# LIBERTY AT THE CROSS-ROADS

*THREE ADDRESSES*

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# LIBERTY AND REVERENCE

IN REGARD to the right use of liberty two things have to be remembered. The first is that we are the heirs and not the creators of our freedom, the second is the danger that two such allies as liberty and reverence may eventually fall out.

As regards the first, so true is it that the battle of freedom was fought for and not by us that, as an age, we appear to be seriously considering the advisability of parting with it; while as regards the second, all that need be said is that the plea urged in behalf of a return to authority and compulsion is that liberty has failed to ensure a proper reverence and that, at any rate in the political sphere, the quarrel is well begun.

Yet, without any doubt whatever, the battle waged by our fathers for liberty of either kind was meant to uphold reverence. In the political sphere, for the obvious reason that without respect it is impossible to govern; in the religious, because religion *is* reverence. It can therefore never have been the intention of such men as fought the battle of our emancipation that liberty should diminish reverence. As a matter of course, anyone who knows the history of that struggle realises that its main object was to place government in the one case, religion in the other, beyond reach of contempt.

Nevertheless, that two such allies as liberty and reverence could conceivably fall out is plain enough from their respective definitions. Nuttall's Dictionary defines reverence as "fear mingled with respect". It is a brusque definition; but at the very mildest reverence is respect touched with awe.

Liberty, on the contrary, implies the right to revere only what merits reverence. It means a full right to inquire into these merits. It means the right of free inquiry and unforced judgment, whatever the department with which we concern ourselves.

Between two such values how delicate the balance! And how difficult to exercise the one without detriment to the other! And not always justly. For generations the Jews guarded with fierce jealousy the Holy of Holies. None but the High Priest could enter there, and all pious Jews respected and preserved its awe-inspiring secret. When, at the fall of the temple, the Roman soldiers, exercising the liberty of the victor, burst into it, they found nothing! Nothing to fear. Nothing to ridicule. The place was empty! All this fuss about a place that was quite empty! It was likely to be empty, for they had only curiosity and no reverence. It does not follow that it was the same for the High Priest—notwithstanding that it contained nothing that could be seen or handled. All we are entitled to say is that for the only people who ever entered it in a spirit of unlicensed inquiry it contained nothing.

On the other hand, inquiry the most fearless may be quite justified. There are groundless fears which will yield at once to free and courageous inquiry. I remember once walking on a brilliantly moonlit night along a very lonely field path, when suddenly I saw ahead of me an awesome, huge, black figure. There it stood, formidably blocking the path, a terrifying giant. I stopped for a moment and looked this way and that for a possible way of escape. None was feasible. If I ran back, or across the field, a creature so vast would soon overtake me. Better to take my chance face to face with him. So, grasping tightly my oak stick, I went forward. To my genuine astonishment, I walked straight through him! It was only a deep shadow thrown across the path by a tree in the hedge, and this my imagination had worked up into a terrifying hallucination. This was the relief I got for such courage and curiosity as I managed to muster that night. I was not partial to ogres, and I got rid of mine.

If these two examples, or any pair better matched in importance, do not provide a criterion of the proper use of liberty, one of them at least contains a hint as to when it can be used improperly. And this is all we can ask. No criterion as to the use of liberty can be fool-proof; but it should be possible to avoid that form of its abuse which we call taking liberties, making too free with things or persons, as the young man did

this is enough, even though, by some strange freak of accident, this man raised Germany from a position of obscure feebleness to that of one of the world's greatest Powers. He was a coward. He was no general. What more need be said? Or, to name a more recent German, the great Ludendorf, the real author of the plan which led to the collapse of the Russian invasion of East Germany in the Great War, and our own most formidable foe on the Western Front. Of Ludendorf merely say what the author of *Sergeant Grischa* says of him, that he was the son of a miller, a jealous, touchy fellow, who could not bear it that his fellow-generals were men of birth. Don't bother about his qualities as a general. He was the son of a miller, and he could not rid his small mind of this unfortunate circumstance. Enough for him! If you are overinclined to be awestruck at the genius of Dostoievsky, just remember that he was an epileptic and that his greatest works are merely the rationalisation of a father-complex. Hint darkly that Florence Nightingale was a cruel, tyrannical old wench, and that General Gordon was a secret drinker. A great and free age should be able easily to compensate itself for any lack of greatness comparable to that of such names as I have mentioned! The same with so-called great ages. Call the "glory that was Greece, and the grandeur that was Rome" barbaric excrescences, founded on the basest of superstitions, and be done with them! It is easy. Ignore the head and torso of the giant, and concentrate on his feet!

