PERSECUTION

A GENERATION ago one thought of " persecution " as associated with the far off, inhuman, uncivilised. The word carried one's mind to Nero, the Inquisition, perhaps to something as recent as the *Mayflower*; and though one heard of Turkish atrocities in Armenia, one imagined that the world as a whole had outgrown that kind of thing, and that it was a mere matter of time before persecution would be as outdated as slavery. A book that was published in 1882 and went through several editions in England and America declared: " The day is not far distant in which the charity of Christ will be embodied in all the legislation, practice and opinion of the civilised nations, and all men shall be free to think, worship and practice (within reasonable restraints) as to them may seem good "; and a very few years later John Morley in *Compromise* assumed freedom of thought to be " now a finally accepted principle ". Our times, however, have discovered that persecution may be an integral part of a modern political and social system claiming to be the last word in civilisation. Elbogen's *A Century of Jewish Life* has brought to our consciousness an amazing amount of deliberate persecution and the late war has provided only too much evidence of calculated cruelty for opinion's sake. The spirit of Machiavelli, Hobbes and Hegel has persisted. Totalitarianism, Nazi or Communist, appears to be constitutionally persecuting and as little worried about it as the Greek city about the helot or the rose-bush about the manure at its roots.

Nature is full of patterns, groups, systems, which are up to a point self-contained and independent, having their own advantages and disadvantages, one might say, their own standards of virtue and success and happiness. Thus we have Egyptian and Aztec civilisations, French and Chinese languages, the birds with sub-kingdoms of crows and ducks, or again bankers or charwomen or poets, or again Hindus or vivisectionists or spiritualists or the readers of racing newspapers, or again the climate and the feeding system in different areas or the length of the day on different planets. Aldous Huxley reminds us that " the universe in which we do our daily living is the product of our limitations ". If we choose the world of Jack and the

Beanstalk we accept giants with seven-league boots; and if we choose Totalitarianism we accept the duty of persecution. We must ask whether Totalitarianism is such a blessing as to render persecution " good ", or whether persecution is such a curse as to render Totalitarianism " bad ".

Persecution is a relative term, and appears to threaten when the general interest of any group conflicts oppressively with the will of a member of it. There are outcastes, Quislings, writers whose works do not sell, people who resist the fashion in dress; and in many cases experience vindicates the hostility of the community so that we think of ridicule or punishment rather than persecution. But there are instances where the attitude of the group falls to be judged according to the interests or standards of some larger society, as when it might be held that a person should be treated not as being a Jew among Germans but as being one of the human race. It is not difficult to recognise the right of a community to protect both its existence and its well-being; but a highly developed organism will, judged by biological standards, involve highly developed individuality, and interests are bound at times to clash and accommodation must be arranged. Trouble might thus arise about private property, nudism, playing golf on Sundays, whereas no one questions the right of society to forbid arson and to compel children to learn the prevailing habits of religion or hand-writing. The modern tendency as far as concerned human society was to consider that the interest of the community would on the whole be furthered rather than injured by wide individual liberty; and as far as concerned thought, political or religious, it had come to be understood that the State might have to rest satisfied with conformity, since conviction and opinion are so related to the personal will that only by the subtle influences of persuasion can they in practice be affected. Not everyone has a mind of his own; most people's minds are flushed by the ideas of their time; but amongst those of developed intellect a man convinced against his will is of the same opinion still, or more so. But Totalitarianism lays all the stress upon society and not on the individuals of which it consists, and the possibility of persecution follows. Religious liberty is excluded.

