NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

CIVIL & RELIGIOUS LIBERTY.

WITH SOME HINTS TAKEN FROM

THE FRENCH REVOLUTION.

A Lecture

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CIVIL AND RELIGIOUS LIBERTY.

"O LIBERTY! how many crimes are committed in thy name!" So exclaimed Madame Roland, one of the most heroic and most beautiful spirits of the great French Revolution, when above her glittered the keen knife of the guillotine, and below her glared the fierce faces of the maddened crowd, who were howling for her death. But Madame Roland, even as she spoke, bowed her fair head to the statue of Liberty which—pure, serene, majestic—rose beside the scaffold, and stood white and undefiled in the sunlight, while the mob seethed and tossed round its base. Madame Roland bent her brow before Liberty, even as the sad complaint passed her lips; for well that noble-hearted woman knew that the guillotine, by which she was to die, had not been raised in a night with the broken chains of Liberty, but had been slowly building up, during long centuries of tyranny, out of the mouldering skeletons of the thousands of victims of despotism and misrule. The taunt has been re-echoed ever since, and lovers of repression have changed its words and its meaning, and they have said what noble Madame Roland would never have said: "O Liberty, how many crimes are committed by thee, and because of thee!" They have never said, they have never cared to ask, how many crimes have been committed *against* Liberty in the past; how many crimes are daily committed against her in the England which we boast as free. They have never said, they have never cared to ask, whether the excesses which have, alas! disgraced revolutions, whether the bloodshed which has ofttimes stained crimson-red the fair, white, banner of Liberty, are not the natural and the necessary fruits, not of the freedom which is won, but of the tyranny which is crushed. Society keeps a number of its members uneducated and degraded; it houses them worse than brutes; it pays them so little that, if a man would not starve, he must toil all day, without time for

relaxation or for self-culture; it withdraws from them all softening influences; it shuts them out from all intellectual amusements; it leaves them no pleasures except the purely animal ones; it bars against them the gates of the museums and the art galleries, and opens to them only the doors of the beer-shop and the gin-palace; it sneers at their folly, but never seeks to teach them wisdom; it disdains their "lowness," but never tries to help them to be higher; and then, when suddenly the masses of the people rise, maddened by long oppression, intoxicated with a freedom for which they are not prepared, arrogant with the newly-won consciousness of their resistless strength, then Society, which has kept them brutal, is appalled at their brutality; Society, which has kept them degraded, shrieks out at the inevitable results of that degradation. I have often heard wealthy men and women talk about the discontent and the restlessness of the poor; I have heard them prattle about the necessity of "keeping the people down;" I have heard polite and refined sneers at the folly and the tiresome enthusiasm of the political agitator, and half-jesting wishes that "the whole tribe of agitators" would become extinct. And as I have listened, and have seen the luxury around the speakers; as I have noted the smooth current of their lives, and marked the irritation displayed at some petty mischance which for a moment ruffled its even flow; as I have seen all this, and then remembered the miserable homes that I have known, the squalor and the hideous poverty, the hunger and the pain, I have thought to myself that if I could take the speakers, and could plunge them down into the life which the despised "masses" live, that the braver-hearted of them would turn into turbulent demagogues, while the weaker-spirited would sink down into hopeless drunkenness and pauperism. These rich ones do not mean to be cruel when they sneer at the complaints of the poor, and they are unconscious of the misery which underlies and gives force to the agitation which disturbs their serenity; they do not understand how the subjects which seem to them so dry are thrilling with living interest to the poor who listen to the "demagogue," or how his keenest thrusts are pointed in the smithy of human pain. They are only thoughtless, only careless, only indifferent; and meanwhile the smothered murmuring is going on around them, and grim Want and Pain and Despair are the phantom forms which are undermining their palaces; and "they eat, they drink, they marry, and are

given in marriage," heedless of the gathering river which is beginning to overflow its banks, and which, if it be not drained off in time, will "sweep them all away." If they knew their best friends, they would bless the popular leaders, who are striving to win social and political reforms, and so to avert a revolution.

The French Revolution is so often flung, by ignorant people, in the teeth of those who are endeavouring to extend and to consolidate the reign of Freedom, that it can scarcely be deemed out of place to linger for a moment on the threshold of the subject, in order to draw from past experience the lesson, that bloodshed and civil war do not spring from wise and large measures of reform, but from the hopelessness of winning relief except by force, from over-taxation, from unjust social inequality, from the grinding of poverty, from the despair and from the misery of the people. It shows extremest folly to decline to study the causes of great catastrophes, to reject the experience won by the misfortunes and by the mistakes of others, and to refuse to profit by the lessons of the past.

Of course I do not mean to say, and I should be very sorry to persuade any one to think, that our state to-day in England is as bad as that from which France was only delivered through the frightful agony of the Revolution. But we have in England, as we shall see as we go on, many of the abuses left of that feudal system which the Revolution destroyed for ever in France. The feudal system was spread all over Europe in the Middle Ages, those Dark Ages when all sense of equal justice and of liberty was dead. It concentrated all power in the hands of the few; it took no account of the masses of the people; it handed over the poor, bound hand and foot, to the power of the feudal superior, and it cultivated that haughty spirit of disdainful contempt for labour, which is still, unfortunately, only too widely spread throughout our middle and upper classes in England. This system gradually lost its harsher features among ourselves; but in France it endured up to the time of the Revolution; and in this system, added to the fearful weight of taxation under which the people were absolutely crushed and starved to death, lies the secret of the bloodshed of the Revolution.

