall to them the centuries of struggle which Christianity maintained against the old, inhuman, but almost universal, practice of plundering the shipwrecked. Before the Christian era all shipwrecked men were likely to be treated as outlaws, and it was only by the slowest degrees that Christian teaching began to tell upon the almost ineradicable

desire for plunder. As late as the eleventh century the Duke of Brabant asserted his right to despoil all who were cast upon his coasts. In 1231, St. Louis of France tried to compound for this right by a money payment, while a little earlier Richard II. of England had, "for the love of God and the salvation of his soul, demanded safety and protection for all shipwrecked persons and their goods in whatever land or sea." The very severity of some of these ordinances suggests the deep-seated character of the barbarities against which they were directed, and the seeming hopelessness of ever banishing them.

And yet, to-day, the vast lake and seacoast of the United States is fortified against calamity by a service that in the four and twenty years prior to July, 1895, had succeeded in saving to its owners one hundred and two million out of one hundred and thirty-three million dollars of property threatened with disaster, and out of more than sixty-seven thousand lives involved had prevented the loss of all but seven hundred and fifty. Thus in a single instance has the Idea of the Kingdom of God touched a state and moulded its activities to the ends of beneficence.

Or, to take a very different instance. When men despair of ever bringing any restraining influence to bear upon those appetites and passions whose indulgence causes so much of the suffering of our modern life, it were well to remind them of the even graver problem that Plato faced. Plato speaks in his "Laws" as though he quite despaired of ever finding any inducement that would lead the men of his day to abandon practices that were eating out the very foundations of virility. He has indeed a faint hope that piety, and the desire for honor, and the love of moral beauty, may do something, sometime, toward the abatement of these evils, if only a way can be devised by which they can be brought to bear, but he admits that it is a romantic aspiration. So far, we

might suppose that Plato found himself just about where we find ourselves in the struggle with widespread immorality, but the moment that we look a little closer we discover that he was speaking of a whole class of outrageous and unnatural vices that are scarcely named to-day, and in comparison with which even the illicit relations between the sexes seem almost venial.

As we turn to the more restricted portion of our theme, it is with the wish that space permitted some picture of the social and industrial condition of the English-speaking world a century ago. But there is room for only two suggestions with reference to it,—one bearing upon taxation, and the other upon crime and the administration of justice. The first seems like a caricature, but it reflects a sad truth. "The school-boy," wrote Sydney Smith, early in the century, "whips his taxed top; the beardless youth manages his taxed horse with a taxed bridle on a taxed road; and the dying Englishman, pouring his medicine which has paid seven per cent into a spoon which has paid fifteen per cent, flings himself back upon his chintz bed, which has paid twenty-two per cent, and expires in the arms of an apothecary who has paid a license of one hundred pounds for the privilege of putting him to death. His whole property is then taxed from two to ten per cent. Large fees are demanded for burying him in the chancel; his virtues are handed down to posterity on taxed marble; and he is then gathered to his fathers—to be taxed no more."

England then, as now, stood in the van of civilization, but even in England the law recognized two hundred and twenty-three capital offenses, one hundred and fifty-six of which dated no further back than the accession of the Georges. To quote a rather popular authority, who is, however, sufficiently reliable here, "If a man injured Westminster Bridge, he was hanged. If he appeared disguised

upon a public road he was hanged. If he cut down young trees; if he shot at rabbits; if he stole property valued at five shillings; if he stole anything at all from a bleach-field; if he wrote a threatening letter to extort money; if he returned prematurely from transportation,—for any of these offenses he was immediately hanged.” It would be a truer statement of the case to say that the law required him to be hanged, and that the officers of justice were ready enough to hang him, but that juries sometimes asserted themselves with true Anglo-Saxon hard-headedness and obstinacy. Sir Samuel Romilly, whose noble efforts finally resulted in a mitigation of the code, tells of one case in which a woman confessed to the theft of five pounds from a house. Although it was money, nothing could persuade the jury that it was more than thirty-nine shillings; an amount sufficiently low to warrant a mitigation of punishment. The whole policy of government appeared to be that criminals and persons of criminal tendency must be put to death or got rid of by transportation.

If we cross the Atlantic in the expectation of finding a better state of affairs, we discover a comparatively new community whose statute-books were of course free from such disfigurement as we have just witnessed, but whose administration of justice was still sufficiently illogical and wrongheaded. The laws with reference to debtors made it possible for “one indiscreet compact to doom a wretch to a lifelong confinement” (Bancroft), and, as late as 1829, it was estimated that no less than three thousand persons were confined for debt in the prisons of Massachusetts alone, while the numbers given on good authority for the other States are so incredibly large that one is reluctant to quote them without opportunity for more searching scrutiny.

