

TOPICS OF THE DAY

SPEECH: CONSCIENCE: JUSTICE: DEMOCRACY: PROHIBITION.

THERE is no greater impediment, no more constant menace to correct thought, than the very means by which thought is made possible. Without the faculty of speech it seems probable that man could not have risen far above the level of other animals. By means of it he not infrequently lowers himself, or is lowered, almost to their intellectual plane. Instead of making words serve to quicken and enhance his reasoning powers, he too often uses them to dull and becloud his mind or even to induce mental atrophy. To the overwhelming majority of human beings language is a mere inherited jargon, half understood or wholly misconceived except for the simplest superficial purposes of daily life. For all other purposes, so far as it mis-serves them, it is an *olla podrida* of catch expressions, invented or misconstrued for their deception.

When the poet sang of one of his generation as the "heir of all the ages, in the foremost files of time", he was unconsciously illustrating the foregoing. He was considering sound rather than sense. We of to-day are not the heirs of any past age, much less of all the ages, except in a very limited and mainly physical sense. We have profited, of course, by some of the simpler discoveries and experiences of those who went before. We have lost or are neglecting most of their abstract ideas. Some, we have travestied and distorted to our injury. We have abandoned languages in which confusion of thought and obscurity of expression were vastly less easy than in our modern speech. As to present-day Europeans or Americans being "in the foremost files of time" with regard to the Humanities or to anything but what is known as "modern science", Greece and Rome, not to mention still older civilizations, stand sufficiently clear in memory to give emphatic and effective denial to the assertion.

Language has been variously defined as "the means of expressing our thoughts," and as "the means of concealing our thoughts". A third variant might well be that it is "the most effective known means of avoiding thought". This is not to belittle in any way our own national language, although it must be admitted that with all its merits as a means of expression English, expansive as it is and better adapted as it also is to modern requirements, lacks the

exactitude of either Greek or Latin. This may be due to the fact that our knowledge of the two ancient languages is derived almost entirely from their literary use. It may be that the vernacular of either or both was as defective as ours. Be that as it may, it is certain that English originated in and has come to us through peculiarly trying times; and in its sweep, like a mighty glacier, across that portion of the world which it has traversed it has picked up, borne along with it and ultimately deposited as a verbal moraine, over which we constantly stumble, a veritable jumble of speech-fragments, of many different dates and localities, each burdened with ideas of its own time and situation, and each, therefore, a possible lingual stumbling block and rock of offence to us. During the formative period of English the greatest of religious, moral, legal, political and social movements were in progress. The words and phrases to which those movements gave birth became embodied in the language and remain frequently to confuse or misguide. They owe this effect, in part, to their forgotten or overlooked origin and in other part to the changes which time has gradually wrought in their signification.

To illustrate: an exceptionally able clerical lecturer was reported by the daily press, a short time ago, as saying that "There are practically only two great outstanding offences against *morality* as very commonly accepted—drunkenness and incontinency". "Why", he asked, "such a narrow code of ethics and morals?" That the reverend lecturer exactly understood what he was speaking about is clearly indicated by his coupling of the terms "ethics" and "morals", the one of Greek, the other of Latin derivation, but each meaning precisely the same thing, that is, social "custom" or practice, and neither of them having anything whatever to do with the idea which the ordinary person attaches to the words "morals" and "morality". If the lecturer, instead of reproaching their "narrow views of morality" had explained to his hearers, in the simplest possible words, the significance of "morality" as distinguished from sin and crime or misdemeanor, he would have done much better. He might have recalled that it has long been the custom to speak of the Ten Commandments as The Moral Law, whereas, in fact, they are, in form and effect, a Legal Code, supposed to have been promulgated by Jehovah himself. Almost every one of that code's enactments was sanctioned by the penalty of death for its violation. Drunkenness and open incontinence are not moral failings, in any exact sense of the word, although each of them is certainly reprehensible morally. They are primarily sins, and secondarily misdemeanors by civil legislation.

