For Idea and Reality.

A Journal,

edited

by

R. Nielsen,

Bj. Bjørnson and Rud. Schmidt.

Volume for 1869.

Copenhagen.

Chr. Steen & Søn, Publishers.

Printed by Louis Klein.

Translated from the Danish

Idea and Reality.

---

[1] Idea and reality are a peculiar matter: they cannot do without one another and yet are constantly at strife with one another. Reality by itself, without guiding ideas and luminous principal thoughts, presents only a dismal spectacle, a ghastly sight of divided interests, petty squabbling, confusion and dissolution; and yet under such circumstances it is by no means convenient for peevish reality to engage with ideas, least of all with the idea it most deeply lacks, the awakening, clarifying, rejuvenating idea, for which, without understanding itself, it has long sighed in secret.

Reality's protest against a new, advancing idea is no valid proof of the idea's invalidity. On the contrary! A side of life may in and for itself be perfectly justified, may have every title as a pretender to the throne of reality, and yet meet resistance in the circumstances and be repeatedly beaten back, either because practical life still stands under the dominion of antiquated traditions, venerable by their age, which must die away only gradually, or else because reality, by suddenly shaking off a whole
[2] dynasty of old, forfeited ideas, has had its blood set boiling and has fallen into such an uproar that some time must pass before it can properly collect itself and provide the conditions for the new, vigorous idea. At last the long-awaited hour comes, the happy moment of understanding, reality opens its eye and recognizes the idea: idea and reality rush into one another's arms like two lovers who have long had to struggle with misunderstandings. But happy moments! alas, they were only brief. When the oath of fidelity is sworn, the festivities of the consecration over, and the honeymoon at an end, then enthusiasm cools, the creditors of existence present their bill for the conditions, and the troubles come again; for that is, after all, reality's lot: it is always full of troubles. Now complaint follows upon complaint from both sides. The idea complains that reality is sluggish, trivial and spiritless, without earnestness, without perseverance, without uplift. Reality complains that the idea, with its far-reaching demands and high-flying plans, is impractical, reckless, with no eye for what lies nearest, for the useful, an idealist, a visionary, in plain words, a dreamer. There may be violent scenes between the pair; the strife may go so far that, despite mutual obligations and the solemn vows of marriage, they even appeal to the public's most esteemed sense of justice and demand a divorce.

To judge in the case, it is each time necessary to investigate on which side the guilt lies. But to find out on which side the guilt lies, one must in every case concerned be

able to distinguish between a true and a false idea. If it is a false idea that has played the seducer's part and by dazzling appearance and flattering phrases has beguiled *[3]* reality in an unguarded moment and tricked it onto a dangerous and ruinous path, then it is plainly a duty to come to the poor beguiled one's aid, to chastise the seducer, and to see, as far as possible, that the hasty step is made good again. But if the idea is within its good right, if the goal it has set is the only reasonable one, because it is the only one that truly answers to the need of the age, and the path it has pointed out the only right one, because it is the only one that leads to the goal: then reality is surely in the wrong when, because it costs effort, it balks at applying its powers and working undaunted at the solution of the tasks the idea has prescribed.

What this means may be seen by a glance at the idea that the present age itself has exalted to be the ruling one, namely the idea of freedom. Is freedom, political freedom of the people, when we examine the matter impartially and speak without circumlocution, a true, self-valid and justified idea, or perhaps false, self-contradictory and ruinous? To make this an open question is, in view of the difficulties, troubles and complications with which it has already burdened reality, surely not so untimely as it might seem at first glance. Yet it is of no use to begin with reality, for reality is subject to many influences; reality has many minds, puts on many garbs and speaks with many tongues. How in the year 1848 the whole real contemporary world was enthusiastic for freedom, ready to bring every sacrifice and to risk everything for the idea! That was the time of awakening, the golden time of expectations, the time of *[4]* hope, and hope was like the fresh spring, hope was light green. But since that time expectations have sunk considerably again. Reality has already several times changed color; the light green has at times faded into the grayish and has even in some places passed into the flame-yellow. No, from reality one gets no reliable explanation; one must begin with the idea.

But is there then really in our days any reasonable person who can seriously think of casting doubt on the political validity of the freedom of the people? We answer Yes! There are still quite a few reasonable people who harbor some doubt. In proof of the correctness of our assertion we shall adduce an original doubter in this respect, a thinker of the first rank, a clear-sighted, liberal-minded man, a man who has the unanimous testimony of his contemporaries that he at least has kept himself outside all political parties and to that extent must be called disinterested, a man of superior shrewdness and with a sure eye for the troubles of reality, a man who precisely set as his life's task to think through the highest idea of freedom, and then, remarkably

enough, came — as it seems — to the result that freedom of the people, politically understood, is a selfish delusion, a false idea. We mean S. Kierkegaard.

S. Kierkegaard was, as is well known, no admirer of the demands of the age, no admirer of the so-called liberal endeavors. Already his first articles on "The Morning Observations of the Kjøbenhavnspost" and "The Polemic of Fædrelandet" together with the replies he exchanged on that occasion with "Mr. Orla Lehmann"
[5] are characteristic. It was a polemic of mood, in which he began by trying his sharp pen; it was his first grip on the string-play of ideality, a few quick strokes of the bow, to hear the tone, and the tone indicated plainly enough that this violin would not tune itself to the blowing instruments of politics.

At a later stage, where the discussion is especially of state and church, he expresses himself, occasioned by a remark of Dr. Rudelbach, very sharply about what he calls an unhappy confusion of politics and Christianity, the inverted Reformation, which reformingly puts a new worse in place of an old better, "though it is supposed to be certain and true that it is a Reformation on the occasion of which the whole town is illuminated." The true freedom is not an outward arrangement but an inward matter; freedom is essentially inwardness. "As it is man's advantage over the animal to be able to live under any climate, so perfection in Christianity ranks, precisely because it is inwardness, according to its strength to be able to live, if need be, under the most imperfect forms. Politics is this outwardness, this Tantalean busyness for change in the outward."

The cognition of freedom is in the strictest sense self-knowledge; liberation can therefore not begin with anything outward, not take its point of departure either in the race or in world history, neither in new constitutions of state nor of church; it must begin from within, each single one beginning with himself, not with great expectations of "the free institutions" , but in faith in the liberating spirit of truth.