It will be well, however, to consider candidly the purposes this method can be made to serve. Because it is not equally useful for all purposes. If the giant has trouble with his feet, we *have* the right to know it, certainly. Liberty confers that right. But unless we are content to resemble him in this alone, the discovery will not be very useful. And this is the whole question. Do we desire to grow to the full stature of the giant, or do we not? If we want to be as big as he was, our first duty is to admit humbly the difference between our present stature and his. If we want to be as great a commander as Cromwell, or as great a statesman as Bismarck, it will not help us materially to know that Cromwell had warts and that Bismarck was a glutton. If we want to be as great as either, we must use the

liberty we to-day boast to discover exactly—to an inch—how far we must first travel.

This question of what we want has a serious bearing on our choice of one or other of these rival methods. For we do not choose the one or the other without motive. Either we grudge another's superiority, or we desire to emulate it. If we do not wish to be great, then we concentrate on the giant's toes; if we desire to be like him, we take all his dimensions into admiring account. I recommend this as a worthier employment of our liberties than the method of impertinent detraction.

Religion, I have said *is* reverence—at least to this extent that the fear of the Lord is the *beginning* of wisdom". Liberty should be the bulwark of reverence, as it was intended to be by those to whose sacrifices we owe our liberties. And let me say at once that in all cases where liberty and religion both exist reverence also exists. At any rate, it is my experience that, despite all appearances superficially to the contrary, it is not to free religion, but to hidebound churches we must look for a fundamental off-handedness and flippancy in the religious attitude. It could hardly be otherwise; for only those who are free as well as religious have indestructible grounds for regarding religion with real seriousness. It is only when liberty is interpreted as conferring the right to reject religion without so much as first examining its claims, that reverence suffers at the hands of liberty. This is not exercising freedom, but taking liberties, and of this there is to-day more than enough.

Now under freedom, pseudo or genuine, the quandary of religion is this: for its right to respect it depends entirely on the care with which we examine and appreciate its merits. This is inherent in the very idea of religious liberty, and for religion it is crucial. You may make free to give it no consideration at all, and against this form of contempt it has no protection. Or, taking the utmost pains, we may honestly but erroneously conclude that it has nothing to recommend it; and once more it is at the mercy of our contempt. Liberty implies the right to deem religion unworthy a single thought, and equally so the right to trust any judgments we form in regard to it, however mistaken. Under liberty, this is the predicament of religion.

It is a predicament almost peculiar to religion—not quite, but almost. It is shared by the very greatest things in human life, but by nothing else. Great poetry, great painting, great music are, in the same way, defenceless against presumption and imbecility. Schubert died of neglect, and Ibsen, at the first appearance of a play of his in London, was condemned out of hand by critics who at that time did not know any better and have since changed their opinions. With almost every other important human interest it is different. Dickens, in his time, made savage and damaging attacks on the Law as a profession; but the Law knew how to preserve respect for itself. For it had it in its power to compel such as Dickens to mind their p's and q's, and what can compel care is not permanently liable to disrespect. A government may be ever so unpopular, yet enforce respect; because it has power. The same with nations. Before the Great War, this country was the object of a good deal of contempt on the Continent, some of which may have been deserved; but the War silenced all that.

Religion cannot compel reverence in any of these ways. And to our disrespect it offers a large target. The more so because at this target we fire with a weapon of exceeding small bore. We demand that religion be never guilty of a mistake of any kind, and not only so, but that the universe shall treat us, not as it notoriously always has done, but as in our opinion it should do. Small wonder that religion has been hit all over the place. For its assumptions are large and generous. It assumes that there have been and still are men and women worthy of our utmost veneration, and this, as we have seen, is now flippantly questioned. It has pledged the sanctity of all institutions and customs necessary to human life and to social welfare—marriage, parenthood and moral rectitude—somewhat rashly, it would appear, for these show signs of disintegrating. If not to-day, in times past, it has even shown a certain partiality towards its own people. Worst of all, it has always clung to the belief that God is probably right, and that, do as He may, He is to be trusted. "Yea, though He slay me, yet will I trust Him".

