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1922.

641st ORDINARY GENERAL MEETING

HELD IN COMMITTEE ROOM B

THE CENTRAL HALL, WESTMINSTER, S.W. on Monday,
April 10th, 1922, at 4.30 p.m.

Dr. JAMES W. THIRTLE, M.R.A.S., in the Chair.

The Minutes of the previous Meeting were read, confirmed and signed, and the HON. SECRETARY announced the Election of the following gentlemen as Associates:—Dr. Arthur Ponsonby Moore-Anderson, the Rev. William W. Craig, D.D., the Rev. Canon Cyril J. Wyche, and the Rev. Prof. John Gresham Machen, D.D.

The Chairman then called on Mr. Theodore Roberts to read his paper on "Seven Decisive and Suggestive Scenes in the History of the Secular Contest between Conscience and Power."

SEVEN DECISIVE AND SUGGESTIVE SCENES IN THE HISTORY OF THE SECULAR CONTEST BETWEEN CONSCIENCE AND POWER.

By THEODORE ROBERTS Esq.

“συνειδὸς ἀγαθὸν φιλεῖ παρρησιάζεσθαι”

“A good conscience likes to speak out.”—*Pausanias*.

I remember reading in Lord Morley's *Life of Gladstone* how that great man expressed his concurrence with the historian Grote's view that there were only two supremely interesting subjects in the world, *viz.*, theology and politics, with which opinion I beg leave humbly to express my entire concurrence.

As the subject which I have chosen is one which lies midway between theology and politics, it will be my own fault if I fail to make it interesting. I must, however, bear in mind the caution contained in our rules that this platform is not to be used for the purpose of forwarding any sectarian or political views. I hope, therefore, that no one will be able from a perusal of my paper to identify me with any less inclusive title than that of Christian, which is, indeed, all I ever wish to be known by.

I cannot deny that some haunting reminiscence of reading Creasy's *Fifteen Decisive Battles of the World* in my youth has led me to propose to treat the history of conscience in its contest with power in an analogous way. I have sometimes occupied my idle moments in speculating what might have been the consequence of Napoleon winning the Battle of Waterloo, and I could see no reason why he should not have firmly re-established the power of France as the first military nation and bequeathed that power to his generals as Alexander the Great did before him. So that if our great countryman had not conquered him at Waterloo, we might never have had the late war, but be still living in the same fear of French aggression as possessed our forefathers even long after the death of the great Napoleon, as witness Tennyson's "Third of February, 1852," and "Riflemen, Form!"

That which makes Creasy's *Decisive Battles* more interesting than battles of crows and kites is the fact that those engaged in them were beings endowed with reason and initiative and capable of appreciating things moral.

But, which ever way these military contests went, the result must be to a large extent at least materialistic, and I must, therefore, make the most of the superior interest of things moral over things material in order to make up for my own deficiencies in investing the subject I am taking with the supreme interest that it deserves.

It may be fairly objected that to place so much emphasis on particular incidents is not portraying history faithfully—that we have learned in modern times to look for the gradual evolution of great movements and principles which are not to be turned back by one event. No doubt there is much truth in this. A great movement is like a mighty river gradually gaining force, and with force both depth and width, and is not to be dammed up by any barrages. Nevertheless, such a river can at a given point by the exercise of a little ingenuity be diverted, so as to take quite a different course to that which it otherwise would.

I think it is often the same with the course of religious and political movements, and nothing interests me so profoundly as to recognize the personal effect of some great man on a crisis in human history. Nay, more, believing as I do not only in a general overruling Providence, but that God raises up and sustains men of spiritual power to stand for that part of the Christian revelation which He sees is needful to be emphasized at a particular time, I recognize that there are crises in spiritual movements where the action of God's special witnesses has decisive consequences in directing the flow of such movements into regions where they may, under God's good hand, become a source of fertility to after generations.

So far as I understand it, conscience, quite as much as reason, differentiates man from the rest of the creatures on this planet. But conscience is superior to reason in that reason is not necessarily amenable to moral considerations, as witness the great minds of Julius Cæsar and Napoleon, men wholly immoral, using that word in the widest and truest sense. Conscience is spoken of by St. Paul in his great treatise entitled "The Epistle to the Romans" as that which within man bears witness to him of good and evil and leads to self-accusation or self-excuse (Chap. ii. 15), but it does not appear in the early ages of the history of mankind to have had any place given it by the philosophers.

Even the famous incident of the unjust condemnation and death of Socrates, the most attractive of all the ancient philosophers, is very far from being a question of conscience. All that Mr. Benn in his recent work on the Greek Philosophers (p. 137) can say is:—"Here, in this one cause, the real central issue between two abstract principles, the principle of authority and the principle of reason, was cleared from all adventitious circumstances, and disputed on its own intrinsic merits with the usual weapons of argument on the one side and brute force on the other."

Conscience necessarily brings in the thought of responsibility to God, and, therefore, it has been well said that while man's reason may be infidel, his conscience never is. By conscience, accordingly, I understand that intuition or voice within us which judges our actions and thoughts (and by inference the actions and words of others) as morally good or morally bad. As Wordsworth puts it—

"Conscience revered and obeyed,
As God's most intimate presence in the soul."

For conscience, therefore, to come into opposition to power it is plain that that power must be itself morally bad and opposed to God. I use the word "power" rather than "authority," because, strictly speaking, the only true authority is that of God, and consequently cannot come into opposition with conscience. I do not limit power to what is physical, but include in the term the force of established customs and public opinion.

We may say that so long as God's ancient people Israel were maintained in any kind of outward relationship to Him, conscience and power could not, strictly speaking, come into contest at all, and this was definitely taught by the Jewish law, for the man who kept it was to prosper in everything.