There was a practical admission, too, on both sides of the Atlantic, that there were classes in society who, as

classes, might be properly exploited for the advantage of other classes. Of course, France under the old *régime* worked out this theory to conclusions that seem almost inconceivably bitter to-day. But in both England and America there was little enough respect for the manhood and womanhood of the less fortunate strata in society. There was almost no feeling of public responsibility for those who were unable to care for themselves. Slavery was regarded in England as one of the foundation-stones of colonial prosperity, and in America as a great vested right of the South. It was not until 1807 that the slave-trade was abolished, and even then the abolition of slavery itself seemed almost hopelessly distant. But with the self-denying labors of John Howard in the latter half of last century, there promised to be an awakening of a public conscience with reference to the treatment of the dependent and the criminal classes. Howard himself was summoned to the bar of the House of Commons, and formally thanked for his examination of the state of the British prisons and the information which he had afforded the public. The Quakers on both sides of the sea had long been protesting nobly against the iniquities of slavery; and as Howard laid down his life and his work together, Wilberforce, Clarkson, and Granville Sharpe were beginning to push, in and out of Parliament, the agitation which issued in the abolition of the slave-trade; while to their success in this endeavor succeeded the patient agitation of Sir Samuel Romilly for the amelioration of the criminal code—a task at which he was still toiling when he died.

These facts are so well known that it may seem scarce worth while to mention them. But it is done because they were more than mere isolated and factitious outbursts of humanitarian sentiment. They are significant of a new social spirit animating the body politic. The world was coming to realize that in the social and industrial realms

humanity's solidarity must be recognized. A new idea of the Kingdom of God was making its way into some very hard heads. An irresistible feeling that men had a right to their religious convictions issued in the emancipation of the Catholics from their political disabilities, and paved the way for the emancipation of the Jews. Men began to see that the time had come when a wider extension of the privilege and responsibility of suffrage was imperatively demanded. It is true that the passage of the Reform Bill of 1832 was partially due to selfish ambition and fear, but still the thing that made it a necessity was the growing sense that men had a right to say how they should be governed, and who should make their laws; and that, because they were men, and not because they were rich or educated men. So, rationally enough, there followed close on this reform a larger sense of responsibility for the dependent, and for those who, though partially able to care for themselves, were yet so situated as to be at almost hopeless disadvantage in the disposal of their scanty abilities and powers.

In illustration, it is sufficient to cite the changed conditions that began to surround the treatment of the insane. The old theory seems to have been that if the body of the insane person were not indeed the home of a demon, it might as well be treated as though it were, and made as undesirable a tenement as possible. Thus harshness, not to say brutality, became almost the rule. Even King George III., though his insanity was of a mild and inoffensive type, is said to have been put in the strait-waistcoat, and to have been struck by at least one attendant. If any of you have an appetite for horrors, I would suggest the reading of Sydney Smith's essay on the treatment of the insane, which appeared in the *Edinburgh Review* soon after the Parliamentary inquiry of 1815. It may be thought that things were better in America; but it is well to remember that at

the beginning of the century there was "no reformatory; no asylum for the blind; for the deaf and dumb, or for the insane," upon our side of the ocean (McMaster); and the superintendent of one of the Massachusetts State hospitals has recently told me that, as a boy, he could remember homes in New Hampshire provided with a cage where an insane member of the family was kept. It was not until 1839, indeed, that John Conolly—a name ever to be held in honor—became resident physician to the asylum at Hanwell, and did away forever with the old *régime* of physical restraint and abuse.

It is interesting to note how, in all this advance, very imperfect and faulty ideals of 'righteousness, peace, and joy' were yet effective in bringing great influence for good to bear. When the Reform Bill passed, Lord Ashley was a young man just entering Parliament; a Tory too, who conscientiously believed that Reform meant revolution and the undermining of the foundations of society. But wrong as we think him; fancying, as he seemed to do, that the Kingdom of God could only be wrought out upon earth either under the administration of the established church as it then existed, or else by a second coming of the Lord to make all things new by force of his visible presence, he did not hesitate to cast all the influence of his personality and his position into the struggle for humane legislation in behalf of the outcast, neglected, and overwrought classes. Scarce any one man of this century has succeeded in embodying more of the beneficent spirit that must animate the builder of the Kingdom of God than Anthony Ashley Cooper, seventh earl of Shaftesbury. There was something that was narrow, something that was suggestive of unloveliness, about his life; and yet the Kingdom of God came the nearer because he lived, and the Idea of the Kingdom made itself felt as a power in the century's history because he yielded

himself to its sway. Contrast for a moment the England he found with the England which he left some twelve years since.

In 1833, to quote a sentence or two from his biographer, "The amusements of the people were a fair index of their general condition. There was universal rioting and carousal at Easter and Whitsuntide. Fairs and wakes were the popular resorts; drunkenness was the prevailing vice; unchastity was fearfully prevalent; and low-class dancing-saloons and still lower-class theaters were largely frequented.

