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June 6, 1919

The MODERN PULPIT

(Being an Essay Written by J. SINCLAIR TAIT, M.D.)

It has been said that "the war has drawn an indelible mark across the history of our times."

For a thousand years we have been waiting for the advent of the avenging comet to sweep away all undue authority, and that heap of vague, empirical deductions which have so long fettered thought and belocuted religious belief. That an enlarging mind is opening up to us new avenues of thought is apparent to all. We stand to-day in the presence of a force which is reconstructing the world, and in the march of events the old must speedily give place to the new.

There is no doubt but that man's belief in the old order has been rudely shaken, and there is a wide demand for a re-statement of current values. Thoughtful people to-day are convinced that a change is inevitable. Nowhere is this more obvious than in the realm of Theology, and in dealing with this subject, men fall to see why we should be guided by any considerations different from those which would be thought appropriate to any other problem. Like most other problems, Theology has a history, and this history is a product of the human mind as much as any other branch of art, science, or industry. In this history, untrustworthy and conflicting evidence, which should not modern thought and criticism be applied as in all other cases? It is obvious that scientific discovery and historical criticism are fast predominating over dogmatism and false interpretation to such an extent that Ethics and Theology are beginning to part company, and the leaders in these departments of thought are now asked for a re-statement in forms more rational and consistent with modern methods of research and experience.

In the trend of social evolution everywhere visible, men look in vain to the pulpit for a complete unification of religious belief considered as the indispensable basis of human order and progress. While the great underlying ideal of human thought is the complete ordering of life in accordance with the spirit and truths of religion, yet, to the modern mind, before complete acceptance is possible, there are opposing forces which must be concentrated and harmonized into a system of living, operative truth consistent with human progress, and the evolution of an enlarging experience. In the trend of the world's advancing culture, the age is waiting for new light, so that humanity may live in a larger and freer atmosphere. Up to the present time, many

people have been impressed that through material accumulations, mankind was to become satisfied; but the world of man's consciousness is larger than his outer environments, so that the present unrest will continue until more thought is given to those great, persistent and directive forces which rule and govern the Universe and their laws, or modes of uniform action; for upon a proper appreciation of these laws, all the interests of man, both theoretic and practical, will ultimately depend.

To a people whose history has been one of orderly development, the revision of diverse and contradictory categories of belief so common to the past, will come as a rude awakening; and nowhere will the struggle be greater than in the reconstruction of the origin, growth and development of conflicting systems of religious faith. In the potency and promise of further development, we can only hope that the outcome will be in accordance with social evolution and scientific discovery, so that the churches may be judged by their deeds rather than by their doctrines. With the passage of time much that was formerly believed has now become unscientific and obsolete; so that the modern mind is no longer content to accept all that the pulpit teaches, any more than they are to believe and accept, all that History or Science may strive to unfold.

The leaders in religious thought stand confronting the problems of the age without any clear faith of their own, so that they remain to a large extent unmoved, by the evolutionary progress of social and economic advance; they fail to see that the world is rapidly moving beyond their standpoint; and, for this reason they fail to respond to the progressive tendencies and wider knowledge of the times. To further attempt to bolster up the tottering heritage of devout but unscientific ages, is only to battle with defeat—the result of which will be only to exhaust time, and secure no measurable rewards. To help carry the Church forward through these unsettled times, and to establish in it a larger and truer conception of what religion really is, will require the utmost patience and the highest type of scholarship. Neither ecclesiastical authority nor institutional connection should in any way influence the weighing of evidence, or the portrayal of results. This is not a question of sectarian prejudice, but a question of historic fact, and of impartial sociological comparison.

The two great movements of the past century which have affected most the inner life of humanity are the doctrine of Evolution, and the advance of Historic Criticism. The time has now fully arrived when the Church must address itself to both of these questions in an attitude unbiassed by dogma, and a mind free from all that is legendary and traditional. To this end more attention must be paid to the laws of nature which have existed throughout all time—controlling the course of events, and influencing life in all stages of its development. Religion can never be studied apart from Science and social order; and in view of what we are accustomed to distinguish the natural order, men must eventually recognise that their power, large and progressive as it is, is not a power of subversion, but a power of subvention; and that the exercise of this power, to be fruitful, must depend on discernment and acceptance.

The tendency of religion in the past has been to concern itself too much with man's possible state in the next world, rather than to observe and try to remedy his actual state in the present world. While the Church of the 20th century is at one with the Apostolic Church in the belief of the gospel of Christ, yet the grounds of that belief have not always been regarded as valid, so that the leaders in this department of thought are called upon for a re-statement of religious belief, not as a system of definitions or abstractions, but as a system of accomplished facts and working forces, compatible with modern forms of thought and experience. To further attempt to keep new wine in old bottles will only result in destroying the bottles and spilling the wine. The Bible must be treated, not so much as of supernatural origin, but as a natural production of the early Church, and it should be approached in precisely the same spirit in which Luke tells us that he produced his Gospel, in which he considered it his duty to exercise his own judgment in dealing with all sources of valuable information.

