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A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

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The Changed Relations of Science and Religion: Peace after Warfare.

THE Archbishop of York, when preaching at Sheffield during a meeting of the British Association in 1910, thus referred to the long-standing conflict between religion and science; a conflict which, he said, had been exceptionally conspicuous in the middle of the nineteenth century. "But of late years . . . another spirit had been working, and though those who might be called the camp-followers of science and religion are apt to break out into quarrels . . . the truest and best men on either side are conscious that there is a call for truce—a truce of God, a truce to adjust misunderstandings, to retreat from rash and hasty claims, to think out their own positions more clearly, and to understand the positions of those who seemed to differ from them with greater sympathy." [1] It was a noble aspiration, and the realizing of it has, I trust, been brought nearer by that awful crisis in the history of our nation, through which we are now passing.

But why were science and religion ever at war? There seems, at first sight, no valid ground for a contest, because of the wide difference between their methods and fields of work. Science arrives at its conclusions by inductive reasoning from careful observations: religion, as expressed in dogmatic statements, by deductive reasoning from information, which has been, or is supposed to have been, revealed. Thus the sphere of science is that which we can discover for ourselves; the sphere of religion that which is not thus discoverable. But in practice the two often overlap. There is a borderland in their provinces, on which each has rights, like those of nations on the high seas. Hence it is always possible for either to advance indefensible claims, and disputes to arise, which are really groundless.

It must, however, be admitted that the champions of religion have too often been the aggressors, or, at any rate, have defended a popular belief, the accuracy of which has been impugned on scientific grounds, with weapons drawn from a theological armoury. The form of the earth may serve as an instance. Nineteen centuries ago people generally believed it to be a disc, with the ocean flowing round its margin. When doubts on this matter began to be ex-

[1] Printed in *The Guardian* Sept. 9, 1910.

pressed, fathers of the Church defended the popular notion with texts drawn from the Old Testament, some even going so far as to express doubts whether a man could be saved who believed in the rotundity of the earth. So persistently was the old error defended by churchmen, that they did not abandon it till about four centuries ago, some time after circumnavigation had proved the world to be a globe.

Astronomers fared no better than geographers. The authors of the Old Testament shared the popular, and very natural, belief that the sun went round the earth. When Kopernik, about the year 1543, proved this to be erroneous, the authorities of the Roman Church denounced his book and all who accepted his arguments. They persecuted Galileo and Kepler, the latter only three centuries ago, and the leaders of the Reformation were not less loud in their outcry.

Students of chemistry and physics ran the risk of being charged with sorcery, while those of anatomy and medicine fared no better. Tertullian denounced surgery, Augustine the practice of dissection for the discovery of disease. In later times Popes forbade clergy and monks, the only educated class of those days, to practise medicine, and even excluded books on that subject from the libraries of convents. Early in the eighteenth century inoculation for small pox was condemned by theologians of the Sorbonne and by Protestants in England, and more recently—not a hundred and twenty years ago —Jenner's discovery of the protective effect of vaccination was denounced as bidding defiance to Heaven itself—even to the will of God. Nay, within the memory of some still living, the use of anæsthetics received a similar welcome in pulpit after pulpit. This last effort, however, to arrest scientific progress by religious prejudice soon died of its own absurdity.

The conflicts of religion and science as to the history of the earth and its living tenants are so recent that some still survive, who took part in the war. Geologists were denounced because they found it impossible, after careful study of the Great Stone Book of Nature, to accept the opening chapters of Genesis as literal history. Charles Darwin's noted work on the Origin of Species, published in 1859, was vituperated, from pulpit and platform, in tracts and newspapers, for maintaining that plants and animals, whether living or extinct, have been the result of gradual change instead of special creation.

