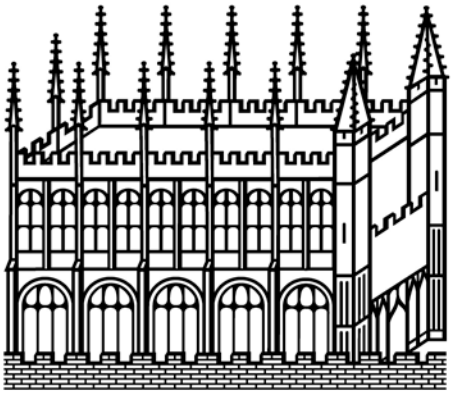
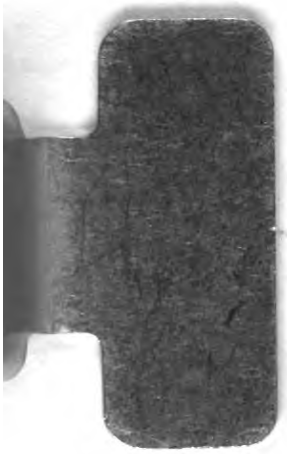
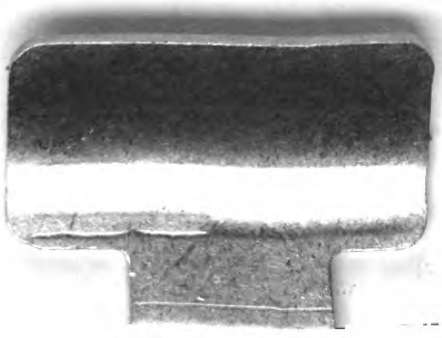


THE FORUM SERIES

THE RELIGION OF AN ARTIST

JOHN COLLIER





THE RELIGION OF AN ARTIST

The Forum Series

THE RELIGION OF AN ARTIST

BY

JOHN COLLIER

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No. 1 of this series is "The Stream of Life," by Professor Julian S. Huxley.

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It should be clearly understood that each writer in this series of little books is alone responsible for the opinions expressed.

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CHAPTER I

Religion

WHAT is meant by "religion"? It is a very difficult word to define, but some definition is necessary: to talk of anything which is quite undefinable only ends in nonsense.

In its broadest aspect it is a supernatural explanation of the universe. In this sense it is common to nearly all mankind. Even the most degraded savages have some sort of explanation of the great problems of Life and Death, of Right and Wrong. Every human community has some code of morality, which is nearly always combined with a personification of the forces of Nature. This personification is what we call "God." He is a supernatural being, more or less resembling ourselves, who is master of the forces of Nature and uses them for the benefit or for the discomfiture of man as he feels inclined. In primitive religions there are generally a number of these supernatural beings; but in the highest forms of religion there is a tendency to monotheism, which finds its completest expression in the Jewish and the Mahommedan faiths. In the Christian religion, which professes to have but one God, there is the doctrine of the Trinity, which distinctly weakens this conception, however much theologians may strive to explain it away. Indeed, this doctrine of the Trinity is a great stumbling block to any Jew who has leanings towards Christianity; being a rigid monotheist, he regards it with horror.

In every monotheistic religion, however, there are all sorts of minor deities, such as angels, saints, and prophets, that have functions not very unlike the multiple gods of the Pagan world. Roman Catholicism is full of these minor gods, and to their trinity it has

practically added the Virgin Mary, which gives a very gracious feminine touch to the austerity of this religion. I should say that Mariolatry is its great redeeming feature.

This belief in a being or beings who govern the universe, and to whom must be ascribed the blessings and the evils that befall us, is very widespread, so that religious people may claim without much exaggeration that the belief in God is universal. They omit to add that superstition, often of the most degraded kind, is just as universal. Taking all religions together, there is an enormous preponderance of horrible and degrading beliefs and practices. I am convinced that the evil done by the various religions throughout the history of the world far outweighs the good. But does this apply to the best religions—to those of the more civilized races? Certainly not to the same degree. There are many redeeming virtues in Christianity which may seem to outweigh its grosser superstitions and its fierce intolerance—the source of so much strife and persecution. This intolerance is seen at its worst in the numerous bitter conflicts between the rival Christian sects.

The most numerous and by far the most influential body of Christians are the Roman Catholics. These constitute a remarkably homogeneous body, with a very definite code of beliefs, imposed on all members of the Church by a small central committee in Rome. Catholics have become much milder since the days when they used to burn heretics and start religious wars; but the spirit informing the policy of the Church has not altered much: it still makes extravagant claims, going as far as infallibility in certain circumstances, and has no doubt theoretically as to the eternal damnation of most heretics.

In speaking of Christianity, we must never forget that as a going concern it is more truly represented by the Catholic Church than by the much less aggressive and arrogant Protestant sects. Only a minority of Christians are really acquainted with the results of modern research and the intellectual difficulties which beset the dogmas of the different Churches. The general body of believers are not enlightened in that sense, and

consequently have not acquired a tolerant attitude towards other forms of belief or towards disbelief.

As for Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, the other two religions of China, the Shintoism of Japan, the Brahmanism of India, and the various Pagan faiths coming down to the bestiality of the lowest savages, important as they are when we are considering the whole question of the advantages and disadvantages of religion in general, they may be left aside in the present discussion, as the great bulk of civilized and progressive people are either Christians or else Freethinkers.

There is one exception to be made in favour of the religion of the Jews, who are of course a highly civilized people, in spite of the great mass of ignorant and downtrodden Russian and Polish Jews who drag down the average. At their best, as in England, where of late years they have been free from any really hampering disabilities, they are probably the most intelligent and the best educated race in the world. The number of English Jews distinguished in science and philosophy, in politics and the law, in literature and the arts, is, in comparison to their percentage of the population, quite extraordinary; and although there are many Freethinkers among them, on the whole they cling to their religion with all the tenacity of their race. Obviously the faith of such a people must be treated with respect.

Christianity is an off-shoot from it. The Old Testament is common to the two religions—I may say greatly to the detriment of Christianity. The Jewish religion has retained many barbarous elements; it is a tribal religion, for the Jews alone, manifesting an immense contempt for the whole outside world, which they consider unworthy of the special revelation granted to the chosen people. In many ways it is a harsh and bitter religion, such as a small and continually persecuted people would naturally evolve; but it has many elements of grandeur, among others an exalted monotheism, which, as I have said, makes orthodox Jews recoil in horror from the doctrine of the Trinity. In any case, it is but the creed of a very small minority of the human race, and shows no sign of spreading

beyond this minority, for the endeavour to make proselytes is strictly forbidden. So, in the general question of Religion as affecting the world, it is not of great importance.

We in England are singularly favoured. The jibe that we have only one sauce and forty-nine religions leaves us unmoved—indeed, as far as it is true it is a subject of rejoicing. We are a reasonable people, and we have forced tolerance on even the most militant of our fanatics. Our numerous dissenting sects are too powerful to be suppressed in the interests of orthodoxy—in fact, orthodoxy in England means to each individual only the creed in which he is personally interested; so that, in spite of their incompatible dogmas, the sects have become quite polite to one another, and there is even a movement for re-union between the principal Nonconformist bodies and the Church of England. This is a vast improvement on the days when they were always abusing one another; but the movement makes but little progress. As far as I can understand the matter, the great obstacle is "episcopacy." I gather that the doctrine of the Church of England is that episcopacy is a divinely ordained institution, essential to the effective existence of a Church as a channel of grace. That is, there can be no proper Church without bishops, and no proper bishops except those who have been consecrated by the laying-on of hands by other bishops, who have been similarly consecrated in an unbroken series from the time of the Apostles. This necessarily excludes from the union of Christendom all those communities which possess no such apostolically-derived ministry. The Nonconformist can hardly be expected to accept this view, and certainly it seems absurd to lay so much stress on a mere method of making bishops. The layman would no doubt say: "What does it matter how he is made as long as he is a good Bishop?" He might even suggest that the Church could get on quite well without any bishops at all. But this high episcopal doctrine is considered of vital importance even by quite liberal clergymen. So the union of the Churches remains a pious dream.

There are many other burning questions in the Church

of England, such as the reservation of the sacrament and the wearing of vestments. These all seem extraordinarily important to the clerical mind, and very unimportant to the average layman.

As for the Nonconformists, their position outside the Church has forced a certain measure of tolerance and liberalism on them; but it seems to be rather against the grain. The sport of heresy-hunting is rife among them. The Baptists, who have an honourable record as being the first to promulgate the doctrine of religious liberty, are, I believe, free from this failing, and even have an admirable principle of "Soul-liberty," which forbids inquisition into the beliefs of their adherents; but this does not apply to most of the other Free Churches.

But, what is much more serious, most of these communities are tainted with the horrible doctrine of Hell-fire—many of them in its most repellent Calvinistic form. Even apart from this they have a superstitious belief in the actual words of the Bible which is very dangerous. The great fight of humane people against the horrors caused by the belief in witchcraft was desperately hampered by Biblical quotations. "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live" has caused hundreds of thousands of cruel deaths throughout the civilized world.

Among many Nonconformists there is a sort of fetish worship of the Bible—the actual book. It must never have another book placed over it, and must be handled as if it were a sacred idol. It has magical virtues—witness the countless stories of the young soldier whose pocket Testament invariably stops the bullet that was on the way to his heart.

To return to the Church of England: there is one very attractive section of it—the Broad Church. Here one finds nice, reasonable people, who vehemently repudiate the doctrine of Hell-fire and all the worst absurdities of the older forms of Christianity, and who are inclined even to explain away the miracles and to gloss over the cruelties and the other horrors of the Old Testament. They will even, if pressed, admit that David was not quite a nice man, although he was

after the Lord's own heart. They very wisely concentrate their religious teaching on the noble figure of the Founder of Christianity.

The history of the young Syrian Jew who, full of love and pity for his fellow sufferers, endeavoured to humanize the harsh and gloomy religion of his country, and who sacrificed his life in the attempt, is one of the most charming and pathetic stories in the world. This is only so if we regard him as a man like ourselves, with human longings and human weaknesses—suffering fear, despair, and pain like the rest of us, but overcoming them by the strength of his ideals, and giving up everything, even his life, for the sake of the cause in which he believed. The story owes its pathos to our regarding him as a man and not as a God. Obviously what is difficult for a man should be easy enough for a God. It is rather like a rich man pretending to be a beggar, well knowing that he can return to his palace whenever he likes. We can appreciate the life-story of Jesus only if we regard him as a man like ourselves—possibly one of the best men who have ever lived, although we do not know enough about him to say that with any confidence; but consider him as a God, condescending for a brief space to our level, and the pathos goes.