But that the intentions and aim of the lecturer were excellent is shown by his remark, after deprecating the narrowness of the popular view of morality, "We seem to have left out the lack of integrity, honesty, and kindness". In other words, largely through lack of proper instruction in and understanding of language, we seem to have left out of our popular view of morality the teachings and life of Jesus of Nazareth which were devoted mainly to verbal instruction in and personal illustration of morality. He had little to say about what we call "religion", or regarding a future life except that this life must be a preparation for it. "Morality" is neither more nor less than unwritten social laws—right conduct towards others, by those who must live together in this world. It is a matter of "conscience", and conscience is not a mysterious, indwelling monitor, but the acquired consciousness or knowledge of what is right or wrong with regard to oneself and one's fellows. The word "morality" may well serve as an outstanding illustration of the urgent need which exists of revising and correcting our phraseology in many spheres of modern life.

"CONSCIENCE", as indicated above, is another word sorely in need of explanation and right understanding. It has passed from commonplace birth, through myth, into semi-deification. It may be interesting to note that it was of twin birth with "science", the *bete noir* of "fundamental" ecclesiasticism. The Latin word, *scire*, to know, was the parent of both. "Science" took the downward path in its mother's exact name. "Conscience" began to climb skyward by simply prefixing *con* (*cum*), meaning "with", "together with", to its maternal *nomen*. *Scire*, unadorned, signified "knowledge". *Conscire* signified "with knowledge"—"according to knowledge." They have the same respective significations to this day—apart from theology. Yet theology frequently damns the former, while it peculiarly sanctifies the latter, of which it habitually speaks as "The Still Small Voice", *alias*, the voice of God, inwardly directing the human soul. There is not merely potential mischief in the word so distorted and wrested from its right meaning. There is monstrous wrong teaching. It removes the responsibility for personal conduct from the individual, with whom it properly and solely rests, and either places it, upon the mythical shoulders of an imaginary, indwelling, personal deity or fastens it upon the still more overburdened back of the Devil who is fabled to deal not in admonitions to virtue but in inwardly whispered "temptations" to wrongdoing. In other words, it

constitutes each human soul a private theatre of the eternal war between good and evil spirits which primitive men fancied as being waged in the outer universe as known to them. Is or is not this blasphemous, in effect, in these days of enlightenment?

The teaching of science, now almost universally accepted, is that the universe, as we know it, is the plan and work of a great Master-Mind whom human intelligence recognises by the name of God. Could there be such a thing as evil in His work? What men call "good" and "bad" are merely mental conceptions with relation to themselves. Evil, if anything, must surely be something positive, and must denote either malevolence or inefficiency in the author of it. Is it possible, rationally, to attribute it to a benevolent supreme deity? It is not only conceivable but scientifically evident that His work is eternally progressive. It is the apparent incompleteness of the part of it which meets our restricted vision that gives us the idea of imperfection, that men, in ignorance, call "evil". Such is the idea which has given rise to the notion of a perpetual struggle for supremacy being waged in the human soul between a benevolent spirit, Conscience, and a malevolent one, Temptation. This conception obviously removes all responsibility from the individual, who cannot be regarded, upon such a theory, otherwise than as doomed ultimately to become the conquest or the victim of one or other of the contending powers.

As shown clearly by its origin, the word "Conscience" has no such signification, nor should any such signification be thrust upon or accorded to it. It means solely "with knowledge". This is somewhat tautologically admitted by intelligent theology in the well-known phrase, an "enlightened conscience". Conscience is obviously a matter of external *enlightenment*—a matter of reason directed by experience or instruction. A babe born in a wilderness and growing to maturity there, without human contact—if such a being can be imagined—would be as devoid of conscience as the hearts of the field surrounding it. Conscience is an outgrowth of human society, the perception of what is good or bad for one's fellows with reference to oneself, and the apprehension of inculcated religious ideas.

It is not by any means in the theological domain alone that words are in need of constant revision and correction. Perhaps, however, it is in that domain rather than another that the necessity is most apparent, for theology is the oldest of the sciences, so called. It has the distinction of having originated before science,

as we recognise it, was born. It was cradled in complete nescience and nourished on confident but unprovable assertion.