Yet now evolution is recognized, in a far wider field than that of biology and geology, as God's mode of working in the world of matter and of life. Yet it is only fifty-two years since an attempt was made by the leaders of the two great parties in the Church of England to force its members to declare war against science by committing themselves to the statement that their Church maintained "without reserve or qualification, the inspiration and Divine authority of the whole canonical scriptures, as not only containing, but being, the Word of God." [1]

This brief summary of the warfare of science and religion shows that, however unwelcome the conclusion may be to the representation of the latter, they have generally been proved to be in the wrong, and have, throughout, assumed an authority to which they had no rightful claim, for they did not possess the knowledge which alone could enable them to pronounce a decision. Neither personal piety, nor any ecclesiastical position can supply the place of that knowledge which comes from a study of the subject. The opinion of the most expert maker of microscopes would be worthless on a question in astronomy, or that of an eminent mathematician on the meaning of a difficult passage in the Hebrew Bible. As the old saying goes, there is no royal road to learning, yet those who supposed themselves to be champions of religion have acted as if they believed that membership of a church brought with it knowledge of things other than spiritual.[2]

I do not say that the faults have been all on one side. Students of science have sometimes trespassed on the province of religion and have even rivalled the dogmatism of their opponents. But they have done it less frequently and with more excuse. It is but human nature to retort upon the assaults of ignorance and prejudice and to repel an aggression by an invasion. We must also admit that, in past time, some students of science have perverted to evil ends their knowledge of alchemy and medicine, and others, in later years, have proclaimed an aggressive agnosticism or declared that nothing can be true which cannot be tested in a laboratory. But

[1] From a document, often called The Oxford Declaration, circulated among the clergy early in 1864.

[2] The past conflicts of the representatives of religion and of science are described in greater detail by Dr. A. D. White (then Principal of Cornell University) in his valuable book "The Warfare of Science." My copy is the second edition (1877), but a much enlarged one has since been published. See also "The Present Relations of Religion and Science" (by myself), chapter vii.

we may claim that, in most cases, knowledge with a belief in religion has been on one side, on the other belief without knowledge. There is another difference, not to the credit of the latter party. Students of science may make mistakes, even in their own field of work, but these are frankly acknowledged when the error is discovered. That, too often, is not the practice of the champions of religion. Instead of confessing themselves to have been wrong, they quietly abandon a position when it proves to be untenable, and retreat upon another, which has also in its turn to be evacuated, and yet continue to maintain the aspect of infallibility. It may be good generalship, but is it honest? Does it not look like caring less for truth than for the interests of a party?

The root of the evil, at least to a large extent, is the failure to recognize that a process of evolution is at work in religion no less than in the realm of nature and in all human institutions. But evolution implies a progress by an absorption of the new and an elimination of the old and outworn; it means growth, not merely by increase of size, but by development of the constituent organisms that they may better respond to the calls which are made upon them. The Apostle's words, "When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things," should be no less true of a state or of a church than of an individual. In the last case no one would dispute them; we should ridicule the man who took delight in the games of his childhood, but we do not so readily accept them in that of a state, perhaps because the development is measured by decades or even generations rather than by years, so that the ruling party is slow to recognize that the laws and customs which may have been suitable for a past age may cease to be so, or may even be harmful in the present one. But if this be true in politics, it is still more so in religion. It may, however, be urged that the latter rests on a revelation, with which we must not tamper and which we cannot hope to improve. Here, however, we must always remember that a revelation is very rarely proclaimed by the trumpet not of Sinai, but is conveyed through some human instrument. Thoughtful men recognize more clearly the significance of a truth or the tendency of the Divine guidance; they become more capable of widening the scope of a commandment, of converting a limited precept into a general principle. The Old Testament teaches this lesson; "line

upon line, here a little and there a little." Its earlier books reflect the crude ideas of the Mosaic dispensation. The mechanical efficacy of sacrifices, suited to a people still liable to be perverted by heathen neighbours, gradually gives way to the certainty that a broken and contrite heart is the sacrifice really acceptable to God. The advance was but slow. The nation, again and again, even up to the fall of Jerusalem, turned aside to idolatry and the worship of false gods. To most of them Jehovah was hardly more than a tribal deity; not till the days of the captivity did they grasp the great truth that there was no other God than one, and that a graven image was no better than a block of stone or wood, not worthy of reverence even as a symbol of some aspect of the Divine power.

This is not surprising, for the spirit of idolatry still lingers in more than one branch of the Christian Church. But in it also an evolution is perceptible, notwithstanding the long and often successful struggle of the spirit of Judaism. Slowly, but surely, many social evils, which once passed almost unnoticed, have been recognized. For instance, Christian nations not only tolerated but actually defended slavery as an institution; they allowed the highborn or the rich to oppress the poor, and even now, if we substitute a majority for an autocrat, many, especially professional politicians, care more whether a measure will be popular than whether it is just or right.

