CHAPTER VII

THE ESTABLISHED CHURCH OF DOUBT

Let us now finally consider what the honest Eugenists do mean, since it has become increasingly evident that they cannot mean what they say. Unfortunately, the obstacles to any explanation of this are such as to insist on a circuitous approach. The tendency of all that is printed and much that is spoken to-day is to be, in the only true sense, behind the times. It is because it is always in a hurry that it is always too late. Give an ordinary man a day to write an article, and he will remember the things he has really heard latest; and may even, in the last glory of the sunset, begin to think of what he thinks himself. Give him an hour to write it, and he will think of the nearest text-book on the topic, and make the best mosaic he may out of classical quotations and old authorities. Give him ten minutes to write it and he will run screaming for refuge to the old nursery where he learnt his stalest proverbs, or the old school where he learnt his stalest politics. The quicker goes the journalist the slower go his thoughts. The result is the newspaper of our time, which every day can be delivered earlier and earlier, and which, every day, is less worth delivering at all. The poor panting
critic falls farther and farther behind the motor-car of modern fact. Fifty years ago he was barely fifteen years behind the times. Fifteen years ago he was not more than fifty years behind the times. Just now he is rather more than a hundred years behind the times: and the proof of it is that the things he says, though manifest nonsense about our society to-day, really were true about our society some hundred and thirty years ago. The best instance of his belated state is his perpetual assertion that the supernatural is less and less believed. It is a perfectly true and realistic account—of the eighteenth century. It is the worst possible account of this age of psychics and spirit-healers and fakirs and fashionable fortune-tellers. In fact, I generally reply in eighteenth century language to this eighteenth century illusion. If somebody says to me, "The creeds are crumbling," I reply, "And the King of Prussia, who is himself a Freethinker, is certainly capturing Silesia from the Catholic Empress." If somebody says, "Miracles must be reconsidered in the light of rational experience," I answer affably, "But I hope that our enlightened leader, Hébert, will not insist on guillotining that poor French queen." If somebody says, "We must watch for the rise of some new religion which can commend itself to reason," I reply, "But how much more necessary is it to watch for the rise of some military adventurer who may destroy the Republic; and, to my mind, that young Major Bonaparte has rather a restless air." It is only in such language from
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the Age of Reason that we can answer such things. The age we live in is something more than an age of superstition—it is an age of innumerable superstitions. But it is only with one example of this that I am concerned here.

I mean the error that still sends men marching about disestablishing churches and talking of the tyranny of compulsory church teaching or compulsory church tithes. I do not wish for an irrelevant misunderstanding here; I would myself certainly disestablish any church that had a numerical minority, like the Irish or the Welsh; and I think it would do a great deal of good to genuine churches that have a partly conventional majority, like the English, or even the Russian. But I should only do this if I had nothing else to do; and just now there is very much else to do. For religion, orthodox or unorthodox, is not just now relying on the weapon of State establishment at all. The Pope practically made no attempt to preserve the Concordat; but seemed rather relieved at the independence his Church gained by the destruction of it: and it is common talk among the French clericalists that the Church has gained by the change. In Russia the one real charge brought by religious people (especially Roman Catholics) against the Orthodox Church is not its orthodoxy or heterodoxy, but its abject dependence on the State. In England we can almost measure an Anglican's fervour for his Church by his comparative coolness about its establishment—that is, its control by a Parliament of
Scotch Presbyterians like Balfour, or Welsh Congregationalists like Lloyd George. In Scotland the powerful combination of the two great sects outside the establishment have left it in a position in which it feels no disposition to boast of being called by mere lawyers the Church of Scotland. I am not here arguing that Churches should not depend on the State; nor that they do not depend upon much worse things. It may be reasonably maintained that the strength of Romanism, though it be not in any national police, is in a moral police more rigid and vigilant. It may be reasonably maintained that the strength of Anglicanism, though it be not in establishment, is in aristocracy, and its shadow, which is called snobbishness. All I assert here is that the Churches are not now leaning heavily on their political establishment; they are not using heavily the secular arm. Almost everywhere their legal tithes have been modified, their legal boards of control have been mixed. They may still employ tyranny, and worse tyranny: I am not considering that. They are not specially using that special tyranny which consists in using the government.

The thing that really is trying to tyrannise through government is Science. The thing that really does use the secular arm is Science. And the creed that really is levying tithes and capturing schools, the creed that really is enforced by fine and imprisonment, the creed that really is proclaimed not in sermons but in statutes, and spread not by pilgrims but
by policemen—that creed is the great but disputed system of thought which began with Evolution and has ended in Eugenics. Materialism is really our established Church; for the Government will really help it to persecute its heretics. Vaccination, in its hundred years of experiment, has been disputed almost as much as baptism in its approximate two thousand. But it seems quite natural to our politicians to enforce vaccination; and it would seem to them madness to enforce baptism.

