

# Voluntary Action<sup>1</sup>

A REVIEW BY CANON MAX WARREN, D.D.

"THE State is or can be master of money, but in a free society it is master of very little else. The making of a good society depends not on the State but on the citizens, acting individually or in free association with one another, acting on motives of various kinds, some selfish others unselfish, some narrow and material others inspired by love of man and love of God. The happiness or unhappiness of the society in which we live depends upon ourselves as citizens, not on the instrument of political power which we call the State" (p. 320). That is the bracing answer given by Lord Beveridge to the question as to why, with complete democratic control of our Government, with social security established by law and full employment established in practice, life in Britain is not better than we find it to-day.

This very important and significant Report on "Methods of Social Advance" is the sequel to two others, A Survey of Social Insurance, and A Study of Full Employment in a Free Society, two reports which together have already had a profound and far-reaching effect upon the whole life and thought of our people. What is so important about this latest volume is that its author, who may justly be claimed as one of the great planners of our day, and who as a planner recognizes the indispensable need for public direction of the processes by which plans can be put into action for the good of the community, yet recognizes the limitations of centralized planning.

"This third Report," says its author, "is designed to show some of the tasks that must be undertaken if prosperity when it comes is to mean the chance of happiness for all. This Report shows in Chapters VIII and IX how much unhappiness remains in Britain, untouched by social security and full employment. That is the negative side of the Report. The positive side is more important.

"The positive side of this Third Report is in the earlier chapters, I to VI, which show how much the making of better conditions of life has owed to Voluntary Action. The world at large is engaged in debating, sometimes by reason and voting, sometimes in other ways, the advantages and disadvantages of private enterprise in business. This Third Report is concerned with private enterprise, not in business but in the service of mankind, not for gain but under the driving power of social conscience. The need for private enterprise in that form is beyond debate" (p. 321).

In a word, Lord Beveridge has provided a study of Voluntary Action viewed in its historic achievements in our own country within the last 150 years: he has shown how this voluntary action has taken shape in voluntary organizations, organizations, that is, which, whether their workers are paid or unpaid, are initiated and governed by their own members without external control. He has shown the enormous field still demanding voluntary action even in a social

<sup>1</sup> *Voluntary Action*—A Report on Methods of Social Advance—by Lord Beveridge, published by Allen and Unwin, 1948, price 16/-.

service state : he has demonstrated the limitations of what the State can do "to make life good" : he has given to all who believe in Voluntary Action and the principle of voluntary organisations a summons to searching self-criticism, to renewed faith, to hope and to courage.

This study of Voluntary Action is of importance far beyond the range, extensive in itself, which Lord Beveridge has set for his immediate task. He is dealing with fundamental principles that apply to every aspect of community living. If he appears to be addressing the civil service, or the Friendly Societies or the Citizens' Advice Bureaux, he is in fact speaking no less plainly to the Church Assembly, to Diocesan Conferences, to the parochial clergy—and to missionary and other Church societies.

#### THE MUTUAL-AID MOTIVE IN ACTION

The first part of the book, and from the general reader's point of view the most technical, is concerned with 'The Mutual aid Motive in Action.' Here is provided a survey of the Friendly Societies, and it is interesting to note how signal a part has been played in this movement by parochial clergy. The largest Friendly Society in England—the National Deposit Friendly Society—for instance, had its origin in plans laid in 1832 by the Reverend Samuel Best, the clergyman of a country parish in Hampshire, to promote the well-being of his neighbours.

The author emphasizes the fact that "the friendly societies have been much more than agencies for dealing with averages by way of mutual insurance. They have been social clubs; they have been societies concerned with the general welfare of their members; they have been channels for the spirit of voluntary service" (p. 60).

It is interesting to note the multiplicity of these Friendly Societies. Far from this being viewed as undesirable it is seen as one of the authentic expressions of a free society. "In a totalitarian State or in a field already made into a State monopoly, those dissatisfied with the institutions that they find can seek a remedy only by seeking to change the Government of the country. In a free society and a free field they have a different remedy; discontented individuals with new ideas can make a new institution to meet their needs. The field is open to experiment and success or failure; secession is the midwife of invention. The new institution may fail or may remain limited. It may grow according to the life that is in it, and growing may change the world" (p. 59).