This being the target, and our weapon a demand that religion shall in no circumstances make a mistake, and that

God shall treat us, not as we have always been treated, but as in our opinion we ought to be, religion would appear to be at the mercy even of the village idiot. And so you and I are at liberty (briefly, we must admit), to strut about a universe we neither fear nor respect.

To this there can be only one fitting answer—don't be more ridiculous than you can help. That reverence which is fear mingled with respect this universe exacts of every one of us as an irreducible minimum. We can restrain fear, and it is often our duty to do so; also we can confine respect to objects meriting it; but we cannot abolish either and live. For reasons not mystical, hidden and future, but present, real and manifest. In the universe and in ourselves there is a relentless logic we call natural law. Which of us can safely flout it? Who of us dare flout it? To the inviolability of this beneficent yet dread reality modern mankind has raised an immense altar. What essential difference does it make that we call this altar science, and not religion? Both are founded on fear and respect. Why should we pretend that a universe which compels us to seek knowledge and to respect its laws has *nothing* in it we need respect and fear? Not fear and respect the ways of a universe of such unrelenting logic that it will not excuse the infringement of one law in consideration of our strictest observance of every other? A poor fellow, stricken with a fell disease, complained to me, the other day, that this seemed undeserved treatment in view of all he had done to cultivate his mind, preserve his morals and serve his fellows. In subsequent conversation I learnt that he had not paid the same respect to his alimentary canal. Would he have dared to take this risk if he had known the price? Why, in a world like this, one of the main virtues of courage is that it enables certain of us so far to overcome our fears as to defy the dangers that beset those who most meekly and with infinite care endeavour to unravel its laws. These walk as delicately before God as ever Agag did. Fear and respect—these are minimum requisites for life in any form. They are the main ingredients of reverence, and reverence is the beginning of religion. What ludicrous objects the irreverent make of themselves!

Liberty, like a damascene blade, must be carefully handled.

Supple, adaptable, it is available for every purpose, from spiritual self-defence to murder and suicide. At once the noblest and most dangerous of privileges, it can be employed equally to destroy or to preserve. Of late, it has been too freely used to libel the great, dishonour courage and self-discipline, to undermine the sanctities and unsettle the world. We are in danger of losing liberty. It can still be retained; but to keep it we must employ it, not to attack but to enhance the worth of living.

# LIBERTY AND CONVICTION

1 Peter ii. 16: "*As free, and not using your liberty as a cloak.*"

IN THE STRUGGLE for freedom the honours seem to be evenly divided between religion and politics. Some would, no doubt, go farther and give the chief honours to religion. Indeed, it is a fact that, even when the struggle has been in the main political, there has usually been a religious element. Of this Cromwell and Milton afford obvious examples, and so do Mazzini and Garibaldi. Then again, religion has often waged this struggle on its own initiative, as in the case of Wyclif. But, not to claim too much for religion by comparison with politics, relatively to any other force, not excluding even science, religion has premier place in the struggle for freedom.

Unfortunately, it must also be admitted that the prize for repression also goes to religion. But then the extraordinary thing is that religion should ever have conceived a desire for freedom. Still more that this desire should have flared up into so fierce and inextinguishable a flame. Because in religion the basic desire is for certainty and stability. "I *know* in whom I have believed". I *know*. People in general turn to religion not for the right to change their minds, but to escape the need to do so. It is their refuge from doubt and bewilderment.

This being so, then in the past, as surely as in the present, it follows that the champions of religious liberty believed (1): that religious truth and conviction are as accessible to the free as to the servile; and (2): that they were contributing to religious truth and conviction in a superior degree. In support of this it is enough to cite the example of Milton, living "As ever in the great taskmaster's eye"; who, as Macaulay says, "kept his mind continually fixed on an Almighty Judge and an eternal reward". Milton claimed, not only that in the open field and in fair combat truth is invincible, but that it is safely established only when it wins on its merits.