In the legal field there is possibly quite as urgent need for lingual reform as in religious regions. For example, there is the fundamental word, "Justice", on which all legal systems are supposed to be based. What does it now mean, what has it long meant, in the minds of ordinary administrators of it, but "legal justice", a very different thing from moral exactitude? Yet the Latin word, *jus*, from which it is derived, signified primarily "right", and only secondarily "law", after the decrees of those who promulgated them came to be accepted as, of necessity, "right". Later, the word, in the extended form of "justice", took on a tertiary signification and came to be regarded by those associated with its courts as meaning strict interpretation of actual law. That may have been defensible while laws were primitive and simple in form. But when laws became more complicated, owing to multiplied social requirements, and more rigid through judicial decisions, which served as inexpugnable precedents, the matter took on a different aspect. Law was at last openly recognised, in England, as anything but justice, and fair-minded judges instituted, by means of "legal fictions" a system of "Equity" to correct in some degree the wrongs of the preceding practice. "Equity" was another name for what the word *jus* originally meant, that is, "right", or "fair play".

Of late years both the old legal system and the old equity system, which arose out of it, have been formally abolished by legislation, equity being presumed and assumed to be inherent in all forms of justice. But is it? If "law" were correctly understood, in its simple, original sense, as "right between man and man", it might be. If law were or could be made an exact science, if our British legal system were even a science of any sort, and not, as Tennyson correctly described it after long wrestling, as a student, with the hopeless intricacies of case law, "the lawless science of our laws", it might be more tolerable to those who live under it. As things are, justice and "legal justice" in our courts are two quite different and sometimes wholly incompatible things. This is probably why courts of law, however deplorable the fact may be, are popularly regarded as existing mainly for the benefit of lawyers and for the spoliation of litigants.

There is a vast difference, not only in the public mind but in fact, between justice in its original and proper sense and the "justice of the courts". There is a rapidly growing belief among the people that law, as a judicial game, may have all the excellence of perfectly good cricket as played by gentlemanly participants, but that it is

exceedingly dangerous for uninitiated, that is to say, for non-professional adventurers.

The laws of evidence, for one thing, have become so refined and so complicated, and are judicially interpreted so strictly that it is often almost impossible for a litigant to get his case clearly or comprehensibly presented to a court. This is perhaps more flagrantly apparent in criminal than in civil jurisprudence. It is more obvious at least to the public which too often sees guilty persons going scot free because of the exclusion of evidence that, if it were admitted, as it not infrequently should be, would ensure their well deserved conviction and punishment.

The law of evidence in particular, which is almost exclusively court and lawyer made, has long been in great need of revision and correction. It could be codified and restricted without serious difficulty. So could our whole civil-law system. It has been done in other countries with beneficial results. We already have our Criminal Code which works satisfactorily or might and would do so were it not for the laws of evidence which so often serve to thwart its intentions.

At any rate, Justice, in its original sense, has become a misnomer under our juridical system, and not merely the word but the thing needs re-interpretation for modern purposes and in order that it may take on a new lease of life and new social usefulness.

IS it necessary to remark that the name of the devil of political verbiage is Legion? In the field of politics the misuse of words is seen at its superlative worst. It would be a work of super-erogation to attempt to particularise. "Language" is there poured out in showers, in torrents, in floods, not to enlighten the minds but to stun the brains of electors. It matters little whether its words are etymologically correct or not. It is the multiplicity of them, not their inaccuracy or accuracy, which is destructive. Their ordinary use is neither to express thought nor to conceal thought but to prevent thought and stir popular ignorance into active imbecility. A specious "cry", however manifestly false it may appear to rational minds, is far more effective in an election than the most impressive facts or the most ineluctable arguments.

But what is the use of crying out against this legion of petty verbal demons while the effective author of their being and powers remains enshrined amongst us and is worshiped as our supreme political deity? "Democracy" is the parent, or rather the grand-parent of them all. For Democracy, when she had conceived,

brought forth Demagogy. And Demagogy, at term, gave birth to the multiple, linguistic devil whose name is Legion. Small wonder, then, when such a spirit enters into and takes possession of a modern electorate, that the units thereof are prone to emulate, politically, the self-destructive proceedings of the four thousand Gadarene swine!

Of all wrestings of words from their proper meanings, surely the case of "democracy" is the most glaring! It was originally compounded of two Greek words, *demos*, "the people", and *kratein*, "to be strong", from *kratos*, "strength". Its signification was "people-power", rule or government by the people. By implication the second word of the compound connoted a "strong" people, a people fitted to govern. With us it has come to mean exactly the opposite, that is, the reign over their more intelligent fellow citizens, by mere force of numbers, of the most ignorant and therefore the weakest people who, from the Greek point of view and from any rational point of view, are mostly quite incapable of wisely governing even themselves.