It is a delusion of the senses when anyone thinks that it is the free institutions
[6] that are to save the Church and Christianity. "Should this", says K., "belong to true Christianity, this faith in the saving power of the free institutions politically obtained, then I am no Christian, indeed worse still, I am a pure child of the Devil; for to speak honestly, I even suspect these politically obtained free institutions, especially as to their saving and regenerating power. That is my Christianity, or so Christian-ish am I, who by the way has never concerned myself with 'Church' and 'State' — that is far too great for me; for that quite other seers than I are required, or else it ought wholly to be left to those duly appointed and called to it. I have never fought for

the emancipation of 'the Church', any more than for that of the Greenland trade, of women, of the Jews, or for any other emancipation whatever. I have only as a single one, with the aim 'the single individual', aiming at inwardizing Christianity in 'the single individual', consistently with the weapons of the spirit, solely and alone with the weapons of the spirit, fought to draw attention to, and against letting oneself be deceived by, delusions of the senses."

As it is then a delusion of the senses if anyone thinks that it is the outward forms that hinder him from attaining freedom, so it is also a delusion of the senses, indeed the same turned in another way, if anyone imagines that it is the outward forms that are to help him to freedom.

According to this view S. K. could then neither attach great hopes to the free movements that distinguished the year 1848. His little writing: "On My Work as an Author" (1851) ends with the following passage, remarkable for his whole standpoint:
"They snapped, the year '48, the threads of prudence; the whine was heard that heralds *[7]*
Chaos! 'That was the year '48, that was progress', yes — if, that is, government is procured, for which perhaps not a single new official is needed, nor the dismissal of any older one, but perhaps indeed an inward transformation in the direction of becoming steadfast with God. The fault from above was presumably this, that on the whole, from the top to the bottom of the government, the strength was essentially worldly prudence, which precisely is essentially a lack of strength; the guilt from below was this, to want to have all government away: the punishment — for the way of sin is always the way of punishment — the punishment is: what is most bitterly missed is precisely government. Never as in our century were the race and the single individuals in it (the commanding — the obeying; the superior — the subordinate; the teacher — the learner, etc.) so freed from, if you will, all encumbrances of there being something that stands and is to stand unconditionally fast; never did 'opinions' (the most heterogeneous, in the most various domains) feel themselves so in 'Liberty, Equality and Fraternity', unembarrassed and made blissful under the free pass of 'to a certain degree'; never will the race so deeply come to see the truth that it and each single one in it needs something to stand unconditionally fast, needs what the Deity, the loving and in love, devised, the unconditional, in place of which man, the clever to his own corruption, admiring himself, set this admired 'to a certain degree'. Bid the sailor sail without ballast — he capsizes; let the race, let each single one in it try to subsist without the unconditional: it is and remains a whirl. It may for a longer or shorter time, at intervals, seem otherwise, that it is firmness and security, *[8]*

at bottom it is and remains a whirl, even the greatest events and the most strenuous life nevertheless a whirl, or like sewing without fastening the end — until the end is again made fast by this, that the unconditional is introduced, or by this, that the single individual, even at ever so great a distance, yet relates himself to an unconditional. To live merely in the unconditional, to breathe only the unconditional, man cannot, he perishes like the fish when it is to live in the air; but on the other hand, without relating himself to the unconditional a man cannot in a deeper sense 'live' either, he expires, that is, he perhaps continues to live, but spiritlessly. If — to stay with what is mine: the religious — the race or a great part of single individuals in the race have outgrown this childlike thing, that another man for them is the one who represents the unconditional: well, the unconditional can nevertheless not be dispensed with. Then the single individuals must relate themselves to the unconditional themselves. It is this that I, according to my granted ability, with utmost exertion and many a sacrifice, have fought for, fighting against every tyranny, also that of the numerical. This striving of mine has been made an object of hatred as immense pride and arrogance — I believed, and I believe, that this is Christianity and love of the neighbor."

However a free constitution may be arranged — here we speak of free constitutions in all generality — it must in the end go out over both state and citizens. The authority of government is weakened. No single one either dares or can step forward decisively, act from his own conviction and take the responsibility upon himself; but everything
[9] is conditioned by the mood of the moment, everything is made dependent on the consent of the majority. The damage is twofold. In the first place the expert must put up with it that his proper principal thought, his carefully worked-out plan is clipped and pruned under oppositions and discussions, and by obstinate objections, partial alterations, accommodating adaptations is so botched that, far from becoming of one casting, it becomes on the contrary a patchwork of heterogeneous pieces, a motley composition of unlike patterns, less like a plan than a quilt. When such a patchwork has been put through, and bitter experience has at long last shown how useless it is: whose then is the guilt? No one's! Who bears the responsibility? No one! This is still the very worst. Responsibility evaporates in discussions, vanishes in committee reports and votes, so that the whole comes out at last as the work of a machine, a kind of anonymous product of the driving wheels of the parties. If one tries to put a better in the place of the recognized worse, then the political comedy begins afresh. Everything goes on publicly and is yet a continued game of intrigue; it looks as if each single matter were subjected to an all-sided trial, a careful, extensive grounding; but what is

it that is actually tried? It is not the thing itself, but the parties' forces. What gives the grounds weight? Not the nature of the matter, not convincing thoughts, but the voters' wholly or half masked tendencies. What is in and for itself true, reasonable, useful, naturally cannot without further ado come into consideration; for the conditions are far more important than the unconditional. It is simply not done to speak out, to defend it, according to one's own conviction, as the only right thing, leaving it to the *[10]* surroundings what they will accept or reject, no, the point is to catch the wind, to stretch out the feelers, to sound out the parties, to learn what one can put through. To get something put through is the most important; the next most important is what it is: half a truth, if only it can go through, is better than a whole one that exposes itself to being rejected. In this way everything becomes acceptable and everything rejectable to a certain degree, truth to a certain degree, and consequently also untruth, justice to a certain degree, consequently also injustice, honesty to a certain degree, consequently also dishonesty. To be straightforwardly untrue, unjust, dishonest will not do; but to be unconditionally true, unconditionally just, open and honest will not do either: reality can use pure truth as little as pure untruth; it demands a peculiar mixture of good and bad, of honesty and dishonesty. The character of reality becomes in this sense a shrewd experience, a cleverly calculated characterlessness. But the clever characterlessness is moral ambiguity, a refined subtlety that does not attack openly but slyly hollows out what exists. This is for the civic way of thinking on the whole the lulling, stupefying, demoralizing thing. "For against rebellion one can use force, for notorious false speech the punishment is in store; but dialectical secretiveness is hard to root out; a comparatively finer ear is needed to trace the soundless sneaking of reflection along the byways of ambiguity. What exists exists, but the passionlessness of reflection finds its reassurance in this, that it is an ambiguity. One does not want the monarchy abolished, by no means, but if one could little by *[11]* little get it transformed into an imagination, then one would gladly cry Hurrah for the King. One does not want distinction overthrown, but if at the same time one could promote a knowledge that it is an imagination — then one would admire. One wants to let the whole Christian terminology stand, but secretly to be aware that nothing decisive is to be thought by it. And one wants to be without regret; for one tears down nothing."

