

## What Is Christianity?

An Answer to  
Dr. Harry Emerson Fosdick  
E. Haldeman-Julius

Considerable amusement is offered by the twistings and dodgings of the "Modernists" (strangely so called, since their object is to save what they can of the ancient faith from modernism) in trying to make Christianity acceptable to a critical age. They search desperately for new "arguments." They bring into play all their skill of rhetoric. Childishly they engage in the game of words, inventing new meanings for old terms and seeking to bring new terms into harmony with old meanings. The sum of their endeavor is to make people believe on a plane inferior to their knowledge. One need not waste pity on these "interpreters." They have a lot of fun and it is even possible that they are self-persuaded, that they satisfy their own minds with specious logic and a lingo contrived only for the confusion of thought. Their dilemma, however, is not an easy one. It is full of special difficulties when they are, presumably, addressing intelligent people, who may be supposed to know rather more than the average and to be not unacquainted with that curious exercise which we call thinking.

These "Modernists" are handicapped in the first place by their subject, which it is very hard indeed to present in any reasonable light. Insofar as they genuinely discuss religion, they discuss something that is not realistic. Thus, at every turn, they collide unpleasantly with facts—scientific, historical, or obvious to common sense—which reduce their appeals to childish ineffectiveness, so far as thoughtful persons are concerned. And their subject unfortunately (for them) belongs to the ignorant past of man. Religion is the record of men's foolish, wild speculations and unintelligently narrow, severe dogmas about what they didn't know. It is, therefore, a sizable task to bring religion fairly into line with what men now do

know and yet save religion. Of course, it is simple if one discards religion altogether. But its defense, its preservation, in our day may well drive even an expert on divinity to drink or the movies.

Everyone knows what science has done to religion. It has exposed conclusively the fallacy of the religious "scheme of nature." It has shown the human evolution of religion and destroyed its pretense of divine revelation, as well as its claims of miraculous events calling the faithful to wonder and belief. It has shown that Christianity is not a pure, original religion of heavenly origin, but a mixture of old myths and primitive notions and some new—and, significantly, still more absurd—theological inventions. It has made untenable the belief in immortality, which was of course never more than a belief or hope. The idea never was susceptible of proof, and science has led to a clearer recognition that the idea is irreconcilable with the facts of life, that it is simply a preposterous illusion and fit only for the credence of children.

In short, science has left religion no plausible, no really defensible ground to stand on. For men and women of intelligence, theology is as out of date as astrology. In what every preacher must look yearningly back to as "the good old days," scriptural quotation was heavily effective, ignorance of nature made the supernatural go down easily, and logic was a practice of delightfully irresponsible hair-splitting. Skeptics were rare, notorious, and avoidable, whereas now their number is, from the ecclesiastical point of view, appalling. God's schemes, commands, and pet notions (as given, authoritatively of course, in the preacher's words) were not subjected to critical reflection and examination. But nowadays, alas, religion is embarrassed on all sides by the knowledge, the criticism, the general enlightenment of the modern age. Assertion is no longer enough. The laxness of the pulpit no longer commands by sheer volume and impressiveness. More and more, it is being demanded that religion shall justify itself, not by appeals to faith, but by appeals to reason; and that it shall, first and last, yield to the inexorable force of scientific truth.

So we have, as I say, these "Mod-

ernists" who are desperately trying to save the intellectual face of religion. They endeavor, for example, to prove the social value of religion (which, even so, would not be proving the truth of religion). And they translate religion into terms of social morality and idealism which, even if it could be successfully done, is after all nothing less than the abandonment of religion—of religion, that is to say, as an explanation of life and a set of beliefs, pretending to be true about man and the universe. And Christianity, in particular, tries to distinguish itself as a specially worthwhile social institution and attitude of belief. In the effort our "Modernists" turn aside from the fine (or crude) points of theology and are very human, very idealistic, very vague, and very inaccurate. Avoiding the task of proving directly that religion is true, they argue that it is good, well-meaning, ripe with tender and affecting virtues, full of comfort for weary souls, and inspirational in this, that, and the other way. They claim that religion has made important contributions to civilization, and so on, evading the primary question of whether the ideas of religion are true. And even in their social, historical, idealistic claims for religion—and, as they are Christian apologists, for Christianity in particular—they deal just about as carelessly with the truth as did the older school of theologians.

### II.

Among the most eminent pleaders for Christianity as something good and beautiful even though not true is the Rev. Dr. Harry Emerson Fosdick, who, in a recent issue of *Harper's*, asks and in his way answers the question, "What Is Christianity?" At first glance, the mere posing of such a query would indicate the confused scattering of the old reliable doctrines, the retreat of Christianity to new and doubtful and not (among so-called Christians) clearly agreed positions of defense. And there is a greater uncertainty than ever about how much of historic Christianity can be given up, what should be emphasized as important and what dismissed as irrelevant and perhaps, in past years, erroneously identified as Christian. It is a time of uneasiness,

troubled searchings of the heart, and difficult, doubtful adjustments of the mind for many who profess, one way or another, to be Christians.

Yet, on second thought, Christianity, long before the arrival of the "Modernists" with their shuffling of the creeds, was a rather bewildering congeries of conflicting doctrines. It has really never been possible to tell clearly just what Christianity is, aside perhaps from a belief in the divine inspiration and therefore literal truth of the Bible, the belief in Jehovah as the one true God, and the belief in Jesus as the divine Christ; but as to the meaning of Bible texts, as to the nature and intentions of Jehovah, as to the theological mystifications connected with the origin, character and message of Jesus, there has always been plenty of dispute.

Now the "Modernists" say that Christianity is not necessarily based upon a belief in the direct, literal, celestial inspiration of the Bible; they are disposed to make Jesus human—or superhuman—although they speak of him in an awed, worshipful tone and maintain that he was holy and inspired beyond all others; some of them also conceive it to be brilliant strategy, in the warfare to salvage some remnants of religion, that Jehovah should be made impersonal: a force, a tendency, an atmosphere, or merely (as the rationalist would bluntly say) a chimeric existing in the mind.

Evidently, when Christians themselves are so hopelessly divided on the question, "What Is Christianity?" the critic outside the fold must watch his step. His safest course, it may be, is to admit that almost any brand of foolishness may come appropriately under the heading of "Christian." He may add that all which has been offered as Christianity, religiously speaking, is quite incompatible with a rational view of life, that all Christian ideas, all Christian doctrines, all Christian assumptions share this in common, namely, that they are not true. It is also the most natural thing in the world that Christianity is, for personal reference, whatever any Christian defines it to be. "This," says he, "is Christianity." No fellow Christian can talk him out of it, and of course no downright skeptic has a chance. So we may say, at a venture, that Christianity is a

large sea of disagreement surrounding possibly a small island of agreement.

What, for the moment, does Fosdick say Christianity is? First of all he gently lays aside practically the whole baggage of Christian theology and says that it is unoriginal with Christianity and is only "superficial." An inspired Book; miracles; a divine Christ; a Messianic return and judgment of the world; ethical admonitions of love, humility, charity, and the like—none of these is distinctively Christian, admits Fosdick, but from beginning to end Christianity shows striking similarities to the fabled lore of other religions. One great distinction he claims for Christianity: namely, it brought forward the lofty conception of personality. "The genius of Christianity," we are told, "lies in reverence for personality." Jesus was "the champion of personality" and moreover "he thought of personality as the central fact in the universe."

That is not all. It is not just personality, here and now, that Christianity is said to set a special value upon. There is no disagreement of course, about personality being interesting and valuable. That is a commonplace, we may suggest, of the advancing culture and self-consciousness of man. But it is personality in a mystic and eternal sense that, according to Fosdick, ennobles Christianity and gives it rarity among the religions of the world. Man has or is a soul, and he or it is immortal. It is essential to the Christian idea that personality shall not be destroyed. Here, indeed, is the little trick in this "Modernist" conception.

For us immediately inquire: Is it personality or immortality that is the great idea—the peculiar genius—of Christianity? Fosdick evidently makes the gratuitous assumption that the two must stand or fall together. That is not true. The personality of a man need not live forever in order to prove its importance. It seems that Fosdick is applying the quantitative measurement to personality: there must be a lot of it, or an infinite extension of it, or it is not so good. Knowing that he must die, a man should, perhaps, think less of himself. He should be the more indifferent to his own ideas, emotions, and possibilities and

be the less concerned with his limited span of conscious, active years. That view may be still further applied: as, for instance, our particular joy in the present moment is not, after all, worth so much, because it will not last always: joy itself, work, love, ambition, the dramatic spectacle of life is of no value or of small value because, for you and for me, it will cease to be. What is that but a ridiculous dogma? It is just as arbitrary and unreasonable an attempt to make a case for Christianity as the attempts of the earlier theologians. A fact, that of personality, is arbitrarily joined with a myth, the notion of immortality, and we are told that reverence for the one depends upon belief in the other.

In fact, we discover that Fosdick's object is not really to interest us in personality but to persuade us that immortality is a fine, true, and worth-while conception. He is not concerned so much with saying that our personal life and development here is important, as he is concerned with affirming that we shall take personality with us and (it is assumed) consciously continue it beyond the grave.

