

MARGINAL NOTES

IDEALS OF GOVERNMENT.—Ever since men began to think politically the noblest among them have dreamed of some form of government so framed as to enable the whole body of people within a defined area to enjoy that full measure of individual liberty and equality of right which makes social life worth the living. Now and again through the centuries these dreams have found material expression in the literary form of 'ideal commonwealths.' Among the earliest of these the best known are Plato's *Republic*, More's *Utopia*, Bacon's *New Atlantis*, Harrington's *Oceana* and Campanella's *City of the Sun*.

Nearly two thousand years separate Plato's excursion into the field of political idealism from that of Sir Thomas More. Yet European civilization had made but small advance in the meanwhile. As a result we find the citizens of an ideal commonwealth in the sixteenth century of the Christian era following in the steps of their antecedents of the third century B.C., and showing the way to build a more excellent social order than was then in being.

As one of the most distinguished of the humanists in the English period of the Renaissance it was but natural that More should find in Plato's *Republic* not only inspiration but more or less of a model for his *Utopia*. But he differs from his exemplar in formulating some features of his polity for the Utopians. We would refer but to one instance of this difference. More, on the one hand, posits the normal family as the political unit of the State; Plato, on the other hand, anticipating Galton of our own times and his science of eugenics, expresses the view that the well-being of his ideal commonwealth would depend upon the biological breeding of its ruling class — the Guardians. To that end he declared that "the wives of these Guardians are to be common, and their children also common." This social canon seems a bit thick to us of the present day, notwithstanding that the advocates of eugenics are vocal in our midst. But our consideration of it must be related to the purpose it was intended to achieve, and the spirit of the age in which it was propounded. Plato lived at a time when unwanted children were subjected to the ruthless process of 'exposure', and as he contemplated perpetuity for the order of Guardians it was expedient not only that the lives of the children begotten by them should be physically safe-guarded, but that as they might by heredity possess mental gifts for government they should be carefully trained for succession to the order of Guardians in later life.

While in Plato's scheme for enabling men to attain to the greatest measure of happiness in social life there were, as we have shown, certain things ordained which did not and could not meet with the acceptance of More and some of the later builders of utopias, its essence is to be regarded as *ante-Christian* rather than *anti-Christian*. Indeed there is an astonishing amount of matter in the *Republic* that is in high accord with Christian morals. Consider for instance the following passage extracted from that work :

"The just is always a loser in comparison with the unjust. First of all, in private contracts : wherever the unjust is the partner of the just you will find the unjust man has always more and the just less. Next in their dealings with the State: when there is an income-tax, the just man will pay more and the unjust less on the same amount of income; and when there is anything to be received the one gains nothing and the other much. Observe also that when they come into office, there is the just man neglecting his affairs and perhaps suffering other losses, but he will not compensate himself out of the public purse because he is just: moreover he is hated by his friends and acquaintances for refusing to help them in unlawful ways."

In the *Crito* Socrates defines the 'good life' of the citizens of a State as "the equivalent of a just and honourable one." That is the sense in which the term is used in the *Republic*.

Plato lived and died in a pagan world: he was born in the early years of the Peloponnesian War, which embittered and degraded public life in Greece, and he is said to have died in 347 B.C. Yet he speaks at times with an accent more distinctively Christian than some of those in the present age who have essayed to lead us into the pleasant ways and paths of peace of the ideal commonwealth. Sir Thomas More, good Christian as he was, follows Plato in a very intimate way when he tells us that his Utopians "define Virtue thus: that it is a living according to Nature, and think that we are made by God for that end."

Plato held to the view that there were four cardinal virtues rooted by Nature in the soul of man, namely, Wisdom, Valour, Temperance (in the sense of self-control) and Justice. With these inherent qualities functioning in the conduct of its citizens, the State would attain unity and security and continuous progress on its march towards the realization of the ideal social life.

** At a time when Canada is aligned with other units of the British Empire in assisting the mother country to defeat the attempt of a league of barbaric nations to make the world a hell-hole for mankind it is well for us to have recourse to

utopian literature. It will refresh the souls of those who are strangers to this literature to know that there have been idealists in almost every civilized nation in the past who would have their compatriots strive to make this earth fit to be called God's footstool, and its people worthy of being made in his image. True, there are critics who maintain that the proponents of these types of political idealism have chiefly spoken from the easy chair of the theorist rather than from the workshop of the practical reformer, but it is very generally admitted that political philosophy owes somewhat of a debt to utopian literature. As to this fact, we call to witness Anatole France. This is his testimony in the case for the Utopians :

"Without the Utopians of other times, men would still live in caves, miserable and naked. It was Utopians who traced the lines of the first city. . . . Out of the generous dreams come beneficial realities. Utopia is the principle of all progress, and the essay into a better future."

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BURKE'S 'REPROOF VALIANT'.—Edmund Burke was a philosopher rather than a politician. He was of too serious a habit of mind to indulge in levity either in his public addresses or his literary performances. Nevertheless during one of his speeches in the House of Commons the Irish wit that was native, but usually dormant, in him prompted his utterance of one of the most scathing sallies in parliamentary debate that has come down to us from the past. On being called to order by a more or less insignificant member of the Government for an alleged insulting reference to His Majesty George III, Burke addressed the Speaker in the following terms:

"Sir, the honourable member has exhibited much ardour, but little discrimination. He should know that, however I may reverence the King, I am not at all bound, nor at all inclined, to extend that reverence to all his Ministers. I may honour His Majesty, but, Sir, I can see no possible reason for honouring"—here he meaningly glanced round the Treasury Bench where his assailant was seated—"His Majesty's man-servant, and maid-servant, his ox and his ass !"

Burke's withering retort uttered on the spur of the moment affirms the truth of the maxim propounded in one of Molière's plays,—"*L'impromptu est justement la pierre de touche de l'esprit.*"

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