

## Private Interpretation of the Bible

LETTER FROM A PROTESTANT M.P.

Under the head of "Stray Thoughts on the Misreading of the Bible," the following letter from Mr. Samuel Young, an Ulster Protestant and a Nationalist M.P., appears in the "Bellast News Letter."

Sir,—Is the common use of the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments not a danger without guidance from those who are authorized to teach? Is the indiscriminate perusal of ancient complex literature to the common man of untrained mind of any real benefit as a guide, here are a number of books of antiquity, about sixty-four bound together, pronounced canonical, produced at different periods by different writers, under different circumstances and written in different languages, and as regards the New Testament, in traditional form till nearly in the second century, and never really in much circulation till after the discovery of printing in the 15th century. Does the unlettered man of the 20th century know anything of the habits, customs, and imagery of these early times, and is he fit to interpret writings which have puzzled so many of the Reformers, those who joined that movement refused any longer to accept the Church as the infallible guide, and were obliged to cast about elsewhere for a standard, and for the first time, the Bible was chosen as the only infallible guide, and the right of private judgment in its interpretation was pronounced as a dogma. What happened? Just that which might have been expected from the free use of writings so involved and so much beyond the comprehension of the unlettered. New sects sprang up until at present, when there are about 112, fanaticism, spiritual pride, the defying of the human judgment, the tyrannous imposing of private opinions on others, and worse than all, the repudiation to an alarming extent of all the cardinal doctrines of the Christian religion to which I may refer as contained chiefly in the Apostles' Creed, which was in existence before the New Testament was written. Of course, this is a logical issue if everyone has a right to think and interpret for himself in the region of the supernatural. To such an extent has this theory carried multitudes down the inclined plane that thinkers, in alarm, have gone back and are going back into the Church of authority. These sacred books are widely circulated at home and in foreign lands without note or comment. One Christian society alone during last year issued upwards of 9,000,000 copies. That this should continue is worth considering. I see Pope Pius X., when Patriarch of Venice, was the supporter of the "Societas S. Gerolami," the object of which is to circulate the Bible, and since he became Pope has encouraged the householders of the poor in every part of Italy to possess free copies of the New Testament, but with notes and comments in regard to the correct reading and interpretation of the revelation therein. For if the Bible contains a Divine or supernatural revelation—which is denied only by the "higher critics" of Germany—then truly its interpretation cannot be accepted through the unaided human intellect, but must depend for acceptance on an order Divinely appointed. But my object in this letter is to point out the evils which have arisen from the ignorant supposition that every man is free to wield the detached statements of the written Divine oracles. In reading the journals of the Houses of Lords and Commons in the reign of Queen Elizabeth, the abuse of Scripture quotations in the debates and notes is an example to the point. For the execution of Queen Mary of Scotland for many sessions over several years members drew from the Old and New Testaments, as they thought, the most powerful arguments which would fit pages to quote. For example, "Because Saul spared Agag, although he was a king, God took from him and from his heirs forever." And then the story of Ahab and Benhadad, the King of Syria, is quoted "Because thou hast let escape out of thy hands the man that I should have to die, thy life shall be for his life, and the life of his people." "If the Queen Mary, escape, God's heavy displeasure will, for the same, light both on the prince and realm, as it did on Ahab and the Israelites shortly after."

