

## THIS MIGHTY HOUR

“Come near, you nations, to bear; and hearken, you people,” says the prophet Isaiah, “let the earth hear, and all that is therein. For the indignation of the Lord is upon all nations: for it is the day of the Lord’s vengeance, and the year of recompenses for the controversy of Zion.” [Isaiah 34:1-8]

This great day, when “the Son of man shall be revealed” draws ever nearer. In the words of Zephaniah:

“The Eternal God’s great day is near, near, speeding apace! The Eternal God’s bitter day is near, rushing on like a warrior! A day of wrath, that day, of woe and anguish, a day of stress and distress, darkness and gloom, a day of cloud and thundercloud, a day of trumpet blast and battle-cry because against the Eternal they rebelled.” [Zephaniah 1:14-17]

What a solemn hour is this! “Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in all holy conversation and godliness, looking for and hastening unto the coming of the day of God?” [2 Peter 3:11,12]

## 14. THE FADING FAITH OF CHRISTENDOM

AT such a time as this, with civilization on the brink of disaster, with the mutterings of war, the rumblings of revolution, and the groaning of creation itself sounding in our ears, it would be reasonable to expect a mighty warning message to issue from the leaders of the great Christian churches. Surely we should see a great awakening among the professed champions of religion—a mustering of the forces of Christendom for a world crusade against the advancing hordes of evil. Surely in such an hour we should witness the stirrings of a great revival in every congregation of believers. Surely in every city church, in every village mission, in the heart of every disciple, there should arise a new spirit of consecration, a keener zest for the advance of Christ’s kingdom, a deeper sense of responsibility for His lost and wandering sheep amid the careless millions of a perishing world.

True, some church leaders have uttered occasional warnings, but one seeks in vain for signs of any general awakening. The members of the large Christian bodies resemble, for the most part, the virgins of the parable who, on the eve of the bridegroom’s arrival, “all slumbered and slept.” Apart from a lone voice here and there, crying in the wilderness, no clarion call to prepare for approaching judgment is heard. The ministers are silent on such issues. They have no message. Priests and people together seem to have lost their way.

Appalling apathy abounds. People simply don’t care. They no longer retain the old, unquestioning confidence of earlier generations in their spiritual leaders. In what way, they ask, is a parson better than anybody else? Has any other profession of late produced such a succession of moral scoundrels? And as for the Bible, they don’t bother to read it any more, for the preachers themselves have destroyed what reverence they once had for its teachings. They do not pray any more—except in dire emergencies. There isn’t time to pray, they say, not in these busy days; and anyhow, what difference does it make?

### **THE PASSING OF OLD FORMALITIES**

As for attending church, they have long since discarded this Victorian habit. And why, they ask, should they go? They can hear a better address on the wireless if they want to listen—and if the preacher is a bore they can shut him off in the middle, without offence. In any case, they say, it’s much nicer to spend Sunday by the sea, or on the river, or in the open country. And healthier, too. And doesn’t someone say somewhere that we are nearer to God in a garden than anywhere else on earth?

The drift away from organized religion is proceeding at a tremendous pace. If anyone doubts it, let him watch the traffic on any of the main roads of England—or America, or the Continent, or Australia, or New Zealand—any fine Sunday morning. A route to some seaside resort offers the best illustration. Thousands upon thousands of cars, of all types and descriptions, lavish limousines and dented Fords, rusty old Morris-Cowleys, all filled with eager, happy faces, tell the story of the vast, silent transformation that is taking place. They say to the leaders of the churches: We are tired of you prattling parsons; you have destroyed our faith; we will go our own way now; we are weary of your insincerity and “fed-up” with your religion.

When the secretary of the Lord’s Day Observance Society endeavors to persuade members of

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Parliament to maintain the Sunday Observance Acts of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, he simply reveals an amazing ignorance of the real religious situation in the country. Sunday, for most people, is no longer a holy day. In the minds of the populace it is just as much a holiday as Easter Monday or Boxing Day. It is looked forward to by millions with eager anticipation as “a day off” for hiking, boating, fishing, motoring, golfing, tennis, car-cleaning, gardening - anything except churchgoing. The old Sunday at home, with prayers and Bible readings in the drawing-room, is as obsolete as crinolines. It simply does not exist, except here and there in humble backwaters where the tide of this swift new life has not flowed as yet.

