

Modern Civilisation.

The subject which I chose last week lay on the border between ethics and metaphysics; but I have decided not to pursue it nor anything of a similar nature. I have thought it an advantage to leave for once our feelings ~~undisturbed~~ ^{slumbering} within our heads, the meaning and traditions of the society ^{slumbering} within the ark, and the hierophants ^{slumbering} within their palaces. ~~But~~ ^{Yet} if I am to maintain these several bold resolves, the ground upon which I may tread is circumscribed. There is left me one spot - the borderland between ethics and the phenomenal world - and there it may turn out that I have nothing to say.

What I shall discuss in the end I cannot promise; what I intend to speak about is this - the real as opposed to the phenomenal meaning of modern civilisation.

It is rarely and with difficulty that we can envisage the incredible change which has come and is coming over the face of society by the agency of what is known as progress. We take these things so much for granted, it is so platitudinous and banal to call attention to them after the manner of the preceding sentence, that we forget them as we forget all daily miracles. It is the sun's eclipse and not the nightly wonder of the stars on which we focus our amazed attention. We also feel that these changes have been going on fast enough all through history and little enough real difference have they made. That is partly true if it is applied to the past, but to the present doubtfully.

I am sure that the present change is a real change; not like the progress

from the eighteenth to the nineteenth dynasty of the Egyptians, but a critical change which is liable to transform what seems most fundamental in the past.

The whole fabric of phenomenal society is being shaken; the mould in which it is cast, the traditions and the prejudices by which it is supported, the duties it involves are passing away.

Our duties may be changing: it is that which I wish to investigate.

Since the time of Moore we have known that our ultimate goods are ~~eternal~~ ^{eternal} and unchanged, sitting at the right hand and at the left hand of God before and behind throughout all time, founded in the nature of things and of goodness, ~~to man~~ made for man but not by him, the unalterable beacons and rewards of all his efforts. But we have also known that it is not by reference to these alone that our duty is determined. What we ought to do is a matter of circumstance; metaphysically we can give no rules.

~~But what we cannot do much~~ But where metaphysics is unavailing, the guidance of practice does not altogether fail us. There are rules, which though not immutable have nevertheless so wide and general a validity that they ought to be obeyed as universally as if they were themselves universal. We may accept the experience of the race in certain matters - in fact we ought so to accept ^{it} and not all cases of action ought to be decided by us individually.

We shall do well, as Burke says, to avail ourselves of the general bank and capital of nations and of ages.

It is out of this that arises that class of actions commonly known

as duties. Duties, in fact, I am defining as those actions not good in themselves but ~~are~~ so generally recognised to be useful as to claim our performance on all occasions irrespective of particular circumstance. These are the Ten Commandment type of duties, family duties, social duties, public duties.

What I wish to suggest is this — that there is and is coming a Revolution in duty. We may have reached a ~~critical~~ point in some matters where the general bank and capital operations and of ~~yes~~ is no longer useful to us.

So great a change may have hold of the Social Organism that in a hundred years there may be a revolution in duty greater than in the previous thousand.

Let me quote Burke again; for he expresses most clearly the very quintessential opposite of what I wish to maintain. There are few to-day who would go the whole way with him; but it is nevertheless rather with him than with me that most Englishmen ~~after~~ would choose to travel.

'Four hundred years have gone over us; but I believe we are not materially changed since that period.. we have not (as I conceive) lost the generosity and dignity of thinking of the fourteenth century; nor as yet have we subtilized ourselves into savages.. Atheists are not our preachers; madmen are not our lawgivers. We know that we have made no discoveries, and we think that no discoveries are to be made, in morality, — nor many in the great principles of government, nor in the ideas

of liberty — We fear God; we look up with awe to Kings, with affection to Parliaments, with duty to magistrates, with reverence to priests, and with respect to nobility. Why? Because, when such ideas are brought before our minds, it is natural to be so affected!

I do not think that it is savage we have subtilized ourselves into, but we have subtilized ourselves far from the fourteenth century; and very little indeed will the primary duties of the future have to do with the gods or Kings or priests or noblemen who may have borne so real a part in the fundamental duties of the past.

If we are in labour over such a change as I am fancying, the cause plainly does not lie in any change in human nature. The differences in kind are due to the differences in the scale of the social organism. It is well known that ~~a model~~^{an} engine on a small scale will work, where a larger ~~or~~ constructed on the same model will fail. We use different contrivances to lift a letter and to lift an elephant. A change in scale may revolutionise our method. In social life duty is our method, and with a ~~for~~ ready difference in the organisation of social life duty may change.

The cause is partly intellectual, but more what is commonly called economic.

It is impossible to study the industrial development of America during the last ten years on lines ~~which~~ which are already beginning

to be introduced into Europe, without the reader's feeling that he has been transported into a wild and wonderful universe, where his old codes are broken, simply because they do not apply. A vast mass of human energy must necessarily be devoted to the production of the essential accessories of a modern human existence; and the colossal mechanism, directed yet uncontrolled, by which this energy is applied calls forth new duties and new moralities between members of different grades of production and between merchants and customers. The ^{old} ~~semi-personal~~ relations of the past are gone. According to the business principles ^{and duties} of the past Mr. Rockefeller and Mr. Carnegie are scoundrels; they will probably be scoundrels according to the business moralities of the future. But they, poor men, have been helpless; the duties ^{they} ~~were~~ taught, were impossible of performance, and useless as well; the code of the future has not yet been built up out of experience. Altogether new duties between buyers and sellers, whether of labour or commodity, must obtain in the future.

