CHARLES BRADLAUGH

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THREE VIEWS OF THE GREAT RONOCLASTS LIFE AND CHARACTER

Tributes to the Memory of the Secularist Hero from Conway, Bradlaugh and Stead

The following articles on the death of Charles Bradlaugh, from three men prominent as secular reformers and radical thinkers in their respective spheres, though occupying widely different points of view, will be read with interest. All the writers were intimately acquainted with the deceased reformer, and their utterances taken together probably convey as fair an idea of the character of Bradlaugh and the place he will occupy in history as could well be obtained.

(H. J. Stead in "The Review of Reviews.")

The death of Mr Bradlaugh, which occurred on January 30th, removes one who has shown much of the strength of a "soldier of God," although of the unconscious and unrecognized sort. He was for the most part of his life in open or latent antagonism to the formulation of any belief in the Deity. He was a militant and aggressive Agnostic, who had assailed Christianity and attacked the theistic hypothesis on almost every platform in the country. And yet, strange though it may seem to many, by those who know him best, the Nonconformists, for the father, who repeatedly returned him to Parliament, and who offered up public prayers for his recovery, Mr Bradlaugh was regarded as being in very truth a sturdy soldier of righteousness. He did not wear Christian regimentals he never took the oath of allegiance, but he did in many things good work for many a good cause. He was in many things a great moral teacher, and his teaching has led many men to apply Christianity in departments of life, political and social, where its supremacy has stood in sore need of recognition. For Labor, for Liberty, for Justice this dead man while living, did many things which entitle him fully as much as the German Emperor to be counted among the "soldiers of God." He had many soldiers, and they often seem to fight on opposite sides. But in the main Mr. Bradlaugh, even his bitterest enemies being his judges, did good service, and all who do good are to that extent the soldiers of God, even though they should unfortunately not enjoy the strength that comes to the rank and file from the consciousness that they fight under their General's eye.

(W. Moncure D. Conway in the "Open Court.")

Bradlaugh was a martyr. No Christian of our time has had a heavier cross to bear. In this country Bradlaugh was known by his lectures, and in country districts but the man's imperfections could be truly seen in that way. He was on a hill side speaking to thousands of miners, smart and hungry, with a canopy of furnace smoke for their only roof, or in his London Hall of Science, where he drilled his humble comrades for service in great issues, or in the court room where he maintained single-handed the constitutional liberties of Englishmen against the retained counsels of Church and State. I have seen and heard him on occasions when he seemed to stand like a 11th century worm obelisk, scarred all over with hieroglyphs of innumerable lies. Even what friendly censors called faults were historic and monumental. He appeared egotistical, it was because he had been left alone by intellectual men who should have been his friends. His voice was sometimes shrill, it was because he was so long compelled to cry out for the plainest truths and simplest advice. If he was now and then rebellious, it was because of the oppression of a Sidmouth says, match a wounded bull. His faults mirrored the wrongs he had suffered. But let me not be supposed to countenance the judgments of his enemies. No man was ever more indicted or misjudged. He was supposed by many to be of a hard and harsh nature. In the course of a long personal acquaintance with him, during which I witnessed some of his most trying experiences, I found in Bradlaugh a womanly tender man. He has often brought to my mind what a person said of Carlyle, "he was a rough armor with an ardent attachment." He was an affectionate husband, a fin father, a faithful friend and most scrupulously polite to all who treated him as what he was a gentleman at heart. In all matters relating to sex and marriage, Bradlaugh was not merely chaste personally, but exceptionally conservative in opinion. Yet he was cruelly slandered in relation to a refined and eminent lady. The gossip was all the more cruel because, as I happen to know, these two leaders of freethought had deliberately sacrificed their happiness for the sake of their example and the honor of their cause. The lady had been driven out of her home by her husband, because of her heresies, was legally separated though not divorced, and left dependent on her own energies for her own and her little daughter's bread. Bradlaugh's wife had long been in an asylum. Morally divorced, their union might have been pardoned by society in any but so called "infidels." Any intrigue was impossible to either, so with love in their hearts they continued apart to the last. In speaking of this matter Bradlaugh once said to me, "If I know myself, I have not a passion that I would not crush like an egg shell rather than stain the honor of my cause." Just now, when we see the slowly raised hopes of Ireland brought to the dust by the vulgar lewdness and egotism of a trusted leader, it is but fair to place on record this heroic self renunciation of free thinkers who had no future reward to bribe them to virtue nor any fear of punishment to deter them from self indulgence.