It is perhaps no accident that in describing the growth of the friendly societies from small beginnings Lord Beveridge uses language taken from another field of community enterprise. "It was almost an accident," he writes, "if a club which had started locally, developed, as the Hearts of Oak did, into a large society. But once men thought of themselves as an order—Oddfellows, Shepherds, Foresters—they became men with a mission; the first lodge sought to be parent of other lodges; it sent out missionaries to preach the gospel of Forestry or Shepherdry" (p. 37).

The Friendly Societies are facing in some ways a difficult future.

For whereas the Government in 1911 in its plans for social insurance sought a maximum of co-operation between the state and voluntary agencies in this field, the Government of 1946 has divorced the two entirely. Lord Beveridge is frankly critical of the Government's decision in this matter, not at all because he fears for the Friendly Societies. He has unbounded confidence in their future. What he is concerned about is the beneficiaries of social insurance. "Will the State," he asks, "be able to create a machine capable of doing what the affiliated orders did in the most difficult of all forms of social insurance, of combining soundness with sympathy in administration of cash benefits to the sick? Will the State be able to avoid the evil alternatives of extravagance and of harshness? The present rulers of the State have light heartedly taken on a task without as yet having shown understanding of its nature" (p. 84).

Not the least valuable part of this Report is its study of such other illustrations of the mutual aid motive in action as is given by the Trade Unions, the Co-operative Movement, the Building and Housing Societies, and the Hospital Contributory Schemes. This whole section is of great importance for an assessment of the political and social trends in our country to-day. Speaking of the Trade Union Movement as "the most influential form of voluntary action in Britain" the author does not attempt to forecast its future. He makes two pertinent comments, however. "Trade Unionism to-day in Britain stands as an exceptional instance of power, resting on money and organization, without financial responsibility"; and, "the trade union movement, like every other form of getting together in Britain, is based in the last resort on local associations retaining independence and the capacity for revolt" (p. 90).

#### THE VOLUNTARY SOCIAL SERVICES AND THEIR DEVELOPMENT

The central section of this Report deals with the Voluntary Social Services and their Development and will be the part most enjoyed by the general reader. Here will be found documented something of the record of what Voluntary Action and voluntary organizations have achieved for the better ordering of our national life. Social surveys upon which legislation has been built, residential settlements as an attempt to break the barriers between Disraeli's "two nations," the struggle to preserve urban and rural amenities, women's organizations and youth organizations, and the wide ramifications of the Charity Organization Society now known as Family Welfare: all these are listed and reviewed. Due note is taken of the value of co-ordination and its difficulties, and a wise word is added which applies to all who feel the compelling urge to co-ordinate the activities of others:

"The nature of Voluntary Action is to be free and independent. Enterprise in this field, as in most others, comes before co-ordination. No central body should be established to break or weaken the connection between voluntary agencies for special purposes and the Government departments or local authorities which wish to use them. Co-ordination and Consultation must be free, not forced" (p. 150).

But Lord Beveridge is no less clear that the voluntary organizations cannot go on as if the world was not changing. If there is a great

and expanding opportunity before them, and this the third section of the Report amply demonstrates; if they constitute in themselves something indispensable to the whole fabric of a free and good society; yet nevertheless there is a need for them to understand the new world in which they must operate; there is much for them to learn if they are to continue to justify the trust which their past services have amply endorsed. Writing of the voluntary social services Lord Beveridge again has something to say which is of far wider relevance than the immediate marks of his concern. "The need for self-criticism among voluntary agencies," he says, "is even greater to-day than in the past. As material standards rise and security of subsistence income is achieved, the relatively simple task of meeting needs for money falls into the background. The new tasks of voluntary agencies then become more difficult, not less difficult: they are concerned with such tasks as the formation of the right outlook in youth, or helping to adjust personal relationships, or rescuing the handicapped physically or socially. All these things and many other things that have still to be done to make a good society need knowledge as well as good-will in the doers. The spirit of service is a wind that bloweth where it listeth. But if it is a true spirit it implies readiness to learn how to serve as well as desire to serve" (p. 151).

