

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

The Atheistic Platform.

X.

DOES
ROYALTY
PAY?

BY

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THE ATHEISTIC PLATFORM.

UNDER this title is being issued a fortnightly publication, each number of which consists of a lecture delivered by a well-known Freethought advocate. Any question may be selected, provided that it has formed the subject of a lecture delivered from the platform by an Atheist. It is desired to show that the Atheistic platform is used for the service of humanity, and that Atheists war against tyranny of every kind, tyranny of king and god, political, social, and theological.

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DOES ROYALTY PAY?

FRIENDS,—Napoleon I. is said to have described the English as a “nation of shopkeepers,” that is, a people whose minds were “cribb’d, cabin’d, and confin’d” by the sordid considerations of commerce, and were unable to rise to the grandeur of the occasion when wars of conquest and schemes of European domination were in question. It is to you as shopkeepers or as commercial men that I now wish to propound this question: “*Does Royalty Pay?*” Is it a profitable investment to the nation? Is our servant paid too high a wage? Is it necessary, or even prudent, to retain his “services” any longer?

No employer of labor would fail to ask himself such a question as regards the men in his employ. A large mill-owner, paying an overseer £1000 per annum to superintend his business, would find it necessary to make some alteration in his arrangements if he were to find that, for several months during the year his servant’s coat, thrown over an empty chair, alone represented the individual whom he employed! Such a system of business surely would not “pay.”

The national balance-sheet in regard to royalty would stand thus :

EXPENDITURE.	£	s. d.	RECEIPTS.	£	s. d.
To Guelph & Co., one year’s salaries and expenses	1,000,000	0 0	By services rendered <i>per contra</i>	0	0 0

Surely this is a most unsatisfactory item in the accounts of the nation! Let us see in what fashion this expensive encumbrance of a useless monarchy has come down to us.

By tracing the history of royalty in England through a few of its most important phases, we shall be able to arrive at a true estimate of its position and character in these latter days. We shall see monarchy gradually dwindling from a position of absolute dominance to its present degraded and anomalous condition. Together with an oppressed and uncivilised people we find a powerful sovereign; with a free and enlightened nation monarchy exists but as a mere costly sham. From this I think we may fairly infer that the system we are discussing is fit only for a crude and barbarous stage of society; and that with the growth of popular intelligence and patriotism the old dominance becomes less and less possible.

When William the Bastard, Duke of Normandy, assisted by a select band of continental cut-throats, invaded England and vanquished the Saxons, he established the feudal system in its most rigorous form. The barons to whom he allotted the land were responsible to him, and to him alone, for their actions. The people were simply *serfs* or *villeins*, without rights or duties as citizens. They were mere chattels appertaining to the estates of their lords and owners, and politically were of no account whatever. Thus the centralised power of the Crown was originally dominant; the nobles existed as dependents of the Crown, and the people, as a political power, were practically non-existent. Thus was the "State" constituted towards the end of the eleventh century.

It would be a most interesting study, but it is absolutely impossible to pursue it within the limits of a lecture, to trace the gradual development of popular liberty; to see the quarrels between the Crown and the nobles; to observe the first struggles of the populace in the direction of freedom and independence. It will, however, be possible to glance at certain epochs of our history in which the gradual decay of the monarchical institution may be traced.

First, then, let us turn to the period when the principle of "Divine Right" was eliminated from English royalty. Charles I. appears to have conscientiously held the view that the Almighty had selected the Stuart family as "fit and proper persons" to hold absolute and irresponsible sway over the British people. With the courage of his convictions, he sought to enforce his views, even to the

desperate length of a resort to arms. God upon that occasion did not support his chosen one; and when the head of Charles fell upon the scaffold at Whitehall it may be said the doctrine of divine right fell with it, for it has never been seriously maintained, as a political principle, in England since that time.