Therefore, before passing on to the parallel between our state and that of ante-revolutionary France, I would fain put into the mouths of our friends an answer to those who say

that the excesses of the French Revolution are the necessary outcome of free thought in religion and of free action in politics. It is perfectly true that the determination to shake off a cruel and unjust yoke was implanted in the bosoms of the French people by the writings of those who are commonly called the Encyclopædists. These men *were* Freethinkers; some of them—as Holbach and Diderot—might fairly be called Atheists; some were nothing of the kind. These men taught the French people to think; they nurtured in their breasts a spirit of self-reliance; they roused a spirit of defiance. These men rang the tocsin which awoke France, and *so far* it is true that Freethought produced the Revolution, and *so far* Freethought may well be proud of her work. But not to Freethought, not to Liberty, must be ascribed the excesses which stained a revolution that was in its beginning, that might have been throughout, so purely glorious. For do you know what French Feudalism was? Do you know what those terrible rights were, which have branded so deeply into the French peasant's heart the hatred of the old nobility, that even to the present day he will hiss out between clenched teeth the word "aristocrat," with a passionate hatred which one hundred years of freedom have not quenched?

In the reign of Louis XIV. there was a Count, the Comte de Charolois, who used to shoot down, for his amusement, the peasants who had climbed into trees, and the tilers who were mending roofs. The *chasse aux paysans*, as it was pleasantly termed, the "hunt of peasants," was remembered by an old man who was in Paris during the Revolution as one of the amusements of the nobility in his youth. True, these acts were but the acts of a few; but they were done, and the people dared not strike back. Then there was another right, a right which outraged all humanity, and which gave to the lord the first claim to the serf's bride. The terrible story in Charles Dickens's "Tale of Two Cities" is no fiction, except in details, if we may judge from some of the chronicles of the time. (Dufaure gives many interesting details on French feudalism.) Then they might harness the serfs, like cattle, to their carts; they might keep them awake all night beating the trenches round their castles, lest noble slumbers should be disturbed by the croaking of the frogs. When any one throws in the Radical's teeth the excesses of the French Revolution, let the Radical answer him back with these rights, and ask if it is to be

wondered at that men struck hard, when the outrages and the oppressions of centuries were revenged in a few wild months? Marvel not at the short madness that broke out at last; marvel rather at the cowardice which bore in silence for so long.

I pass from these hideous rights of feudalism to its milder features, as they existed in France before the Revolution, and as they exist among us to-day in England. The laws by which land is held and transmitted, the rights of the first-born son, the laying-on of taxation by those who do not represent the tax-payer, a standing army in which birth helps promotion, the Game Laws—all these are relics of feudalism, relics which need to be swept away. It is on the existence of these that I ground my plea for wider freedom; it is on these that I rely to prove that Civil and Religious Liberty are still very imperfect among ourselves.

In France, before the revolution, people in general, king, queen, lords, clergy, thought that things were going on very nicely, and very comfortably. True, keener-sighted men saw in the misery of the masses the threatened ruin of the throne. True, even Royalty itself, in the haggard faces and gaunt forms that pressed cheering round its carriages, read traces of grinding poverty, of insufficient food. True, some faint rumour even reached the court, amid its luxury, that the houses of the people were not all they should be, nay, that many of them were wretched huts, not fit for cattle. But what of that? There was no open rebellion; there was no open disloyalty. What disloyalty there was, was confined to the lower orders, and showed itself by a fancy of the people to gather into Republican clubs, and other such societies, where loyalty to the Crown was *not* the lesson which they learned from the speakers' lips. But such disloyalty could of course be crushed out at any moment, and the court went gaily on its way, careless of the low, dull growling in the distance which told of the coming storm. We, in England, to-day, are quite at ease. True, some of our labourers are paid starvation-wages of 10s., 11s., 12s., a week, but again I ask, what of that? Has not Mr. Fraser Grove, late M.P., told the South Wiltshire farmers that they had a right to reduce the labourer's wage to 11s. a week, if he could live upon it; and, if he did not like it, he could take his labour to other markets? Why should the labourer complain, so long as he is allowed to live? Then the houses of our people are scarcely all that they should be. I have

