

Religion

AFTER finishing a job on the premises of a Jewish patron, the writer got his permission to carry away a weekly paper, the "Canadian Jewish Review" which, as it is printed in English could be used for general purposes in dealing with the religious question.

In discussing religion, we incline to view it only from the best known standpoint—that of Christianity. But this paper shed light on other aspects, for it contained an article on its contributing editor, Rabbi B. R. Brickner of Toronto, who had accepted a "call" from one of the very largest Jewish congregations in America, meeting in Cleveland at the Temple Centre. This structure, regarded as one of Cleveland's show places, was recently completed at a cost of \$350,000. The Rabbi is an M.A., B.Sc., Ph.D., and has served on many important Boards. The Cleveland congregation, which he will lead has a membership of 1,260 families, a Sunday School of over 1,200 children, the largest Jewish Sisterhood in America with a 1,600 membership and an unusually large brotherhood.

From the above and from what we know of other congregations we realize how powerful is the hold that religion exerts upon its followers. And yet, despite its apparent strength, religion is weakening; for Joseph McCabe, himself an ex-priest, says that "religion is slowly dying everywhere. Social idealism is growing everywhere." Even Judaism is now split into two bodies, a sort of Old and New Light sects; or, as they are called, the Orthodox and Reform sects; and of the two, it seems far better salaries and conditions are enjoyed by Reform Rabbis, than by Orthodox ones.

Bishop Brown tells us that every modern church with its ministry, bible, creed, heaven and hell, is founded on capitalism and that the churches, as so constituted, are but so many expedients for protecting an economic system from change. For example, in the above mentioned Jewish paper, there is a weekly saying by "Rivka" (Rebecca), the current one being, "It doesn't take so very much prosperity to convince a man who was once a radical, that radicalism really belongs to the kosher (Jewishly clean) restaurant intelligentsia; and should remain there."

As socialists know, religion has its materialistic basis, or as Marx, we believe, says "religion does not make man; man makes religion." Epictetus, born 60 A.D., an ex-slave and Stoic philosopher, tells us in his Handbook, "Where (personal) interest is, there too is piety placed." The modern workers are drawing so little material advantage from the Church, that their "piety" is gradually finding its true sphere in Socialism. Hence, in the U. S. A. recently, a movement arose to promote religious attendance; in which Catholic priests, Protestant ministers and Jewish rabbis sunk their differences and combined against the common foe of growing distaste for their respective religions.

Several Jewish religious festivals are founded upon the materialistic basis of some "historical" preservation of their race from foreign destruction. Perhaps the most historical of these is the Pass-over, to commemorate their deliverance in Egypt, when the destroying angel passed over the houses of the Israelites, but not over those of their Egyptian oppressors. Of course, in this case, the Egyptians were "wicked" and "deserved" all they suffered from the good Lord. But what about the Jewish invasion into the Promised Land, when the original inhabitants were ruthlessly exterminated? So far as they were concerned, the latter had no reason to praise the Lord, especially those Midianites (Numbers, xxxi, 17-18) who were all killed with the exception of the virgins; whom the pious and wrathful Moses commanded to be kept alive for the males of the Chosen People of God.

Hence, we see, that although "religion" may be useful for making otherwise careless people dress and clean themselves up for worship, and develop

the memory, industry, courage and determination in regard to following out highly complicated rituals, etc., it by no means always fosters the spirit of peace. Therefore, commenting on a politico-religious murder that occurred in 1922, in London, Eng., H. E. M. Stutfield accused Ancient Egypt, Greece, India, the Far East, Mexico and modern Rome of all having the same tale to tell of religious or quasi-religious butchery and mutilation.

But why did not Stutfield mention Palestine and the Jews as well? The falling away of a section of the Israelites into idolatry (Exodus xxxii, 27) caused the orthodox remainder, at God's command, to slay every man his brother, his companion and his neighbor. And then there is the holy murder story of Elijah (I Kings xviii, 40) which is considered such a lovely subject for religious admiration, that it has been set to music in the shape of a famous oratorio, by a Christianised Jew—Mendelssohn.

Of course, Marx is notorious for the nasty knock he gave religion when he said it is "the opium of the people." But it seems clear that all Marx was kicking at was the habit people get into either through laziness, ignorance or stupidity, of taking doses of religion like opium addicts, to kill the pains arising from unbearable surroundings; instead of logically revolutionising out of existence the bad material environment that causes the trouble. And if it be objected that that is merely the debased opinion of a "renegade German Jew," still it may be backed up by a previous and almost identical one from a genuine Scots Presbyterian peasant, Robert Burns, who in his "Tree of Liberty" poem (which, by the way, like several others, he dared not publish while he was alive), says that without liberty "this life is but a vale o' woe, man; a scene o' sorrow mixed wi' strife; nae real joys we know, man. We labor soon, we labor late, to feed the titled knave, man; an' a' the comfort we're to get, is that ayont (beyond) the grave, man."

