

## RELIGION OF HUMANITY.

The Western Republic.

Order and Progress.

## POLITICAL TRACTS.

## V.—EMPIRE AND HUMANITY.

*A Letter to The House of Commons.*

AS an English adherent of the Religion of Humanity, I venture to address a few words to you on the question which you have been especially summoned to discuss at the present time. As to the nature of that question there can be no doubt: it is in principle the most solemn and momentous that the representatives of a civilised and great nation could be asked to consider. It is a question of peace and war. You have been called together to give your sanction to the policy pursued by our Government in regard to the South African Republic, and to enable it to prosecute that policy to its natural end in a war of aggression and usurpation—the first war with a civilised state, be it remembered, which this country has waged for more than forty years. It is almost too much to expect that any words which may reach you now will induce you to withhold that sanction, yet to the English Parliament Englishmen may turn in the hope that its deliberations at such a juncture will at least be worthy of the nation for which it speaks—not hurried, not resentful, not passionate, but calm and far-sighted, and governed by the consciousness that England, great and powerful as she is, stands not alone in the world, but must justify her action in the Court of mankind itself. It is because I share this hope that I shall presume to ask you to consider the question of English policy in regard to the Transvaal, not as a special and temporary question, to be decided by a vote of money and a victory for the British arms, but as a question large and far-reaching, affecting the whole ordering of our national life, both in its relations with the other constituent parts of the world's civilisation, and in its own domestic progress. Practically, perhaps, this war which you are asked to sanction has been sanctioned already. It is too late to prevent it; it may be too late even to discuss it. When a policy which logically leads to war has been pursued for years; when that policy has been ratified by the open applause of some and by the acquiescence or indifference of others; when the passions of war have been appealed to; when the temper of war has been aroused; when the conditions of war have one after the other been created by acts of aggression, by words of provocation, by an interference which entails further interference, and advances which appear to make

retreat discreditable—then the war which comes, comes inevitably, and any protest against it—honourable and necessary as it may be—must seem only a useless effusion of barren sentiment. In such a situation we stand now. But if it is too late to speak against war with the Transvaal, it is neither too late nor too soon to consider the policy which has provoked the war, and which must be pleaded in its justification, if justification it can receive at all. That policy, I admit, is not Mr. Chamberlain's policy alone; it is not the policy of the present Government alone; in its essential motive and spirit it is—in degree, at least—the policy of both our great parties, and in principle it is not repudiated even by those who stand astonished and aghast in presence of the bloody consequences to which it leads. For the principle of that policy is the principle of empire; and it is to the working of that principle in our national life and in our international action that I now ask leave to direct your attention.

In doing this, I can plead no higher title to address you than that of an adherent of the Religion of Humanity, and my one concern must be lest I should fail to represent it in its spirit, its range of truth, its power of practical guidance. Even in the least capable presentation of it, however, something of that power will be seen, and I shall hope that any imperfection in what I may say will be ascribed rather to the failure of the interpreter than to any weakness of the doctrine. A Positivist who addresses you may at least claim that he does not do so under a mask of anonymity, that he is without personal bias or party prejudice, and that he represents, however inadequately, a religious and political construction which frees him from sectarianism, which exempts him from that arrogant patriotism that takes the form of national self-assertion, which imposes upon him respect for all, of whatever party, who worthily discharge the responsibilities of Government, and which derives its authority from the fact that it brings to bear on the large and complex questions of practical policy not only the definiteness and comprehensiveness of social science, but the greatest principle of universal order that has ever presented itself to the minds of men.

That principle is the principle of Humanity. I do not hesitate to speak this word to you, even at this moment. Not even now, when the madness of war has broken out amongst us; not now when men have been suddenly summoned from their peaceful occupations to become instruments of slaughter; not now when the gross voice of a bastard patriotism is sounding in our ears its cry for blood; not now when the calm strength of the English people has given place to the weakness of hysterical passion; not now when, in the inviolate security of our own land, we pronounce the doom of a distant nation; not now when we have so far forgotten the ancient temper of Englishmen as to arm that we may crush a people infinitely weaker than ourselves; not now when England, once famed throughout the world for her sympathy with struggling peoples, becomes herself an oppressor, and uses resources which she has won in freedom to efface the freedom of others; not now when our statesmanship is paralysed, and the lust of the market or the brutality of the

barrack room becomes the ruling motive of our national action: not now when we are entering on a war in which victory must be a curse for us and defeat an infamy—not even amidst the raging of this malignant fever of greed and hatred do I refrain from pronouncing to you the word Humanity.