The contrast between that dispensation and the Christian dispensation is summed up by the great Bacon in his sentence that "Prosperity is the blessing of the Old Testament; adversity is the blessing of the New, which carrieth the greater benediction."

I.

It may, therefore, seem at first sight a little strange that I can take, as the first of my seven scenes, in which conscience and power are opposed, an incident which is recorded in the Book of Daniel; but we must remember that this occurred after the Jewish people had, according to the prophet Jeremiah, been rejected on account of their sins by the Divine Governor of the world in favour of the great Gentile monarch Nebuchadnezzar.

I make no apology for treating the Book of Daniel as authentic history, in spite of the so-called Higher Critics. I am glad to be able to refer to two papers lately read from this desk by men specially competent to deal with the subject and endorsed in this room by other true experts. These papers have shown us, first, that there is nothing in the language of the Book inconsistent with its having been actually written by Daniel, and, secondly, that its references to contemporary history are borne out by the most recent archæological research.

I might perhaps be allowed to refer to Dr. Pusey's point that the order "Medes and Persians," in which these two great amalgamated nations are mentioned in Daniel vi. 8, 12, 15 and viii. 20, in contrast with the order "Persians and Medes" in the later written Book of Esther (Chapter i. 3, 18, 19), proves that Daniel must have been composed while the amalgamation was yet recent and the Persians' power had not become plainly predominant. It is inconceivable if the writer lived after the downfall of that empire, as the higher critics allege, he could have put the two names in an order which had passed out of use in the early days of the monarchy and made most of the people which had long ago lost its separate entity in the Persian nation.

The relation of miracles in the Book cannot form a difficulty for those who believe in the bodily resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, and we have His testimony to the fact that Daniel was the writer of the Book.

The incident I bring before you concerns those three Hebrew youths who refused to bow before the image erected by Nebuchadnezzar in the Plain of Dura, and if we consider their situation, I think we shall see that there is not to be found in all history a finer example of suffering for conscience sake.

Although of the seed royal of Judah, they had, in accordance with Isaiah's prophecy to their forefather Hezekiah, been made eunuchs in the court of the king of Babylon, whose power over them was absolute. They had witnessed the subjugation of their native country, and their own enslavement had been sealed in a

peculiarly barbarous manner. This did not prevent their refusal under Daniel's leadership of participation in the king's meat and wine, no doubt in obedience to Moses, whose law was still valid for them. They may have found it comparatively easy to follow Daniel in his protest, but in the present scene they had to stand on their own faith and with a horrible death in view as the penalty for obeying conscience.

Might I remark in passing that, if this Book had a merely human origin such as the critics contend, we should certainly have had some explanation given of the absence on this crucial occasion of Daniel, who is by the critics posed as the great hero of the Book.

There is something noble and attractive in standing for a great leader or for the worship of some venerated religious object, but it is much more difficult to be enthusiastic over a negation, and it cannot be too clearly pointed out that the witness of these three youths was entirely negative.

The image which they refused to worship was no doubt suggested by the dream which Daniel had recently first told and then interpreted to Nebuchadnezzar, and the king whose command they dared to disobey was not only the greatest monarch in the world, but the one about whom their own nation's prophet Jeremiah had said that all nations must submit to him (Chapter xxvii. 6-8). The Protestant Princes might refuse to bow to the Roman consecrated Host in later times at the Diet in Germany, but they had a large body of public opinion behind them, whereas these three youths stood absolutely alone.

Nebuchadnezzar appears to have felt some special interest in his former page-boys, for he took the trouble to offer them a second chance of obeying his command. But they tell the great king, in whose hands their lives appeared to be, that they are not careful to answer him, at once anticipating our Lord's direction in after days to His disciples. After affirming that their God could deliver them they add: "But if not, be it known unto thee, O King, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up."

I know nothing finer in all history than this answer, which heralded the entrance of a new moral force into this world, before which the mightiest monarchies were to crumble in the dust.

The same conscientious scruple led thousands of Christian martyrs to refuse to throw a little incense on the altar burning before the statue of the Roman Emperor of the day, although they knew it meant death to refuse.

The latter part of the Book of Isaiah's prophecy contains the account of two separate controversies of Jehovah with Israel, one in respect of their idolatry (Chapters xl. to xlvi.), and the other in respect of their treatment of His Servant (Chapters xlix. to lvii). The faith of these three Hebrew youths appears to have purged the nation from idolatry, but it is not without significance that the men, who escaped from the Babylonish captivity and refused all the blandishments of Antiochus the Great and endured his persecutions, in their zeal for the exclusive worship of Jehovah, had as their lineal descendants the Pharisees who crucified our Lord. So surely does true religion turn to hypocrisy when left in human hands.

II.

In the next Scene I bring before you the witnesses for conscience stand on more difficult ground. Peter and the Apostles had been brought up to regard the great Council of the nation with its High Priest and doctors of the law as entitled to unquestioning obedience, for they sat in Moses' seat. Yet the apostles stand up before that Council, their very speech betraying that they were ignorant peasants, and give utterance to that magnificent asseveration of freedom of conscience, "We ought to obey God rather than men." They were not setting up any right of independent action, for they say, "We ought to obey," and then they add "God rather than men," in order to meet the claims of that venerable religion which they had ever been taught to reverence, but which, by its rejection of their Master, had lost all claim to divine authority over them.

We have here the conscience of man in obedience to faith in the new Revelation disowning the claim of a religious system originally established by God.

There is no more convincing proof of the Resurrection of our Lord than that these men who had fled like timid hares a few weeks before, when He was arrested, could now brave the Council who had done Him to death and charge them with His murder. Nothing but the fact that they had actually seen Him alive again and thus triumphant over His enemies could have nerved them thus to bear witness to Him.

