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THE PROPAGANDA OF FUTURISM

THE evangelistic work to which historians ascribe much of the prosperity of Britain and North America took its rise in the evangelical revival of the eighteenth century. At first a mere tricklet which even a child could have overstepped with ease, within the lifetime of some of its first promoters that revival became a great river, sending its waters forth into almost the ends of the earth, having on its way fertilized the soil of the Anglo-Saxon and Celtic Churches so richly that no table in those lands was without some of its mellow fruits, which ere long were being marketed throughout the world.

To read the introductory chapters of that most powerful revival of the Christian religion carries the mind back to the days preceding and following the altogether unique givings of the Holy Spirit which brought the Christian Church into being at Jerusalem in the beginning of our era. Only, in this most recent reformatory work of the Spirit the company of seekers for a true knowledge of God and things eternal, on whom descended the power of the Holy Spirit nearly two centuries ago, was even smaller than that which, in the privacy of the Upper Room and in the courts of the Temple at Jerusalem, had waited for the promise of the Father whose foretaste they received the evening after the Resurrection. The first members of the Oxford "Holy Club" were easily counted on the fingers of one hand; and when the power of the Spirit fell upon them, their number was still far short of a score in all.

On the completion of their preparatory course in the school of Christ, they received thus His full equipment for service in the world; and into the wide spaces of Britain and North America they sped forth, in lanes and fields and highways proclaiming that by the atoning work of Christ, God has been reconciled to men, everywhere beseeching and constraining each and all of their hearers to seek reconciliation with God in penitence and contrition of heart through Christ who, with pardon full and free in His hands, stands waiting to welcome back into His family circle all the weary and heavy laden. The proclamation of this gospel of reconciliation to rich and poor brought high and low crowding around the gates of the kingdom of heaven, with a steady stream of entrants pouring through into its courts.

Wheresoever needy communities were heard of, thither these heralds of this Divine reconciliation betook them ; the number of such preachers increasing almost month by month, especially when it had become plain that God meant to extend His grace and mercy to poor perishing sinners, by the agency, not only of men versed at the Universities in the lore of the ages, but also of the gifted sons and daughters of the manual toilers—the ploughman, the artisan, the costermonger, the cobbler, the fisherman, the sailor and the soldier—all whose hearts God had touched with a deep sense of their sinfulness and fired with His love by the Holy Spirit.

These all, following humbly but confidently in the steps of Christ and His apostles, became themselves truly apostolic men who, by their ministries, soon begat a race of faithful God-fearing people such as ere long salted the life of Britain and North America with the preservative of Christ's Gospel. In the early years of last century, so general had this work of God's grace become here and there that cautious observers began to think "the restitution of all things" (Acts iii. 21) was even then at the very doors—that *palingenesia* foretold by Christ (Matthew xix. 28), in which God according to His promise will pour out His Spirit on all flesh (Joel ii. 28-32, etc.), bringing in a reign of righteousness in which no man need any more admonish his brother, *Know the Lord* ; but all, from the least even to the greatest, shall know Him and serve Him.

II

That vision faded away all too soon. In the third and fourth decades of last century, when various subversive movements both here and in Germany were set afoot within the pale of the Protestant Churches, aiming to regiment them all in catholic order, one of these has quite eviscerated evangelistic work and transmuted its essential character—a movement forking out into two, one of which has split up in sects almost innumerable. The origins of this foray are associated with two names in particular, Henry Drummond, the London banker, and Edward Irving, assistant to Dr. Chalmers before he went to London in 1822 as minister of the Caledonian Church. In the course of a few years the association of those two men led to the formation of a new denomination, called "the Catholic Apostolic Church", which happened on this wise :—

(1) In 1823 Irving was introduced, apparently by Drummond at Albury Park, to a man named *Hatley Frere* who, after some years spent on the Continent, returned to England to promote a study of the Bible prophecies according to that *Futuristic method* conceived by a Spanish Jesuit, called Ribera. In March 1826, Irving stated (*Prophecies of Daniel and the Apocalypse*, pp. iii and iv) that under the tutelage of this Frere he had begun publicly to expound the tenets of Futurism a year or more previously, that is, early in 1825. To inculcate the mysteries of Futurism became to Irving thenceforth the very acme of Evangelism.