Even if religion doesn't land a person, as it often does, into a hospital for the insane, it may cause him to act in the way that called forth this item in the Manitoba Free Press: "A man in New York burned himself fatally while undergoing the rites of some weird religious cult. That's one of the odd things about religion; numerous persons are always willing to do something foolish in the name of it."

Rabbi Brickner, in his current approving editorial upon many prominent Jews having contributed money to complete the Episcopal Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York City, tells us that "religion is a road leading up the mountain of life toward the peak—God. Every man is entitled to pursue the road Godward that suits him best. . . And let us also remember, that as we get toward the peak, the roads show a tendency to converge."

Suppose we grant the tendency towards religious convergence; what features are or will be dropped, to make the final approach possible? Assuredly Jewish or any other religious national preservation festivals are meaningless to outsiders. And to those who know the evidence about Christianity reported in Bishop Brown's "Heresy" trial magazine; and the "Chrestus" facts of Prof. Murray's, as recently published in our "Clarion," Christianity is no better. A chain is not stronger than its weakest link; and when Christ (Luke vi, 27-30) is reported as sustaining his general character by such mild advice as, Love your enemies, do good to them which hate you, etc., etc., how weak is the Biblical chain, with all the attempts at "symbolical" explanation, when a link in Luke xix, 27, makes the same Christ say "But those mine enemies, which would not that I should reign over them, bring hither and slay them before me." So weak, (and repulsive) is the latter link, that a certain clergyman refused to believe, until he was "shown" that it was in the Bible at all; nor was that the first time we have found that the clergy are ignorant of their own text book!

Hence, the "converged" future religion, will be

very much as laid down in Bishop Brown's "Communism and Christianity" (to be had from 'Clarion' office); but without the author's "symbolical" hankering after staying in a Church from which his more than 40 years connection, makes him reluctant to completely break. Judging religion by its fruits and by its disruptive, mind-obscuring and burdening puerilities in an age when, as never before, the brain must be kept clear, clean and efficient to deal with modern problems, Socialists generally avoid contact with what Voltaire called "the infamous thing." Or, as Goethe put it "I am too religious, to be 'religious.'"

Though her person has been gorgeously arrayed and decorated by the genius of musical composer, musician, poet, author, orator, singer, architect, sculptor and artist, 'neath it all, she is only—Religion: so, let us beware! Those who truly know her wisely exert a far greater, purer and nobler strength of will in refraining from touching or countenancing her; than do those who imagine they are doing well, whilst they are her miserable and abject slaves!

—PROGRESS.

LIBERTY

THERE is no more useful and courageous work in this country than that done by representatives of the American Civil Liberties Union in going to places where free speech is denied, submitting to arrest, and then carrying the issue into the courts. An especially interesting case arose in Patterson, New Jersey, during the silk-workers' strike last autumn when the chief of police forbade the meetings which the strikers had been holding in the Turn Hall. Thereupon Roger N. Baldwin, director of the American Civil Liberties Union, rented the building for a free speech meeting, and when the doors were locked against the speakers by the police the former proceeded to assemble on the steps of the Paterson City Hall. They chose this place purposely in order to avoid a complaint of trespass or interference with traffic. The meeting was just beginning with the reading of the constitutional guarantees of free speech and assemblage when it was violently broken up by the police, who charged that it was riotous in character and made numerous arrests.

Ten persons were subsequently indicted under an old English law, re-enacted in New Jersey in 1798, on the charge that they "did then and there unlawfully, routously, riotously, and tumultuously make and utter great and loud noises and threatenings," manifesting their purpose "to beat and assault and frighten and intimidate certain and quiet and orderly persons then and there gathered and standing"; that they did "unlawfully, routously, riotously, and tumultuously" assemble "to commit assault and battery upon the police officers, patrolmen, and officers of the police department of the said city of Paterson, and to break, injure, damage, and destroy and wreck the City Hall." Mr. Baldwin and six others were tried on these ridiculous charges. When argument was heard last December it was brought out that the only previous trial in New Jersey under the statute was in 1913, when "Big Bill" Haywood and others were released on a writ of habeas corpus on the ground that a meeting for redress of grievances was not unlawful assemblage. Judge Delaney held the case of Mr. Baldwin and the six others under advisement for more than three months and then, without delivering a written opinion, found them guilty. This silly decision will be appealed, and should be reversed in the higher courts.

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