If we turn now to the end of the seventeenth century, we shall note a further advance in the direction of popular freedom. James II. had become so obnoxious to the country that he wisely fled and abandoned the throne. William, Prince of Orange, was therefore invited by the Lords and Commons to assume the Crown. An attempt was made, however, to limit William's authority, and to this the Dutch prince would not agree. He told the English representatives that he was perfectly contented with his position in Holland; a crown was no great thing, and he had no wish for it; the English had sought him and not he the English; and if they wished for his services they must agree to his terms. Ultimately the Dutchman ascended the throne of Great Britain as William III. upon a distinct contract with the [nominal] representatives of the people. "The Constitution," says Hume, in his *History of England*, "had now assumed a new aspect. The maxim of hereditary indefeasible right was at length renounced by a free Parliament. The power of the Crown was acknowledged to flow from no other fountain than that of a contract with the people. Allegiance and protection were declared reciprocal ties depending upon each other. The representatives of the nation made a regular claim of rights on behalf of their constituents; and William III. ascended the throne in consequence of an express capitulation with the people."

Here, then, is a great advance. The people and the Crown are the two parties to a contract. Such a contract may be determined by either of the parties; and the constitutional Republican agitation of to-day is a movement directed towards the lawful, peaceful termination of such a contract, as being no longer useful or necessary. The object is a purely legal and justifiable object; and when our opponents describe the Republican agitation as "seditious" they merely expose their malice and ignorance.

It would be at once interesting and instructive to trace the history of English monarchy from the commencement

of the eighteenth century down to the present time. We should see how the importation of a disreputable German family brought the Crown into contempt—how the German mistresses of George I. and his successor had “exploited” the British—and how the people had been estranged from their rulers. We should see the pious but stupid and prejudiced George III. exercising his authority upon the side of privilege and oppression, and retarding, to the full extent of his power, every movement in the direction of popular progress and freedom. The foes of liberty were the “King’s friends,” and, necessarily, the friends of the people were the “King’s enemies.” The student of history will be aware that the influence thus exercised by George III. was a very real and weighty factor in political affairs. That estimable monarch died sixty-four years ago; and it will be instructive to note the vast change in the power and status of the Crown that this comparatively brief period has brought about.

Queen Victoria ascended the throne of England seventeen years after the death of George III.; and in the year 1840 was married to Prince Albert of Saxe-Coburg. This gentleman came from a small German court, and the prospect of wielding a certain degree of influence over the affairs of a mighty nation was very attractive to his mind. His position in this country was somewhat anomalous; the Queen took precedence of her Consort, and politically Albert was a fifth wheel in the coach. It was taken for granted by the people that the Prince would not meddle in political business, and time after time he was publicly complimented on the supposed fact that, recognising his position in this country, he had abstained from interference in the national affairs. Albert, however, *had* been so interfering in a secret and underhand fashion; and when the fact became known, public indignation was aroused. The Queen and her Consort thereupon wrote to Baron Stockmar, asking for his advice and assistance. Stockmar, it may be explained, had been a long-life friend and counsellor of the Queen, and his direction would naturally have much weight with her. In reply to the Queen’s appeal, Stockmar wrote a long and tedious letter (given at length in Sir Theodore Martin’s “Life of the Prince Consort”) from which one or two passages may be given. He pointed out that, “in our time, since Reform . . . and the growth

of those politicians . . . who treat the existing Constitution merely as a bridge to a Republic, it is of extreme importance that this fiction should be *countenanced only provisionally, and that no opportunity should be let slip of vindicating the legitimate position of the Crown.*" Stockmar then discusses the imaginary situation of a stupid or unscrupulous Minister pursuing a foolish or mischievous policy, to the detriment of the public welfare. The only punishment that could be inflicted in such a case is "the removal or resignation" of the offender. But the divine system of a properly-constituted monarchy would, Baron Stockmar alleged, provide an efficient safeguard against such disastrous mismanagement. Who, he asks, "could have averted the danger, either wholly or in part? Assuredly he [the Sovereign], and he alone, who, being free from party passion, has listened to the voice of an independent judgment [*i.e.*, his own]. To exercise this judgment is, both in a moral and constitutional point of view, a matter of right, nay, a positive duty. The Sovereign may even take a part in the initiation and the maturing of the Government measures; for it would be unreasonable to expect that a King, himself as able, as accomplished, as patriotic as the best of his Ministers, should be prevented from making use of these qualities at the deliberations of his Council."