The explanations of a production which remain so homogeneous in character, and yet so heterogeneous in form, appear meaningless to a responsive and critical age, and the world-philosophy of to-day cannot longer maintain its order and interest in those aesthetic productions and pantomimic performances handed down as relics of a former age, and in substitution thereof, it looks for a more rational and scientific re-statement of facts consistent with modern thought and historic criticism, and the progress of advancing civilization. In order to effect this, Religion must be studied more in the mind of its founder, and less in the colleges and councils of theologians. If it is true that Religion is "the life of God in the soul of man," then this life in humanity is one of continuous progressive change, according to certain divine laws, and the forces inherent in humanity itself. This regular and orderly sequence may be discovered in all forms of thought consistent with practical experience, conduct and spiritual advancement. The various measures which have improved education, emancipated trade, extended the franchise, abolished slavery, and secured religious freedom—have all been fought out as great national and economic questions, and not altogether on religious grounds. Our civilisation is a developing, organic growth, and its life history must be studied as a whole.

Society in the past has been more religious than intellectual, and by this means, in the evolution of thought, various ethical systems have arisen which, by the law of natural selection, require a considerable readjustment from the standpoint of which the progress of society has been hitherto regarded. Truth can never be the isolated discovery and declaration of a single separate mind; or a separate body of men, or of a single separate age. The civilised world to-day is thronged with eager minds, all seeking for new and abiding truths. It deplores that self-deception and narrow-mindedness, which disregards new facts of late development, and resists the introduction of new and valuable facts, which tend to raise the standard of scientific fitness and practical achievement.

The present war has done more to open the minds of the blind than all the creeds of Christendom, so that the modern mind is no longer held in servile bondage to dogma and tradition, but is free to look forward to a better adjustment of life and its laws. It has opened up to us a new era, and thrust upon us higher standards, and newer types of thought, to which we must give respectable consideration. Our boys in the trenches have broken forever the trifling differences of denominationalism, and revealed to us the wide difference existing between the essentials of religion and the refinements of Theology. While our lives cannot always become what we would wish them, yet when we are taught to accept the lawful and orderly ways that come to us from a knowledge of true religion, and a proper understanding of the fitness and adaptation of life, then only will the abiding foundations of our belief become, not only a matter of material concern, but a question of spiritual advance.

The master lesson yet to be learned is that mankind has been equipped

in every way—spiritually, mentally and physically to work out all his problems, whether they be great or small, and through the doing of this, to enter into the fullness of life. To help effect all this, the pulpit of the past has lamentably failed. "The letter killeth but the spirit giveth life." Let us, then, frankly admit that the old order is rapidly passing away, and the reign of the new spirit has begun. Altho' the age is

"Dark with excessive bright," Yet further light shall shine, And order from disorder spring.

[Note by Editor.—The foregoing essay will shortly be followed by Part II., entitled "The Modern Pulpit."] DO IT NOW.

If there's work that should be done, do it now; if you wish to borrow money, do it now; putting off from day to day is a foolish, slipshod way, and such methods never pay—do it now. If you'd ply a deathless pen, do it now; if you ought to set a hen, do it now; if you're billed to trim the lawn, do not wait the morning's dawn; you may then be dead and gone—do it now. If you'd build yourself a home, do it now; if you'd write an epic poem, do it now; oh, so many fellows cry, "We have plans for by and by!" If you'd climb to places high, do it now. If you'd renovate your life, do it now; if you'd cheer your weary wife, do it now; if you're to sit and wait till you get your mood on straight; if you ought to pull your freight, pull it now. If you'd buy next winter's coal, buy it now; if you wish to save a roll, save it now; for no man can rise and say what may happen when to-day is worn out and laid away; do things now. If you'd demonstrate your grit, do it now; if you hope to make a hit, do it now; for the idler cuts no ice, and the dreamer lacks the price; if you'd get there once or twice, do it now.

WALT MARCH

A Misunderstanding.
Mr. John De Grey, the London police-court magistrate who has recently retired, has a good stock of legal anecdotes. One of the best concerns a brother magistrate in the country in the district where poaching was all to prevalent. For the sixth time (says Mr. De Grey) a certain youth had been up before him on the charge of stealing game, and the magistrate, seeing the father present, anxiously awaiting the result, made up his mind to appeal to him on the boy's behalf. "This boy of yours," he said, "has been charged so many times with poaching that I'm absolutely tired of seeing him here."

"Ain't as tired of seein' 'im 'ere, sir, as wot I am," replied the father. "Then why don't you teach him better?" said the magistrate. If you show him the right way he won't be coming here!" "I have showed him the right way," was the reply, "but the young fool's got no brains. He always gets caught!"

His Recommendation.

"Have you any one in court who will vouch for your good character?" asked the magistrate of a man charged with a petty offence. "Yes, sir," said the defendant; "there is the head constable." The head constable was amazed. "Why, Your worship, I don't even know the man," he protested. "Now, sir," broke in the culprit, "I have lived in the town for twenty years and if the constable don't know me yet, isn't that a character for you?"