(2) Late in 1824, solicited by some persons unnamed, Irving had begun to study the Spanish language (*vide* Preface to his translation of *Ben Ezra*, p. xviii, and Oliphant's *Life of Edward Irving*, p. 198). Some months later he found on his study table a Spanish book, *La Venida del Mesias in Gloria y Majestad* ("The Coming of Messiah in Glory and Majesty"), by *Ben Ezra*, who claimed to be a Jew converted to Christ. In it Irving found the tenets of Futurism expounded far more fully still. Soon those interested in the subject begged him to translate the book into English, which he consented to do. Being thoroughly committed to Futurism ere he had quite completed the translation, Irving was informed that "Ben Ezra" had been in fact a Jesuit priest, named Emmanuel Lacunza; but still most charitably he continued to regard him as having been a converted Israelite. Without a drop of Hebrew blood in his body, and with no known contacts whatsoever with Jews, obviously Lacunza had not written his book for them. In his Preface (page 16 of Irving's translation) he forecasts its being placed on the *Index Expurgatorius* (as in fact was done immediately it was published); so for Roman Catholics also it certainly was not meant. On the other hand, those who put it in Irving's hands and published it with his name as translator, left no stone unturned to get it read by British and American Protestants, among whom its ideas have taken root, deeply and widely, though scarcely any seem to know aught as to their real origin or to sense their most deadly import.

(3) In 1826 the first of four conferences on prophetic subjects was held at Albury Park, on the invitation of Henry Drummond; a second in 1828; a third in 1829; and the last in 1830. In them the whole Futuristic scheme of prophecy was

expounded and debated. At first such outstanding leaders of evangelical religion as Daniel Wilson of Islington (afterwards Bishop of Calcutta), Hugh McNeile, Vicar of Albury, and Robert Story, Minister of Rosneath, attended. But on seeing how the movement was tending to put the Gospel doctrines of sin and salvation quite into the background, and to substitute for them the chimera of Futurism, they ceased to attend the conferences and opposed the movement. Even were Futurism substantially true, it deals with the externals of religion only, but the Gospel of Christ with man's heart and character.

So great at first was Irving's influence on this branch of the movement that it became popularly designated *Irvingism*. As a tug, he towed it out of the harbour. That done, its real masters not only cast off the tow-ropes, but even treated the tug as an enemy. Almost from the day it was launched, the greatest man ever seen in the movement was treated with great contumely, and ere long he died heartbroken and in utter desolation. If the movement survived that ignominy heaped on a generous, brave and gentle soul, it was only as stay the wizened apples, unsightly to the eye and acrid to the taste.

III

For the rise of its second branch we must cross over to Ireland. There, almost coevally with the happenings in London and at Albury, a group of youngish men had been forming in Dublin, notable among whom were John N. Darby, John G. Bellett, and Anthony N. Groves—to name no more. Bellett attended the 1828 Albury conference and sent Darby an account of the discussions there. Darby replied that his mind also had been some time moving in that direction. All the Dublin group being closely associated with Lady Powerscourt, a habituée of the Albury conferences, it may well be that Darby had learnt from her the new "gospel", and that she procured Bellett's going to Albury in 1828.

This lady organized similar conferences at Powerscourt House, near Bray, in County Wicklow. From the first, apparently in 1829, the Dublin brethren were prominent at these meetings, which in 1838 were still going on, with Darby and Bellett taking a leading part (Neatby's *Plymouth Brethrenism*, pp. 38-9). Invited by Lady Powerscourt, Irving visited Ireland

in 1830, and in Dublin was fêted by "the brethren". From conducting the Powerscourt conference, he went preaching and lecturing in that region, directing his discourses to an exposition of the "gospel" of Futurism.