At this high level religious liberty ought always to be maintained. In any case, the wish to be religiously free will always imply something, and we should be very careful to learn what that something is. We desire to be religiously free. Why? A candid, individual answer to this question might be both revealing and useful. For to such a question the possible answers are both numerous and diverse. It is possible even to claim religious freedom on the ground that no truths of religion will ever merit full intellectual assent. We can be tempted to keep up an appearance of religion without once admitting that it is getting us anywhere. This happens probably more often with people belonging to hidebound faiths than with such as uphold free religion. But it *can* happen with us, and for reasons honourable enough in some respects. It is in one sense nothing against men and women that they should retain an outward loyalty and a certain respect towards a church for no profounder reason than that it is the church of their fathers. Especially if it asks no questions as to what they do or do not believe. Nevertheless, the compliment paid is to their fathers rather than to the church, and their service to it is severely limited, if not in material, in spiritual, value. Admittedly, cases of a less worthy kind could be named in connection with orthodoxy—insincere allegiances based on intellectual despair, fear, worldly expediency and even spiritual intrigue. It is said of a racial and religious minority in France in the fifteenth century that it was advised to send its sons into the priesthood with a view to undermining Catholicism and preventing religious persecution. To abuses like these no free church is liable. None the less must we remember that there is only one strictly honourable and inviolable reason for professing attachment to any church, and this is that in one way or another it represents our aspirations or faith and serves a serious spiritual need.

However, the needs which a free church can be made to serve may be perfectly sincere and genuine without having in all cases great spiritual value. In the main, liberty serves two requirements, not both of equal value.

(1) The first is the right to be without definite convictions of any kind;

(2) The second is the right to wait until evidence suffices to make conviction reasonable.

(1) With regard to those who associate themselves with us because they are not compelled to reach any settled conviction, or even to struggle to do so, you will probably agree that we are right in offering them complete and cordial hospitality. They would hardly remain with us unless they derived *some* good from worshipping with us, and good must be denied to none merely on grounds either of differing beliefs or of a total absence of belief. Besides, in such people there is sometimes, at least there may be, a feeling, not amounting to faith, but a sense of values which belong to religion and do not belong to worldliness; it may be, a bias towards expectancy, or spiritual desire, seemingly unsupported by cold fact, but, nevertheless, secretly cherished and wanly adhered to. And even if positive good has not yet accrued to them, and no hope is frailly adhered to, there is always the possibility that association with the spiritually minded will one day effect a change.

This, however, should not blind us to the fact that in this condition we may receive good but can hardly give it. It is like attaching ourselves to an army because it neither pledges us to a faith in its cause nor calls upon us to fight. We should frankly acknowledge that we are not servants of the cause but dependants, now and then in a sense too indefinite and casual to be an interesting responsibility even as such. A person in definite and conscious need may well stimulate helpfulness; not so the person who hardly knows in what respect, much less in what degree, he needs help. It is as if we are asked to hold ourselves in readiness to lend money which the applicant is not sure he will ever need, or to give him advice on a matter that may never arise. We neither know what to give nor what to ask. This is the position of those of us who attach ourselves to a free spiritual community for the sole reason that it admits our right to believe nothing.

(2) As a sect, fortunately, we have so few of these that only a very occasional encounter with one of them excuses the suggestion that there are any at all. People who believe nothing are far better off in orthodox communities, where, it is true, credal questions are still asked, but almost any answer will do,

provided it is not too blatantly orthodox like that of the curate, who, according to Dr. Lunn, complained to his bishop that he was in difficulties with the Thirty-nine Articles. "Don't bother about that", replied the tolerant bishop. "But", said the distressed curate, "my difficulty is that I *believe* them!" A truly awkward situation! In conditions which may or may not be literally portrayed by this yarn, but to which it is not an entirely unreliable clue, Laodiceans are better off than with us.

The great bulk of us use our liberty, when we use it at all, to secure for ourselves the right to wait until we are really convinced. We are not to be rushed into yes or no before we have made up our minds, like some foolish fellow who, for no better reason than that the salesman tells him to-morrow will be too late, buys something of no use to him. We will believe when we can believe, and not a minute sooner. Which is right and proper.

But may we add, the sooner the better? Surely, if religious conclusions have any value for us, we ought hardly to be too passive in regard to them. We should not simply wait for them to come, or until experience and life force them upon us; nor in the lamentable fashion of to-day should we plaintively bemoan the lack of a great prophet who would make everything clear. There are, to be sure, those who suspend judgment until after death, which would seem almost too patient! We ought to realise that in regard to clearing up difficulties and getting to know, religion is very like ordinary experience. If we are set a problem in mathematics, we do not wait until the answer occurs to us, or until somebody turns up who knows the answer; if we are the least bit interested, we set about finding the answer. We do not let a business problem settle itself, or wait any longer than we can help before getting to the bottom of it. These, of course, are important matters. It may be difficult to convince those not already in agreement that religious matters are equally important; but it should not be difficult to shew that unless we are as anxious to clear up a religious as we are a business tangle, our liberty cloaks a secret belief that business is more important than religion. About this, if only in justice to ourselves, we should be quite

clear. For of all types of garment the least necessary and the most useless is the religious cloak. To the free man it is more than unnecessary; it is a deliberate forfeiture of his liberty. Liberty makes only one moral demand upon us, and that is that we be honest with ourselves. As free people we have a perfect right to employ our liberty to show that we are less interested in religion than in some other things, should it be so; but if we are truly religious, then, whether we arrive at doctrinal certainties or not, there will be no postponement and no slackening of the effort to reach a conclusion.