"The Queen must not be spared" (Ezekiel 21:17). Joshua, a worthy prince, put to death at one time five kings, ergo—"We find also in Scripture Jezebel, and Athaliah, both infanticides, and Athaliah, who had been by God's marshall's execution, and the same execution commanded in Scriptures." In Psalms 136, the killing of the mighty kings are called the merciful works of God. Elias is quoted, who killed all the prophets of Baal. It was further argued, "Shall we think that the gathering of a few sticks on the Sabbath Day is to be punished by death in a poor, simple person, and the seeking to subvert the Gospel of Christ not to be worthy of punishment in a notable person?" Another senator pointed out "how wisely proceeded Solomon to punishment in putting to death his own natural and elder brother." Again, how much more magistrates were commended who had put to death those mischievous and wicked queens, and Athaliah. And in this way for days Scripture was quoted for this wicked deed. When urging on Elizabeth the speedy execution of Queen Mary she said, "The neglecting thereof may procure the heavy displeasure and punishment of Almighty God, as by sundry severe examples of His great justice in that behalf let us in the sacred Scriptures doth appear." This 14th Parliament advised Mary's execution, which, however, did not take effect until the 28th year of Elizabeth's reign. No one can read "the Cromwellian Settlement" in Ireland by John P. Prendergast, or the history

of Cromwell by Morley, without being shocked by the cruelty and crime committed under the name of that religion which, by private interpretation, Cromwell believed by God found a sanction for in the Scriptures. A remarkable instance of imposture and fantastic tricks before high Heaven arising from misuse of Scripture by private interpretation, is the modern Divine healing theory so successfully worked by Rev. John Alexander Dowrie at Zion City, Illinois, near Chicago, who professes to be Elijah the Restorer, and addresses many thousands every Sunday in Shiloh Tabernacle, and who circulates his views weekly in a publication called the "Leaves of Healing," in which Scripture texts would prove his healing art by prayer and faith. If private judgment be allowed, Rev. Dowrie has as good a right to believe and propagate his views by quoting texts of Scripture, as the scientific world has in holding the theory of evolution. It is well known to the police and law courts that many people scattered up and down the religious world, being the victims of private judgment in the interpretations of several passages of Scripture, depend entirely on Divine interposition to heal all physical maladies and refuse medical assistance to the danger of the health of the community. Again, what has produced about 312 forms of religion, but private judgment. Can it be that Divine guidance is granted to every form? In our daily intercourse with the people of the world we hear all sorts of absurd views, with a text of Scripture to buttress them up. Left to themselves, are the people not in a fog, a maze, an indescribable state of uncertainty as regards the supernatural. Yours,

AMUEL YOUNG,  
Derryvoige, 27th November.

## Troubled South Africa

Among the loyalists themselves in South Africa a new crisis has now arisen. The resignation of Mr. W. J. M. Botha, the prime minister, has been followed by the even more remarkable retirement of Mr. J. H. Smuts from the editorship of the "Johannesburg Star." No two men had more to do with fomenting the Outlander agitation than Mr. Wyberg and Mr. Smuts, and the latter gentleman was said to have escaped from Johannesburg on the approach of trouble disguised as an old woman. They now agree that the administration of the country is being conducted exclusively in the interest of the big financiers, and that a serious state of discontent has arisen. They are opposed to the importation of Chinese labor, as they believe that the experiment can only be successful on conditions which would be of permanent injury to the country. The Boers are taking no hand in this quarrel. Their leaders foresee from the start what the upshot of Milnerism would be, and they declined to be in any way responsible for it. In this they showed that shrewdness in which they so far excel their English fellow-subjects. If both the others had accepted the responsibility for the new regime which Lord Milner sought to force on them, and if they had come out as the opponents of Chinese labor, they would be charged with using that question for ulterior and disloyal ends. But they were too clever to get themselves into such a difficulty. They have stood aside; the trouble has arisen, as they foresaw; but the split is between the two sections of the British population. Lord Milner is strongly committed to Chinese labor, and Mr. Chamberlain only gave a temporary refusal. But it is clear that Lord Milner must be prepared to give way, or else South Africa will be plunged into another internecine conflict, in which the Boers can rest on their arms awaiting with equanimity the extinction of either British faction.