But the idea of immortality, for that matter, is not peculiarly Christian. It is just as much an evolution, appearing in various suggestive forms in primitive superstitions, as any other feature of religion. Naturally, it is at first indefinite, like the idea of God it is subject to erratic interpretations, and it becomes more definite as man goes further in speculation and in the artful formulation of faith and doctrine. Nor did Christianity introduce the belief in immortality in a clear, positive, and solemnly impressive shape. The ancient Egyptians were strong believers in immortality. The thought of life after death dominated their religions.

For one, I should be perfectly willing to let Christianity have for its very own the myth of immortality. It is not a valuable, because it is not a true, idea. There would be no genius in having hit first upon this error. But the fact happens to be that it is not originally nor exclusively a Christian idea. Even if Jesus had been the first to express it, that still would not signify anything wonderful in Christianity. It was an idea which naturally would occur to the vanity and hope of

men. The wish alone, one that men obviously would dwell upon, would sufficiently account for the pater- nity of the thought.

And there is not only to consider the idea itself but the shape it has taken in Christian theology. I presume that Fosdick does not regard the Christian mythology of heaven—angels, streets of gold, gates of pearl, wings, harps, and all—as dignifying or making more impressive the personality of man. After all, Christianity could only do childish things with this idea of immortality. It is evident, also, that Jesus himself had just such a childish, unscientific and, in fact, utterly meaningless conception of a future life. (And he believed, moreover, that this world was on the verge of annihilation and that the Last Judgment and the Other World was imminent for the whole human race.)

It seems that Fosdick does not believe in the mythological Paradise of primitive and historic Christianity. He (in this wisely) does not attempt to describe the conditions of immortality. He does not tell us in what shape, nor with what objects and interests, nor just where indeed we shall spend eternity. We shall, he says, have our personality—but, apparently, without body or habitation or objective. Immortality, in Fosdick's hands, becomes less definite but not a bit more reasonable than it was in the hands of older theologians, or than it is in the hands of Fundamentalist parsons today. And his dropping of the old crude pictures of another life is not explained by any "genius" of Christianity. He is but yielding perforce to the rationalism of modern times, and is simply abandoning those portions of Christianity which he, at least, does not feel able to defend to his own satisfaction.

It certainly cannot be claimed that rationalism is any part of the "genius" of Christianity. A critical view of antiquated doctrines of theological bunk is, assuredly, not Christian in its inspiration. Fosdick shifts from the older Christian ground and endeavors to take a more human, yet even so a mystical, view of religion. But such an attitude does not come from Christianity: rather it is the natural result—the unescapable result—for any preacher who would make the

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## Philosophy and Art of the Debunker

Joseph McCabe

Impressions of "The Outline of Bunk"

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It is eighteen years since I set out on my first world-tour, and from my ancient liturgy I retained a lively sense of the need of protection against "the perils of the deep" yet had lost all faith in any other protector than the skipper. With a little seriousness and more humor I, before starting, expounded my intellectual last will and testament to an audience to which I was accustomed to lecture in London. It was to be a caustic pronouncement that there was something radically wrong in every department of modern life, not an uplift or an inspiration or an 'ism of any description. This something I have since learned to call bunk, but the word is in respectable England regarded as one of those naughty American additions to the language. I entitled my deliverance "The Tyranny of Shams," and I, feeling that I might not be called upon to face that audience again, just spat venom at their political, economic, social, ethical, educational, patriotic, and religious shams. In my mind was really Francis Bacon's ancient attack on the "idols" of the seventeenth century which means the same thing, and I felt that the last useful word I could give my generation, if it was to be the last word, was my acrid opinion that they were slaves to old shibboleths and verbiages and had better get rid of the last trace of that ignoble servitude before they could hope to be able to see clearly enough to build anything. I survived the perils of the deep, which happened to be very real, also the perils of the heights and of the middle level—I nearly fell over a 700-foot precipice on Table Mountain and had my life threatened in Sydney—and, out of gratitude to whatever powers there be, expanded my theme into the most scurrilous and (until I wrote the Little Blue Books) the most useful book I ever wrote, "The Tyranny of Shams." To my astonishment it was bought eagerly, until the publishers refused to republish it. Even the *New York Times* had a gorgeous portrait of

and interview with "McCabe the Sham-Smasher."

However, the point of this long-winded and grossly egotistic paragraph is that you see that I have been a complete debunker for twenty years and have at last found my true spiritual home. Never did I realize it so much as when, a few weeks ago, I cut the pages of my friend E. Haldeman-Julius' new book. Reading it was like talking to myself. Somewhere in it he is good enough to say that if he "were called upon to name one man who is utterly emancipated from all kinds of bunk," he would name me. Well, I have read this broad and penetrating survey of the whole of modern life and thought, pretty nearly the life and thought of all time, and must echo the words: "Vainly I try to recall some slight bunkistic deviation from a generally free and rational attitude toward life."

And that is saying a very great deal. Amongst the debunking heroes, the "admirations," of Mr. Haldeman-Julius it seems to me that there is only one man, Anatole France, of whom it can be said. Shaw, who comes next, and has certainly been one of the greatest debunking forces in English life, has to be admitted to have the vices of asceticism and mysticism; though one may also admit that his asceticism is too anti-Christian and his mysticism too ante-lituvian to give much influence to his scorn of science, reason, and sensuous pleasure. Wells is nearer heretical perfection, but he is too snobbish for a perfect debunker; he still hankers after the companionship of God and an aristocracy. Bertrand Russell is very able and stimulating; but too narrow a concentration on our blunders makes him unduly pessimistic. Conrad and Hardy were impressive and disturbing; but the one left a mystic and despondent impression on his readers, and the other, Hardy, used in his later years to go regularly to church in top hat and Prince Albert, to the great joy of Bunk. Havelock Ellis has had the courage to debunk in the most dangerous of all fields; but he has even in that field too uncritical an ear for the praises of itself and its saints and virtues that Christianity sings. They are all great and good men, but—well there is a but every time.

The genuinely and thoroughly emancipated person will, on the other hand, read this large volume from cover to cover and make no reserves. As in my own little book, the torch is turned in succession upon every field of thought and action: politics, war, ethics, religion, science, history, education. My only

irritation is to find a much younger man, and one who has had for years a large business to attend to, saying just the right thing as he passes from one section of life or thought to another. It has taken me forty-five years of intellectual perspiration to fortify myself against bunk in so many different fields, and here is my junior partner in the debunking business discussing everything with a sureness and sanity of judgment, an unflinching independence, a maturity of expression, a colossal and always correct knowledge of history and thought-movements, that a man of his age has no right to have. At least he ought to have the bad temper of youth in reviewing so much stupidity or the pessimism of middle age. Not a bit of it. He smites bunk-shooters with cheerfulness and, whenever he finds himself speculating what will come out of this world of ours, he is spontaneously and sincerely optimistic. I thought that at least that was a monopoly of mine.

But I ought to have known. Let me tell you a little secret. Three years ago I was invited for the first time to Girard. It will not be offended if I remark that it is not a metropolis, and I looked along the almost deserted depot for the huge, weighty, massive-jawed, loud-speaking American whom I had in mind as Mr. Haldeman-Julius, the man who had made America read a hundred million Little Blue Books. Instead I saw a quiet-looking little man standing near a handsome car. Certainly not the formidable debunker, I said to myself, yet much too highbrowish for a chauffeur; unless chauffeurs grow like that in Girard. So I approached him probably with an air of patronage, and asked: "Did Mr. Haldeman-Julius send you to meet me?" You see I had recently come from Galion, Ohio, where my dear friend Bill Brown—I mean the Right (or Wrong) Reverend William Montgomery Brown—had met me at the station; a monument of a man, though a chronic invalid, with the hug of a bear. So I expected something even larger and stronger and louder. And in the quietest of quiet tones the shy little man—so he seemed to me—said: "I am Haldeman-Julius." He carried me to the car and tucked me in.

Bunk is as inevitable a phenomenon of modern times as vegetarianism or psychology-by-the-dollar. We are just getting out of a long era of appalling ignorance and illiteracy when established powers did not, as a rule, need to give any reason for their encroachments on human rights. If any man or woman had the congenital disease of thinking and wanted to know something about the

bases of authority Pope and King agreed that he must be removed. There were, it is true, far more of these "diseased sheep," as they are described in the Canon Law which Mussolini has lately made the natural law, than is commonly supposed, but the majority asked no questions. They were like the Irishman who, when an English neighbor confided to him that he had some doubt about this Jonah story, replied: "I could believe, if the Church wanted me to, that Jonah swallowed the whale. It's the drink that troubles me." But in the Middle Ages, and until quite recent times, the Church was very lenient as regards drink and other amenities. People were free to follow every impulse except the impulse to think: which most of them had not got.

The eighteenth century disturbed this old order with a claim that everybody ought to be taught to think, but the nineteenth century discovered that this was dangerous and had to invent the substitute for thinking which we call bunk. It invented the wisdom of our fathers, the consensus of all good men, the profound social importance of virtue, the supremacy of the spiritual, the sacredness of the Constitution, the need of reverence in all criticism, the wickedness of being merely destructive, and so on. These passed as first principles, and from them bunkish maxims were derived for the judgment of every kind of activity. The Salvation Army, in fact all religion, does good: you can't change human nature: he who goes slowly goes farthest: the sanctity of the home: the full quiver: it is the function of the priest or the statesman, not the character of the man, that matters: and so on. As Mr. Haldeman-Julius says, the question is not whether these people are or are not sincere. Torquemada and Comstock were perfectly sincere. There is no one so sincere as the homicidal maniac. Whether a man is sincere or not in originating or repeating one of these phrases it is bunk if it is a form of words that shuts off the intelligence from demanding a sound and adequate answer to its questions.