It is, of course, possible to lean too far to the other extreme. Thus Lecky and Bury in their propaganda for rationalism appear to me to go astray in making liberty something which wins by

hostility to, departure from, victory over, authority, as if the good emerged from evil, as if there was something bad about the conservative instinct, as if laziness, fear, superstition, class interest, and general obstructiveness were the essence of the opposition to progress. I seem to find a corresponding defect in the recent evangelical publication, *Religious Liberty*, by M. Searle Bates, where liberty tends to be identified with the right and authority with the wrong. There is no doubt as to the existence of conflict; but I think it is of fundamental importance to realise that it is not a conflict between right and wrong, but a conflict between two rights. It amounts to the natural conflict between the instinct of self-preservation and the instinct of race propagation; between law and freedom. The essence of the situation is the balance, tension, polarity of two vital principles. Freedom is won, not by mere departure from authority, but in dependence upon, by means of and in collaboration with authority. The life process only wins by growing out from the past. Everyone would probably admit this, but it is often ignored in argument and it affects our problem. There has been over-emphasis both ways, and we have either the evils of intolerance or the evils of anarchy, death from over-sleeping or death from over-exertion. The ideal result depends upon a true accommodation, not a compromise, but a working tension.

This position may be simply illustrated. Musical originality is essentially built up on obedience, although its value may be said for us to lie in the success of its departure from this. We concentrate our attention on the new; but this is in fact inclusive of the old, which we take for granted and no longer applaud. A musician can obviously achieve nothing except in accordance with an ordered set of circumstances which provides his instrument and the rules and the discipline and the conventions from which he reaches out to freedom. Reason itself cannot afford to despise the multitudinous unconsciousness of the body, for this alone makes it possible. Intolerance may thus be merely the hostile name for the natural phenomenon that whenever a point of advance has been gained, nature fixes it in the determination not to slip back but to maintain what has been achieved; inevitably this fixing is obstructive to progress, and progress has to be made in spite of it, but plainly there is a co-operative process of moving and stabilising, of change and permanence. An illustration may be taken from language, for language aids progress

by facilitating expression of thought, but thereupon immediately begins to act as an obstruction to further thinking through the fossilising of thoughts in words. Words are both creative and obstructive in relation to thought. Similar is the conflict between truth and charity, between the determination of the truth-adherent that what has been won shall not be lost, and the determination of the charitable-minded that experiment and variety shall have their chance. We are so apt to be biased by a word like liberty that we may not think of the process as the gradual victory of order over chaos, while on the other hand we may be so obsessed by the glory of system as to forget Nietzsche's words: "Man muss noch Chaos in sich haben um einen tanzenden Stern gebären zu können."

Persecution has frequently been the work of organised society, the State, and has been ostensibly compulsion in the interests of peace and order, although it was difficult for those in authority to keep the balance between the right of some persons to protection and the right of others to self-expression. It has also proved far from easy to distinguish between politics and religion. Both were involved in the persecution of Jesus; and, though Socrates was put to death on a religious charge, political and social reasons are not far to seek. The early Christians had to defend themselves against the suspicion of disloyalty to the Emperor. It is doubtful whether Priscillian was martyred as a heretic or as an enemy of society. Much of the trouble about Romanists in Elizabethan England was due to their political intrigues. In the Killing Time of seventeenth-century Scotland Episcopalians regarded Covenanters as traitors, and thought of those who disliked bishops as potential subverters of monarchy. In our own time some at least of the hostility to the Orthodox Church in Russia was due to its association with obnoxious political forces. There was also the trouble which the Germans found in dealing with the Church in Norway, and there is the difficult position of the Hungarian Reformed minority in Czechoslovakia: one party may believe the issue to be political while the other regards it as a matter of religion.

State interference with religion to the extent of persecution has sometimes hinged on the problem of national unity and prosperity. It was understood that two religions within one State meant an unworkable situation; we are having new light on this problem in India. This was the basis of the Augsburg

"*Cujus regio ejus religio*"; and likewise of the opinion common to Francis I and Henry IV: "un roi, une loi, une foi." Queen Elizabeth aimed at a comprehensive and moderate Erastian Church settlement that would ensure peace and unity. Holland alone found economic advantage in liberty of thought.

Persecution was in some cases effective. Augustine was satisfied that Donatists could be brought over to the Catholic unity by fear of the Imperial edicts. Theodosius managed to drive the lingering Roman paganism almost out of existence. Islam by an exhibition of force drove multitudes to accept the faith, whose descendants are ardent Moslems. The use of violence under Louis XIV reduced the Huguenots to a very small minority Church. Romanist countries such as Austria, Spain, Portugal have long successfully restrained Protestant effort within extremely narrow limits, and that as much by petty irritation as by actual law.