My natural sympathy for the Broad Church is a little impaired by the attitude of make-believe which pervades the rationalistic side of the Church of England.

How does a liberal clergyman reconcile it to his conscience to subscribe to the Thirty-nine Articles? That these Articles are held to be a bar to liberal beliefs is clearly shown in the well-known story of Jowett being asked to sign them in the hope that his lack of orthodoxy would make it impossible for him to do so. Jowett did not turn a hair. All he said was: "Have you a pen?" and promptly signed. This is generally considered as an admirable repartee. Perhaps it is; but is the conduct equally admirable? Is it well to profess publicly doctrines in which you do not believe? Of course it is possible to wriggle out of very difficult positions—to believe with so many reservations that it

practically, though not nominally, amounts to disbelief; but it is not good for the conscience of the man who practises these gymnastics, and even if satisfactory to himself it is apt to be distasteful to the onlooker.

Then there are the Creeds. I understand that the Athanasian Creed has occasionally to be recited in church even by those clergymen who regard its doctrines with abhorrence. Some years ago there were fierce controversies about this question, and it was proposed to abandon entirely this antiquated horror; but apparently the majority of the clergy clung to it with great affection. I believe that one temporizing bishop had the bright idea of ordering the creed to be sung and not said, so that the congregation should take it less seriously.

For the man who cannot, in spite of all possible reservations, accept the orthodox doctrines of the Christian faith, but who still has a soft place in his heart for the old religion, there is an obvious refuge in Unitarianism. This is a very respectable form of belief, although it is denounced by strait-laced Christians as being perilously near to Atheism. It is really the form of Theism that approaches most closely to Christianity, and as such it makes a strong appeal to reasonable people with decided religious instincts. To me it has a fundamental absurdity. The God of the Unitarian, like that of the Christian, is a being of absolute perfection. He is all-wise, all-good, all-powerful. That is to say he could make the world a good, indeed a perfect, world if he liked; but it is so obviously nothing of the kind that there is no theological dogma more repugnant to common sense than that of the perfection of the Deity. The world is a bad world, full of cruelty, suffering, and injustice, and there is no getting round the dilemma either that the Deity does not want it to be any better (in which case what becomes of His benevolence?), or else that he cannot make it any better (which disposes of his omniscience and his omnipotence). I think it was Agassiz who remarked that the only satisfaction that one gets from pressing a contradiction home to a theological adversary is to hear it styled a mystery. The religious man leaves it at that; but

no rational enquirer can possibly do so. The obvious absurdity of the perfect Creator and Ruler of this very imperfect world has been so impressed upon the consciences of all reasonable people by the horrors of the Great War that there is now a widespread reaction against this figment of the theologians, resulting in a general feeling that, if there is a God at all, his power is severely limited.

Perhaps the best and certainly the most vigorous expression of this modern feeling about the Deity is to be found in the writings of Mr. H. G. Wells, who towards the end of "Mr. Britling Sees it Through" says, in his usual uncompromising style: "If I thought there was an omnipotent God who looked down on battles and deaths and all the waste and horror of this war—able to prevent these things—doing them to amuse himself—I would spit in his empty face." Mr. Wells has evolved a theology of his own, with a curious dualistic conception of a "Veiled Being," who made the world and is apparently omnipotent, but not particularly benevolent. Further, he has an assistant, called by Mr. Wells "the Invisible King." This secondary Deity is benevolent, but his power is very limited; he is continually maintaining, with the aid of all men of goodwill, a not very successful struggle to redress the monstrous evils of the world.

Unfortunately, this new theology, like all the old ones, involves so many difficulties that I have to fall back upon the Agnostic attitude, and to confess humbly that I am unable to believe in any of the supernatural explanations of the universe. I can find no evidence of the moral governance of the world. Nature, red in tooth and claw, shrieks impartially against all creeds. Like the beasts we are born; we struggle through our lives, and then return to the earth whence we came. Many of us are, on the whole, happy; some are extremely unhappy. We have some power over our lives; but ill-luck can at any time be stronger than our utmost efforts. The world we live in is in many ways a bad world, full of cruelties and injustice. If it has a Creator, he must bear the responsibility of its want of morality. If there is a Providence watching over us, it is singularly

unable or unwilling to protect us from the most horrible happenings. If there is another life, there is no reason to suppose that it will be any better than the present one; but it may be, so we can have some hope for the future.

CHAPTER II

Ethics and the Universe

THE world, as it appears to me, consists of matter, force, and mind. For the present, avoiding metaphysics and using language in the sense of the man of science, I should describe matter as made up of certain materials which have been classified into a definite small number of elementary forms, which are differentiated by complicated arrangements of atoms; which again have been resolved into positive and negative units of electricity. Out of these infinitesimal bricks the universe has been built up. Everything in the universe is in motion; all activity, including light and heat, is a form of motion. This is what we mean by force. We have formulated certain laws which define the nature of these activities. By paying attention to these laws we have established some control over nature.

Then we have mind, which is in a different category from matter and force. From one aspect it appears to be a function of the brain. A Russian scientist said that the brain secreted thought. This is a very crude way of putting it; but undoubtedly the quality of the thought varies with the condition of the brain. The mind works badly if the brain is disordered, and ceases to work altogether if the brain is destroyed or paralysed. That is undoubtedly true of living beings. I am not now discussing the possibilities of an after-life, in which it is claimed that there may be thought without any material agency.

It is by the action of the mind through the brain and the sense-organs that we become aware of the external world. This awareness has many metaphysical difficulties. It is, of course, possible that the external world may be quite different from what the mind reports it to be. All we can say is that our conception

of the external world works. We can reason about it; and if the reasoning is carefully done it is possible, within limits, to predict how the external world will behave, and to put some constraint upon it to serve our purposes. In other words, our conception of the universe is all right as a working hypothesis. We seem to be learning more about it and increasing our control over it every day. We have not gone very far as yet; but there seems to be practically no limit to what the future may bring in the way of knowledge and control. The scientific conception of the universe is that it is orderly—like causes produce like effects. There is nothing incalculable about it, but there is an immense amount that is quite beyond our present methods of calculation.

In this universe there seems nothing of the nature of mind except the minds of human beings and of the rest of the animal world. Mind is entirely different from matter or motion, although there seem to be mutual interactions. We have endeavoured with some little success to formulate laws for the working of the mind, in the same way that we have formulated laws for the working of matter; but it is a very difficult task, and we are only on the threshold.

There are different kinds of mind. Those of the higher beasts seem to resemble our own to a considerable extent; but they must be very much more simple. It is probable that every creature that has a brain has a mind akin to ours, but, in the lowest forms, of quite unimaginable simplicity. Creatures, indeed, like the jelly fish, without a brain, but which still belong to the animal kingdom, have probably some rudimentary form of consciousness. Some naturalists go so far as to credit plants with something akin to the animal brain; but for this I can see no evidence. It seems to me that there is no trace of mind discernible in matter outside the animal kingdom.

Neither is there any morality. Morality, as we understand it, is chiefly the product of the complicated brain of man. The rudiments of it, however, are certainly to be found in the higher animals. The social instinct in man has been traced by Darwin to the herd instinct

of those animals which congregate in packs and have learnt by natural selection to subdue their individualistic tendencies out of consideration for the welfare of the community.

Of course all the higher and many of the lower animals have a high standard of unselfish care for their young, and of attachment to their mates. Some of the domestic animals, the dog especially, manifest a devotion and a fidelity to their masters which are naturally very highly appreciated by human beings.

But what can be called a definite code of morality is the invention of man. He must have begun to invent it very early in his history. We find elaborate moral codes quite in the dawn of civilization. They are mixed up with a great deal of myth, and with religious observances (some of them very undesirable); but they contain many precepts which hold good even to-day.

The connection of morals with religion has been, on the whole, unfortunate. There is a great deal of substantial agreement on questions of morals, for there is a solid substratum of utility in all moral questions which binds people together. Religious questions, on the contrary, tend to keep them apart, and have been throughout history a most fruitful source of strife.

The only thing that can be said in favour of the connection is that men are much more fervid in the cause of religion than they are in that of morality, and where the two happen to coincide religion gives a very valuable driving force. There is something in this contention, but the fervour has the disadvantage of overriding reason, which is the only sure basis of morality. To me, the balance of advantage lies in keeping morality free from the interference of religion. We are never likely to agree on religious matters; with the progress of knowledge and the decay of superstition we are more and more likely to agree on a code of morality based on reason. But no doubt the objection will be raised that it is no use having even a perfect code unless you can get people to adhere to it. If you leave out religion, what is the sanction? My answer to this is that the sanctions offered by religion are very

imperfect. The ones most relied upon are the fear of Hell and the hope of Heaven. These are a direct appeal to self-interest, and not to good feeling. It has been often pointed out that a man who abstains from crime for fear of punishment is not virtuous, but merely cowardly. To base morality on self-interest is to make it non-moral. Moreover, these sanctions are distinctly losing their force; even in the Middle Ages, when people really believed in Hell, there was an immense amount of crime. It was never an effective deterrent force. Now, when this belief is repudiated by many enlightened Churchmen and by most educated and even uneducated laymen, it can hardly be relied upon as a substitute for an efficient police. As for the hope of Heaven, the Christian version of it has never offered any great attractions. It has now become only a sort of vague suggestion of something a little better than the world we live in. It is only the Spiritualists who give any definite details of the future life, and they, quite wisely, make it very like our present life, with even such advantages as synthetic cigars thrown in. But even so the Spiritualist Heaven is not very exhilarating. In it even the most brilliant intellects become platitudinous. Shakespeare is a dull dog, and Milton a driveller.

There is a more worthy sanction, which does have some effect on really religious people, who often attribute all their good deeds to their love of God. Love of any kind is a worthy motive, but it is apt to be unreasonable. Religious people are always talking about doing the will of God. It never seems to occur to them that they have very little knowledge of what that will is. They merely assume that they know the will of God, and that it agrees with what they think right. Of this they have no evidence whatever. When they are a little doubtful they seek enlightenment by prayer, the answer to which is generally in curious accord with their prejudices. In the Dark Ages the answer was often, to have no mercy on heretics, and generally to indulge in methods of persecution which would be abhorrent to a modern conscience, however religious. Yet these immoral answers were quite as firmly believed,

and acted on much more promptly, than the milder encouragements of to-day.