Ultimately it is a device to protect established interests which fancy they are threatened by any further extension of the art of thinking. We have accepted principles which prevent them from saying crudely that they are going to hold on by hook or crook. A certain political party in England some years ago put a large poster on the hearings showing a British bull-dog standing defiantly on a map of the Empire on which the sun never sets and barking: "What have we hold." The

dog too truly represented the intelligence of people who could honestly feel that, who could be quite indifferent to the manner in which they had got what they held, so the picture had to be abandoned. Then appeared the highly respectable and quite moral tag of "the White Man's Burden." At terrible strain and sacrifice he was initiating the Hindus and Zulus and Maoris to the higher ways of civilization; and, when some misguided critic wanted to spoil the bunk by giving the world a true account of the ghastly mess we have made in Honolulu or Samoa, he was not constructive or he had an imperfect appreciation of sin or of the blessings of Christianity.

In every age a few raise their heads above the surface of this stream of pseudo-principles and phrases in which we float and see the essential mischief of it all. Taking bunk as a whole, or the imperfect intellectual level at which the general public are deliberately kept so that they will be directed by it, one is inclined to say that it is the successor of the Inquisition. It is mainly a device for preventing progress. In large numbers of individual cases it is, of course, a personal device for saving oneself from the work of thinking. In a still larger number of cases the bunk is accepted with at least a half-consciousness that it is bunk because change, either in the political, economic, or social world, is distrusted. It may bring on an era of incompetence, of less money, less jobs, less prestige, less liberty. Better stick to a regime which is comfortable enough for most of us and extremely comfortable for those who control what we may broadly call the education in bunk of each generation.

Events in Russia in the last few years have confirmed these deliberate bunk-shooters. They discover that the Church, which they had begun to regard as an anachronism in the twentieth century, is a bulwark of the state (and particularly of the banks). These professors of science must quit pointing out that science is inconsistent with religion or quit their chairs. The press must be encouraged to talk about the importance of spiritual things. There is a recoil something like that which was witnessed in France after the Communist revolt of 1871. Before 1870 the clerical power had already sunk to a very low level, but in 1876 thirty million out of the thirty-six million people of France described themselves in the census-paper as Catholics, and Congress, which was two-thirds Catholics, declared it to be of "public utility" that a great church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus should

watch over Paris from the heights of Montmartre (though the Moulin Rouge was not abolished and did as good a trade as ever).

Each age, as I said, naturally produces its debunkers: men, rarely women, who loathe the moral and intellectual quality of the bunk-system, who know quite well that sound thinking and realism or truth not only cannot hurt in the end but are an essential condition of progress. Samuel Butler, Shaw, Wells, Ibsen, Strindberg, France, Nietzsche, Brieux, Eugene O'Neill, Mencken—the nineteenth century and early part of the twentieth saw a prodigious crop of them. Never mind their limitations, except to take warning from them. They were all essentially right and did fine work. They were chasing the money-changers out of the temple, and in using the whip they had a classical model. Papius makes up his picture of the gentle Jesus, in a supposed rational and modern spirit, by judiciously omitting all the little courtesies like "brood of vipers": which in an oriental atmosphere is quite equal to "son of a canine animal of the feminine sex." Nor is the constructive and inspirational person any less free from bunk when he regrets the violence and pure negativeness of their language and thinks his own method better: brilliantness instead of tearing the hair. Nietzsche has had, I suppose, some millions, certainly more than a million, readers in various countries. Shaw has had as many readers or hearers of his plays. And the refined lecturer who deplores their intemperance and lack of constructiveness reaches five hundred or a thousand people, most of whom listen to him because they were already of the same opinion.

Mr. Haldeman-Julius is a different type of debunker, and, while every man does right to use gifts of invective and paradox if he has them on the grand scale, and there is at all times bunk in circulation to which invective is the only reply, the quieter method is just as effective. In one respect the fiery scorn of Nietzsche and the cold contempt of Shaw are amusing. Both were too limited in knowledge to avoid bunk themselves, but the amusing thing is that the more disdainfully they assured their generation that it was wholly stupid and brutal, and that they themselves alone were completely wise, the more people applauded them and bought their books. Shaw has made a fortune by telling the public that it is stupid and hypocritical. Nietzsche would, if he had lived long enough and been properly protected in his royalties, have become a millionaire by saying that

people were too brutal and swift to listen to him. Wells becomes the best seller when he abandons neutral stories and sets out to detrone the spiritual and religious and ethical idols. I once heard Shaw, in at least a half-serious mood, assure a crowded audience that the humor of Shakespeare had become so stupid and that, had he so utterly forfeited the opportunity offered to it, that the Vital Principle would probably withdraw its inspiration from man and take up some other animal. And the whole audience beamed and applauded. The louder the prophets shriek that the political order is infantile, the economic order sordid, the religious order prehistoric, the moral order hypocritical, the more we who are supposed to be abandoned to a servile admiration of these orders buy their books, while their critics live on cereals.

Making allowance for the fact that these men had very high artistic gifts which would secure for them an audience whatever their message was this obviously means that the world is by no means in the desperate condition which they describe. Looking back on the Europe of the last thirty years, and taking novelists and dramatists together, I should say that the writers who have reached and deeply affected most people are Shaw and Wells in England, Zola, France and Brieux in France, Galdos and Ibanex in Spain, D'Annunzio in Italy, and Hauptmann and Sudermann in Germany. Each of these would have been burned at the stake in the Middle Ages or imprisoned a hundred years ago. We give them from fifty to a hundred thousand dollars a year; and they tell us that we are the damndest fools that ever yet adorned this planet.

So it is no longer possible to debunk without discrimination. Somehow the invective has passed from the lips of the heretics and immoralists to the lips of the pietists and moralists. The situation is becoming quaint. One half of the world is reading every day that this generation is sodden with superstition, servile to authority, moral to the fingertips, and so on; and the other half is reading that this generation is godless, openly immoral, rebellious against all authority. Which is only another way of saying that there are now two halves of the world, one reactionary and the other progressive. Unquestionably the great majority of people are still in one respect or other receptive of bunk. A dervish like Straton does not find it necessary to retire to the

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The Moving Finger Writes

Informal Comment on Developments of the Week

Lloyd E. Smith

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TWENTY NEW BOOKS

New Little Blue Books are now scheduled for publication up to No. 1458, and the total will soon rise to 1500.

It is a huge mechanical problem to get all these books into type and printed, ready for the public.

1825 Americans of a Million Years Ago. Maxnard Shipley.

1826 The Origin of the Solar System. Maxnard Shipley.

1827 Facts You Should Know About Sound. Lawrence A. Barrett.

1828 Huxley, Who Advanced Human Progress 100 Years. J. V. Nash.

1829 Facing Life Fearlessly. Clarence Darrow.

1830 Facts You Should Know About Digestion. T. Swann Harding.

1831 How Much Does Man Really Know? T. Swann Harding.

1832 Debunking the Laws of Moses. Joseph Wheelless.

1833 The Common Sense of Health. L. M. Birkhead.

1834 Why I Am a Skeptic. T. Swann Harding.

1835 Can Knowledge Be Made Popular? E. Haldeman-Julius vs. C. Hartley Grattan.

1837 The Breakdown of American Marriage. Clement Wood.

1838 Oil Painting for Beginners. Archie Mearns.

1839 Creaked Financial Schemes Exposed. George Husser.

1840 How to Get a Job. Heinz Norden.

1841 Unusual Menus: Eating for Health and Pleasure. Gloria Goddard.

1842 Typical Love Problems Answered. Clement Wood.

1844 How to Psycho-Analyze Your Neighbors. Clement Wood.

1845 Sandwiches and Box Lunches. Gloria Goddard.

1847 Why I Believe in Trial Marriage. Clement Wood.

Note: Nos. 1836, 1843, and 1846 will be announced later.

Little Blue Book regulars will see many familiar names among the authors listed above. Maxnard Shipley, President of the Science League of America, is well known for his scientific Little Blue Books.

ably, do not send such letters with an order: mail orders separately. And do not address them to me personally. Earl D. Biegert, 2242 Noble Ave., Hamilton, Ohio, says: Having just finished reading your "Moving Finger Writes" in the weekly...

Meanwhile, The Debunker has an alluring Table of Contents that is improved by what had been scheduled for the quarterly! THANK YOU! C. W. Laudner, Dallas, Texas, questioned the running of the Amore Temple advertising in this paper.

peral power to the Pope at Rome has created world-wide discussion and speculation. What are the facts? What is the significance? Joseph McCabe is one man to write something interesting on this subject.

of surds. I suppose he means both surds and sonants (a surd is a voiceless consonantal sound, like p or t; a sonant is a voiced consonant, like b or d). I confess, however, that I don't know what he means by "soft checks."

Art Herman, Chicago, congratulates Mr. Ek for winning the prize for suggesting the name THE AMERICAN FREEMAN for this weekly paper.