H. M. Hyndman in "London Justice."

"Fortunate in the moment of his death." Few, if any, say this of Charles Bradlaugh. They consider his growing reputation in the House of Commons they reflect upon his indomitable energy and his power of getting up a subject, they remember his ability in exposition and debate, and they look forward to what might have been his position as Secretary of State for India in a Liberal or Radical Cabinet. How sad that such prospects should be blighted by death, is therefore, the general remark. We Social Democrats do not take that view. Charles Bradlaugh had chosen his side, and that side, whether he knew it or not, must shortly have brought him into direct and bitter antagonism with the great mass of his fellow countrymen. His very tenacity and determination, his logical acumen and contempt of odds against him, would but have rendered his position more hopeless and more reactionary as time went on. To-day, stalwarts uncovered by the open grave of a foe, a foe, we trust, they will soon learn to remember only the good which he did in years gone by, to-morrow—his best friends could not have wished for the great demagogue that his closing years should have been embittered by strife with the people whom he had once served.

It was a wonderful career. Poor, proud, self-educated, self reliant Charles Bradlaugh's extraordinary physical strength and equally extraordinary mental vigour and dexterity brought him to the front, though with characteristic daring and indifference he adopted and preached opinions most hateful to his puritanical countrymen. Their most hateful form. He had the courage of those opinions in the highest degree. And, succeeding as he did against tremendous odds in impressing his personality on the people around him, can we wonder that he was a staunch individualist, or that having survived and conquered in such a struggle he should believe that the fittest would survive?

Bradlaugh fought sturdily and well for a whole generation on behalf of a complete democratic system on the old Radical lines, on behalf of oppressed nations and colonies, on behalf of equal justice to men of all opinions, and on behalf of that free thought which he championed so fiercely that it became a sort of dogma itself. His life was one long fight for his principles, and for years he never shrank from advertising his person, whether it was to maintain the right of public meeting in Hyde Park and Trafalgar Square, or in opposition to what he considered the dirty support of Turkey against Russia.

Of Charles Bradlaugh's attitude towards Socialism we need scarcely speak. We considered him greatly unfair to us, he, we believe, thought we were also unfair to him. But let us at least give him credit for the pluck that was in him. He was too shrewd not to have seen that, of late years at any rate, ours is the winning side. Yet he deliberately set his back against us, and was ready to meet us in open argument even when he knew that his attitude was increasingly unpopular. For this he is entitled to our respect. That his physical strength was failing was apparent at his last debate in St James's Hall. But he never gave in. Though told by his physician that his life was in danger if he remained the winter in England, he stuck steadily to his work and has died in harness. The House of Commons expunged the resolution against him as he lay insensible in his last hours. There was something pathetic in the strong man passing away with not even hearing that in death he had won a victory over the theological prejudices which he had spent his life in breaking down. Charles Bradlaugh is dead and the Social Democrats who withstood and denounced him most vigorously in life feel regret at the end of their bitter opponent.

CASUAL COMMENTS.

I saw a document the other day which illustrated better than a half hours dissertation, on the subject "the red tapism and lack of common sense which characterize the administration of our water work's office." It was a bill for water used at a building on Lome Crescent, duly made out in duplicate and delivered at the user's residence by a salaried official. This, of course, is the usual routine and quite correct, but when I tell you that the gross amount of the bill was *one cent*, you will perhaps see where the point comes in. Of course I know as well as you do that there must be a system to go by and rules to govern the employees in the office, but surely there ought to be room for the exercise of a little of that commodity vulgarly known as horse sense. Imagine any business house rendering an account for that sum to a regular customer who would be buying from them all he required for the next few months. In the case mentioned, building operations had just begun, and only a few bushels of lime used out of the number which would be required to complete the work. The incident is in itself only laughable, but it serves to show to what an extent red tapism and routine can be carried, when men are employed to make out and deliver bills amounting to 3½ cents net.

The Board of Health by making of themselves a spectacle for gods and men in the matter of appointing a health officer. They meet, they talk, they squabble, move motions and adjourn only to repeat the same childish manœuvres at their next sitting. Surely they must have an idea that the citizens will try to find a reason for their strange hesitancy in making an appointment, and if the public reach the conclusion that they have themselves to blame. A good many who have taken the pains to watch their movements, have begun to think that most of the members are so interested in securing the appointment for his pet applicant, that they are unable to agree to any line of action which will be likely to defeat their object. If this is the case, it is high time that the members of the Board had a forcible reminder that they are supposed to be acting as guardians of the city's health, and that they are not there to procure a fat appointment for some medical friend.

For a month the air has been full of oratory, and on every platform men vested their power to sway or convince an audience. Of course the old heads with an established reputation know pretty well just what their powers are in that particular, or if they don't, those who hear them do, but the younger men must experience some very strange feelings when they essay to talk to a large assemblage, such as has greeted them at the recent political meetings. Sometimes it was really painful to listen to them, and we felt as sorry for them as we could, but did everyone know just how a man feels when he sits down and realizes that he has said nothing our hearts would go out to them in their trouble, as they couldn't otherwise. I have been there, and I know whereof I speak. Also yet I question whether a man in that position really has as much reason to feel ashamed and want to kick himself as some of the before-mentioned old heads who say too much. Compare, for instance the attempt of Arthur Mowat and the finished (?) speech of S. H. Blake at the Jarvis Reform meeting. The former certainly succeeded in saying nothing, or next to it, the latter a great deal too much for his record as a Christian gentleman. Of the two, I would rather be in Arthur Mowat's position, he will be not doubt, has the least to be ashamed of, for he has only done what many of us succeed in doing, nothing, but Mr Blake has lowered himself in the estimation of hundreds, not only of his opponents, but friends as well. They cannot reconcile any more than I the insinuations made against his character with those of a man who knows in his heart and conscience that his intentions as him self, with his profound following of the Nazarene were honest and honorable in his own self, with his profound belief in the work and lowly