In Greece the number of theoretically "strong people" was restricted. Politically, they constituted an oligarchy rather than a nation. Probably the mass of the people were slaves, or little better than slaves. No one ever thought of such a thing as allowing them a voice, much less a controlling voice, in the government of the country. It took two thousand years of "western progress" to beget the brilliant idea that ignorance is no bar to the exercise of governing functions, and to sublimate that idea into its present form, that, as a great English poet puts it, "Only those who cannot read can rule".

We owe this conception, and its consequences, entirely to successive broods of "practical politicians". They are just now putting the keystone on the constitutional fabric they have reared upon it, in England, by enfranchising girls at twenty-one, for no better or other reason than that they senselessly and recklessly enfranchised all boys at that age, years ago. We in Canada, with the usual sane exception of Quebec, being so much less "effete" than the Old Country, preceded them in this respect by several years. Only our cattle and our infants are now excluded from participating in the glorious privilege of "self-government". Ever since 1832 successive groups of politicians have been engaged in "setting the bounds of freedom wider yet"—for themselves—by gathering in ever-increasing bodies of electors whose votes they hoped to win by bestowing on them the franchise, regardless of whether they were likely to exercise it intelligently or even sanely.

We may be thankful for at least one thing—they have now done their worst, for as far in the future as can be seen. Not a single soul, male or female, has been made better or happier by their past operations. The country is obviously vastly the worse. Its now downward directed path leads visibly towards a constitutional precipice. Its future guidance has been committed directly to the keeping of the mob, the most irrational and dangerous of all human aggregations. The world has learnt by long and bitter experience what is the invariable outcome of that. Mob-rule means the sway of demagogues.

The mob only follows such as it can push ahead of it in the guise of leaders. This affords the demagogue his coveted opportunity. He systematically stirs up the passions of those whom he would lead and then graciously allows them to come and "take him by force" to make him their uncrowned king and director. It would be as great folly to expect sane judgements on public questions from an electorate such as Canada now has and Great Britain will have before her people are next summoned to the polls, as it would be to anticipate reason or altruism from a panic-stricken crowd.

Overlook it or try to conceal it from ourselves as we may, our British countries, and many other countries too, are at present in the political keeping of the most ill-fitted and incapable of their peoples. Only a very small percentage of any population is capacitated by nature or education for the exercise of political power. That percentage is always envied, and usually disliked, by the masses beneath it, which will not select its leaders from among them. It will have none of their guidance. Its self-elected leaders will carefully foster its prejudices by constantly flattering them. They are already and for years past have been at this work. For that purpose they have even read into the word "democracy" a still more demoralising meaning. The up-to-date demagogue, in making his appeals, no longer wants to be understood, when he proclaims himself "a democrat", as expressing his political faith. Far from it. He intends to convey to his hearers that he is a hyper-"plain" person, one of the mob, in short, strictly on a level with the commonest of the "common people" to whom he is appealing.

Should the modern demagogue happen to be more or less educated he must help nature to disguise the fact by the "commonest" of "common speech". He must run counter to no such notion, however ill-founded or vicious it may be. He must deny or conceal the truth should it be in any degree "unpopular". He must be all things to all men that he may by all—or any—

means catch some votes. He must never disclose the least desire or intention to lead. That would be fatal to his ambition. He must persistently teach his flattered dupes that the less they know about public affairs the better are they fitted to pass judgements concerning them, and the gladder will he be to abide by their decisions.

This is a frank, is it an exaggerated statement of what politics have already come to, under modern democracy and its inevitable accompaniment, blatant demagogy? What would the Greek originators of the word have thought could they have foreseen its present distortion and perversion? They believed that people capable of doing so wisely, should rule instead of being ruled by and for the pleasure of a despot. That was as far as they went or intended to go. The idea of setting up the ignorant masses of their compatriots to rule over them would have been even more repugnant to them than the willing acceptance of a usurping tyrant. The people of the Italy of today are showing practical agreement with the ancient Greeks by acceptance of the overlordship of Mussolini in preference to such a "democratic" regime as was theirs before him.