Then, again, the love of God is distinctly a less unselfish emotion than the love of man. I do not wish to appear flippant, but there is something very self-seeking about it; indeed, it is almost snobbish. It is like the exaggerated worship of Royalty, which in former days so often took the place of any desire to help the common people, who needed it so much more than the exalted ones.

What can our love do for God? On any supposition, he can need it very little. What can our love do for our fellow creatures? A great deal; they need it, poor souls, very badly. We do not know much about our neighbours, but we know a great deal more about them than about God, and we know their manifold wants; whereas, as far as we can judge, he has none.

Instead of relying on supernatural sanctions I would rather rest the plea for adherence to a moral code on the natural good fellowship and decency of mankind.

I have lived a long while; I have known a great many people, some very intimately, and I have hardly ever come across what I should regard as a really bad man or woman. The worst that I could say of my friends and acquaintances is that they are sometimes weak and selfish. But they have been nearly always kindly people, if the need for kindliness has been properly brought before them. There is an immense amount of latent sympathy in the world; even the most hardened are touched by the sufferings of others, if only they can be brought to realize these sufferings. It has been well said that evil is mostly done for want of thought. If the misery caused to others by wrong-doing could be vividly brought before the imagination of criminals, there would be much less crime.

This founding of morality on the inherent kindliness of mankind is obviously a very different thing from the systems of rewards and punishments on which all religions so greatly rely. These may hinder wrong-doing, but they have distinctly a bad effect on the moral character. The man who is able to swallow the innumerable paradoxes of dogmatic religion finds it an

easy task to curry favour with his Deity, without putting much restraint on his criminal tendencies. He compounds for sins "that he's inclined to by damning those he has no mind to." The comforting doctrine of faith being more than good works is of great service in this matter. If he is prepared to believe all sorts of incredible things about his Deity, surely that Deity will not be too hard on his cheating his neighbours, who are often criminally lax in doctrinal matters. Again, there are religious observances the strict performance of which is to the pious much more important than a pettifogging observance of any lay code of morality.

From these and similar considerations one can understand why the tremendous threat of everlasting torture had so little effect on morality in the Middle Ages. This threat, indeed, is so tremendous that it defeats its own object. A man may say that he believes it, and genuinely think so; but it is so horrible that no sane intellect can really assimilate it. It does not bear thinking about. If it were realized, it would destroy any possible love of God, or any respect for Divine justice.

There is no possibility of argument on this question. An omnipotent Deity who sentences even the vilest of his creatures to eternal torture is infinitely more cruel than the cruellest man. Think of any earthly tyrant who sentenced a malefactor, not to an eternity of torture, but to ten years of it. Can one imagine any human being not being satiated with his revenge long before the period had passed? If he were not, would he not be much viler than his victim? But is the God of the Roman Catholics, and of the great majority of other Christians, satisfied with ten years of torture for the damned? Not so; he decrees an eternity of it. So I say advisedly, he is *infinitely* more cruel than any man could be.

My Christian friends (of whom I have many) will hold up their hands at this description of their faith, and will assure me that this terrible doctrine has no place in their religion, which is one of Love. I am quite willing to believe it in their case; indeed, if I could not believe it they would not remain my friends.

I readily admit that a Christianity such as theirs, with all the worst features left out and the best features accentuated, is at any rate a very harmless faith, and to many people may be helpful. But are they right in calling their religion Christianity? It is held by only a very small number of professing Christians. The whole Roman Catholic Church holds firmly to the doctrine of eternal punishment: to deny it is to be a heretic. One eminent Roman Catholic man of science, St. George Mivart, was so horrorstruck by their doctrine that he invented a most ingenious theory of possible happiness in Hell. It was to the effect that, in comparison with the unspeakable bliss of the saved, those who had forfeited this bliss might be regarded as in a state of severe punishment; but, judged by human standards, they would be quite comfortable and even happy. It was, in fact, a matter of relativity.

But the Church would have none of this comforting doctrine. Mivart was severely disciplined, and had to recant.

Not only the Catholics, but also the Greek Church, the High Church, and Low Church sections of the Church of England, most of the Nonconformists and of the foreign Protestants, including the American Churches, adhere to this abominable doctrine. At any rate, the clergy preach it, and inculcate it on their followers, even if (as I hope) a good many of them do not believe it themselves. I am not exaggerating when I say that it is a fundamental tenet of the great majority of Christians. Up to quite a short time ago there were hardly any professing Christians who threw any doubt upon it.

Dean Inge has very sensibly remarked that when one talks about religion it should be remembered that there are bad religions as well as good ones. He prides himself, with some justice, on being an outspoken man. I should like to put it to him that Christianity, as held by the great bulk of its adherents, is a bad religion, if only on account of this one doctrine. Very fortunately, in the case of these bad religions the adherents of them are much better than their creeds. There are many gentle and kindly Roman Catholics, who, without

casting doubt on any of the dogmas of the Church, are very sorry for the poor damned, and think as little about their torments as possible, just leaving this and other difficult questions to the Church, whose business it is to look after them.

This, indeed, is the great strength of the Catholic Church. Many quite acute minds get so worried over the difficult problems of religion that they are only too glad to hand them over *en bloc* to a body of experts, who assure their followers that all such matters are quite safe in their hands, and that they, the followers, can with a clear conscience devote all their intelligence to mundane affairs. This is a very convenient division of labour. Personally I regard it as highly immoral, and very dangerous to the community; but there is no doubt as to the strong appeal that it makes to many fine intellects.

It may be objected that the appeal to authority is quite logical. In many matters we have to leave the decision to experts. The patient is wise who leaves himself more or less in the hands of his doctor.

In matters of science a layman has to take many things for granted, so why not in matters of religion? The answer is that, before relying on experts, we have to be very careful to examine into their credentials. In any scientific question there has been free discussion open to the best brains of the whole civilized world. Wherever possible, theories have been put to the crucial test of experiment; no scientific theory has much chance of surviving unless it works. Take the case of Einstein. His theories demand for their apprehension an acquaintance with high mathematics such as few laymen possess. But they have been examined by the not inconsiderable body of scientists who have the necessary qualification, and (what is extremely important) they have been put to the test of experiment. Einstein put forward three cases to which an experimental test could be applied. I understand that now all three tests have borne out his predictions. The result is that the theories are accepted, though with caution, by most of the competent physicists of the world, and the ignorant layman may regard them as substantially true, although with

the progress of knowledge they may have to be modified. This is the way in which most scientific theories are tested. They have to pass a very severe ordeal before acceptance.

In the case of the doctors, scepticism is more justified. A hundred years ago the patient who used his common sense and mistrusted his doctor's theories and practice was more likely to survive than the one who had unbounded faith. But medicine has now become a science; a somewhat uncertain one as yet, but still a science, relying much more on experiment than on a priori theory. There is a general consensus among its practitioners as to the treatment of most diseases, and it can point to a decided decrease in the mortality caused by nearly all of them as a proof that their practice is sound; but even now, if my doctor seems to me to talk nonsense, I am inclined to disregard him. In all matters of science authority is respected only if it can show proofs that it is worthy of respect.

Is there any equivalent authority in matters of religion? Is there any general agreement among experts as there is in science? Obviously none. Is there any experimental evidence in favour of one religion more than of another? They all appeal to miracles that have happened in the past. Most of them, except the savage ones, are very chary of appealing to miracles in the present. It is true that the Roman Catholic Church produces for the benefit of its more ignorant followers a few half-hearted wonders such as the pretended cures at Lourdes and the liquefaction of the blood of St. Januarius. But these are not popular with the more intelligent Catholics, who are aware of the extreme weakness of the evidence on which these miracles rest. Nearly all the Protestant faiths have dropped any question of modern miracles, and the more enlightened are endeavouring to explain away the ancient ones. The miracles of science are becoming more and more; the miracles of faith are lessening. Of course the miracles of science, wonderful as they are, are not miracles at all in the theological sense. They are capable of rational explanation, and they can be reproduced whenever the conditions are the same.

The most learned doctors of all religious sects are busily engaged in refuting the dogmas of their fellow experts. What religion can appeal to authority when this authority is disputed by all the other religions? As to the other question which we are always asking of science, Does it work? the answer with regard to religion is obvious—All religions work very badly. Their history is full of wars and persecutions, suppression of freedom of thought and action, hatred of science, hindrance of progress. One can call them generally the most fruitful cause of the unhappy divisions which prevent the human race from working together for common objects. All religions are intolerant, and naturally so, for each assumes that it alone is right in its interpretation of the universe, and that all the rest of them are not only wrong, but wickedly wrong, in their various other interpretations. Intolerance is probably the most mischievous quality of mankind. It has been rampant throughout history, but now at last reasonable people are ashamed of it, and even the religions are beginning to acknowledge that perhaps they have not an absolute monopoly of truth.

This is the spirit that saves me from despair when I consider what bitterness still remains among the warring sects. Human nature and the human intellect being what they are, it is hopeless to expect any general agreement on the difficult metaphysical questions which arise in all religious discussions; but we may expect reasonable people to acknowledge that their views are fallible and may be not very much better than those of their opponents, who anyhow are very decent people even if they are unsound about Predestination, or indeed about the Virgin Birth.

If religion is excluded—or made tolerant—there are so many questions on which men of goodwill can agree, so many causes on which they can work together for the good of mankind, that there seem hardly any limits to the improvement that may be effected in this wicked world.

I must not put the case too strongly. Of course there are other causes of disunion: religion is not the only thing that makes men hate their fellows. The

spirit of aggressive militarism, the spirit of Bolshevism, class hatred, the insolence of the rich and the envy of the poor—perhaps these count for more in modern civilization; but it can hardly be denied, in the light of history, that religion has had a great effect in promoting strife and in exacerbating all the other causes of hatred. The clergy are always lamenting the spread of the secular attitude. Any man of sense among them ought to rejoice in it. They must know, from the dissensions in their own Churches (often about quite trivial matters), how difficult it is to get men to work together wherever the *odium theologicum* comes in, and even fanatically religious people understand that the work of the world has to go on.

Very fortunately, the modern spirit, although much interested in religious questions, is all in favour of keeping them apart from the practical working of the world. Men do not now consult the Bible as a guide to conduct; they do not hurl texts at one another's heads; arguments are not settled by a reference to the supposed Will of God; the clergy have but little say in the affairs of State.

