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'Private Vices' and 'Public Benefits.'

By the Very Reverend W. R. Inge, D.D., Dean of St. Paul's.

'From whence come wars and fightings among you? come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members?'—Ja 4^{1}.

In the year 1723 Dr. Bernard Mandeville, a physician, published a book which became famous, called *The Fable of the Bees; or, Private Vices, Public Benefits*. The fable described a hive of bees, who after growing wealthy and great by the practice of fraud and luxury, agreed to turn honest and lost everything. This flippant essay provoked a reply from William Law, the author of the *Serious Call*, one of the most powerful and virile minds that the Church of England has ever produced. Of this reply John Sterling, a competent critic, says that it is 'one of the most remarkable philosophical essays he had ever seen in English.' Law does not argue at length that in the history of nations private vices have not been public benefits. He goes to the root of the matter by attacking Mandeville's thesis that man is only an animal, and moral virtue only an imposture; that human nature is but 'a compound of various passions, which govern him by turns, whether he will or no.' 'The province,' says Law, 'which you have chosen for yourself is to deliver man from the encroachments of virtue and to replace him in the rights and privileges of brutality; to recall him from the giddy heights of rational dignity and angelic likeness to go to grass or wallow in the mire.' Which is the truth? This estimate of human nature or that of the Book of Genesis: 'God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness'—'a declaration of the dignity of man's nature, made long before any of your sagacious moralists had a meeting.' What are we to say about the origin of virtue? 'In one sense it had no origin—that is, there never was a time when it began to be—but it was as much without beginning as truth and goodness, which are in their natures as eternal as God. But moral virtue, if considered as the object of man's knowledge, began with the first man, and was as natural to him as it was natural to man to think and perceive, or feel the difference between pleasure and pain. The reasonableness and fitness of actions themselves is a law to rational beings; nay, it is a law to which even the Divine Nature is subject, for God is necessarily good and just; and it is the will of God that makes moral virtue our law, and obliges us to act reasonably. Here is the noble and Divine origin of moral virtue; it is founded in the immutable relations of things, in the perfections and attributes of God, not in the pride of man, or the craft of cunning politicians. Away then with your idle and profane fancies about the origin of moral virtue. For once turn your eyes to heaven, and dare but own a just and good God, and then you have owned the true origin of religion and moral virtue.'

There are words and phrases here which belong to the eighteenth century and the controversy with the Deists. But Law's position is plain. The moral sense has an absolute sanction, being part of the nature of the God who made the world and what we call the laws of Nature. Morality or virtue is and always has been natural to man, who was made in the image of God; and his social happiness here, no less than his individual happiness hereafter, is bound up with his obedience to those higher impulses which are in truth the law of his being.

The theory that private vices are public benefits has seldom been stated so crudely and offensively as it was by Mandeville. But in its essence it has often been held, defended, and acted upon. It was the source of much of the optimism of nineteenth-century political thought. The business man, it was held, though his one aim in life is to make a fortune for himself or his family, is, by an admirable dispensation of Providence, doing the very best thing for his country and for the progress of mankind. In a State where every one is personally interested in producing and offering what his neighbours want, every one will get what he wants at the lowest price without appealing to those lofty motives which are inoperative in the majority of men. So competition is to produce all the advantages of co-operation, having itself the great advantage of being natural to man; for we all wish to make money, and we do not all wish to help each other.

Thus our grandfathers thought that some private vices were public benefits. The opinion seemed

plausible for a time; that was in fact the time when the nation was expanding most rapidly. But the beneficent consequences of keen competition were in a sense accidental, and were bound to be transitory. It was not realized that the same desire to make money which had created many useful and flourishing private businesses would after a time lead to great combinations aiming at monopolies; that the manufacturer would be swallowed up by the international banker; that the wage-earners would form their own combinations against the capitalist and consumer alike. Our grandfathers regarded competition as a contest in serviceableness; as we see it, it is quite as often a conspiracy of unserviceableness. Private vices and public benefits no longer pull together; they get sadly in each other's way.

Moreover, our grandfathers seldom contemplated that acquisitiveness would organize itself so completely as to turn a whole nation into a gigantic business Trust. Yet this was exactly what was happening in Germany, and it is the logical result of the maxim 'Private vices are public benefits.' The private ambition of one nation was defended as being really a benefit to the whole world which was to be drilled by it into greater efficiency. The Germans, however, knew that when their aims became manifest they would have to fight for them; and they determined to strike first. Hence the recent war. The private vices of nations—their patriotic aggressiveness and inordinate pride—have not proved public benefits; they have almost, if not quite, wrecked our civilization.

The doctrine which inspired Mandeville and incensed William Law has not been accepted without protest. Martineau declared that 'From "each for self" to "each for all" there is *no road*.' And Herbert Spencer pronounced the impressive warning that 'There is no political alchemy which can extract golden conduct from leaden instincts.'