## The Destruction of Ottawa University

The sympathy of the Catholics of these islands will go out to their brethren in Canada over the loss caused by the burning of Ottawa University. It is a loss which will in due course be repaired, but which in the meantime will be keenly felt by Canadian Catholics. The institution is one of those which show that a different policy is pursued by Great Britain towards the Catholics of Canada from that which is adopted in dealing with the Catholics of Ireland. The Catholic University of Ottawa is recognized and endowed by the state. It has been conducted with unquestionable success, and its reputation has drawn students to it not only from all parts of Canada, but also from the United States, Mexico and other countries. Over five hundred students were in residence when the fire took place. Many of them must have had very narrow escapes with their lives, as few had time to put on their clothes when aroused from sleep. Of the professors several were injured, and unfortunately one lost his life, as the damage to the buildings is estimated at half a million dollars, a considerable time will probably elapse before the University is again in working order.—Catholic Times.

## The Bishop Passed

The present Protestant Bishop of London, who enjoys a joke, even when it is against himself, tells how, when he was Bishop of Steyney, he once addressed a large assembly of Sunday school children in one of the East End parishes. Anxious to get in touch with his young congregation, he said, "Now is there any little boy or girl who would like to ask me a question?" When this offer had been repeated more than once a little shrill voice from the centre of the church cried out: "Please, sir, why did the angels walk up and down Jacob's ladder when they had wings?" The Bishop's presence of mind did not fail him, as he asked again, in his most diplomatic way, "Now, is there any other little boy or girl here who would like to answer this little girl's question?"

## Spencer and the Future Life

New Orleans, Dec. 15, 1903.

Editor Catholic Register.

Herbert Spencer in the preface of his latest work, "Facts and Comments," endeavors to detail in few words his reasons for abandoning Christianity. He first declares that his study of primitive beliefs leads to the conviction that there is no origin for the idea of an after-life other than the conclusions which savages have drawn from the notions suggested by dreams. This statement is a begging of the entire question, in the old and much contested as to whether man was created originally with a strong primitive intellect, the savage being a degenerate, or whether the first men were merely improved brutes, whose progeny has since been making more or less progress towards civilization and enlightenment. It is begging the question also, as to whether or not there has been an original Divine Revelation, as the scientific world is holding the theory of evolution. It is well known to the police and law courts that many people scattered up and down the religious world, being the victims of private judgment in the interpretations of several passages of Scripture, depend entirely on Divine interposition to heal all physical maladies and refuse medical assistance to the danger of the health of the community. Again, what has produced about 312 forms of religion, but private judgment. Can it be that Divine guidance is granted to every form? In our daily intercourse with the people of the world we hear all sorts of absurd views, with a text of Scripture to buttress them up. Left to themselves, are the people not in a fog, a maze, an indescribable state of uncertainty as regards the supernatural. Yours,

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The second reason he assigns is the mysterious connection between brain and consciousness, and the fact, as he sees it, that we have no evidence of the existence of the latter, without the activity of the first. This connection between brain and thought animists do not deny. Indeed, there seems to be, likewise, an essential relation between thought and the blood, hence the lungs and the heart, which poetically we call the blood, but these phenomena are no wise hostile to belief in the soul and its immortality. Christians have always held that soul and body, though distinct in nature, are in this life bound intimately together; that the body, with its organs, is a bond between spirit and matter, the instrument by which an interior and invisible soul passes into contact with an exterior and visible world. Concede that the brain is the point at which the soul places itself in connection with the entire nervous and muscular systems, and which it first affects, when exercising acts of will, memory and understanding. Is not the brain the grand centre of the nervous system, the point to which converge the sensations, waves which bring, as it were, information from the exterior, and whence start responsive currents, operating the limbs and members? And when information is thus passed from senses to spirit, and when the spirit exercises its functions, should it astonish us to find, in either case certain physical manifestations in the brain? The electric current from battery or dynamo, operating the telegraph or telephone, must first strike a certain particular point, the wires, etc., forming the circuit. The fact that physical effects are observable in the brain, during thought, in no manner indicates the identity of thought and brain activity. Fire under the pot makes the water boil and evaporate; but the additional heat communicated, one and the same thing with the water, which is disturbed? When the will decrees the crooking of a finger, there is in the member affected something of the same phenomena, which are to be observed in the brain, when thinking is being done; an access of blood and a disturbance and waste of tissue. But does this mean that the act of will, manifesting itself initially in the great nerve centre, the brain, is one with the muscles which operate to bend the finger? But, waiving these considerations, let us inquire whether the conclusion that Christianity is to be abandoned, results fairly from the premises Mr. Spencer himself lays down. "He inherited from long lines of Christian ancestors belief in God, in the soul and its immortality." His later condemnation of these dogmas is simply in the nature of the Scotch verdict, "not proved." Indeed, considering the vast multitude of good and learned men who differ with him in these matters, his mental state in this regard is that rather of some dissenting jurymen, who finds a fact, not proven to his individual satisfaction, though it be accepted as true by his colleagues.