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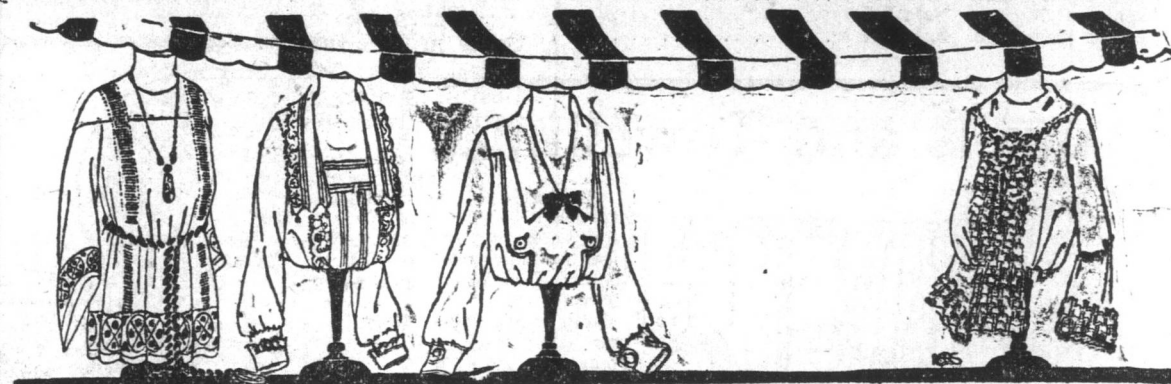
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Visions of the Future.

(From The New York Times.)

There was a providence that took care of those aviators, aloft they knew not where. The feat will always be wonderful, and posterity will say that no stouter-hearted men, no men greater of soul, ever faced a hazard on land or sea with more indomitable spirit. There is the kind of honorably won fame that the bravest men will always envy them. With the success of this flight across the wide Atlantic comes a realization of the service that may be expected of aviation as its instruments are improved. Captain Alcock had one-third of his fuel left when he landed in Galway; he might have gone on for almost another thousand miles. We know that any well-engined airplane can fly the Atlantic in clear and fair weather with a competent pilot at the wheel. The task set inventors is to provide a plane that can get across in any but the most tempestuous conditions, and there will follow a regular air service. Lord Northcliffe in his message of congratulation to Captain Alcock said that he looked forward to the time when London morning newspapers would be selling in New York in the evening. Let no one make light of the prediction. Twenty years ago who would have dreamed that the Atlantic would be crossed in the air in about sixteen hours? It is evident that the cable, which for the delays has fallen under criticism of late, will one day have a competitor as to much of its business in airplanes darting across the ocean in a comparatively few hours.

Some of the most striking parallels are made of silk and feathers.

The Atlantic Air Route.

Commander Towers is quoted as saying that in about five years from now there will be a regular service of airplanes across the Atlantic, but he also says that such a service will be dependent on the establishment between shore and shore of a line of lightships something like 300 miles apart, each of them a well-equipped meteorological station, sending constant weather reports both east and west.

Perhaps if the Commander had been a little more fortunate himself in his recent flight he would have shortened this period by a year or two. He speaks, however, from knowledge and with authority, and his prophecy has weight. He admits that the maintenance of his lightships will be expensive, but says that they would be worth their cost, and be beneficial to surface craft.

as well as airships of all kinds. Apparently he did not see any insuperable difficulty in keeping the lightships at their appointed stations. Yet to do so would not be altogether easy, for there is not anchorage in midocean or at any rate there never has been any, and Atlantic storms are apt to drive small vessels fast and far.

He is unquestionably right in the importance he ascribes to obtaining more and better knowledge of aerial conditions. Upon this systematic investigation of the air, over land as well as sea, is largely conditioned, and the present sources of such information are of demonstrated inadequacy. If men knew as much about cyclones as do the migratory birds, air traveling would be far safer and dependable than it is now.—New York Times.

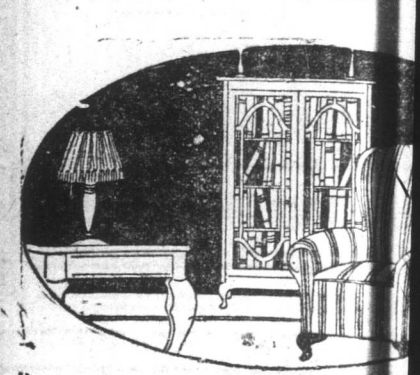
The Union Jacks.

(From The Westminster Gazette.)

Mr. Magee is one of the protagonists in a story still told in Oxford Senior common rooms. In 1888 Lord Morley went to the Union to propose Home Rule for Ireland, and young Magee, then in his second term, but already known as the son of the witty Archbishop of York, was put up to oppose him. As a matter of fact, Lord Morley lost the motion, largely as the result of a most powerful appeal made shortly before by Lord Randolph Churchill; but the best remembered incident of the evening occurred at the close of the debate. An undergraduate who had been dining to well at the Clarendon succeeded in entering the hall, waving in violent fashion a Union Jack. Immediately the President was asked, "Is it in order, Sir, for the Union Jacks to wave the Union Jack?"

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