If America, which we have not seen, is incredible, London which we know is yet more overwhelming.

Even Burke ^{if he had seen} ~~seeing~~ its sordid splendours, its dirt and its beauty, and its incredible multitudes, the ~~complex~~ ^{strange} ropes and coils of wire passing mysteriously high above the thoroughfares, and the thousand sights and sounds which ~~but such a~~ ^{cast so strange a glamour} ~~and~~ ^{forbade} and ~~fill the~~ ^{forbade} such enduring excitement, must have admitted that whatever we may have gained we have lost

as irrevocably as we have lost yesterday the modes of thinking and of action that were more fitting in the fourteenth century. London is more than she was when she appeared as the busy hive of industry and navigation, the creation and the servant of merchants and kings. She has the awful grandeur which we most naturally associate with the unresisted display of natural forces.

And for whether for good or for evil she is making the social and family duties of a village or a country town ~~as~~ ^{as} irrelevant as ^{they are} ~~as~~ impossible. The right relations of those living in small communities to their neighbours and their families are changed: what was natural before has ^{now} become unnatural.

In all respects the ^{whole} world is becoming increasingly the unit of our observation; many of the boundaries between nations are being broken down; problems that could once be ^{read} ~~be~~ usefully from a local point of view are fast becoming world problems.

In all the fields of knowledge and action boundaries are being broken down with a rapidity to which there is no kind of parallel whatever in the past history of the world.

The field that is relevant for any individual has grown; but the individual has not grown in proportion; each human being ~~is still~~ must always be our unit; he bears an altogether different relation to his field.

The length of an epoch grows less, but the life of an individual does not grow longer.

This paper is deliberately and necessarily vague. It may be possible, a hundred years hence, to ~~write~~ investigate for the Buxton Prize the influence of railways on morality. All we can do, for the ^{present} ~~present~~, is to point out how momentous this influence may ~~be~~ prove to be.

We, moving for the most part in a narrow circle and an academic atmosphere, tend to turn introspectively to the permanent feelings and emotions, or outwardly to the changelessness of beauty, or ^{casually to} the amenities of our immediate surroundings, or retrospectively to the past, or scientifically to permanent truths.

We prefer to analyse and to discuss ends; we have not very much to say about means and duties. We know ^{and} our elders and the outside world are used to fuss about those matters; and we ^{are} inclined to think their condignities and their methods ^{alike} ~~absolutely~~ irrelevant; they seem to worry about abstractions. And we are, I still maintain, most often right. But we cannot, for that reason, ignore the outside world, real life — London and New York and Paris and Vienna, where fortunes are made and tragedies enacted, where men really help one another and go to prison for it, where ^{some} ~~men~~ are hungry and where others ~~men~~ are cruel and rapacious, not because they are wicked, but because they are in the grip of the machine. We are not in the grip of the machine, but we ~~do~~ consume its products; we have hardly any duties, as I understand

the word. We can ~~see~~^{feel} enough to perceive that many of the old moralities ~~are~~ may be unfounded.

Heaven knows what the new moralities are to be.

It is to be expected that we ~~shall~~^{will persist} desperately - and by we I mean others - cling on to the old, after they are demonstrably absurd.

But I cannot believe that family relations, or business relations, or political relations will subsist much longer with any sincerity or useful purpose, unless we remember that all duties are with respect to time and place, ^{and} that sometimes old duties must go to be replaced by new.

Before I meander to 9.30 and my end, I would consider some of the changes which seem ^{to be} rather intellectual than economic - though the ultimate cause of both may be the same.

There is, I think, a great contrast between our public and our private life; there seems a kind of semi-publicity about all our forefathers thought and did. We seek for and obtain a far deeper intimacy than they ever contemplated; and at the same time publicity ~~is~~ now means publicity with regard to an always widening circle.

Their inner unit was large and their outer unit smaller than ours. The increasing publicity of publicity drives us by contrast and reaction into an increasing intimacy of

intimacy. We have more secrets from the world and fewer from our friends. We have less timidity and greater shamelessness of mind in the range of our inquiries, of our feelings, of our search for beauty.

I can scarcely believe that my grandson will take part in as many conversations which it would be palpably ^{impossible} for me to overhear, as I enjoy which nothing would induce me to disclose to my grandfather or to the grandfathers of any persons whatever whom I have known or dreamt of.

I am convinced that we live at a critical moment, or rather as we are fifty years before our time before a critical moment: ~~as we are near the end of our~~ there will be more real kinship between us and our descendants than between us and ~~our~~ those ~~descendants~~ who have gone before.

The old world which took its rise at the dawn of civilisation is at last passing away. There were great transitions, ~~at~~ about the time when Jesus Christ died and was buried, when the mediaeval world superseded the Roman, when the mediaeval world itself gave way. But the greatest transition of all will be ~~noted~~ seen, I think, by future rhetoricians and historians, in the two or three centuries which ^{will} have succeeded the industrial ~~rev~~ and the French revolutions - a long period of continuous & far-reaching ever accelerating change.

Our goods will remain as they must always remain, but our duties will change. The first and the greatest prophet of ends,

Plato, will remain the prophet of those who live apart from the machine.

But in the Kingdom of morality and duties the Galilean will himself be conquered, not by words or argument or proof, but equally with his predecessors by the irresistible trend of human affairs and the need for an adequate and relevant morality. He will be superseded rather than destroyed; for there must be a limit to the allegorical sophistic of his high priests: and men, though they will not read Principia Etica, will come to see that while the good is changeless and apart, the ought shifts and fades and grows new shapes and forms.