Even if it be admitted that the telescope, the microscope and the spectrometer fail to show us God, and that the scalpel uncovers no evidences of a soul, why yet should he surrender, in default of all positive proofs against it, a creed which formed part of his heritage, and one which is accepted by the vast majority at least of civilized men? "These dogmas, a multitude of our strongest thinkers?" Belief is an act of the will and not of the understanding. The judgment may sometimes influence the will, in this regard, but it does not and should not always control it. Very many things are true which the understanding cannot fathom; and were faith, in practice, the bond slave of comprehension, we would believe very little. Indeed, passing a sentiment are usually more potent to control the will, in the matter of belief, than is the understanding. Many men believe what is agreeable to them, no matter what their own judgments may declare. We cannot say that this is, in every case, wrong; for human reason is not an infallible guide, especially in matters of grave importance. Even Mr. Spencer lays no claim to positive certainty in behalf of his own conclusions. He admits that upon the deeper questions he has reasoned himself into a blind alley. There was no warrant for his halting, dazed and helpless, in this no-thoroughfare of his own making, rather than follow the pathways which had been beaten by millions of confiding Christians, who had little difficulty in finding their way out of doubt and gloom and into light and certainty. Still less reason is there why Mr. Spencer should have employ-

ed a lifetime in luring others into this same maze where he himself is landed, and in striving to persuade them that there are no pathways leading out of such distressful confusion. FRANK MCGLOIN, President Society of the Holy Spirit.

## Remarkable County Down Centenarian

There recently died in the County Down, Ireland, a remarkable centenarian in the person of Mrs. Catharine "Aice" of Carnary, near Rathfriland. The old lady, who had reached the extraordinary age of 115 years, lived under no less than 15 sovereigns, and remembered the Battle of Waterloo and other long distant historical events, and she had 83 sons, grandsons, great-grandsons, and sons-in-law, and a singular fact is that each of these followed the same calling as her father, grand-father, or great-grandfather—that of brogue or shoemaker. On her death-bed, when reclining the number of her kindred, she made the interesting discovery that all the brogue-makers of twelve miles around were her offspring or kindred. She asked, as a dying request, that "for the honor of the trade," she should be followingly epitaph upon it: "When I am laid beneath the ground, My praise all o'er the nation sound, Among my sons there are no rogues, But honest men as e'er made brogues."

## The Hardest Piano Piece

"Among all known musical compositions written for the piano, which is the most difficult of execution?" To this often-asked question Le Figaro has endeavored to obtain a definite and final answer by interviewing the best-known pianists and teachers of the piano in Paris.