been into some so-called homes, composed of two small rooms, in one of which father and mother, boys and girls growing up into manhood and womanhood, were obliged to sleep in the one room, even in the one bed. I have seen a room in which slept four generations, the great-grandfather and his wife, the grandmother (unmarried), the mother (unmarried), and the little child of the latter, and in addition to these relatives, the room also afforded sleeping accommodation to three men lodgers. Yet people talk about the "immorality of the agricultural poor," as though people could be anything except immoral, when the lads and lasses have to grow up without any possibility of being even decent, much less with any possibility of retaining the smallest shred of natural modesty. The only marvel is how, among our poor, there do grow up now and then fair and pure blossoms, worthy of the most carefully-guarded homes. But a very short time since there were worse hovels even than those I have mentioned. Down at Woolwich there were "homes" composed of one small room, 12 feet by 12, and 8½ feet high in the middle of the sloping roof, and the huts were built of bad brick, the damp of which sweated slowly through the whitewash, and the floor was made of beaten earth, lower in level than the ground outside, and in front of the fire they kept a plank all day baking warm and dry, in order that at night they might put it into the bed, to keep the sleeper next the wall from being wet through by the drippings as he slept. And in other such huts as these four families lived together, with no partition put up between them, save such poor rags as some lingering feeling of decency might lead them to hang up for themselves—and these huts, these miserable huts, were the property of Government, and in them were housed her Majesty's married soldiers, housed in such abodes as her Majesty would not allow her cattle to occupy near Windsor or near Balmoral. Yet among us there is no open rebellion; there is no open disloyalty. Among us, too, what disloyalty there is, is chiefly confined to the lower orders, and that, as everyone knows, can be snuffed out at a moment's notice. Among us, it also shows itself in that fancy of the people to gather into Republican clubs and other such societies, where loyalty to the Crown is not the lesson most enforced by the speakers. The quiet, slow alienation of the people from the Throne is going on unobserved; a people who are loyal to a monarchy will not form themselves into Repub-

lican Clubs; yet our rulers never dream that the people are discontented, and that these clubs are signs of the times. They fancy that the agitation is only the work of the few, and that there is no widely-spread disaffection behind the Republican teachers; only the leaders of popular movements know the vast force which they can wield in case of need, but the Government will never listen to these men, any more than in France they would listen to Mirabeau, until it was too late. Yet do sensible people think that a sound and a healthy society can rest upon the misery of the masses? and do our rulers think that palaces stand firm when they are built up upon such hovels as those which I have described? It appears they do; for our Queen and our Princes seem to believe in the lip-loyalty of the crowds which cheer them when they make us happy by driving through our streets, loyalty that springs from the thoughtlessness of custom, and not from true and manly reverence for real worth. For I would not be thought to disparage the sentiment of loyalty; I hold it to be one of the fairest blossoms which flower on the emotional side of the nature of man. Loyalty to principle, loyalty to a great cause, loyalty to some true leader, crowned king of men by reason of his virtue, of his genius, of his strength—such loyalty as this it is no shame for a freeman to yield, such loyalty as this has, in all ages of the world, inspired men to the noblest self-devotion, nerved men to the most heroic self-sacrifice. But just as only those things which are valuable in themselves are thought worthy of imitation in baser metal, so is this true golden loyalty imitated by the pinchbeck loyalty, which shouts in our streets. For what true loyalty is possible from us towards the House of Brunswick? Loyalty to virtue? as enshrined in a Prince of Wales? loyalty to liberality, and to delicacy of sentiment? as exemplified by a Duke of Edinburgh? loyalty to any great cause, whose success in this generation is bound up with the life of any member of our Royal House? The very questions send a ripple of laughter through any assemblage of Englishmen, and they are beginning to feel, at last, that true loyalty can only be paid to some man who stands head and shoulders above his fellows, and not to some poor dwarf, whom we can only see over the heads of the crowd, because he stands on the artificial elevation of a throne.

The court in France was very extravagant; it spent

£34,000,000 in eight years, while the people were starving; our princes do not spend so much; *they dare not;* but that the spirit is the same is clearly seen when a wealthy queen sends to Parliament to dower her sons and her daughters: when the scions of a family so rich as are the Brunswicks, become beggars to the nation, and pensioners on the pockets of the poor. However, courts are expensive things, and if we want them we must be content to pay for them. Now, in France, the nobles, the clergy, the great landed proprietors, paid next to nothing: the heavy burden of taxation fell upon the poor. But the poor had not much money which they could pay out to the State, and it is not easy to empty already empty pockets with any satisfactory results; so, in France, they hit upon the ingenious system called indirect taxation; they imposed taxes upon the necessaries of life; they squeezed money out of the food which the people were obliged to buy. Also, those who imposed the taxes were not those who paid them: they laid on heavy burdens, which they themselves did not touch with one of their fingers. We, in England, also think that it conduces to the cheerful paying of taxes that they should be laid chiefly upon those who have no voice wherewith to complain of their incidence in Parliament. If you want to knock a man down, it is very wise to choose a dumb man, who cannot raise a cry for help. A large portion of the working classes, and all women, have no votes in the election of members of Parliament, and have therefore no voice in the imposition of the taxes which they are, nevertheless, obliged to pay. It is a long time since Pitt told us that "taxation without representation is robbery;" it is a yet longer time since John Hampden taught us how to resist the payment of an unjust tax, and yet we are still such cravens, or else so indifferent, that we pay millions a year in taxation, without determining that we *will* have a voice in the control of our own income. We are crushed under a heavy and a yearly increasing national expenditure, partly because of our extravagant administration, partly because the burden falls unequally, weighing on the poor more than upon the rich, and wholly because we have not brotherhood enough to combine together, nor manhood enough to say that these things shall not be. Our system of taxation is radically vicious in principle, because it must of necessity fall unequally. Those who impose the burdens know perfectly well that it is impossible for the poor to

refuse to pay indirect taxes, however onerous those taxes may be: they *must* buy the necessary articles of food, whether those articles be taxed or no; a refusal to pay is impracticable, and no combination to abstain from buying is possible, because the things taxed are the necessaries of life. Yet as long as indirect taxation is permitted—and the major part of our annual revenue is drawn from Customs and from Excise—so long must taxation crush the poor, while it falls lightly on the rich.