There are many signs that a general uprising against "democracy" as it has been established is not far distant. Voice is being given to rational and patriotic thought in many quarters. Of course that voice will be drowned for a time by the outcries of the priests of the fetish of Democracy. But common sense and common interests must prevail in the end over unreason and self-seeking claptrap which have at last reached the limits of absurdity and far passed the bounds of public sanity.

FROM the linguistic *terrains* of theology, morals, law and politics one enters naturally the no-man's land of Prohibition. Its supporters will probably correct this characterisation of their besetting idea with the assertion that "it is every-man's land", not because they appeal for it sometimes on religious grounds, sometimes on moral, sometimes on legal, sometimes on political grounds, but because they are *the* people, and it is their very own idea, therefore not to be profanely classified or irreverently handled.

Their primary appeal is usually made on religious grounds, because, for example, of a remark of St. Paul's concerning meat offered to idols, and because the first murderer of record is alleged to have impudently asked if he was his brother's keeper after having deliberately murdered that brother. Their non-logical but cheerful

conclusions are that none should be permitted to drink because a few drink to excess, and that all who do not favour the legal prohibition of the manufacture and sale of liquors are chargeable, spiritually as well as spirituously, with the deaths of such as may or do drink more than is good for them. When it is pointed out that this conclusion of theirs bears an indistinguishable resemblance to a *non sequitur*, they promptly shift to moral ground and assert that liquor-selling is against good social habits and should therefore be suppressed by law. When told that law is not concerned with the social habits but with the public conduct of people, they take their stand on the political fact that a prohibition law has been enacted, and that all good citizens are therefore bound to uphold it.

With so many loopholes of escape and so many open spaces for squirming and doubling on themselves, it is as vain to attempt pinning them down to reason as it is to hope to convince them by concrete facts. All that is intended at present is to point out that their hobby is misnamed.

To prohibit is merely to forbid. What they apparently want to do is to prevent. They actually claim, in spite of obvious and unmistakable evidence to the contrary, that their law is preventing while it is quite unmistakable that it is merely forbidding. And to forbid by legislation that which cannot be prevented, at least to a reasonable extent, is manifestly demoralising to all concerned.

It is reminiscent of a story which used to be told by a Nova Scotian school inspector, since deceased, who, by the way, was a strong Prohibitionist. He was visiting a very large rural school in which he found almost every one of the pupils not merely visibly but audibly chewing gum. Now it happened that gum-chewing was excessively obnoxious to this particular inspector. But he bore up manfully in the hope that time, or the exhaustion of the chewers, would bring relief. The hope was vain. So, at last, he turned to the unperturbed master of the school and enquired severely: "Do you permit your pupils to chew gum in class?" Taken completely aback, the master began a surprised, long-drawn-out and hesitating "Y-e-e-s". Then, suddenly realizing the situation, he thundered: "No, sir; *I have prohibited it*". Almost to a certainty he had. So the manufacture, sale and legal consumption of liquor has been "prohibited" in the United States and parts of Canada.

There could be no more crushing indictment of so-called democracy than the enactment, with its nominal consent, of such a law as prohibition. It not only exposes the iniquity of "voting-

majority-rule" in the name of democracy, but it reveals how easily a majority can be trumped up at almost any time by an aggressive, organized minority thoroughly equipped with the means of propaganda; and how difficult it is to undo their ill-considered work.

There is no more able or responsible journal in the United States than *The New York Times*, which summed up the prohibition situation among our national neighbours, a short time ago, as follows: "Counsels are divided between modification of the Volstead Act and repeal of the Amendment. When is the time for either to be ripe, if, to avoid a 'fight in the convention', both parties close eyes and mouths to the one imminent and vital subject most passionately and constantly discussed by most Americans? Whatever appearance of concord may be juggled in conventions, there is implacable war outside, in both parties. The hypocritical silences of platforms are but another reminder of the long hypocrisy of prohibition. The perpetual serial of prohibition enforcement is futility, corruption, murder, violation of the rights of the citizen; sapping of respect for law, degradation of morals; Pecksniff in Congress, Bill Sikes on the highway".

The case has not been as bad as this, in all respects, in any of the Canadian provinces, most of which only experimented with prohibition for a few years to drop it thereafter. But it has been fully as bad in some ways, because no serious attempt was or is being made to enforce it. Demoralisation enough has flowed from that fact, without the violences and outrages which have characterised mainly futile attempts at enforcement in the United States.

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