

Thorne Guy

# I Believe and other essays



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### DEDICATION

**To F. V. WHITE, Esquire**

My dear White,

The publication of this book is a business arrangement between you and me. Its dedication however has nothing to do with the relations of author and publisher in those capacities, but is merely an expression of friendship and esteem. This then is to remind you of pleasant hours we have spent together on the other side of the channel, in your house at London, and my house in Kent.

*Yours ever sincerely,  
Guy Thorne.*

# I

## “I BELIEVE”

### “*Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision.*”

When I was a boy I made an occasional invasion of my father’s study, and in the absence of more congenial matter tried to extract some amusement from the shelves devoted to Christian apologetics. At any rate the pictures of the portly divines, which sometimes prefaced their polemics, interested me, and I was sometimes allured to read a few pages of their scripture. I remember that I enjoyed the sub-acid flavour of Bishop Butler’s advertisement, prefixed to the First Edition of his *Analogy*, at an early age, and I have thought lately that in certain circles one hundred and seventy years have not greatly modified the mental attitude.

Hear what the Rector of Stanhope who, as Horace Walpole said, was shortly to be “Wafted to the see of Durham in a cloud of metaphysics,” says about his literary contemporaries —

“It is come, I know not how, to be taken for granted, by many persons that Christianity is not so much as a subject for inquiry, but that it is now at length discovered to be fictitious, and accordingly they treat it as if, in the present age, this were an agreed point among all people of discernment, and nothing remained but to set it up as a principal subject of mirth and ridicule, as it were, by way of reprisals for its having so long interrupted the pleasures of the world.”

Perhaps the difference between the times of George the Second and Edward the Seventh may be best discerned in the status and calibre of the popular penmen who in either age have found, or furnished amusement in a tilt against the Catholic Faith.

The man in the street, as we know him, did not exist in the eighteenth century. He is the predominant person to-day, and he requires the services of able authors to assure him of immunity, when he is inclined to frolic away from chastity or integrity, much as did the county members who pocketed the bribes of Sir Robert Walpole and prated of patriotism.

Fortunately for society the man in the street is a very decent fellow, and generally finds out before long that Wisdom’s ways are ways of pleasantness. A man may enjoy posing as an agnostic when he wants an excuse for — as the negro said — “doing what he dam please,” but when he takes to himself a wife, and children are born to him, a certain anxiety as to the continuity and perpetuation of these relationships begins to show itself. A man who has lost a little child, or waited in agonizing suspense to hear the physician’s verdict, when sickness overshadows his home, discovers that he needs something beyond negations, something that will bring life and immortality to light again within his soul.

Moreover, the man in the street finds it necessary to come to some decision on other problems of existence. He is a citizen and must needs exercise his enfranchisement and give his vote at an election now and again. He must help to decide whether the State shall ignore religion and establish a system of ethical education, of which the ultimate sanction is social convenience, or maintain the thesis that Creed and Character are mutually inter-dependent.

As he pays his poor rate wrathfully, or with resignation, its annual increase reminds him of the necessity of curing or eliminating the unfit. When he reads of Belgian and Prussian colonial enterprise, or ponders on the perplexing problem of the Black Belt which the Southern States must solve, he is compelled to consider whether it is true that “God has made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth,” or whether this shall be accounted as another of the delusions of Saul of Tarsus whom Governor Festus found to be mad.

Indeed, our friend, the man in the street, when he becomes a family man, without any pretensions to be a man of family, very often finds himself face to face with other problems. Shall he simply sing with the Psalmist “Like as the arrows in the hand of the giant, even so are the young

children. Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them,” or shall he be guided by the gloss of a modern interpreter who maintains that the oriental quiver was designed to hold but two or three arrows at most?

Even when the plain man confines his interests to his business and seeks relaxations in “sport” alone, endeavouring to evade the puzzles of politics and avoid all theologized inquiry, he cannot escape from ethical consideration. Professionalism in athletics and questions of betting and bribery contend with his conviction that there is something which ennobles man in running and striving for mastery, and it is futile to curse the bookmaker when his clients are so many, his occupation so lucrative.

The average man gets little guidance from pulpit or press. It is dull work reading sermons, even if sermons came in his way. From time to time some eloquent bishop or canon is reported in the Monday morning papers, but journalists know that the publication of a summary with, in the case of a few of the preachers, some epigrams or denunciations, is all that can be permitted or expected. These may arouse the attention to the existence of evils, but give no guiding principle for their cure.

The habit of attendance at some place of worship is easily abandoned in the days of bachelor freedom, and rarely regained in maturer years. Men for the most part find the preacher unconvincing. The usual audience does not desire discussion of difficulties. When the honest instinct of devotional worship is gratified by common praise and prayer, the people who regularly go to church, elderly, and orthodox in their own way, resent a demand upon their intellectual exertion, and the Northern farmer of Tennyson hardly misrepresents them, “I thought he said what he ought to ha’ said and I comed away.” The great Nonconformist societies may, in some congregations, give a larger latitude to the preacher, but his freedom is rather in the direction of divinity than of ethics. Mr. Rockefeller is a prominent pillar of Protestantism in the States, and Mr. Jabez Balfour, in another congregation at Croydon, apparently knew no qualms of conscience before his actual conviction, which was public, of sin.

There is an old proverb which tells us that “A man is either a fool or a philosopher at forty” – and, though proverbs are often only venerable prejudices in disguise, it is true that a man, who has attained his eighth lustrum and is of average ability, generally has come to certain definite conclusions as to the rudimentary laws of health. He knows enough about his body to avoid fatal errors in diet, and has learned the necessity of exercise and fresh air. But when he is called upon, as a member of the body politic, to decide questions of ethics on which the sanitation of society must depend, he feels himself at a loss. To many people it will seem a hard saying that a man must be either a fool or a philosopher at forty, but long ere he has reached that age he will have encountered problems of philosophy which it is impossible to shirk if he is to do his duty as a free man.

St. Paul, it is true, when writing to a Christian Community in Asia Minor, bids them “beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy.” And the unfortunate habit of Bible Christians, of tearing a text from a treatise and making it into a precept, has thrown a sort of discredit upon philosophic thinking, while the mass of mankind will always prefer rules to principles of conduct. But in vain do we clamour against intellectual complications which are the inevitable endowment of these days. Life is necessarily intricate, subtle and anxious, and Democracy has made of each man a ruler and governor in his degree. Is it possible to point to a single principle which shall be a motive and a standard of duty, which shall establish a synthetic method after the ruthless analysis of the later Victorian days?

How searching that analysis has been! Fifty years ago the man in the street might rarely read the Bible, but he had a tolerably assured conviction that the Bible was infallible, however resolutely he might refuse its interpretation by an infallible church.

Then

“...the Essays and Reviews debate  
Begins to tell on the public mind, and Colenso’s views have weight.”

Plain people were taught to look on the Old Testament as a library of Hebrew literature containing not only poetry and history, but romance.

When Colenso's book first appeared, Matthew Arnold deprecated its publication since it brought criticisms familiar to men of culture before the notice of the public, without considering how the beliefs of "the vulgar" might be upset.

The supercilious apostle of "sweetness and light," himself contributed largely in later years to the general confusion in men's minds, and the New Testament criticism has been introduced to the general public by Mr. Arnold's accomplished niece.

Our friend, the man in the street, was all unprepared!

What had he ever been taught of theology, the Divine word to man? In his school-days, if his father was an income tax payer he probably had a weekly lesson in "Divinity," when he construed a few verses of the Gospels in the Greek Testament, and showed up to his master, now and then, a map of the journeying of the Apostle Paul in Asia Minor and Eastern Europe. If his father expected him to be confirmed, in due course, some lessons in the catechism were added for his benefit, but prudent pedagogues took care not to endanger the popularity of a school, whether public or private, by any definite teaching which might be accused of being dogmatic. The head-master was probably a person of unsuspected orthodoxy, with a possible deanery or bishopric in view for his days of superannuation. His sermons in chapel used to set a fine standard of conduct before the boys, and were gracefully free from all mention of controversial questions. In due course they were published with the title *Sermons at Yarrow*, and enterprising parents turning over their pages would find little to criticize and much to admire. The Cross, if presented at all in these publications, was so bespangled with rhetorical jewellery that "Jews might kiss and Infidels adore." And the children of Israel as public-school boys were never painfully conscious of any great difference between themselves and their baptized companions. But unfortunately only a few of the boys came under the civilizing instruction of the Chief. Bright young athletes from Oxford and Cambridge, lured into the ranks of pedagogy by their love of football and cricket, were the assistant-masters. A regular salary with holiday for a fourth of the year, the prospect of early marriage, and a remunerative boarding-house, attracted them to a pleasant position, and they had no wish to rebel against the time-table which made them teachers of "Divinity" for at least one hour in the week. All educated people should be tolerably familiar with a book so largely used in quotation as the Bible, and the succession of the Kings of Israel and Judah could be used in strengthening the memory, whilst the stories of "Jehu and those other Johnnies you know" were by no means devoid of picturesque incident. Greek Testament could also be made useful in the acquisition of a vocabulary, or in a lesson showing the difference between classical and vernacular Greek. "Of course we must leave the application of these studies to conduct to *Home influence*," the headmasters would blandly observe, and between parent and pedagogue the teaching of the Christian Faith fell neglected to the ground.