On the other hand one reason for the abandonment of persecution has been its general failure to achieve its end. Sir Frederick Pollock has emphasised this. The Church in the time of Diocletian had become too extensive to be exterminated, and Constantine took the prudent course in seeking alliance with it. The sixteenth-century Politiques acted in a similar spirit believing that the Huguenots should be tolerated because too strong for annihilation. The Emperor Julian was clear that direct persecution was impolitic, and he accordingly tried subtler methods of attack. Tertullian long before had said that martyrdom was the seed of the Church. The martyrdom of Stephen was clearly a step to the conversion of Paul. Henry IV reminded James I that religion was "a flame which burns with increasing fierceness in proportion to the violence employed to extinguish it". In Scotland it was said that the "reek" of Patrick Hamilton infected all upon whom it blew. Believers also were confirmed by suffering. Basil spoke of persecution as God-appointed trial, declaring: "No one who shuns the blows and the dust of battle wins a crown." Sir Thomas Browne says of the Jews that "the persecution of fifteen hundred years hath but confirmed them in their error". Persecution is apt to produce an underground movement, extreme and desperate. Hugh Peters in seventeenth-century England wrote: "The chief means to increase an error will be by violence and opposition, when slighted it dyes." A hysterical and exhibitionist desire for martyrdom is also in

danger of appearing, as Clement of Alexandria was aware when he pronounced this to be suicide. Ecstatic results of another sort resulted from persecution among the Cevennois and the Quakers. The cult of the martyrs was one of the less edifying results of persecution in the Early Church. Gibbon and Bernard Shaw have dwelt on this folly; Vigilantius, greatly daring, had attacked it at the close of the fourth century.

Persecution by or within the Church was only too plentiful. Orthodox persecuted Arians and Arians in their turn persecuted Orthodox. The voice of Lactantius made almost the only protest as to the absurdity of it all. Augustine, though at first inclined to toleration, changed his mind and advocated compulsion. The Council of the Lateran in 1215 required rulers " to exterminate from their dominions all those who were branded as heretics by the Church ". We have Arnold of Brescia burned in 1155, John Hus in 1415, Aonio Paleario in 1570, Giordano Bruno in 1600. There is the whole terrible story of the Inquisition, and there is the fact of the Roman Index. The Reformation with its individualism did facilitate the possibility of religious liberty; but Protestants cannot but remember the harrying of Castellio, the tragedy of Naylor, the imprisonment of Bunyan and Baxter, the ill-treatment of Defoe, the civil execution of the youthful Thomas Aikenhead; the panic about witchcraft in England, Scotland, and Massachusetts; the slow process of emancipation of Unitarians, Romanists, and Jews in England and the religious tests that survived at the Universities till 1871.

Patrick Hutchison, speaking for the tolerant Relief Church in eighteenth-century Scotland, declared: " In that age of civil uniformities in religion, persecution and arbitrary power did not change its nature, but only shifted from one side to another. . . . The serpent was the serpent still. . . . When arbitrary power was employed to propagate Popery or Episcopacy, the Presbyterians viewed the monster in a proper light, and called it persecution; but when employed to propagate their own scheme, the unhallowed thing was sanctified, and received the venerable name of Reformation."

Persecution became unpopular along with all cruelty. A writer as early as Fuller records that " such burning of heretics much startled common people, pitying all in pain . . . and the purblind eyes of vulgar judgments looked only on what was next to them, the suffering itself, which they beheld with

compassion, not minding the demerit of the guilt which deserved the same." In the nineteenth century through the individualism of the French Revolution and the Romantic Revival the English conscience grew sensitive to social suffering, to conditions of child labour and city housing. Torture was no longer defended as it had been in the seventeenth century and is once more in certain countries. People became sensitive about ghastly forms of punishment; cock-fighting ceased to appeal; the writings of Dickens and Kingsley had their effect; and there was a general humanitarian tendency which to Nietzsche seemed degenerate softening. At the same time there was almost a worship of liberty revealing itself as *laissez faire* and both the rights of property and the rights of the people. " The core of Victorian economics ", says Arthur Bryant, " lay in the doctrine of unlimited contractual freedom "; and he quotes a French writer to the effect that in London, police will respect the liberty of skaters to the extent of watching them drown.