### ***A RELIGIOUS REVOLUTION***

What has happened to Sunday is happening to every religious custom-baptism, confirmation, communion, marriage. The services, truly, are still carried out but they have largely become hollow conventions, devoid of spiritual significance. They resemble to some extent the great cathedrals. People like to know they still exist. Now and then they visit them with pleasure. There is something appealing about their antiquity, something reassuring in their solemn architecture. Everybody would be sorry if they were suddenly to be removed altogether. But as to taking part in them, from a sense of their spiritual value, that is another matter.

Whether we like it or not there is taking place around us a widespread revolution in religious ideas. Millions have cut their old moorings, and are drifting out, without a compass, on a wide, uncharted, and perilous sea. Some have set their helm definitely, as they think, away from God. Many more are merely drifting, befogged and bewildered by what they have seen and heard, but anxious to do right, groping for some harbor, trusting to find safe anchorage at last.

### ***THE FLIGHT FROM ORTHODOXY***

Despite all the accessions to atheism, however religion is not dead yet. On the contrary, some say that there is more of it about nowadays than there ever was. Perhaps there is. But it is religion of a new order, radically unorthodox, extremely unconventional, rebellious against clerical authority, suspicious of all ceremonial, naked indeed in its stark simplicity. Shorn of their faith in the doctrines so ardently believed by their forefathers, dissatisfied with the many mockeries perpetrated in the name of Christianity, thousands are contenting themselves with this new religion of their own devising.

Their creed, if such it can be called, is a vague conglomeration of the beatitudes, the golden rule, and the Sunday newspapers. They will tell you that, in their opinion, if a man does his best to live a good life that is all that is required. Beyond this-into the intricacies of the old doctrines of salvation and redemption and the future life-they positively refuse to go. It is a sort of attenuated Christianity, well watered down, sweetened to taste, and with all the reproach of the cross carefully eliminated. One might almost term it a benevolent atheism, a sort of religion that desires the good of humanity with as little connection with God as is respectably possible.

### ***CAUSES OF DECAY***

What has brought about this decay of religion, this fading of the faith of Christendom? What is it that is quenching the fires of holy fervor that enabled frail women to face lions in Rome's arenas, martyrs to glory in persecution, preachers to withstand the anger of infuriated mobs, missionaries to endure the hardships of inclement climes? What is it that is sapping the vitality of the church of Christ, and is leaving it as a whole so enfeebled, so helpless in the presence of evil, so lacking in evangelical zeal, so disinterested in the promulgation of the principles of righteousness it professes, so unwilling to sacrifice further for the advance of the kingdom of God?

Undoubtedly the war was partly responsible. It revealed so much blatant hypocrisy that it made men sick of religion. The spectacle of Christians of almost all creeds on both sides of the firing line doing their utmost -in the name of God and righteousness-to maim and mutilate each other was enough to smash faith in organized Christianity for all time. The heathen, looking on, laughed mockingly and said, “See how the Christians love one another!” And others, beside the heathen, said it, too. But worse than the actual fighting in its ultimate effect, perhaps, was the urging by patriotic preachers that all able-bodied young men

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should take up arms and fight. Innumerable pulpits were desecrated by such war-mongering sermons. Everywhere churches became recruiting stations, and battalions of boys were sent to their death through the instrumentality of parsons who had forgotten their mission as ambassadors of the Prince of Peace. Only a few smaller bodies, like the Quakers, the Brethren, the Christadelphians, and the Seventh-day Adventists, stood out against the surging tide of militarism; the rest were up to their eyes in the unholy business.

It was not good for Christianity. The boys -those who were fortunate enough to come back-did not forget. Those awful years of bloodshed and beastliness, to which so many of them were lured by the specious pleadings of some Christian minister, made an ineffaceable impression. They began to ask awkward questions. Why had not the Christian churches in every country combined to prevent the war, or at least to stop it after it had started, instead of fomenting the war spirit and praying God's blessing on the accursed thing? How could Anglicans on the one side and Lutherans on the other pray for success at the same time? Was it right that Christians should bayonet each other and drop bombs on women and little children? Did God mean what He said in the sixth commandment, not to mention the others? Or didn't God or the commandments matter very much any more? It was all very perplexing, and many lost what little faith they had brought with them through the flames.