Here we trace the beginning of that loyalty to Christ which was to fill the annals of the world with innumerable examples of a nobility of spirit in slaves and other depressed classes that incomparably transcend all the much vaunted heroic virtue and public spirit of Greece and Rome. Compare, for example, with Stephen praying for those who were in the act of stoning him to death; Brutus, generally acclaimed as the most patriotic and commonly called the last of the Romans, imprecating punishment on his enemies, when about to commit

suicide in despair of his country; or Socrates, the best of non-Christian teachers, refusing to escape by bribery from his death sentence, with the slave Blandina in A.D. 177, enduring prolonged and terrible tortures until death released her, and amidst her greatest agonies merely protesting, "I am a Christian and no wickedness is done among us."

III.

We now withdraw within the Christian circle and find our third decisive Scene in the well-known controversy between Paul and Peter at Antioch, related by the former in his Epistle to the Galatians, the most characteristic of all his writings. The great Apostle of the Gentiles, like Athanasius in a later day, found himself alone against the rest. The coming of the strict Jews from James at Jerusalem had led Peter to forsake those very Gentiles to whom he had opened the door of salvation at Cæsarea and to set up a narrower circle than true Christian fellowship, and Paul sorrowfully records that even the faithful Barnabas was swept away by the rising tide of Jewish exclusivism.

He at once recognized what was at stake, nothing less than the whole conception of Christianity as a world religion, afterwards so wonderfully expounded by him in his Epistle to the Ephesians (so called). So he took the daring step, so inexplicable to those who assert the Primacy of Peter and the infallibility of the Roman bishops, among whom they vainly place the Apostle, of publicly arraigning that Apostle before the whole Antiochian church for his patent denial of true Christian liberty.

But we must not regard the Apostle Paul as a statesman acting with a view to the future, but rather as a simple believer whose conscience compelled him to adhere at all cost to his divinely given concept of the Gospel. It required no small courage for him to oppose men like Peter and Barnabas, long his seniors in the faith, with the whole Church apparently behind them; but what he did then at Antioch bore fruit in the decree of the first Christian Council, that at Jerusalem, held (I believe) shortly after this scene, at which the Gentile believers were put on a platform of perfect equality with their Jewish brethren. He himself speaks of refusing to give place to his opponents, even for an hour, in order that the truth of the Gospel might continue with the Gentile believers, which shows what he felt was in question in the dispute.

IV.

We now pass from the sure ground of holy writ to the equally interesting history of the Christian church in later ages. In our next decisive Scene we find Christianity so established in the world that participation in its rites is regarded as a privilege by the greatest of monarchs.

In the year of our Lord 390 the great city of Thessalonica was convulsed by a seditious insurrection, in the course of which the imperial general and several of his principal officers were inhumanly murdered by the populace. The occasion of the insurrection only aggravated its guilt.

Theodosius the Great was reigning at the time and, being of a somewhat impulsive and fiery temper, ordered his barbarian auxiliaries to massacre the inhabitants, with the result that at least 7,000 were slain. When the great Ambrose, then Archbishop of Milan, the imperial seat of government, heard of this he retired into the country grief-stricken and addressed a private letter to the emperor, pointing out the seriousness of his crime and suggesting that he should confine himself to prayer and should not presume to receive the holy eucharist with hands that were still polluted with innocent blood. Though many of his predecessors had professed Christianity, Theodosius was the first emperor who gave any certain signs of true conversion, and in private he deeply bewailed the sin of which he had been guilty. When, however, Sunday came round he presented himself, as in former times, at the great Cathedral of Milan to take the communion. Ambrose stopped him in the porch, declaring that more was needed than private repentance for such a public sin as that which he had committed. Theodosius ventured to suggest that if he had been guilty of murder, David, the man after God's own heart, had committed not only murder, but adultery. To this Ambrose replied: "You have imitated David in his crime, imitate then his repentance," and for eight months the monarch of the Roman world was debarred from the sacrament and appeared in the Cathedral as a penitent for his sin.

This scene represents perhaps the greatest triumph of conscience over supreme power. Never in the past had a monarch been publicly debarred of religious privileges on account of personal guilt; and if we recall the Third Napoleon partaking of the sacrament in the Cathedral of Notre Dame after he had broken his oath to the French Republic and usurped imperial power, imprisoning and massacring his opponents, as so eloquently described by Kinglake in his history of the Crimean War, we must admit that the moral force of conscience is not as great in our times as it was in the period, which some of us are pleased to refer to as the Dark Ages.

It is interesting to note that Theodosius was the last universal ruler of the civilized world, for the empire was divided on his death between his two sons and never reunited, nor has any sole world-ruler since appeared.

It was no longer a case of conscience energising feeble men to resist the world power unto blood, but of conscience compelling that world power to obey its behests. No one can deny that

the moral force which the church exercised on this occasion was entirely salutary. But we can hardly say the same of the world-famous scene of Henry IV. of the restored western Roman Empire in January, 1077, standing in the snow in the thin linen dress of a penitent outside the castle of Canossa and there fasting, waiting humbly for the absolution of the arrogant priest within, the Pope Gregory VII., better known as Hildebrand, which was necessary for his continuance in the empire. Well might Bismarck in his contest with the Pope of his day protest that "Germany will not again go to Canossa."

Alas, we have not long to trace the Roman church's history before we find her using the veneration which she had inspired for the basest of purposes. In the words of our Lord's parable "The servant who should have given the household meat in due season began to beat his fellow servants." Therefore, in our next scene we shall find conscience standing up against all the might of the Roman hierarchy in league with the temporal power.

V.

