

taken the trouble to cable the news of these sickening revelations as made in the columns of *L'Humanité*, we have been unable to discover it.

Most important of all, of course, is the light thrown by these disclosures upon the present attitude of the Paris press toward M. Poincaré and his policy. If editors are willing to suppress the truth for a few thousand francs from the Tsar, how much more likely are they to bend to the will of their own government on such important matters as the state of the national finance and the results of the Ruhr invasion! *L'Humanité's* revelations have left the candor and good faith of the entire French press under the gravest suspicion. It remains for these gentlemen to clear themselves of the charge of intellectual prostitution—if they can.

The American Mercury

WHEN Messrs. Mencken and Nathan announced that they were going to have a vehicle all their own, a beautiful green and black tandem steamroller, in which they, along with all their prejudices, health, and Sandow sarcasm proposed to drive down the middle of the American road, there was considerable excitement. The first number has come and gone, and in some cities is reported to be already worth ten dollars a copy. And now here is the second instalment of what has been referred to as the literary event of the year—praise with which we need not quarrel, since the total number of years is large.

It was understood that this new venture would give Mr. Mencken wider scope for an increasing interest in politics and general affairs, and the first number contained a declaration of faith not signed by him, to be sure, but unmistakably characteristic. The *American Mercury* wasn't going to follow any creed, nor be bowed under the consciousness of any mission, nor advocate any panacea. It disclaimed any tendency to radicalism (some years ago its editors would have been more likely to disclaim conservatism). It proposed to steer a middle course, not from any motives of caution or "liberalism," but because a coal barge in midchannel has a better chance of bumping into and sinking all other craft, whether they be hugging the left bank or the right. It proposed, in general, to have a good time, which is the purpose Mr. Mencken has gaily admitted to be his only real one whatever he writes.

"Iconoclastic" is a word which one fears will be frequently applied to our *Mercury*. A better word will have to be invented to describe someone who loves to hear the crash of empty bottles quite as much as that of ikons, who often can't tell the difference between them, and who always uses the same crowbar on both. The resulting noise is so loud as almost to sound like a philosophical system,

and many people have been fooled accordingly. Some of them have even contributed to the *Mercury*, for it is Mr. Mencken's misfortune to attract minds of equal cynicism (in the most literal lamp-post sense) but of inferior ferocity. These imitators (from whose number we emphatically exclude the brilliant and genuinely damaging articles by John Owens and Ernest Boyd) seem engaged largely in demonstrating that one puncture isn't enough to let the air out of an old tire.

There is a heavy concentration of this state of mind in the second number, which is rather monotonous with petulant muckraking and apparently wilful ill-humor. Even Mr. Mencken, in a neither able nor amusing editorial, is nearer spleen than savagery; even he, who is usually peeling a new cudgel, is content with the old name-calling—"unjust," "insane," "ludicrous," "idiots," "dervishes," "sorcerers," "swindle," "buffoonery," "yokel," "blackmail," "ass." It has become a habit, like cursing central for the wrong number.

Certainly it would be useful to have, in this profoundly imperfect America, a journal whose chief and only function it was to point out, without attempt at or suggestion of remedy, like the barker on a sightseeing bus, all the atrocities and imperfections. This function the *American Mercury* seems likely to assume and to perform in the spirit of Flea in the American Bed. Well, fleas are valuable, and we have done a good deal of biting ourselves. But it is discouraging to find, so early in the *Mercury's* career, such a lack of variety, gaiety, humor and discrimination in its attack; and so strong a tendency to use the same vocabulary whether speaking of a deep cancer or of a surface rash. We do not expect Mr. Mencken to understand anything in America (except its language), but we did expect, though we are now prepared to admit we had no business to, that not all of the *Mercury's* complaint would be uttered in the same tone of voice. On the whole, we expect no startling deviation in the future from the two numbers already before us; Messrs. Mencken and Nathan will continue shooting at mastodons with birdshot, and at guinea pigs with an elephant gun.