All this is to the good. There is still the great political power of the Church of Rome to be dealt with. To me, as to most Englishmen, the triumph of Roman Catholicism would mean an unspeakable disaster to the cause of civilization. It has to be watched; but it is unthinkable that such a retrograde organization could finally triumph, with the whole force of modern science against it.

CHAPTER III

The Future Life

EVEN if my ideal were realized and all the business of the world were conducted on a strictly secular basis, there would still remain certain questions connected with religion which would have a profound interest for all thoughtful men.

Is there a future life? This is a question which has much less bearing on the conduct of our present life than religious people are willing to admit. Right is right, and wrong is wrong, whether we are mortal or immortal. Our whole code of morality has of necessity to be founded on the conditions of the only life of which we have any knowledge. Indeed, if there be no future life to redress the injustice of this world, there is all the more reason for endeavouring here and now to remedy that injustice.

But I cannot agree with many of my Rationalist friends that it is not a question of the most poignant interest to all of us. Personally I particularly dislike the idea of extinction. I entirely agree with a well-known letter of Huxley's to Lord Morley in which he expresses this feeling with his usual clarity and vigour, not omitting his characteristic humour :—

> " It is a curious thing that I feel my dislike to the thought of extinction increasing as I get older and nearer the goal. It flashes across me at times with a sort of terror that in 1900 I shall probably know no more of what is going on than I did in 1800. I had sooner be in Hell a good deal—at any rate in one of the upper circles where the climate and company are not too trying."

I feel like that too. I am much too interested in

the world around me to regard with equanimity the prospect of having soon to leave it. No conception that I can make of a future life is altogether satisfying, even supposing that I am to have one. I want this life and no other; but almost anything is to me better than extinction. I am unhappily so made that I cannot believe anything merely because I wish to do so; no amount of longing for a future life has any effect in persuading me that I shall get it; but neither am I a pessimist. I do not believe that Fate is bent on spiting me and thwarting my desires, so I am quite inclined to welcome anything which seems like a valid argument in favour of survival. It is by no means a simple question; there are arguments on both sides.

Let us consider them. In the first place, I will eliminate the question of eternity. We know nothing of eternity, and we have no power of even conceiving it. It is a useful symbol for the mathematician, but nothing else. By a future life I mean merely what I say. Shall I survive my apparent death in this world? It is no question of being immortal. We have no notion of life without the passage of time—of course the time must be left indefinite, but there is no reason that we should postulate eternity. It may be suggested that the future life is possibly timeless. Of course this is so; it may be anything; but one of my difficulties is that, if the future is to be quite unlike the present, existence ceases to have any meaning for us. Our only conception of existence is our life in this world. Our emotions, our perceptions, and our activities are all conditioned by our surroundings; and one of these conditions is time, another is space. It is quite impossible to conceive of living outside of time or space. This is not to say that I deny the possibility of a future existence outside of time or space, but merely that to me it is meaningless: it has nothing to do with existence as I know it.

For the future life to make any appeal to me, it must not to be too different from our present life. For instance, one great reason for wishing to live again is the hope of being re-united to the dear ones that we have lost; but if they are entirely changed, with none

of the little human oddities and peculiarities which we remember with so much affection, will not the reunion be merely disappointment?

However, I will not make too much of these difficulties. We have no experience outside the world we live in, so it is not likely that we should have any accurate vision of another world. If we survive, our experience will probably be very unexpected.

But do we survive? The arguments against are rather strong. In the first place, there is the obvious relation of consciousness to the brain. Anything that goes wrong with the brain has an immediate effect on thought and emotion. As far as our experience in this life is concerned, there is no mind without brain, and a healthy brain is essential to a healthy mind. This is so obvious that there is no need to labour the point. Of course, the difficulty is more or less overcome if we adopt the old Christian idea of the resurrection of the body; but this has been abandoned by all except the most primitive believers as being unbearably materialistic. All intelligent modern believers in a future life seem to envisage it as purely spiritual (which is certainly pleasanter than the thought that we shall rise again with our worn-out old bodies). It is our bodies that die, while our minds survive. On the face of it, it seems unlikely that even the most trifling indisposition of the brain should have so much effect upon the mind, but that the actual destruction of the brain should have none at all.

Then there is the very difficult question of the non-human animals. The higher of these are very nearly related to us, and they have undoubtedly a certain amount of reasoning power and of rudimentary moral qualities. Is there such a tremendous gap between them and us as to justify the distinction that they are the beasts that perish, whereas we are the beasts that survive? Some kind-hearted people get over the difficulty by assuming that our special friends among the animals, such as the horse, the dog, and the cat, will accompany us to the happy hunting-grounds. I believe, however, that this is not countenanced by the orthodox, and in any case it is only putting back

the difficulty. No one seriously believes that there is a heaven for the flea, the mosquito, and the cockroach. (If there is, I trust we shall not share it.) Yet where can the line be drawn? At what point in evolution does the soul become the accompaniment of the animal body? I am afraid that we shall have to rule out the beasts. The difference between man and them is certainly much greater than any difference there may be between them and their nearest affinities in the brute creation. If we have to draw the line, it is easier to draw it between human and non-human beings than at any point lower down.

Then there is the question of number. I regard this as trivial, but there is something a little appalling in the idea of new souls continually being manufactured out of nothing in such tremendous numbers. After all, we had no existence before we were born (at least such is the general belief); why should the mere fact of being born give us a right to exist for ever? The answer to this objection is obviously "Why not?" and I think it is valid.

Now let us take the arguments for the future life. The favourite one is that it is needed to redress the monstrous injustice of the present life. This assumes that there is a moral governance of the universe. For this I can see no evidence. As far as our experience goes, the evidence is all against it. The world is full of injustice; some of it caused by man, but by far the greater part caused by Nature, which seems to take no account at all of man's deserts. What reason is there to suppose that the next world will be infused with a spirit of justice which is so conspicuously absent in this one? Of course the orthodox will reply: "Because there is a just God, who must put matters right in the end." This comes but ill from the people who conceive of their God sentencing sinners to eternal torment—an example of monstrous injustice such as no human Judge has ever approached. But, setting that aside, is there any conceivable reason why a good ruler should not begin, here and now, to establish justice in his dominions, instead of waiting for the future to redress the balance of the present?

There is surely no valid reason for expecting justice in the future when we do not have it now. This also affects the question of the survival of the brutes. Surely they suffer a great deal of injustice? Some of them lead happy lives enough, others extremely unhappy ones. Are they to be denied compensations merely because they have stopped short in the scheme of evolution? It seems hardly fair. I cannot attach any importance to this argument, much as I should like to do so.

In quite another category comes the direct testimony of innumerable people who claim that they have held communion with the spirits of the dead. The bulk of this evidence is enormous, and, if it were of good quality, it should be conclusive. But unfortunately it is of very bad quality. Most of it in modern times comes from paid mediums, a most unsatisfactory body of people, many of whom have been detected in trickery, whose methods at the best are so open to suspicion, and whose motives are so obviously mercenary, that very little value can be attached to their testimony. Other evidence comes from hysterical women, or from men in a state of religious exaltation which is closely allied to hysteria. It is seldom that quite sane, level-headed people are mixed up with these revelations. Such instances do occur, but they are rare; and, after all, the sanity of none of us is quite impeccable, especially in such highly emotional questions.

Moreover, the revelations are so very disappointing. As I have pointed out, the spirits of great men say such very banal things; the future world seems to have a deplorable effect on the intellect of its denizens. What accounts are given of the future life are vague and contradictory; they very conveniently agree with whatever may happen to have been the religious faith of the spirit who makes the communication. These contradictory accounts cannot all be true; many of them are vulgar and repulsive, many frankly incredible. It is quite open to the sceptic to ask: Why may not the whole of this testimony be rejected? It is certainly highly suspect.

But, on the whole, I am not inclined to reject definitely

this comforting hope of a future life. If there is one, it may be no better than this; but there is no reason to suppose that it will be any worse. If it is no worse, I should certainly welcome it rather than the prospect of annihilation. Also, I should have the hope that I had learnt something in my long life, and that the experience I have gained will be of use to me in any future existence.

The material difficulty of the dependence of thought on the brain does not weigh much with me. Mind is in such a different category from matter that it is very doubtful if one can argue from one to the other; after all, mind is the only thing we know directly.

I will borrow a quotation from Mr. Macleod Yearsley as to Huxley's view of the matter :—

> "It seems to me pretty plain that there is a third thing in the universe—to wit, consciousness—which, in the hardness of my heart or head, I cannot see to be matter, force, or any conceivable modification of either, however intimately the manifestations of the phenomena of consciousness may be connected with the phenomena known as matter and force."

The connection between mind and matter is so mysterious that it is wise to adopt a purely agnostic attitude with regard to it. Mind may be able to exist independently of matter; or there may be a material basis to the future life. We really know nothing about it; certainly not enough to declare that the future life is impossible. I think we may cherish a hope.

From one point of view, the question of the future life is unimportant. It has nothing to do with morality. Were I to receive a definite assurance that I should live again, it would make no difference to my conduct. I should still endeavour, according to my lights, to be a good citizen and a kindly man. Whatever is to happen to people hereafter, it is evident that they need our help and sympathy here and now. My duty to my neighbour, which is the only one I recognize, is just the same whether we have to die or not.

I will borrow another quotation from the *Literary Guide*. It is a paragraph from the " Church Times " :—

> " We are inclined to shudder at the Middle Ages for their cruelty. We are equally inclined to forget that they have never been matched in the depth and intensity of two fundamental religious experiences—a sense of sin and a confident belief in a life beyond the grave."

Precisely; this confident belief had no effect in mitigating their cruelty.

Any influence on morality that the belief in a future life may have is probably to the bad. After all, why be compassionate to suffering here on earth if it is to be more than compensated in the next world? Should we not rather congratulate the sufferer on the amount of bliss that he is accumulating with compound interest for future use? It would certainly tend to reduce our efforts to remove the injustice of this world if there is a just and mighty being on whose shoulders we can lay the burden. If we had an active and vivid belief in these compensations, it might have a considerable effect in deadening our compassion for the unfortunate. Happily our emotions in this world are too strong to allow us to be much influenced by our very hazy visions of the next. We all regard suffering as an unmitigated evil, and, if we are charitably inclined, endeavour to diminish it as if there were no Omnipotent Justice to see to it for us.