To the darkest shadow-regions of free constitutions belongs precisely this, that the will of the people must always, mediately or immediately, make itself known as the will of the crowd, and the crowd is, this is K.'s thesis, "The crowd is untruth." At

bottom there are none who have more contempt for man as man than those "who make a profession of standing at the head of the crowd. Let one come to such a one, a single human being — well indeed, what does he care for that; it is much too little; proudly he turns him away; there must be a hundred at least. And when there are a thousand, then he bows before the crowd, bows and scrapes; what untruth! — That the crowd as crowd is all, the single individual in the crowd nothing, means that the crowd is the public. But precisely the circumstance that the single individual in the crowd is nothing makes it possible that he can identify himself with the crowd, speak and write in the name of the crowd without standing personally to account for what he says. For who is it one has before one? The crowd and yet no one, an anonymous. "That an anonymous one, by help of the press, day in and day out can get (also in
[12] respect of the intellectual, the ethical, the religious) said what he wants, what he perhaps would not in the remotest way have had the courage to say even the least of in the situation of singleness; can every time he opens his — well, mouth one cannot call it — his gullet, *at one stroke* address himself to a thousand times a thousand; can get a thousand times a thousand to say after him what was said — and no one has the responsibility," this K. regards as the great misery of our age, a misery that is greater than the greatest of antiquity. "Let no one say that truth can after all by help of the press overtake the lie and the error again. You who speak thus, ask yourself: do you dare to maintain that men taken as a crowd are just as quick to reach for truth, which is not savory, as for untruth, which is always daintily prepared, to say nothing of when it is moreover to be bound up with an admission that one has let oneself be deceived! Or do you merely dare to maintain that truth is as quickly understood as untruth, which demands no prior knowledge, no school, no discipline, no abstinence, no self-denial, no honest self-concern, no slow labor! No, truth, which also abhors this untruth: as sole aim to seek diffusion, is not so quick on its feet." ("The Point of View for My Work as an Author." pp. 95–96.)

The dark picture is completed in the depiction of the public. Certainly one can by no means say that it is the idea of the freedom of the people that produces the public; for that is culture: the public of the present age is a peculiar degeneration of the culture of the present age. On the other hand one can say with good reason that the
[13] free constitution has its most ambiguous friend, its most dangerous ally in the public. What then is the public? J. L. Heiberg, who, as is well known, has fought several hot battles with the public, has also delivered valuable contributions to its description. In his treatise "People and Public" (Intelligensblade, 1842, No. 6) he proceeds from the

well-known opposition, that a people is an organism, a public a mass, and expresses himself on the transition from people to public thus: "The successive transformation of the people into a public is a fact which in this country already has its *history*, and I myself have delivered not a few documents toward it, though partly without being aware of it, for since our political development is much younger than our literary one, but it is precisely the latter that first throws the right light on the former, one could long be ignorant of the true significance of the forces moving in literature. Already in "Christmas Jests and New Year's Pranks" I introduced the public personified as "a colossal monstrosity", but let the poet in the first moment greet it with the words: "My people!" Only later, when at the sight of its thousands of eyes, mouths and hands, and by its crude, self-contradicting utterances he gets sight of its atomistic nature, he meets it with the utmost contempt, without however taking back the expression with which he first greeted it."

It is now easily understood that public opinion, which plays so great a role in all free commonwealths, can under the semblance that it is the voice of the people be appropriated by the public. Precisely because the public is always spectator and the single individual in the public essentially nothing — insofar as he is otherwise something, perhaps even something capable, steps at once outside the public — then *[14]* the public is not acting; its only action is to make its opinion known in expressions of approval and displeasure. The making-known itself is inarticulate. It is a chattering and prattling for and against, a humming and droning, a whirring and buzzing, to which a politician must prick up his ears every time he wants to listen out whether it is approval or displeasure that actually has the preponderance. What conjures up the phantom of a public opinion is no whole, simple thought, but a magnitude of the utmost complexity, a swarm of countless little infusorial opinions, a sum of fractions with different denominators and different signs. That such a collective magnitude can impossibly yield a view in which there is popular unity, still less be determinative of a true will of the people, is obvious. "Only in a passionless but reflective age" — says S. Kierkegaard, who in this respect honestly continued what J. L. Heiberg had begun — "can that phantom which is called the public develop by means of the press, when the latter itself becomes an abstraction. In enthusiastic times, in passionate tumultuous times, even when a people wishes to realize the idea of the barren desert, to raze everything to the ground: still there is no public… The public is a concept which cannot occur at all in antiquity, because the people itself, en masse, in corpore, had to step forward into the situation of action, had to bear the responsibility for what the

single individual from its midst brought about, while again the single individual — personally, as this determinate person — had to be present, had to submit to the court of the moment in approval or disapproval."