What chance had the boys so brought up, of forming any conception of the essential truths of Religion? A superficial acquaintance with the stories of Hebrew history, a perfunctory attendance at chapel, some well-meant exhortations on the subject of temperance and chastity, as the catechism was revived in their memories before they were brought to be confirmed by the Bishop, and some ability "to translate and give the context" of a few phrases from the Greek texts of the Gospels, these were their intellectual religious equipment for a life of fierce temptation from within and without. And when they encountered the storm and stress of modern social life they found that the critics had taken from them the old reverence of nursery days for "God's Book," their school training had taught them only a rough code of honour, and their chief restraint from any ignoble impulse was a feeling that to do certain deeds was not "good form."

A little lower down the social ladder the man in the street has fared no better in his boyhood. In the public elementary schools he has had a half-hour's lesson in Scripture and catechism five days of the week, and annually the Diocesan, or the School Board, Inspector came round to ascertain whether

the Syllabus of religious teaching had been duly followed. But only when devout parish priests had a talent for teaching and a love for boys and girls was any attempt made to give children a *religion*, and even in this case not very much could be done for those who left school for ever when they were twelve years old.

A generation ago Lord Sherbrooke, on the extension of the franchise, told his contemporaries that it was time to begin “to educate our masters” – but we have not gone very far in our instruction of Christian Sociology, though as yet we have not adopted the Utilitarian basis of morals accepted by the French Republic, and endeavoured to establish principles of duty towards man without any reference whatever to a duty towards God.

Can any one be surprised if the plain man be perplexed when he is called upon to decide questions of economy and morality without any guiding principle? As a matter of fact he makes no such effort. “Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision, for the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decisions,” but the sun and the moon are darkened, and the stars withdraw their shining. The puzzled popular vote is but as the swing of the pendulum, first to this side, then to the other. “These fellows have been no good, let us give the others a show.”

Yet assuredly there is a principle which is guidance and strength if only men could discern it. There are Teachers who can tell men of its beneficent power, but they are as yet few in number, and their voices are not sufficiently strong. When once these can get a hearing, men welcome their evangel and find in it a guide of life.

I am persuaded that just as Bishop Butler, when he perused the preface of his *Analogy*, had no prescience of the young fellow of Lincoln, who was in a few years to give the Christian faith a fresh hold in the hearts of the common people, who gladly heard him, so in our time many of our Bishops seem unable to perceive the dawn of another “day of the Lord.”

Indeed, it is our misfortune in England that Bishops are almost necessarily bad leaders. We are told when an election to the Papacy is imminent that this or that Cardinal is in the list of “Papabili” – a possible Pope – so in like manner we may almost select amongst the undergraduates of Oxford and Cambridge our future diocesans. These are men clever, shrewd, and hard-working, of estimable private character, and not without some modest patrimony. Early entered in the race for preferment, ambitious, and yet, *mirabile dictu*, devout, they are endowed first of all with the true qualification for episcopacy, a capacity for compromise and a pliant political mind. *Sic itur ad astra* the excellent curate or tutor, the courteous and accomplished chaplain to the Bishop, the eloquent canon and ecclesiastical courtier is consecrated and enthroned. Henceforward for the rest of his days he must hurry from his study table, crowded with correspondence, to his confirmations, his diocesan society meetings, and his weary, humiliating attendance at the House of Lords. What wonder if Bishops discourage new ventures of faith, who have no time for thinking, no time for reading, and perhaps, sometimes, too little opportunity for prayer!

And so we find them not unwilling to accommodate the Catholic Faith to the popular prejudice of the moment, acquiescing in an undogmatic, undenominational, more or less Christian creed. Popularity becomes the very breath of their nostrils, and they proceed to hide in an appendix to the Prayerbook, the hymn *Quicumque vult*.

Yet the discerning can see that now is no time for keeping in the background the great truths of religion. Already men are being prepared in many ways to receive them.

The Christian Faith in England is no longer hampered by certain arbitrary axioms of the Puritan Divines. In the sixteenth century men were almost compelled by the exigencies of the situation to discover some Infallible authority which they could set up over against the Infallibility of the Church of Rome, and they endeavoured to treat Holy Scripture as though the great library of Jewish and Christian writers contained a complete code of consistent legislation. A text was a convincing argument for the Divine right of Kings, or for binding them in chains, for the burning of witches or the destruction of a shrine, and although in the two following centuries the Protestant ministers taught

men to modify this conception, and to realize the difference between the Old Testament and the New, the popular idea of Revelation allowed small scope for theological inquiry. The biographies of our literary men of the Victorian period have shown us how they were tempted to separate themselves from all public communion with the Church, by their misgiving that the Church was committed to an impossible position. Carlyle groaned for what he called an “exit from Houndsditch,” some deliverance from the Rabbinic interpretation and use of the Bible. Things are very different to-day, as Henry Sidgwick says in a letter to Alfred Lord Tennyson published by his son in a recent memoir. “The years pass, the struggle with what Carlyle used to call ‘Hebrew old clothes’ is over, Freedom is won.” And in the result a scientific criticism of the Old and New Testament is found to be compatible with, and often a compulsion to an acceptance of the Christian creed, not the creed of Calvin, or the Westminster Confession, but the reasoned statement of Nicæa. The student of physical science no longer believes that if he goes to church he must be taken to accept the cosmogony of Genesis, and on his side he no longer stumbles at the difficulty of miraculous events. He knows too much about the influence of mind over matter to say that it is impossible that Jesus Christ and His Apostles should have healed the paralytic and made the blind to see and the deaf to hear. He is no longer “cocksure” of his capability of drawing a line of division between the organic and the inorganic. He can conceive of the existence of spirits which can control and modify the ordinary laws of life. He finds it probable that evolution is not exhausted when Man has come into being, and can look forward to a spiritual existence without suspecting himself of superstition. Sacraments, the union of the spiritual with the material, seem to him to be in accordance with the laws of the Universe, and he would never now-a-days stigmatize them as “Magic.” However he may explain the methods by which cures were wrought upon the afflicted, the scientific man of to-day would not accuse St. Luke of falsehood because he tells us that, “God wrought special miracles by the hands of Paul, so that from his body were brought unto the sick handkerchiefs or aprons, and the diseases departed from them and the evil spirits went out of them.” Indeed the man of science knows himself to be on the track of discoveries which will show us secrets of personality and spiritual possession which will banish for ever the absurd incredulity of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Who now-a-days would assert that “miracles do not happen,” when men like Sir Oliver Lodge are laboriously discovering some few of these laws of the Universe which give us these portents and signs? Who dares to sneer at Parthenogenesis or repeat the slander of Celsus about the Mother of God? Men only who have grown rusty in reposing on their past reputations and cannot see that materialism as a philosophy is dead. Day by day fresh evidence of the power of the spirit over matter bursts upon us. A plea for “philosophic doubt” of Professor Huxley’s infallibility is no longer necessary. The very distinction between matter and spirit grows more and more difficult as science develops analytical power. The minds of men are being prepared again to receive that Supreme revelation which told of the wedding of the earth and heaven, the taking of the Manhood into God.

In truth, this is the one principle which can give men guidance in the tangled intricacy of modern life. It is necessary to salvation, *now*, not hereafter only, to believe rightly the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ.

For, first of all, men need to be saved from the apathy of despair. They need some hope that there is an answer to the riddle of the Universe. Let them once begin to feel that it *may* be true that the very God cares for His creatures and has made His love for them manifest by taking to Himself the body, mind and spirit of man, and joining for ever human nature to the Godhead, then through the darkness comes a human voice saying —

“O heart I made, a heart beats here!  
Face, my hands fashioned, see it in Myself.  
Thou hast no power nor mayst conceive of mine,  
But love I gave thee, with Myself to love,

And thou must love Me who have died for thee.”

A man regains his self-respect when once he has escaped from the paralyzing sense that his is only

“a life of nothings nothing worth  
From that first nothing ere our birth  
To that last nothing under earth.”