I am not frightened of the word "persecution" when it is attributed to the churches; nor is it in the least as a term of reproach that I attribute it to the men of science. It is as a term of legal fact. If it means the imposition by the police of a widely disputed theory, incapable of final proof—then our priests are not now persecuting, but our doctors are. The imposition of such dogmas constitutes a State Church—in an older and stronger sense than any that can be applied to any supernatural Church to-day. There are still places where the religious minority is forbidden to assemble or to teach in this way or that; and yet more where it is excluded from this or that public post. But I cannot now recall any place where it is compelled by the criminal law to go through the rite of the official religion. Even the Young Turks did not insist on all Macedonians being circumcised.

Now here we find ourselves confronted with an amazing fact. When, in the past, opinions so arguable have been enforced by State violence, it has been
at the instigation of fanatics who held them for fixed and flaming certainties. If truths could not be evaded by their enemies, neither could they be altered even by their friends. But what are the certain truths that the secular arm must now lift the sword to enforce? Why, they are that very mass of bottomless questions and bewildered answers that we have been studying in the last chapters—questions whose only interest is that they are trackless and mysterious; answers whose only glory is that they are tentative and new. The devotee boasted that he would never abandon the faith; and therefore he persecuted for the faith. But the doctor of science actually boasts that he will always abandon a hypothesis; and yet he persecutes for the hypothesis. The Inquisitor violently enforced his creed, because it was unchangeable. The savant enforces it violently because he may change it the next day.

Now this is a new sort of persecution; and one may be permitted to ask if it is an improvement on the old. The difference, so far as one can see at first, seems rather favourable to the old. If we are to be at the merciless mercy of man, most of us would rather be racked for a creed that existed intensely in somebody's head, rather than vivisected for a discovery that had not yet come into anyone's head, and possibly never would. A man would rather be tortured with a thumbscrew until he chose to see reason than tortured with a vivisecting knife until the vivisector chose to see reason. Yet that is the real difference between the two types of legal enforcement.
If I gave in to the Inquisitors, I should at least know what creed to profess. But even if I yelled out a *credo* when the Eugenists had me on the rack, I should not know what creed to yell. I might get an extra turn of the rack for confessing to the creed they confessed quite a week ago.

Now let no light-minded person say that I am here taking extravagant parallels; for the parallel is not only perfect, but plain. For this reason: that the difference between torture and vivisection is not in any way affected by the fierceness or mildness of either. Whether they gave the rack half a turn or half a hundred, they were, by hypothesis, dealing with a truth which they knew to be there. Whether they vivisect painfully or painlessly, they are trying to find out whether the truth is there or not. The old Inquisitors tortured to put their own opinions into somebody. But the new Inquisitors torture to get their own opinions out of him. They do not know what their own opinions are, until the victim of vivisection tells them. The division of thought is a complete chasm for anyone who cares about thinking. The old persecutor was trying to *teach* the citizen, with fire and sword. The new persecutor is trying to *learn* from the citizen, with scalpel and germ-injector. The master was meeker than the pupil will be.

I could prove by many practical instances that even my illustrations are not exaggerated, by many placid proposals I have heard for the vivisection of criminals, or by the filthy incident of Dr. Neisser.
But I prefer here to stick to a strictly logical line of distinction, and insist that whereas in all previous persecutions the violence was used to end our indecision, the whole point here is that the violence is used to end the indecision of the persecutors. This is what the honest Eugenists really mean, so far as they mean anything. They mean that the public is to be given up, not as a heathen land for conversion, but simply as a *pabulum* for experiment. That is the real, rude, barbaric sense behind this Eugenic legislation. The Eugenist doctors are not such fools as they look in the light of any logical inquiry about what they want. They do not know what they want, except that they want your soul and body and mine in order to find out. They are quite seriously, as they themselves might say, the first religion to be experimental instead of doctrinal. All other established Churches have been based on somebody having found the truth. This is the first Church that was ever based on not having found it.

There is in them a perfectly sincere hope and enthusiasm; but it is not for us, but for what they might learn from us, if they could rule us as they can rabbits. They cannot tell us anything about heredity, because they do not know anything about it. But they do quite honestly believe that they would know something about it, when they had married and mismarried us for a few hundred years. They cannot tell us who is fit to wield such authority, for they know that nobody is; but they do quite honestly
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believe that when that authority has been abused for a very long time, somebody somehow will be evolved who is fit for the job. I am no Puritan, and no one who knows my opinions will consider it a mere criminal charge if I say that they are simply gambling. The reckless gambler has no money in his pockets; he has only the ideas in his head. These gamblers have no ideas in their heads; they have only the money in their pockets. But they think that if they could use the money to buy a big society to experiment on, something like an idea might come to them at last. That is Eugenics.

I confine myself here to remarking that I do not like it. I may be very stingy, but I am willing to pay the scientist for what he does know; I draw the line at paying him for everything he doesn't know. I may be very cowardly, but I am willing to be hurt for what I think or what he thinks—I am not willing to be hurt, or even inconvenienced, for whatever he might happen to think after he had hurt me. The ordinary citizen may easily be more magnanimous than I, and take the whole thing on trust; in which case his career may be happier in the next world, but (I think) sadder in this. At least, I wish to point out to him that he will not be giving his glorious body as soldiers give it, to the glory of a fixed flag, or martyrs to the glory of a deathless God. He will be, in the strict sense of the Latin phrase, giving his vile body for an experiment—an experiment of which even the experimentalist knows neither the significance nor the end.