Thus originated the second wing of a movement whose "gospel" appealed to the head rather than the heart, its chief aim being to devise and propagate notions of Christ's future kingdom on earth, not to set up His present kingdom in the hearts and homes of penitent sinners. That "gospel" the Dublin men received from the knot of people gathered around Henry Drummond, banker and financier of the movement, Hatley Frere, who on his Continental wanderings got primed in Futurism, and Edward Irving, translator of the epoch-making book written by Emmanuel Lacunza, S.J., alias *Ben Ezra* "the converted Jew".

Having established themselves in England by 1834, the Plymouth Brethren became the chief exponents of Futurism wheresoever they went. Everywhere they scattered such ideas as these—that all organized churches in Christendom are now corrupt and apostate; that the depravity of morals will everywhere get worse and worse, till the earth becomes one vast moral cesspool; that owing to the apostasy of the Churches a prime duty of all Christian believers is to forsake them and persuade others to quit the seething cauldron; that soon Christ will leave heaven with His holy angels and come down into our stratosphere with the sound of a trumpet which none but true and "separated brethren" will hear; that at the blowing of that trumpet all who sleep in Jesus will awake and arise from among the dead, "brethren" on earth will put on the body of immortality, and both together will be *secretly* caught up to meet the Lord in the air; that the earth being now bereft of all the godly and given over to the Wicked One, "the great antichrist" will arise to seize absolute power and dominion over the entire world, making a covenant with the Jews so as to use them for his purpose; that after three and a half years he will annul his bargain with the Jews and harry them in the remaining three and a half years of "the great tribulation", as previously he had ravaged others; and that at the close of "the tribulation" Christ will appear on earth with saints and angels to smite down and destroy "the great antichrist", and to execute judgment on all nations of the earth.

Through the Albury group "the brethren" learnt the seeds of these and other fanciful ideas from the writings of the Jesuits Ribera and Lacunza; and they are still being developed in a way that does more and more violence to the truth of God set forth in Holy Scripture.¹

IV

Prior to its taking shape as *the Catholic Apostolic Church*, two events in the Albury movement reacted on the Dublin group towards separation. The opposition into which evangelical churchmen like Hugh McNeile, Haldane Stewart, Daniel Wilson, Robert Story and E. T. Burder were forced after having contributed largely to its early success, made the Dublin men cautious about some of the developments begun in London; though to the antinomianism inherent in Futurism they seem to have remained quite insensible. As early as 1826 Daniel Wilson had become alive to the danger of this, and had stressed the need "to mark strongly the distinction between nominal and vital religion, . . . the necessity of the Holy Spirit's work of grace, of true conversion to God, and of daily supplies of the influences from above." In separating from the Albury circle the evangelicals insisted that God's primary and grand purpose in giving the Bible to men was, and is, not to fill their minds with debatable ideas, but to humble and chasten their hearts, and renew them by Love Divine. This the Dublin men were prevented from reaching by having accepted the general scheme of Futurism.

The practice of *speaking in tongues*, begun at the Caledonian Church in 1831, made the Dublin "brethren" sheer apart. This novelty was based on the idea that at times the Holy Spirit so inspired certain of the Albury group that they, as did the prophets of old and the apostles, received direct messages from God, sometimes delivered in what was claimed to be an *unknown*

¹ One of to-day's commonest expositions of Futurism, Scofield's *Reference Bible*, dealing with the supposed "secret rapture of the saints", baldly affirms (p. 1272) what, if not unintended blasphemy, is certainly most repugnant to the sense of the Bible and to the theology of the Reformation, that the Holy Spirit will then be withdrawn from the earth; but that, nevertheless, "the great tribulation will be a period of salvation" (p. 1337), in which the Israelites will be brought to know Christ and a great multitude of Gentiles saved—a salvation to be effected, not by the operations of the Holy Spirit, but "by power, not persuasion" (p. 977). If this could in any sense or measure be true, we might well think the regimes headed by Fascist or Proletarian dictators are of a diviner order than that set up by our Reformers. Let us keep in mind, then, whence the whole gamut of these false and pernicious ideas were derived.

tongue. Many of the Albury innovations resulted from such "messages", a feature the Dublin men could by no means homologate or approve of.