Opinions and Observations

What the Editor Has Been Thinking About

E. Haldeman-Julius

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SMOKES AND SWEETS

Lately we have seen a new kind of advertising which consists in a combination of what is currently known as "boosting" and "knocking."

One kind of commodity is recommended with implied disparaging reference to another kind of commodity.

You are of course familiar with the advertisements of a popular brand of cigarette, in which one celebrity after another, photographed and signed, declares: "When I want a sweet, I reach for a Plucky instead."

Here the idea is implied that sweets are not so good for the system, that a good substitute for sweets is tobacco, and that it is better to smoke a cigarette (the hygienic and even helpful Plucky, of course) than to eat, say, a candy bar.

It is not my purpose to argue about the relative health values of smokes and sweets. I like both reasonably well and so am neutral.

But, obviously, such a method of advertising can cut both ways. Why should not candy manufacturers come back with the appeal or admonition: "When you crave a cigarette, reach for a sweet?"

Candy might be boosted as a great aid in breaking the cigarette habit. And, as a matter of fact, the candy side of such an advertising controversy would be more convincing to the average mind.

The notion is more popularly impressed that cigarette smoking is a bad habit than that eating sweets is a bad habit.

Such an advertising policy might be carried to any extreme. Shoe advertisements might exclaim: "Why spend your money on a new hat? Buy a new pair of shoes instead!"

Or: "If you are thinking of buying a new rug, buy a new couch instead." Or: "Are you thinking of having your house newly painted? Don't. Have it newly papered."

Or: "Why sit in a theater when you can go to a dancehall and enjoy healthful motion or go to a ball game and enjoy the fresh air as well as the game?"

Well, you can imagine what such a policy would lead to. Fifty percent of the suggestion of advertising would be aimed at persuading people not to buy. Openly knocking one another's products would become a free-for-all conflict among advertisers.

Eventually people might decide that the safest course is not to buy at all, unless absolutely necessary. To be sure, advertising is competition even now and it always was. It has not been customary, however, to say that people should buy one thing and not buy another. The deliberate campaign of advertising propaganda against another commodity—as, for

IMMODESTY RAMPANT

Ordinarily, I am rather modest. Modesty is supposed to be becoming. But readers are writing in to say that they like "The Moving Finger Writes," and, like a radio announcer, I can't resist giving their names and what they say.

As the broadcasters so curtly put it: Send in your telegrams, folks, if you want us to continue; otherwise we may get discouraged, and sign off. (And, by the way, just address any and all communications to Haldeman-Julius Publications, Girard, Kans. Preferred

THE STORK AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI

By Heinz Norden

There is at least one thinking student at this high institution of learning, the University of Missouri in Columbia. There may be more. This one in particular had decided to write a thesis on sex psychology.

So he did the logical thing in order to gather his material. He sent out a questionnaire to 500 male students and to 500 coeds. The questionnaire asked some very frank questions.

Perhaps the questionnaire method of collecting first-hand information has late been overdone. Every amateur investigator turns to this convenient means of research. But its efficacy cannot be doubted. In the case of sexual morality there is and always has been too much that was only hearsay and tradition, rumor and euphem-

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GLASS HOUSES

The old admonition is very sensible: "People who live in glass houses shouldn't throw stones." But it is based upon two assumptions that, I submit, are erroneous: namely, that people who live in glass houses have something to be afraid of and, again, that they have a tendency to throw stones at the conduct or reputation of others.

It seems to me that the very fact of living in a glass house—that is to say, living openly in the face of the world and his neighbor—suggests a man who is not concerned with hiding anything. He is either a man of pretty good virtue or a man who is not ashamed of his vices and doesn't greatly care what people may say about them. A hypocrite may talk virtuously and behave viciously; but he will try to keep secret certain aspects of his behavior and to persuade people that he is other than what he really is. It may be hypocrisy about small or large things. It may be the concealment of something that is really evil and dishonorable and which, discovered, would mean forfeiting the good opinion of all men. On the other hand, it may be the concealment of actions which are not vicious, or the concealment of pleasant and personal vices, but which a man is afraid to own because of his excessive regard for respectability or because of his own inherent Puritanism of outlook.

Some men are hypocritical and sly about kinds of behavior which other men more or less openly practice without caring much what others think. Here, let us say, is a man who quite frankly has a free and easy attitude toward sex. He doesn't flaunt his philandering in any way of juvenile impudence. He just isn't distressed at the thought that he has a reputation for being what is whimsically called "a ladies' man." Opinions can't hurt him, as he has the courage of his way of life. And he doesn't, for economic or social reasons, fear the watchful eyes and critical tongues of the Public. Such a man, obviously, lives in a glass house but at the same time he isn't worried about stones being thrown at him. The man who is afraid, and who wants a great deal more secrecy than a glass house affords, is the man who pretends to be the apothecis of strait-laced virtuousness yet carries on clandestine affairs with women.

It's the same with other things. The man who drinks openly is evidently not bothered about what others will say and his glass house is just as safe as the solidest one that could be built. The man who enjoys gambling and makes no bones

HUNTING A NEW GOD

I read a good deal these days about the search for a new conception of God. It is, of course, not clearly agreed among the disputants that a new God is required. There are preachers who with fine rhetoric and magnificent idealistic terminology try to show that the old idea of God is the best ever and that it is futile sacrifice to monkey with it. What we need, they say, is not a new idea but a closer acquaintanceship (or, as they put it so sweetly, companionship) with the one true God of our fathers. On the other hand are sentimental laymen who are considerably influenced by modern thought, who cannot possibly entertain the notions of the old theology, who find nothing real in the personal, literal God of old, but who want some kind of divine image to play with. They can't bear atheism. They are not willing to admit that any idea of God is not better than dark, deluded fancy. So they say, "Let us frame a new idea of God that will be suitable to us as moderns."

What strikes me about the whole discussion is its utter lack of an impersonal interest in the truth. The disputants on both sides start with the unquestioned assumption that there is or must be a God. Of course it doesn't occur to them, apparently, that the word "God" means nothing until it is defined—and even then it means nothing more. They do not ask: Is there, strictly

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In the World of Books

Weekly Reviews and Other Literary Ruminations Isaac Goldberg

(Copyright, 1929, Haldeman-Julius Co.) IN WHICH I SURRENDER—CONDITIONALLY—TO THE LADY

I am not inflexible. As a grammar-school pupil I was, for four successive years, secretary of an Anti-Tobacco League. I believed, as I was taught, that cigarettes were harmful to a growing child; I believe it yet. So that, with this teaching as a start, I abstained from cigarettes for my first forty years. It was not hard. Perhaps excessive indulgence in candy—not at all an exclusively lady-like activity—was a compensation for the lack of other vices. At any rate, just to prove that I could do it, I suddenly, without warning to myself, abandoned my favorite chocolate. Absolutely. And to my intense surprise, I felt no craving for it from the first moment. Then, to occupy my lips with something else, I thought I'd try cigarettes. Not that I reached

for the weed in an attempt to conquer the sweet. I was no slave to it. Not that I was trying to reduce. I'm about 153 or 154 in ordinary street clothes; for a man about 5 feet 6 inches that is about right. Call it the wish for a nouveau frisson.

To my surprise I found that cigarettes were pleasant, especially if they were not too strong. Then began the quest for a favorite brand. (Suggestions, especially accompanied with bona fide samples, are hereby solicited.) Also, and this time not to my surprise, I found that slogans mean nothing. I coughed over Old Golds and did not cough over Lucky Strikes; Marlboros, I found, were not as "Mild as May"; in rapid review there burned from my lips Fatimas, Melachrinos, English Ovals, Walter Raleighs, . . . a list, in fact, as long as Homer's catalog of ships. I'm still at it, though with due adherence to my family motto, "Nothing in Excess." Something tells me that I've joined the fraternity of smokers.

Which reminds me of a conversation I had years ago with my family physician. It was also about cigarettes. He had just advised a friend of mine to quit them. "But, doctor," I said, "you're an inveterate smoker yourself. Don't you believe that it does you harm?" "Undoubtedly," he replied, with physicianly assur-

ance. "Probably it will take off two years of my life. But they'll be the old, old years. And who wants those, anyway?"

No, Lady Nicotine, I don't inhale.

VICIOUS CIRCLE

The quest of the self-seeker Is properly rewarded. He findeth, at long last, Only himself.

A YIDDISH CLASSIC

Fishke the Lame. By Mendele Mocher Seforim. (S. J. Abramovich. London. Stanley Paul. Freely translated from the Yiddish, with a Preface, by Dr. Angelo S. Rappoport. Abramovich, who achieved a double triumph through his pseudonym, Mendel the Bookseller, is known as the "grandfather" of Yiddish literature. He virtually created the modern Yiddish idiom; he wrote, too, a library of works that for a time set the standard of composition in the various genres. Years before Ibsen, in his play, "The Meat Tax," he had shaped a Yiddish Dr. Stockmann, whose reward for civic virtue was to be made into an "enemy of the people"; in "The Dobbin" he wrote an allegory of Jewish life, through the mouth of a horse, that was astoundingly successful, despite the traps that allegory sets for the unwary; in "The Magic Ring" (or, The Wish Ring), he presented to

Jewish childhood a gift that is still enjoyed.