[15] That the public cannot be the people itself, indeed cannot even represent the people, is evident, among other things, from the fact that the public cannot act. The moment the public wants to come forward acting, it ceases to be the public; one may then, as circumstances dictate, call it mass, crowd, rabble, people, whatever one likes, but the public it is not. Where there is talk of a revolution it is therefore never said that the public has been fired upon, but that the mass has been fired upon, the people: a phantom one cannot fire upon. Nor will history ever be able to report that a public has either overthrown a throne or driven a prince into exile; one might as well suppose that it was ghostly mischief that had overthrown the throne, that a ghost had driven out the prince. In relation to everything that belongs to action and character, the public is a ghost. The public's character is reflecting, ratiocinating idleness, and its changing opinions are idle. Yes, so ghostlike idle are these opinions that it is even idle, as S. K. has aptly shown, to want to be of the same opinion as the public. "To adopt the same opinion as such and such determinate human beings means that one knows that these will be exposed to the same dangers as oneself, that they will go astray along with one, if the opinion is misleading, and so on. But to adopt the same opinion as the public is a treacherous consolation, for the public is only in abstracto. Whereas therefore no majority has ever been so sure of keeping right and victory as the public is, this is but little comforting to the single individual, for the public is a
[16] phantom which permits no personal approach. If one today adopts the opinion of the public and tomorrow is hissed off, then he is hissed off by the public."

The public can organize nothing, it can only level: levelling is "the envy that is establishing itself." Levelling is not the act of a single person, but a play of reflection in the hand of an abstract power; this abstract power is the public. "The abstraction of the press (for a newspaper, a daily, is no civic concretion and only in an abstract sense an individual) begets the abstraction's phantom: the public, which is the properly levelling thing.… The less idea there is in an age, the more it, exhausted by a flaring-up enthusiasm, takes its rest in indolence, even if we were to imagine that the press became weaker and weaker because no event, no idea grips the age: the more easily will levelling become a pernicious pleasure, a titillation of the senses, which for a moment tickles and only makes evil worse. And if one has often described the demoralization of absolute monarchy, the decay of revolutionary times, then the decay

of a passionless age is something just as pernicious, even if, owing to its ambiguity, less conspicuous. This sluggish crowd, which understands nothing itself and wants to do nothing itself, this gallery-public now seeks pastime and then gives itself up to the conceit that everything anyone does is done so that it may get something to talk about. Sluggishness sits grandly with its legs crossed, and everyone who wants to work, the king and the official and the people's teacher and the abler journalist and the poet and the artist, all become as if harnessed in order to drag this sluggishness forward, which grandly believes that the others are the horses. — So the public keeps itself a dog for amusement's sake. This dog is literary contemptibility. Now if a better man shows *[17]* himself, perhaps even an excellent one, the dog is set on him, and the fun begins. The snappish dog tears at the skirts of his coat, allows itself every unruly impertinence — until the public grows tired of it and says: now that may be enough. Then the public has levelled. The better man, the stronger man has been maltreated, and the dog, well, it goes on being a dog, which the public itself despises.… And the public is without remorse, for it is not the public — it was the dog; just as one says to children: it was the cat. And the public is without remorse, for it was no disparagement — it was merely a little fun. And the public wants to be without remorse, for it is really not they who keep the dog, they merely subscribe, nor do they set it on directly, nor do they whistle at it outright; in case of a lawsuit the public would say: the dog is not mine, it is a stray dog; and in case the dog were sent to the veterinary school to be put down, the public could still say: it was really good that the nasty dog was killed, we have all wished it — even the subscribers." (A Literary Review. pp. 95-96.)

The result is easy to draw: the freedom of the people is conditioned by this, that every unconditional authority is to a certain degree weakened and broken down, so that all authority, including governmental authority, sinks little by little beneath the level of relativity. Through tough but pliant constitutional forms, movable in all directions, the parties with their leaders, making the best possible use of the oscillations of public opinion, work to promote the interests which, whether they are otherwise harmful or beneficial to society, rational or irrational, at a given time *[18]* show themselves dominant with the majority. The majority's opinion is, to be sure, officially stamped as valid for the opinion of the people, but ought nevertheless, since it each time must seek its proper center of gravity in the preponderant majority, that is, in the crowd, most of all to be conceived as a constitutional, though provisional, expression of the crowd's opinion. Then the metamorphoses follow as of themselves: the government becomes a people, the people becomes a crowd, the crowd becomes

a public, the public becomes a phantom, a political ghost, a kind of indeterminable nothing. These are retrogressive metamorphoses, premises from which it is concluded: ergo the freedom of the people is a vain conceit, a false idea.

Now if this conclusion were wholly reliable and the result gained in all and everything irrefutable: then it would certainly look sorry in the present, not least with us. But the conclusion is, as the attentive reader has surely already told himself, not reliable. In the ambiguity of the premises there is a composition of heterogeneous elements, a dubious mixture, which can be separated and cleared up only when we reflect on the relation between idea and reality.

Those who, under uncanny impressions of what offends them in reality, have grown accustomed to adjust their judgments to their mood and on that account think that under the pressure of the freedom of the people they really have grounds to be dispirited, will find in an author such as S. Kierkegaard utterances that correspond to their personal view, soothing flashes of wit, polemical, refreshing sallies, expressions
[19] so apt that it must at times seem to them as if he had read in their political heart and taken every word out of their own inner being; they can, so far, read him with a spiritual-aristocratic self-regard for ironic edification and amuse themselves with the witty images; — but to declare him a decided opponent of the freedom of the people and straightforwardly to claim him as their own they cannot. With him it is a peculiar matter; in his case attack essentially means defense, and defense in turn attack. To want to pin him down in a single one-sided mood, confusing those brilliant, volcano-like eruptions of idea-spouting polemic of mood with conservative jeremiads of political despondency, is unreasonable; for though he is rich in moods, he is never despondent; in his fundamental mood there is a seething spring of thousand-hued moods of the idea: he is a man with more than one face, a bifrontal figure.

There is no one among us who has expressed himself so strictly conservatively and yet so extremely revolutionarily, no one who has to such a degree defended and to such a degree attacked the established order as S. Kierkegaard. What a contrast, what a crying difference between his first and his last utterance on the relation, mark you the fundamental relation, between religion and state! That he was not a political but a religious author is in this respect beside the point.