(3) It must be so, unless religion is the only interest in the world to which theory is useless. In everything else we search for clearness and a theory. We strive to get our facts right, and then, if we can, discover a theory into which we can fit them. Indeed, apart from a suitable theory concerning it, a fact is not complete either as to meaning or utility. Of the apple that fell when Newton was sitting in his orchard the only use he could make was to eat it, until he framed his colossal theory regarding falling apples and everything else that falls. The use it acquired after he found a theory of its behaviour is expressed in every mechanical invention and engineering feat of modern times.

The subject-matter of religion is life, experience. It is our own experience, not other people's. This we do not always fully realise. We look for such experience as can be turned to religious use mostly in books. We look to the Bible for the experience of the Jewish nation and, later, for that of Jesus and the rest; to the records of the Buddha for his experience; to the Koran for that of Mohammed. Not that in itself this is a wrong thing to do. These records, and others like them, are of immense importance, and no earnest and thorough seeker will be tempted to neglect them. What *is* wrong is our habit of forgetting that in no essential is one experience different from another. The essence of all experiences, our own or other people's is that we are treated in certain ways. This conclusion no accurate observer can ever escape. We are not gods; we are in the hands of God. Things happen to us, kind or cruel. Were they accidental or designed? If designed, is there reason to trust this Power that handles us so unceremoniously, so

variously? Religion is a theory of experience. Our own experience. Is it possible to be so little interested in a thing so manifestly miraculous as either not to frame a theory respecting it or to despair prematurely of ever doing so? Yet in so far as we adopt a listless attitude towards religious theory, experience has ceased to interest us. Our liberty then cloaks a simple disinclination to interest ourselves in what is at once our own affair and an astounding miracle.

(4) But then, some of us have such difficulty in framing religious convictions that are "just so". So conscientious and fastidious are we that no belief is tolerable that is not absolutely water-tight and correct. Now, as it happens, no other kind of knowledge is absolute; it is merely near enough to satisfy and to be practically useful. Knowledge is like a razor blade. Under the microscope the edge of the blade is feathered and jagged. What about that, so long as we can use it with comfort? The fact is it is not impossible, as a rule, to provide ourselves with means for doing what we really want to do. Nor is it difficult to reconcile oneself to what is at least good enough for the job in hand. The razor's edge is, be it confessed, not perfect. But I must shave. For this purpose it is good enough, so I use it.

With regard to the truths of religion we are more particular. Why? Well, is not the answer obvious? Perhaps not—so delightfully secretive and complex a thing is human nature. Much will depend on what we have set our hearts upon. There are purposes for which religion is quite unnecessary. If we want to live without order or restraint; to live with a low or frivolous opinion of ourselves and what we are here for; to live gloomily and madly in fitful alternation; if we are prepared to see others go to the dogs and to go with them ourselves—if this is what we want, no religious conviction is needed. Religion is necessary only for self-respect, self-control, a sense of direction and the power to follow it; for honour, loyalty and good faith; for a soul above some things and yearning towards others; for a discriminating temper and for distinguished living. If we desire to be at peace with ourselves and the world; if we would go our way, not fretful and afraid, but calm and trustful; if we want to forgive and be forgiven;

to be truthful, unselfish and kind, we usually have no great difficulty in finding a theory for the purpose. Speaking personally and quite candidly, my own want of conviction, when I experience it, is nearly always due to the fact that in one respect or another a lofty conception of life would not square with what I am after. I recognise this to be so even when the outward facts might seem to justify uncertainty. As, for example, when suffering overtakes me, or loss, or disappointment. I do not want to be patient or heroic; I want to grumble and feel aggrieved. If I desired above all things to smile at adversity or conquer pain, I should have no difficulty whatever in discovering a conviction to match. Alas! then it is that I use my liberty as a cloak.