He broke, at last, through the religious fog that so long had enshrouded the national letters. He was among the first to see that the material misery in which his people dwelt demanded a material, a socio-economical remedy. "Not books," as one of his characters says in "The Wish Ring"—"not books, but bread." His own books were both: sustenance for the spirit and for the body. In "Fishke the Lame" (it would have been so easy, and so much more idiomatic, for the translator to have called the book "Fishke the Cripple") Mendel the Bookseller helped to lay the foundations of the modern Yiddish novel.

That phrase, today, calls up the name of Sholom Ash, and the peculiar blending of poetry and realism which characterizes such of his books as "Marie," "The Road to Self," "Martyrdom" (Kiddush Hashem), "Mottke the Vagabond," and "Uncle Moses." Well, in this same "Fishke the Cripple," Abramovich, writing in the early sixties of the last century, showed the path that Sholom Ash and Joseph Opatahu were to tread generations later. It is difficult to believe that the book was written over sixty-five years ago. In technique, in outlook, in essential style, it is as new as the latest Yiddish fiction, and superior to most of it.

The tale seems to begin with several different starts; we have first the talkative Mendel, who rides through all of Abramovich's fiction, talking now to himself, now to his nag, even a prey to the Jewish struggle between prayer and pleasure as he rides past the verdant fields from one town to another. Mendel comes with a fellow book merchant, Alter, who has a story of his own to tell. When to these is suddenly added Fishke, whom Alter has saved from slow death in an abandoned homestead, where he has been left by the gypsies who stole his sweetheart, it begins to seem that a three-cornered tale is in progress. Yet it is only part of Abramovich's skill to weave these strands into an organic pattern.

The tale is chiefly Fishke's, though he does not really appear until the book is almost half finished. Induced to marry a blind beggar, he falls in with a rout of Jewish gypsies—that is what it amounts to—and loses such affection as his wife can give to a schemer who would use her for his own enrichment. The picture of organized beggarmongery Abramovich presents is, for its day, and still for ours, almost exotic. It is a strange milieu, at once romantic and realistic. Fishke falls in love with an abandoned little hunchback; forever they are thwarted by his blind wife and her accomplice. Such

love as this was new to Yiddish fiction, in which passion is a theme relatively new. To be sure, Fishke struggles between his sterile allegiance to his wife and his desire to run off with the hunchback. To be sure, in the end, she is snatched from his arms by his wife's accomplice, just at the moment when escape seemed certain. Left to die, Fishke is discovered by Alter. What became of his blind wife? What became of the little hunchback? Nobody knows. It is "an unhappy ending."

Abramovich's fondness for conversation appears in his method; Mendel, Alter and Fishke tell the story in collaboration. As a narrative, the book is original enough even for our present-day "movies." As style it is engaging. It abounds in pictures of Yiddish life amidst the lower strata—a life that must have been new to most of the first readers. It abounds, too, in pungent commentary upon Yiddish life in general: its poverty, its aspirations, its peculiarities. The man's irony says more in a paragraph than much passionate pleading manages to convey in a volume.

A Jew, once he has conquered the ugly passions for food, cares but little for it, and is quite capable of keeping alive on little. There are even now plenty of Jews who have practically no stomach at all, only just a vestige, a sign of it, and there is great hope that Jews will gradually give up eat-

ing altogether, and among the generations to come will have no stomach at all. They will then be greatly respected in the world.

As Mendel listens to the growing love of Fishke for the hunchback, he is seized with qualms.

Lord of the Universe—thinks he—what is that "being gone on somebody"? . . . In my native town they used to say it was a sort of madness brought about by witchcraft—an illness, a disease. Old witches could conjure up such a madness by giving you to drink some drops of their own concoction. Among us Jews, to be in love meant to suffer from some weakness or fever; it was something like being possessed by a demon, and when people saw a madness of such a kind usually took hold of their eyelashes, spitting out seven times. Such an illness, or madness, however, I perfectly well remember, only happened either among the very rich or among the very poor. The middle classes were usually spared.

Yes, indeed; it is Mendel's book as much as Fishke's. It is, moreover, still one of the outstanding books in Yiddish fiction. A modest, but an enduring accomplishment. Better still is the "Jewish Don Quixote" (the name by which "The Travels of Benjamin the Third" is known), by the same author; here his humor has a wider scope and a broader canvas. Yet "Fishke" is the more original.

The translation is generally good, falling on occasion into a literalness that gives a disturbing, but valid hint of the Yiddish idiom.

Philosophy and Art of the Debunker Joseph McCabe

Continued from page one

deserts of the central states, but the more serious fact is that the crowds of New Yorkers who listen no longer to that kind of bunk lend a very ready ear to other kinds. Skepticism is, as Haldeman-Julius says, of the very essence of debunking, but too many people think that it is the whole of it. Your entirely emancipated neighbor, as far as religion is concerned, will talk to you the most pitiful nonsense about politics or ethics or war, or even some mysticism which does not happen to be Christian. You know the type of man who, of course, does not swallow these medieval dogmas of the Churches, but do you not recognize the perfect personality and teaching of Jesus? All bunk, says the next man, but certainly we must admit a great cosmic power. Still bunk, says the third man, but naturally we must have a religion of values, especially spiritual and moral values. Bunk again, says Wells; we want a religiosity, not a religion, and an ethic that says nothing about sex sensuousness.

So it goes on in every field of life and thought, and we have in this book a broad and genially critical survey of so many varieties of bunk that Shaw, if he reads it, will probably ask: Why not say in a word that the race is sodden with folly and doomed? Because that too is bunk, says Haldeman-Julius. Pessimism is bunk. He is too well read in history to be caught by that fallacy. Your pessimist is generally a man who in the springtime forgets the winter out of which we are emerging and the summer that is coming: who on a bad tract of road does not ask if it was once worse or what the prospect is of it becoming better. If he glances at history at all it is to tell us how inferior we are to the Athenians, about whom he usually knows very little. You find the opposite virtue to that defect in Haldeman-Julius. A large and accurate knowledge of history on its essential lines informs the whole book. He knows why the light shone very brightly here and there in the past and why it was dimmed. He knows how long and deeply the darkness brooded over Europe and how an age of imperfect light, an age of struggle of interested forces to keep us in the dark, is bound to produce a great crop of bunk. He knows the struggle of man for the last three hundred years to get knowledge and power, and, in particular, he appreciates the formidable significance of the entirely new force, modern science, which has come to help us. He is an artist, but from end to end of the book he insists that we shall not try to understand ourselves except in the light of history, and not forecast the future without realizing how science, both as a means of ascertaining truth and of enriching life, has given us something of inestimable value that no generation of men ever had before.

He even has a good word for philosophy: not so much recommending the present study of metaphysics, though he feels that it was an inevitable and on the whole useful stage between the theological and the scientific, but understanding by the philosopher "the man who offers wise and witty reflections upon life and human nature, without claiming to have discovered the final and absolute truth, or without asking us to subscribe to a pat, ready-made

system of belief." But it must be a philosophy without mysticism. It is not in the least necessary here to quote specimens of how Haldeman-Julius writes. "This," he says somewhere, "is a question that can be plainly answered, without evasion, and without any play upon words." But that is what he says about every question, and there are none of importance that he does not raise. "For a man," he says, "to deal in riddles, meaningless even to those who are brought credulously under their spell, when the world demands earnest thought and labor, seems—and is—childish." The questions that are most worth answering, the questions which press for an answer, can all be answered now. We can settle our problems of reconstruction without understanding the relation of the electron to ether, the nature of consciousness, or the embryonic development of the body. Clear your mind of cant—the originator of the phrase, by the way, had a mind full of it—and you will see more clearly. Haldeman-Julius cleared his mind, and his lucid, terse, always pleasant and often epigrammatic style reflects the clear-seeing mind.

Several years ago a publisher asked me to translate into English the "Travel-Diary" (I think it is called in German) of Count Keyserling. It promised to be a lucrative job but I refused, because it seemed to me needlessly to complicate the motives of conduct. It declared religion unnecessary and harmful, to which I cordially assented, but it went on to explain that you needed quite an elaborate philosophy to guide you. If this were true, we might make up our minds that for a few generations at least the majority of people are going to do without guidance. Some day the acquisition of knowledge and the enjoyment of good art may be found by most people to be an even more pleasurable use of one's time than playing bridge or going to the movies. But education will have to be transformed and industrial conditions very different before we get to that stage. In the meantime what is the use of offering as guides of life systems of philosophy which very few have the least inclination to study or systems of theology which few educated people can contemplate without repugnance? Especially when life is essentially simple as far as general guiding rules are concerned. "The only good man is the man who hurts no other man," says the debunker. There could not be a better general rule. Of course it implies modifications of accepted codes of action, but the world is coming rapidly to see that. I often fear that my work on this side may be very displeasing to some of my old friends who were so very rational in judging theology so very non-rational when it came to ethics, and I was agreeably surprised to hear the daughter of one of the most puritanical of them sum up all problems by echoing my simple rule: Hurt no one.

Yes, I am quite aware, it is no modern discovery. It was well known in Egypt five thousand years ago, but unfortunately it was mixed up with so many other rules that people became confused. It was well known to Buddha, but he unfortunately made asceticism higher than it. It was formulated again by the Greek moralists like Democritus. It was put into the mouth of Jesus and incorporated in a world-religion: which inflicted more pain on mankind than all the other religions put together since human sacrifice was abandoned. We just cut it out from all the mystic bunk in which it has been buried, and we are going to make it a basic principle in solving many problems.

