

June 24, 1899.]

THE SPECTATOR.

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and, far more, in England, has succeeded in blinding Englishmen to facts. Any further to support such a State—for which we are responsible, and which is causing unrest to territories and people directly depending upon us—seems to many of us an act of iniquity and unrighteousness, which England ought not to be answerable for, without grave searchings of heart.—I am, Sir, &c., W. J. KNOX LITTLE.

The College, Worcester, June 20th.

NATIONAL AND INDIVIDUAL MORALITY.

[TO THE EDITOR OF THE "SPECTATOR."]

SIR,—The statement by Mr. Charles W. Fox in the *Spectator* of June 17th, that an honourable nation, like an honourable individual, would be one which "swearth to its own hurt and changeth not," seems to me so hostile to a true political morality that I hope you will allow me a word of protest against the doctrine, quite apart from the merits of the case forming its illustration,—a case on which I have nothing to say. All that I would urge was brought forward many years ago by J. S. Mill, when Englishmen were indignant at Russia's reassertion of her rights in the Black Sea, abdicated after the Crimean War. Many persons still living can perfectly well remember that war, yet the fact that the breach of the treaties which closed it was justified by the foremost philosopher of his day is already forgotten, and its drift needs recalling. The statesman who formulates a treaty is a trustee for the millions of his countrymen and the billions of their posterity. His duty is to do his best for them, and certainly he would do his worst if he affixed his signature to a pledge he had any intention of breaking or of teaching them to break. But to assert with your correspondent that his successors are equally bound is to lose all sense of what a nation is. There is such a thing as national honour; they have a grave responsibility who impair it. One would need your whole issue to discuss its relation to individual honour. But it is certain that none do more to impair it, however unconsciously, than those who would confuse a man's duty to stand by his word, at whatever cost to himself, and his power of standing by somebody else's word, at whatever cost to a number of people whose inconveniences or disadvantages he would never even be forced to witness. The case of the Outlanders in the Transvaal, whether good or bad, is to most of us almost an abstract question; it is easy to give out fine sentiments in a matter which so little comes home to us. Does any one suppose that a treaty to England's hurt would or ought to be faithfully observed from generation to generation, supposing the matter to be one concerning the interests of Englishmen on English soil, of what we mean by *England*? The danger of an unreal morality, of a morality, that is, which would have no connection with action if any stress were put upon it, is, as you have so excellently urged in connection with another subject, that it defeats what is best on its own side. It needs merely a crisis enforcing public attention to confute the notion that a man, because he happens to be a Cabinet Minister, ought to behave in the same manner towards his own interests and towards those of other people. If that has been accepted by the world as the meaning of national honour, the awakening of strong feeling which swept such rhetoric away like dust would sweep with it much that is most precious in the ideal of national righteousness. When the battle was lost the Ark would be gone.—I am, Sir, &c., JULIA WEDGWOOD.

ENGINEER OFFICERS, ROYAL NAVY.

[TO THE EDITOR OF THE "SPECTATOR."]

SIR,—In the *Spectator* of June 10th a correspondent, "X," has seen fit to give expression to his views concerning certain portions of the *personnel* of her Majesty's Fleet, and of their relation one to another. The whole composition is, however, so erratic, and inapplicable to the Royal Navy, and is so undoubtedly contributed in ignorance of the subject in hand, that it is to be hoped you will find space in your valuable paper for a correction of statements as ridiculous as they are unjust. The facts are as follows:—(a) The heading "Royal Naval Engineers" is fictitious, there being no corps or body of men so known or described in her Majesty's Navy. (b) There are no officers in her Majesty's Fleet who officially, or

by the custom of the Service, are ever described as "deck" officers. (c) The engineer officers, Royal Navy, who as students merely go through a short course of field exercise, without examination, are not "trained men" as understood in the Royal Navy. (d) The engine-room ratings, as represented by the stoker class, receive instruction in small-arm and other drills, and are quite capable of performing rank-and-file duties in a battalion. The engineer officers, however, are not competent, and take no part whatever in the instruction of these ratings in such duties, and have no qualifications which would enable them to manœuvre the nine hundred men here mentioned, nor to perform the minor duties of company officers of even the supernumerary rank. (e) Outside the engine-room, and when not employed in departmental work, the engine-room ratings in every ship, and from all time, come directly under the executive officers; their mess-deck, leave, discipline, military instruction, and employment during general drills being the care of these officers only, to let alone those employed in steamboats, &c., and other work directly supervised by executive officers. (f) The "sequel," under headings 1, 2, and 3, is but thinly-veiled abuse of a body of men who invariably do rise, and have risen to whatever is required of them, and who at no period of their career either give more trouble or are more discontented than any other sect at similar periods of their service. The discontent recently voiced in one of the Service journals is absolutely unmirrored in the subordinate ranks of the engine-room department, for whom, selfishly enough, no claims whatever have been advanced by even the most energetic of the malcontents. And so far as these engine-room ratings themselves are concerned, they view with absolute indifference this struggle by their superiors for ranks and uniforms, the duties appertaining to which are entirely beyond, and altogether foreign to, the qualifications and knowledge of the officers thus desiring them.—I am, Sir, &c., VINCET-VERITAS.

[We are glad to print our correspondent's letter, as we wish to hear all sides, but we cannot think that this most difficult and important question will be solved if it is to be approached in the spirit in which he approaches it. We may recall to our readers' minds Mr. Kipling's very guarded but most significant handling of the subject in "A Fleet in Being."—Ed. *Spectator*.]

THE PEACE CONFERENCE.—A PARALLEL.

[TO THE EDITOR OF THE "SPECTATOR."]

SIR,—May I be permitted to draw a parallel in your paper between the Peace Conference now being held at the Hague and the Holy Alliance of 1815? Like the present Czar Nicholas, Alexander I. conceived an alliance ostensibly for the promotion of "happiness, safety, the benefits of peace, and strengthening the bonds of fraternity forever indestructible." In this he was vehemently supported by Madame Krüdener, a religious enthusiast who had great influence over the Czar; and at her suggestion the word "Holy" was, unfortunately, applied to the Alliance. This Madame Krüdener was, in fact, the Mr. Stead of those days; and as he has so admirably and enthusiastically supported the cause of peace at the end of the century, so did she at the beginning. To every one acquainted with history the epithet "unholy" would better have been applied to the Alliance of 1815. It became, in fact, nothing short of a powerful political coalition for the suppression of all reforms tending to the liberty of the nations who came under its sway; the original and admirable aims of the Alliance were completely distorted by the politicians of that day. Of course, I would not presume to say that such a thing could happen to the present Conference; to begin with, it is quite on different grounds, and even if it does fail in the main there will be a lot of good derived from the mere fact of its having been held. I cannot, however, help remarking that politicians as a rule do not regard things in the same light and with the same fervent enthusiasm as people of Madame Krüdener and Mr. Stead's character. Before concluding I must draw attention to the practical disruption of the Holy Alliance by Mr. Canning recognising the independence of the revolted Spanish colonies in South America. To quote his celebrated saying: "I called the new world into existence to redress