CHAPTER IV

Secular Morality and the Sexual Question

FORTUNATELY, our morality is becoming secular. The almost universal conception of a good man is that he is kindly and unselfish—a man whose word can be relied upon (this is very important), who is honest in his dealings, who is not quarrelsome and quick to anger, who is not so conceited as to be intolerant, who is not mean in money matters nor in any others, to whom the thought is hateful that any action of his can bring suffering to a fellow creature, who is free from the gross vices of gluttony and laziness, who is not selfish and brutal in his love affairs, who has no unnatural and anti-social vices. A good husband, a good father, a good friend, and a good citizen; such is my ideal of the virtuous man, and, with the obvious verbal corrections, of the virtuous woman.

So far I should have most people with me; even in the past these would all have seemed attributes of the good man, but there would have been many additions. For instance, the most important virtue of the good man would have been "piety." That is, he had to believe firmly the dogmas of whatever religion was in the ascendant at the time; and, what was almost more important, he had to be punctilious in the performance of its ceremonial observances. Again, his kindliness had to be reserved for certain limited classes of the community. There were many people whom it was his duty to hate and, if possible, persecute; such as heretics, pagans, unbelievers, Jews, natives of enemy countries, people disloyal to his King, witches and warlocks, people suspected of being Wehr wolves or of being succubi and incubi—numberless people, unspecified, suspected of being in league with the Devil and, more or less justifiably, taxgatherers. These hatreds went far to neutralize any natural kindliness he might have, and the ceremonial

observances were so important that he could not spare much time and attention to the more secular virtues. He was quite strong as to the theoretical value of chastity, but he paid little attention to its practical observance, except among his women kind, with whom he was very strict about it. He had strong views as to the inferiority of women and his own position as the Lord of Creation. He might, or might not, be kind to animals, according to his temperament; but he did not account cruelty to them as in any way a sin.

His whole code of morality would seem very lopsided to most of us, but many religious people of to-day would have a good deal of sympathy with it—witness the passage I have recently quoted. We are shocked at the cruelty of the Middle Ages; but, after all, they had a sense of sin and a belief in a future life, which amply made up for a little blood and torture. That is quite the mediæval spirit.

I have alluded to the virtue which has always been so highly extolled and so little practised by Christians—that of chastity. It is curious how obsessed pious Christians have always been by this particular virtue—very unlike the founder of their religion, who was not in the least shocked by Mary Magdalen, and who saved the woman taken in adultery from the hypocrites who would have stoned her.

I have a little hesitation in treating this subject quite frankly—there are still so much bigotry and so much hypocrisy connected with it—but it is too important to be shirked. To me, the so-called virtue of chastity is nonsense. The sex-instinct is a perfectly natural and wholesome one; it is, indeed, of vital importance to humanity. Any community in which it were markedly deficient would certainly die out. This is not to say that it can be left entirely unregulated. Like all natural passions, it is liable to regrettable excesses. In the form of crude lust it is a selfish and often a very cruel passion. It is a crime against the community not to keep it under some sort of control. On the other hand, to suppress it entirely is a crime against Nature, and Nature has a way of revenging herself. The sex passion is so strong that an endeavour to repress it completely leads to all sorts

of nervous disorders, and often merely results in directing the instinct into morbid channels. Obviously, the morality of the matter is to direct this natural instinct into healthy channels, but not to suppress it entirely. A happy marriage is undoubtedly the best solution of the problem, and if happy marriages were possible for every member of the community we might have some justification for denouncing irregular unions; but we know quite well that a great number of people are debarred from any marriage, and that many marriages are so unhappy that they cannot be called unions at all, and only serve to keep together people who by every law of nature ought to be apart. There is an obvious remedy for this latter difficulty, and that is greater freedom of divorce; but here the disastrous connection of morality with religion bars the way. I have never been able to understand the clerical objection to giving people who are unhappily married another chance of the happiest and most wholesome life that this imperfect world affords; but so it is. There are thousands of homes where husbands and wives are open or secret enemies, where children are brought up in an atmosphere of hatred and deceit, where all the best instincts of humanity are frustrated and outraged, and yet every obstacle is put in the way of a legal dissolution of this hateful bond. Fortunately, in the many hard cases in which the law refuses to interfere there is always the possibility of disregarding the law—which is bad for the theoretical sanctity of marriage, but is much better than keeping to the immoral bond. I am entirely in favour of the institution of marriage; it gives people the best chance of the best kind of happiness, and I should like as many as possible to have this happiness. To exclude the unhappily married people from any further chance of achieving it is to me extremely wicked; but the great bulk of clerical opinion is dead against any reform in this direction. It is a striking example of the evil effects of religious prejudice on questions of morality.

Another example of this is the much smaller question of marriage with a deceased wife's sister. This, on the face of it, is an eminently desirable marriage. It is obviously the best thing for the children, and has many

other advantages. It is a matter of common experience that these marriages hardly ever turn out ill; the ordinary layman has never been able to see any objection to them. But the Church of England opposed this small reform in the most violent and unscrupulous manner, and owing to their power in the House of Lords were able for many years to prevent the passing of a Bill for the legalization of these marriages, which was desired by the great bulk of the laity, and is now acknowledged to have been a much-needed reform. I need hardly add that there is no trace of the dreadful evils predicted as the result of the passing of the Bill.

Unfortunately, no matter how many artificial hindrances to the making of happy marriages we remove, there never will be nearly enough of them. For one thing, there is the regrettable surplus of women over men in the British Isles—a surplus which is increased by the number of men who cannot, or who think they cannot, afford a wife, to say nothing of the selfish bachelors who shirk the responsibilities of matrimony.

This is a very serious question. What are we to do with these surplus women? There is one obvious remedy which is adopted by most non-Christian countries, and that is polygamy. It was a common and quite lawful practice in Old Testament times, so Christians who have (very unwisely) adopted the Old Testament as the word of God can hardly maintain that it is in itself immoral. What was right for the patriarchs cannot be so very wrong for us. Not being a Christian, I can examine this matter strictly on its merits. It was probably a useful institution in early days, when the status of women was so much inferior to that of men; an inferiority that was quite natural when bodily strength was of such enormous importance in the struggle for life. Women, inferior in strength and handicapped by the disabilities of their sex, were obviously much more in need of male protection than they are now, and naturally much preferred to share a man with other wives rather than have no man at all. Nor do I think that even now-a-days the practical disadvantages of polygamy are at all serious. The Mormon community in its early days surmounted incredible difficulties, and

founded a prosperous settlement in the heart of a desert, without being in any way hindered by this peculiar institution. It is even arguable that polygamy helped them in the struggle.

Nevertheless, I am dead against polygamy. One of the most encouraging features of modern civilization is the way in which the disabilities of women, both natural and artificial, are being gradually overcome. Muscular strength is now of little importance; in health and vigour they are rapidly approaching the male standard; indeed, in the matter of health, in spite of their sexual disabilities, they have probably exceeded it. As for intellect, now that women are receiving an education comparable to that of men, the difference in mental power is found to be quite small. In many ways we are approaching the ideal of equality between the sexes—an ideal to which I attach an immense importance. It cannot be absolute, but the nearer we can get to it the better. Anything much short of it is quite incompatible with a high civilization. Obviously polygamy would be a retrograde step in view of this ideal; it would put women in a position of such humiliating inferiority that no advanced community could possibly adopt it.

What, then, can we do for these surplus women who are debarred from matrimony? For one thing, we can be kind and generous to them. Let us, at any rate, refrain from throwing stones at them if they contract irregular unions with men who are also debarred from matrimony either from want of means or because they are unhappily married, and owing to our iniquitous laws have been denied the relief of divorce. As long as these women remain in other respects good citizens, let us continue to respect them, and to see that they incur no disabilities either for themselves or their children.

But of course this will not entirely solve the problem. Even if every man in the country had found a mate either with the sanction of the law or without it, there would still be not men enough to go round. This is a very unfortunate state of things, but it is not quite as bad as it looks. The sexual instinct is distinctly different in men and women. Nearly every man feels the craving, and is apt to be unhappy and unbalanced if it is

frustrated. But there are quite a number of women in whom the instinct is either absent or in abeyance. These are the natural old maids. They are often very capable and intelligent people, and now that so many occupations are thrown open to them they can mostly live useful and happy lives free from the trials and disabilities of matrimony. Unfortunately, many of them do not realize their limitations and make loveless marriages, which often turn out disastrously. With the spread of knowledge and of common sense these marriages, I hope, will become more and more infrequent, so that women will be divided into sexless workers and happy wives and mothers.

There remains a sort of intermediate class of women, who have a passionate desire for children, but no desire at all for a husband except as a means to an end. Marriage with these women is very hard on a normal man. He may get children, but he does not get a wife. On the other hand, it is hard on the women if their craving for children is denied. In these cases a temporary union is probably best for all concerned. A really happy marriage which should last a lifetime is only possible between men and women with normal instincts, who marry for love, and whose affection, aided by wholesome sexuality, is proof against the trials and disappointments inevitable to matrimony.

That by these means we should avoid all the evils of the present system is too much to hope, but we should undoubtedly reduce the scourge of prostitution, which is so degrading to women and so coarsening to men, besides being answerable for the spread of diseases disastrous to the physique of the race. It is true that the prevalence of these diseases is largely due to the action of religious people who oppose the employment of the simple precautions which would go far to prevent them; but even were these diseases to be entirely overcome, as they would be in a really enlightened community, prostitution would remain a great evil, and every effort, short of persecuting the poor women who follow this oldest profession, should be made to minimize it.

We must now consider the great question of birth control. It is quite obvious that this is far too important

a matter to be left to chance. If no sort of control were exercised, our population would increase far too rapidly; but the difficulty is that at present the control does not act in the best way. It is most exercised by the prudent, well-educated, self-respecting classes, of whom one might reasonably expect a good progeny. It is least exercised by criminals, drunkards, and imbeciles; so that there is a sort of unnatural selection going on, which favours the preponderance of births from the least desirable members of the population. This is fortunately counteracted by a certain natural sterility in the degenerate classes, and, also somewhat cruelly, by the much larger death-rate of the children of those classes. But at the best it is an unfortunate state of things.

A society has been formed to counteract this disastrous tendency. I have every sympathy with the aims of the Eugenic Society, but it is like a voice crying in the wilderness. Nobody seems to pay much attention to it. Theoretically, the ideal state would breed human beings much as the domestic animals are bred, with a careful selection of the best sires and the best dams and the absolute suppression of all offspring from inferior stocks. Wonderful results might come from such a method, but it is far too cold-blooded and too tyrannical to be within practical politics. We might, however, go some little way towards this ideal. I see no great objection to the sterilizing of lunatics and imbeciles, of habitual criminals and of habitual drunkards. It may be a little cruel to deprive them of the pleasures of sex; but we do so already by shutting them up for long periods, during which they live under a regime of enforced chastity, which is, in fact, a good deal crueller.