### **CHURCH DISSENSIONS**

The suspicion of insincerity, which fastened on the ministry in those days was augmented by the publication of the fact that there were actually thousands of recipients of stipends in the Church of England who were definitely opposed to the Articles they had signed when accepting their positions. Occasional doctrinal disputes among "the doctors of the law" could be understood by the ordinary layman, but this holding on to position and money by, church leaders who, by their own confession of disbelief, had forfeited their right to such employment, was beyond him. His simpler code of honor called for adherence to a contract when once made-or, if that were impossible, getting out of it honorably, by making amends for failure to keep it. But here were men, churchmen of all people, breaking a solemn, oath-bound agreement, and carrying on as if nothing were the matter. It did not seem right.

It was the Prayer Book controversy that really brought this distressing situation to the attention of the general public. When this issue was finally considered by the House of Commons it became plain to everybody-as it had been to many, observers for a long time previously -that there was a strong movement in the Church of England working openly and secretly to reintroduce Roman Catholic practices, with the ultimate intention of bringing England back into communion with Rome. The man in the street said, This is rank dishonesty. If these people want to be Roman Catholics, there is nothing to hinder them. Let them go over to Rome now. But don't let them act like spies and thieves, taking money from one cause while working for another. And the man in the street was right. Duplicity in a worldly business is bad enough, but in ministers of the gospel of Jesus Christ it is despicable beyond words. And if there has been any one factor more than another that has brought organized religion into disrepute of recent years it has been the tactics of the Anglo-Catholic party in the Church of England.

### **RESULTS OF HIGHER CRITICISM**

But another destroyer of faith has gone forth into the ranks of Christendom. More deadly and devastating than a prairie fire modernism has swept through the churches, consuming every fundamental of belief, scorching every page of sacred Scripture, drying up the very springs of Christian ideals. Like a plague of locusts the higher critics have descended upon the fair garden of Christianity, devouring every green leaf, every lovely flower, and leaving only a desert of dead faith and shriveled hopes.

These supposed friends of the church, many of them occupying high positions in its fold, began their nefarious work more than a century ago. At first they were few in number, and there were many champions of the old faith ready to resist their sinister attacks and to roll back their false accusations upon their own heads. Now, however, the situation has changed. The critics are virtually in complete control. Even bishops have admitted that they have accepted the modernist position and thousands of the clergy in all the churches are with them. Fundamentalists, who still hold to the inspiration of the Bible, are a constantly diminishing remnant, the butt of newspaper ridicule, the jest of the careless crowd.

Aiding and abetting the critics has been a group of scientists who have gratuitously stocked their armory with numerous theories concerning the age of the world and the origin of man. The most potent

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weapon thus donated was the doctrine of evolution, which was seized upon by the critics with great zest and applied with full force against the very foundations of Christian belief. For years they had raised clouds of doubt and suspicion concerning the authenticity of the books of the Bible, pouring scorn on their claim to inspiration, ridiculing miracles, mocking at the faults of the patriarchs, and denying the fulfillment of prophecies. But such attacks were a superficial bombardment compared with the mine they were able to explode under the whole Christian position with evolution in their possession.

### **EVERY DOCTRINE ATTACKED**

Genesis, with its record of the creation of the world and mankind by the fiat of Almighty God, was the first to suffer. The critics had long held a grudge against Genesis and rejoiced at being able to last to work it off very thoroughly. "A fairy tale," they had called it, "a relic of ancient folk-lore." But now, with evident triumph, they added: "The scientists, you see, substantiate our surmizing. The world is not six thousand years old, but six hundred million, and man has been in process of development all this time from a tiny speck of slime in the primeval sea. As for the Flood ' that is another absurd old fable; modern geology has quite disproved that."

But having destroyed the authority of Genesis to their satisfaction, it was not difficult for them to proceed to other acts of spiritual brigands. For if, as they asserted, there never had been any creation, if man had been slowly evolving upwards through long eons of time, how could there have been a Fall? Obviously the story of the temptation of Adam and Eve must also be an allegory. And sin must be merely a "state of mind," an incubus on the upward progress of man, to be discarded in due time as his evolution should proceed.

"We are the highest of the mammals," said Bishop Barnes, in an address delivered at the University of Cambridge. "We have emerged quite recently, as geological time is measured, from some group of anthropoid apes. The gorilla and the chimpanzee are literally, our cousins. Our sins result from the persistence of animal instincts which war against the recent moral and spiritual growth that is still sadly imperfect in humanity."