Lord Beveridge believes that the spirit of service is alive in Britain. But he is under no illusion as to the need to stir it into far greater life if the benefits of legislation are even to be effective at all at the deepest levels of national well-being. He notes the disquieting fact recorded by the Mass Observations Report that "no matter in what sort of area they lived . . . less than a third of the people with whom investigators come into contact were found to be giving any sort of fairly regular voluntary help to people outside their families." The author sums up his conclusions with the words:

"The spirit of service is in our people. But only in the few is it a driving force which makes them pioneers, not to be stayed by difficulties. There is always need for the few—dynamic individuals wholly possessed by this spirit. They call it forth in others; they create institutions and societies through which it acts; they lead by their example. Voluntary Action depends on its pioneers" (p. 152).

Then follows appropriately enough a chapter on the pioneers. "No study of voluntary action as a means of social advance," says Lord Beveridge, "would be complete which did not describe, however briefly, some of the individuals who had fire in their bellies, show their origins and how they came to their tasks. Emergence and freedom of action of pioneers are the conditions of progress" (p. 154). Shaftesbury, Henry Duncan, Elizabeth Fry, Frederick Denison Maurice, Henry Solly, William Booth, Octavia Hill, Dr. Barnardo, Mary Augusta Ward, Canon Barnett, Baden Powell, Sidney and Beatrice Webb, are some of those whose lives are sketched. It is significantly recorded that "Most of the pioneers, so far as anything is known of their opinions, were moved by a religious motive or came from a home where religion was a reality" (p. 155).

The moral drawn from this chapter is a simple and direct one—"It is important that the road should always be open for gifted

individuals to blaze new trails. It is as important that there should remain the liberty of simple men to associate for action, in new forms for new purposes, free of prohibition either by the State or by associations already established." The whole of that quotation, and not least its last four words, are of central importance for the life of the Church no less than for the life of the State.

This section of the book is completed by an intriguing chapter on Charitable Trusts which ought to be read by everyone before they make their wills !

#### THE CHANGING ENVIRONMENT OF VOLUNTARY ACTION

Part III deals with 'The Changing Environment of Voluntary Action.' Lord Beveridge lists four major changes and tendencies in this country as having taken place during the last 150 years. "They are the rise of the general standard of living since the early part of the nineteenth century ; the movement to greater equality in the distribution of incomes in the past thirty or forty years : the parallel movement to greater equality in the distribution of leisure ; and the coming in the same period of the Social Service State " (p. 217).

The first two of these changes will inevitably affect the nature of many voluntary social services, and some of them will be no longer necessary. The third poses the question of how leisure can be used well and the problem of how to obtain from the many the voluntary service once rendered by the few, and without which a good society cannot be made. The fourth of course poses the largest question of all. "The State has undertaken to see that, irrespective of the means of his parents, every child shall have education fitted to his abilities. The State has set out to ensure freedom from want by ensuring that at all times, of earning and not earning alike, the income of each family shall be enough for its basic needs. The State has set out to ensure freedom from avoidable disease, so far as this can be attained by providing that every sick person irrespective of means shall be able to get the treatment needed to make him well. What else remains to be done ? " (p. 225). The future of Voluntary Action must be considered in the light of these four factors.

#### THE SCOPE OF VOLUNTARY ACTION TO-DAY

The next chapter is the most moving of the whole book. Here there is demonstrated a vast mass of human need and suffering in our own country which no State action can meet. Here we see the aged, an increasing company, whose basic need is companionship, a sense of being wanted, whose tragedy is loneliness. Here are the children who have no homes. The Curtis Report upon this area of human need has prepared the way for legislation. But a huge question mark remains to haunt the drafters of the Children's Bill. Lord Beveridge voices it thus. "The care which parents give to their children is not given for money. When that care fails, it cannot be replaced by people who do what they do only for money. How are we going to find foster-parents and house-mothers who, under local authorities and voluntary agencies alike, will do their work for the sake of the children and not for the pay that they receive ? " (p. 238).