Does the debunker hurt nobody? Let us be quite clear that we are not running into a new kind of bunk with our new principles. There are obvious limits to universal charity. When I have to write about a man or a creed that wants to impose

privations on large bodies of people I have no more intention of being polite than when I confront a man who has wilfully brought poverty upon some hundreds of families. The sincere fanatic is generally a much more mischievous person than any type of man or woman whom he denounces so fluently and it is in practice not the least use to say so politely. Over and over again, in debate or in the informal debate which often follows my lectures, my Christian opponent quotes the historian Lecky. He was a Rationalist, and in his "History of European Morals" he put together a mass of facts that constitute—if you cut out his rhetorical passages—one of the most damning indictments of Christianity that was ever written. But he was so determined to be polite that his language is often completely at variance with his facts, and his bouquets to the Christian religion have been used ever since throughout the English-speaking world to detain people in superstition and throw discredit on more truthful historians. American historians are, under pressure of the influence which the Churches exercise in education, doing a good deal of that sort of thing. Men of science like Osborn and Millikan are doing the same thing in a different field.

It is not only bunk but mischievous bunk. There are agreed many beliefs and opinions about which one has to use strong language or something very different from polite language, which is in these cases quite ineffective. There are two ways of criticizing. One is the Nietzschean or the Shavian way: the vitriolic way. Test it by the results, not by your taste in such matters. If Voltaire had written about religion in the vein of sweet reasonableness of Rousseau the world would be far less advanced than it is. And there are people who write and deserve caustic language much more than the sincere fanatic. They make money by posing as fanatics, and I know no more pernicious type. Humanity is on a graduated scale from the lunatic and the criminal, who have to be hurt sometimes, to the quite sane and socially correct. "Hurt nobody" is a general social principle; and, after all, we do not propose to put Straton or anybody else on the rack, as they would put us. There is, however, the other method of shifting bunk from people's minds: put the facts of the matter, the truth before them. It seems to me that in "The Outline of Bunk," Mr. Haldeman-Julius correctly sees both the uses and limitations of that method.

Modernism, or the art of sophistication, has shown many of us who are in the great debunking struggle that it is not nearly as effective as it once was and cannot be used alone. The Fall of Man, for instance, is one of the most puerile doctrines of any religion that exists in the twentieth century, yet millions in America believe it. Just tell them the facts about the real record of man on the earth, says my friend of the "constructive" school, and they will shed the old dogma. Will they? Here is Oliver Lodge telling them that science is quite consistent with religion even on that point: primitive man had no moral idea and therefore could not fall, and at last man developed moral ideas—and he fell. Do you want me to be polite to such bunk as that? The Atonement is the most repulsive doctrine of modern religion, and millions in America believe it. Oh, says my friend, just tell them courteously how Frazer has traced the whole evolution of the belief, and then . . . Why, then they will stumble upon a modernist book which will point out to them that you have only to break up the world into Atonement, and you see that it means that the beautiful example and teaching of Jesus (more bunk, dulling the sense of truth in history) made humanity again at-one with God. If you succeed in next

laying before your patient the historical facts, or lack of them, about the personality of Jesus, there is another religious bunk-shooter ready to assure him that it does not matter in the least whether there ever was a historical Jesus: it is the ideal that inspired the world. And when you have finally put before the patient, if he has not by this time given up the cure and gone to play golf, the real facts about the inspiration of Europe after the fourth century, there are scores of preachers smiling: what is the gospel failed to do in the past it is doing now and will increasingly do in the future.

You have to warn men against the procedure itself and do it sharply. It is the bunk-habit that is pernicious. I have taken an example or two from religion, but Mr. Haldeman-Julius shows that it is just the same in the political and every other field. I cannot and need not follow him over this wide territory. It is only necessary to say that you will find wise words, concisely and attractively put together, about prohibition and Nicaragua, democracy and psycho-analysis, patriotism and puritanism, sex and sensuousness, and all the questions which we are actually discussing. The book will be hailed as the First Gospel of the Debunker. A course of it will leave you much wiser and mentally more braced than if you go to Chicago University for a year and take on, in succession, all the promising courses it offers.

It is, however, necessary to make clear that all this criticism and denial and censure occupies only one-half of the book. The second part, equally long, consists of "The Admirations of a Debunker." There is a type of person who, whenever you criticize the Churches or the actual marriage system or something of that kind, asks with an air of profound sagacity: What will you put in its place? With the people who imagine that the world is thirsting for something to replace the old I have no patience. Of the sixty million people in America who have done with the Churches more than fifty million want you to leave them alone. And even the more serious person who argues that a discarded "inspiration" must be replaced by another deserves to have his knuckles rapped. The ground on which he bases his opinion is mostly bunk: an utterly false version of history and a refusal to look at the plain facts of contemporary life.

However, it was a good idea to give half the space to enthusiasms and admirations. Was there ever a greater mistake, a more bunkish phantasm, than the idea of those who think one's life is empty or dreary when theology goes out of it? There is so much to enjoy, so much to be enthusiastic about, that we find the days too short. Their idea that, at the best, we are unfortunately constituted people who perhaps cannot help sticking pins in other people's spiritual and political balloons, but may at least be reminded of what we have deprived them, is too funny. We are all the time teaching people how to live. You can hardly ever destroy an idea without letting in another that has been waiting. Convince a nation that monarchy or aristocracy is a medieval fiction and it becomes at once a democracy. Convince a man that churchgoing is a waste of time, and he has a hundred other interests or recreations waiting to occupy the vacated hour. We want people to occupy their time better, not to leave it idle.

One of the most useful chapters in this book is "The Object of the Debunker is to Make Life More Sane, Better Ordered, and More Enjoyable." There are, he says, a few "mere grumblers and soreheads," but these are not the serious debunkers who have a "thoughtful, critical attitude toward life," who are "as quick to recognize and appreciate the good as the bad, the useful as the futile, the

true as the false." It is precisely because we have high standards of taste, critical judgments of truth, and fine emotions that we use blunt language occasionally. Out of this great store of things that life presents we want to teach people to select only the best, and they will find life far more satisfactory than if they had remained with a lower taste or a less critical attitude toward statements. We have the most definite ideals for we oppose "skepticism to religion, freedom to intolerance, realism to sentimentalism, naturalism to puritanism, and the like." There's the rub, of course: we oppose naturalism to puritanism. And the answer is that in so far as a puritan ideal has real roots and reasons in this modern life of ours there is no reason to suppose it will be neglected, but that in so far as it is purely Christian it is a matter for Christians to consider. The world will not go to pieces because we no longer dab ourselves with holy water or abstain from meat on Fridays.

"Ideas are in the last analysis," he says, "of no value unless they light the way to a life more abundant, more pleasant, more comfortable, more filled with happy things." What are the happy things? All the beauty that art and nature can give us, all the knowledge and mental cultivation that science and history can give us, all the pleasure of friendship and entertainment, all the joy of helping the world on and spreading sunshine in new places, all the comfort that comes unceasingly to each when lies and hypocrites are made an end of, all the freedom to follow our own taste and impulses that is consistent with the equal freedom and rights of others, all the laughter and humor in the world that is consistent with good taste; Pagan? Exactly. Haldeman-Julius' aim is stated over and over again, to return from Puritanism to Paganism, and any skeptic who is not equally explicit will waste hours in futile controversy. The best of the Pagans knew far better than we do how to live. The world has for fifteen hundred years been torn between its new code of life and its eternal spirit of life. It has been darkened by the most confused and tyrannical of all the products of the bunk-box: spirituality. If the word means anything that is of value, of vital importance, to us moderns, it means a cultivated mind, a refined taste, a high character. We have debunked history and shown that the pagans thought as much of these things as we do and infinitely more than their successors. We are, like them, reuniting the elements of human nature which have been so long divorced: the pleasures of sense and character, intellect and emotion. In debunking we are not merely not negative but are displacing a morbid and false conception of human nature and life by one which is sane and sunny. The world has for ages been out of joint because it had not a creed of life that it could respect. We are giving it one.

So I come to the last chapter: "Whatever the Issue, the Debunker Will Always Be Found on the Side of Freedom and Progress." Neither freedom nor progress is to us a mere word. Our lives are actually cramped by tyrannies which have no basis in social welfare, and it is a recognized principle of modern civilization that the individual shall be restricted only in so far as the needs of the whole demand this. We want all the freedom of literature and art and life, that is consistent with the harmony of the commonwealth. At present much of the encroachment on our liberty is notoriously based upon the religious beliefs of a minority amongst us. If a man tells me, for instance, that a parent should be free to say that things which are repulsive to him ought not to be taught to his children, I say, yes, if that man has consulted the proper authorities about what is taught; if he does not put people

in prison for telling him the truth about it; if he does not prevent other people's children from learning the truth by excluding it from the schools; if he has made a sensible effort to test the soundness of his objection and is not merely echoing the words of some preacher who knows nothing about it. In my last debate with Riley, on the theme "That evolution is true and ought to be taught in the schools," I devoted nineteen minutes of my opening speech to the first part of the proposition and one to the second part. And Riley agreed: if it is true, it must be taught. But the people who prevent it from being taught have never taken any serious trouble to find out if it is true.

