

Transcription, March 2015:

The Citizen (Gloucester, U.K.) 23(233) (6 Oct. 1898): 3f (anon.).

[p. 3f]

‘Lord Grimthorpe a Convert to Anti-Vaccination.’

The following, in many respects remarkable, letter, addressed to Dr. Alfred Wallace, has appeared in the London Press:—

“Sir,—I dare say you will excuse my troubling you with this letter on a subject on which I do not profess to be an expert, but on which it may again be my duty to form a legislative judgment. Last Session I was not able to go up and sit through two probably late debates to vote; and, indeed, I had not then made up my mind as I have now, though I had written a short letter to the “Times” on the vacillation of the Government about the Vaccination Bill.

“Since then I have been reading the chapter about it in your recent book, ‘The Wonderful Century,’ and the subsequent letters in the ‘Times,’ and those of yesterday, especially Dr. Bond’s, move me to tell you that, absurd as his statement about your ‘only three converts’ is, he and his associates may add me to the number. I do not profess to have wandered through the thickets of the Commissioners’ contradictory reports, but I have long learnt in controversies involving facts to take more account of the style of the controversialists and their apparent regard for truth than of their assertions and references to other people and the final balance of voting. Specially I had to do so in the somewhat similar controversy in the ‘Times,’ which lasted several months in 1887 and 1888, in which, from the accident of being put in the chair of a hospital meeting that had been called to turn out some doctors for homœopathic heresy, I had gradually to take a leading part, being helped by information from the experts on both sides as the dispute went on. Finally, the ‘Times’ pronounced that I had completely proved the charges of medical conspiracy and tyranny which the ‘orthodox’ party had been called upon at the meeting to answer, and declined to attempt except by their own dicta.

“Such letters as that of Dr. Bond, even without the answers to it, always go a long way to persuade me that the author has no solid case; and I regard them as mere controversial fireworks, throwing no real light on the subject of discussion. In most controversies involving facts it soon becomes apparent to competent judges, after hearing the professed experts, on which side is the balance of truth and honesty, as it is very clearly in one of a very different kind which has been going on in the ‘Times’ for two months, on what is called clerical and episcopal lawlessness, in which the writers on one side think themselves at liberty to assert anything that is ‘necessary for their position’ (as their great founder avowed 50 years ago), and take their chance of being refuted.

“In your dispute, as in that, the really decisive facts are becoming more and more extant from the intolerable mass of assertions and references to other people’s writings, which are worthy very little in the face of current genuine evidence, such as you and other writers on your side have produced in a manageable form, and which the other side have now had plenty of time to refute, if they can, but certainly have not. In such a case neither past nor present majorities go for much. Indeed a heavy discount may generally be taken off as due to laziness and the desire of most people to take the apparently strongest side. I can only say that the more the vaccinationists go on writing and talking as they have done for a long time, and more they are likely to be wrong and conscious that they are so.

“Lest I should be thought to include your ‘appendix’ of a socialistic nostrum or ‘remedy for want’ in my general approval of your book I think it prudent to add that I consider it more demonstrably wrong and ruinous

to any country that should adopt it than any disease that has ever been propagated; but I am not going to discuss that. I can only add that you may either publish this if you like, or announce me as a ‘fourth convert’ to anti-vaccination under your treatment—and such as Dr. Bond’s.

“Yours obediently,

“Grimthorpe.

“Bach Wood, St. Albans. September 14th.”

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The Alfred Russel Wallace Page, Charles H. Smith, 2015.