But neither the warnings and protests of good and wise men, nor the terrible breakdown of civilization in the late war, have had any appreciable influence in weakening the widespread belief that through strife and envying, through hatred and malice, through greed and violence, we may arrive at a better social order than we have at present. The advocates of civil war naturally pour out the vials of their wrath against democracy, because it rests on the assumption that there is a common good which all citizens wish to promote, and a common law which all citizens must obey. They are equally hostile to State socialism, which demands a semi-military subordination of the individual to the State. The new doctrinaires assume an irreconcilable antagonism between classes, and hope to establish a new order by giving full scope to this antagonism.

We have not the slightest wish to identify Christianity with any one of the opinions on which good and sensible men are divided. But this particular type of political thought, by whatever name it calls itself, is flatly and absolutely unchristian. It has all the evils of aggressive militarism without any of the redeeming qualities which make soldiering a school of courage, discipline, and self-sacrifice. It tears to pieces the country which we have come to love as we never loved it before. It degrades human nature, and poisons all the relationships which bring men together in their working hours. And surely we must see that it is a short cut to national suicide. How can a house divided against itself ever hope to stand? What bond of union is there even between the various trades which may for a time combine for war against society? How can any good come out of broken contracts, dishonest work, organised terrorism, and callous cruelty?

Was not William Law quite right when he said that the root of the whole evil is an acceptance of human nature at its worst, and a blind hope that somehow or other chaos will evolve order out of itself? If we could not find better texts in the Bible, we might well go back to the Stoics, who bravely maintained that men are framed for co-operation, not for mutual injury, and that the law of Nature sanctions and demands a life of duty, obedience, and service.

What are the good things which we are not ashamed to desire for ourselves and our country? What are the things which we are not ashamed to pray for? In seeking these good things for ourselves or for others, are we driven inexorably in the direction of strife and war? Do we find that the pursuit of these things divides us into jarring and at last warring factions? Do these objects disintegrate a nation, so that it is useless to its friends and contemptible to its enemies?

On the contrary, we know that as soon as we live on the higher plane of our nature, as soon as we remember that we are children of God, redeemed by Christ, and citizens of a better world

than this; as soon as the prayer 'Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done,' comes to life in our minds and shines before our eyes as an ideal and a glorious promise, we are drawn together, irrespective of class and even of nationality. As fellow-workers with God we are all fellow-workers with each other; we have no irreconcilably discrepant interests, because we are all fellow-workmen, bringing, in St. Paul's famous picture, to the building of the Temple of God, the Temple raised on the only possible foundation, Jesus Christ—bringing the diverse materials which are our life's work, in the hope that the Master-Builder will find a use for them, and that they will stand the fire on those Days of Trial, when Christ 'is sifting out the hearts of men before His judgment-seat.'

We are tired of the word 'reconstruction,' but let us dwell upon it for a moment, since it is one of St. Paul's favourite metaphors, as in the passage which was in my mind. We have to rebuild our national house, which we hope is part of the Temple of God, to be built in co-operation by all the nations of the earth. Each of us has to bring a stone, a living stone, as St. Peter says; and these living stones are ourselves, as our characters find expression in our lives. 'Whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men.' 'Not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers; but in singleness of heart, fearing God.' Are we to be content to bring rotten materials to that building? How can any 'reconstruction' take place under such conditions?

Christ offers us peace instead of war—'Peace on earth, good will to men.' 'Let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also ye are called in one body.' 'In His will,' as Dante says in a famous line, 'In His will is our peace.' Peace, which we longed for during the four glorious and terrible years of national conflict; peace, which we have longed for even more ardently through the inglorious and degrading civil troubles of this year; peace is within our reach, and on easy terms. 'If ye be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above.' Believe that human nature is not the mean and brutish thing that it sometimes appears. Believe that we were not meant to hate and devour one another, but to help each other, forgetting all those foolish barriers of class and race and sect which Christ levelled once for all. 'Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.' Are these words true, or are they not? We know that they are true, so true that we have kept them bedridden in the dormitory of our souls, and have forgotten them. It is time to bring them out. 'Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light.'

Recent Foreign Theology.

Christology.

Professor Rade pursues his plan of treating the whole dogmatic field in his own practical and distinctive fashion. This is volume two of the whole work;[1] more accurately, perhaps, part two of volume one. Its subject is the Person and work of our Lord. He studies in order three efforts to read the secret of Christology. First, the Logos Christology, which ends, as he puts it, in a *cul de sac*, from which there is no escape save through the illegitimate bypath of Kenoticism. (This estimate of Kenoticism, I should tend to say, is overmuch preoccupied with the very vulnerable details of especially the earlier systems, without an adequate attempt to get at the *principle* of which they were more or less clumsy applications, but which wins the assent of every Christian heart, viz. the truth that God has stooped down to bless us in His Son, and has done so at infinite cost.) Next, the movement revolving round 'the historic Jesus,' which Rade declares (and proves) has sought to extract from historical research purely religious values which it can never yield. Thirdly, Christological speculation, elaborating the Christ-idea more or less in independence of the gospel record. His observations on the Logos Christology, though in some degree familiar, are weighty

[1] *Glaubenslehre:* ii. 'Christus,' von Martin Rade (L. Klotz Verlag, Gotha; 1926; Mk.4).