For my fifth scene I take you to the famous Diet of Worms in the year 1521, when Martin Luther appeared before all the princes of Germany presided over by the young emperor Charles the Fifth. History records that there had been no assemblage so numerous and brilliant since the days of Charlemagne, seven centuries before. The emperor himself had gathered up the crowns of more kingdoms than had ever yet been united on a single head. He was king of all the various kingdoms that now make up Spain, and he also ruled over the greater part of Italy and the whole of our present Belgium and Holland. In the New World the valuable West Indian Islands, Mexico, Central America, Peru, as well as the Philippines, were his, while his brother, also present, ruled over Hungary, Bohemia and the adjacent lands; so that with the exception of France and England, who, however, both sent ambassadors to the Diet, practically the whole civilized world was represented at Worms.

Even to go to Worms at all required great courage on the part of Luther, when he remembered the fate of John Huss, who went to Constance a century earlier relying on the safe conduct of Charles' predecessor Sigismund, which he violated and allowed Huss to be burned; but Luther's reply to his friends who would have dissuaded him is well known: "Though there were as many devils in Worms as the tiles on the housetops," still he would enter it.

On his way he passed through Erfurt where as a monk he had first learned the truth of the Gospel. The sermon which he preached there on his journey to Worms has come down to us, and perhaps I may quote a passage from it in order to show exactly what was the truth for which Luther was standing.

“ Philosophers, doctors and writers,” said the preacher, “ have endeavoured to teach men the way to obtain everlasting life, and they have not succeeded. I will now tell it to you :—

“ There are two kinds of works—works not of ourselves, and these are good; our own works, they are of little worth. One man builds a church; another goes on a pilgrimage to St. Iago of Compostella, or St. Peter’s; a third fasts, takes the cowl, and goes bare-foot; another does something else. All these works are nothingness, and will come to naught, for our own works have no virtue in them. But I am now going to tell you what is the true work. God has raised one Man from the dead, the Lord Jesu Christ, that He might destroy death; expiate sin, and shut the gates of hell. This is the work of salvation.

“ Christ has vanquished! This is the joyful news! and we are saved by His work, and not by our own. . . . Our Lord Jesus Christ said, ‘ Peace be unto you! behold my hands,’ that is to say, Behold, O man! it is I, I alone, who have taken away thy sins, and ransomed thee; and now thou hast peace, saith the Lord.”

It was the first time for centuries that the truth of justification by faith had been thus clearly stated. Those who had previously rejected the prevailing superstitions of Rome had ultimately been silenced, nor had their doctrine been as clear as that of the monk who now shook the world. If he could have been cowed or coerced into silence, it is likely that Calvin would never have had a safe place in which to preach, nor should we have had any real reformation in England. Not only had Luther the fate of the early reformers to remind him of his own danger, but he was standing up against a church which had been united by the Council that burned Huss and had, therefore, a greater apparent claim to the obedience of mankind. It was a church which he had been taught to reverence as the only true representative of the Divine Revelation on earth, a church whose creeds indeed set forth the faith of the earlier and purer ages.

It is interesting to learn that it was on his journey to this Council that Luther composed his famous hymn, “ A strong tower is our God,” and sang it sitting in his conveyance as the towers of Worms appeared in view. When he reached the gates the citizens left their dinner and with all the multitude of princes, nobles and men of all the nations gathered there gave the monk a greater reception than had met the emperor a few days before.

On the following morning Luther appeared before the Diet, someone whispering in his ear, as he entered, “ Fear not them that can kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do.” On this occasion he was asked two questions, first, “ Did he acknowledge his books? ” which had been collected and placed

on the table, and, secondly, " Was he prepared to retract and disavow the opinions he had advanced in them? " To the first question he replied, after their titles had been read, that the books were his, and as to the second he asked for time for a reply, which was granted until the morrow. I have often thought that crowned heads have less of the gift of discerning character than the rest of mankind, and Charles, though the ablest man since the Christian era who has reigned by hereditary right, except Charlemagne and Frederick the Great, proved no exception to this observation. He had not taken his eyes off Luther during the whole time that he was before him, but his opinion was unfavourable, he said: " Certainly that monk will never make a heretic of me. "

On the following day, after a night spent in prayer, Luther again appeared before the Diet and spoke for about an hour in German, repeating it in Latin for the emperor's benefit, as he knew not the tongue of the great nation over which he ruled. In substance he defended what he had written, though expressing great readiness to be shown where he was wrong, and before he closed he added a word of warning which must have sounded strange to that glittering throng of kings and princes. He told them they were on their trial, and referred to the great monarchies of ancient time, which, he said, by fighting against God, had brought upon themselves utter ruin, and counselled them to take warning by these examples. When he ceased to speak the Chancellor of Treves, Dr. Eck, pressed for a direct answer: " Would he or would he not retract? "

Undismayed, Luther replied: " Since your most Serene Majesty, and your High Mightiness, require from me a direct and precise answer, I will give you one, and it is this. I cannot submit my faith either to the Pope or to the Councils, because it is clear as day they have frequently erred and contradicted each other. Unless, therefore, I am convinced by the testimony of Scripture, or on plain and clear grounds of reason, so that conscience shall bind me to make acknowledgment of error, *I can and will not retract*, for it is neither safe nor wise to do anything contrary to conscience. " And then, looking round on the Council, he said—and the words are among the sublimest in history—" *Here I stand. I can do no other. May God help me. Amen.* "

These words still move us after four centuries. The impression which they made on the princes was overpowering, and a murmur of applause, as emphatic as the respect due to the Emperor's presence permitted, burst out in the Diet.

Luther then retired and was allowed to leave the city unharmed, The awakened public opinion of Europe, aroused chiefly by his writings, would not permit the violation of his safe conduct.

Luther had struck a blow for conscience, the effects of which are still apparent. One hundred and fifty years later Bunyan, in his immortal allegory, could depict Giant Pope in his cave, surrounded by the bones of his former victims, but gnashing his teeth because he could not touch the pilgrims of that day.