And there is only one starting-point for those who journey on this quest of an answer to the enigma of life. They must resolutely abandon the long travelled “*a priori* road.” They must understand that the science of to-day is not tied to any materialistic axioms, that metaphysic cannot be ignored by the physician, and that no competent scientist to-day would say of the Resurrection of Jesus on which ultimately depends His claims to our adoration, “*That could not happen.*” We know enough now of the laws of the Universe to know that we do not know them all.

So some of us perceive that what is needed to-day is to arrest the attention of the man in the street, to get him to perceive that Christianity has much more to say for itself than he suspected, and that Christian Philosophy will place in his hand a clue which will guide him in the labyrinth of life.

“I say the acknowledgment of God in Christ  
Accepted by thy reason, solves for thee  
All questions in the earth and out of it.”

We must set men free from phrases and get them to think. It suits the game of the party politician to pretend that ethics are easily self-evident, and that there is a simple fundamental religion on which all men are agreed; but there is a question which must be insistently urged, and upon the answer to which all things depend, “What think ye of Christ?”

Probably nothing has done more to alienate the man in the street from religious observance than the hypocritical pretence that all men are agreed about “simple Bible teaching.” He knows well enough that what really matters is whether a man believes or not that God became man. If ever the Labour Party should definitely declare for elementary education without religious teaching it will be because the men whose children attend the elementary schools know that they cannot read the New Testament without asking, “Is it true?”

“Did Jesus Christ really die and rise again the third day according to the Scriptures?” “Did Jesus Christ go up into heaven in the sight of the apostles till a cloud received Him?” “Did Mary’s Son come to her as other babies come?” “Was Joseph Jesus Christ’s real father?” Our members of Parliament who have no leisure to know their own children, who keep them in the nursery till it is time for them to go to the Preparatory School, who leave their training to the governess and the headmaster, may talk about “the cruelty of the religious differences which hinder the establishment of an efficient system of education for the children of the State.” But the men and the mothers who live with their children and talk to them about their lessons, know that a child will insist upon an answer to its questions. A father of a family in the artisan and labouring classes, if he be at all intelligent, loses all respect for ministers of the Gospel who pretend that there is no difficulty about the simple Gospel story, and losing his self-respect for the men who have appointed themselves his teachers, he is tempted to throw all theology aside. And if he ventures on this despairing expedient he finds himself in mental confusion again over ethics instead of theology, and there arises a prospect of anarchy and disorder. Capital is timid, so enterprise is checked. Poverty increases and riot follows, and it all ends, not now-a-days in the Napoleonic “whiff of grape-shot,” but in the rattle of the maxim in the streets and the desolation of a thousand homes.

The experience of all civilization is that you cannot separate morality from religion. When the Romans lost their faith in the old gods and became “undenominational,” civic virtue decayed. When the genius of the Empire was set up for a universal Deity and men were bidden as good citizens to burn their few grains of incense before the statue of the reigning Emperor – the representative of an ordered and moral state – we know what happened. You cannot make an abstraction alive and deify Government. Laws, which have the sanction only of expediency, do but furnish mankind with exercise in evasion. Indefinite belief in the existence of “something not ourselves which makes for righteousness” has no motive force, and though men may rub on in some fashion or other by following ancient custom, and the law of use and wont, this can only be done in quiet times. And ours are not quiet times; indeed, the air is thick with principles which are forcing themselves into expression. The principles of Nationality or Cosmopolitanism, the comity of nations and the limits of destruction, international trades unionism, and the laws of marriage are recurring items upon the programme of every social science congress. All these dark questions are forced upon the attentions of men, and never was there greater need of some synthetic philosophy which may help us in their exploration. Are we going to put Christianity aside and rule out theology from our calculations?

I may quote the testimony of the late Sir Leslie Stephen here. Every one knows that he held no brief to defend orthodoxy —

“To proclaim unsectarian Christianity is, in circuitous language, to proclaim that Christianity is dead. The love of Christ, as representing the ideal perfection of human nature, may indeed be still a powerful motive, and powerful whatever the view which we take of Christ’s character. The advocates of the doctrine in its more intellectual form represent this passion as the true essence of Christianity. They assert with obvious sincerity of conviction that it is the leverage by which alone the world can be moved. But, as they would themselves admit, this conception would be preposterous if, with Strauss, we regarded Christ as a mere human being. Our regard for Him might differ in degree, but would not differ in kind, from our regard for Socrates or for Pascal. It would be impossible to consider it as an overmastering and all-powerful influence. The old dilemma would be inevitable; he that loves not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love Christ whom he hath not seen? A mind untouched by the agonies and wrongs which invest London hospitals and lanes with horror, could not be moved by the sufferings of a single individual, however holy, who died eighteen centuries ago.

“No; the essence of the belief is the belief in the Divinity of Christ. But accept that belief; think for a moment of all that implies, and you must admit that your Christianity becomes dogmatic in the highest degree. Our conceptions of the world and its meaning are more radically changed than our conceptions of the material universe, when the sun instead of the earth becomes its centre. *Every view of history, every theory of our duty, must be radically transformed by contact with that Stupendous Mystery.* Whether you accept or reject the special tenets of the Athanasian Creed is an infinitesimal trifle. You are bound to assume that every religion which does not take this dogma into account is without true vital force. Infidels, heathens, and Unitarians reject the single influence which alone can mould our lives in conformity with the everlasting laws of the universe. Of course, there are tricks of sleight of hand by which the conclusion is evaded. It would be too long and too trifling to attempt to expose them. Unsectarian Christianity consists in shirking the difficulty without meeting it, and trying hard to believe that the passion can survive without its essential basis. It proclaims the love of Christ as our motive, whilst it declines to make up its mind whether Christ was God or man; or endeavours to escape a categorical answer under a cloud of unsubstantial rhetoric.

But the difference between man and God is infinite, and no effusion of superlatives will disguise the plain fact from honest minds. To be a Christian in any real sense you must start from a dogma of the most tremendous kind, and an undogmatic Creed is as senseless as a statue without shape or a picture without colour. Unsectarian means un-Christian.” – From *Freethinking and Plainspeaking* (pp. 122-4), by Leslie Stephen. (Longmans, London.)

The considerations which seemed to compel the clearheaded author of this extract to his own well-known intellectual position no longer apply. In England, at any rate, the Church is not bound down to any mechanical theory of the inspiration of the Bible, and accepts all the discoveries of Modern Physical Science without misgiving. Such books as the late Archbishop of Canterbury (Dr. Temple) gave us in his Bampton Lectures have long ago shown the futility of attempting to map out the exact terms of a reconciliation between the claims of science and religion, but they have shown that religion and science are *not* destructive and contradictory of each other.

“The same principles are found in each. The principle of evolution, for instance, is as evident in the gradual development of religion as in the age-long process by which the natural world was created; the order and beauty and regular succession manifest in Nature can be traced also in the spiritual universe. The revelation which was formerly held to be violation of law is seen to be a revelation of higher law. The great postulate of science, the uniformity of Nature, is not infringed.”

We know now that there are laws of the Universe which, if we knew more about them, would tell us how it was that a Virgin could conceive and bear a Son. It is not to us an inconceivable superstition that “The Son of Man” should have in His own person powers of which the rudimentary signs can be traced in all humanity, manifesting themselves from time to time. The day is long past when the resurrection of Jesus Christ can be set aside as a “cunningly devised fable.” No scientific man, who has not deliberately shut himself in an hermetically sealed materialism would say to-day that “Miracles” do not happen. It is a question of evidence.

And educated men know that there is a science of metaphysics, that there is a science of psychology, that literary criticism is scientific, that the age of a document can be decided, that cumulative evidence cannot be ignored, and that simply to put aside the claims of Christianity without examination is absurd.

But, as Sir Leslie Stephen shows, it is the Christianity of the Catholic creed that matters, and it is this Christianity of which the man in the street has need. It gives him a solution of those social and ethical problems which he must solve, which he can only neglect at the peril of natural degradation. For example, the position of women depends upon our belief or disbelief that Christ was born of the Virgin Mary. To say that monogamy is the natural evolution of humanity, that chastity in the young unmarried man is a product of civilization, that a high conception of a man’s duty to posterity will keep him from harlotry, is simply to show ignorance of history, of human nature, and of the world as it is. A man who talks now-a-days about the respect of marriage being a Teutonic contribution to the evolution of civilized society, is behind the times. *We know* that respect for women, and marriage held in honour, are the creations of the Holy Catholic Church, which insists on the Incarnation of the Lord Jesus Christ.