Here also are the children in their homes, the hardest to reach of all when love towards them has turned to carelessness and even cruelty. It has been a Voluntary Organization which has so signally reduced this area of human misery. "For the children in their homes," says Lord Beveridge, "the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children stands indispensable for curing evils of individual failure on which higher earnings, family allowances and social security will make no impression, and for raising continually the popular standard of responsibility in regard to childhood" (p. 243).

Here are the physically handicapped, the aged and the children, the blind and the deaf, the otherwise disabled, the chronic sick, handicapped children. In addition there is the unmarried mother and her child, the discharged prisoners, and a class more wide-ranging than ever to-day—the overburdened housewife.

"The picture presented in this chapter is a grim one. It is a picture of unhappiness of many different kinds, with relieving agencies working against odds. The unhappiness is not due primarily to want of money. It is due to shortage of things which money should represent, but which are not being produced and of services of a kind which money often cannot buy" (p. 266).

But in addition to the kind of needs listed above, which all come within the time honoured range of voluntary social action and which in many respects can only be met on that basis, there are new spheres of activity being opened up for such action. One of the most far-reaching of these is to be found in the increase of leisure. Holidays with pay have created a vast problem to which at the moment no solution is within sight. The function of the State in solving this problem ought to be strictly limited to such minimum legislations as will encourage the staggering of holidays, though in view of the inability even of the State to alter the climate it may be doubted how far even such legislation will affect the situation. The People must solve this problem for themselves. When it is remembered that "to give the wage-earner a holiday does not in itself mean giving a holiday to the housewife and mother" it will be seen that voluntary action may well find significant scope for its initiative in this field.

Equally important is the point made by Lord Beveridge when he says: "The people with most leisure to-day are the adolescents and the young adults before family responsibilities begin. They are the citizens of the future. Upon the kind of citizens that they become the future depends. To promote the right use of adolescent leisure is perhaps the greatest of all tasks for Voluntary Action to-day." Voluntary organizations for youth inspired by a Christian view of man and his needs have their day of greatest opportunity before them. What is no less certain is that if they fail other organizations will enter the field, perhaps even the State itself, and we shall find ourselves in a regimented society. The totalitarianisms of the modern world have climbed to power on the backs of youth.

The growing complexity of modern life has provoked the natural and necessary reaction of the calling into being of Citizens' Advice Bureaux. First mooted in the annual report of the National Council of Social Service for 1935-1936, this project took definite form at a

conference of voluntary organizations in the Autumn of 1938. "The work of a Citizens' Advice Bureau is extremely varied in nature and in responsibility. Some of it is no more than handing out the correct information as to regulations of the social insurance scheme or war pensions or rationing . . . some of it—particularly under the growing heads of personal and family problems and matrimonial problems—involves handling human problems of extreme difficulty and delicacy" (p. 283).

These Citizens' Advice Bureaux are voluntary organizations, dependent in considerable degree on unpaid volunteers. The increase in paid staff in recent years is due to the demand for the Bureaux and the need to serve longer hours than volunteers with other duties are able to afford. It is not due to a falling off of the voluntary spirit. Lord Beveridge makes the important point about this when he says: "Advice to citizens must be given independently by other citizens. A public authority may provide the material means for Citizens' Advice Bureaux but should no more control them than it controls Universities." That wise counsel is convincing only in a free society. Where that counsel is not heeded, where every encouragement is not given to Voluntary Action, the society is no longer free.