Religious persecution may be a form of self-defence and partly due to fear. There may be something that is tabu, a sacred ark which may not with impunity be touched, a sacred tree or image which must not be injured, a Shia shrine that may not be polluted by the presence of an infidel. As Tertullian records, any disaster at Rome might rouse the cry, " The Christians to the lion ". When Rome is sacked Augustine must write his *City of God* to relieve the Christians of blame. Or again the wrath of God appears to be vented in Scotland because professing Christians are attending worship under " indulged " ministers. There is that fear of the unknown and the instinct of " safety first " that makes one crush an insect as to whose capacity for attack one is ignorant, or leads one to vote against something new as Bolshevistic, a word coming in to spare us the effort of thought.

Most religious persecution involves the view that a given body of doctrine may be contrasted with all other teaching as true is with false; that this exclusive truth is plainly available as a result of divine revelation; and that it is in the believer's possession to be cherished and maintained as of vital importance for salvation. *Extra ecclesiam nulla salus.* All heresy is consequently anti-God opinion, and repression at any cost the only possible treatment. In the words of Ephraim Pagitt: " If such as poyson waters and fountains at which men and beasts drink,

deserve capitall punishment, how much more they, that as much as in them lyeth, goe about to poyson mens soules." As H. H. Henson points out, " Toleration can never really commend itself to men who believe themselves possessed of a divinely-ordained system."

This conception of Truth demands something like the *Book of Mormon* or the *Koran*, an authentic record with secret meaning intelligible to the elect, a deposit of faith once delivered to the saints, infallible, undeniable, complete and exclusive, a treasure or possession, a magic set of formulae, a separate substantial transmittable whole. We have the kingdom of light and the kingdom of darkness, the City of God and the City of the World, fundamentally separate, exclusive and antagonistic. Christianity was in this sense from the beginning entirely intolerant, as Judaism had been. Gibbon undoubtedly exaggerates when he contrasts with this the tolerant spirit of the ancient world of classical times; but Christianity stood out uniquely against compromise with paganism, though it was more eclectic than it knew. The struggle with Gnosticism made clear the difference between Christianity (as alone true and saving) and all other religions (which were devil-worship). The Church was a small group whose kingdom was not of this world, and who tended to hate the world, to take no part in worldly affairs, to flee from the world into solitude, to insist upon obeying God rather than men, acknowledging primarily another loyalty than that of the empire. Hilary regarded it as a great collapse when the Church began to glory in being popular, " she who could not be Christ's did the world not hate her ".

In the Middle Ages there was a unified view of society, with the State as servant to the Church. Heresy was treated as disobedience: a heretic, as Figgis points out, was " not a person who is in intellectual error but a rebel against ecclesiastical authority ". The only liberty that interested the Church was liberty from state control. Liberty of religious opinion was inadmissible, and unorthodoxy was treason against God: Thomas Aquinas calls heresy the worst of sins and deserving of death. Hence the Massacre of Saint Bartholemew approved by Gregory XIII, the treatment of the Moors in Spain, the Smithfield burnings under " Bloody Mary ". Liberty of conscience was explicitly denounced by Clement VIII, and has been described by a modern Romanist authority as " an abominable impiety ". The *Catholic*

Encyclopaedia says: " The Christian revelation is the supernatural message of the Creator to his creatures, to which there can be no lawful resistance "; " such compulsion as is used by legitimate authority cannot be called persecution, nor can its victims be called martyrs ", since they witness to their own sincerity but not to the truth. Romanism, while anxious for toleration in predominantly Protestant countries, is harshly intolerant wherever it is itself predominant; and when liberty of conscience is found to be advancing in Romanist lands, as for example in Latin America, it is in spite of clerical influence and largely through secularist tendencies.