There is the same bunkish attitude at the back of blue laws and other prohibitions. Take the restriction on the propaganda of birth control in America: from a purely social point of view not merely an irrelevant interference but a most stupid disservice to the community which, without birth control, would already be seriously congested. Take the restrictions on divorce, especially in several of the states where the grounds of divorce are disgracefully few. Before the eyes of these people who talk about the evil of divorce is the social condition of states and of foreign countries with ampler divorce, but they will not trouble to make the social comparison. They just bleat about the large number of divorces and refuse to see the human facts, the liberation of life and recovery of happiness, behind them. All their talk about the social good is bunk of the most insincere character. They are beginning to use the word social almost as they use the word spiritual. So hypnotized are people by the fallacy that Roman Catholic writers are now actually explaining away the massacre of the Albigensians, one of the vilest religious outrages in history, on the ground that these heretics held unsound principles of social life; and they were the most prosperous people in Europe.

Progress also is no mere word with us. We mean quite definitely that a larger number of people shall be happy, or happier than they are today. We mean that vast volume

of pain that is today caused by poverty, ignorance, religious or ethical superstition, and medieval legislation shall be increasingly reduced. We mean that there shall be an improvement and extension of education until every man and woman is at least in a position to choose the wisest ideal of personal and collective life. That there is in this pagan or materialistic doctrine anything which threatens other valuable elements of civilization is once more sheer bunk. Science will never again perish, or cease to advance, because it is wholly bound up with our material prosperity. Art will not relax in its efforts to reach the highest point of creativeness, for it was the spirit of Greece and of the Renaissance, the spirit we are going to restore, that gave birth to the highest art. Fine art and the capacity of every man and woman to enjoy it are quite obviously essential elements of our idea of progress. And it is only by a new rush of bunk that any concern can be framed about character. Our aim essentially implies that the general character shall, in every respect that matters, be enormously improved: that roguery and lying, meanness and cruelty, injustice and sourness, shall be gradually eliminated.

That is the great ideal that informs the whole debunking crusade: an ideal in the positive, not the mystic sense—the conception of something better than what actually exists. But I return to my starting point. Debunking is in itself a profoundly valuable social service, just as bunking in every form, if not most especially in that spiritual form in which it is most insidious, is a profound social disservice. Just as I write this last page I get from America the stenographic report of my recent debate with Riley in New York. What ghastly bunk! And to think that in America, which prides itself on its superiority to the political bunk of the Old World, millions of people regard this as wisdom. Their minds need an anti-septic. They need startling into a perception of the bare fact that they have been duped by bunk. Then, and then only, they will ask for the truth, for constructive ideas; and we have it ready for them.

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# What Is Christianity?

An Answer to  
Dr. Harry Emerson Fosdick  
E. Haldeman-Julius

Continued from page one

shadow of an intelligent appeal on behalf of religion—a general anti-Christian trend of thought which is scientific, skeptical, humanistic. But this trend of thought bears as strongly against immortality as against the other notions of religion. Here is a scientifically indefensible (and, the more one reflects upon it, a meaningless) idea; and Fosdick represents it—in the guise of personality—as the central message of Jesus and meaning of Christianity.

And Fosdick is not quite honest when he emphasizes only one side of the Christian doctrine of immortality. If Christianity has held out the hope of personal felicity (or, to follow its mythology, a dull and empty personal life) beyond the earthly grave, it has also terrified men by the threat of personal suffering, wretchedness, damnation throughout all eternity. Moreover, it seems to have been the cheerful view of the holy gospels, until quite modern times, that a great majority of the race was logically, almost certainly, doomed to the fires of hell. Actually, the balance of sentiment, in Christian theology, was one of fear rather than hope. No other religion, I believe, has ever dwelt so intensely upon such a horrible picture of a hereafter—for sinners, unbelievers, etc. That was one chief objection which the Pagans had to Christianity: namely, its vulgar, superstitious, cruel dogma and vision of eternal punishment. This dogma was not only abhorrent to the Pagan philosophers, to all cultivated persons of the ancient world; but it was not commonly a belief in that pre-Christian world; indeed, it remained for Christianity to stress immortality, not as something beautiful and wonderful, but as a desperate and dark chance which a man would be a great deal better without. The actual history of the belief of immortality in Christian hands reads grimly ironical. Fosdick's statement, "The genesis of Christianity lies in reverence for personality."

And far worse can be said about this statement. Historically, it is as wide of the truth as any statement could possibly be. Let us for the moment dismiss the notion of immortality, and consider briefly what Christianity did for personality in a real, human, social sense. For a thousand years Christianity was supreme in Europe, and indeed until the past century this religion has been, not merely the conventional religion to which lip service is given, but a system of belief and an institution holding the credulity of mankind. And it was precisely when Christianity was most powerful that personality—or, let us say more plainly, human sympathy and justice—was least respected. Christianity was completely indifferent to the ideals of freedom and culture, which, asserted by liberals and skeptics in hostility to Church and State, constituted the real declaration of the value and the rights of personality. Christianity upheld by its power and justified by theological and scriptural argument the institution of slavery and the servile condition, lasting for centuries, of nearly the whole of Christendom. The brutality, barbarism, and intolerance of medievalism—Christian medievalism—impress us as the wildest imaginable opposite of that "reverence for personality" which Fosdick would have us believe is the sublime gift of Christianity to mankind.

What of the bigots who took the lives of their fellow men because of differences in doctrine? What of the official and extreme and overwhelming bigotry by which the Christian faith was upheld? Fosdick cannot well deny, nor can one see how he can very well dodge, this outstanding fact in the record of Christianity. To be sure, it belongs to the past; and, significantly, so does Christianity, as a decisively ruling social force, belong to the past; the extreme cruelties of bigotry and the reality of Christian power have alike been outlived by humanity—and the connection between the two is unescapably obvious.

It is not useful for Fosdick's argument to point out merely that in this modern age, when Christian power is broken, there has been a humane modification of the ideas and pretensions of Christianity—or of a good many Christians. It would be idle to praise Christianity for the humanity, for the recognition of personality, that is witnessed in our age: this is a general characteristic of the age and is actually the result of the increased secularization of life.

The basis of Fosdick's claim must be historical—and, thus viewed, it has no basis in fact. Compare the social life of Greece and Rome with the social life of Europe for a thousand years, yet for fifteen hundred years, under Christianity: the record is brilliantly in favor of the

Pagans as having had a far more intelligent and humane regard for personality. For one must repeat that if "reverence for personality" means anything, it must mean a sense of justice, a devotion to human rights, the inspiration of a decent life for men on this earth. And in this respect Christianity's record is about as bad as could be. Under Christian rule and inspiration, men generally rotted in bestiality and ignorance during the appalling dark stretch of medievalism; and not only that, but they were incredibly cruel to one another; the average man was, in the medieval Christian view as that view was actually demonstrated in social life, no better than a beast of the field; the old "holy" rule of Church and State was the most terrible denial of personality; and all these features of civilization, in which personality is most truly reflected, were left for a rational world to produce—for them, man does not owe Christianity the slightest debt.

Christian theology revealed as much contempt for personality as Christian practice. Man was held to be like a worm in the dust. He was, not only the slave of a few lords on earth, but he was the slavish, stupid, cringing creature of a despotic God in the sky. His chief duty was not to realize his own human personality but to worship and sing the praises of this God. He was, finally, in all probability damned by this God—and even the best of Christians were taught to believe that, however stainless their life, they were nevertheless wretched creatures in the sight of God and really could deserve nothing better than hell. God might be good-natured and give them something better; but, being human, they deserved only damnation.

Of course, the whole of Christian theology is not found in the reputed sayings of Jesus. But in the first place Jesus, himself, was not the discoverer of personality nor its only great (not even its greatest) champion or teacher. Anyway, the supposed teachings of Jesus are so contradictory, he is (at least insofar as we have any impression of him) such a legendary figure, that no very clear and applicable gospel or viewpoint of life is to be had from that quarter. What I would emphasize here is that, apart from Christianity as an institution, apart from the Church, Jesus is merely a minor figure and would convey nothing in particular to the minds of men, would indeed very likely be quite forgotten. Take him by himself, and he is simply a little known Jew who a couple of thousand years ago uttered a few moral parables and aphorisms, not new nor brilliant, and who may have been the protagonist of a doubtful story, suspiciously laden with miracles. After all, Jesus is but a name and the shadow of a shade. Even as the alleged "founder" and second god of Christianity, he cannot be said to have contributed a thing to the culture of civilization or to the vision and nature of man. Christianity, on the other hand, is historically an immense and terrible fact. What Christianity taught and did cannot be denied—and the whole trend of its faith and practice was against human rights and "reverence for personality."

What, then, has lifted the personality of man to a civilized plane? It has been the rationalistic, materialistic growth of a society devoted to real and not illusory objects. Personality could not amount to much until the tyranny of Church and State was broken. The dogmas of Christianity stood most evilly in the way of a realization of the free, intelligent, self-respecting personality of man. A world in which man could really enjoy life, in which he could exercise freely his creative intelligence, in which he would be emancipated from the superstitious fears and harsh, gloomy restrictions of a Christian society—this was what man needed in order for his personality to be triumphant.