But if sin were only the "persistence of animal instincts," if indeed there had been no Fall, surely the story of a Savior from sin was also open to grave question. How could there be a Savior from something that was merely a passing phase of man's evolution? As for the vicarious death of such a Savior, and a reconciliation between man and God, well there simply was no necessity for it.

Similarly the expectation of a second advent went by the board without a word. Such an event would be supernatural and entirely out of harmony with an evolutionary process. So also the re-creation of the world -the making of "new heavens and a new earth" depicted by the Apostle John-how absurd to anticipate such an upheaval when evolution would bring about all necessary improvement in due time! Merely give evolution long enough to work, said its champions, and all would be well.

### **EFFECTS OF EVOLUTION**

It is easy to see how the acceptance of the theory of evolution immediately destroys confidence in almost all the essential doctrines which have been associated with the name of Christianity for the past nineteen centuries. Indeed, if evolution be correct, untold millions of honest souls have been grossly deceived. All the great preachers and missionaries of the past who have proclaimed Jesus Christ as man's Savior from sin, the Redeemer of the world, and the coming King of glory, were hopelessly mistaken and wasted their lives repeating pious platitudes without substance or meaning. All the interpretations of Christ's words and mission given us by the apostles in their letters to the first Christian churches were vain and baseless assumptions. The acceptance of evolution indeed means nothing less than the discarding of the greater part of both the Old and New Testaments and almost every doctrine based upon Biblical teaching.

Some people assert that they can be both Christians and evolutionists. Conscience keeps them from breaking completely from the old traditions, yet something seems to compel them to accept this latest speculation of the armchair scientists. It is like attempting simultaneously to serve God and Mammon. It will not work. The more fully evolution is received, the weaker must be the Christian witness. In fact, no sooner is it admitted than there is an end to fervent proclamation of the old beliefs. A little water puts out a great fire.

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### **CHURCHES COMPLETELY CAPTURED**

How completely the churches of Christendom have evolution and departed from their old belief in the Word of God was demonstrated by an investigation carried out by an enterprising newspaper in the Newcastle area, England. As a result "there was not found a single member of the cloth who was prepared to deny the evolution of mankind from lower forms of life."

One of those visited was the Reverend J. C. Bacon of the Presbyterian Church. He said: "From my point of view, discoveries in modern anthropology do not touch the spiritual truths which the early stories of Genesis are intended to convey. To regard these stories as literal history, however, is not only foolish but interferes with our understanding of their spiritual message."

The Reverend H. Barnes, of the Unitarian Church, expressed his opinion thus: "Openly and frankly I accept the evolutionary theory. Modern religion has got to be based upon its truth. The Genesis theory of man's origin must frankly give way to the scientific. Man has been on this planet for hundreds of thousands of years. He is not a fallen creature, but a rising and ascending creature."

### **CRITICS IN THE SCHOOLS**

Such teachings are typical of those being set forth by religious leaders all over Great Britain, in the United States, in Australia and New Zealand, and indeed in every place where Christianity has penetrated. Bishop Barnes - whose modernism is notorious - even claims that from his vantage ground he can see signs that "among both Roman Catholics and fundamentalists belief in man's descent from an ape-like stock is being gradually though grudgingly accepted." These teachings have also entered the universities, denominational colleges, grammar schools, and council schools, so that there is now scarcely any educational or religious institution where the rising generation may escape their demoralizing effects.

The seriousness of the situation in the schools is emphasized by this letter sent to the Christian by one who signed himself "B.Sc.":

"I have been teaching for more than twenty years in secondary schools in various parts of the country, and have only on rare occasions found Scripture being taught by a master or mistress who believed in what was being read. I am now in a large school, with a staff of more than thirty, and, as far as I know, there are only two of us who believe that Jesus Christ was anything but a man. I hear prayers being read by men who jeer about it all in the common room. Any Scripture lessons given-and these amount to one per week per form-are by such persons. Little wonder is it that our boys and girls leave school with not even a literary knowledge of the Bible, much less with any realization that it is the Word of God."

Is it any wonder then-with the professed champions of Christianity virtually denying the faith they are paid to preach, with the keepers of the oracles of God betraying their sacred trust, with the very teachers in the schools quietly inculcating the new atheism-that the common people are losing their confidence not only in Christianity, but in all that pertains to religion? Can we wonder at the fading faith of Christendom?