No fewer than sixteen compositions and groups of compositions are named by the French pianists as among those presenting the greatest technical difficulties to the performer. They are as follows: Beethoven's sonata, op. 57 and 106; Bach's "Chromatic Fantasy and Fugue"; Brahms' "Variations on a Theme of Paganini"; Liszt's "Etudes"; Chopin's "Ballets," first, third, and fourth, and the finale of his sonata in B flat minor; Liszt's "Etudes," and the "Rhapsody," "Schumann's sonata in F sharp minor and his "Etude Symphonique"; Saer's "Allegro Appassionata," a sonata by Thalberg, and a sonata by Von Weber. Of these compositions only four have more than one vote, and none has more than two. Only one composition has the undivided support of its adherents. This is Blackwell's "Fantaisie Orientale Russe," which is the most difficult to execute of all music yet written for the piano. Mme. Roger-Miclos and Marmontel, the eldest of the professors of the Paris Conservatoire, pronounced for Liszt's "Rhapsody, No. 12," among others; Raul Pugno and Mme. Roger-Miclos name the Beethoven sonata in B flat, opus 106, and these two pianists are also agreed as to the extraordinary difficulty of Schumann's sonata in F sharp minor. "Islamey," then, must be pronounced the winner in Le Figaro's competition.

## Science and Religion

The Rev. W. T. McCormick sends an English Protestant contemporary an interesting letter he received from Lord Kelvin in 1896, in reply to some questions on the authority of the Bible. Lord Kelvin says: "I have never read any theological works myself, being wholly occupied with science, which I find full of the evidence of God. And I find no reading of theological books needed to keep me contented with the religion of my childhood." This letter from one of the greatest scientists of the age will be rather a difficult nut to crack for some of our very clever modern Agnostics.

## What Steel is Made Of

The raw materials of manufacture in making pig iron consist of iron ore, coke, and limestone, in the proportions of 2 pounds of ore to 1 pound of coke and 1-3 of a pound of limestone. In the manufacture of the steel from which rails are rolled, there are two fundamental processes; first, the reduction of the ore in the blast furnace; and then the conversion of the molten blast furnace into the steel industry; for blast furnace practice is broadly the same to-day in every furnace throughout the country. Each furnace (there are eleven in all at the Edgar Thomson Works) consists of a huge steel shell varying from 75 to 90 feet in height. It has its largest diameter at about a quarter of its height, and tapers regularly to its smallest diameter at the top platform. The upper portion is known as the "stack," the lower portion as the "bosh," while below this is the "hearth," in which the molten cast iron collects. The bosh, which is just above the tuyeres, is provided with annular hollow work, through which a stream of cold water is circulated for the purpose of keeping down the temperature of the brickwork at the hottest part of the furnace. It should be explained that the whole interior of the steel shell is lined with about three feet of brickwork.—From the Scientific American's Special Number on Iron and Steel.

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## THE NEW BOY

"You had better eat meat, you know, Rodgers," said Monks. "Meats is a terror," whispered another; "you had better."

"I can't," expostulated Rodgers, "Catholics can't eat meat on Fridays."

"But you'll have to," continued Monks.

"I shan't," was the quiet answer. "See here," said Monks, "if you don't I'll make you. We shall stand none of your bigotry here."

"Try."

Monks reflected, made a mental estimation of the newcomer's fighting powers, and seemed to hesitate, then stammered: "Well, I would, only I don't like to hurt you."

Rodgers smiled. He was a newcomer at Seaforth's Boarding School, Seaforth's, you know, was one of the most successful schools in the colony. It was a Presbyterian school, but professed to be perfectly impartial in matters of religion. To this academy Willie Rodgers was sent by his father, who was ambitious that his son should carve his name on the future history of Australia. Mrs. Rodgers ventured to expostulate, she had been so careful of her son's training from the cradle that she looked with some anxiety to the prospects of his living in such an un-Catholic atmosphere as a Presbyterian boarding school. Her husband was indelible.

"My dear," he said to her, "you shut your eyes to Willie's best interests. The boy has talent, remarkable talent, and it would be unfair to him as well as to ourselves if we were to deprive him of the advantages of such an education as may be had at Seaforth's. There are already plenty of Catholics there. Major Hardy told me last summer he was sending his two boys there."