On this point I direct your attention to the following extract, taken from the *Liverpool Financial Reformer*, and quoted by Mr. Charles Watts in his "Government and the People":—

"A recent writer in the *Liverpool Financial Reformer*, divided the community into three divisions—first, the aristocratic, represented by those who have an annual income of £1,000 and upwards; the middle classes were represented by those who had incomes from £100 to £1,000; and the artisan or working classes were those who were supposed to have incomes under £100 per year. He then assessed their incomes respectively at £208,385,000; £174,579,000; and £149,745,000. Towards the taxation, each division paid as follows. The aristocratic portion contributed £8,500,000, the middle classes £19,513,453, and the working classes £32,861,474. The writer remarks: 'The burden of the revenue, as it is here shown to fall on the different classes, may not be fractionally accurate, either on the one side or the other, for that is an impossibility in the case, but it is sufficiently so to afford a fair representation in reference to those classes on whom the burden chiefly falls. Passing over the middle classes, who thus probably contribute about their share, the result in regard to the upper and lower classes stands thus:—Amount which should be paid to the revenue by the higher classes (that is, the classes above £1,000 a year), £23,437,688; amount which they do pay, £8,500,000; leaving a difference of £14.937,688, so that the higher classes are paying nearly £15,000,000 less than their fair share of taxation. Amount which should be paid by the working classes (or those having incomes below £100), £16,846,312; amount which they do pay, £32,861,474; making a difference of £16,015,162; so that the working classes are paying about £16,000,000 more than their fair share. In other words, the respective average rates paid upon the assessable income of the two classes are—by the higher classes, 10d. per pound; the working classes, 4s. 4d. That is to say, the working classes are paying at a rate five times more heavily than the wealthy classes.'"

The whole system of laying taxes on the necessaries of life

is radically vicious in principle; to tax the necessaries of life is to sap the strength and to shorten the life of those men and those women on whose strength and whose life the prosperity of the country depends; it is to enfeeble the growing generation; it is to make the children pale and stunted; it is, in fact, to undermine the constitution of the wealth-producers. To tax food is to tax life itself, instead of taxing incomes; it is a financial system which is, at once, cruel and suicidal. As a matter of fact, taxes taken off food have not decreased the revenue, and when this policy of taxing food shall have become a thing of the past, then a healthier and more strongly-framed nation will bear with ease all the necessary burdens of the State. Indirect taxation is also bad, because it implies a number of small taxes (some of which are scarcely worth the cost of collecting), and thus necessitates the employment of a numerous staff of officials, whereas one large direct tax would be more easily gathered in.

It is also bad, because, with indirect taxation, it is almost impossible for a man to know what he really *does* pay towards the support of the State. It is right and just that every citizen in a free country should consciously contribute to the maintenance of the Government which he has himself placed over him; but when he knows exactly what he is paying, he will probably think it worth while to examine into the national expenditure, and to insist on a wise economy in the public service. I do not mean the kind of economy which is so relished by Governments, the economy which dismisses skilled workmen, whose work is needed, while it retains sinecures for personages in high places; but I mean that just and wise economy which gives good pay for honest work, but which refuses to pay dukes, earls, even princes, for doing nothing. This great problem of fair and equal taxation ought to be thoroughly studied and thought over by every citizen; few infringements on equal liberty are so fraught with harm and misery as are those which pass almost unnoticed under the head of "collection of the revenue"; few reforms are so urgently needed as a reform of our financial system, and a fair adjustment of the burdens of taxation.

In France they had Game Laws. If the season were cold the farmers might not mow their hay at the proper time, lest the birds should lack cover; they might not hoe the corn, lest they should break the partridge eggs; the

birds fed off the crops, and they might not shoot or trap them; if they transgressed the Game Laws they were sent to the galleys; herds of wild boar and red deer roamed over the country, and the farmers and the peasants were forbidden to interfere with them. Englishmen! who call yourselves free, do you imagine that these relics of barbarism, swept away by the French Revolution in one memorable night, are nothing but archæological curiosities, archaic remains, fossilised memorials of a long-past tyranny? On the contrary, our Game Laws in England are as harsh as those I have cited to you, and the worst facts I am going to relate you have no parallel in the history of France. These cases are so shameful that they ought to have raised a shout of execration through the land; they have been covered up, and hushed up, as far as possible, and I have taken them from a Parliamentary Blue-book; and I have taken them thence myself, because I would not quote at second-hand deeds so disgraceful, that had I not read them in the dry pages of a Parliamentary Commission I should have fancied that they had been either carelessly or purposely exaggerated in order to point a tirade against the rich. I allude to the deer-forests of Scotland.