Writing thus to a member of the House of Hanover, Stockmar must have been singularly ignorant or strangely oblivious of the history of that family. Where, since the Guelphs first landed upon our shores, shall we find the sovereign "as able, as accomplished, as patriotic as the best of his ministers"? Can we so describe George I., ignorant of the English tongue, absolutely indifferent to the national welfare, contented to pass his time carousing with his fat German mistresses? Is it possible thus to regard his scarcely more estimable successor, George II.; the ignorant, bigoted, obstinate madman, George III.; the profligate and unprincipled George IV.; or his successor, William IV., who, as Greville declared, would make a good king if he did not go mad? And, looking to the future, can we dare to anticipate that the Prince of Wales, if he ever ascend the throne, will display either ability or patriotism in a very eminent degree? Baron Stockmar urged the Queen to avail herself of every opportunity to

vindicate the "legitimate position of the Crown." This clear and decided advice, it must be remembered, was given by the Queen's most trusted counsellor in response to a direct appeal for such aid; but can it be pretended that Her Majesty has ever followed it? Is it under the reign of Victoria that the dwindling prerogatives of the monarch have been strengthened and extended? On the contrary, the forty-seven years of the present reign have seen the almost absolute self-effacement of the sovereign as a political and social factor. Parliament is opened by "commission" in the absence of the Queen; drawing-rooms are held by the Princess of Wales, in the absence of the Queen. Whilst the political machine is running, and the wheels of society are swiftly revolving in their appointed fashion, the nominal head alike of the State and of Society is buried in the remote fastnesses of Balmoral, the solemn glories of Windsor, or the sylvan glades of Osborne. Privacy of the most complete nature is all that is apparently sought. In short, Her Majesty is teaching the English how easily and comfortably they may exist without a Queen!

Politically, the Sovereign now only operates as a machine for affixing the sign-manual. The responsibility for every measure, for every action, rests upon the official advisers of the Crown. Without their aid there could be nothing to sign; but—according to the glorious principles of our constitution—the result of their labor and genius would be null and void, *minus* the signature of the Sovereign. The sole object, then, for which monarchy now exists, politically, would be equally well served by an india-rubber stamp, an impression of which could be affixed to any document or measure that had received the sanction of both Houses of Parliament. And the cost of this need not exceed the moderate sum of one shilling.

With reference to the functions of the Sovereign, I am, however, bound to admit that the view I have just endeavored to state is not universally accepted as correct. There can be no possible doubt that the principle that "the Sovereign reigns but does not govern" is the only one upon which the majority of Englishmen would tolerate the existence of royalty. The spirit of democracy has so deeply permeated English political life that the exercise of an irresponsible unrepresentative power in public affairs would not long be permitted to exist. Supposing, for instance, that a Fran-

chise Bill, after being passed by the Commons and Lords, should be vetoed by the Crown, such use of the royal prerogative—although legally perfectly justifiable—would be the death-warrant of the monarchy. But, judging from certain statements that have been made public, and which have emanated from responsible sources, it seems probable that, in truth, the Queen does exercise a very real influence over public affairs, but it is an influence of which the public officially knows nothing. Several years ago Mr. Disraeli stated in a public speech, at Hughenden, that the duties performed by the Queen were “weighty,” “unceasing,” and “laborious.” “There is not,” he said, “a dispatch received from abroad, nor one sent from this country, which is not submitted to the Queen. . . . Of our present Sovereign it may be said that her signature has never been placed to any public document of which she did not know the purport, and of which she did not approve.” Now Mr. Disraeli was on many occasions extremely parsimonious of the truth; and it is quite possible that the startling statement there made was merely a vivid flash of the imagination. For what does it amount to? If the Queen signs no document of which “she does not approve,” then her influence in the State is paramount, and if any difference of opinion arise between the Sovereign and the Ministry it is the latter that must accommodate itself to the former before anything can be done. If all that Mr. Disraeli said at Hughenden on this subject be true, it is difficult to detect the essential difference between the “constitutional rule” of Victoria and the “autocratic sway” of Alexander III. of Russia! I for one cannot believe it. If the judgment of the Prime Minister and the Government is to be on occasion subjugated to the conflicting judgment of a doubtless honest and well-meaning, but very commonplace old lady, the sooner the people understand this the better for us all. But, I repeat, I cannot believe it. Shrewdness is a prominent trait in the Queen’s character; and I cannot conceive it possible that she should *dare* to follow the course of action indicated by the words of Mr. Disraeli. Certain it is that the people officially know nothing of it; and, judging from the facts as they are displayed before us, we are justified in regarding the monarchy as simply useless—not worse than useless.

