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## THE INFLUENCE OF THE CHURCH ON THE COUNTRY.<sup>1</sup>

BY THE VENERABLE W. L. PAIGE COX, Archdeacon  
of Chester.

WE are much concerned on behalf of our country at the present time. We are passing through an economic crisis, almost without precedent in our history, and it is becoming a serious question whether we shall weather the storm. It is not merely a question whether we shall be on the whole a richer or a poorer country in the future, with an increased or a diminished trade, but whether we shall be able to sustain the large population which only came into being within the last hundred and fifty years through the development of our modern industrial system. Will millions of our people, before very long, be starved out of existence? It is not a chimerical speculation, but one which comes very seriously within the range of possibility.

The national well-being must depend on the national character. If we are to weather the storm which threatens us, it can only be if we, as a people, retain the qualities which have made us strong in the past.

"Nought shall make us rue,  
If England to itself do rest but true."

This is where the influence of the Church comes in. "What the soul is in a body, this the Christians are in the world. The soul is spread through all the members of the body, and Christians through the divers cities of the world." That was said in a notable apology for the Christian religion (The Epistle to Diognetus) which has come down to us from the second century. When we speak of the influence of the Church in the terms thus used, we do not think of the official Church nor of any utterances by leaders of the Church or by organizations professing to speak as organizations having the sanction of the Church. It is the influence of the mass of Christian people, mostly of the laity, that is alluded to as that of the "soul within the body"—of the commonwealth as a whole. No Bishop in our time has given a wiser attention to social questions than the late Bishop Westcott, and in his last charge to the Diocese of Durham, he spoke of the need to call into "full and ordered activity, the gifts of laymen." "There is the more need," he said, "that we should do this because we have come to know that the Christian faith deals with the whole sum of human affairs. We must have therefore the benefit of every form of experience if we are to apply it rightly to the different problems which are pressed upon us."

The beneficial influence upon the national character, then, which is needed—to quote our ancient authority again—is that of "all the members of the body"—of individual Christians—"through the

<sup>1</sup> A Visitation Charge delivered in the Archdeaconry of Chester.

divers cities of the world." It is for the teachers of religion to give clear instruction about principles, leaving the application of those principles in particular cases mainly to those who have the necessary expert knowledge.

The prospect of Christian service in this form is the more hopeful as the ground-stuff of the national character, so to speak, is still so good. This was proved in the Great War. Shortly after the war was over I had a conversation with the General who at that time was at the head of the Western Command. There had been much talk during the war of the respective qualities of the soldiers of different nationalities and of different parts of the British Empire, and I asked the General which soldiers on the whole did the best. He answered without hesitation, "The soldiers of the English county regiments." A week later I put the same question to another General whom I met in a different part of the country, and he at once gave me the same answer. I was a little surprised, as we had heard less about the English soldiers than about others. They had, so to speak, not been advertised at all. It was explained to me that the men who came from the English country-side, and indeed, in many instances, from the towns as well, were found in the long run to be the most reliable of all. They took the discipline especially well. They could be depended upon for steadiness in attack and in retreat; and they never knew when they were beaten.

It is something to know that the British soldier, take him for all in all, take him for his good humour, his chivalry, and his stubborn gallantry, is unsurpassed by any soldier in the world. And we are not, relatively to others, a quarrelsome people, and we have no inclination towards what is called militarism. All this is worth noting, not with a foolish national pride, but as a ground for hope in regard to the strain which is now being put upon us as a people; for the qualities of a people are most noticeably tested in war. This has always been so in the long history of the human race. The best nations always conquered the worst. It was the nations that had the qualities of courage, endurance, respect for law and discipline, and a readiness to act with one another in a common cause, that came to the front everywhere. Human progress has been largely bound up with the success of the best warrior nations. It is the law of the survival of the fittest as illustrated in human history.

It is instructive to notice how this law is recognized in the earlier books of the Bible, which treat of times when war was more or less prevalent everywhere. The opening verses of the third chapter of Judges, for instance, represent it as the will of Jehovah that the Israelites, on their entrance into Canaan, should not settle down in ease and softness without experience of the discipline of warfare. "These are the nations," so the narrative runs, "which the Lord left to prove Israel by them, even as many as had not known all the wars of Canaan; only that the generations of the children of Israel might know to teach them war."

What is the moral of this? That we should wish that wars should continue in these days on account of the toughening and test-

ing effect of warfare on human character? Most certainly that is not the lesson we have to learn from this record of the past, though it does teach a lesson of great importance which we are in danger of forgetting.

We have fully reached the stage in human development when wars should cease. We have learnt so much of the horror and wastefulness of war, that we should do our utmost in every honourable way to avoid war and to stop it. Time has demonstrated the reasonableness and the possibility of bringing to the fore in international relations those qualities of justice and peaceableness and enlightened consideration for others, which should make the appeal to arms the last possible resort when international misunderstandings arise. We have had much experience of recent years of the settlement of differences and of the removal of possible causes of difference by friendly negotiation, and it is by the putting into practice of Christian principles in dealings between nations that we may look eventually for the almost total disappearance of war.