But before dealing with these it is interesting to note the curious points of similarity between our Game Laws and those of the French. In France, they were sometimes forbidden to mow the hay because of the cover it yielded to the birds: in England, you will sometimes find a clause inserted in the lease of a farm, binding the farmer to reap with the sickle instead of with the scythe, that is, to reap with an instrument that does not cut the corn-stalks off close to the ground, so that cover may be left for the birds; thus the farmers' profits are decreased by the amount of straw which is left to rot in the ground for the landlord's amusement. In France, the game might not be touched even if the crops were damaged; in England, the hares may ruin a young plantation, and the farmer may not snare or shoot them. In France, those who transgressed the Game Laws were sent to the galleys; in England, we send them to prison with hard labour, and we actually pay for the manufacture of 10,000 criminals every year, in order that our Princes of Wales and our landed proprietors may make it the business of their lives "to shoot poultry." In France, the herds of wild boar and red deer might not be molested; in England we manage these things better; we have, un-

fortunately, no wild boar, but we clear our farmers and our peasants out of the way in order that we may be sure that our deer are not interfered with. As the son of a Highland proprietor said, when planning a new deer-forest: "the first thing to do, you know, is to clear out the people." *The first thing to do is to clear out the people?* Yes! clear out the people: the people, who have lived on the land for years, and who have learned to love it as though they had been born landowners; the people who have tilled and cultivated it, making it laugh out into cornfields which have fed hundreds of the poor; the people, who have wrought on it, and toiled with plough and spade; turn out the people and make way for the animals; level the homes of the people and make a hunting ground for the rich. "It is no deer-forest if the farmers are all there," said a witness before the Commission; and so you see the farmers *must* go, for of course it is necessary that we should have deer-forests. No less than forty families, owning seven thousand sheep, seven thousand goats, and two hundred head of cattle, were turned out from their homes in the time of the present Marquis of Huntly's grandfather, their houses were pulled down, and their land was planted with fir-trees; some of the leases were bought up; in cases where they had expired the people were bidden go. And thus it comes to pass, according to the evidence of one witness—a witness whom members of the Commission tried hard to browbeat, but whose evidence they utterly failed to shake—thus it comes to pass that "you see in the deer-forests the ruins of numerous hamlets, with the grass growing over them." A pathetic picture of homes laid desolate, of the fair course of peaceful lives roughly broken into; of helpless and oppressed people, of selfish and greedy wealth. "From Glentanar, thirty miles from Aberdeen, you can walk in forests until you come to the Atlantic." And this evil is growing rapidly; in 1812 there were only five deer-forests in Scotland: in 1873 there were seventy. In 1870, 1,320,000 acres of land were forest; in 1873, there were 2,000,000 acres thus rendered useless. Under these circumstances, it is scarcely to be wondered at that the population is decreasing; the population of Argyleshire in 1831 was 103,330; in 1871, forty years later, when it ought to have largely increased, it had, on the contrary, decreased to 75,635; in Inverness it was 94,983; during the same time it has gone down to 87,480.

But this is not all. While some farmers and peasants are "cleared out" altogether, those who are allowed to remain suffer much from the depredations of the deer and other game. In Aberdeenshire alone no less than 291 farmers complained of the enormous damage that was done to their crops by the deer. The deer-forest is not generally fenced in; and as deer are very partial to turnips, it naturally follows that the herds come out of the forest and feed off the farmers' crops. One proprietor graciously states that he does his best to keep the deer away from the farms, but—judging by the complaints of the farmers—these laudable efforts scarcely appear to be crowned with the success that they deserve. Not only, however, do the deer stray *out* of the forests, but the farmers' sheep stray *in*, and as sheep are not game he is not permitted to follow them to fetch them out. When such evidence as this comes out, and we know the pressure that is put upon tenants by their landlords, and the danger they run by giving offence to their powerful masters, we can judge how much more remains behind of which we know nothing. And, in the name of common justice, what is all this for? Why should a farmer be compelled to keep his landlord's game for him? Why should the farmer's crops suffer to amuse a man who does nothing except inherit land? This wide-spread loss, these desolated homes, these ruined lives, what mighty national benefit have these miseries bought for England? They all occur in order that a few rich men may occasionally—when other pleasures pall on the jaded taste, and *ennui* becomes insupportable—have the novel excitement of shooting at a stag. Verily we have a right to boast of our freedom when thousands of citizens suffer for the sake of the amusement of the few.

But these deer-forests do not only injure the unfortunate people who are turned out to make room for the deer, and the farmers who lose the full profit of their labour; *to turn cultivable land into deer-forests is to decrease the food-supply of the country*. Some people say that only worthless land is used for this purpose; but this is not true, for pasture-ground has been turned into forests. In one place, 800 head of cattle and 500 sheep were fed upon one quarter of the land which now supports 750 red deer. That is to say, that 1,300 animals good for food were nourished by the land which is now devoted to the maintenance of 187½ useless deer. Judge then of the decrease of the food-supply of the country

which is implied in the fact that one-tenth part of Scotland is now moor and forest. A baillie of Aberdeen calculates the loss to the country at no less than 20 millions of pounds of meat annually. In England things are not so bad; but in England, also, the cultivation of the land wasted in game-preserving would increase to an almost incalculable extent the food supply of the country. There is the vast estate of Chillingworth, kept for a few wild cattle, in order that a Prince of Wales may now and then drive about it, and from the safe eminence of a cart may have the pleasure of shooting at a bull. But at this point the question of the Game Laws melts insensibly into that of the Land Laws, for under a just system of Land Tenure such deeds as these would be impossible; then, men could not, for their own selfish amusement, turn sheep-walks into forests, and farms into moors.