There is no doubt that they must not be permitted to breed, and there are only three ways of preventing them—by death, imprisonment for life, or sterilization. (They are far too unbalanced for any system of birth control.) There can be no question which is the least cruel method. Such a method would take us a considerable way along the eugenic road. Another possibility is State aid for children of selected parents. Poor people, who could pass certain tests, might be helped to bring up a larger family than they could otherwise afford. But that would

be for future consideration, when our population has ceased to increase. At the present moment the crying need is to eliminate the unfit.

As usual, this important question has been obscured by the irrelevancies of the religious. Most pious people object to any form of birth control; the Catholic Church, indeed, absolutely forbids it. It is very disheartening to find the discussion of this vital subject blocked at every turn by prudes and fanatics.

Another difficult question concerns the imparting to children of the knowledge of sexual matters. It is obviously very dangerous to leave them after the age of puberty in complete ignorance, or to let them acquire knowledge from precocious companions or evil-minded adults.

It is certainly best to give children of both sexes fairly full knowledge of these matters before their feelings are aroused—but not much before, for the longer their curiosity can remain unawakened the better. The ideal is that they should think as little as possible about sexual questions until they are grown up. In most cases this is best attained by a frank statement at the proper age—an age that would vary a good deal with individuals.

I have lingered for some time in this section of morality, for it is the most difficult and the most controversial. There are other very important questions, but on these there is much more agreement among civilized people.

CHAPTER V

The Most Important Virtues

WHAT are the most important virtues? I should put in the first place the will to be virtuous—the goodwill towards men that is the foundation of morality. I have already said that I regard this as a very common attribute of humanity; if it were not, humanity would have ceased to exist long ago. There is hardly any one in whom it is absolutely lacking. Even the most hardened criminal has a pal or two to whom he wishes well rather than ill. A great number of people wish well to the whole world, although they are generally very lax in putting their wishes into practice. Anyhow, the goodwill is there, and I regard it as the foundation of morality. Reward and punishment have nothing to do with it. It is unselfish in that it aims at the happiness of other people rather than of oneself, although of course there is a certain pleasure attached to well-doing and a certain pain attached to evil-doing, unless the natural conscience is absolutely dead—a very rare condition.

Some philosophers regard all our actions as purely selfish. We do a thing because on the balance it gives us more pleasure than not to do it. This doctrine can be upheld with much plausibility. It is like the denial of the freedom of the will, which also has a fine show of logic behind it. For myself, I hold that freedom of the will and the existence of altruism are such obvious and fundamental truths that they override any system of philosophy that regards them as non-existent. Explain them away as you will, we know that for all practical purposes we can choose between two courses, that we are more or less responsible for the one we take, and that we are capable of overcoming our selfish impulses in order to do good to other people or to avoid doing harm to

them. Necessitarian philosophers will no doubt reply that I do not understand the elements of the controversy, and that I am like Dr. Johnson, who thought he proved the reality of matter by kicking a stone. I admit that my argument is a little crude, and that the subtleties of philosophy are the products of some of the best brains that the world has produced. I have a great respect for philosophers. They are generally earnest seekers after truth, and, unlike the theologians, their appeal is mostly to reason; but they are like them in one respect, that they can never agree among themselves. There are almost as many systems of philosophy as there are religions. They are excellent devices on which to sharpen men's wits, but until they can come to some sort of agreement they are of no use to practical people. I am afraid I lean towards the cynical definition of a philosopher—"A blind man, in a dark room, searching for a black hat which isn't there."

The man of science gives us results; the philosopher gives us nothing except ingenious systems, which can always be pulled to pieces by the next philosopher who comes along. So for the foundations of morality I have to rely on certain rather crude assumptions which have the merit of working—at any rate, well enough for practical purposes. The principal of these assumptions are the two I have mentioned: freedom of the will and moral responsibility. I further assume a general attitude of goodwill, which requires no incentive of reward or punishment. This goodwill is the foundation of all the virtues. There are many virtues on which most civilized people agree, although there is a good deal of difference as to their relative importance. Personally, I attach an enormous importance to truthfulness. It has a distinguished place in all the codes, and every one does it lip-service; but most are very lax in its observance. How important it is can be gathered from the consideration that concerted action, on which the whole life of the community depends, is impossible unless a man can rely to a certain extent on the word of his neighbour. Some measure of mutual trust is imperative. The ideal, of course, would be a community in which every man's word is his bond, and where every statement

can be relied upon implicitly; where every man not only speaks the truth as he sees it, but takes the utmost trouble to find out what is the actual truth, weighs the evidence for every statement, and never allows his wishes to influence his judgment. However, we are not talking of Utopias. This is an impossible ideal, but every one who wants to do his duty in the world should aim at some approximation to it.

Then there is justice. This is closely allied to truth. You cannot be just unless you know the truth. Of course, justice should be as merciful as is consistent with the avoidance of injustice to others. The virtuous man is essentially kindly.

This leads to the corollary, that the most hateful vice is cruelty. It is difficult to bring home to those people who believe in eternal punishment the horrible nature of this vice, as they might regard it as a reflection upon their God. If one is to derive moral benefit from communion with the Deity, He should surely set a good example. The better kind of orthodox people in their heart hate this doctrine, but dare not abjure it, as they believe it has the sanction of Holy Writ; but there are some of the baser sort who seem to gloat over it, and contemplate with horrible complacency the torments prepared in a future world for those people who differ from them in religious belief, or who have got the better of them in this world. If the saints in heaven derive a considerable portion of their bliss from the contemplation of the tortures of the damned, as has been maintained by an eminent divine, they are very bad examples for living men and women.

Fortunately, very few people are naturally cruel; but many are callous. The adage, that harm is mostly done by want of thought, applies especially to this vice. Sportsmen are not by nature cruel; most of them are quite unaware that they are cruel at all. But no impartial observer can deny that field sports have a considerable element of cruelty. It is only by deliberately shutting their eyes to this side of their favourite pastimes that kindly people are able to indulge in them. Future ages will regard it as an extraordinary paradox that quite humane people, who were fond of animals, could

have enjoyed killing them by methods which certainly were not the most painless. That animals have to be killed for the benefit of human beings is obvious. Even if we did not need them for food, we should often have to destroy them because they multiply unduly, or because they are hurtful to man; but in civilized countries it is universally agreed that this killing ought to involve as little suffering as possible—except where sport is concerned.

I think this exception should weigh rather heavily on the national conscience. Of course great progress has been made. The more brutal sports have been abolished except in very backward countries; and, as regards cruelty to human beings, we are immensely better than our forefathers. Judicial torture was an integral part of the law of most countries up to a recent date. England has been claimed as an honourable exception, as the common law has never recognized torture as legal; but this has not in the least prevented its application. The glorious reign of Elizabeth was notorious for its tortures. In the words of Hallam, "the rack seldom stood idle in the Tower for all the latter part of Elizabeth's reign." Torture as part of judicial punishment existed in fact, if not in name, down to a very recent period. The last witch was burnt in Europe in 1781. In South America and Mexico witch-burning lasted into the second half of the nineteenth century. Our record is comparatively honourable; in England the last trial for witchcraft was in 1712, when the woman was convicted, but not executed. We abolished flogging in the army in 1881. The treatment of criminals and of the insane has made enormous progress. Corporal punishment in schools has become almost innocuous. Cruelty to children is rare except in the homes of drunkards. We are gradually becoming quite a kindly race. But there is still a good deal of preventable suffering.

This leads to another very horrible vice. Drunkenness is probably responsible for more human misery than any other single cause. All of us have known men of great promise whose lives have been wrecked by drink; and not only their lives, but the lives of others dependent on them. It is bad enough in the upper classes, where as

a rule there is room to get away from a drunkard, and where he can generally be restrained from physical violence; but think of a household among the poorer classes, where the father spends his scanty wages in drink and beats his starving wife and children. I do not wish to exaggerate—in this respect we are much better than our forefathers; but there are still far too many of such households. Even short of this, drinking among the poorer classes always means widespread misery; there is so little margin of expenditure, and they all live in such close contact with one another.

Think of the waste of it all. I believe the national drink bill is something over 300 millions pounds a year, spent on a commodity which is answerable for a great deal of the crime, squalor, and degradation which disgrace our civilization, and which can easily be dispensed with, as the number of healthy and cheerful teetotallers abundantly proves.

In these days of great financial stringency, think of the extra savings that might be effected by the giving up of alcohol. It is true that we should lose a good deal of revenue, but the national taxable income would be immensely increased.

I firmly believe that if alcohol had never been discovered the world would be a much better place to live in. It is odd that, knowing its evils so well, we British express so little sympathy for the great experiment which is being made in the United States. It is true that this experiment is far from fulfilling the expectations of its authors. It is a pity that it should have been tried in the most lawless of all the great civilized communities. The United States have an extraordinarily vigorous and capable population, but they are not law-abiding. The statistics of crimes of violence are terrible. Undoubtedly the measure has been too drastic; the chief promoters were fanatics, and, like all such, have acquired their immense driving power at the expense of reason and moderation. The saner prohibitionists are now coming round to the opinion that beer and light wine ought to be permitted; that the great enemy is the consumption of spirits. This I believe to be quite sound. Total prohibition is so complete a reversal of the habits

of the people that it has produced a very violent resistance. It is true that this chiefly applies to the idle rich, who in the States are possibly more selfish and useless than in any other country; but even among the middle classes, especially in the big towns, there is a widespread conspiracy to evade the law, which produces a general spirit of lawlessness, and even in places an increase of drunkenness.

On the other hand, there is distinctly less drinking among the working classes: the efficiency of labour has improved; the working women and the wives of working men are almost solid in favour of prohibition; and in the country districts all classes seem to have become more sober. I understand that there is still a considerable majority of the whole population in favour of prohibition, in spite of its many drawbacks, and this majority would be greatly increased if the ban on beer and light wines were removed.

