

inferences be drawn—the hundred meetings held on Monday and the hosts that flocked to them, gave no pronouncement upon the value of theism or the respectability of atheism, but they spoke upon a simple question of rights. They said: which comes first, the popular election or the oath? And the answer was, the popular election—that must hold, and the House must itself find a way to get over any other difficulty. Of course, the people come first. If they wish to establish and endow a church and call it national, they do it; at their pleasure they can undo it all again; if a constituency chooses to elect a man to oppose and endeavour to overturn the present constitution they are free to do it. The electors have not been required to take an oath, and until that is imposed upon them it is easy to see that Bradlaugh may get into parliament.

Instead of this ignoble yielding so as to allow Bradlaugh to affirm, it would have been greatly better and more dignified to have abolished the oath altogether. There is a tendency everywhere to divorce politics from religion. The state and church idea was good when it was held that government was in some sort under, and representative of the divine will, for then an oath was a recognition that heaven had revealed laws for earth—but now all that is changed, and only a few old fashioned people can be got to believe in anything but the divine and eternal right of majorities. The member of parliament understands that he represents the majority of his constituents, and has to work in the interests of his party, which form the centre and circumference of his obligation, and an oath cannot shift the one nor enlarge the other.

And for the matter of that—of what value is an affirmation? Mr. Bradlaugh simply declines to bind himself to do certain things and support certain institutions in the name of God, but he is willing to “affirm” that he will do those things. But he enters the House intending to oppose those things with all the might of his influence. So that the affirmation is just as much a “solemn mockery” and a lie as the oath would have been, and as it is evident that neither oath nor affirmation can be made to assume the form of a practical moral obligation. The only true and practical method of dealing with the case is to abolish both, and let it be understood that the M.P. represents his constituency.

As it now stands, or will stand when Mr. Gladstone has succeeded in persuading his Cabinet and the Liberal party not to play into the hands of the Conservatives in this miserable Bradlaugh business, the Atheist is permitted to assume a position for personal integrity infinitely superior to that of the ordinary Christian. He must put himself under an oath! He must swear in the One Name which fills Heaven and earth that he will keep his word and do his duty; and in some undefined but real way it is intended to convey to his mind that the violation of his word will impose upon him some terrible punishment on the part of Him whose name has been lightly treated; while it is assumed that the Atheist is in no need of such obligation and help to make him speak truth and do right, his own moral sense being a sufficient guarantee. This is a difference with a most obvious distinction. What an edifying sight! Mr. Gladstone appealing to Heaven for help, and promising in the name of Him who holds his destiny in His hands to do his duty, and Bradlaugh—friend and companion of Mrs. Besant—merely giving his word. It is too ridiculous.

If I were a member of the British House of Commons when Bradlaugh takes his seat upon a simple affirmation, I should demand to be allowed to withdraw my oath and make an affirmation, in like manner,—for I would not acquiesce, even tacitly, in the assumption that the bare word of an Atheist is more binding than the bare word of a Christian. I would not go through an act which is a positive declaration that my personality is less in the matter of morals than that of any of the Bradlaugh kind.

The same reasoning holds in the matter of taking the oath, or affirming, in a Court of Justice. If it has been legally decided that an Atheist can give evidence without taking the customary oath, then

it is the right of every man to refuse to take an oath and demand that his evidence be accepted upon the ground of his own sense of truthfulness. Surely it is an anomaly and absurd upon the face of it to say to a man: You believe in God, that He has laid moral obligation upon you to speak the truth; you believe that He can and will punish in this world or in the world to come, a violation of the law of truth if you swear in His name to observe it—we require “the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth” therefore swear by the sacred name of God that you give a recital of facts in fulness and in truth as you fear hell and hope for heaven:—and to another: You do not believe that there is a supreme Being who has laid it upon man as an obligation to speak the truth and so promote righteousness—you have no fear of punishment or hope of reward to influence you—but we require the truth from you—declare that you will speak the truth and we shall trust you and execute judgment upon your evidence. It is high time that Christians should assert the value of Christian manhood as against atheistic manhood—and for one I am determined that if ever I have to give evidence in a Court of Justice I shall enquire if the law permits *any* man to affirm and not swear? if it does I shall not take the oath, but give my simple bond.

All Europe is to be congratulated on the fact that Turkey has announced her intention to resist the terms of the Berlin Conference, at any rate so far as the cession of territory to Greece goes, and the work of internal reform. This means the destruction of Turkey in Europe, for at last the Powers are agreed together, and have announced their intention of having the terms of the Conference carried out. It is hardly likely that the Turks will at once take up arms to defend their territory and their political and moral vices, but they will try again the old policy of postponement and *non possumus*. It will not avail. This time England and Russia are in harmony—as they should have been long ago—and Turkey will be compelled to respect the voice of the Conference, and reform or die—about the same thing, so far as Europe is concerned, and probably regarded as about equal penalties by the vice-loving Turk.

Sir Bartle Frere is a thorn in Mr. Gladstone's side. As a matter of personal friendship, and under a plea that it was necessary to continue him at his post until the South African Confederation is completed, he was maintained in office notwithstanding the strongly expressed opinion of the majority of the Liberals that he should be recalled. Of course, Mr. Gladstone hoped that Sir Bartle would rescue him from the awkward position by tendering his resignation, or justify the step by some achievement in diplomacy; but he has done neither the one nor the other. He appears to be utterly incapable of understanding the delicacy of his position, and will not make even the slightest effort to relieve his friends from the difficulty, and it must be by this time apparent to Mr. Gladstone that the services of the unctuous, whining, blundering Sir Bartle Frere must be dispensed with.

The Jesuits have been expelled from France, but it is by no means certain that the Government has carried with it in this matter the sympathies of a majority of the people. Great excitement prevailed in many of the principal towns on Wednesday and Thursday, and the banished ecclesiastics have been encouraged to bear themselves as martyrs. The Government has adopted a rough and ready method of dealing with a nuisance, but whether it is the most effectual is still open to question.

The Roman Catholic hierarchy is again in hot water with Belgium, and will find her a much more determined opponent than France. In the *London Times*, of June 28, I read the following:—“Diplomatic relations have been finally broken off between Brussels and the Vatican. Early in June a notification of recall of the Belgian Legation was sent to the Pope, and all efforts to obtain a postponement of the measure have been unsuccessful.” Further, a Brussels despatch says that the Bishop of Tournay, who is now in complete disagreement with the Papal See, has been the chief agent in causing the rupture, by communicating despatches proving the duplicity of the Vatican.

EDITOR,