You will not say that that word is without meaning for you. In its lower senses, at any rate, if not in its higher and nobler, it is a word which you cannot disavow. If it has not yet become for you a word of religion, at least you may accept it as a word of policy. If, in your conception, it is not yet highest for the life of the soul, it must, at any rate, be acknowledged as highest for the life of the nation. The time is long past when our statesmen could govern England as if she stood isolated and independent in the world. We boast that even the range of her Empire calls her into immediate contact with every people upon the earth. But Empire is not the only force, it is not the greatest force, which brings her into living relationship with all other countries. The development of industry, the course of the world's commerce, the steamship, the railway, the electric telegraph, the movements of the emigrant, the enterprises of the traveller and the missionary, the constant diffusion of ideas, the increasing intercourse of people with people—these are all influences which are rapidly enlarging the comity of nations, and bringing every individual country into presence of a vast range of interests and responsibilities from which it is impossible for it to dissociate its own. It must recognise that it is a member of a universal commonwealth, in comparison with which the greatest Empire in existence becomes insignificant. To that commonwealth we may rightly give the name of Humanity, using that great word in this connection not in all its spiritual depth and fulness, but simply as a word of politics, representative of the widest contemporary human relations. It is not an expression of sentiment only, it is a truth of sober policy to say that the conception of this commonwealth should operate as a guiding and restraining principle in the action of each of its constituent parts, and that a statesmanship which does not aim at preserving the peace of the world is now as much open to the charge of incapacity and shortsightedness as a statesmanship has long been which recklessly imperilled the peace of Europe. Not many years ago we all praised the utterance of an English statesman who declared that the "greatest British interest is peace." Surely the range of that idea may now be enlarged, and we can recognise not only that the greatest interest of mankind is peace—or, in other words, is the preservation of international order—but that the maintenance of the world's peace is just as clearly an obligation of practical statesmanship as is the maintenance of peace amongst those advanced nations of Europe whom Auguste Comte described as the "Western Republic."

In Western Europe we have had no war since the disastrous conflict of thirty years ago—a conflict the provocation of which would now be universally admitted to have been due to an insensate and criminal rashness. During that period the essential strength of the forces

of peace has been proved by the fact that even the existence of the vastest military preparations the world has ever known has not sufficed to tempt men into a war which it was universally felt would have been a war fratricidal and inexcusable. Moreover, within the limits of the western order itself, no new causes of conflict have arisen, and the activity of the old has gradually become less intense. Speaking generally, so far as Western Europe is concerned, what is sometimes called the principle of the *status quo*,—but what would be better described as the principle of international order,—has been accepted as a ruling principle of statesmanship and diplomacy, and neither in France, Italy, Spain, England nor Germany has the policy of a war of territorial extension or disturbance found responsible advocates. The new causes of conflict have arisen entirely out of the extra-European relations of the European Powers; they have resulted from the prosecution of a policy of aggression and unsettlement in Asia and Africa which our highest political wisdom has abandoned as contrary to the interests of Europe itself; they have followed upon the adoption of a standard of action in new fields of statesmanship lower than that which we long since learned to apply in the old. In other words, while a policy of settlement and order has been adopted for Europe, a policy of empire and encroachment has been adopted for Asia and Africa.

The consequences of this have not been long in declaring themselves. It is impossible to separate Europe from the rest of the world. A conflict between two European nations in Africa or Asia cannot be confined to those countries. The clash of interests which provokes it may be local, but the results of it are universal. It reacts inevitably upon their European relations, which themselves, in other respects, would remain pacific and harmonious. In this way a dispute about an African desert or the control of an Asiatic railway may imperil the highest results of civilisation; and two nations great in history, great in social progress, great in political advancement, great in intellectual culture, and having a wide range of high human interests in common may be plunged into a wasteful and bloody war, not to preserve any clear good of national liberty or international order, but to assert a title of priority in the spoliation of an uncivilised race. For eighty years England and France had lived at peace with one another. The memory of ancient quarrels had died out. They had borne arms together. They had laboured together. They had learnt from one another. In art, in science, in industry, in political action they had exchanged influences and ideas, and such rivalry as existed between them was only an honourable emulation in the field of progress. But there suddenly arose between them an ignoble competition in plunder and usurpation, arising out of the clashing of illusory interests in Egypt or the Soudan; and in a moment the harmony of almost a century was endangered and the world was barely saved from one of the most wanton and inhuman wars that has ever been waged. What is true in this instance is true in others. Within the last few years war has appeared to be imminent between England and Germany, between England and Russia,

and in each case the cause of conflict sprang not from the European relations of these countries, but from the assertion of unwarrantable pretensions by one or the other of them beyond their proper field of action.