### **APPALLING CONSEQUENCES**

But what will the harvest be? Have all the consequences been considered? What will result from this scattering of the seeds of doubt and unbelief in millions of minds the world around? If men have sown the wind, shall they not reap the whirlwind?

Already there is growing up around us a generation of potential atheists and agnostics, recruits for the growing army of those who are not only indifferent to religion but are working to encompass its downfall. In assisting the destruction of faith, are not the critics playing into the hands of those who are seeking to bring upon all the world the same red ruin as lately swept through one of its greatest powers?

It was Christianity, that made possible the building up of our complex civilization, unchristian as much of it may be. The Christian code of honor, morality, and respect for law, founded primarily upon the Scriptures and faith in Christ, has been the cement which has bound it together. Once let this cement disintegrate and the whole fabric will tumble in ruins.

And it must not be forgotten that the roots of Christianity are embedded in the Bible. The mighty tree that now spreads its branches so impressively over every land has drawn its life, its nourishment, its powers of growth and fruit-bearing, from the truths enshrined in that wonderful volume. Separated from the Book the tree must inevitably wither and decay. Christianity cannot exist without the Bible. Apart from it

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the church is impotent; it can have no saving message; it can know no converting power; it must inevitably perish. And if this happens, all that is fair and beautiful, all that is of real value in this golden age, must perish with it.

### **HOW TO RENEW FAITH**

At such a time as this, when iniquity is rife, when it would seem that the very legions of darkness are at work to nullify the work of Christ, to devitalize the gospel, and to destroy the work of generations of His disciples, it becomes those who have not yet become enmeshed in these subtle snares to take up their Bibles afresh and renew their faith and confidence in their God. There is no need to fear the doubts and sneers of the higher critics, as we shall see in the following chapter. We may take comfort, too, from the fact that those who would disci-edit the Bible have nothing whatever to put in its place. They have invented no substitute that will so comfort the sorrowing, uplift the fallen, and satisfy the hunger of weary souls as this Book they are trying to destroy.

Until the critics have something better to offer, let us retain our confidence in the Scriptures of truth. They have been the guide and stay of the people of God for centuries and are still "profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." [2 Timothy 3:16] They only can breathe new life into the dry bones of a dead or dying religion; they only can stir the cooling embers of a fading faith into the glowing fire of a new enthusiasm. They only can stop the drift away from the things of God and recapture the interest and loyalty of the disappointed and careless multitudes.

Every church, every minister, every member of Christ's family on earth today needs this spiritual renewal, this awakening of soul, this strengthening of confidence, that Wily the Word of God can beget. Without it none can face with safety and assurance the increasing perils of this mighty hour.

## 15. POISON IN THE POTTAGE

"THERE is death in the pot," [2 Kings 4:10] cried the sons of the prophets to Elisha. And there is, under the guise of the theory of evolution, worse poison in the modern melting pot of religion. Already we have shown how it has captured the imagination of religious and educational leaders everywhere and is fast undermining all confidence in the fundamental doctrines of Christianity. We have seen, too, how, like some potent drug, it is putting the whole church to sleep and sapping its spiritual vitality.

As though it were nectar from the Elysian fields evolution has been accepted by bishops, priests, and preachers of almost every denomination apparently without thought of the disastrous consequences it must ultimately bring to themselves and all that they represent. A strange blindness seems to prevent them from seeing that the pleasant potion of which they have drunk so freely has been drawn, not from above, but from the dark, poisonous depths of some Stygian pool.

But surely, with such an imposing array of intellectual giants supporting the theory, there can be no question as to its accuracy! Surely such a galaxy of the great could not be deceived! It seems impossible, but we recall that there were many celebrities sadly mistaken in the days of Christ - and oftentimes since. The battle is not always to the strong, nor the race to the swift, nor the reward of truth to the self-sufficient.

### **FACT OR FICTION?**

Of course, if evolution is a fact it must be received as such and all old beliefs must be adapted thereto. Facts must not be rejected merely because they are inconvenient. Any religion that declines to acknowledge the proved findings of science must ultimately perish. Truth will finally triumph over all false creeds.

The question therefore resolves itself into an inquiry concerning the authenticity of the credentials of evolution. Is it, or is it not, a well-proved, incontrovertible, scientific fact?

Frankly, it is not. In all well-informed circles it is still spoken of as the evolution "theory." True, it has received such enormous publicity that people have come to think that there must be extensive