May I timidly suggest that I am not alone in this? Our age has no religion. This is generally understood. The explanation glibly offered is that the creeds are untenable and religion, vaguely but comprehensively, discredited. "Where *can* we look for a religion?" people ask. Where should they look, except among their desires and habits? Why do they not, for a change, ask what they are doing and would like to do? Having done this, let them ask what sort of theory of existence they would need to match this way of living and these desires. You do not need a plough if you do not intend to plough your field. Neither do you need a heroic theory of life if you do not wish to live heroically. Taking into account all the main activities of mankind to-day, may we not reasonably suggest that our theories of life match very well the kind of life we are living and that this is what they are intended for?

We must not deceive ourselves in regard to the liberty we exercise. Liberty is not meant to bar or postpone conviction. It is meant only to confer on each generation as it arrives the right to adapt religion to the newer knowledge, loftier aims and fresher idealism which should be its inheritance from the preceding age.

# LIBERTY AND RESTRAINT

1. Cor. ix, 25: "*Every athlete practises restraint all round; but while they do it to win a fading wreath, we do it for an unfading. Well, I run without swerving; I do not plant my blows upon the empty air—no, I maul and master my body.*"—MOFFATT'S TRANSLATION.

IT IS A LITTLE ODD that the Bible should begin with the story of the boldest bid ever made for liberty—a bid against the authority and might of God—a bid which succeeded in every particular but the cost. Equally so that the chapter from which this text is taken should open with a claim to complete liberty and end on a note of voluntary restraint. As a myth is always inwardly and in the profound sense truer than any true story can ever be, we may observe that in neither case is the particular use made of liberty unmotived. In the one case it is abused, in the other restrained, but in both cases with an object. In Genesis, the object sought was knowledge, in the case of Paul the victor's wreath. We may do well to accept the hint. When we claim liberty for ourselves it is always with a view to some concrete object, acknowledged or concealed; and its value for us depends entirely on the use we make of it.

This is always more clearly seen at the outset of any combined effort for liberty than at any later time. For it is not in human nature to undertake what will entail sacrifice and danger without a clear and inspiring idea of the end aimed at. To this end liberty has probably never been considered enough in itself. "Liberty, equality, fraternity"—not even this slogan of the French Revolution dared to trust exclusively to the inspirational merits of liberty. Liberty, it implies, is the basis of certain inalienable rights of the human spirit. It will cover all cases to say that when liberty has to be fought for, it is generally believed that the dignity of man requires nothing less and that the worth of the objects it is meant to serve will fully justify it.

It is not always so easy to determine the spirit and objects

of those who can take their liberties for granted. For this reason, that while liberty can be obtained only in one way, it can be employed in a dozen. As the art of living is a difficult one, and its rhythm disturbed by the slightest excess either of freedom or restraint, it is incumbent upon the freest age in human history to be as candid with itself as it is unrestricted in the use of its liberties.

If it is, it will not mind being told that there is a servitude of contemporary imitativeness just as real as any servitude to bygone ways. We are not necessarily the freer for doing exactly what everybody else is doing at the moment, or for thinking precisely as they do. Cato the Younger was not less free than his contemporaries in that he adopted the spirit of his great-grandfather in preference to the venality and corruption of his own times. In at least that one respect he proved himself so entirely right that for the next two hundred years he was the model on which the nobler Romans fashioned their lives. Indeed, it is a high grade liberty not to be the slave of the palpable delusion that what is new is necessarily better than everything that is old. Servitude to the present is always dangerous; in completeness it is barbarism. Anyhow, later Romans did not fail to appreciate the superior independence of Cato, whether as regards his indifference to the ways of his contemporaries or in respect of the savage restraints he imposed on himself. An age free for any useful purpose would make a note of this.

Society, however, is not an affair of such extremes of past and present, but of contemporaries, some of whom have the misfortune to be older than others. May I suggest that it is neither a refined nor a fearless use of freedom to discount in advance the experience of those who are merely older than ourselves? It is not infrequently done. More than once I have heard a youth, well beaten in argument by an older man, coolly retort, "You are older than I am, and you cannot be expected to understand our point of view". As it happens, the views discussed on such occasions are frequently those of men who were fairly old, or even dead, when present-day youth was born. But that can be waived. The point is that to talk like this is not a free and fearless use of the intelligence,

but hidebound and timid. It dare not submit its findings to any tribunal but its own, and escapes this duty by substituting the authority of the immature for that of age. It has been known to go farther than that and seek sanctuary for its originality among those tried by inexperience!

