

Our Way of Life

By FRANCIS NEILSON

PHILOSOPHY HAS BEEN DEFINED as a way of life, and a very good definition it is, for we know that many men have shaped existence for themselves in a worthy manner. But what is "our" way of life? Recently the head of a university said it was a possession to be defended. From this one may infer that it is something precious and worth keeping. Still, it is necessary to know just exactly what "our" own peculiar way of life amounts to on investigation. Men who can look back sixty years frequently remark that the present cannot be compared with the past for security and well-being.

What with politicians who find new ways of squandering the people's money and trade unions taking their "slice" of wages, "our" way of life for millions of producers is by no means a "primrose path of dalliance." Indeed, "our" way of life is strewn from cradle to grave with fines and penalties. We have to go back more than a hundred years to find a condition similar to the one that afflicts us now. In 1820 the "wit of wits," Sydney Smith, wrote the following to the *Edinburgh Review*:

We can inform Jonathan what are the inevitable consequences of being too fond of glory;—taxes upon every article which enters into the mouth, or covers the back, or is placed under the foot—taxes upon every thing which it is pleasant to see, hear, feel, smell, or taste—taxes upon warmth, light, and locomotion—taxes on every thing on earth, and the waters under the earth—on every thing that comes from abroad, or is grown at home—taxes on the raw material—taxes on every fresh value that is added to it by the industry of man—taxes on the sauce which pampers man's appetite, and the drug that restores him to health—on the ermine which decorates the judge, and the rope which hangs the criminal—on the poor man's salt, and the rich man's spice—on the brass nails of the coffin, and the ribands of the bride—at bed or board, couchant or levant, we must pay.—The schoolboy whips his taxed top—the beardless youth manages his taxed horse, with a taxed bridle, on a taxed road:—and the dying Englishman, pouring his medicine, which has paid 7 per cent. into a spoon that has paid 15 per cent.—flings himself back upon his chintz bed, which has paid 22 per cent.—and expires in the arms of an apothecary who has paid a licence of a hundred pounds for the privilege of putting him to death. His whole property is then immediately taxed from 2 to 10 per cent. Besides the probate, large fees are demanded for burying him in the chancel; his virtues are handed down to posterity on taxed marble; and he is then gathered to his fathers—to be taxed no more.

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