The issue of this great experiment is still uncertain. It is a *very* great experiment; probably fraught with more importance for the welfare of mankind than any other movement, either social or political. I am much disappointed with the tone of our Press with regard to it. It is either used as a subject for cheap jokes, or else abused with curious bitterness. Every item of news that tells against prohibition is seized on with avidity; any suggestion that the movement may spread to Great Britain is regarded with horror. The attitude generally is that of the bishop who said that he would rather see England free than sober. I have always regarded this as a silly saying. What is the freedom which seems so important to the bishop? Freedom to get drunk. Is it so very important?

A great deal of nonsense is talked about freedom. In every civilized State the freedom of the individual has to be curtailed in all sorts of directions. If it were not, we should relapse into a state of anarchy, where the strong would tyrannize over the weak and the great majority would have no liberty at all. One of the best directions in which to control individual liberty would be to prevent the drinking of spirits. We already do this with universal approval in the case of certain deleterious drugs. No one

can deny that there are many more cases of harm produced by spirit drinking than by the taking of drugs. It is true that there is a good deal of spirit drinking which is practically innocuous; but the benefits, if any, are very small, while the evils are very great. We are an eminently reasonable, law-abiding country; why should the prohibition of spirits be unthinkable here? I am all in favour of leaving the working man his beer. It is possible, indeed it is easy, to take too much of it; but the consequences are seldom serious. It is very difficult to get drunk on beer. It is a pleasant drink, and in so far promotes the happiness of mankind. It is mainly drunk for its agreeable taste, and not for its effect on the brain. Spirits are mostly drunk for this very effect, which in the long run is almost always harmful.

The evils of drink are undoubtedly diminishing under the present system, so it may be asked: "Why not leave it alone?" The answer is that the progress is slow, and might be very much accelerated. There are many diseases, such as consumption, which are steadily diminishing; but that is never considered a reason why we should relax in our search for an absolute cure. I do not despair of seeing before I die a great measure of prohibition adopted in this country.

The fight against disease is one of the movements which ought to claim our enthusiastic sympathy. We do it lip-service, but the layman is not really interested, except when the fight is against some definite disease which he either has himself or thinks he may have in the future. Progress has been enormous. We have at last something approaching to a rational theory of disease. Instead of the hypothetical "humours" of our ancestors, we have the invasion of the body by germs, many of which have been identified; and ingenious methods have been discovered by which the body can be helped in its warfare against these germs. We are only on the threshold; much still remains to be done. There are certain diseases, the chief of which is cancer, which remain mysterious; but we are certainly on the right path. We can point to solid results. The death-rate is continuously diminishing; the average duration of life is much longer than it was even thirty years ago. To

quote Mr. Joseph McCabe: "We have nearly doubled the average span of human life in a century, and trebled it since the Middle Ages." Certain very dreadful diseases, such as hydrophobia, are well under control; infant mortality, which used to be a blot on our civilization, is much diminished; and, above all, we have made enormous strides in the conquest of pain.

I should like to make a digression in order to point out, to those pessimists who disbelieve in progress, one incontestable and immensely important benefit that we have derived from science. Chloroform was discovered by Sir James Simpson in 1847. This was practically the first conquest that we have made over pain. That pain is an evil cannot be denied, occasionally a salutary evil as a warning against worse things or as a punishment of wrong-doing, but in most cases just an evil—the greatest cause of unhappiness in the world. Ever since the world began, until this discovery of chloroform, pain had to be endured; there was nothing to be done but to grin and bear it. There were certain alleviations, but they had a very slight effect over the innumerable sources of pain which afflicted all sentient beings.

Let us take but one source—that of child-bearing. Think of the myriads of women who up to the nineteenth century of our era had to endure the often excruciating agonies attending parturition, without any hope of alleviation. It is bad enough even now, but at the worst there is always the blessed drug which women know will come to their help when the pain is getting unbearable. There is even a method, "twilight sleep," which makes childbirth almost painless. It is true that there seem to be drawbacks to this method which inculcate caution in its adoption; but in the near future we may hope that by this or some other discovery women need no longer be tortured while doing their duty to the world.

I am always amazed at the injustice of Nature towards women. That men should be spared all the horror of this necessary process, and only given the pleasure connected with it, is to me yet another proof that the moral governance of the world leaves much to be desired. If I can draw any moral from it at all, it is that men should

endeavour by every means in their power to make up to women for this monstrous injustice. It makes my blood boil when I think that in the early days of chloroform women were often denied the benefits of it on the plea that God had decreed that women should bear children in pain and anguish, and that any endeavour to alleviate their suffering was flying in the face of the Almighty. Many doctors even were guilty of this incredible cruelty—another instance of the harm done by relying on Scriptural texts, and by pretending to know the wishes of the Deity. I believe that among very religious people there is still a trace of this cruel doctrine, especially among men, as they do not suffer on account of it; and it is men for the most part who say that we have made no progress.

CHAPTER VI

The Good Citizen

OTHER important virtues have to do with citizenship. We live in a very complex community, which would at once cease to exist if we were not mostly engaged in helping one another. The smoothness with which the great machine works in a well-ordered State is very wonderful. Think of the way London is supplied with food drawn from all parts of the world. Think of its immensely complicated transport system, dependent upon the co-ordination of hundreds of thousands of skilled workers; a system which hardly ever goes wrong, although the mistake of one signal-man can cause an appalling accident. All this great army of men are doing their job, and doing it well. If any considerable number of them were doing it badly, London could not carry on. We see when a strike occurs how delicately balanced is the machine, and how easy it is to put it out of gear. That is the curious part of our otherwise admirable organization, that the very people who normally do their jobs so well and so faithfully are willing, both masters and men, to upset the machine for what often seem trivial causes. This is not good citizenship.

It would be absurd to say that a lock-out or a strike is never justified; it is as absurd as to say that a war is never justified. But, as in the case of war, it is a crime to resort to it save in the last extremity. Every strike is a kind of war. It nearly always seeks to gain its object by so inconveniencing the innocent public that pressure will be put upon the masters to concede the men's demands. This may be justified as against the masters, who are often to blame for a strike by being hard upon the men; but it is very unfair to the

public. It is curious that working men, who generally have a very good sense of their civic duties, are so ready to hold up the community for the benefit of a small portion of it. The working man will probably retort that if he had his ideal community—a Socialistic one—he would not think of striking, but that the present regime is so unfair to him that he need not be tender with it. There is a good deal in this contention, and I think it needs careful consideration. The worst of a capitalist regime is that under it the distribution of wealth is so very unequal. A working man is supposed to be doing pretty well on £4 a week—a steady £5 a week is almost luxury; on that he can bring up quite a large family of children. To the clerk it is just sufficient to marry on, but the family must be severely limited. To the professional man and the upper classes generally it is semi-starvation, making marriage and the family impossible. It is true that these different classes have different expenses. The clerk must be better dressed than the working man, or he would lose his job. The professional man has to be somewhat better dressed than the clerk, and generally has to have a place of business which eats into his profits. But when we get to the prosperous business and professional men, to say nothing of the fortunate inheritor of property, the discrepancy becomes rather outrageous. These successful people have at the very least £1000 a year, and many of them a great deal more. No working man can aspire to anything like this wealth; yet the skilled artizan is often a man of great ability, and his skill has not been easily acquired; also it loses its commercial value long before the age of retirement of the professional and commercial classes. If I were a working man, I should feel that I did not get my fair share in this wealthy community. As it is, I am a little ashamed of my comparative prosperity.

There is a good deal in the Socialist ideal which appeals to my sense of justice. Take it in its simplest form. Imagine a small community wrecked on a desert island. If they were good average people of British stock, they would at once begin to organize themselves, and this organization would probably be on Socialist

lines. They would form a small committee to review their resources, to take charge of all available stores (which would be held in common), and to allocate the various jobs required for the maintenance of the community. The women, children, and infirm would have the first consideration; if there were any shortage of food and comforts, they would be the last to suffer. The most vigorous of the men would willingly undertake the most unpleasant jobs, and would take pride in enduring privations so that the weak should have every chance. There would still be competition, but it would take the form of rivalry as to who could do the best work for the community. There would be no private property except as regards little personal things that had been saved from the wreck; all would be held in common for the good of all. In short, it would be an ideal Socialistic community. But then it would be a very small one in exceptional circumstances.

It would probably work quite well for a time. At the best, as in "The Admirable Crichton," it would sooner or later degenerate into a petty but very efficient despotism; at the worst, into chaos. At any rate, it is a fine ideal.

The question is, Would it work on the enormous scale and in the very different conditions of a modern State? I am reluctantly compelled to the opinion that it would not. The present regime is far from ideal, but it is marvellously efficient. Even the working man with his ungenerous pay gets good value for his money. He enjoys more of the amenities of life than did most wealthy men a century or two ago. He obtains peace and order; protection from violence, extortion, and injustice; free schooling for his children; a somewhat inadequate, but still helpful, provision for sickness, unemployment, and old age; and a far from negligible share in the numerous amenities brought by science into modern life. He has great and increasing political power; he has a very important voice in all modern legislation. There is no longer the least fear that his opinions and his interests can be disregarded.

The rich do not have things all their own way. They are taxed as they have never been taxed before. The

very rich have to pay at least half their income to the State. When they die not nearly all their property goes to their descendants; the State again steps in. The sacred rights of property are disregarded in a way that has never happened before.

There are many reasons why the working man should not be too discontented with the present regime. At any rate, he has the power to amend it, and, without shattering it, to mould it nearer to his heart's desire.

Should we be better off if we adopted the Socialistic State? The well-to-do would certainly be worse off—which, I am afraid, would please the working man; but would *he* be better off? Is it worth while to take this very complicated machine to pieces, with the risk that we might not be able to put it together again? With the elaborate and delicate adjustments of modern life, any sudden change is very dangerous. Even the best of revolutions are very unpleasant things; famine, bloodshed, and anarchy are always waiting round the corner.

Supposing our Socialist State duly installed and the inevitable mess caused by its installation duly cleared up, would it work any better than our present regime?

All Socialistic schemes are necessarily vague, but the essence of them is the immense power of the State. Now, all experience shows that even the best State Departments are inefficient as compared with good private enterprises. In the latter there is always the survival of the fittest. The most efficient inevitably come to the top. In the enterprises themselves this is always the principle at work. In the public office no one gets sacked as long as he performs his routine duties decently and behaves himself. In the private business a man is not kept on unless he is worth his pay. Where there is so little competition, as in the public office, there is but little incentive to extra exertion, and the survival of the fittest does not come into play.