"The opportunities for improving their mental and moral condition were very limited. The factory system . . . was cruel in its oppression. Mines and collieries were worked in great measure by women and children. Bakers, sailors, and chimney-sweeps were left unprotected by legislation. Friendly societies, many of them rotten to the core, were the only legalized methods of self-help. Sanitary science was practically unknown. Education was not a right. Ragged schools, reformatory and industrial schools, mechanics' institutes, and workmen's clubs had not begun to exist. Taxation was oppressive and unjust. Limited liability, enabling working-men to contribute their small capital to the increase of the productive power of the country, was not so much as thought of. The poor laws were pauperizing and degrading. . . . The Compensation for Accidents Act did not exist. The cheap literature of the day reflected the violent passions which raged on every side."¹

To relate what the ideal of a more perfect social life ordered in accordance with Christ's law of love, wrought through the instrumentality of this one man, would be to tell the story of the social reforms of nearly three-quarters of a century. There is not space to recount how he pro-

¹ Hodder's *Shaftesbury*, i. 132.

moted what has been called the Magna Charta of the liberties of the insane; how he freed the chimney-sweeps from their practical slavery; how he rescued the little children from their overwork in the mills; how he stopped, in great degree, the awful underground labor of women and of children under thirteen who had done so much of the work in English mines; nor how he succeeded, through a life of utmost devotion and strenuous toil, in giving efficiency to the benevolent instincts of a multitude of people who dimly saw a better way, but who failed to walk in it, for lack of leadership.

It would be wrong to leave this portion of our theme without passing reference to two other great advances of the century along lines suggested by an ideal of the Kingdom. Most men would smile if any one attempted to bring the Repeal of the Corn Laws under this category; for, if there be one thing above another that has ministered to the material advance of England, it has been her conviction that she had no right to hamper trade. We fancy that this has been a mere commercial conviction. But we forget the story of the repeal. Cobden's ideal has been thought to be that of a great commercial community merely. But the thing that made Cobden one of the prophets of the century was his outspoken conviction that the corn-laws, exploiting as they did one class, and that a humble class, for the benefit of another, were unsocial, and so in the large sense unchristian and immoral. And it was this conviction which underlay the political necessity that, in face of the distress of 1845, converted Sir Robert Peel, and brought Tories like Lord Shaftesbury to his support, even at cost of great political sacrifice.

The other reform, which is mentioned here the more briefly because it is so well known to all, was, of course, the long agitation for the abolition of American slavery. It is entirely true that there is much in the story of it to

convict the Christian church of sin. It was but slowly that she opened her eyes to her great responsibility and opportunity. But none the less it was an Idea of the Kingdom of God, sometimes very imperfectly conceived and yet more imperfectly expressed, that sustained the unconquerable spirit of the abolitionists. And it ought always to be added that the Idea of the Kingdom arose primarily from the teaching of the church herself. The word of her Lord that she had uttered carried with it implications which, though clearly enough discerned by many of those to whom she spoke, she herself was somewhat slow to recognize, and to which she was quite too slow to conform her practice.

Having thus said something of the Idea of the Kingdom as a power working for the reformation of the social and industrial life of the Anglo-Saxon world during this century, brief mention must be made of the same beneficent agency as it has influenced Politics and Statecraft on the one hand, and as it has modified certain of our Intellectual and Ethical conceptions upon the other. But it will be impossible to do more than indicate the lines along which such a discussion might profitably be carried on.

It requires but the most superficial acquaintance with the political history of the last one hundred and fifty years to discern manifestations of a larger spirit at work among statesmen and a deeper sense of responsibility to the commonwealth. We think that we live in an age of corrupt politics. So we do. But when, in the middle of last century, William Pitt, afterward Lord Chatham, became Paymaster-General, it was thought a marvelous thing that he should refuse to put into his own pocket the interest accruing from the vast sums that lay in the bank subject to his official draft. Henry Fox and Rigby took these gigantic perquisites as a matter of course, laying thereby the foundations of great fortunes, and the world seemed to think but little the worse of them for it. So when a subsidy to a for-

eign power was voted during Pitt's administration as Secretary of State, and he refused to receive the customary commission on the transaction, the bewildered prince who was subsidized scarce knew what steps to take in face of such unheard-of disinterestedness. To-day a Minister in England or a Cabinet officer in America who should be detected in lining his own pocket as it was expected he would line it then, would be discredited forever. All this is said without forgetting the present lamentable state of public and especially of civic ideals. But the very fact that their low estate concerns us, and is thought fit subject for agitation, is a sign that the Idea of Service instead of Profit is slowly moulding the public conception of office. "To the victors belong the spoils" is, as a maxim, discredited even in its birthplace to-day, and to have discredited a maxim is to have done much. So it was very well observed the other day by Mr. Godkin, that the gigantic armaments of the modern nations are supported nominally in the interests of peace, or at most in those of self-defense, and that none dares avouch a scheme of conquest.

