

The Religious Outlook in England

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THE man who is in the thick of the mêlée sees least of the fight; the onlooker who has the double advantage of a keen eye and a high position sees most of the game. In other words, the man who lives in the midst of the religious thought and life of England is least able, from the very intensity of his interests and the extent of his concern, to see things in their proper perspective, or judge them in their true proportions. But so far as I am able to detach myself from the field of action, and transport myself to a position where it becomes the field of vision, I would say that the outlook is, on the whole, full of promise, though also crowded with forces whose action and issue no man can watch without an anxiety strangely blended of confidence and fear.

I may begin by noting the remarkable change in the attitude of the working classes.

In the two previous generations secularism was very largely their common creed. They spoke the language of Tom Paine; they attacked sacred history and literature with a fierce and crude naturalism which despised the historical sense, knew no reverence for the religious emotions, and followed a logic whose premises were as narrow as its conclusions were broadly bald and negative. Now the social idea is stronger than the secular. We have the claims of labor rather than the rights of man, and positive theories as to the relation of classes to the distribution of wealth, the limits and the laws of property. This is in its attitude toward religion a more hopeful spirit than the secular. The workmen of to-day may be no more reconciled to the churches than those of yesterday, they may be even more distinctively alienated in feeling and hostile in speech, but their new notion of society and labor makes direct appeal to ethical principles, and invokes teachings and sanctions which can be described only as religious. They do not assail religion in the narrow way of the old prosaic secularism, but they speak more fiercely concerning the churches as the support of capital, the sanctuary of class distinctions, and the sanction of the order that seems to bar the coming of the millennium. But this attitude to the churches expresses now and then a passion for religious ideals, or what may be so conceived. Then on the side of the churches there has been a corresponding movement. With a perfectly new zeal they have been seeking to serve the cause of social amelioration and to understand the claims of the workers. Christian Socialism is in the air. It has its home alike in the Anglican and the Free Churches. Those University Settlements which have a distinctly religious basis and function are serving it. The men who went to convert the East End of London have been in a great measure converted by it; and, alike by tongue and pen and service, the churches are laboring to make the cause of our helpless classes their own. This is the really hopeful phase of the matter. The desire of the churches to love mercy, to do justly, to walk humbly before God, has never been more manifest, and it is possible that in the lapse of a generation or two they may have achieved something in the way of reclaiming those millions that have, by the sheer stress of the struggle for life, been forced out of those communities that have, while teaching men to do well, lived too much for the well-to-do.

In another class, between the workmen and the middle class proper, the outlook is perhaps more troubled. I mean the large class of small traders. Life is pressing very hard upon them; the difficulty of making both ends meet is greater with them than with the artisans. Income is less assured and too precarious to relieve from grinding daily care, profits are reduced to the narrowest margin, the time demanded by business leaves no space for the cultivation either of the minds or of the conscience. This class has hitherto been, on the whole, religious, but it seems to me as if the pressure that had alienated so many of our work-

men was beginning to sour the spirit of the tradesman. He is the man who is hit most heavily by the financial needs of modern legislation, who suffers most from the growth of great distributing businesses, who is forced to feel in the most acute form the uncertainty and the drudgeries that belong to living from hand to mouth. And the churches or chapels the tradesmen frequent are often those placed in districts forsaken of the rich, and they sit amid their all too squalid neighborhoods like forlorn monuments of a lost prosperity. There is indeed nothing in the religious outlook that I like so little as the isolation of classes, for it is so provocative of the social suspicion and mutual distrust which act like the very breath of winter on the fair flowers of faith. It is so promoted by the new geographical conditions of our great cities, the flight of business men from the place where they transact their business, the abandonment of the multitudes that live either by daily labor or by supplying the laborer with daily bread, by those who employ or who find the capital to pay the employed. This, indeed, is one of the forces generated by the industrial revolution against which the churches have need to contend most strenuously, and yet against which the most strenuous contention seems to avail the least. Among the middle classes the power of religious convention and custom seems to be on the increase, while as much cannot be said of the potency of ideals and ideas. The middle-class counterpart of the workman's socialism is class distinction, sectionalism, the apotheosis of the conventions which divide.