But the man in the street does not know these things. The discoveries in science, whether physical or psychical, do not reach him. Technical treatises are too strong meat for his intellectual digestion. The pulpit does not appeal to him. At every baptism in the Church of England the priest solemnly instructs the god-parents of the child, “Ye shall call upon him to hear sermons,” but for the most part the admonition is in vain. As a matter of fact, he picks up his religious notions from the newspaper press. And the newspaper press is not now controlled by men who have a distinct and definite belief in Christianity. It depends upon Finance, and financiers have other interests. The assertion of the Psalter, “Notus in Judæa” has been changed now-a-days into an interrogation, and we ask, “In Jewry *is* God known?” Let any man who has an intimate acquaintance with the newspaper

world run over in his mind the names of the great newspaper proprietors, the editors of our journalistic press, the writers of leading articles, the rising young journalists; and when he has excepted a few Irishmen, who may happen to remain faithful to the Roman Catholic Church, to which they owe their education, how many men will he find who honestly believe the Nicene Creed, and are habitually present on the first day of the week at the Breaking of the Bread?

The tone of the daily paper is tolerant. There is no rude hostility displayed towards definite Christian doctrines, but the toleration is politely contemptuous. "All wise men are of the same religion, and what that religion is wise men do not say."

It is true that in political matters the press has less power than it used to have. A magnate of finance cannot now seriously affect public opinion, though he may buy newspaper after newspaper, and sweep out the editorial staff to supply their places with men of his own choice. One wealthy wirepuller has other plutocrats to reckon with in questions of party politics, and a newspaper man who is dismissed by the proprietor of the *Tariff Reformer* may find another editorial chair placed at his disposal by the owner of *The Standard of Free Trade*.

The man in the street looks out for a newspaper which may strengthen his own party proclivities. He expects to find political questions discussed, but so far as religion is concerned he accepts without knowing it the current convention of the pressman, and imbibes a semi-sceptical atmosphere without misgiving or suspicion.

And yet, as Sir Leslie Stephen saw, every theory of duty depends upon Belief or Disbelief in the Divinity of Christ. We may talk of duty to Society, duty to the Race, duty to Posterity, duty to Civilization; but the plain man will recall the question of Sir Boyle Roche: "I do not understand, Mr. Speaker, all this talk about our duty to Posterity! What has Posterity ever done for us?"

You cannot control conduct by asserting that a man owes a debt to an abstraction which you vivify by printing it with a capital letter, and there remains always the question of the dying Lucretius

—  
"Thy duty? What is duty? Fare thee well."

The problem, then, which we have to solve is – how to arrest the attention of the average man to those Christian principles, of which the acceptance or definite refusal will determine the course of civilization during the next twenty years.

The mere assertion of authority will not suffice, and men are not impressed in favour of Catholic doctrine simply by dignified ceremony and Ritual. We have only to look across the English Channel to be assured of this. Frenchmen have not been encouraged to study the evidences of Christianity. Bishops and priests have only advertised sceptical books by forbidding their perusal to the faithful; and as the devout have been instructed to live by faith, but not how to give a reason for the faith which is in them, in the result M. Viviani's atheistic rhetoric has been placarded at the cost of the State in every commune throughout France.

We may consider, then, if there be any method by which the man who does not read theological or scientific or philosophical books, the man who has left off going to church, or gets no help from the average sermon, the man who has no reverence for mere authority, may be induced to consider the Christian Revelation as offering him a key to those riddles of life which his civic responsibilities are perpetually propounding.

Remember that his present condition may be roughly described as consisting of religious haziness and moral laziness. The moral laziness is being subjected to a series of rough shocks. He *must* make up his mind about some questions of morality. The relation of the sexes, the duties of property, the treatment of the subject savage, the survival of the unfit, the ethics of commerce, the control of the sale of alcohol, the education of children, these things he has to decide and he will ultimately decide. But he is at present perplexed, and his religious haziness is the reason of his perplexity. He

perhaps has not reached the conclusion of his contemporary in France, but he is on the way to it. Those heavenly lights which M. Viviani declares that his Government has extinguished still shine faintly for men in England, though the mists obscure them.

Can we get men to look upwards for light, and instead of cursing the ancient creed in a confused commination, to take Arthur Clough's advice —

“Ah! yet consider it again.”

I believe that there is a method, and as I mention it I am prepared for derision from all the “chorus of irresponsible reviewers, the irresponsible indolent reviewers.”

I believe that Fiction will find those that can be reached by no other means. Fiction sometimes sets a man seeking for Fact.

Very diffidently and very reverently I may remind my contemporaries that one, who has, at any rate, profoundly influenced the course of history, whatever view we may take of His person, did not disdain this method, “He taught them by parables.”

“Let me tell you a story.” Is there any age of mankind which does not respond to the invitation and give audience? A story stilled the tumult of the nursery in our earliest days, when heavy storms shook the windows and the tedium of a long, wet afternoon had turned play into fretfulness. A story beguiled us into interest when our History lesson had seemed an arid futility in Fourth Form days, and our magisterial enemies began to show themselves human after all when they bade us read *The Last of the Barons* as we were painfully plodding in the Plantagenet period, and found the War of the Roses a very thorny waste.

It is strange to turn over the pages of eminent evangelical sermons of the early Victorian days and to notice how “Novel reading” is denounced. Probably the worthy divines who fulminated against fiction were thinking of their own boyhood, and the mischief which came to them from Fielding and Richardson and Smollett surreptitiously perused. Sir Anthony Absolute's detestation of the circulating library survived in some provincial circles even when Sir Walter Scott had come to his own. The last forty years have altered things considerably, and though some men may pretend to despise novels, now-a-days they must take them into account. Wise and learned persons began to prescribe them, not only as a vehicle for the exhibition of wholesome but unattractive information, but as having a remedial value of their own. “The intellectual anodyne of the nineteenth century,” I remember that somebody called them — perhaps it was Sir Arthur Helps. It came about that those who had a secret and timid predilection for the story-book, but blushed a little if at Mudie's counter they ventured to ask for a novel, found that their ordinary reading of Biography and Memoirs revealed some unsuspected sympathies of the illustrious and wise. Who would have thought that Darwin devoured novels and Dean Church did not disdain them, and that Mr. Gladstone sat up all night to finish *John Inglesant*? The respectable pater-familias has long ceased to proscribe novel reading, and the most austere biographer no longer hides as a revelation of weakness his hero's literary diversions. Finally, in this year of Grace 1906 we are boldly told that Archbishop Temple could stand an examination in Miss Yonge's novels, and on one occasion was heard keenly discussing with Lord Rosebery the careers of the May family in the *Daisy Chain* as though they were living acquaintances. From being recognized as a recreation the novel has developed into a power, and Charles Dickens was a pioneer in its progress. It is the custom amongst certain “superior persons” to sneer at the novel with a purpose, and to suggest that authors attained remunerative results by taking some subject which was already ripe for discussion and weaving round it a web of fiction.

Undoubtedly there is danger to-day of such artifice, but I maintain that the great reforms of the past century owed much to writers whose purpose was perfectly innocent. Cardinal Newman has told us of the literary influence of Sir Walter Scott, who turned men's minds in the direction of the Middle Ages.

“The general need,” he said, “of something deeper and more attractive than what had offered itself elsewhere, may be said to have led to his popularity; and by means of his popularity he reacted on his readers, stimulating their mental thirst, feeding their hopes, setting before them visions, which when once seen are not easily forgotten, and silently indoctrinating them with nobler ideas, which might afterwards be appealed to as first principles.”

If Cardinal Newman could thus maintain the value of Fiction in the great ecclesiastical movement which has regenerated the Church of England, I may claim without apology that the reform in Poor Law Administration gained the attention of the public when Dickens made “Bumbledom” ridiculous, and that the Court of Chancery was swept cleaner by the breezes which were blowing from *Bleak House*. Let any man run over in his mind the undoubted improvements in social matters during the last fifty years, and it will be seen how Fiction has assisted in their promotion. Did Charles Reade’s *Hard Cash* do nothing to arouse the attention of the public to the condition of the insane? Did Sir Walter Besant’s novels turn no light on the sins of the sweater, or Charles Kingsley’s *Alton Locke* show no reason for legalizing the Trade Union and the reform of the Law of Conspiracy? Mrs. Harriet Beecher Stowe may to-day be forgotten, but the southern states of North America would not dispute the influence of Fiction upon the public mind.

The fact is that men, who generally read nothing else but newspapers, will read a good novel, and if the book brings before them principles which they have hitherto neglected, they will very often consider those principles again. It is necessary, however, that the novel shall appeal to them as being a fair record of the present or the past. They may as they read it be unable to pronounce on the thesis which is at the back of the book, but they will be led to consider and discuss it if the story, as a story, holds them. And it is here that the story which has a genuine religious motive often fails. Most of the great artists in fiction, when they have taken in hand a subject which is of religious interest, have written in a spirit of detachment. George Eliot’s *Romola* is an example, and the result is that men are more interested in Tito Melema than in Savonarola. Novels in which religion is necessarily much in evidence have been written either by literary artists who have studiously endeavoured to lay aside their own personal convictions, or if the books have been written with a distinctly religious purpose the hero and heroine have been unconvincing, the people in the story have not been alive.