I will take from Dr. Shadwell's recent articles in the *Times* an account of the administration of the State mines in Germany. A commission composed of the

most able and responsible Socialists, with Kautsky, for over thirty years the intellectual leader of the party, in the chair, unanimously condemned these mines on the ground of "inefficiency through bureaucracy, red tape, favouritism in appointments and promotion, political influence, lack of a sense of financial responsibility, slackness, slowness, delay, and rates of pay absolutely low and in comparison with private industry positively ridiculous." As Dr. Shadwell says: "No die-hard free trader has ever condemned State enterprise more roundly than this Commission." There are many other difficulties in the working of the Socialist State, but I will not dwell on them. I am convinced that the machine would not work so well under the new regime; at any rate, the risk would be enormous.

I may be asked: What has a discussion of Socialism to do with religion and ethics? It certainly has a great deal to do with ethics. The good man must be a good citizen, and must endeavour to have a sound judgment on all such questions. Having formed his judgment to the best of his ability, he should turn to politics to get his views as to what is best for the State carried out. It is silly to sneer at politicians; they have their weaknesses, but if the good citizen withdraws from politics he only hands them over to the bad citizen, with disastrous results to the State. The trouble with politicians is that they are continually confronted with difficult cases of casuistry. It is all very well to say that no vote should ever be given which is in any way at variance with one's principles. The thing is not quite so simple as that. To get anything done, we must act with our fellow-men: some sort of combination is essential for political purposes, and a combination is possible only with a certain give and take. A political party is a group of people who are agreed on certain big questions. The individuals composing the party must subordinate their views on the minor questions in order to make a united front against the opponents of the big ones if they wish these big questions to prevail. A member of the House of Commons is continually faced with the dilemma: Ought I to vote against my convictions on a particular point in order to keep in

office a Government which I firmly believe is the best Government now available? Of course it depends on the importance of the point; it has to be very important to justify any action that tends to break up a political combination which, on the whole, is to the benefit of the nation. This give-and-take is obviously justifiable, but too much of it is apt to weaken the moral fibre. It offends against the principle of truth, to which I attach so much importance. It is for these reasons that politicians are apt to be condemned as shifty folk by people who do not share their difficulties. They *are* shifty, possibly more so than they need be; but that is no reason for shunning them. At any rate, those who condemn them ought to be the first to come and help, so that a better tone may be brought into politics. To be a member of the British Parliament is one of the highest positions in the world. It is to be one of a small body of men who have been chosen to conduct the affairs of the greatest Empire ever known. Merely to help choose one of this body is a great privilege and a great responsibility. It should be taken very seriously by the good citizen.

Above all, the good citizen should be law-abiding. He may agitate as much as he likes to get altered what he considers are bad laws; indeed, it is his duty to do so, but until the laws are altered he should obey them. The machine cannot work smoothly if any of its laws are disobeyed. There are countries in which the laws are so bad that it may be right to disobey them, but I am confident that Great Britain is not one of them. The more I see of the action of the law in this country, the more I am amazed at its general fairness and reasonableness. It is often dilatory, and is much too expensive; but it is wonderfully just.

I should like the laws to be simplified, and if possible codified, so that ordinary people may have a better chance of understanding them; and there are certain reforms, such as that of the Divorce Law, which are long overdue, but, as they are, they have to be obeyed.

There is one other great question that must be considered—that of War and Peace. I am, of course, a

Pacifist; no one who remembers the Great War is likely to be anything else. But it is obvious that the "peace-at-any-price" man is merely inviting foreign militarists to trample on him. Nothing would more encourage the aggressive spirit of other nations than to feel certain that they would meet with no opposition from us. "Si vis pacem para bellum" is quite a wise maxim, but unfortunately big armaments have a way of frightening other people, and so producing bigger armaments, until the militarist spirit is awakened, and then good-bye to peace.

What is to be done? It seems insane that wars should break out when the vast majority of all civilized people are passionately in favour of peace. It is so insane that I entirely refused to believe in the possibility of the Great War—until it came. I still do not know why it came. We certainly did not wish it, France did not wish it, Italy did not wish it, Russia did not wish it; apparently no one wished it except Germany and possibly Austria—and Germany had no reason to wish it. She was strong and prosperous; there was nothing to prevent her from getting stronger and more prosperous if she remained at peace. No one dared to attack her; surely the great bulk of her highly intelligent population would have been quite content to go on as they were doing. No nation had a brighter future. But she had a rotten Government, an Emperor half-mad with conceit, an over-confident army whose chiefs were longing for military glory in a war which they firmly believed would be short and sweet—"ein frischer, frölicher Krieg"—and a far too subservient people with little political power. The politicians were mere courtiers, entirely under the thumb of the Emperor and of the military clique. These were the commonplace begetters of the greatest disaster the world has ever known. It makes one despair of human nature and of common sense. Millions of lives have been sacrificed, untold misery has been incurred, in proving that peace is better than war. The lesson has been a very severe one; I hope that we have profited by it, but the spirit of unreason is not easily exorcised. If the world went mad in 1914, how can we be sure that it will not go mad

again? One thing we can be sure of, and that is that the next world war will be yet worse than its forerunner.

What is to be done? What ought to be the attitude of the good citizen? I think the best hope lies in working for the League of Nations, the Hague Tribunal, and especially for Conferences on the limitation of armaments. The Washington Conference was a good beginning; I hope that the next one, which is impending as I write, will carry further the good work. Any general reduction in armaments is a clear gain to the prosperity of the world. It is not an impossible ideal to do away with all armed forces beyond those required for police purposes and for subduing aggressive savages. For this latter object, with modern scientific appliances, very small forces should be sufficient. At the present moment every civilized nation is anxious for peace. It is sheer lunacy that such enormous sums should have to be spent in providing for a war which every one dreads and abhors. If we have learnt our lesson, we shall seek the one sure means of preventing this war—that of universal disarmament; but all must play fair in the matter. As Alphonse Karr said: "Abolissons la peine de mort? Certainement, mais que messieurs les assassins commencement."

Obviously, among the civic virtues honesty ranks high. Like truthfulness, it is essential to any fruitful co-operation in the work of the commonwealth. I think my countrymen have as high a standard of honesty as that of any nation; but it might be higher. We have a great feeling for fair-play in most things, and of course fair-play implies honesty; but we do not always play the game. Many people do not mind cheating the State, although they would not cheat an individual. Petty smuggling is rather a thing to be boasted of than to be confessed with shame; a little trickery in the way of Income Tax returns is regarded as a legitimate form of economy. Not only the State, but the big public companies, have to complain of this curious laxity; many quite respectable people will travel first-class with a third-class ticket if they think they will not be found out.

These aberrations are mostly due to a failure of imagination. If they cheat an individual, they can hardly fail to realize the harm done to that individual; whereas if they cheat the State or a big company they cannot visualize the harm that is undoubtedly done to the community. With the progress of time the average citizen will acquire a higher standard of civic honesty; at the present there are a good many minor lapses. There is another thing that he often fails to realize, and that is the harmfulness of extravagance. It is commonly held by thoughtless people that money spent on luxury is good for trade. Now, it is one of the few things on which political economists are agreed, that the community, like the individual, grows poor by spending and grows rich by saving. The miser accumulates money which provides fresh capital for trade; the spendthrift destroys capital, and so diminishes the total stock. I leave aside the obvious gravamen of the offence, that the spendthrift generally does himself a great deal of harm by his luxurious living, and fans the flame of class hatred by flaunting his extravagance in the face of the poor. The idle rich (of whom fortunately there are not very many in England, where there is a high standard of work and duty among the wealthy classes) fill me with horror. They do not even enjoy themselves. I have a certain respect for a successful hedonist—at any rate, he gets something out of life; but these silly people get nothing but boredom and indigestion, while they squander funds badly needed for all sorts of public purposes.

I have tried to discuss as honestly as I can the main problems of secular morality. My standard is frankly utilitarian. As far as morality is intuitive, I think it may be reduced to an inherent impulse of kindliness towards our fellow creatures. The fool, with the best will in the world, will do harm to other people—a wise man, if only moderately amiable, will do a great deal of good. The ideal citizen will train his body to be healthy, and his mind to be well-stored and logical; he will interest himself in all social questions, will be diligent in acquiring information, which he will use fearlessly and impartially in forming sound judgments.

He will not entirely abandon this intellectual attitude even in his love affairs; he will find it impossible to marry a fool, however attractive she may be physically. Having married a more or less sensible woman, he will have as many children as his wife thinks advisable, and he and his wife will spend immense care and thought on bringing them up to be good citizens also. Not being a fool, he will live as pleasantly and comfortably as his means and duties permit; but he will avoid luxury like poison. He will probably live to a good old age; he will preserve his faculties much longer than did his ancestors; and he will die without having been much of a burden to his family and the community. He may be interested in philosophical and religious questions, but he will avoid dogmatism, and will be well aware that no certainty can be attained in these highly speculative matters; consequently he will be tolerant of other people's opinions. He will not worry much about unknowable things, such as the future life; he will concentrate his energies on doing his duty in this life, and his great ambition will be to leave the world a little the better for his presence in it.

Such is my ideal citizen: a somewhat prosaic ideal, but it has the advantage of not being in any way impossible. I should imagine that most people would not disagree very violently with my conception of the good citizen. Morality divorced from religion becomes much less controversial, and there need not be much bitterness in discussing these questions even where there is disagreement.

I may be asked why I have called this essay "The Religion of an Artist." It is mostly concerned with ethics apart from religion, and there is nothing in it to indicate that the writer, as an artist, has any special views which differentiate him from his non-artistic brothers. The answer is that I am looking forward to a time when ethics will have taken the place of religion, and will, I hope, have absorbed the enthusiasm hitherto lavished on the latter—an enthusiasm which, as I have pointed out, has in the past bred strife rather than fellow-feeling. It voices the opinions of an artist because I happen to be an artist; but I am also a citizen,

and I cannot see that my artistic pursuits separate me in any way from the rest of my fellow-citizens.

As a body, we artists are a little inclined to hold aloof from social questions. For this there is no excuse. A man's a man for a' that, even if he be an artist, although perhaps some of us are apt to forget it.

CHAPTER VII

Conclusion

MY religion is really negative. Most people assume that some kind of religion is necessary. I do not see the necessity; some of the best people that I have ever known have no religion at all. No thoughtful person can deny that great evils have been wrought in the name of religion, but it is generally assumed that great benefits have also been derived from it. The object of this essay is to point out that these benefits are independent of religion, and can be attained by other means which are less conducive to strife and which put less strain upon the reasoning faculties.