This development of the Citizens' Advice Bureaux is momentous from another point of view and that is from the point of view of the Churches. On the one hand such Bureaux may well serve the useful purpose of saving the clergy a portion of their present great burden of functioning as unpaid civil servants, a saving which could be increased if such Bureaux carried staff authorized to sign some of the innumerable forms that are brought daily to the clergy. On the other hand their increasing use for the solving of intimate human problems is a reflection of the failing grip of the Churches on large numbers of the population. But the situation is not necessarily one to deplore. If the clergy will only recognise the fact they are being offered by these Bureaux one of the greatest opportunities for evangelism, only it is an evangelism for which they must train their laity. For the most part the work of Citizens' Advice Bureaux can only be handled, and ought only to be handled, by the laity. Will the clergy have the vision to see that far from being an infringement on their prerogative these Citizens' Advice Bureaux offer an unparalleled opportunity for re-establishing in our modern society the priesthood of the laity in that sense in which Evangelical Christians have always understood it?

Of course training will be needed. The Family Welfare Association, for instance, makes adequate training a condition for paid and unpaid staff alike. But as important as training is vocation. Lord Beveridge significantly quotes in this connection some words by a leader in Voluntary Action from Lancashire:

"To-day there is much emphasis laid, and rightly laid, on the need for training in Social Service, and attention is being paid to the need for adequate salaries and for satisfactory conditions of service. But no training is of use on bad material, and without the background of a sense of vocation, social service will have no basic principles."

What an amazing opportunity confronts the Christian Churches of this country!

## THE STATE AND VOLUNTARY ACTION

Part IV—the final section of the book—deals with conclusions and recommendations. Its closely packed paragraphs do not lend themselves easily to quotation because every sentence matters. Its hopefulness may be gauged by one brief extract: "The capacity of Voluntary Action inspired by philanthropy to do new things is beyond question. Voluntary Action is needed to do things which the State should not do, in the giving of advice, or in organizing the use of leisure. It is needed to do things which the State is most unlikely to do. It is needed to pioneer ahead of the State and make experiments. It is needed to get services rendered which cannot be got by paying for them." That is finely said. And it is applied in different terms by Lord Beveridge to the future of the Friendly Societies no less than of other forms of Voluntary Action.

Very realistically Lord Beveridge then confronts the issue implicit in his whole argument that for a society to be a free society in our complex modern world there must be frank and friendly co-operation between the State and all those organizations which are the expressions of Voluntary Action. Recognizing the difficulties facing the State and the voluntary organizations involved in any attempt by the State to finance the voluntary organization, yet Lord Beveridge is clear that some way must be found by which larger material resources can be put at the disposal of those organizations which in fact can alone make "the good life possible" for many of those whose minimum needs have been assured by the State. This he would suggest could be done in a variety of ways. As touching the Friendly Societies there is need for an Act re-defining their purposes and enlarging their scope "beyond monetary insurance to provisions of services and neighbourly mutual aid," due attention being paid to tax exemption and other financial considerations. In the interest of all philanthropic organizations some re-examination of the Taxation of Voluntary Agencies is urgent. A Royal Commission on Charitable Trusts should be appointed not by way of an implied criticism of these Trusts but with a view to encouraging them and making them even more beneficial than they already are. There should also be a Minister-Guardian of Voluntary Action, for "it is important that the voluntary agencies should have a recognized voice and protector in the Government itself."

Lord Beveridge does not of course mean by this the setting up of a government department for this purpose. That would be a contradiction of his whole argument. But rather "The suggestion made here is that the Lord President of the council, who is now Minister-Guardian of Voluntary Action in the academic and scientific fields, should extend his interests to the field surveyed in this Report" (p. 313). The State should also encourage specialized training. It is no interference with the principle of Voluntary Action, for instance, to ensure that those who are prepared to give their time and service to meeting the problems of their fellow men should have received at least a minimum of the necessary training to discharge this responsibility. Nor would it qualify the voluntary character of the service, if the State paid for the training, though it would be dangerous if this payment was used as an excuse to dictate the nature of the training



given. The freedom of the Universities in spite of large Government grants provides the necessary precedent to safeguard this point.

The very important practical question of continuing and increasing Government grants to voluntary organizations is recognized by Lord Beveridge as being extremely complex. Here the University Grants Committee provides no precedent. Universities "differ from one another only as individuals of the same species and race differ from one another. To divide a total grant between these twenty institutions from time to time, after reviewing their needs and aims of the moment, is not a simple but it is a quite possible task. The task of allotting a single public grant among all philanthropic agencies would be quite different. They are numbered not by tens but by thousands. They are infinitely various in scale, methods, form of government, and degree of responsibility. And unlike the Universities, they have widely differing aims" (p. 316).