In the above-cited article against Dr. Rudelbach he has as good as nothing to object to the existing church constitution; for the time being everything is good, very good, as it is. It is not the protection of the state, not the ecclesiastical arrangements, but
[20] only a little worldly levity that is to blame for Christianity at times sinking down to

what Dr. R. calls *Habit-Christianity.* "I hate," says S. K., "Habit-Christianity in whatever form it shows itself." This "in whatever form" I could wish particularly noted; for Habit-Christianity can indeed have many forms. And if there were nothing else to choose, if the choice were only between this kind of Habit-Christianity: a worldly levity that lives on carelessly in the conceit of being a Christian, without perhaps even having any impression of Christianity, and the kind of habit Christianity found among sectarians, the awakened, the hyperorthodox, partisans when it comes to the crunch, I choose unconditionally the first. The first kind has indeed only frivolously and negatively taken Christianity in vain, if one can even always dare to judge it so strictly; the second has perhaps in spiritual pride, in any case positively taken Christianity in vain; the first one could almost be tempted to smile at, because one hopes; the second can make one shudder." Here there is no thought that there could be anything amiss in the whole state-church system, not the remotest hint that the clergy's salaries as royal officials should stand in conflict with their calling as servants of the Word. But how long did it last before the leaf turned! Four years later we read in "The Moment, No. 3, 6" the following announcement. "As long as there exist in Denmark 1000 royal livings for teachers of Christianity, the best possible has been done to prevent Christianity. As long as there are 1000 royal livings, there will always be a corresponding number of people who intend in this way to earn their bread. *[21]* Among these there will be a few, a very few, who perhaps did find a calling to proclaim Christianity. But just at the moment when it was to become really serious, when, trusting in God alone and at one's own risk, one would have to take it upon oneself to appear as a teacher — just then the state opens to them the comfort of taking a royal office, whereby these few are, Christianly, stunted. The far greater number have no calling at all to proclaim Christianity, but regard it quite simply as a livelihood. In this way the state succeeds in filling the whole country with corrupted Christianity, the very greatest difficulty for the placing of true Christianity, far greater than complete paganism."

No one who really wants to fix his attention on these highly dissimilar utterances can, however much respect and sympathy he otherwise feels for the exceptionally gifted author, conceal from himself that here is a contradiction. For here the question is not of different better or worse conditions, since such a change concerns only reality; no, here the question is of the idea as idea, of a principle valid for all conditions. If it could in the year 1851 accord with the essence of Christianity that its duly appointed teachers be paid by the state, then the same must also hold for the year 1855, and

conversely. Either — or: either Christianity must in the course of four years have changed its principle, or else the author must in the interval have wholly altered his judgment about the essence of Christianity; since now the first is unthinkable, and the last improbable, the question forces itself involuntarily upon us: how is the contradiction to be resolved?

[22] To the new edition of "Practice in Christianity," which appeared in the midst of the strife, the author appended ("The Fatherland" May 16, 1855) indeed some remarks clarifying in this respect. "This book, I have," says he, "let go out in a wholly *unaltered* edition, because I regard it as a historical document. If it were now to have come out, now that I have convinced myself that the established order, Christianly, is untenable, it would have been altered.... My earlier thought was: if the established order is to be defended, this is the only way: poetically (therefore by a pseudonym) to place the judgment upon it, by thus drawing on "grace" in the second power, so that it became Christianity, not merely finding in "grace" forgiveness for the past, but finding in grace a kind of indulgence for the actual following of Christ and the actual exertion of being a Christian. In that way truth does after all enter into the established order, it defends itself by judging itself, it admits the Christian requirement" etc. But that this clarification does not make the matter clear, anyone can tell himself. It is indeed a veritable trade in indulgences that the single individual here, if in perfect disinterestedness as regards advantage — underhandedly and in all quiet — has wanted to carry on with the established order.

Of "a worldly levity which in the year 1851 lives on in the conceit of being a Christian without perhaps having any impression of Christianity," he says that it has only frivolously and negatively taken Christianity in vain and is — "if one can even *[23]* always dare to judge it so strictly" — to be smiled at, "because one hopes." In this there hides, unmistakably, the ulterior thought that if the established order would only admit its "worldly levity" and concede "the requirement," then it should — even without its confession of its distance being able (see the cited article in "The Fatherland") to be "called a striving in the direction of coming closer to the requirement" — still have leave to call itself a Christian established order and yet be exempted from "the actual following of Christ." A strange traffic between idea and reality!

In the year 1855, when the author of "Practice in Christianity" has convinced himself that the established order, Christianly, is untenable, the time of grace is over. The established order is pronounced under the ban, the whole of Christendom is laid under interdict. Still in the year 1854 the established order could have saved itself

by "drawing on grace in the second power"; but in 1855, when the Moment came, the Moment No. 1-2-3, it was over with the possible indulgence, over, over with drawing on grace. Reality might then fold its hands, join in with a credo, creep on its knees, clothe itself in sackcloth and ashes, in short, behave as it would, it was over. In the time of Innocent the Third, when France was to be laid under interdict, the legate appeared, clad in a sky-blue stole, as on the day of the Savior's passion, had the images of the saints shrouded in crepe and stones thrown from the pulpit down among the congregation, as a testimony that thus the Lord of Heaven and Earth had now rejected the whole people. It was a gripping sight, a spine-chilling scene. But for serious thinkers it was still more spine-chilling to see that single individual with the New Testament in his hand, a penitent who was going in to judgment, a dying man, *[24]* already clad in the shroud, throw stones at the old church and break the staff over the whole existing "Christianity of Christendom." It happened wondrously suddenly and yet with an eternity's earnestness; it was like a rash act and yet so well considered, so long, so all-sidedly prepared. A fearful break between idea and reality!