After the Catholic Apostolic Church was formed, a factor which drove the Dublin circle to complete separation was the creation of a hierarchy composed of leaders of the Albury group. "Divine messages" uttered by some of their "prophets" enjoined that certain leaders of the movement should be recognized and obeyed as "apostles" called by the Lord to reorganize the body on "apostolic" lines and to govern it according to their unfettered discretion and will. To all the ideas and feelings of the Dublin men this ran clean contrary. So from the parent body they sheered off, completely and finally. But each half, when they had separated, held fast to the Futuristic teachings derived from the book of the Spanish Jesuit Lacunza. As the Catholic Apostolic Church was never more than an unhealthy exotic, exerting no powerful or abiding influence on the nation, and even less upon the world, its story may be dropped here.

Wheresoever "the brethren" went, they aimed, not to convert the ungodly and the profligate, but to seduce and proselytize members of the Churches. In a word, they were "sheep-stealers" *par excellence*. At first the pretence that all members of their "assemblies" were in all respects on an equality with one another was the great lure used to draw people away from their Churches, till the hollowness of the sham rendered it unattractive. A bait with which they have hooked many unwary fish has been the plea that, by holding the tenets of Futurism and joining one of their "assemblies", people could rest assured of being caught away in "the secret rapture of the saints", thus escaping the terrible woes of "the great tribulation". But many nibble at that bait who avoid the hook. It is truly surprising how many remain in their several Churches after ingesting the idea in question. Hundreds of times over, touching the supposed nearness of "the great tribulation", I have heard words to this effect, *How blessed will it be to be caught suddenly away before that awful time begins!* But could selfishness more smug be well imagined? What Christian heart indeed, with loved ones around *some of whom* must in such case be in danger, would not bleed to death at the bare thought of being unable to move hand or foot to save them? No, to that heart such

a bait can have no attraction, but with Moses, when faced with a lighter tax on love and offered a far higher premium on a policy of abandonment, must choose rather to be blotted out of God's book of life. Is the Christ of God become wholly forgotten? Is there now no meaning in His clarion call, Whosoever would save his life shall lose it: and whosoever shall lose his life for My sake shall find it?

As regards personal salvation through Christ, the rank antinomianism which (in theory at least) has characterized aggressive Brethrenism from the outset must be held but a corollary to its Futuristic doctrine. But also it is highly remarkable that, if we except "the fifth monarchy men" of the Commonwealth time, "the brethren" were almost the first body of Christians since the Reformation to adopt and promote antinomian doctrine. A study of the religious experience of Ignatius Loyola, followed by an examination of the evidences of Jesuit influence and agency among the fifth monarchy men, strongly favours the idea that in Futurist Brethrenism this Jesuit fruit has sprung naturally from a Jesuit root.

Yet more, a master key to the mysteries of militant Brethrenism lies in its combination of an ostensibly keen individualism with a real autocracy which Czar or Pope might almost have envied—a hybrid first seen at the French Revolution of 1789-1815. Howsoever this reappearance of that revolutionary combination be explained, it is beyond doubt that the temper prevalent in Britain and America a century ago, with many very favourable to the trend of things in France, largely accounts for the thumping success of Brethrenism among Protestants there and here. No other subversive movement of that period produced half so well the French combination of sham liberty with inflexibly rigid despotism.

The closer we scan the history of this parasitic hybrid, the deadlier becomes the significance of its emergence in the garb of the Brethren movement. This part of their system the Dublin men did not acquire from *Irvingism*, though it may have reached them through Hatley Frere. Or perhaps they got it from that high Continental personage whom Irving held in awe so great as seldom to have mentioned and never to name. Be that as it may, the Dublin "brethren" were quick to learn that the strong and widespread demand for ultra-democracy could be easily met by nominal concessions to plebeian feeling under a

dictatorship almost fanatical, as was the case in the French Revolution, and as we now see in every type of political socialism and communism. Not least perhaps in the garb of "Bible-loving Brethrenism" a finger was still pointing back to the parent and true prototype of all these cults, the old Paraguay Republic of the Jesuits; for in this garb it aims at side-tracking such as have come to know God through believing with the heart His every word in the Bible touching our salvation. To get the mind filled with fancies as to Christ's future kingdom on earth can hardly fail to quench our zeal for the spread and establishment of His present kingdom in the hearts of men and over the nations of earth.