With our great and increasing population it is absolutely necessary that all cultivable land should be under cultivation. To hold uncultivated, land which is capable of producing bread and meat is a crime against the State. It is well known to be one of the points of the "extreme" Radical programme that it should be rendered penal to hold large quantities of cultivable land uncultivated. Then, instead of sending the cream of our peasantry abroad, to seek in foreign countries the land which is fenced in from them at home; instead of driving them to seek from the stranger the work which is denied to them in the country of their birth; we should keep Englishmen in England to make England strong and rich, and give land to the labour which is starving for work, and labour to the land which is barren for the lack of it. "Land to labour, and labour to land" ought to be our battle-cry, and should be the motto engraven on our shield.

But it is impossible to throw land open to labour so long as the laws render its transmission from seller to buyer so expensive and so cumbersome a proceeding. It is impossible also to effect any radical improvement so long as the land is tied up in the hands of the few fortunate individuals who are now permitted to monopolise it. Half the land of England, and four-fifths of the land of Scotland, is owned by 160 families. These few own the land which ought to be devoted to the good of the nation. Land, like air, and like all other natural gifts, cannot rightly be held as private property. The only property which can justly be claimed

in land is the improvement wrought in the soil. When a man has put labour or money into the land he farms, then he *has* a right to the advantages which accrue from his toil and from his invested capital. But this principle is the very contrary of that which is embodied in our Land Laws. The great landowners do nothing for the land they own; they spend nothing on the soil which maintains them in such luxury. It is the farmers and the labourers who have a right to life-tenancy in the soil, or, more exactly, to a tenancy, lasting as long as they continue to improve it. The farmer, whose money is put into the land—the labourer, whose strength enriches the soil—these are the men who ought to be the landowners of England. As it is, the farmer takes a farm; he invests capital in it; he rises early to superintend his labourers; the land rewards him with her riches, she gives him fuller crops and fatter cattle, and then the landlord steps in, and raises the rent, and thus absolutely punishes the farmer for his energy and his thrift. The idle man stands by with his hands in his pockets, and then claims a share of the profits which accrue from the busy man's labour. Meanwhile the labourer—he whose strong arms have guided the plough, and wielded the spade, he who has made the harvest and tended the cattle—what do our just Land Laws give to him? They give him a wretched home, a pittance sufficient—generally at least—to "keep body and soul together," parish pay when he is ill, the workhouse in his old age, and he sleeps at last in a pauper's grave. O! just and beneficent English Law! To the idle man, the lion's share of the profits; to the man who does much, a small share; to the man who does most of all, just enough to enable him to work for his masters. But if this gross injustice be pointed out, if we protest against this crying evil, and declare that these crimes shall cease in England, then these landowners arise and complain that we are tampering with the "sacred rights of property." Sacred rights of property! But what of the more sacred rights of human life? The life of the poor is more holy than the property of the rich, and famished men and women more worthy of care than the acres of the nobleman. If these vast estates are fenced in from us by parchment fences, so that we cannot throw them open to labour, so that we cannot make the desert places golden with corn, and rich with sheep and oxen; if these vast estates are fenced in from us by parchment fences, then I

say that the plough must go through the parchment, in order that the people may have bread.

The maintenance of a standing army, in which birth helps promotion, is another blot upon our shield. A Duke of Cambridge, General Commanding-in-Chief, and Colonel of four regiments, who holds these offices by virtue of his "high" birth, and in spite of the most palpable incapacity, is an absurdity which ought not to be tolerated in a country which pretends to be free. A Prince of Wales, who has never seen war, made a Field-Marshal; a Duke of Edinburgh, created a Post-Captain; such appointments as these are a disgrace to the country, and a bitter satire on our army and our navy. Carpet-soldiers are useless in time of war, and they are a burden in time of peace; and to squander England's money on such officers as these, simply because they chance to be born Princes, is a distinct breach of equal Civil Liberty.

The need of Electoral Reform is well-known to all students of politics. No country is free in which all adult citizens have not a voice in the government. A representation which is based upon a property qualification is radically vicious in principle. But not only is our civil liberty cramped by the fact that the majority of citizens are not represented at all, but even the poor representation we have is unequally and unjustly distributed. In one place 136 men return a member to Parliament; in another, 18,000 fail to return their candidate. In Parliament 110 members represent 83,000 voters. The next 110 represent 1,080,000. A group of 70,000 voters return 4 members; another group of 70,000 return 80. In one instance, 30,000 voters outweigh 546,000 in Parliament by a majority of 9. Hence it follows that a minority of electors rule England, and, however desirable it may be that minorities should be represented, it is surely not desirable that they should rule. Our present system throws overwhelming power into the hands of the titled and landowning classes, who, by means of small and manageable boroughs, are able to outvote the masses of the people congregated in the large towns. As long as this is the case, as long as every citizen does not possess a vote, as long as the few can, by means of unequal distribution of electoral power, control the actions of the many, so long England is not free, and civil liberty is not won.