When Cardinal Newman had abandoned prematurely his hope of maintaining the Catholic character of the Church of England, he did not disdain to employ his pen in the production of a novel with a religious purpose; but we are amazed to find that the exquisite grace of style which is one of the charms of the *Apologia* could not render Charles Riding interesting, or the novel *Loss and Gain*, of which he is the hero, readable.

It is perhaps dangerous to give another example from contemporary fiction, but those who justly admire Mrs. Humphry Ward’s subtle discernment of character and great and increasing mastery of form and style, will not be inclined to dispute the opinion that when, in *Robert Elsmere*, she undertook the defence of the modern Unitarian position, her hero was hardly a “Man’s man.”

The reason is not far to seek. The average man knows too much of the darker side of life; and the necessary effort made by the author of religious novels to depict that of which they, fortunately for their own souls, have had no experience, is not successful. Charles Kingsley’s undergraduate days were perhaps not without knowledge of the shadows, but he is happier in the Schools of Alexandria, or in the spacious days of Great Elizabeth, than in a tale of modern life such as *Two Years Ago*. His Broad Church Catholic teaching does not always find its way to the man in the street, and Henry Kingsley, whose life was so different from that of his illustrious clerical brother, has more of human interest in his stories.

The novel with a purpose, and especially with a religious purpose, fails only, when it does fail, because the author’s knowledge of the average man in his sins and his temptations to sin, is altogether incommensurate with his familiarity with the great religious and social problems of which his story would suggest a solution.

It is often supposed that the men do not care to find the subject of religion introduced in fiction, that they resent religion in a novel, as children resent the administration of a medicinal powder in a spoonful of jam; but the expert witness of publishers demolishes this opinion. After all, the religious claim is insistent, and life is untruly depicted when men and women are described in a story as uninfluenced by it. There is something unreal in a book which has no Sundays in it. Critical opinion as expressed in the notices of books in the daily papers, and in more weighty reviews, is very misleading, simply because the reviewers are generally very young men or women who know more or less of literature but very little of life. The wrath of the young man fresh from the University at the success of those books which do not ignore the spiritual needs of men and women amuses the experienced author.

“Faugh!” cries Mr. Jones of Balliol; “another batch of sin and sentiment!” “The Christian creed and the conjugal copula! Religion and Patchouli!” Yet the critic forgets that those who would reach the minds and hearts of men must deal with the problems of creed and character which men have to solve, each one for himself.

Our censors, dilettante, delicate-handed, with their canons of criticism might do worse than reckon up the number of English novels which have lived on into the twentieth century. They will be surprised to find that they are nearly all novels with a purpose and a religious purpose for their “motif.” Charles Reade when he wrote *Never too late to mend*, not only helped forward the humane and intelligent treatment of criminals, he showed how the Divine Image was stamped indelibly on human nature, and where it seemed to be obliterated could be restored. But Charles Reade drew real men and women. His characters are not puppets of the play-house but are alive. And Thackeray—*Clarum et venerabile nomen*—making hypocrites his quarry, and raining his quiver full of satiric shafts upon the hateful crew, never scoffed for a moment at reverent things, but with bowed head and hushed footsteps passed by the sanctuary. Therefore, these men are still living forces. Men will read other novels of the past as women look at old-fashion plates, and amuse themselves with the differences and contrasts of succeeding generations, but the novels which men buy in their hundreds of thousands, the novels which are reprinted again and again, the novels for which the publishers wait as their copyright is expiring, like heirs expecting a rich man’s death, that each may endeavour to be first in the field with an edition which pays no royalty to the author; these novels are those which truly represented life as it seemed in other days, life seeking ever to be reassured that One has come who offers to those who walk in darkness the light of life.

It is exasperating to some minds to discover that the man of the world is not altogether worldly, and that he finds in books which recognize religion as a considerable part of man’s life, something which gives to them reality and truth. Immature minds and inexperienced penmen are not impressed by the things which really matter, and in the interval between the University and man’s settlement in life much nonsense is written and spoken.

I speak from personal experience; and when I look back upon the reviews I wrote ten years ago, it is with invariable consternation, and sometimes a real sense of shame.

Nevertheless, there is some criticism of the religious novel which must be taken seriously. I have maintained that men generally in England are in a state of theological confusion, but that they are interested in religion if they can be induced to consider it. There is, as the great African Presbyterian wrote seventeen hundred years ago, a natural response in the hearts of men to the chief articles of the Christian Faith. There is a *Testimonium animæ naturaliter christianæ*. But there are some who can only be described by a quotation: “They are the enemies of the cross of Christ.” They are determined that the Catholic creed shall have no place in the counsels and considerations of social legislation. Of Jesus Christ they have said, “We will not have this man to reign over us;” and if there be any chance that a man’s books may catch the eye of the public and rouse people to think whether opportunism is really statesmanship, and empiricism in politics really prudent, if, in a word, the principles of Christianity are offered as a solution of social problems, then the author is attacked on every side. It

is suggested that his intention is insincere, that his knowledge is inadequate. The things which have been part of his painful discipline and development are described as his accepted environment. If a Bishop happens to find an illustration for a sermon in his pages, or a prominent Nonconformist divine recognizes that the laity like to read them, and says so; if any of those true hearts who love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity have been ready to see that men who have been rescued *de profundis*, men who have had experience of [Greek: ta bathea tou satana] are not thereby disqualified for duty in the field of Faith; if, in a word, books which claim for Christianity the first place in the thought of the time are successful, a very malignant hostility is aroused.

It is most probable that this hatred of Christianity will grow and increase. The world has never before been as it is to-day. The system of party politics has placed power in the hands of the democracy. The "working man" has at last discovered what he can do. He must make his choice between the secular and the religious principle. Hitherto the Christian pastors of the people have appealed to his emotions, and not without success. The emotions will always be the chief guides in conduct for many; but the leaders of the working men are hard-headed, well read in social science and politics; and, owing to the insufficient training of the clergy in these subjects, the politicians of the *proletariat* have conceived a sort of contempt for the parson and the minister and the priest. The small body of Unitarians, wealthy from their constant intermarriage with the great Jewish families, and opposed to an aristocracy which has only in the last forty years been willing to receive them, has been quick to see that the working man must be alienated from the Catholic creed, and his vote secured at any cost. On the railway bookstalls we may note the activity of the Unitarian propaganda committee. Fifty years ago it was not necessary to consider the opinions of the man in the street: the Unitarian minister and his congregation were comfortable in the assurance of their own intellectual culture and their kindly interest for the poorer classes. In politics they were Liberals, for an Established Church interfered with their sense of superiority, and the landed proprietors and the hereditary aristocracy socially ignored them. But they had no notion of calling into existence an electorate which should endanger the supremacy of the capitalist, and, like Frankenstein, they are afraid of their own creations, now that the working man has become the dispenser of Parliamentary power. It is vital to their interests that he should be diverted from further attacks upon capital, and encouraged to believe that it is the priest who is his true foe. "*Le cléricalisme voilà l'ennemi*" is a convenient cry. A vague Deism is not dangerous to wealthy manufacturers; but if the clergy are going to take up Christian Socialism it is time to be up and doing. So every weapon against the creed of Christendom is being taken down and examined, and many an old fallacy is refurbished and employed once more. Celsus is disinterred from the tomb in which Origen had buried him, and his filthy slander of the Blessed Virgin is printed as though it were a new discovery of historical research. Collins is called into court again as though Bentley had never exposed his ignorance, and Hume's *a priori* method is revived as though it had never been discredited; whilst Strauss and Renan are quoted as authorities, as if Westcott and Lightfoot had never been known. Shunt the working classes on a new line of rails. Set them shrieking against sacramentalists, and swearing at sacerdotalists, and we may quietly arrange our commercial combinations and protect our manufacturing interests!

I want to see the seats under the dome of St. Paul's filled not by only the middle-aged middle classes, who for the most part are Christian in creed, but by the young artisans and craftsmen, and the strong politicians who fill the Free Trade Hall in Manchester, and crowd the great Assembly Rooms of Birmingham and Liverpool when an election is drawing near. The timid members of the Episcopate who may be reminded that "He that observeth the wind shall not sow; and he that regardeth the clouds shall not reap," are not our only Bishops. Occasionally a Prime Minister offers for election and consecration a man who can reach the minds and consciences of men. Is it too great an ambition for a storyteller to try to arouse in people's minds a suspicion that after all something may be said for the Catholic Faith, and so to bring them to listen to those who know and can teach it? Each man must do his work with such tools as have come in his way. The Mission preacher will use his magnetic power,

the artist whose skill it is to build or to paint, will make his appeal to the love of order and beauty, the musicians will meet the heart through the ear. May not the writer of fiction use his psychological training and his knowledge of many sides of human life to create a story which shall set men thinking about the old doctrines which he believes to have lost none of their regenerating power?