There is no doubt at all concerning this real evolution of personality in the shape of greater culture, freedom, and power for man. Skepticism and the spirit of revolt—revolt, mind you, against the barriers either established or maintained by Christianity—appeared as the forerunners of this evolution. (The fact is also worth mentioning that Pagan culture, not Christianity, was a very important inspiration toward the dawning of the rights of man and the liberation of human personality.) Step by step, as the world became more secular and less religious, the actual conditions of life and personality improved. Science brought to man the greatest power and hope he had ever known—greater than he had ever dreamed of. Tolerance—an un-Christian attitude of mind—grew with the growth of secularism; and tolerance, certainly, is a fine and essential tribute to the dignity and rights of personality.

Now, in the modern world, when Christianity no longer governs the thoughts and relations of men—when it is, intellectually (i. e., for all intelligent persons) an outcast and discredited system of belief, we find that personality is more widely and happily significant than ever before in the world's history. We have come to the richest fruition of personality, not by the Christian route, but by the rationalistic, liberal, sec-

ular right. Christianity, in a word, had to be forced out of the way in order that man should enjoy a free personality.

We do not think of eminent Christian names in history in connection with the rights of man (save as having opposed these rights): we think rather of the names of great champions of free thought, great challengers of theology and despotism, great exponents of rationalism and a secular, worldly humanism. Can any Christian be named who did as much for the rights of man, for civilization, for personality as did Voltaire? Can any ten or a hundred Christians be named in fair and equal comparison with Voltaire? In a few decades in the eighteenth century a small group of French skeptics and anti-Christians, did infinitely more in affirming and advancing the cause of personality, of justice and humanity, than Christianity did during a thousand years. It is exactly the weakest position which Fosdick has taken in his defense of Christianity. Its historical record so far as man's rights and personality are concerned is overwhelmingly on the wrong side.

But again let me say that Fosdick is not really discussing personality, as we realistically, humanly understand the term. There is no argument about the value of personality, nor about the fact that the human mind and personality is the superior manifestation of life on this planet. What Fosdick emphasizes, and what he illogically confuses with the idea of personality, is the myth of immortality. He assumes that personality, as a quality, is poorer in value if it is shortened in duration to this span of earthly life. Here, again, he is confusing the fact of personality with the existence of particular persons. As persons, we die; but personality is still as real and strong in the world we depart from. It is another way of saying that life, not the individual, is scientifically the more enduring fact.

It does not matter whether immortality is a beautiful or a comforting theory. Even if the assertion of immortality as a belief is taken to be a fine gesture of idealism, that does not make it true. If the "genius" of Christianity is a reverence for what, is untrue—and that indeed seems decidedly to be the case—then immortality is as good a thing as any other for Christian apologists to dwell upon. They didn't originate the idea, but they are welcome to it. They are welcome also to the idea of the personality of God, which Fosdick, though a "modernist," expresses a belief in as something vague and undefinable but (what use reason?) true. And this "Modernist" delivers himself a choice bit of hokum. Christianity, he says, "rejoices that we cannot comprehend God, for if we could he would not be worth comprehending." That is to say, what we can know is not worth knowing, therefore ignorance is bliss.

The "Modernists" are as amusing as the Fundamentalists in their tricks of argument and rhetoric. Sophistry has been most amazingly sly and erratic and weirdly defiant of reason in defense of religion. And the Fosdicks can perform with a skill, in this branch of bunkistic legerdemain, equal to the Stratonians. Fosdick himself walks away with the honors by his embryological analogy in support of immortality. "Imagine twin babes," he says, "unborn in their mother's womb, gifted with the power of thought, the one a skeptic and the other a believer. They are living without light and without breathing, both of which would be to them unthinkable. The crises of birth, tearing them loose from the matrix on which their existence seems fundamentally to depend, would appear to them like death. As for picturing the world without, that would be impossible." Imagine that, he says—you have to use a good deal of imagination to follow Fosdick's "argument." Or rather you have to put yourself in the state of mind of one who credulously reads a fairy tale. Fairies are supposed to talk, and so are unborn babes in the Fosdick-spun analogy. We are asked to hear, spiritually of course, "this little conversation:

The skeptic babe could say to the believer: "You are only a wishful thinker; you desire to go on living and so you think you will. How can you be decently scientific and think that? You see how absolutely our existence depends on present circumstances. You are credulous to suppose that the disruption of them will still leave us alive."

To which the believing babe could reply: "My faith is not mere wishful thinking. Month after month nature has been at work here developing something so marvelous that I am confident of an aftermath. Nature is not utterly irrational. She means something by all these preparations, and something will come of them."

To which the skeptic might retort: "How, then do you picture the new life? If you are so sure about the future, describe it! What is it like?" This would obviously put the believing babe in a difficult situation. "I do not know how to picture it," he would have to say. "It is to me unimaginable, but it may still be true. I am agnostic about all details. Only of this I feel confident, that nature is not so senseless as to undertake such a promising process with no end in view. The crises she calls death will turn out really to be birth."

That, obviously, is not a complete statement. What if the babe is "born" dead?

Undoubtedly, no more ridiculous bit of fancy has ever been presented—oh, so seriously—as an "argument" for immortality. If one is keeping a scrapbook of bunkettes, that imaginary conversation between embryos should at once be prominently pasted on a page by itself. It shows how desperate, how ludicrously desperate, is the position Fosdick holds.

And is it really an honest "argument"? It is, I should say, quite trickily and irresponsibly Christian. The preacher takes a well-known fact of nature—the fact of birth—and uses it to lead credit to a pure myth, to the myth of immortality. And the fact of birth is not taken realistically, but we are asked to suppose a theological discussion between unborn babes! Evidently Fosdick has not got the miracles entirely out of his head. He may have ceased to believe in them, but he still thinks in a miraculous strain.

There is more that is wrong with this analogy. The embryo is growing toward life. The living man is decaying toward death. The case would be at least more plausible, very different indeed, if a man steadily increased in vitality, in zest for life, in all his parts and powers and at last died in the best condition of all his years. On the contrary, the individual life develops to a certain point and then goes downhill. This is not as quickly nor as obviously true of mental as of physical powers. Yet it is even true mentally as well. The mind is not as vigorous, as facile, as alive in old age as in youth or in the prime of life. Memory becomes poorer; endurance, mentally and physically, is less; interest in life is not what it was in the younger years. It is true of the genius as of the ordinary man. The genius in his old age may have a better mind and greater knowledge than a mediocre person in his prime; but he, the genius, has not the intellectual vitality in old age that he had in his prime—although he may have greater wisdom. And some minds, some bodies, last longer than others. One man is worn out at sixty; another is still going, with his strength and his wits about him, at eighty or ninety. Decay and death are inevitable, it may be sooner or it may be later, for all living things.

But it is enough to say that all the facts are against Fosdick and that he can do no better than to "argue" in his own peculiar style that because a man is born, he will therefore live forever; take a fact and prove a myth—that is the style, which has, just for moment, a ludicrous novelty. It is certain that Fosdick will have as much difficulty in convincing us living skeptics by such methods as his unborn believer in convincing the unborn skeptic. His assumptions are too great and too untenable. He relies, for instance, upon the old discredited assumption—that nature has intelligence and purpose. Yet it is evident that nature is indifferent. Individual forms of life are destroyed quite recklessly, time and chance happens to them without regard to plan or favoritism or nice discrimination, and such purpose and planning as we see are the work of man himself. Immortality remains, what it always was, an incredible dream. It is incapable of proof, the idea cannot even be put into intelligible shape, and this is only shown the more clearly by Fosdick's poor, queer attempt to prove it. He practically admits that the position of the skeptic is sound and impregnable. The difference between him and the skeptic is that he, Fosdick, has the will to believe. He thinks that there must be—that there ought to be—immortality or the show wouldn't be worth while. For our part, we are not less interested in the show because it has a last act.

# THE DEBUNKER

Edited by E. Haldeman-Julius



## BERTRAND RUSSELL

ENGLAND'S greatest rationalist, philosopher, educator extraordinary, one of our most famous contemporaries in the world, is the author of an original, exclusive, copyrighted article entitled: HAS RELIGION MADE USEFUL CONTRIBUTIONS TO CIVILIZATION? which will appear in the June issue of the DEBUNKER. This is an announcement of tremendous importance to all those interested in the liberal, progressive viewpoint of life. Mr. Russell writes a brilliant, scintillating style. His logic is inexorable. His is a refreshing purity and beauty of language. You must read this forthcoming contribution of his in the DEBUNKER. It is a scathing, scorching indictment of religion, a denunciation of creeds so fierce and yet so utterly reasonable that you will enjoy every bit of it. One by one the inflated claims of contributions made by religion to civilization topple and collapse. Only the unspeakable misery and stupidity of religion remain with here and there a puny little achievement struggling to hold its own among the ruins. E. Haldeman-Julius, editor of the DEBUNKER, has spared no effort to get this article of Bertrand Russell's for the enthusiastic readers of his magazine. And this policy of obtaining unusual, outstanding contributions will be pursued in the future. There will be several surprises. Join the thousands of DEBUNKER readers now! Enjoy free, truthful, iconoclastic writing each month. The DEBUNKER costs only \$1.50 a year. Bertrand Russell's article alone is worth that much. Be sure you don't miss it. Use the blank below and subscribe now!

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CLARENCE DARROW

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