Puritanism has acted from the same conception of Truth, and is open to similar criticism. Calvin, according to Stefan Zweig, one of his least appreciative students, " had been able to transform a whole city, a whole state, whose numerous burghers had hitherto been freemen, into a rigidly obedient machine; had been able to extirpate independence, and to lay an embargo on freedom of thought in favour of his own exclusive doctrine ". There was the burning of Servetus, the discipline of the consistory at Geneva, his most logical of theological systems, and the scholasticism which in Scotland and Holland resulted from his teaching. Balzac spoke of Calvin's " rabid religious intolerance "; and Beza followed his master so closely as to describe liberty of conscience as " diabolicum dogma ". In Scotland John Knox was clear on Old Testament grounds that the blasphemer must die and leaves us in no doubt as to what he includes in the term; Samuel Rutherford wrote fiercely " against pretended liberty of conscience "; Robert Baillie spoke of " this wicked toleration " and declared that the State could no more grant " liberty or toleration of errors " than it could support brothels, stage-plays and duelling. The Solemn League and Covenant pledged its signatories to " endeavour the extirpation of popery, prelacy, superstition, heresy, schism, profaneness and whatsoever shall be found to be contrary to sound doctrine and the power of godliness ". A similar spirit was shown by writers such as Thomas Edwards in England, by the dominant Calvinism of New England, and by the triumphant orthodoxy of Dort. " What concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? "

Amongst those who opposed a policy of persecution were some whom a practical issue drove to a theoretical position.

John Owen says: " I never knew one contend earnestly for a toleration of dissenters but was so himself"; and John Dewey in his *Freedom and Culture* asks: " Is love of liberty ever anything more than a desire to be liberated from some special restrictions? " while Cromwell pointed out that " everyone desires to have liberty, but none will give it ". Under stress of persecution a belief in toleration emerged: Milton's *Areopagitica* may be regarded as the classic of this type; but we must not forget that even Jeremy Taylor was in days of Episcopal triumph inclined to retract some of the *Liberty of Prophesying*. Obviously toleration with many was a matter of expediency.

Even some who, like Cromwell, really believed in religious liberty were unable to be completely consistent and drew the line at Romanists, Unitarians, Quakers. John Locke himself shows this defect. Rousseau was prepared to tolerate all but the intolerant. The experience of persecution, however, did on occasion lead to a genuine principle of toleration: thus Catherine of Bourbon, sister of Henri II, declared: " la liberté que je réclame pour moi, je la veux aussi pour les autres."

Hostile to persecution are also the sceptics. They should be distinguished from the indifferent who constitute to-day the commonest type amongst upholders of toleration, for indifference to theological or religious distinctions normally implies an opinion that such questions are practically unimportant. The sceptic is not concerned with the realm of importance but with that of truth, and he dislikes persecution as implying false views of truth. He has education, and has had experience of various Churches and perhaps an acquaintance with non-Christian religions; knows the difficulties about biblical criticism, translation and interpretation; has some interest in psychology; understands something of scientific hypothesis; realises that even those who sign the same formula will not usually mean quite the same thing; that language is a very crude instrument at the best, that a creed cannot be more than a symbol and that a religious statement is more closely related to poetry than to philosophy. Says Whitehead: " The duty of Tolerance is our finite homage to the abundance of inexhaustible novelty which is awaiting the future, and to the complexity of accomplished fact which exceeds our stretch of insight." Erasmus, Montaigne, Bayle, Voltaire, and Latitudinarians generally occupy some such position. Kierkegaard indicates one weakness of the sceptical attitude

when he attributes it to Pilate and writes: "Had he asked subjectively, the passion of his inwardness respecting what in the decision facing him he had in truth to do, would have prevented him from doing wrong." But the sceptic has no dealings with passion and is not at home in the realm of decision.