There is a danger, however, in periods like the present of going to extremes, which may lead to the cruellest and the most costly results. It has been pointed out recently that when the Napoleonic War closed with the victory of Waterloo the nation went peace-mad, and the soldiers who had won us the victory were cursed as plagues. A General could not ride down Piccadilly in uniform without it being regarded as a flaunting of militarism, and everything was done to shame and dishonour the armed forces of the Crown.

Time went on and we blundered into the Crimean War: almost immediately afterwards the Indian Mutiny was upon us. Everything was mismanaged at home, especially in the Russian War, but the magnificent British soldier pulled us through. Yet, as the historian of the British Army, the Hon. Sir J. W. Fortesque, has told us (Vol. XIII, 230), "the long service soldier at the time of the Crimean War was by repute almost outside the pale of civil society." He was despised "chiefly because he was a disciplined man," and "the public of that day preferred the navy, simply because he had not, to his great misfortune, been taught to obey."

"Englishmen," it has been said, "are never quite as great as during the continuance of a dangerous war, never quite so silly as when it has come to an end." Such silliness is upon us now. The year before last when Armistice Day was being observed at Chester, some zealots for peace went in and out among the crowd who were standing round the War Memorial and tried to distribute leaflets in favour of disarmament. It was deeply resented by those who were mourning for their gallant dead, as casting a slur on their memory. It was not meant so: it was just silliness; it was so utterly inopportune. If these men at such a time had tried to penetrate into Russia and distributed their leaflets there, where a propaganda for the disuse of armed force is so greatly needed, they would have been brave as well as wise.

We have been told several times in public lately what a fine thing it would be if this country were to make a gesture of peace to other

nations, including Russia, by abolishing all its armaments. We might as well make a gesture of peace to the burglars, motor-thieves, and gunmen in this country by abolishing our police.

These people imagine possibly that in this they are recommending the practice of Christian principle. They are doing nothing of the kind. Christianity teaches us indeed not to resent personal injuries. We are to be so generous and self-restrained in our private lives as to be kind even to "the unthankful and the evil." Christ was that. He never resented any wrong done to Himself. But He could be almost fiercely angry with those who did wrong to others, and He Himself used violence in cleansing the temple.

Those persons are grossly and dangerously misrepresenting Christianity, who teach that it flouts our natural instincts to protect the weak and to defend the hearth and home. A religion of that sort would merit nothing but contempt and neglect. Christianity is very different from that. It teaches emphatically that there is a God that judgeth in the earth, Whose face is set against all evil-doing. We may not usurp the Divine function by avenging ourselves, we must on the contrary in our private relations be long-suffering and gentle; but on behalf of others it is different. We have no Christian law to sacrifice others—our nation, for instance—as well as ourselves. On the contrary the nation—the State—has a function of its own on God's behalf to act as "an avenger for the punishment of evil-doers and the protection of them that do well." This is an absolutely clear and incontrovertible Christian precept as taught in various passages in the New Testament, though much overlooked.

Take the case of India, for example. It is a moral obligation on the Government of this country to maintain security of life and property in that diversely peopled continent. Every life taken by violence there brings a responsibility upon us. Every incitement to violence, in speech or writing, is a crime that we should punish at once. This is a matter that has nothing whatever to do with negotiations for constitutional change in India. Crime is crime throughout it all, and we too are guilty of crime—we bring innocent blood upon ourselves if we do not take all necessary measures for the prevention and punishment of crime.

It has become a very serious question whether we have not reduced our armaments so far that we cannot adequately discharge our Christian duty in this regard in different parts of the Empire—at any rate by keeping ourselves in readiness to meet emergencies that might come upon us at any time.

We are spending millions upon millions of pounds on the dole, for which we get no equivalent in work from the recipients. We should be well advised, as a Christian people, if we were to spend a part of this money on military training for at least some of the able-bodied young men among the unemployed, so that, if the need arose, they might make a return to their country in protective service on behalf of the weak and defenceless persons who are under our care.

There are between two and three millions of men in this country

who are out of employment. The necessity of the dole is admitted by all. It is a Christian duty—a duty of justice and of charity—to provide at the present time for those who cannot get work through no fault of their own. But it is equally a Christian duty on the part of the nation to see that the dole is administered most economically and without abuse. We have learnt the practice of charitable relief from the Christians of the First Days. From them too we have to learn that none must be relieved but those who are ready to help themselves. It was St. Paul himself who laid down the rule, “If a man will not work, he shall not eat” (2 Thess. iii. 10, R.V.). Such a man must be allowed to suffer hunger for the good of his soul—that he may learn the bracing lesson of honest, steady work, without which true manhood is impossible. Always the effect on character must be kept in view by those who would do their duty by their fellow-men.

We have been suffering in the past from the prevalence in some quarters of false economic theories derived from foreign and un-Christian sources, and perhaps there is a danger still of vindictive legislation in memory of bygone wrongs. None now are a party to those old wrongs, and none are responsible for them. We are learning, or should be learning, that the true well-being of one class in the community is bound up with the well-being of all. We English people are members of one body in such a way that if one of the members suffers all the members suffer with it. It is along the lines of this grand, true Christian principle that we must look in the future for the solution of our difficulties. All classes have had their faults in the past; and we must now come together as one people with the resolve to be just and fair one towards another in all our industrial relations and to work together single-heartedly for the common good.