But to such tendencies, atavistic as they would be called in science, its spirit is hostile, and that is why its students have been persecuted by those who supposed themselves to be defenders of religion. But these had begun to recognize their mistake even before Europe was convulsed by the present war. What, we may well ask, will be its effects in those happier days when God has once more given us the blessings of peace? Shall we find that religious bickerings, as will too probably be the case with political, have only been stilled for a time by the sense of a common peril, or will this war have done much to change a truce into a lasting peace?

I hope, indeed expect, that it will be the latter, for at least three reasons. This is one. War, as perhaps nothing else can do, brings us face to face with realities. The efforts for self-preservation, the life-and-death struggle, whether of men or of nations, scatter conventions to the winds and prove with irrefutable logic that deeds are more potent than words, and phrases, without an adequate backing of facts, are as futile now as they were in the days of the Scribe and

the Pharisee. In the time of peace, professional politicians and well-meaning sentimentalists had persuaded the populace to shut its eyes to unpleasant facts and to stop its ears to the warnings of those who could read the signs of the times. With the first shot fired the cloud-castle, built up with the resolutions of delegates and the votes of those who believed the millenium had begun, tumbled down in ruin, like the walls of Jericho, and left its ill-prepared inmates face to face with an enemy inspired by the primitive passions of rapine and murder.

A second reason is that war, while emphasizing the necessity of discipline and the distinctions between those who can lead and those who must be led, has broken down, among those fighting for a common cause, such conventional distinctions as have no better foundation than the accident of birth or the inheritance of wealth. To share hardships and face dangers is the strongest bond of union, and I believe it will be long before those who have fought side by side in the trenches or encountered the perils of the sea will distract or despise one another as was often done in the wantonness, which was a fungoid growth of peace and prosperity. If anything can make our nation dwell in unity at home, it will be this war, which may teach us the possibility of differing without bitterness on religious no less than on political questions.

The third reason is that war has shown that no little unity underlay apparently wide divisions. Not only have the aristocrat and the democrat fought side by side on the battle-field, but also religious discords have been minimized as they never were before. The ministers of different Christian bodies—Anglican, Nonconformist, even Roman Catholic, generally the most rigid and exclusive in his definition of a church, have joined in prayer, have afforded opportunities for worship, have recognized that their differences were slight compared with their unity in love for Christ and a desire to extend His Kingdom. In the hour of danger, in the time of suffering, in the shadow of death, men are drawn together by the sense of a common cause, a common loyalty to one Master, be this as patriots or as Christians.

The war, I say, has done much to heal our unhappy divisions, but will they break out again at home, when there is once more peace abroad? Let us hope, let us pray, that they will not. In everyday life to have been associated in work for some common cause draws together

political opponents and softens asperities by showing them that their differences very frequently relate, not to the end which is sought, but to the way of reaching it. So also in disputes about questions in religion. Though it may sometimes be necessary to resist teaching which limits the mercies of God, virtually denies His love towards man, or insists on the vital importance of forms and ceremonies—to resist it, as Paul did Peter at Antioch, because it would substitute the bondage of the Law for the liberty of Christ; yet while so resisting, while Protestant against error, however insidious, we must never forget that we are servants of one Master, brethren in Christ. It is for us, members of the Church of England, which in former days too often took the lead in the exclusion of others, frankly to confess past mistakes, and endeavour to win back those sundered from us by recognizing that they also are fellow-soldiers in the army of Christ, and by admitting that, while we hold our own to be "the more excellent way," we do not assert it to be the only one across the wilderness of life to the Heavenly City.

This war will not obliterate real distinctions between man and man—distinctions of education, intellect, and disposition—but it should lead—God grant it will lead—to a better understanding between class and class, between Churchman and Nonconformist, between all sorts and conditions of men.

I began by quoting words spoken by the Archbishop of York, more than five years ago; let me conclude with some others which are about as many weeks old: "Two years ago we seemed within measurable distance of civil war, the last word of an educated democracy. After fifty years of education, drink was slaying its thousands and lust its tens of thousands: the authority of the home was going to pieces; young men and women were gaining a reputation for a very dangerous kind of impudence and levity. We had come to an end of our boasted nineteenth-century civilization. We must begin to rebuild the life of the English people. In England today we saw abroad a spirit of fellowship, of sacrifice and self-discipline, sure signs of the redemption and rebuilding to come." [1]

T. G. BONNEY.

[1] *Guardian*, March 2, 1916 (at Burnley).