Then there is a form of freedom that is merely impudent and ill-bred. It consists simply in choosing standards of one's own and selecting carefully from those which require least restraint, or none at all. Contrary to occasional opinion, it requires no courage, for courage is demanded only when we do what we like in defiance of consequences we know will follow. By a fortunate turn of events, the modern vandal is spared this ordeal. For it so happens that we have taken it into our heads to interpret freedom as the right to do as we like and get "away with it". Those who fifty years ago undertook to exhibit a contempt for cherished standards had to be of sterner stuff. Neither does it require energy, strength or high spirits. It is on a par with inattentiveness, or the peevishness that makes a boxer refuse to train, or lose his temper in the ring. It is the behaviour of weaklings who, because they cannot stay the course or keep the pace of the old-timer, would cancel the records of past achievement and make a fresh start. It is the role of those who cannot and therefore will not bear effort or restraint.

Now the problem of harmonising liberty and restraint is a difficult one, admittedly; and in the circumstances named it does not seem likely that we shall be told much about how the present age is attacking it. We must therefore resort to indirect methods. One of these is to learn from current literature and current jargon how restraint is likely to be standing in relation to liberty. Another is to draw what inferences we can from the fact that certain objects are specially singled out for attack.

That voluntary restraint is in a bad way theoretically, may be deduced from what one reads; that it is no better off practically may be seen in the field of politics.

It is possible to note with alarm the suppression of democratic liberties in a majority of the great Powers of Europe, not to mention Yugo-Slavia and, now, Austria, without

perceiving the moral of it. What we have to remember is the amount of social unrestraint required to reconcile any country to the loss of political privileges. Communities do not lightly part with the right to vote freely, to speak freely, to hear all sides, and govern themselves by parliamentary methods. History and experience alike show that things can be very bad indeed without its being thought necessary to forfeit liberty. Dictatorships are a last resource and a desperate remedy. The state of things for which, on the testimony of Mr. Vernon Bartlett and of others, Italian Fascism was the adopted remedy, was industrial havoc and national decay. This represents an amount of unlicensed behaviour, gross and intolerable. If, as the same authority affirms, Germany under Hitler is happier than she has ever been since the War, what an abuse of democratic freedom must be reflected in her earlier condition! Liberty has always been used to destroy or damage other values, and in a degree that cannot be tolerated, before nations consent to part with it.

"Where there is smoke there is fire", and so far as the jargon affecting morals is concerned there is to-day a good deal of smoke. Who to-day has not heard of "repressions" and their pathological consequences? Or of "inhibitions", "guilt", resulting not from what we have done, but from secrecy regarding it, and the rest of the rather grubby phenomena of the Freudian Unconscious? Who has not learnt that religion is "regressive", and "erotic" in origin, or that the basic structure and necessities of our nature are amoral? Is there anybody to-day who is not aware how much more difficult it is to account creditably for our virtues than for our vices? And in face of this subversive barrage how many have either the independence or the courage to scoff as Aldous Huxley does at this domination from the basement? An American lady once told Freud that sexual preoccupations like his might be natural to people living in Vienna, but that they did not obtain in America! I admire her courage! Indeed, how many so much as suspect that in regard both to standpoint and method irreconcilable differences exist between the three main schools of psychoanalytic teaching? Or that the only point in common between them is their recognition of the existence and activity of the

unconscious? And if some have learnt from Mr. Gerald Heard to give the place of honour to food, rather than sex, what difference does it make to the impression of shabbiness given to all spiritual values?

In these decidedly ugly circumstances, with practically everything of moral consequence reduced to the status of a taboo, with humanity divided roughly into sadists and masochists, and with the utmost uncertainty as to our individual category, it would be more than remarkable if we never once wondered if there is a single impulse that ought not to have its own way. It may be a little significant that we find ourselves nowadays seeking for pleasant ways of excusing conduct, our own or other people's for which a generation ago the only excuse we could have offered would have been weakness or wickedness. There may, of course, be nothing whatever to distinguish this or the next age in respect of actual behaviour from any other; but one would have to be blind not to notice the attack on values that proceeds *pari passu* with the attack on restraint. Mr. H. G. Wells complained not long ago, with reference to the burning of certain books in Berlin, that a clumsy lout was afoot in Europe and that intellectual freedom is in jeopardy. Well, I am acquainted with at least some of the books that were burnt and are now prohibited in Germany, and I can only say that if the effect of reading them corresponded in any strict sense to the character of the books, I should be tempted to wonder whether the liberty to read them is not dearly bought.