There is danger lest men with good intentions should go blindly to work to redress and diminish social grievances. Individualism with its hateful cry, "Each man for himself and the devil take the hindmost," is now at a discount, but it may be replaced by a despotism of State regulation which will destroy the family and the home. There is, I believe, only one creed which can make the capitalist unselfish and the sons of labour satisfied, which will tell men that wealth means responsibility and that there is dignity in toil, which will teach the rich man to order himself lowly and reverently to those who are *his* betters and to hurt nobody by word or deed, which will teach the labourer that his chief need is not other men's wealth, but the "carrière ouverte aux talents" and the determination to do his duty in that state of life, whatever it may be, unto which God *shall* call him.

It is the Holy Catholic Faith which makes equality of opportunity for all men its earthly ambition, and offers refreshment and hope to those who are not strong enough to strive with the rest. The old men saw visions and we have found that they were prophecies, a young man may dream dreams. My dream is that the men who are doing the work of the world to-day may be taught that Christ is their best teacher and the Incarnate God their refuge and strength.

There is a tale of an acrobat and juggler who knew well that his tricks were the outcome of years of concentrated effort and constant exercise, and being moved by the Grace of God, he desired to offer the best thing he had to give to the Lord of Life. His best was his skill. He lived by it. Shown in the streets and the play places, it won for him his daily bread. His work was to give men amusement in their hours of recreation by an exhibition of his feats of strength and nimbleness. Could this, his one talent, be consecrated and devoted to God? So he considered, and humbly sought the sanctuary, and there before the Presence he performed his fantastic tricks which had cost him years of endeavour. The story is a parable which men have not been slow to read, and it has become the theme of the musician and artist.

Shall I offend my fellow-writers if I repeat it here in this connection?

## II

# THE FIRES OF MOLOCH

***“There is a lion in the way; a lion is in the streets.”***

Every three months with unfailing regularity small paragraphs appear in the daily papers headed “RECORD LOW BIRTH-RATE.” Some figures follow, and then occurs the sentence – unhappily a stereotyped one in our day – “*This is the lowest rate recorded in any quarter since civil registration began.*”

Now and again a blue-book upon the subject of the birth-rate is dissected by a journalist and the result appears in his newspaper as a series of startling figures. The story of England’s decadence is set out in the plainest language for every one to read.

At rarer intervals still, some prominent clergyman or sociologist writes or lectures in order to call attention to what is going on, and thus to bring home the spiritual and economic dangers of our racial suicide.

A few people read or listen and are convinced. A good many other people are too utterly ignorant of either the Philosophy of Christianity or the Science of Sociology to understand in the least what the point of view of the protesters is. According to their temperament, they smile quietly and dismiss the subject, or bellow their disgust at such a subject being mentioned at all.

“He who far off beholds another dancing,  
And all the time  
Hears not the music that he dances to,  
Thinks him a madman.”

A party which has the fools at its back is always in the majority, and discussion is stifled, alarm is lulled by the anodyne of indifference and the great number of honest folk who call themselves both Patriots and Christians have no time to spare from fighting and squabbling for money – in order that the dishonest men may not get it all.

Half-a-dozen problems of extreme national importance confront every thinking English man and woman in 1907. The air is thick with their stir and movement, and so great is the noise and reverberation of them that true “royalty” of “*inward happiness*” seems a thing impossible and past by in these troubled times. Be that as it may, it is quite certain that one of the most real and pressing of these problems is that summed up in the stock phrase “Record Low Birth-rate.”

We hear a great deal about the doings of a class of people who are referred to as “The Smart Set,” and it is actually said that its influence is having a serious effect upon the national character. I do not believe it for a moment. It seems a folly to suppose that a handful of champagne corks floating on a cess-pool has any far-reaching influence upon the English home. I mention that small section of society constituted by the idle and luxurious rich, because, whatever their vices are, they are being used as whipping-boy for enormous numbers of people whose lives are equally guilty with theirs in at least one regard – in the matter of which I am writing now.

I propose in this essay to discuss the question of the decline in the birth-rate from the Christian and Catholic standpoint. There is only one perfect philosophy, and all other half-true philosophies in the light of which we might consider such a momentous matter as this, lead only to the conclusion that expediency is the highest good. Without the incentive of the Christian Faith and without the light of the Incarnation one may sit in a corner and think till “all’s blue in cloud cuckoo land.” Christianity can alone be reconciled with Economics, theory and practice celebrating always the marriage of the King’s son, the wedding of Heaven and Earth, the spiritual and the material. Plato knew that it was

impossible to raise the Greek state to the level of his philosophic principles, and Aristotle frankly abandons the attempt to connect ethics and politics with the highest conclusions of his creed. We are in the same position to-day if we ignore the supreme truth which is our possession and which was not vouchsafed to the great Greek thinkers.

There is one cause and one cause only of the decline in the birth-rate and the beginning of the country's spiritual and material suicide.

The way of Nature is for every species to increase nearly to its possible maximum of numbers. This is a proved law, and nothing but the limitation of families by artificial means, or infanticide, can check its operation.

The truth is exactly as Dr. Barry put it nearly two years ago, "It stands confessed that the great, proud, English race, famous as a people for manly virtues, once the very Stoics of Christian Europe decline more and more to be fathers and mothers, will not be worried with children, and – cannot be spoken of in decent language."

It is a truth of history that when a nation begins to refuse the responsibility of providing for posterity it begins to decline.

The doctrines of Malthus in his great *Essay on the Principles of Population*, are no longer believed in by the Christian philosopher. Malthus was perfectly sound upon the ethical problem, and the "Neo-Malthusians," of whom I shall presently speak, have no right whatever to use his name upon their banners. Malthus, so the modern socialistic thinker, such as Mr. H. G. Wells avers, "demonstrated for all time that a State whose population continues to increase in obedience to unchecked instinct can progress only from bad to worse. From the point of view of human comfort and happiness the increase of population that occurs at each advance in human security is the greatest evil of life."

Malthus, however, never once suggested or advocated the limitation of population by mechanical means. He believed that it was a patriotic duty of men and women to *abstain from producing more children* than the State could bear, and it is as well to remove at once a popular misconception which stains the name of a good man and a powerful though mistaken thinker.

Otter says of him in a memoir, "His life was more than any other we have ever witnessed, a perpetual flow of enlightened benevolence, contentment and peace; it was the best and purest philosophy, brightened by Christian views and softened by Christian charity."

It is economically and from the sociological point of view that the modern student condemns the theories of Malthus and those who follow him.

Socialist thinkers disregard the entity of nations, and treat of the world and its population as a whole. The Christian Patriot loves his own country, believes in its destiny no less than he reveres its past, and knows that if our English nation is going to live, it must go on reproducing itself.

The "no room to live" theory is preposterous upon the face of it. In 1879, Lord Derby asked a somewhat obvious question. "Surely," he said, "it is better to have thirty-five millions of human beings leading useful and intelligent lives, rather than forty millions struggling painfully for a bare subsistence."

This has been made into a watchword by those who advocate the limitation of population.

It can be answered by a simple statement of fact – in our colonies there are places for a hundred million wives.

While I have not lost sight of the main object of this paper – to summarize the weight of Catholic Christian feeling upon the *mechanical* limitation of population, and to tell how this is being accomplished – I find that there is yet some ground to be cleared before coming to the main issue.

I have said that there is only one material cause of our decadence, but there are many reasons.

More than a year ago in one or two newspapers, particularly the *Daily Chronicle*, various sociologists gave the results of their thought upon the matter. I print a few extracts here.

The outspoken Dr. Barry wrote: —

...“As for religion, Christian or any other, when its dogmas are no longer believed, its ethics pass away,’ and he draws a picture of the rotten state of society in our Western world, which he attributes directly to the growth of agnosticism. The fact that the birth-rate in England has been declining for twenty-five years, and was lowest in 1904, seems to Dr. Barry to be due to several causes – ‘poverty and luxury, pleasure-seeking and disbelief in the Bible,’ and he adds, ‘The spirit of anarchic individualism that cries, “No God, no Master!” is needed to tell us why Englishmen and their wives, once dedicated to a blameless and lasting union, have fallen into the pit which Malthus or his followers digged for them.’ England alone is not at fault. ‘Wherever unbelief has taken hold, or doubt saps the ancient creeds, there Malthus reigns instead of Christ.’”