VI.

We now pass to a much smaller circle, the city of Geneva. In the middle years of the 16th century John Calvin, who shares with Napoleon and Voltaire, men so utterly different from him, the place of the three foremost Frenchmen of all time, had moulded a theocratic state, which became the model of Presbyterians in Scotland, this country and in America. But he had to deal with republican institutions, and a democratic government which necessarily regarded all citizens as equal in privilege. He had taught the Genevans that the highest of all privileges was participation in the rites of the Church, and when he appeared to discriminate between those who desired to take the communion he encountered the opposition of the party which was called by the stricter sort the party of the Libertines. The question was similar to that which was raised in the great scene between Ambrose and Theodosius, namely, that of the Christian conscience seeking to keep holy the most precious ordinance of its religion.

The crisis arose through a proposal to transfer the power of excommunication from the Consistory, which was composed of the ministers of the City and twelve laymen, to the Senate, which represented merely the civil power of the City. There was one Berthelier, son of the martyr of 1521, who had for evil-living been debarred by the Consistory from participation in the sacrament. This man appeared before the Council of the City and demanded the annulment of the sentence of the Spiritual Court against him. In spite of Calvin's remonstrance the Council complied with Berthelier's request.

It is significant to find that the Libertine or popular party was supporting Servetus in his argumentative contest with Calvin which was proceeding at the same time. As regards the Reformer's responsibility for the ultimate fate of his opponent, I will only quote Coleridge's comment: "If ever poor fanatic thrust himself into the flames it was Servetus."

Within two days of Berthelier's absolution by the Council, Sacrament Sunday came. In the meanwhile the Council had disregarded the protest of all the City pastors against its interference in things spiritual.

On Sunday, September 3rd, 1553, just a generation after Luther's appearance before the Diet, Calvin had to stand against those who would use the rights of civil citizenship to desecrate the Communion Table. Calvin preached in the Cathedral as usual

and took for his subject the state of mind with which the Lord's Supper ought to be received. At the close of his sermon, raising his voice, he said, "As for me, so long as God shall leave me here, since he hath given me fortitude, and I have received it from him, I will employ it, whatever betide; and I will guide myself by my Master's rule, which is to me clear and well known. As we are now about to receive the Holy Supper of our Lord Jesus Christ, if anyone who has been debarred by the Consistory shall approach this table, though it should cost my life, I will show myself such as I ought to be."

When the prayer and praise of the vast congregation were concluded, Calvin came down from the pulpit and took his stand before the Table. Lifting up the white napkin he displayed the symbols of Christ's body and blood, the food destined for believing souls. Having blessed the bread and wine, he was about to distribute them to the congregation. At that moment there was seen a movement among the Libertines, as if they would seize the bread and the cup. The Reformer, covering the sacred symbols with his hands, exclaimed in a voice that rang through the edifice, "These hands you may crush; these arms you may lop off; my life you may take; my blood is yours, you may shed it; but you shall never force me to give holy things to the profane, and dishonour the table of my God." These words broke like a thunder-peal over the Libertines. As if an invisible power had flung back the ungodly host, they slunk away abashed, the congregation opening a passage for their retreat. A deep calm succeeded; and "the sacred ordinance," says Beza, "was celebrated with a profound silence, and under a solemn awe in all present, as if the Deity himself had been visible among them."

In this scene again conscience prevailed over the brute force that was ranged against it, and, if we consider the issues, the victory was greater than the German Reformer's at Worms.

If Calvin had given way the Sacrament would have been robbed of all its meaning and become a mere civil pledge of citizenship, such as it became in England at a later period through the operation of the Test Acts, which required everybody holding office under government to take the Sacrament.

Calvin's faith and courage on this day preserved the Reformed Churches that looked to him as their leader from subservience to the civil power in things spiritual.

VII.

For our seventh and last decisive scene I propose to come to our own country and to refer to the greatest religious leader that the English nation has ever produced, John Wesley, who shares with Shakespeare and Cromwell the foremost place among men of our nation. Born in 1703 and dying in 1791, his life almost covered the 18th century.

In May, 1738, he passed through that spiritual experience which it was his mission to press upon all his hearers from that day forward as a necessity for true salvation. He says in his diary: "I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation; and an assurance was given me, that He had taken away *my* sins, even *mine*, and saved *me* from the law of sin and death."

It is interesting to see how the assurance Wesley then and there received of his own pardon produced corresponding feelings towards those who had ill-treated him, for on the next day he records in his diary: "I began to pray with all my might for those who had in a more especial manner spitefully used me and persecuted me. I then testified openly to all there what I now first felt in my heart." Having regard to the immense results which flowed from Wesley's work, Lecky, the rationalistic historian, describes Wesley's conversion thus recorded as the most important event of the 18th century in English history.

Having received this blessing through the Moravian brethren, who had brought over from Germany a more spiritual Gospel than was then current in England, Wesley almost immediately proceeded to Germany, not returning until September, when, as he tells us in his diary, Sunday, the 17th, "I began again to declare in my own country the glad tidings of salvation."

Within six months of this another crisis occurred in Wesley's life that was fraught with more momentous consequences than even his conversion. This was his decision to preach in the open air, which marked the beginning of that beneficent activity that made him the greatest field preacher that ever was. But we had better have the account in his own words. He records in his diary on March 31st, 1739, a Saturday: "I reached Bristol and met Mr. Whitefield there. I could scarce reconcile myself at first to this strange way of preaching in the fields, of which he set an example on Sunday [the next day]; having been all my life (till very lately) so tenacious of every point relating to decency and order, that I should have thought the saving of souls almost a sin, if it had not been done in a church."