In the region of moral tendencies in present-day literature and their actual effects, we are, as I say, left to surmise. We need not be in the same doubt regarding the inwardness of the complacency with which this generation has parted with a great deal that its predecessor believed and cherished. We have discarded quite a number of things, and with a suggestive cheerfulness. We must not flatter ourselves that we parted with them on grounds too superior for words, or for reasons exclusively intellectual, or, for that matter, solely at our own instigation. Beliefs, like conduct, are largely imitative. It is very difficult at any time to resist a fashion. In regard to beliefs the fashion somehow mysteriously changed, and, for

reasons not difficult to fathom, we took to it. Let me name a few of the least fashionable of them. God, moral order, love, in any spiritual sense, or romantic for that matter, inward privacy and the self-respect that depends upon our knowing how to keep some things to ourselves, racial pride, nationality. Of none of these must we to-day speak in typically enlightened society. But why part with them so cheerfully? Well, they have this in common: every one of them imposes some kind of restraint. Conversely, the ideas substituted for them in every case lessen restraint. Is it a mere coincidence that we are so pleased to let them go?

Let us take, perhaps, as an all-inclusive example, our disbelief in God. I suggest that nobody, either believes or disbelieves in God without ulterior motive. Certainly, nobody ever believed in God without having an object demanding such a belief. Moses desired to convoy his people safely across the desert and to a Promised Land. What more natural than that he should believe in God? There is no such thing as a purely intellectual proof of the existence of God. We believe in God when it serves our purpose so to do. On the other hand, there are no coercive grounds of a purely intellectual kind for not believing in God; and nobody has ever seriously challenged the existence of God on grounds exclusively intellectual. The most serious and damaging challenge of modern times was that of Nietzche; but the motive of his attack was a feeling that the existence of such a Being would threaten the supremacy of man. Why should we suppose that we alone are unmotived?

This seems the less likely when we consider the reasons urged in favour of His dismissal. For they are not of a kind we could imaginably think sufficient in themselves. We say, God is useless for any of the purposes we have in hand. Nothing is more likely, but that is no reason for not believing that He exists. Any child can see that. Or we say, He does not interfere. We are left to our own devices. If this is so, it proves Him to be a bystander. But nobody says a person exists the less for being a bystander. And even if these arguments were valid, there would be no reason to be pleased about it. This is a ground for complaining, like Mr. Cowper Powys, that God is

not as good as He should be, and no ground at all for feeling pleased with ourselves. Who knows whether such a Being does not interfere—to our hurt? Why then this jubilation? As it happens, God is not useless for all purposes: to those who seek to maintain standards He is indispensable. But standards, in whatever direction, imply self-restraint, the very opposite of our mania for self-expression. Here is an indubitable sign, and it is ominous.

One is constrained to ask is this the best we can do with our freedom? Is liberty, full-grown, doomed to devour the values for which it was reared? Is it the fatal enemy of the restraint on which all our values depend? The very question is itself tantalising; for without the help of liberty no high value can ever be perfect, and restraint itself loses all spiritual importance. Is it possible, then, to reconcile liberty and restraint? Every year the university boat-race is contested. For weeks before that race, the young men engaged in it have subjected themselves to the will of their trainers and to every deprivation requisite to success. They do this because they think the object worth it, and they do it of their own accord. They get nothing for doing it, except the honour. This they contrive to think sufficient, and many are left out of the race who would have thought as they do, had the honour fallen to them. In all these men liberty and restraint harmonise to perfection. All seems to depend, then, on whether in spheres higher than that of the athlete, prizes remain, still sufficiently attractive, despite the action of a corrosive thought, to call for a like effort and a like self-denial. It is an anxious question; but unless it can be answered satisfactorily, liberty of mind and conscience is doomed for the life-time of the present civilisation. Let there be no mistake about this. Libertinism cannot forever pass for liberty, and once it is attacked it is quite defenceless. And when it ceases to be possible to abuse liberty, liberty itself will have perished—except on one condition, namely, that we learn in time so to value the things for which liberty was intended that to destroy it would be absurd.