To strike at the House of Lords is to strike at a dying

institution; but dying men sometimes live long, and dying institutions may last for centuries if only they are nursed and tended with sufficient care. A House in the election of whose members the people have no voice; a House whose members are born into it, instead of winning their way into it by service to the State; a House which is built upon cradles and not upon merit; a House whose deliberations may be shared in by fools or by knaves, provided *only* that the brow be coronetted—such a House is a disgrace to a free country, and an outrage on popular liberty. As might be expected from its constitution, this House of Lords has ever stood in the path of every needed reform, until it has been struck out of the way by hidden menace or by stern command. Is there any abuse whose days are numbered? be sure it will be defended in the House of Lords. Is there a monopoly which needs to be abolished? be sure it will be championed in the House of Lords. Is there any popular liberty asked for? be sure it will be refused in the House of Lords. Is there any fetter struck from off the limbs of progress? be sure that some cunning smith will be found to weld the fragments together again, under the name of an amendment, in the House of Lords. The only use of the thing is, that it may act as a political barometer by which to prognosticate the coming weather; that which the House of Lords blesses is most certainly doomed, while whatever it frowns upon is crowned for a speedy triumph. It has not even the merit of courage, this craven assemblage of toy-players at legislation; however boldly it roars out its "No," a frown from the House of Commons makes it tremble and yield; like a reed, it stands upright enough in the calm weather; like a reed, it bows before the storm-wind of a popular cry. As a question of practical politics, the House of Lords should be struck at almost rather than the Crown, because the whole principle of aristocracy is embodied in that House, the whole fatal notion that the accident of birth gives the right to rule. Our puppet kings and queens are less directly injurious to the commonwealth than is this titled House. The gilded figure-head injures the State-vessel less than the presence of hands on her tiller-ropes which know naught of navigation. And with the fall of the House of Lords must crash down the throne, which is but the ornament upon its roof, the completion of its elevation; so that when the toy-house has fallen at the breath of the people's lips, and we

can see over the near prospect which it now hides from our gaze, we shall surely see, with the light of the morning on her face, with her golden head shining in the sun-rays, with the day-star on her brow, and the white garments of peace upon her limbs, with her sceptre wreathed in olive-branches, and her feet shod with plenty, that fair and glorious Republic for which we have yearned and toiled so long.

Having seen the chief blots upon our Civil Liberty, let us turn our attention to the defects in our religious freedom. And here I plead, neither as Freethinker nor as Secularist, but simply as a citizen of a mighty State, and member of a community which pretends to be free. For every shade of Nonconformity I plead, from the Roman Catholic to the Atheist, for all whose consciences do not fit into the mould provided by the Establishment, and whose thought refuses to be fettered by the bands of a State religion. I crave for every man, whatever be his creed, that his freedom of conscience be held sacred. I ask for every man, whatever be his belief, that he shall not suffer, in civil matters, for his faith or for his want of faith. I demand for every man, whatever be his opinions, that he shall be able to speak out with honest frankness the results of honest thought, without forfeiting his rights as citizen, without destroying his social position, and without troubling his domestic peace. We have not to-day, in England, the scourge and the rack, the gibbet and the stake, by which men's bodies are tortured to improve their souls, but we have the scourge of calumny and the rack of severed friendship, we have the gibbet of public scorn, and the stake of a ruined home, by which we compel conformity to dogma, and teach men to be hypocrites that they may eat a piece of bread. The spirit is the same, though the form of the torture be changed; and many a saddened life, and many a wrecked hope, bear testimony to the fact that religious liberty is still but a name, and freedom of thought is still a crime. Public opinion, and social feeling, we can but strive to influence and to improve; what I would lay stress upon here, is the existence of a certain institution, and of certain laws, which foster this one-sided feeling, and which are a direct infringement of the rights of the individual conscience.

First and foremost, overshadowing the land by her gigantic monopoly, is the Church as by law established. This body —one sect among many sects—is given by law many privileges which are not accorded to any other religious denomination. Her ministers are the State-officers of religion;

her highest dignitaries legislate for the whole Empire; national graveyards are the property of her clergy; and the best parts of national buildings are owned by her rectors. So long as the State was Christian and orthodox, so long might the Establishment of the State-religion be defensible, but the moment that the Church ceased to be co-extensive with the nation, that same moment did her Establishment become an injustice to that portion of the nation which did not conform to her creed. Every liberty won by the Non-conformist has been a blow struck at the reasonableness of the Establishment. She is nothing now but a palpable anachronism. Jews, Roman Catholics, even "Infidels" (provided only that they veil their Infidelity), may sit in the House of Parliament. They may alter the Church's articles, they may define her doctrines, they may change her creed; she is only the mere creature of the State, bought by lands and privileges to serve in a gilded slavery. The truth or the untruth of her doctrines is nothing to the point. I protest in principle against the establishment by the State of any form of religious, or of anti-religious, belief. The State is no judge in such matters; let every man follow his own conscience, and worship at what shrine his reason bids him, and let no man be injured because he differs from his neighbour's creed. The Church Establishment is an insult to every Roman Catholic, to every Protestant dissenter, to every Freethinker, in the Empire. The national property usurped by the Establishment might lighten the national burdens, were it otherwise applied, so that, indirectly, every non-Churchman is taxed for the support of a creed in which he does not believe, and for the maintenance of ministrations by which he does not profit. The Church must be destroyed, as an Establishment, before religious equality can be anything more than an empty name.