On that day, April 1st, he records in his diary how, Whitefield having left him, he expounded to a little society in Nicholas Street the Sermon on the Mount, adding "one pretty remarkable precedent of field-preaching, though I suppose there were churches at that time also."

On the following day, Monday, the decisive moment came, for he records: "At four in the afternoon, I submitted to be more vile, and proclaimed in the highways the glad tidings of salvation, speaking from a little eminence in a ground adjoining to the city to about three thousand people. The scripture on which I spoke was this: (is it possible anyone should be ignorant, that it is ful-

filled in every true Minister of Christ?) 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He hath anointed me to preach the Gospel to the poor. He hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted; to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind; to set at liberty them that are bruised, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.' "

As is apparent from his own words describing the incident and what led up to it, Wesley's habit of mind was essentially conservative, and it therefore required the most definite assurance that he was obeying his conscience to enable him to set at naught the religious conventions of his day, in which he had been brought up, and on the side of which were ranged the power of the established church, which still commanded Wesley's love and veneration.

It was not the first time that Christian preachers had used the fields even in our own country, and on this particular occasion Wesley had been preceded by Whitefield, but what gave Wesley's first open-air sermon its decisive character arose from those extraordinary gifts of leadership and authority which he possessed beyond any other man of his time.

Henceforth, he turned not back, and as he was gradually shut out from the churches, and public assembly halls were not yet, he was compelled to rely almost exclusively on field-preaching.

For over fifty years he continued this work, until England, Scotland and Ireland were studded with Methodist Societies, all looking up to Wesley as their founder.

Had he flinched at the critical moment from doing violation to his preconceived notions, it is difficult to see how he could ever have been a real power for world-wide good, as his opportunities for preaching would have been narrowed down to the few and tiny meeting-houses of the new society.

Some historians have said that it was the Wesleyan movement which saved England from the horrors of the French revolution by producing a new spirit among the working classes. But whether this be so or not, this movement undoubtedly was the parent of that revival which led to the establishment of the missionary societies and, in the last century, to the sending forth of Christ's Gospel from this our land to the very ends of the earth. At the present time, I believe, there is only one country in the world into which Christian missionaries have not penetrated, Afghanistan, and this on account of some Convention between our Government and the old Russian Government prohibiting propaganda from either side.

If those persons who presume to think that Christianity is decaying and may ultimately disappear from the world, would take the trouble to contrast the condition of the Christian religion,

in China, India or Central Africa to-day with what it was only fifty years ago, they would find good grounds for abandoning their presumption.

CONCLUSION.

Having now completed the task which I set before me, I will ask you to spare me a few minutes longer, in which to summarise briefly the lessons which I think may be learned from the incidents I have endeavoured to describe.

In the first we have the conscience of three Hebrew youths defying the autocratic world-power of Nebuchadnezzar in its attempt to impose a universal idol-worship. In this case conscience comes before us as operating in a purely negative way.

In the second scene we have the conscience of the twelve apostles defying a religious authority, which originally had a divine sanction over them but which now forbade them to preach Christ. In this scene conscience is found to require its possessors to occupy an aggressive and positive position.

In the third scene we find the conscience of one man, Paul, withstanding the force of public opinion and great and justly honoured names in order to maintain the world-wide character of true Christian fellowship.

In the fourth scene we have the conscience of one man, Ambrose, withstanding the autocratic universal world-power of the day in order to maintain the holiness of Christian fellowship.

In the fifth scene we find the conscience of one man, Luther, leading him to defy all the power and prestige of the great world-system, into which the professing Christian church had gradually passed, in order to maintain the right of the individual to obey his conscience. It is somewhat akin to our third scene, in that it is the orthodox religious position which is assailed by conscience.

In the sixth scene we have Calvin withstanding a democratic state power in order to maintain the holiness of Christian fellowship. This carries us back to our fourth scene, where the issue was the same, although the power opposing conscience here is democratic rather than monarchic.

In our seventh and last scene we have individual conscience defying the conventions of an established religion, backed up by popular opinion, in order to give effect to its irresistible impulse to make known to the multitude a salvation received and enjoyed.

Conscience is thus seen to have been the great determining factor in each crisis in the evolution of true religion on the earth, using the term religion in its proper sense as the answer on the part of man to the Divine Revelation. It is this moral factor of conscience which distinguishes the religion of the Bible from the other religions, whether merely national or universal, as Mahomedanism or Buddhism

It may seem at first sight an exception to this that in the

present day we find non-Christians exhibiting scruples of conscience, such as Mrs. Annie Besant refusing to take the sacrament with her dying mother without informing the clergyman who administered it, the late Dean Stanley, that she was an atheist. And no one would think of questioning that Lord Morley is a conscientious man, although he would disclaim any profession of Christianity. But it must be remembered that, although men to-day may repudiate Christianity, they cannot erase from their minds, or indeed from their manners, the effect which the prevalence of its principles in the world around them has produced. Although refusing the name of Christian they are essentially a product of the Christian religion, which has operated on long generations of their forefathers and in their own early training. Anyone who doubts this has only to compare the state of society in the first three centuries of our era with what obtains to-day amongst us, the one being the result of philosophy appealing to men's reason, and the other of the Christian Revelation appealing to men's conscience. The sceptic Matthew Arnold's description taken almost verbatim from a contemporary Roman poet, is well known,

“ On that hard Pagan world disgust
And secret loathing fell,
Deep weariness and sated lust
Made human life a hell.”

When first we find the new religion confronting the old non-Christian system, we get Paul's well-known declaration in his defence before the Roman governor Felix, “ Herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men.” (Acts xxiv. 16). A man whose conscience thus responds both to divine and human claims is the noblest product of our religion, as indeed the speaker of these words was in his time.