It falls to be added that quite early in the history of the movement a large section, perhaps a third of the whole, adopting much more evangelical views, broke away from the rigid "brethren"; and it is pleasing to record that these "open brethren" have continued to display a growingly pacific spirit towards their fellow-Christians of every denomination. It is even a greater pleasure, a matter indeed for heartfelt gratitude to the most bountiful Giver of every good and perfect thing, that among these "open brethren" especially there have been many men and women of most saintly, devout and benevolent disposition and mode of life, whose praise may very justly be in all the Churches of Christ. Perhaps also it is generally true of our day that the evils that have come through Brethrenism are more alive and active outside their community than within it, or at least in more aggressive activity.

So far as my knowledge of the case goes, it warrants also an expression of my conviction that not one in a hundred of the "brethren" of our time, perhaps not one in ten thousand even, has any inkling of the most important facts above set forth or of the deductions which fall to be drawn from them. Nothing I have said, therefore, is meant to reflect in any way on the good faith or on the well-meant efforts of the "brethren" generally.

V

On the other hand, let me not be understood to minimize in any way the damage done by the movement. The greatest damage caused by Brethrenism has resulted from its mishandling of the New Testament truth of spiritual regeneration. By its

antinomian perversions of the Reformed doctrines of justification and sanctification by faith, whereby in practice it did away with the necessity of repentance unto life and thorough purgation of the heart from its inveterate tendencies to evil; by its illegitimate infracture of the unity and solidarity of Holy Writ in order to give face and force to its basic idea of "Dispensationalism", whereby it set Scripture in flat contradiction to Scripture, so that to the uninitiated it makes God appear a changeful and rather hopeless muddler trying out various plans in successive "dispensations" of His administration of world affairs; and by its twisting and warping of what God has said in the Bible, to give currency to the ideas taught under the doctrine of "Dispensationalism", it has quite elided and nullified the elements of God's Word which prepare poor sinners for a saving change of heart and those the Holy Spirit uses to effect what the New Testament calls *the new birth*. Thus, in a matter wholly essential to the prosperity and spread of the Evangelical Faith, aggressive Brethrenism has struck a resounding and deadly blow at the root.

Another such blow simultaneously struck in England at the selfsame Bible truth of spiritual regeneration throws some light on this. Somewhat over a century ago began the Tractarian movement in which the Roman Catholic heresy of *baptismal regeneration* became a pet theory. Its introduction within the pale of Christianity dates from the third to the fifth century of our era. It was derived from pagan sources; it contradicts the whole tenor of New Testament teaching concerning the new birth; and—the idea that the Christian ministry is a priestly caste in which the rank and file members of the Churches have no office or place, having insinuated itself from the later second or early third century—baptismal regeneration was eagerly seized upon and used to support and give effect to the spreading canker of sacerdotalism.

This heresy the Tractarians (now called *Anglo-Catholics*) took over from the apostate Latin Church. Their movement is held to date from 1833; and from the outset (though at first strictly *sub rosa* amid a loud clatter of ultra-Protestant denunciations of the Papacy as if in defence of the Reformation) they claimed that they, with the priests of Rome and the Eastern Churches, form a sacerdotal order, and that baptisms performed by them or other duly authorized agents do in fact effect a spiritual regeneration of the subjects baptized. Thus from the side of

pretended priestly powers and privilege, the Tractarians struck at this citadel of British Christianity at the epoch when from an opposite direction it was assailed by the Futurist Brethren. Came that to pass by some mere coincidence ?

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