It is a testing and an anxious time, but it gives us a unique opportunity of applying our Christianity to the ordering of our social life as it has never been applied before; and in the light of the principles of our religion and in the moral strength to be derived from it we shall come out in the long run a happier, a wiser, and a more united people.

We end where we began. It is the qualities of the good soldier that we want among us, but for peace and not for war. We want among our people the patriotism of the good soldier and his devotion to his country's service. Yet it is one of the sillinesses of the time that patriotism is disparaged, almost as though it were an evil thing. Certainly that is not the teaching of Christianity. Christ Himself was a patriot. As Son of Man, indeed, His work was for all people and for all time. But He had a passionate love for Jerusalem as the city of His fathers. He wept bitterly at the prospect of its impending destruction. He confined His personal Ministry to the “lost sheep” of the house of Israel; and when He gave His missionary instructions to His disciples He told them to be witnesses to Him in Jerusalem, in Judæa, in Samaria, and so onward and outward to the uttermost parts of the earth.

The Apostles followed their Master exactly in this. One and all of them laid down their lives in the Missionary cause, but they taught consistently that nearer duties come before more distant duties, and feelings for kith and kin should be stronger than for the world outside. "Let us do good unto all men," said St. Paul, "and especially unto them that are of the household of faith." "Honour all men," said St. Peter, "love the brotherhood." "No lukewarm relative," said Burke, "ever made a good citizen," and we may equally add that no lukewarm patriot is likely to show much devotion to mankind.

"He best will serve the race of men  
Who loves his native country best."

That is a law of nature, fully endorsed by the religion of Christ. So we must teach our children patriotism. An important part of the instruction given to them in the schools provided for them by the nation must be to show them what the nation has done for them, what an inheritance they have from their forefathers of liberty and enlightened institutions, and what a civilizing and emancipatory mission in the world their country has been enabled to fulfil; so that they may grow up with the desire to serve their country in return and to carry forward its beneficent influence among other nations.

And we must try to imbue our children with the good soldier's *esprit de corps*, with his sense of being one among others who are banded together in a common cause; and to that end we must teach them discipline, the readiness and quickness to march and stand and act with others, and the care for physical and mental efficiency. We must train them thus in school, and when they leave school the officials of the Church can do no more useful work in our parishes than in giving all the support they can to organizations like Cadet Corps, Lads' Brigades, Boy Scouts, and Girl Guides. It has been noted that those who have passed through this quasi-military training in youth as a rule turn out excellently, and acquire all the main qualities requisite for good citizenship and good churchmanship.

Above all we must try to nurture in our people from their youth up the primary virtue of the good soldier, which is courage. Elementary courage of the physical sort we have among us in plenty, no doubt, but not to the same degree the courage of the higher type which will enable a man to take a firm stand when truth and principle are at stake. The worst of the good people, said Voltaire, is that they are such cowards; and so it has often been left to men like Voltaire to oppose abuses and demand justice for others when orthodox Christian people have been dumb.

We have seen splendid examples of moral as well as physical courage among our great soldiers; indeed they have all been distinguished for it; but we have not seen equal examples of it, as a general thing, among our leading men in other walks of life. It was said not long since by the Lord Chief Justice of England of an eminent lawyer and statesman now retired that "he has the quality of strength"; but it was added, "the course of history might have

been very different if some of his most conspicuous opponents had exhibited the same quality in the same degree."

It is another of the sillinesses of our time that a name given to a famous regiment for its proverbial gallantry has come to be used by some as a term of reproach. When I was sitting in the Church Assembly not long since a person got up to speak who had taken an active part previously in defence of some doctrinal principles to which all were pledged but which some seemed to regard lightly. My neighbour remarked to me under his breath: "This person is a 'die-hard.'" I felt moved to make the retort: "Christ was a die-hard." If Christ had not been a die-hard there would have been no Christian Church.

We think much, especially in these days, of the gentleness of Christ, and we cannot think too much of it. But we need to think more than we usually do of His courage, of His utter refusal on any occasion to compromise with anything that savoured of falsehood or injustice.

And so we must try to imbue our young people with the courage of Christ, we must school them to keep the Christian motive, the motive of following Christ in His disinterested fearlessness, ever in view in all their actions everywhere. That is what the country wants above all things, citizens who are touched with the spirit of heroism. The country will be saved from all the evils that may threaten it if only we can get into its different spheres of service—in Parliament, in County and Municipal Councils, in Employers' Federations, in Trades Unions, in business offices, and in workshops—men and women who, by their integrity and public spirit, by their abhorrence of that which is evil and devotion to that which is good, will bring the ideals of the religion of Christ to bear on the regulation of the varied interests of our common life.

We shall thus learn how true is that famous saying of a very famous Englishman—

"Peace hath her victories  
No less renown'd than war."

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