So Willie was sent to Seaforth's, late in the term, which caused every one to talk of the newcomer. He had been put on to bowl at cricket the first day and took Monks' wicket the first over. Every one was delighted except Monks, for Monks was a bit of a bully, and was, of course, secretly hated by the boys.

His first night the newcomer knelt down by his bedside to say his night prayers, as was his unfailing custom. There was a titter in the dormitory. Some one threw a pillow at him, another hit him with a sponge; but he didn't appear to mind. Monks hit him with a slipper. That hurt. "Twas mean, too, Rodgers seemed vexed when he looked round, and Monks pretended to be engaged with his toothbrush, but the night prayers were finished without further interruption. This was the beginning of it, but the real trouble came on Friday.

On Friday the newcomer found that no provision had been made for anyone who did not wish to eat meat. The dishes came out one after another, but with the exception of some vegetables and a potato, he found there was nothing he could eat. This himself. Potatoes and vegetables are never satisfactory in such a case. It was still harder to see his neighbors on all sides watching his evident discomfort. They were staring and sneering at him so. He could hear whispered remarks and polite inquiries about his health and appetite. He felt the shame burning on his cheeks at so much attention being paid to him, yet it never occurred to him to eat meat than to cut off his head. At length Monks, the biggest boy at the table, took it upon himself to compel the newcomer to eat his meat. His attempt failed ingloriously, as we have seen above.

After dinner Rodgers found himself in the midst of a crowd of boys regarding him with feelings of mixed wonder and curiosity, as the boy who checked Monks, and refused to eat meat on Friday.

"What a silly ass he is," he overheard one say.

"Oh, yes, a little bigot," responded another; "this is the first time a Catholic refused to take what he got on Friday. We'll soon teach him better."

"Oh, let him alone," said a bigger boy, who just joined the group. "He will soon get tired of his abstinence. He will eat meat like the rest next Friday. Let the youngster alone. It's not quite fair to a newcomer."

The majority of the boys began to feel ashamed of themselves, and hurried off to their cricket and tennis, leaving their recent victim in peace. He repeated, more than once, "He will eat meat, like the rest, next Friday." Why what a stupid lot of duflers they are, he thought, not to know that a Catholic can't eat meat on Friday. But I wonder if it is true that the Catholics here eat meat. Here comes Hardy. "I'll ask him."

Hardy had been a distant, former acquaintance, and had acted as the newcomer's patron since his arrival at Seaforth's. Great, then, was Rodgers' surprise when this young gentleman called out:

"What the dickens do you want to make such a fool of yourself in the refectory to-day? The sooner you drop such nonsense and do as every one else does the better. I thought you were a fellow of some sense."

"Sure, Hardy, you don't mean to say you eat meat to-day, Friday?"

"Why, you little idiot, do you suppose one can live on potatoes and bread? One can abstain on Friday at home if he likes, but in Rome one must do as the Romans do. Have a little sense in future, Rodgers."

"And you call yourself a Catholic, Hardy?"

There was such a degree of contempt in the voice and gesture of the newcomer that Hardy blushed for very shame. Muttering something about narrow-minded bigotry, he hurried away to hind his confusion.

As Rodgers knelt by his bed that night he was assailed with quite a shower of stockings, sponges, pillows, etc. Without showing the slightest alarm or irritation, he finished his prayers. Many whispered from their beds, "The newcomer is a plucky fellow, at any rate." Henceforth he was seldom disturbed at his devotions.

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After dinner the boys crowded round him, clapping him on the back and overwhelming him with congratulations. The captain of the house approached, and shaking hands with him, said:

"You are a plucky fellow, Rodgers. You did quite right in punishing Monks. We have treated you most caddishly, and we are very sorry for it. Three cheers for the newcomer boys!"

When Rodgers became captain of the school a little later, new boys always wondered why he had a special cover at table on Fridays, and the smaller boys never tire telling how he defied the whole school and punished a bully in the golden days of old.—New Zealand Tablet.

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