Nearly every day an account of some new Russian atrocity appears in the telegraphic despatches. We read of young girls torn from their beds in the dead of night, and carried no one knows where to suffer untold horrors until death ends their sufferings, or they are "lost" the name of some one who is suspected of being a Nihilist. Of beautiful, educated and refined young ladies tortured to obtain evidence against their lovers, of suicides to escape such treatment, or the terrible prospect of a slow death, by brutal neglect, or more brutal ill treatment in government prison. This we learn from the daily press, but still we do hear horrible things not brought to light by information from other sources. Stories are told, which are all too true, of women being ravished, stripped and whipped to death by brutal soldiers, in some instances when they are about to become mothers, and this in the sight of their husbands lovers or brothers. We read of this and our blood boils to think that to day, in the close of the nineteenth century such things can be. That they do happen is horribly true, but how long will the civilized world allow them to continue. Can we calmly go on knowing that hundreds of men and women, who are our brothers and sisters, if the brotherhood of man means anything, are tortured and murdered because they dare to think that the system which makes such atrocities possible should be changed. Why, these opinions are not one-quarter as radical as yours and mine on scores of questions, and yet they are treated like wild beasts, aye, worse than beasts, because they hold them. Horrors like these which are committed in the name of law should rouse the whole so-called Christian world to action and a mighty protest should be made which would convince the Czar and his advisers that the time has come when such things must cease. The cause of the Nihilists is our cause, and we should see to it that, in some way or other, a Government which treats men and women as not even the most barbarous of barbarians would dream of doing, should come to an end. If we really desire to do something for these our brothers, the old proverb, "Where there is a will there is a way," will be found to be as true as ever.

Two weeks ago I commented on the recent action of St Andrew's Church in making the evening service entirely free and contrasted it with what occurred at St James' where the Bishop of Toronto preached. It appears that in referring to the latter I did not give them quite their due and the rector, Rev J D Cayley, has kindly set me right. I give his own words in an extract from the letter received.

ST JAMES' RECTORY

SIR—I have commended St Andrew's Church for the effort lately made to attract the masses by making the church free and open on Sunday evenings. Such action is certainly praiseworthy. But in commending St Andrew for its recent action, why have a fling at St George's, where the very same praiseworthy action was taken just twenty one years ago? On March 7, 1870, all the pews in St George's were declared free and unappropriated at evening services, and they have been free to all comers from that day to this. That this "fog strip in advance" (as you term it) is not unknown or unappreciated by "the masses" is evidenced by a full church, aisle and gallery, every Sunday night. Moreover, we provide prayer books and hymn books for those who come. This free seats system at evening services is almost forced on the churches now under the changed conditions of 1891. It is a long step in advance now, it was a step even far in advance in 1870, when the Church of England made her churches in Toronto free, without any pressure of compulsion, except that of casting her others besides her pew holders.

I am glad to learn that the state of affairs meets and is not always the case at St George's and also to give that church all credit for advance made so many years ago in the direction of free seats. It is rather strange, however, that they had not continued to advance, and long before this joined the ranks of those churches where the seats are free at all the services. I had no intention of singling out St George's as an example, as there are many other churches as great, if not greater sinners, in this respect, but used the facts given in proof of a state of affairs which cannot long continue. It will not be long before as Mr Cayley says, "the changed conditions of 81 will force all the churches to make their seats free at every service."

Mr Cayley goes on to say, after referring to the church's courage in inviting Father Huntington, and which is certainly to be commended, "After doing all that we could to welcome the champion of labor and his friends in St George's, the Lamb throws at us grievous mere kicks than halfpence. I call this ungenerous, so will I then if he is generous. Now I am sorry if my reference to the matter implied a lack of appreciation of what was done on that occasion to afford, all who could the opportunity of hearing Father H. . . ing."

The sum not my desire. I wished to call attention to what I consider a strange anomaly, to call a building "God's House" dedicate it to His service and then rent seats out, and as the instance referred to was a public one, I used it for that purpose.

While it was perhaps, rather unfair to select any one church as a scape goat yet I still hold that there is no justification for such a course of action under any circumstances and in another issue will take the matter up again more fully. I thank Mr Cayley for his letter and hope that he will consider this explanation satisfactory. I really do, as he says "want to feel at home with my readers, and they with me and am always glad to see honor where honor is due.

BEE.

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