A “well-known public man” wrote: —

...“It is within my knowledge that certain flats in Mayfair and elsewhere for the married servant and artisan class are let on the express or implied condition that not only no children shall be brought into the tenements, but that none shall be born there. The direct consequence of this embargo on natural increase is terribly disastrous. Many footmen and coachmen in Mayfair could tell a tragical story of the results of compulsory sterility.

“A Japanese friend was telling me the other day that after an absence from England of a dozen years he is startled at the visible deterioration of the race and the great increase of penniless British weaklings, who add strength to no nation. ‘You English are losing both patriotism and religion, and consequently you are not only decadent but doomed, unless you mend your ways in the treatment of women and children.’”

I take the following from a leading article in the *Church Times*: —

...“After making all allowances for minor contributory causes, the fact remains and may be proved by a little inquiry, that married people have come to regard a large family as a curse instead of a Divine blessing. The birth-rates in London are instructive. Residential districts, with fewest poor, show the lowest rates. Hampstead 16.6 and Fulham 32.3 may be taken as typical districts at each end of the scale. Stepney with its Jewish population has a rate of 37. If the Aliens Bill is to be effective it will need a clause compelling Jews to limit their families, just as their Christian (!) neighbours do. The misery of it all is that we find the practice of child murder, for such it is in plain English, defended by men of education; lawyers, medical men, and even priests make no secret of their approval of it, if no more. And as working men become aware of what their ‘betters’ are saying and doing – and they are not slow to follow a similar course – the evil spreads. Our proper leaders, the Bishops, ought long ago to have dealt with this subject resolutely and firmly. But apparently a grain of incense is a more terrible thing to them than the murder of an existing if unborn personality. We can only judge by their public utterances, but we have yet to learn that as a body their lordships have spent a thousandth part of the time over this supreme question of national morality that they have devoted to the suppression of things disapproved of by Lady Wimborne and her league. The spectacle of disproportionate interest and action is melancholy, and indicative of incapacity to observe the real dangers to be faced.”

Again —

“The personal causes of this mischief are fear of pain (*i. e.* failure to see in pain the discipline of God which elevates human nature), hatred of duty, shirking of responsibility, love of pleasure, the substitution of hedonism for the religion of Jesus Christ the Lord, and ignorance of the Holy Spirit as Lord of *all* life. How far religious teachers are accountable for this we leave to their own consciences to say. The same causes are at work in the high mortality of infants. The honour of doing her best for her child is cast aside by many a mother because it involves a certain amount of self-restraint and some seclusion from the gaities of the hour; and recourse is had to all sorts of patent nostrums and infants’ ‘food’ (often the cause of rickets) until the hospitals are over full of young children, whose sufferings are the result (God grant that they may be the atonement also) of their mothers’ negligences and ignorances. Where there is not deliberate and wilful avoidance of maternal duty, there is neglect through awful ignorance.”

In the *Daily Mail* Mr. H. G. Wells writes: —

...“On the other hand think of the discouragements. While the mother toils in a restricted anxious home amid her children, she sees through her imperfectly cleaned window (one can’t do everything) the childless wives having a glorious time, going a-bicycling with their husbands, dressed gaudily with all his superfluous income, talking about their ‘Rights.’ As her children grow up to an age when they might help drudge with her or drudge for her, the State, without a word of thanks to her, takes them away to teach them and make good citizens of them. If the husband presently becomes bored by his restricted prolific household and its incessant demands, and absconds, or if he is simply unlucky and gets out of work, the State deals with her in a spirit of austere ingratitude. She is subjected to ‘charity’ and every conceivable indignity; she undergoes profounder humiliations than fall to the lot of the most dissolute women. If a husband ‘goes wrong’ and a woman has kept childless, she can get employment, she can shift for herself and be well quit of him, but a family disaster for a mother is catastrophe.

“I submit the situation is preposterous. I do not believe that with increasing intelligence and refinement women will go on marrying and bearing children under such conditions. I gather that the statistics of marriage-rates and birth-rates bear me out in this.”

And in the *Daily Chronicle* the Rev. Cartmel-Robinson: —

...“This phenomenon of the falling birth-rate is of course not confined to England; it is to be met with, you might say generally, in all Christian countries. It would be far more marked but for the tremendous decline in the death-rate, especially among infants. We ourselves should be vitally bankrupt but for this factor, and in France, as you know, the population is slowly dropping. That is an old story, but it is startling to learn, as President Roosevelt tells us, that the native-born American population is actually declining.

“One of the main causes, no doubt, is the determined pursuit of pleasure by all classes. The man will not take the burden of providing for a family, or, at any rate, a large family, upon himself, because that would mean a curtailment of his luxuries, perhaps even his necessities, while the woman refuses to spend all the prime of her life in child-bearing and child-rearing. She also wants to enjoy herself, and the pure, simple joys of maternity, which we used to think ought to be sufficient for a woman, have in many cases become irksome.

“For my part I do not think that you will ever rouse England to this question of home and children by an appeal to patriotism. The Englishman has become too cosmopolitan for that, and I am afraid the feeling is growing.

“The reason for the decline in America is said to be that women are becoming neurotic, and will not face the dangers and responsibilities of motherhood. No doubt that is true to a certain extent here also, and it is quite certain that among intellectual and highly-educated women, such as are trained at our universities in increasing numbers, the maternal instinct, the capacity for love, if you like to put it in that way, is apt to be destroyed.

“Then, among the middle classes thousands of young women, who not many years ago would have looked to marriage as their natural career, are earning their own livings, and are less eager to rush into matrimony.”

I have taken these extracts from the words of a few people crying in the wilderness. All of the dicta are at least eighteen months old. I am writing now, in November 1906, and three days ago the apparently inevitable paragraph again made its appearance: —

“RECORD LOW BIRTH-RATE.

“The births registered in England and Wales during the three months ended September 30 – 234,624, or 26.9 per 1,000 of the population – was the lowest rate recorded in any third quarter since civil registration was established.

“The average in the same quarters of the past ten years was 28.8.”

These opinions as to the reasons for the terrible decadence of England are doubtless all true. They are all contributory causes, and I do not think we can put a single one of them aside. Nothing could be more dismal or more hopeless reading. As one goes on, one experiences a sense as of a chill, deepening shadow.

Few people who read will be able to adopt the average man’s attitude towards unpleasant and disturbing matters – to sidle by with a deprecatory shrug of the shoulders.

Where then do we stand?

So far I have endeavoured to show (*a*) the entire indifference of the ordinary man and woman to the fall in the birth-rate; (*b*) the only light, in which, as I understand it, one can see the problem as a whole – in the light of the Incarnation; (*c*) the fact that the Christian Sociologist to-day is inclined to condemn the theory that the limitation of population is necessary at all, even by legitimate methods of abstinence and control; (*d*) the varied reasons which, in the opinion of those who have studied the question deeply, contribute to the one central and shocking fact —

*That incredible numbers of English men and women many of them professing themselves Christians, are constantly using methods to prevent the birth of children.*

Every parish clergyman in England is perfectly aware of what is going on. Every Nonconformist minister, and indeed every one whose work brings him in touch with large masses of people in the capacities of leader, adviser, or friend, knows it also. Just as the figures of the Registrar General form a gauge by which to measure the generality of the malignant influence, so the personal experience of any man of the world will supply particular evidence of the state of things within his immediate purview and surroundings.

Always remembering that the evil is progressive, is hourly increasing, the observer of social phenomena at once asks himself if there is not some definite and organized control and direction of it. The desire to obtain the gratifications of passion while evading its responsibilities is, perhaps, the strongest feeling implanted in the fallen nature of mankind. This is sufficient to create a demand for knowledge of how to obtain the desired end, and the demand has in its turn created the supply.

There is a definite literature upon the subject, there is a large body of highly-trained and cultured men and women ready and anxious to disseminate the necessary information to produce these results.

I propose to deal briefly, in the first instance, with the literature which urges and explains practices which the laws of God, the laws of Nature, and the teachings of the Church utterly and emphatically condemn.

The people who call themselves “Malthusians” (and to avoid an injustice to the memory of Malthus I shall here style them Neo-Malthusians) have an organ of their own in the shape of a periodical which is the official voice of a league into which they have formed themselves. The periodical has, I believe, an extensive circulation, and it is published at the lowest possible price. Moreover, in each number of it which I have seen the following notice appears: —

“The Secretary of the Malthusian League will be glad to send copies of back numbers of this journal to friends willing to distribute them for propagandist purposes.”

We see that an ordered press campaign is in progress. This periodical is most ably written and edited. Signed articles appear in it by men and women of standing and position. I find it impossible to doubt for a moment that these economists and scientists are not absolutely sincere, and actuated by a high and laudable desire to benefit the world in which they live.