Such leaps from one extreme to the other can be explained only by a violent tension, an inner strife in the principle itself. At first it looks as if the Idea, as regards everything external, were perfectly satisfied with the given reality. The Idea seeks the single individual. The single individual has enough in himself, for he has enough in the Idea. The only thing he needs for inwardness's sake is a few highly beneficial exercises in patience, self-denial, forbearance, longsuffering, peaceableness, etc., but in this respect the existing reality will at any time be able to be of service to him; for it is just the good thing about reality: it seldom lets there be a lack of some fine occasion to practice those virtues, invaluable for the single individual's freedom and peace. In this way the Idea toward the external surroundings is mildness, pliancy, condescension itself. No abolition for the single individual's sake, no inconvenience with the external conditions; all is good, very good, excellently good, as it is. But what does this mean? It means that the Idea in absolute inwardness is infinitely sure of itself, but it by no means means that it is on good terms with reality. Far from it! it means that the single individual with concealed contempt for all that is external *[25]* looks smilingly down upon the existing order, in the tacit presupposition that the existing order with silent admiration looks up to him, and humbly acknowledges the Idea's superiority. Since now reality unfortunately is not always so sensitive, and the existing order prefers to follow its own head, it can happen at the slightest unforeseen occasion that a violent war breaks out. For the Idea makes great demands,

the Unconditioned will rule. As graciously mild as the gracious Idea can otherwise be, so terribly severe in turn is the wrathful Godhead. Where everything before suited the Idea, now nothing suits: reality is condemned, a court-martial is held over the existing order. The struggle is waged on unequal terms. The existing order has physical power as its defense; the single individual, the Idea's servant, fights only with spiritual weapons. It is the Idea's glorification, its highest revelation, that its true combatants can conquer inwardly by losing outwardly, that more and more single individuals can become martyrs. The struggle can be continued so long, so many victims can fall, that the clumsy, brutal reality at last for its own sake is compelled to crawl to the Cross and make concessions to the Idea, on which condition there can then be concluded, if not a real peace, yet an armistice. But whether the condition is otherwise peaceful or unpeaceful, the secret has come to light. The relation between idea and reality is namely so determined that the Unconditioned must lie in an eternal strife against its conditions. Within the secret there sits a contradiction. The contradiction is double-edged: it cuts through reality, and it wounds the Idea.

[26] From the side of reality the contradiction is this, that reality with its web of conditions incessantly hungers for the Idea and yet cannot digest the Idea, since the finite conditions can never be reconciled with the Unconditioned. In the Idea itself the contradiction is this, that it wants to be realized, that it inwardly desires reality without yet being able to endure reality, since the Unconditioned is constantly repelled by the conditions. If a true mutual reconciliation between idea and reality is to be possible, then the principle itself must be changed.

It is a fundamental unity of the Unconditioned with its conditions on which everything essentially depends. There must be in the Idea determinations of the conditioned that fit external reality, and there must be given in reality's own essence determinations of the Unconditioned that at least approximately — that is, under a continued development — satisfy the Idea. The question now is how matters stand with these reciprocal determinations.

As for S. K., it has hitherto been and still is our full conviction that he with his sharp eye saw very well the reconciling intermediate determinations, but that in accordance with the tactics corresponding to his peculiar task he considered himself obliged to keep them in the background. He had to hold strictly to the Unconditioned and see to it that he worked by a sudden blow, if he was to succeed at all in rousing the age out of its spiritual torpor and in placing a decisive point. "For," says he, (The Moment No. 1) "to place a decisive point — and this is the task — cannot be done

in the same way as everything else; and when moreover the misfortune of the age is this "to a certain degree," to a certain degree of going in upon everything, when *[27]* this is just the sickness, then above all care must be taken that, so far as possible, it does not happen that it too to a certain degree goes in upon this, whereby all is lost. No, something decisive is delivered otherwise than anything else. Like the beast of prey's spring upon its quarry, like the eagle's stoop in its fall, so something decisive is delivered: suddenly and gathered into One (intensively). And as the beast of prey unites cunning with strength, first cunningly holds itself quite still — as still as no tame animal can be; and then gathers itself wholly into a single spring or stroke — as no tame animal can gather itself for or rise into the spring: so something decisive is delivered. First still — so still is the weather never on a still day, so still it is only before thunder; and then it breaks loose".

The basic form that alone is capable of taking up the intermediate determinations of the conditioned and the unconditioned and of reconciling the Idea with reality is, with its rich content, more than a form, it is itself an idea, a true idea of reality, namely the idea of society. It is the idea of society that S. K. everywhere puts in shadow, so that a so much stronger light may fall upon his single individual. "The single individual," he says, "is the category through which, in a religious respect, the age, the generation, history are to. And he who stood at Thermopylae was not so secure as I, who, in order at least to get attention drawn to it, have stood at this narrows 'the single individual.' He was namely to keep the throngs from pressing through the narrows; if they pressed through, then he had lost. My task is at least far less exposing me to the danger of being trampled down, since it was that of a *[28]* lowly servant… if possible to cause, to invite, to move the many to press through this narrows 'the single individual,' through which, mind you, no one presses except by becoming the single individual; the opposite is indeed a categorical impossibility." Here, then, it is assumed that the narrows "the single individual" is quite otherwise secure than the narrows at Thermopylae; but about this one may be permitted to harbor a doubt.

The narrows at Thermopylae had, after all, always, whether the throngs pressed through or not, its definite extent, its rock-firm boundaries; but the narrows "the single individual" has, so far as we can see, no rock-firm boundaries: it constantly widens as the throngs press through, even to such a degree that it finally must hold them all. For when all become the single individuals, then the single individuals must necessarily again become all, but to become all is indeed to become the crowd: by

going out of the crowd — into the narrows, the throngs go thus precisely into the crowd — out of the narrows. In order to enter into the truth the single individuals without exception must separate themselves from the crowd, for the crowd is untruth; but when now each single individual, after they all have separated themselves from the crowd, just for that reason comes to stand in the midst of the crowd: where does he then find himself, in the truth or in untruth? If we say in untruth, since he is one of the crowd, and the crowd is untruth, then a mistake has been committed here in the narrows, here is, frankly speaking, a disaster come to pass. When fire breaks out in a large building, where many are assembled, and the building's only exit is a
[29] narrows, it easily happens that all burn inside, because all want out at once: by going singly, one after one, at least some could have been saved. Roughly so it stands with the narrows "the single individual," when it is to hold unconditionally that crowd is untruth. Only by being the exception, the one distinguished above the others, can the single individual categorically separate himself from the crowd. Every generation, every throng one must therefore, when the single individual is to come forward, cry out to: One at a time, one in each generation, only one, a single one! for one more and one more is already crowd.