There is nothing we should prize so much as an exercised conscience, whether in ourselves or in others, and even if the other man's obedience to his conscience leads him to differ very widely from me, I need to treat him with the highest respect, though I may think him badly instructed.

Nothing was so humiliating to my mind during the late war as the wave of reprobation, to use no stronger term, which swept over our land against those whose conscience forbade them to kill or to take any part in warfare. It is no doubt very disagreeable when at grips with a foe to find those who will not move one finger to help you, but you will do well to remember that if you get such men on your side in any future contest they will prove your most redoubtable supporters. I recollect hearing how *The Times* wrote after one of Bright's greatest speeches

against the Crimean War, "What would Mr. Bright be on a war of which he approved? It would be a war terrible to the enemies of England."

If these fragmentary remarks put together amid the stress of a busy life succeed in interesting any of my hearers in the history of true religion, to me a subject of commanding attraction, I shall feel amply repaid for the preparation of this paper.

DISCUSSION.

This communication from Dr. A. T. SCHOFIELD was read:—May I be permitted to suggest an alternative to the lecturer's view of conscience. He appears to regard it somewhat as a power placed within us, that has the *intrinsic* faculty of distinguishing right from wrong. Is such really the case? His paper is a carefully written and interesting record of seven instances when conscience so acted, and which he has selected as being of special import in the history of the world. I would submit to this institute the suggestion that the reason why the action of conscience in these seven cases so clearly distinguished right from wrong and good from evil was not due, as this author appears to suggest, primarily to conscience at all. It may be that one reason why I write now is because, as a physician, I have had endless trouble with all sorts of consciences which have been a perfect plague to their owners, being morbid, crochety, and the like. It may be objected that such consciences are more or less diseased. In a sense this is true, but it is not the reason I assign for their perplexing and disastrous effects. I consider, indeed, that even in its normal and natural condition conscience has not the intrinsic knowledge which the author describes on p. 124: "By conscience accordingly, I understand that intuition or voice within us, which judges our actions and thoughts as morally good or morally bad." The whole paper proceeds to show that the word "judges" here certainly means "rightly" or "intuitively judges." Such I fear is not the case; for to me it seems there is no intrinsic knowledge of right, or even intuition about conscience at all, and to prove this I need not go outside Scripture, although it is illustrated every day.

May I use an illustration to make my meaning clear?

A sundial owes *all* its value to light; without light it is the most useless structure that exists. But even light is of no value to make it of use, unless it be one special sort of light—sunlight. Only in this light does it give the correct response to the questions with which it is concerned. In this case not those of right or wrong, but concerning time. These answers, however, are not intuition by any means, but very much the contrary. They are indeed wholly dependent for their value not on the dial at all, but on the sunlight.

Let the dial be illumined with any other light—by the moon, by a camp or candle, and the sundial will as surely record the opposite to the truth; and thus if, instead of time, the issues had been moral, would call good evil and evil good.

God alone really knows these issues of good and evil, and if only the view of conscience taken in the paper be held, there seems some danger of regarding it as an expression of the voice of an immanent God, and especially if its voice be said to be intuitive, which surely it is not.

There seems no possible reasons to doubt that when Paul, on the steps of the fortress of Antonia, declared (Acts xxiii. 1) that he had "lived before God in all good conscience until this day," and further in 2 Timothy i. 3, when he said, "God, whom I serve from my forefathers in a pure conscience" that he referred to his whole life when he "verily (i.e., conscientiously) thought with himself that he ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth (Acts xxvi. 9). Few can doubt that S. Paul's conscience was as "good" when he called "evil" "good" and good, evil, as subsequently when after the true Light shone on his conscience on the way to Damascus, and at last his conscience recognised the good, as good and evil as evil.

It is even credible that the inquisition perpetrated their atrocities with a good conscience, but under a wrong light. Indeed when the conscience is not under God's light there is no limit to the evil it can do. The fact is the conscience *per se* is the most unreliable guide imaginable, as its registers are absolutely dependant on the light that shines on it at the time, and not on any intuition at all.

The seven instances given by Mr. Roberts are undoubtedly true registers of good, simply because the true Light of God's Word was shining on the sundial of the conscience in every case. With most, alas, it is not so; and so long as the conscience is illumined by any false light, so long will its result be unreliable, and often the direct opposite of truth.

(1). Mr. W. E. LESLIE said: Man has the power of directly or intuitively perceiving three fundamental values—the Good, the True, and the Beautiful. The area of the True and of the Good which can be directly or intuitively perceived is very limited, the bulk of our knowledge is indirect or inferred, and is therefore susceptible of error. In addition to this there is in the case of the Good a sense of obligation to perform acts which are either perceived or inferred to be Good. If "conscience" could be limited to the immediate perception or intuition, and the obligation experienced to perform acts believed to be good it might properly be said to be infallible. But in the paper, as in common usage, it includes indirect or inferred elements, and must therefore be said to be fallible.

(2). Mr. Roberts' assumption that when Conscience and Power come into conflict Conscience is always right and Power wrong is thus seen to be baseless. This raises the interesting question—by what principle are we to determine when Power may properly override Conscience?

(3). Why is the conflict between Christianity (Conscience) and the world order (Power) so much less acute than it has been? Will our doctrinal orthodoxy ever produce any more vigorous reaction than dislike if it is divorced from its practical moral implicates? I suggest, for example, that if we dwelt less upon the mint anise and cummin of abstention from alcohol, tobacco, dancing, cards, theatres, and Sabbath desecration; and by speech and example fearlessly condemned the selfishness of any man living in comfort (to say nothing of luxury) while his neighbour was in want, we should speedily find ourselves in agonizing conflict with the flesh within and the world without.

Lt.-Col. F. A. MOLONY said: Mr. Roberts has very well shown us the great part which conscience has played in promoting spiritual progress and reforms.

