

**THE
PARLIAMENTARY
OATH**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649423934

The Parliamentary Oath by Edwin de Lisle

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Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

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Hanc igitur video sapientissimorum fuisse sententiam, legem neque hominum ingenis excogitatum, neque scitum aliquod esse populorum, sed æternam quiddam quod universum mundum regerat imperandi prohibendique sapientiâ . . . que non tum demique incipit lex esse cum scriptum est, sed tum cum orta est; orta autem simul cum mente divina.

CICERO, DE LEGIBUS, li. 4.

LONDON:
W. H. ALLEN & CO., 13 WATERLOO PLACE,
PALL MALL. S.W.

1888.
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LONDON:
PRINTED BY W. H. ALLEN AND CO., 13 WATERLOO PLACE.

ARGUMENT.

To abolish the Oath is to divorce Religion from Morality. To divorce Religion from Morality is to sap the foundations of Society. To sap the foundations of Society is to prepare the downfall of England.



THE PARLIAMENTARY OATH.

I.—THE OATH.

“Those called to any office of trust are bound by an oath to the faithful discharge of it: but an oath is an appeal to God, and, therefore, can have no influence except upon those who believe that He is.”—*Swift*.

THE decision to which the Government have at length come was formally announced in the House of Commons on the 19th of February, when the Attorney General asked for leave to bring in a Bill to amend the Parliamentary Oaths Acts. The purport of this Bill is to enable not only men possessing no religious convictions whatever, but even those who may have committed themselves to the public profession

and propagandism of Atheism, to take their seats in Parliament, to legislate for the Christian people of Great Britain and Ireland. The occasion of the Bill is best described in the phrase already too familiar to our ears—the Bradlaugh difficulty. The 19th of February, in the year of grace 1883, may be said, therefore, to mark an epoch in the history of England. I speak of History in its highest sense, that sense which has been called the philosophy of history, that development of principle upon which the formation of law and character depend. On this twofold basis, the public law of the nation and the private character of individuals, a commonwealth is established. As these are modified, it ripens to maturity or decay. Whether the Bill shall ever become law depends upon the will of Parliament, influenced by the will of the people. But the will both of Parliament and of the people is determined by their grasp of first principles, subject to their just or unjust estimate of the circumstances under which these principles are called into action. Now the pro-

posed legislation involves the most fundamental question which can occupy the thoughtful mind; the necessary, contingent, or superfluous belief of mankind in the existence of a Supreme being, the Author of Creation, and the Arche-type of all law. No serious writer will approach this subject without a grave sense of the responsibility which the workings of his mind may have in further obscuring or elucidating the truth. But a crisis has come. The arrogance of the few, misinterpreting the silence of the many, has forced it upon us. If the Government have been weak—I do not mean numerically, but mentally and morally—we must be strong. We are compelled to form a definite opinion, and to express it boldly. It is our duty to our country. The Government have taken up the cause of the Atheist, and they are no doubt prepared to face the issue. If party allegiance is to be used as a lever to cramp and cripple the moral freedom of the Liberal party, it is, of course, useless to discuss this question with a view to preventing the Bill from passing