It is evident that the crowd cannot possibly form what S. K. calls a *qualitative* opposition to the single individual. The crowd is formed of single individuals; as the single individuals are, so is the crowd. If the crowd consists of true single individuals, then there is truth in the crowd; if the crowd is untruth, then the ground is that it consists of untrue single individuals. The crowd as crowd is in and of itself neither good nor evil, neither true nor untrue. In order to grasp the crowd as the existing untruth, one must first in one's concept exclude it from the truth, by excluding it from the Idea. The idealess crowd — yes, that is indisputably true — the idealess crowd is, as the case may be, mass, rabble, public, the numerical, the untrue; but it is then not the untrue because it is crowd, it is so only because it is excluded from the truth. In a corresponding way one can indeed also begin by excluding the single individual from the truth, regarding the single individuals outside the Idea; and it then follows quite of itself that the idealess, that is to say untrue, single individuals are untrue. But
[30] the single individuals are then untrue, not because they are single individuals, but because by the concept set up they are excluded from the truth.

If any true opposition is to be formed between the crowd and the single individual, then both opposed terms must fall within the Idea; but the crowd, when it is referred to its idea, is existing society. Thus we come to the opposition between the single

individuals and society; crowd is reality, society idea: we must then lay particular weight on the question: how things stand in real society with idea and reality.

Society has its subsistence in the organized crowd. When now the Idea is to develop and realize itself in society, which way does it then go? Does it begin partly with the single individuals and work its way first little by little through the whole, or does it begin straightway from the whole, in order gradually to kindle its light in the single individuals, or does it begin at one stroke both from the whole and from the single individuals? To these questions, so highly important for the idea of freedom, S. Kierkegaard gives us nowhere any definite answer. He pushes the investigation from him, presupposes without further ado society's subsistence, polemicizes against the crowd and holds to the single individual. But that the investigation, precisely for the single individual's sake, is of the utmost importance will become evident when we cast a glance at the position of the single individuals in the diverse, narrower and wider circles of society, in the congregation, in the state, in the people.

If we, to begin with the religious, set the single individual against the congregation, then we meet at once the fact that so long as the truth existed exclusively as the *[31]* prototype himself, the One, the unconditionally single individual, the congregation could not be founded, and when the congregation was founded, no single individual could step forth independently against the congregation's spirit. But in zeal to defend the narrows "the single individual" S. K. goes in this connection so far as even to assert that "Christianity has really not come into the world," since not even the apostles have properly been able to keep order at the entrance. "For one thing is," he says (The Moment No. 5), "to work in such a way for dissemination that one uninterruptedly early and late proclaims the doctrine to all, another thing is to be too quick to permit people thus in hundreds, in thousands to assume the name of Christians.… Had a multitude of people let themselves be seized by Christ's speech, he would assuredly not at once have permitted these thousands to call themselves Christ's disciples. No, he held back more strongly. He won therefore also in 3½ years only 11 — whereas an apostle in *one* day, perhaps in *one* hour, wins 3000 disciples of Christ. Either the disciple is here greater than the master, or the truth is that the apostle is a little too quick to strike," etc.

If this is taken according to the letter, then the idea of the congregation is without further ado to be given up. The idea of the congregation namely presupposes that the spirit at one and the same time begins its activity from society and from the single individuals. The apostle speaks as the single individual to the single individuals in

the crowd; but he speaks from the spirit. The spirit from which he speaks is the religious spirit of society, the spirit that will not work singly upon the scattered single individuals, but unite them in society, in order in and through society to work in every
[32] single individual thereby that they could work upon one another reciprocally and under reciprocal interaction develop into true single individuals. Therefore he hastens to get the congregation founded. Had the apostle waited. until the single individuals had become more prepared, so that the truth in the congregation could at last become a plain and simple result of the truth in the single individuals formed outside the congregation, then he would never have come to found any congregation. When, then, should he have founded it? Before the single individuals had yet become true single individuals? That was too early! After they had become true single individuals? That was too late! It is another matter if the apostle had let it stay with baptizing the many thousands and said to the crowd: now you are baptized, now you are the congregation, now nothing more is needed; but that is not how it went. It is so far from the case that the crowd as crowd comes to rule in the congregation, that the congregation's spirit precisely sets its single individuals, its chosen, the great task of setting the crowd right. of organizing, disciplining, bringing it up, so that the many, each for himself, must recognize what it means to be before God the single individual.

If we, as regards the political, set the single individual against the state, a similar result emerges. The mass, the idealess crowd can naturally not found any state; but the single individual who despises the crowd cannot either. The idea of the state has two equally original points of departure. It already stirs powerfully in the crowd, in that it begins to clarify itself for the individual leaders. In order to organize the masses and work against the public, the merely numerical, it is not enough "to cause,
[33] to invite, to move the many to press through the narrows the single individual," it is at the same time necessary that one uninterruptedly early and late inculcate the validity of the idea of society, the authority of the government, the rights of the citizen and the duties of the citizen. By separating the consciousness of civic duties from religious inwardness and impressing upon the single individuals contempt for the tasks of society under the pretense that these are only worldly external forms, one does the state a poor service. What does it help to bow to the authorities and speak piously, submissively, of the magistracy being appointed by God, and of the administration ought to be left to "those duly appointed and called thereto," when in the same moment one undermines the foundation of all rational government? Who is it that is to govern? the single individuals or not the single individuals? If it is not the

single individuals, then it must indeed be the crowd, the public, the numerical. But if it is only "the leaders of the crowd" who make up the government, then it sounds strange indeed that such a government ought not essentially to seek its strength in "worldly prudence," but in "an inward transformation in the direction of becoming steadfast in fearing God." If the government is to become steadfast in fearing God, then it must necessarily consist of single individuals duly appointed thereto, of such as in religious inwardness have learned what it is to press through "the narrows." In these true single individuals the religious cannot possibly be indifferent to the political; in order to gain strength to govern, they must become steadfast in fearing God, but the power of inwardness they win by fearing God shall in turn show itself in the power and authority with which they govern: a more inward interaction between politics and "fear of God" cannot be thought. What holds of some true single individuals *[34]* holds of all; they are indeed all to go through the narrows. In the capacity of citizens society's single individuals now have the finest example in the government. Just as the "God-fearing" government for its part must in no way regard the outer social forms as indifferent, notwithstanding that they are worldly, so the God-fearing citizens for their part dare not either. If it is a matter of conscience for a government composed of true single individuals to further the development of the idea of society and to care for the welfare of the state by watching over the rights of the citizens, then it must also be a matter of conscience for all individual citizens to live themselves into the idea of society and punctually fulfil the civic duties.