At present our india-rubber stamp costs us at least a million sterling per annum. The Civil List of £385,000 represents but a portion of the outlay which the maintenance of royalty involves. The pensions and allowances to members of the Queen's family; the cost of maintaining and repairing the numerous palaces required for their accommodation; and innumerable indirect expenses which are carefully dispersed amongst various branches of the public accounts, fully make up the enormous total given. Sir Charles Dilke, for instance, whilst investigating this matter some years ago, found that a certain number of men were continually employed in painting the ornamental fire-buckets on board one of the royal yachts. Year in and year out their sole duty was to paint these buckets. As soon as they were finished the work was begun over again.

What advantage does the nation derive from the exertions of its most expensive "servant"? The *Daily Telegraph* and other pious and loyal journals sometimes urge that the Queen furnishes us with a noble example of a sovereign and mother. But how? Officially she has for over twenty years almost entirely neglected the public duties of her high position. And where is the nobility of her example as a mother? Many a poor widow toils incessantly in order to maintain her young family, denying herself proper rest and food, so that her children may be decently clothed, fed, and educated, and obtain a fair start in life. Such cases of devotion and self-denial are frequent amongst the poorest classes of society. Is not this a nobler example than that of a lady in possession of immense wealth, who is perfectly well able to support the whole of her numerous family, but who yet permits the burden of their maintenance to be thrown upon the nation? The private wealth of the royal family must be enormous, and abundantly adequate for their needs; and yet how many appeals for charitable grants have been made upon their behalf! Prince after prince, and princess after princess, have thus been quartered upon the nation as out-door paupers, recipients of a charity that is disgraceful, and would be degrading to any family save the Guelphs.

Let us glance at the long roll of pauper princes, and see what advantage the nation derives in return for their generous allowances. The Prince of Wales receives an

income of more than £150,000 a year, including his wife's allowance, but *not* including the accumulations of the Duchy of Cornwall, or various sums that have been voted for exceptional purposes. His Royal Highness is a Field-marshal of the British army, and honorary colonel of several regiments. Now, what is the work that H.R.H. performs in return for his ample wage of £3,000 per week? Upon this point I will cite the evidence of the *Daily News*, a Liberal, pious, and respectable authority: "The Prince of Wales had a hard day's work on Saturday. In the afternoon, besides holding a levée, he unveiled a statue of Sir Rowland Hill at Cornhill, and in the evening he dined with the Lord Mayor and the provincial mayors at the Mansion House, afterwards witnessing part of the performance of 'The Marriage of Figaro' at the Covent Garden Theatre." And this, O ye Gods! was a *hard* day's work! Not one of the simple rounds of daily toil, but over-time into the bargain! Cannot such labor be performed at a cheaper rate? Cannot some patriotic individual be induced to expend his energies in the service of the State at a more reasonable rate of remuneration than £3,000 per week? Surely if the contract were submitted to public competition the Prince's post could be filled, his arduous labors performed, more economically than is now the case.

Take, again, the Prince's oratory. He opens bazaars, lays foundation stones, and performs similar ornamental if not useful functions. At Norwich, opening the Agricultural Hall in that city, Albert Edward eloquently remarked: "Mr. Birkbeck and Gentlemen,—I have the greatest pleasure in declaring this hall to be now open. It is worthy of the County of Norfolk and the City of Norwich. (Loud cheers.)" Is this the oratory of our £3,000 per week Demosthenes? Without any desire to over-estimate my own ability, I could venture to undertake to make a much better speech than that at a mere fraction of the cost.