There are laws upon the Statute Book which grievously outrage the rights of conscience, and which subject an "apostate"—that is, a person who has been educated in, or who has professed Christianity, and has subsequently renounced it—to loss of all civil rights, provided that the law be put in force against him. The right of excommunication, lodged in the Church, is, I think, a perfectly fair right, *provided that it carry with it no civil penalties whatsoever.* The Church, like any other club, ought to be able to exclude an objectionable member, but she ought not to be able to call in the arm of the law to impose non-spiritual penalties. But

the "apostate" loses all civil rights. The law, as laid down, is as follows: "Enacted by statute 9 and 10, William III., cap 32, that if any person educated in, or having made profession of, the Christian religion, shall by writing, printing, teaching, or advised speaking, assert or maintain there are more Gods than one, or shall deny the Christian religion to be true [this Act adds to these offences, that of "denying any one of the persons in the Trinity to be God," but it was repealed *quoad hoc*, by 53 George III., c. 60] or the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be of divine authority, he shall upon the first offence be rendered incapable to hold any ecclesiastical, civil, or military office, or employment, and for the second, be rendered incapable of bringing any action, or to be guardian, executor, legatee, or grantee, and shall suffer three years' imprisonment without bail. To give room, however, for repentance, if within four months after the first conviction, the delinquent will, in open court, publicly renounce his error, he is discharged for that once from all disabilities." Some will say that this law is never put in force; true, public opinion would not allow of its general enforcement, but it is turned against those who are poor and weak, while it lets the strong go free. Besides, it hangs over every sceptic's head like the sword of Damocles, and it serves as a threat and menace in the hand of every cruel and bigoted Churchman, who wants to extract any concession from an unbeliever. *No law that can be enforced is obsolete;* it may lie dormant for a time, but it is a sabre, which can at any moment be drawn from the sheath; the "obsolete" law about the Sabbath closed the Brighton Aquarium, and Rosherville Gardens, and is found to be quite easy of enforcement; though people would have laughed, a short time since, at the idea of anyone grumbling at its presence on the Statute Book. Poor, harmless, half-witted, Thomas Pooley, in 1857, found the Blasphemy Laws by no means "a dead letter" in the mouth of Lord Justice Coleridge. And there are plenty of other cases of injustice which have taken, and do take place under these laws, which might be quoted were it worth while to fill up space with them, and but little is needed to fan the smouldering fire of bigotry into a flame, and to put the laws generally in force once more. Already threats are heard, murmurs of the old wicked spirit of persecution, and it behoves us to see to it that these swords be broken, so that bigots may be unable to wield them again among us.

I do not, as I have said, protest now against these laws as a Secularist; I challenge them only as unjust disabilities imposed on men's consciences, and I appeal to all lovers of liberty to agitate against them, because they impose civil disabilities on some forms of religious opinion. And to you, O Christians! I would say: fight Freethought, if you will; oppose Atheism, if you deem it false and injurious to humanity: strike at us with all your strength on the *religious* platform; it is your right, nay, it is even your duty; but do not seek to answer our questions by blows from the statute book, nor to check our search after truth by the arm of the law. I impeach these laws against "infidels," at the bar of public opinion, as an infraction of the just liberty of the individual, as an insult to the dignity of the citizen, as an outrage on the sacred rights of conscience.

I do not pretend, in the short pages of such a paper as this, to have done more than to sketch, very briefly and very imperfectly, the chief defects of our civil and religious liberty. I have only laid before you a rough draft of a programme of Reform. Each blot on English liberty which I have pointed to might well form the sole subject of an essay; but I have hoped that, by thus gathering up into one some few of the many injustices under which we suffer, I might, perchance, lend definiteness to the aspirations after Liberty which swell in the breasts of many, and might point out to the attacking army some of the most assailable points of the fortress of bigotry and caste-prejudice, which the soldiers of Freedom are vowed to assail. I have taken, as it were, a bird's-eye view of the battle-ground of the near future, of that battle-ground on which soon will clash together the army which fights under the banner of privileges, and the army which marches under the standard of Liberty. The issue of that conflict is not doubtful, for Liberty is immortal and eternal, and her triumph is sure, however it may be delayed. The beautiful goddess before whom we bow is ever young with a youth which cannot fade, and radiant with a glory which nought can dim. Hers is the promise of the future; hers the fair days that shall dawn hereafter on a liberated earth; and hers is also the triumph of to-morrow, if only we, who adore her, if only we can be true to ourselves and to each other. But they who love her must work for her, as well as worship her, for labour is the only prayer to Liberty, and devotion the only praise. To her we must consecrate our brain-power and our influence

among our fellows; to her we must sacrifice our time, and, if need be, our comfort and our happiness; to her we must devote our efforts, and to her the fruits of our toil. And at last, in the fair, bright future—at last, in the glad to-morrow—amid the shouts of a liberated nation, and the joy of men and women who see their children free, we shall see the shining goddess descending from afar, where we have worshipped her so long, to be the sunshine and the glory of every British home. And then, O men and women of England, then, when you have once clasped the knees of Liberty, and rested your tired brows on her gentle breast, then cherish and guard her evermore, as you cherish the bride you have won to your arms, as you guard the wife whose love is the glory of your manhood, and whose smile is the sunshine of your home.

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