The older middle classes were very open to ideas and very sensitive to ideals. They believed intensely in freedom; in the emancipation of the slave; in the excellence of free institutions; in government of the people by the people.

The great leaders of the middle classes were more distinguished by a lofty idealism than were the spokesmen of the lords and gentry. If we compare the generous and ideal humanity of Richard Cobden with the hard and sordid selfishness of the Tory squires who believed in protecting the land at the expense of the people's food, or the broad and ethical philanthropy of John Bright with the exclusive and rigorous Chauvinism of the men who so fiercely opposed him, we may see how the very industrial and economic changes that were pleaded for were advocated on grounds that were moral rather than material.

But to-day the middle classes have waxed fat and grown contented. Ideals move them less: the institutions and conventions which have been so kind to them they prize more and more. They have become too comfortable, and they dearly like the comfort into which they have come. Small blame to them in one sense, for it makes life a pleasant thing to wander through; but for progress there is nothing so fatal as to have attained.

A feature in the religious situation which specially affects our middle classes is the growth of æstheticism in worship. It is part of the general movement in matters of taste that marks the time—a taste too self-conscious to be delicate, too fastidious to be fine, too much a distinction of class to be inbred, or, indeed, more than underbred; but it has had and is having a most unwholesome influence on congregational worship. Men think so much of modes, love so much sensuous elegance, richness of detail, and harmony of effect, that the conduct of worship is becoming a sort of depraved fine art. The attitude to God tends to fall out of consideration, through the emphasis which is laid upon the agreeableness to man. To say this is not to advocate a squalid worship, heartless, mean, vulgar; but rather to say that what we need is an awed worship in which the feeling of what satisfies God is all in all and what is pleasant to man does not in any degree come into consideration. We hear too much of short services and bright services, Pleasant Sunday Afternoons, warm and cheerful

gatherings; what we need is a keener sense of what God is in worship, and what man ought to be before Him.

So far as concerns thought and criticism, the outlook has never in my experience been so bright. The heart of man is more reconciled to theology, simply because in theology there is more of the heart of God. Criticism is coming to be the exercise of religious minds rather than the hostility of an irreligious rationalism. There could happen no greater calamity to religious thought than that religious scholarship, research, and criticism should be in the hands of men whose aims are simply negative. It is hardly possible to overestimate the gain which religion has made by, as it were, capturing the critics. They are not less thorough, not less distinguished by love of truth, not less learned than the men who went before them, so many of whom used the higher criticism as a weapon of offense against faith. Nay, in all these things we may say that, on the whole, the new men are superior to the old, but their pre-eminence lies partly in deeper reverence and in keener sympathy with the thought they deal with in the past and the spirits they speak to in the present, but especially in the marvelous reconciliation they have accomplished between critical freedom and spiritual truth. The Church of Christ has, therefore, it seems to me, problems enough to tax her strength, hopes enough to inspire her with courage, and reason enough to use her splendid opportunities, which were never greater than they are to-day, for the reconciliation of man with man, and of men with God.

This paper ought not to conclude without a reference to the desire for unity, which may be said to be common to all the churches. Rome seeks to effect on her own terms—those of absorption—union with the Anglicans; many Anglicans have craved such unity with Rome as would be involved in the recognition of their orders. The Evangelical Free Churches are drawing together in various forms of co-operation and confederation, the most notable form being a system of councils, local and general. All this speaks hopefully to those who feel the evil and wastefulness of division. But I confess to having only a qualified appreciation of this desire for unity. Variety is a more divine thing than uniformity; difference, though not division, belongs to the realms both of nature and grace; and it is as easy to make too much of unity as to make too light of difference. The passion for agreement may mean only indifference to the more serious convictions which divide and ought to be allowed to distinguish men and societies. We suffer at this moment from a tendency to deal insincerely with beliefs in order that we may deal kindly with cognate communities, and I am not clear that a kindly unity gained by good-natured obliviousness in points of difference is worth the price paid for it. But what is pure gain is the growth of interdenominational courtesy, and the feeling that the brother from whom we differ is as much a son of God as those of our own immediate fellowship. The Church that feels too ashamed of the Athanasian anathema to use it is not far from the kingdom of heaven. And the only unity compatible with life and truth will have been reached when each Church can say to all the rest: "Ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's."