Although the religious and the political idea must indeed be opposed to one another, as inner freedom is opposed to outer, they nevertheless have this in common, that both are ideas of society, both laid out to engage with the crowd, take the conditions up into the unconditioned and transform reality. The role the crowd plays in the determination of the relation between idea and reality shows itself especially prominently when the talk is of society in its widest extent, of the *people*.

That the *people* in a state-society must, when we look at reality, exist as crowd cannot be denied; but just for that reason it becomes, for the sake of the Idea, of the greatest importance to make a distinction between the people and the crowd. The people is the crowd insofar as it is the sum of the population's individuals, and yet the crowd is not yet the people; only by being referred to its original idea, the idea of the fundamentally human in its natural-force peculiarity (cf. "On Obstacles to and *[35]* Conditions for Spiritual Life in the Present Age," VIII), can the crowd be conceived as a people. Were it really impossible to make the distinction between the people and

the crowd valid in a penetrating, clear manner, evident to sound reason, then freedom of the people and freedom of the crowd would be synonymous words. But if freedom of the people without more falls together with freedom of the crowd, so that a free constitution is to be one that sets up the conditions for the crowd lawfully to get its will, even if this will be in itself ever so unreasonable, put through: then it is not to be seen how any reasonable human being could place either trust or hope in such a freedom. It is only the opponents of the freedom of the people who, whether they otherwise despise or idolize the crowd, make the people one with the crowd.

In what sense the people as people must be said to be raised above its own crowd and the true will of the people exalted above the accidental will of the majority can easily be explained by some examples. Suppose that the majority in a population, which is hardly likely, but yet not unthinkable, to such a degree surrendered itself to faith in eternal peace that it regarded all defense as a superfluity, and on that occasion got put through that all items of expenditure for army and navy were struck out: then it would still not be the people that harbored such a faith, it was only the crowd. Or suppose that a vote once with a great majority brought about permission that men and women — for the sake of personal liberties — henceforth might dress alike, so that woman, in order to come to her natural right, might even dare to put
[36] on a false beard, so then it was by no means the people that came to speak through such a vote, no, it was only the crowd. Or suppose that a liberal-minded majority, in recognition that marriage is as much a civil as a natural institution, got put through at a twenty-seventh reading of the marriage law the change that it should henceforth be permitted a man to have several wives, provided only that the number of wives came to stand in strictly regulated proportion to the income tax, then a progress of this nature would still not be attributable to the people, but to the crowd. What is it now that in the examples cited makes it so easy to distinguish the crowd's whims from the people's thoughts? It is precisely the in itself absurd, unreasonable, for the whole harmful; for the people as people can will only the reasonable, what accords with life's basic demands, what is beneficial to the whole of society.

If all matters important for society were of such a nature that nothing more were needed than sound sense, natural understanding and a good will in order at once to see what it is on which it each time depends, and how much in critical moments may be at stake, then it would still be an easy matter to clarify the people's view and set the crowd right. But the difficulty is that precisely the most significant tasks, the great questions that reach deepest into the life of society, the matters that are popular

in the most proper sense, belong to those whose significance is most difficult to grasp and fully to recognize by the whole people, because the crowd, as the saying goes, cannot keep up. If this hitherto insurmountable obstacle to true popular cultivation is at last to be overcome, it can happen only on the condition that the popular questions *[37]* at one and the same time are treated both theoretically as questions of the idea and practically as questions of reality: idea and reality must then not be separated, but held against each other, so that in clear, simple outlines it can be seen how in every matter concerned they illuminate each other reciprocally.

The question of the religion of the people is, as surely everyone will concede, both a question of the idea and a question of reality. The common opinion, in itself quite correct, that a people cannot possibly do without a positive religion, is too vague and weak to bear the reality's heavy, deep-cutting debates concerning the position of the people's church toward the state. The first thing needed is that the people in its entirety come to clarity about the essence of religion and see its significance for human life. Only gradually as a living cognition of what religion is, in what inner essential relation it stands to every independent people's morals and way of thinking, to the progress of culture and civilization in all directions, spreads more and more, will the people appear as a people and lay the weight of its mood and voice on the scales of the debates.

What distortions of words and misunderstandings can be set in circulation when great questions of the idea are without more drawn down into finitude and furnish slogans for the benefit of the parties, is seen from the present age's peculiar dispute about the worth of intelligence. Outside the Idea such a dispute will never end. It is evident that those who cast a shadow upon intelligence connect with the word an entirely different conception than those who defend it. Intelligence is insight, insight requires enlightenment. Without enlightenment no freedom, without popular *[38]* enlightenment no freedom of the people. What is freedom without enlightenment, a free people without intelligence? A day without light, a sword without blade, — thoughtless contradictions! Against imagined cultivation, the empty enlightenment, the puffed-up, unfruitful intelligence objection ought to be made; but well-founded objections against false intelligence indeed contain precisely a defense of the true.

On the surface of reality it may indeed in the eyes of the crowd sometimes look as if art, poetry and science were only luxury articles for the enjoyment of the higher classes of society; but a people that wants to understand itself will also understand that the clear forms of the spirit belong essentially to the free, many-sided development

of the life of the people, are true necessities, although they cannot, like "*Bread and Iron*," straightforwardly be reckoned among the first necessities. The basic question is how the higher cultivation as a whole relates to the lower; for that the lower cannot raise itself without help from the higher is a fact. Ask the worker, he already knows that one can work properly only with the hand when one at the same time works in the spirit, that he can use his strengths fully only when he has learned to use his thoughts.

A telling proof that enlightenment and freedom go hand in hand is the unmistakable need, the drive and striving that everywhere stirs in the population after knowledge and cultivation: the masses gather where they sense a thought; they listen to the word, they glimpse the light, they press forward to greet the day of freedom.
[39] This striving, this need is a testimony that the people as people has a deep sense of its future's task, that it will not settle down at rest with outward freedom, but stride further forward and know how to win by struggle the inward. Only by the union of outward freedom with the inward does popular freedom become complete, conditioned in reality, unconditioned in the Idea: the freedom of the people is, like the people itself, a becoming, growing unity of idea and reality.

R. *Nielsen.*