It is unnecessary to give the title of the periodical, but immediately beneath it the following sentence is printed in large letters —

### “A CRUSADE AGAINST POVERTY.”

Here is the *raison d'être* of the journal plainly stated, and so far it is no more than indicating the precise aim of Malthus – to find an economic remedy for the sufferings of poverty.

I proceed to give some examples of the teaching inculcated in the journal, and in the first place quote from a review of *L'Instinct d'Amour*, by Dr. Joanny Roux, a very distinguished French physician: —

“Must all who refuse to procreate refrain from love? How easy it is to clothe one's self in the robes of social purity when replying to this question! The social purists tell the world that chastity is obligatory if procreation be not intended. It is impossible to carry out this view. The philosopher contents himself with studying sterile love and its consequences. He rejoices to think that thousands of infants are left out of the world who would have been doomed to suffer. The inconveniences resulting from some selfish people who refrain from parentage are as nothing in the balance when weighed against the horrors of indigence.

“Should we not, by acting thus, lead to a progressive diminution of the population? Certainly; but that would be a good thing. As if, forsooth, human progress depended on quantity, and not on quality! Take China as an example of quantity without quality. Some writers seem to wish that the earth should be filled up with miserable and suffering people. Malthus, that gentle clergyman, in 1798, was the first to protest against such a view. Over-reproduction, he showed, was the cause of poverty. He, however, thought the only remedy for this was chastity, and was quite opposed to *sterile love*.

“To accept sterile love, some say, is to run counter to Nature and natural morality. ‘No,’ says Dr. Roux, ‘it is the preserving of these laws. In all cases where we construct houses or warm ourselves, we get one law of Nature to defend us against the other which injures us. We must not forget that our instincts are fixed customs of very ancient date; and there can be no doubt that man has the right to intervene in questions of that sexual instinct if morality (*i. e.* happiness) requires it of him.’”

When one reads these passages a flood of light as to the real influence and direction of such teachings comes to us at once. The writer, no doubt sincerely enough, assumes as an axiom of his whole position, that there is no law but “Nature,” no morality but what he calls “Natural Morality.” We are, in fact, under no obligations to anything but the promptings of animal instinct which are part of our human nature.

We see immediately the inherent negation of Christianity implied in this attitude, and apart from the definite teaching of the Faith upon the question, which I shall enter into later, it is most important that we should realize that the holders and preachers of Neo-Malthusianism must always be opposed to Christianity. Even those people who do not profess their hatred for, or disbelief in our Lord in so many words, logically imply them. Christians who may not have troubled themselves about this menace to the State and its morals must be told in no uncertain voice that the movement is purely heathen in its position and built upon a basis of heathenism. Let us call things by their right names, and realize that the Neo-Malthusian worshipping Nature and the Chinese Coolie worshipping his Joss are only two manifestations of exactly the same thing.

Nor are the people who are attempting to turn marriage into a polite and recognized form of prostitution always so reticent as to their attitude towards the Christian Faith. In an article which professes to sum up the work of the Malthusian League I read: —

...“The medical profession in England is still too much under the sway of the Church and conventional opinion to be able to discuss the population difficulty, except to censure those who are wise enough to follow science instead of theological traditions derived from the *juventus mundi*. Dr. Taylor, of Birmingham, who is said to be an ardent Churchman, in a presidential address to the Gynæcological Society, attacked the views of the Neo-Malthusians.”

And again: —

...“We have to chronicle the prosecution of a new organ of the League, *Salud y Fuerza*, published in Barcelona, on account of an admirable article by Señor Leon Devaldez. Spain is the most retrograde of all our European nations; but the prosecution, we believe, will end in the defeat of the clerical party, as has been the case in England and in France. Science is destroying our traditional superstitions.”

I feel sure that a great many people have not the slightest idea that not only is this detestable propaganda utterly incompatible with the profession of Christianity, but must logically be opposed to it.

Here is a case in point. The official organ of the Malthusian League quotes a letter from “a warmhearted clergyman,” whose name is not given, in which he says: —

“The theory of Neo-Malthusianism finds a way out of the difficulty. It is the use of preventive checks which, while they make possible to all married persons the gratification of their natural desires, will prevent the possibility of the ordinary results of such gratification following. ‘This clergyman,’ adds the editor, ‘is one of the few who are fit to follow in the footsteps of Malthus, Whately, and Chalmers.’”

It is a not uninteresting speculation, which we may permit ourselves for a moment, as to the probable identity and character of this “clergyman.” One hopes, of course, that he was not a clergyman, and that the editor of the journal, naturally unfamiliar with ecclesiastical affairs, gives the title to some minister of one of the Unitarian sects. But if the writer of the letter is really an ordained priest, then he must surely be either —

- (1) An honest fool who means to do right, and does it as far as he knows how.
- (2) A dishonest fool who means to do wrong, and does it.
- (3) A fool who does whichever of the two he finds most convenient in this or that regard.

We need not, therefore, take the anonymous writer very seriously, but I quote him because the incident throws a side-light upon the psychology of the half Christian. It would be as unwise as it is unnecessary to quote freely from any of the Neo-Malthusian publications. My business in this essay is to make it quite clear to readers that there is a powerful and able organization which is constantly producing literature teaching the limitation of families. There are now six or seven "Malthusian Leagues" in existence, in England, Holland, Germany, France, Belgium, and Spain, and a Woman's International Branch uniting the women of these countries, while the printed matter issued by these organizations is enormous.

In the English journal to which I have been referring there are many advertisements of books and pamphlets in which the wording is undoubtedly designed to attract others than the earnest seeker after truth. I read, to give one example, that for eightpence post free I can obtain "*The Strike of a Sex*; or, Woman on Strike against the Male Sex for her 'Magna Charta.' One of the most advanced books ever published; intended to revolutionize public opinion on the relation of the sexes. Should be read by every person."

And lower down in the same column I am informed that the publishers of this sort of thing not only sell books advocating Neo-Malthusian practices, but are also willing to provide the means for committing them.

So much for the unsavoury products of the Neo-Malthusian press, products which would make the gentle old clergyman of Haileybury turn away in loathing and disgust could he but see them. Large as the output of this pseudo-economic obscenity is, it does not reach a twentieth part of the people who are responsible for the decline of the birth-rate. They have derived their knowledge from another channel, from the instructions of the medical man or his lesser colleague the chemist.

The poorer classes who, a few years ago were ignorant of this propaganda, are now being instructed in it by the men from whom they buy their medicines. Doctors, in the majority of cases, are perfectly willing to explain to married people how they may avoid having children by means other than those of self-control. As a rule the medical man seems to have no conscience at all in this regard. His point of view is too often merely materialistic and concerned with nothing but physical function, and he has become in many cases, the active agent of the malignant forces which are sapping our national honour and prosperity. In discussing the question, more than one person has expressed his amazement at the readiness of doctors to explain and advocate the limitation of families. The doctors of England form one of the finest classes in the community. I will venture to say that very few men and women arrive at middle life without experiencing a lively feeling of gratitude, friendship, or even affection for some medical man. The devotion to his high calling, of even the average English doctor, is a fact in the lives of nearly all of us. It is the more surprising, and alarming also, when we realize, as inquirers are forced to realize, how wrong and mistaken the general attitude of the physician is towards this aspect of the sexual relations of men and women. It is said that infidelity is rife among those who are educated to cure our bodily ailments, that the agnostic habit of mind is frequent in this profession. I am not competent to judge of this, or to pronounce an opinion upon such a statement, though my own experience is directly opposed to it. But it is certain that until the last fifteen years the scientific temperament was disinclined to believe in anything it could not weigh, measure, analyze, touch, or see. Huxley, for example, was a striking instance of this position. But science has been revolutionized within the experience of one generation, and the "cock-sureness" has disappeared. We are all realizing that "unseen" simply means that which does not appeal to our sense of sight, or perhaps that which does not appeal to any of our senses. One of the most famous and honoured scientific men of to-day, Sir Oliver Lodge, says in regard to miracles, "I think we should hesitate very much before saying that they are impossible, because we do not know what may be the power of a great personality over natural forces."

As the years go on, we may have great hopes that the regarding of psychology as just as much a necessary part of a doctor's education as biology, or therapeutics will produce a better feeling among

medical men in regard to the great question of which the statistics of the birth-rate form the gauge. Doctors will probably understand that harm done to the body and harm done to the soul react upon one another with remorseless certainty, and that there can be no real separation of spirit and matter. And directly this is understood we shall never find medical men recommending and assisting what Dr. Roux calls “sterile love” though some of us could find a very different name for it.

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