Lord Beveridge would distinguish between the giving of grants by a particular Government department to a particular voluntary agency for some social service where there is a joint specialist interest between the two bodies, and the giving of supplementary grants to activities which do not fall directly within the purview of any one department. The former is already established in principle and should be increased and might well "be made not simply to cover the bare cost of services but to help with the overheads as well." For the latter there would seem to be a case for "placing alongside of the great charitable foundations—London Parochial, Carnegie, Pilgrim, Nuffield, and the rest—an independent corporation endorsed by the State for social advance by Voluntary Action."

Lord Beveridge believes that some such measures are at least essential as an interim measure during a period of rapid social change and of economic stringency. This combination of a measure of State provision combined with the essential freedom of the voluntary organizations to give Voluntary Action is a far-reaching one. It has obvious dangers. It might reduce the degree of financial support contributed by the members of the voluntary organizations and in so doing impair their moral independence. It might, and some will certainly insist that it inevitably will, involve the extension of State control. These dangers must be faced. But they are dangers inherent in our contemporary situation. A Free Society will only continue to survive if men believe in freedom and are prepared to give themselves sacrificially not only to secure but to maintain it. Those same free men, inspired by the same purpose and the same ideals, elect some of their number to function as the Government of the State. In so functioning they need not lose the ideals or cease to be inspired by the purposes of their fellow citizens whose devotion animates the voluntary organizations. As Lord Beveridge sums it up—"The State should encourage Voluntary Action of all kinds for social advance. . . . It should in every field of its growing activity use where it can, without destroying their freedom and their spirit, the voluntary agencies for social advance, born of social conscience and of philanthropy. This is one of the marks of a free society" (p. 318).

By any reckoning Lord Beveridge's Report *Voluntary Action* is one of the more important social documents of our time. Its interpretation of the changing social scene is as fascinating as it is illuminating. Its analysis of the limitations of the State and its critical appraisal of the function of voluntary organizations is of quite first-rate importance for every alert citizen. For the Church it is a most solemn and searching warning against the prevailing tendency towards ecclesiastical bureaucracy, the while it is a notable stimulant and encouragement to ordinary Christian men who believe they have a part to play in the Conversion of England.

## Contemporary Commentary

A Quarterly Review of Church Affairs and Theological Trends

BY THE REV. F. J. TAYLOR, M.A.

### THE NEW ISLAM

**P**OLITICIANS upon whose shoulders rest heavy burdens of responsibility and students of international affairs are alike pre-occupied with the insistent challenge of communism to the ideals and practice of western civilisation. The Christian Church, because of its historic connection with that civilisation and its commitments in every part of the world, is confronted with the same grave issues. Probably the most formidable challenge for a thousand years to the world mission of Christianity is to be found in the communist expansion into all parts of the world. The strength and appeal of communism are derived from its passionate exposure of the cruelties and injustice inflicted upon the ordinary man in the industrial disorder of the modern age. It is presented to men in the guise of a substitute religion with an orthodox theology, an integrated world outlook, a sacred literature and a company of the 'saved' governed by a rigid discipline. As a substitute religion, despite its exclusive concern with the economic and social conditions of human life and its repudiation of a spiritual world, it is able to evoke a measure of devotion and self-sacrifice which can only be compared with the most heroic moments in the history of the Christian Church.

In the last few decades Roman Catholic Christians following the lead of the Vatican have identified communism as the chief enemy of the gospel and have declared unrelenting war upon it. Christians of other allegiances, believing that something more is required of the Church than an aggressive counter-attack on communism as an utterly unchristian philosophy, have sought to meet the challenge in a spirit of penitence for Christian social shortcomings, acknowledging in the words of the Archbishop of York that communism is "a judgment on the social and economic sins of western civilization." It seemed reasonable to conclude that the persecution of Christians in Russia in the early years of the Bolshevik regime was no more than a very