As to the Prince's military worth I am not in a position to offer any facts or opinion. His uniforms are covered with medals, and it therefore follows that the Prince must, during some portions of his career, have earned those decorations by many acts of bravery and devotion. I have searched the pages of contemporary history for the records

of these deeds of heroism, but, alas! I have found them not. It is difficult to account for the remissness of historians in this matter. In none of their works do we find a line or a sentence referring to the Prince's exploits on the battle-field, to the deeds of valor which bear their outward and visible signs in the Prince's medals. I do not, however, despair of obtaining the information some day.

Take another Guelphic hero and warrior, the Duke of Connaught. This young man is a major-general in the British army, and in due course—if the monarchy survive long enough—will doubtless be appointed commander-in-chief when the Duke of Cambridge shall have passed away, and his umbrella alone shall remain as a memento of his glorious career. The Duke of Connaught has taken a more or less active part in the military service, and it is clearly to his ability alone that his rapid promotion is to be traced. Unlike the heir-apparent, our major-general can point to the records of history in proof of his achievements. When the English troops were sent to Egypt to crush the national movement organised and directed in that country by Arabi, it was deemed advisable that a prince of the blood should accompany the expedition. The flagging popularity of the Crown needed a stimulant, and it was hoped that the participation of a member of the royal family in the noble work of suppressing Egyptian freedom would bring about this result. Statements were circulated to the effect that the Prince of Wales, inflamed with military ardor, desired to take part in the war, but that, "in deference to the highest authority," he had decided to remain at home. His younger brother, however, was nominated to an important command, and his departure from our shores was the signal for the most fulsome and ridiculous panegyrics from "loyal" journalists. The *Daily Telegraph* in bombastic and inflated language described the satisfaction that every Englishman must feel at the sight of one of the princes placing himself at the head of British troops and leading them to glory on the battlefield. A special general was sent out to see that the duke got into no danger; a special doctor accompanied him, and every precaution was taken for his comfort and safety. Soon after his arrival the battle of Kassassin was fought, and telegrams reached this country extolling the bravery of the duke during the combat. It subsequently

became known that while the battle of Kassassin was taking place the Duke of Connaught was ten miles in the rear! It is not a difficult matter to display the most reckless heroism when one is ten miles from any danger. Artemus Ward escaped a fatal wound at Sebastopol by not being there, and our major-general owes his preservation to a similar piece of good fortune. I believe the only privation to which the Duke was subjected during the campaign was a temporary scarcity of soda and brandy. At the conclusion of the war many of the troops returned to England, and were enthusiastically received by their countrymen. A certain number of picked men were summoned to Windsor, when the Queen affixed a medal to the breast of every soldier who had distinguished himself. And, as a grand climax, the Duke of Connaught came forward, his royal mother fastened a decoration upon his already overloaded uniform, and affectionately imprinted a kiss upon his martial brow! Could any more ridiculous farce be imagined? The carpet warrior who had merely accompanied the expedition as an ornamental appendage, who was never in real danger—to him was vouchsafed the same reward as to the men who had risked their lives in the discharge of their duty. However little we may admire the trade of the soldier, it is matter of credit to him when he bravely performs the duty imposed upon him, and the decoration earned by devotion and heroism is an honor to him. But as for the rows of medals and ribands that are so thickly strewn upon the uniforms of princely toy-soldiers, they might just as well be fixed upon a German sausage for any relevance that they bear to the object upon which they appear.

The sham heroes of English royalty are in perfect keeping with the system to which they belong. They form part of an institution that was once terrible and powerful, but which is now as weak as it is contemptible and ridiculous. The political aspect of monarchy has entirely disappeared; it is not merely useless, but an actual clog and nuisance in the work of the State. Its social duties are frivolous and unimportant, and its "services" could be dispensed with, not only without detriment, but with actual advantage to the nation. We are sometimes told that England is a wealthy country and can afford to bear the expense entailed by royalty. I deny the state-

ment absolutely and in all earnestness. Whilst we find large numbers of people dying from starvation in our midst; whilst we see so many thousands of our countrymen barely able, by the most arduous exertions, to keep the wolf at bay; whilst we find that misery and want are rife among the laboring classes of the community, I say that it is criminal extravagance to maintain in idleness and luxury a family that perform no service to the country, and whose position is based upon a barbarous and obsolete form of government.