But to do that he has been compelled to select outstanding and unusual incidents, in which men and women have been constrained by the inward voice to set themselves in opposition to constituted authority and governments. It would be a pity if anyone were to go away with the idea that conscience usually works along unpatriotic lines, or that its everyday working hinders and incommodes those who are specially responsible for the welfare of mankind. I am sure that the opposite is the case.

For instance, the conscientious administration of justice in India, the conscientious work of railway and canal engineers, of police and forest officers, and especially Missionaries, doubtless had much to do with keeping India loyal during the great war.

I have often thought that our success in recent wars has been largely due to the uniform excellence of our weapons, supplies and munitions. And, of course, conscience had a great deal to do with maintaining that same excellence.

Even in the case of the conscientious objectors to which Mr. Roberts referred, conscience did not work against the interests of the army so much as is commonly supposed. I had two companies of them working under me in Scotland. They were composed of two classes—religious men and Socialists. The religious men did very good and useful work, at a time when it was extremely difficult to get necessary work done.

Thus on the whole, in its every day working, conscience is a **most** useful servant of Governments—even in war time.

Lt.-Col. HOPE BIDDULPH said:—I am sorry that in this fine paper our learned lecturer has referred to the conscientious objectors. as if they were in any way on a par with the heroes mentioned in the seven cases he has depicted. To be consistent a C.O. should not take advantage of police protection, nor cling to paid work which can only be secured by the men who fought. In fact, to paraphrase St. Paul—if he will not fight, neither should he reap the advantages which fighting has secured. A public duty owed to a civilised state cannot be conscientiously ignored if it injures other people. I do not, of course, include acts of worship, or divine homage.

Mr. W. HOSTE said: I think we owe a real debt to Mr. Roberts for his inspiring paper. The criticism of those who belittle the authority of conscience seems hardly reasonable. Because a conscience unilluminated by the true light may and does go wrong, conscience is not therefore wrong. It works wrong, because wrongly handled. As to the origin of conscience, surely it was the only thing man gained by the fall, "knowledge of good and evil," without the ability to attain to the former or avoid the latter.

Of one thing we may be sure, it is never safe to ignore conscience in the moral and spiritual domain. But we must not confound conscience with what may masquerade under its name. We may question whether a Torquemada knew much about conscience. (We must not confound that with religious fanaticism, nor yet with private fads and fancies.) We hear much about "conscientious objections" to-day, but much that passes thus may be merely self-opinionatedness, for it operates in spheres where private conscience has no authority. Then conscience becomes a usurper. A man says he has "conscientious" objection to vaccination; these might be medical, traditional, social, but it does not seem clear how they can be "conscientious." Should a "conscience" which endangers the community be respected? That is an "intrusive" conscience which meddles with matters outside its sphere. I must render "to Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's,"—is it for each individual to define "the things that are Cæsars" by the light of nature? Cæsar may be a bad man (he was when Paul wrote Rom. xiii. 7), and may spend my taxes on bad things. How can I support a bad man in bad things? I "conscientiously" object. No, says Paul, "we must needs be subject (i.e., to the powers that be) not only for wrath so as to escape it), but also for conscience sake." "Leave to Cæsar his responsibility. He must render an account to God. You pay your rates and taxes!" But if Cæsar tells me to worship his gods and not to worship the true God, then he is intruding into the domain of God, to whom I must "render the things of God." But laws, perhaps arbitrary and oppressive, which do not directly infringe on the rights of God I must conscientiously obey. With reference to the closing remarks of our lecturer, need we try

(in the case of a misbeliever who is also a conscientious man) to take all the credit to the influences of Christianity. The Christian has not the monopoly of a sense of right. Does not Romans ii. teach that the Gentiles, even when quite outside the sphere of God's direct revelation, are still responsible to God in their measure, and have a conscience which accuses or excuses them!

THE LECTURER'S REPLY.

Referring to Dr. Schofield's communication I need hardly add much to Mr. Hoste's reference thereto, but I think I might say that Dr. Schofield seems hardly justified in judging of conscience by the abnormal cases which he has come across in his practice as a physician. We might as well judge of reason by the madness of lunatics. I think the sundial is a rather unfortunate example for Dr. Schofield to have taken of the fallibility of conscience, as it never goes wrong. It was the only time-piece that Parliament could not alter by the Summer Time Act.

As regards Paul's conscience he could do no other even in his unconverted state than take it as a guide, and it only led him wrong for want of that right instruction which he afterwards received.

As regards Mr. Leslie's remarks, I think he goes too far in claiming infallibility for conscience, and I think also he is wrong if I am correct in understanding him to say that the state has the right to override conscience if it be for the good of the great majority. I think it is this principle which operated in Germany and produced the late war. On the contrary, I believe that a small minority of conscientious people are so valuable an asset that any nation will do well to cultivate them, for they are the salt of the earth. Mr. Leslie's regret that the contest between conscience and power appears to have died out in modern times should make him welcome the conscientious objector. I believe that the main reason for the change to which Mr. Leslie refers is the gradual permeation of the modern world by Christian principles, which, however, have become corrupted in the process. Yet they have produced the toleration of Christianity which we see everywhere around us except perhaps in Russia.

With regard to Colonel Molony's criticism I would not say that conscience is always opposed to power, but the reason why I have only referred to cases when this is so is that it is only in such cases that conscience is seen to advantage and comes out in its true glory.

As regards Col. Biddulph's remarks, I cannot agree that it is the duty of a Christian to submit himself to the law of the land, except only in cases of religious worship. If that law interferes with his conscience toward God in other matters, I believe it may be his duty to refuse to obey it, as we get in 1 Peter ii. 19: "If a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully, this is acceptable."