How Weary is Our Heart

By William Watson

"Of kings and courts; of kingly courtly ways
In which the life of man is bought and sold;
How weary is our heart these many days!

Of ceremonious embassies that hold
Parley with Hell in fine and silken phrase,
How weary is our heart these many days!

Of wavering counselors neither hot nor cold,
Whom from His mouth God speweth, be it told
How weary is our heart these many days!

Yea, for the raveled night is round the lands,
And sick are we of all the imperial story.

The tramp of Power, and its long trail of pain;
The mighty brows in meanest arts grown hoary;
The mighty hands,
That in the dear, affronted name of Peace
Bind down a people to be racked and slain;
The emulous armies waxing without cease,
All-puissant all in vain;
The pacts and leagues to murder by delays,
And the dumb throngs that on the deaf thrones gaze;
The common, loveless lust of territory;
The lips that only babble of their mart,
While to the night the shrieking hamlets blaze;
The bought allegiance, and the purchased praise,
False honor, and shameful glory;—
Of all the evil whereof this is part,
How weary is our heart,
How weary is our heart these many days!"

[Says the London "Academy:" "Coleridge published verse in the 'Morning Chronicle,' and more often in the 'Morning Post.' Ever since then occasional poems have appeared in the daily press, such as Lord Tennyson's 'Riflemen, Form!' in the 'Times,' and Mr. Coventry Patmore's 'Toys' in the 'Pall Mall Gazette.' While the 'Morning Post' seems to be the least inclined to follow the example it originally set, the 'Daily Chronicle' opens hospitable doors to poets, especially to poets who are also politicians in a sense. To Mr. William Watson it has this week been indebted for stanzas which we find a real pleasure in repeating."]

Our Boys

By William Ward Russ

There has been so much said and written about "Our Girls" of late that it is an open question if "Our Boys" are not being neglected. This is distinctively a girls' age. Girls are admitted to our schools and colleges on equal footing with boys. They take degrees in law and medicine—in short, enter every profession, and are found in many of the trades. They are good scholars—often better scholars than boys, who are not so quick to learn. The girl of to-day enters heartily into physical recreations, enjoys out-of-door sports, and when she is through school she does not hesitate about taking up some business or life-work. She is not at all a dependent creature, but is capable of taking care of herself. It is all right for her to push ahead, get an education, and find employment in some useful field of labor. She is bound to be something and somebody. She is not satisfied to sit around listlessly and do nothing. She is ambitious, and the chances are that when she gets at anything, she goes at it with her whole soul, and she succeeds. But how about her brother?

Credence can hardly be given to the statement that girls are smarter than they used to be, only as they have taken the means for better development, both physically and mentally. Neither is it to be believed that our boys are degenerating. Our boys are just as bright and capable as boys ever have been, and if they are not pushing to the front as rapidly as they might, it is because they fail to realize their opportunities, or do not grasp the changed condition of things where, as their competitors, they find their sisters in almost every field of labor.

There are opportunities to-day, and chances for success, as there always have been in the past, and always will be in the future. Men are wanted in trade, in commerce, in business, in the professions. This great world of ours must be kept moving. Our boys are our coming men. They will gradually occupy the places left vacant by their fathers. Among them are our future statesmen, our merchants, our professional men, our mechanics. How is it—are our boys getting an education? Are they fitting themselves for the places they are to occupy?

It is taken for granted that the boy who expects to succeed has his eyes open, and is doing a little thinking for himself. Possibly he has already formed plans for the future; and it is well if he has. He certainly labors under a delusion if he thinks success depends upon some mere matter of chance. The boy who takes no thought regard-