I should be performing but a portion of the task which I have undertaken, if I failed to point out one consideration that is too often overlooked. The huge sum of money appropriated to the maintenance of royalty does not go into the pockets of the royal family, and by far the greater portion of it is absolutely outside of their control. The institution of monarchy is in this country the means of supporting that huge crowd of lazy aristocrats who have been irreverently but not inaptly termed "Court Flunkies." If the British tax-payer were to take the trouble to enquire what is done with the money which he grumbles so loudly at paying, he would find that it filters in many ways into the pockets of the Crown's most devoted adherents. The royal family are bound by the iron fetters of custom and precedent, and many huge establishments have to be supported, at enormous expense to the country, for their accommodation. A glance at the composition of the royal household would show "about one thousand unselected, vested-interest, hungry, hereditary bondsmen dancing round the Crown like Red Indians round a stake, and scrambling for £325,000 of the £385,000 that is thrown to them every year by a liberal and unenquiring country." Royalty requires a whole army of attendants, and all of them have to be highly paid. Many of the superior officials do absolutely nothing. Their offices are sinecures; and, in many cases, even when certain duties have to be performed, the country, while paying A. a handsome salary for occupying the office, obligingly pays B. to do the work. It would be instructive to reproduce the mere list of officials and servants employed in the service of royalty. It comprises offices that are obsolete, offices that are ridiculous, and offices that are unnecessary. We have an aristocratic Master of the Tennis Court, with

a large salary but no Tennis Court ; a barge-master with two men to help him, but no barge—only the salary ; there are chamberlains of various kinds, chief clerks, ordinary clerks and assistant-clerks ; lords in waiting, grooms in waiting ; gentlemen ushers and ushers who presumably are not gentlemen ; masters of the ceremonies, assistants, and people to assist the assistants ; state pages, pages of the back-stairs, a page of the chambers, pages of the presence, and pages' men to wait upon the pages, of whom—reckoning all varieties—there are sufficient to make a large volume ; several kinds of serjeants-at-arms, kings-of-arms, heralds, chaplains, dentists, painters, librarians ; gold sticks, silver sticks, copper sticks and sugar sticks ; secretaries to everybody and under-secretaries to the secretaries ; inspectors, equerries, footmen, “three necessary women,” priests, painters, organists, composers, etc., *ad infinitum*.

These officials pass their lives comfortably and luxuriously, subsisting upon the public money. If any one of them has any work to do it will be found that three or four others are provided and paid to help him ; and their assistance is sometimes afforded when there is actually *nothing* to be done. To these men and to their relations royalty is the best possible form of government, and they will defend to the last gasp the institution which enables them to live in idleness upon the fruits of honest industry.

I should like to suggest a possible way in which many of these tax-eaters could be got rid of. A short Act might be passed ordaining that the salaries of “Court Flunkies” should in future be collected *direct* from the people by the holders of the offices in person. The “bargemaster” and his two “watermen,” who so efficiently help him to do nothing, might possibly be able to gather in the £400 per annum that they receive for their valuable services ; but I am rather doubtful whether, after deducting wear and tear of clothing (damaged in frequent kickings-out), doctors' bills, time, trouble, etc., they would find the pecuniary results to be worth consideration. There would be fair ground for hoping that in a very few years the greater part of these useless offices would fall into desuetude.

We may venture to trust that, in time, the English

people will open their eyes to the anomaly of their position. With a political system in which the Republican spirit is the very breath of life, we foolishly continue the expensive luxury of a useless monarchy. The only terms upon which we consent to retain and maintain the monarchical element is, that it shall do nothing to logically justify its existence. The misfortune is that the nation has not the courage of its convictions. The facts of our political existence are democratic; the fictions—and most expensive fictions—are monarchical. But the day is not far distant when the scales of prejudice and ignorance will fall from the eyes of our people; when they will be aroused to the dignity and independence of their manhood; when, being no longer children, they will put aside childish things, dismiss the useless representatives of a bygone system, and transfer their allegiance from the Crown to the Commonwealth.