There has been, too, through the century a constant growth in the sentiment of responsibility for dependent races. It can be truthfully said that at last we are honestly desirous, as a nation, of doing our best for the Indian and the Negro, though it is by no means easy to discover what that best is. And he is a very prejudiced student indeed who shuts his eyes to the mighty advance which India and Egypt have made under British rule along those lines that promise security and decency of life. No Anglo-Saxon people is ever entirely disinterested in its treatment of those who are its subjects. But the day is past when public opinion will permit a subject people to be exploited for the master's gain, as though they owed duties, but had no rights.

We find ourselves at present in the midst of a struggle

for larger comity between the two great branches of the Anglo-Saxon race. What does it mean? I am little enough disposed to go into raptures over the dim prospect of perpetual peace; but, underneath this present agitation for whose consummation every Christian must devoutly pray, there is a subtle though mighty force at work, convincing men that the old notion that what one nation gained, must always be gained at the expense of another, is anarchistic and utterly opposed to the larger interests of society. We are coming, too, under the persistent pressure of the Idea of the Kingdom of God, to recast our notions of patriotism, and to make it a holier thing; to see that even the *nation* is not to be the ultimate object of the Christian citizen's service, although it may be and may remain the more immediate object. Patriotism, from the beginning, has always been animated in its attitude toward the world at large by something of that cruelty of fear which, in those moments when it gains the upper hand, always mocks at the moral sense. The moral sense, held in abeyance to selfishness too long, is coming to assert itself unmistakably in national affairs, and it is in the light of this fact that our present effort after international arbitration assumes its deepest significance; and however shrilly the mere Jingo may vociferate the message of his father, the Devil, he must learn at last that in the awakened moral sense of Christendom he will eventually find a master.

It might easily be shown that it is an ethical consideration which underlies much that is most powerful, and all that will prove permanent in modern socialism. The world at large only dimly perceives how our intellectual and ethical notions are being subtly but deeply wrought upon by the Idea of the Kingdom of righteousness, peace, and joy. It is telling upon our ideals of manhood. Renan thought a Christian society would necessarily be "so weak" — *si faible*. But the world resents any such notion of

Christianity as that to-day, and has lifted up higher than ever St. Paul's exhortation, "Quit you like men; be strong!" There is arising a new sense of the responsibilities of wealth and the obligation to acquire an economic understanding of its expenditure. And last of all, within the passing decade, even the so-called scientific spirit has come to recognize, at least in some slight measure, that humility and charitableness are necessary conditions of the truest knowledge. Surely "this great drama of Providence which we call History" is worth our reverent study as we face the immediate and troublesome problems of to-day.

In what has gone before no attempt has been made to picture the marvelous material progress of the last hundred years. Whether the riches we have gathered and the energy we have developed prove a blessing or a curse to later generations must depend upon the Idea to which these things are subject. I believe that the idea of the Kingdom of God—that is, the Idea of a Society whose life shall be spiritually and ethically as well as materially complete—has, even when very meagerly and imperfectly grasped, proved itself a power of vast significance in the world's progress, and I have striven to indicate roughly the place of this Idea in the life of the century now drawing to a close. It has expressed itself under such common forms sometimes that in looking back we miss it altogether. We think we see it in the turmoil of some great religious revival. But its real coming is just as often without observation. When such a very material thing as the first big Plimsoll mark was painted on the hull of a steamship, it was a sign, to those who could read, that the Idea of the Kingdom was at work upon the lot of those who go down to the sea in ships; and that one great commercial nation had put itself on record as decreeing that men's lives should not be bought for gold.

Nothing is more deplorable than the shallow optimism that pictures this world as sailing over summer seas to blessed isles, if only men would believe it to be so. Our true progress does not come in that way. It is rather a steadfast and courageous beating up against tempestuous winds and rugged seas, now to this side and now to that of the straight line we fain would follow; sometimes losing on this tack, sometimes only holding our own upon the other, but gaining on the whole; not able to see it always, except as day after day observation of our relation to the steadfast things above shows it to us. Thus it is that the story of men's toilsome advance, as all unwillingly and timidly and partially they have consented to become dwelling-places of the Holy Ghost,—that story that some count dull and others call profane,—is really the most ineffably sacred of records. One does not need to have commission to bring things new and old out of the treasure-house where this record is kept, and present them to his fellows. It is sufficient to remind them that the treasure-house is there, and that the door will open to him who knocks with reverent hand.