But war and the constant apprehension of war are not the worst results of our Imperialism. It is a policy which poisons the English people. Under its insidious and fatal influence it is losing the characteristics which once distinguished it among the nations—a temper heroic and magnanimous, a generous passion for liberty, an instinctive horror of usurpation and injustice, a high-minded and ready sympathy with small countries struggling to shake off an alien yoke, a disposition to protect and shelter the oppressed, and that sober preference for peace which is the most fitting attribute of a nation of workers, conscious of its own strength, powerful either for defence or attack, and yet deliberately setting the ideals of domestic progress high above the false prestige and glory of war. These characteristics are in abeyance. To the noble zeal for national freedom has succeeded a greedy appetite for plunder and encroachment; the sagacious choice of peace as the highest of our country's interests has given place to a puerile delight in military display; for the strong and calm pursuit of our domestic development have been substituted the feverish expectations of the gambler in regard to the exploitation of conquered territories. We have called the democracy into counsel, and we have corrupted it. The boasted breadth of our Imperialism has narrowed the range of its sympathies, has intensified and hardened its egoism, has rendered it callous and insensible where before it was responsive to the higher human appeals, has developed in it a collective arrogance, impatient and resentful, has encouraged it to turn from the slow processes of truth to the hasty methods of force and violence, and has made its patriotism only an insolent assertion of the supposed interests of England against the claims of the world's commonwealth. In so far as statesmanship depends upon a nation's calmness, its patience, its breadth of outlook, its sense of responsibility, its willingness to learn, its capacity for self-restraint, its disposition to accept the labours and the burdens of progress, then our policy of Imperialism has rendered the tasks of government in this country infinitely more difficult than they were before.

What good have we to set against this sum of evil? We cannot say that our Imperial expansion is necessary for the development of our trade. Facts and probability both are against this view. The successes of English industry never have been, and are not now, dependent upon the victories of our arms. If the question of markets is to enter into the argument, let us be content with no less a market than the world itself. From this standpoint, I venture to say that we have obtained nothing by our policy of encroachment which we could not have obtained better and at smaller cost without it. But if it has brought no advantage to us who have prosecuted it, what are its inevitable effects upon those who endure it? We are accustomed to flatter ourselves that if we rob them of their territory and deprive them of their freedom, we give them in exchange the

blessings of peace and settled government. To them it may well seem that what we take is of more value than what we give, for they understood liberty better than the arts of British administration, and may be excused if they prefer the possession of their country to a peace which renders them aliens and slaves within its borders. They may be pardoned, too, if they begin to question the worth of virtues which we impose upon them, but make no attempt to practise ourselves. In China, the European Powers are exhibiting the methods of Western warfare to one of the most pacific and industrious of the world's peoples; all that the inhabitants of the Soudan at present know of us is that we are masters of a superior mechanism of slaughter, or perhaps that we were on the point of waging war with another civilised and Christian State, for the purpose of securing a monopoly in oppression; and at the present moment we are making clear to the native inhabitants of the Transvaal that the only difference between the whites and themselves in regard to war is that the latter have become consummate in the art of killing, and can wield the whole apparatus of civilisation to accomplish the aims of barbarism. Let us, at least, rid ourselves of our hypocrisies. The wars of a backward race, rude and savage as their methods may seem, are less odious, and carry with them moral consequences less fatal, than those which are deliberately planned by a civilised nation in the midst of its refinements, and in presence of a standard of human good which renders them a crime against its conscience.

But if the political advantages of our Imperialism are thus illusory, are those which follow from the propagation of our religion or the spread of our social habits more substantial? The truth is that it is easier for us to confuse the mind of the backward races with the unintelligible conflict of our creeds, or to debase them with the contagion of our immorality, than it is for us to raise them in the scale of existence. In spite of our platonic efforts to withhold from them the liquors which they see us indulging in ourselves, they will be initiated into our drunkenness more easily than into the ethics which condemn it, and they will fall victims to our profligacy more readily than they will understand our code of chastity. Our colonists and administrators are not saints. Our missionaries who go to proclaim the creed of the conqueror are the representatives of a hundred contending sects, and are ready at a moment's notice to call in the soldier to aid in the propagation of the gospel of peace. Wherever we go, we spread the disorders of our civilisation more surely and effectually than we can hope to disseminate its virtues, and we force our policy and our religion upon the backward races at the very time when we are losing faith in them ourselves, and when in every English city we see a chaos of sin and misery which is the despair of our philanthropy and our statesmanship.