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Fundamentals

IT is an old story that the right name is half the battle in moral and social disputes. With the fundamentalists, their key-word, whether or no it turn out to be half the battle, is nine-tenths of their case, perhaps ninety-nine one-hundredths. The craving of human beings for something solid and unshakable upon which to rest is ultimate and unappeasable. Many philosophers have made the search for a principle of certitude their chief quest. They sought certainty, however, not because they were philosophers but because they were human. Certainty merely happened to be the name given to the object of their particular human desire for a harbor that cannot be troubled, a support that cannot be weakened. Fundamentals are the answer to man's cry for security, living as he does a life of uncertainty in a world that is always on the move.

Just what is taken to be so fixed and final that man may repose upon it, differs with race, clime, epoch and temperament. Looking at the variety of philosophic and religious ideas of the basic and ultimate which history displays, it seems hopeless to try to define fundamentals except in a circular manner. They are whatever afford a considerable group of men living amid troubles and vicissitudes a sense of stability, safety, peace. There have even been those who carried doubt to such a point that it ceased to be a torturing perplexity, a harassing of the soul. To them scepticism become an ultimate exercise, something so certain that nothing could affect it. The mere act of doubting became a sacred rite; the performance of it afforded the requisite sense of the solid and unshakable.

Two things are equally inept. One is to forget that human nature must have something upon which to rest; the other is to fancy that one's own preferred foundation-stones are the only things that will bring stability and security to others.

As far as names go, the fundamentalists have shrewdly stolen a march on their foes in the title they have given themselves. In putting their opponents in the light of having incidentals instead of fundamentals, they have shifted the issue. Instead of raising the question, what truths and beliefs are likely at the present day to provide needed foundations, they have created a presumption that theirs is the only brand of fundamentals. One can hear them reiterating on every hand: Take ours, or go entirely without.

Between fundamentalism and modernism as tendencies within ecclesiastical denominations, this seizure of strategic ground by one party is of no great interest to outsiders; the war is civil, domestic. But it is always of public interest that issues should not be confused; there should be at least intellectual clarity as to what is at stake. And the very names under which contending parties are now

ranked is proof that the issue has not been clarified; there is no real joining of issues. In consequence, a controversy which has tremendously caught the popular imagination and aroused public interest—conceive religion on the first page!—is likely to produce too much heat and smoke where light is needed.

Obviously there is no inherent conflict between fundamentalism and modernism. Modernism joins issue with traditionalism. The respective claims over human life of traditions and of novel discoveries is a matter which is unsettled and which is of immense import for the conduct of life. There is much to be said on both sides. Yet it has hardly begun to be faced as an intellectual question. Such consideration of it as has been undertaken is entangled in questions of the merits of some particular tradition and some particular discovery—such as the Mosaic tradition of the world's creation against the discovery of the principle of evolution. If the issue had taken the form of literalism versus symbolism, controversy would have been enlightening as well as important. There are doubtless some matters which have to be taken with a certain literalness or not taken at all; brute matters of fact, for instance. There are other matters which lend themselves naturally to poetry, and where a vesture of emotion and imagination is favorable to the apprehension of the meanings involved. Honesty demands that things of the first kind be taken literally. Only crude, illiterate Philistinism will insist upon translating poetic symbolism into the prose of the first reader. But just where is the division line to be drawn in religious beliefs at present?

Just what in religion today, in the Christian religion in particular, is matter of fact to be accepted as such? Just what is symbolism, of value as far as it fulfills the functions of ready conveyance of moral truths and of inspiring men to their observation in life? If existing controversy were definitely devoted to clearing up such questions as these it would get somewhere over and above a victory of one faction over another. Yet while those who follow the discussion find this issue touched upon here and there, they do not find it, it seems to me, clearly faced. The presentation of the issue as between fundamentalism and modernism tends to create only obscurity.

Again, one finds involved in the discussion the issue of the claims of institutional authority versus personal liberty of judgment. This issue is probably one in which the average person is most interested; the one in which he understands the controversy now raging in the churches. For this is an issue with which most men are already familiar; they have met it in politics. They have become used to thinking of a struggle between institutional authoritarianism and personal libertarianism as