Quite a number of religious writers have imagined that the problem would be solved if Christians would agree to unite upon the basis of a few fundamentals. Richard Baxter was fond of the adage: *In necessariis unitas, in non-necessariis libertas, in utrisque caritas.* But a new problem immediately arises as to what are the fundamentals, and as to this no agreement has ever been made. Lord Herbert of Cherbury, John Owen, Roger Williams of Rhode Island, Madam Guyon, Schleiermacher and Von Harnack would produce very different programmes of union. John Forbes of Corse, the celebrated Aberdeen Doctor, writes: "In all indifferent things complete liberty is left in the matter of opinion"; but then is forced into a long and learned discussion as to what can rightly be called "indifferent". Most people prove so intensely concerned about the small sub-truth which they have uncovered, that they lose all sense of proportion. Points of difference bulk much more largely in the mind than what is held in common.

Ruffini holds that "to Socinianism alone belongs the glory of having as early as the sixteenth century made Toleration a fundamental principle of ecclesiastical discipline". Some credit must certainly go to Acontius. The Congregationalist Robinson of Leyden was far in advance of his time. Jordan emphasises "the positive character of Baptist devotion to the principles of religious liberty" and among works noted there is, of course, Williams's *Bloody Tenent of Persecution.* The Remonstrants of Holland were likewise critics of the policy of persecution, while Quakers, after they ceased to interrupt services and abuse clergymen, tended to a wide charity such as we find in John Woolman's words: "I found no narrowness respecting sects and opinions, but believed that sincere upright-hearted people in every society who truly love God were accepted of him." Such sects carried to an extreme the Reformation teaching as to the right of private judgment upon which Calvin had put a sufficient check through his doctrine of the Church. Religion was regarded as a purely personal matter between the individual soul and God. Nothing must be done to restrict the absolute

freedom of the Christian conscience. In an atmosphere of entire liberty it was confidently assumed that truth would prevail. There was, however, the danger of taking conscience to be a magical touchstone, and of allowing too much scope on the one hand to irresponsible and eccentric minds, and on the other to inherited prejudice, obscurantism, timidity, facile submission to family or local opinion. There is no virtue in mere differences as there is none in mere traditionalism. Further, some of those who condemn the use of " carnal " weapons have seemed to be ignorant of the nature of some weapons reckoned " spiritual," overlooking the influence of propaganda, of a strong personality, of a charming friend, of a well-trained revivalist, of a hypnotist, of public opinion, of economic pressure, of the books we read, the newspapers to which we happen to subscribe, and other " force " to which the individual soul is subjected and which he should be educated to test. The principle of love and charity is also capable of being carried too far, as is plain from the philosophy of Tolstoi. All distinctions may become meaningless, and we may find ourselves Pantheists.

Most of the early supporters of Toleration belonged to Troeltsch's " sect " type for whom the Church was a voluntary association of saved individuals. Small sects were sometimes far from tolerant, while on the other hand the national Church in England could produce not only Laud but Chillingworth. There came, however, to be a general opinion that separation of Church and State made for religious liberty. The issue is perhaps not so simple. It is open to question whether there is more freedom of thought and action in parts of the United States than there is in Erastian England; while Scotland boasts of an arrangement which seems to combine the blessings of national recognition of religion with the spiritual independence of the Church. States differ from one another so fundamentally that generalisation may be dangerous.

To-day the violence of persecution must be left with the Totalitarians, political and religious. Protestantism generally as a result of slow enlightenment rejects it, being satisfied that in principle it is contrary to the mind of Christ and that in practice it may produce subdued hypocrites but never converts. The institution of the World Council of Churches may be regarded as evidence of the prevailing attitude. Erastians may still be supercilious in England, but Nonconformity is at least " permitted

vice". Most Presbyterians have long ago surrendered the *jus divinum* claim and abandoned the "persecuting clauses" in their historic documents. Independency of many types has realised that man cannot live by antidotes alone, and that while uniformity has little to commend it, unity among Christians is a vital necessity. There is room for authority, for the voice of principle and conviction, for the refusal to condone suspected error. There is room also for charity and humility and the injunction, "Quench not the Spirit". The ideal may be expressed in the words of the Psalmist: "Mercy and Truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other."

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