A policy which is a constant menace to the world's peace; a policy which by a fatal reaction imperils the highest results of our European development; a policy which enslaves and demoralises those against whom it is directed, and which not less surely carries corruption into the nation that pursues it—this is the policy of Empire, and the war to which you are now asked to give your approval is only the latest of its evil products.

That war, indeed, is not immediately a war against an uncivilised race, but for that very reason it serves to exhibit more clearly the spirit which our wars with uncivilised races have engendered, and their inevitable effects within the circle of civilisation itself. It serves, too, to unmask the hypocrisy of our Imperialism. We cannot, in this instance at least, pretend that we are fighting to establish a settled Government, for we are fighting to overthrow one; we cannot pretend that we are fighting for the diffusion of our official religion, since the people whose independence you are about to destroy acknowledges the same God, and appeals to the same Scriptures as your own. We have thrown off our disguises, and are fighting for Empire pure and simple—for “suzerainty,” for “paramountcy,” for the profitable possession of territories which we have recently discovered to be valuable. Not in the black annals of our imperial development can we discover the records of a war so devoid of those higher justifications which the soldier was once able to invoke, so incapable of arousing the true civic virtues, so destitute of any appeal to that exalted and self-sacrificing patriotism which has sometimes made death on the battlefield sacramental. Do not suppose that those on whose behalf I am addressing you have no honour for military greatness when military greatness is associated, as in the past it often has been, with the maintenance of some grave interest of mankind. Few as they are, too, I make bold to say that if war could at any time be shown to be necessary, either for the defence of our own national freedom or to uphold the freedom of other nations, the call to arms would not be addressed to them in vain.

But not for any sanction for this war must you look to them. Both on grounds of scientific politics, which bid us regard respect for the integrity of every existing national unity as a principle of international order, and on the higher grounds of human brotherhood, their sympathies in this struggle will be with the men who have risen to resist our encroachments. We shall succeed, doubtless, in our enterprise. We have strength to crush this people. But the inspiration of patriotism, the wisdom of statesmanship, the zeal of the citizen, the true virtues of the soldier—nay the essential ideals of religion itself—will be on the side of the little community against which we are arraying the forces of an empire. We may destroy its independence; we may rob it of its territory, but of the glory of a last struggle for freedom we cannot deprive it. When the clamours of this hour of strife have ceased; when the angry passions to which we have appealed have spent their force; when we are no longer mastered by a vulgar vindictiveness or a hideous rapacity; when the English people is restored to itself, to that inherent and indestructible generosity, which nothing, as I believe, can long suspend; when shameful recollections and a humiliating remorse have taken the place of a savage exultation; when we can look back upon the carnage of the battlefield, and contemplate the waste and the desolation which we have caused; then, to the calm and universal tribunal of Humanity—for to no less an authority must we now submit ourselves—two statesmen will be summoned for judgment. One of them

will be he, who, being responsible for the conduct of a great nation in a time of international peril, used the arts of a demagogue to summon up its evil passions; who addressed to it no wholesome counsels of patience or restraint; who showed no consciousness of the nobler traditions or the higher obligations of English policy; who brought to a great imperial task no foresight, no measure, no sober proportion in speech or conduct, but only a narrow contentiousness, and a temper of ignoble provocation; and who so succeeded in confusing the spirit of the English nation as to induce it to be false to its proudest memories and make war for the subjugation of a free people. The other statesman will be President Kruger. He has, I suppose, made mistakes, and I am not now concerned to defend his domestic policy. But his position has been one of unexampled difficulty. He has been called to rule a small community, in the midst of a large native population, naturally and fiercely hostile. He has been face to face, on the one hand, with a constant influx of unfriendly aliens, supported by a great foreign State, and on the other with the jealous impatience of his fellow Burghers. He has been subject to incessant interference and pressure on the part of England, and he has had to defend his country against a wanton attack from without, assisted by a conspiracy from within, and condoned by those who had the clearest obligation to censure and punish its perpetrators. Under these circumstances, in measure and prudence of speech, in practical sagacity, in steadiness and calmness of action, in personal dignity, and in patriotic courage, the fairness even of a hostile Englishman must admit that he has not failed; and if to the verdict of the civilised world we are to make our appeal, then we may be certain that that verdict will be given rather on behalf of him who has shown such high qualities in the defence of a small nation than on behalf of him who has so signally failed to represent the virtues and the right purposes of a great one. It is time for us to ask ourselves whether the policy of Empire, which yields us such results, and forces us to such conclusions, really stands for the last word of English statesmanship.

MALCOLM QUIN.

*Church of Humanity,*

*Newcastle-on-Tyne,*

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