

The Silvertown Journal

Published every Friday morning at Silvertown, Oregon, by
J. E. HOSMER, Editor.



Entered at the postoffice at Silvertown, Oregon, as second-class matter.
Subscription, 50c per year, in advance. Single copies, 5 cents.
Advertising rates made known upon application.

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PROGRESSIVE TENDENCIES IN RELIGION

By Richard F. Fischer.

There is perhaps no branch of study so interesting and fascinating as the evolution of man and of humanity as revealed and depicted in the historical development of great religious movements, or systems of religious worship, which even to this day exert great influence upon our spiritual, moral and social ideals of life.

In order to appreciate this evolutionary process and these progressive tendencies in religion we shall have to read a few pages of history.

In order to more fully appreciate the radical and fundamental differences, the new plan and method, the new ideals and hopes which Christianity (essential) brought into the world, we shall be obliged to make a brief inquiry into the character, purpose and general effect of the old systems of religion. By contrast and comparison alone can we ascertain their respective values. Let us realize that the hope and life-giving gospel of Jesus was not only a progressive gospel revealing progressive tendencies in religion; it was not only a forward and upward movement toward higher attainments, but—it was a dynamic gospel. It was a revolutionary message with revolutionary force and intent!

Was not its purpose the complete overcoming of the old powers of darkness? The complete overthrow of the old, corrupt and perverse system?

Here then we note a revolutionary intent and purpose fulfilling itself in evolutionary method and process. In order to trace both method and process let us take a brief glance at beginnings.

In the earliest stages of civilization we find our primitive ancestors worshipping stones and sticks. Later we find him making images and totems of wood and stone, making fantastic and grotesque shapes, begotten of their own elemental and fear-bound imaginations.

A little later our primitive ancestors, rising slowly in the scale of development, begin to personify and deify and worship nature's forces: Sun, moon and stars; earth, water, fire, air, until through centuries there are evolved great systems of pompous and ostentatious worship.

Symbolic mysticisms, ceremonies, magic, sacrifices, burnt offerings, vicarious atonements and elements of substitution are indispensable elements. Men are actually seeking to buy divine favor by rich gifts, or trying to placate the wrath and anger of offended deities.

Thus we find throughout the ancient world a rich and diversified fabric of idolatrous worship; each system serving its own gods and goddesses; each bearing its own magnificent temples, its sacerdotal orders and mystical cults, its own mysteries and sacred shrines; each temple and god having its own priesthood and hierarchy.

What was the chief function and purpose in and of all this religion?

What share and part did the people have therein?

What influence did it have upon the people? What were the conditions of the people? As we judge a tree by its fruit, so also must we judge religion by the influence it exerts in the life of man.

The people had no part in this magical and ceremonial worship.

The effect and influence upon the people was most demoralizing and degrading.

Man and humanity were of little or no consequence. Humanity existed in passive submission and in slavish subjection until at last the entire structure collapsed beneath the weight of its own corruption and through internal weakness.

The chief purpose of Paganism was and is the formal, lavish and idolatrous worship, adoration and glorification of its gods and deities! and—the elevation of the priestly class to supreme rule and power!

The only and inevitable result was the complete subjugation of the people; moral and spiritual bondage leading to degeneration, decay and death.

It is not difficult to see how under such a system of corruption and usurpation the masses became hopelessly bound in superstitious awe and fear, leading to self-destruction.

Such is the inevitable result and fate of Paganism and of any system of religion that fails to bring man and people into conscious self-recognition of their divine possibilities; that neglect the cultivation of the higher spiritual nature of man.

Into the darkness of this spiritual and moral degeneracy came the precious light of the new gospel.

With what result? What always does happen when the light of progressive reform comes into conflict with organized darkness?

Turn on the light and the darkness flees!

We can easily realize the alarm and consternation struck to the very heart of this perverse and corrupt system, which took no account of man or humanity by the new revelation, by the new gospel of Jesus, which made man the very corner-stone of its foundation.

Not mythical gods and idols, but the divine Presence—the indwelling Father—the inner Light and Life—the God in man, the man in God—these are the basic elements in the teachings of Jesus.

Eternal Oneness and identity is the foundation of man's divine sonship upon which Jesus erects the glorious temple of the living God.

That temple is man! is God's own Humanity!

Jesus completely revolutionizes the old system by reversing the order and method; by placing the emphasis upon the "Inner Life."

Not burnt offerings and sacrifice, not magical intercession or blood atonement, or vicarious substitution, but the conscious presence of the Spirit of God within the purified heart! Not outward conformity and observance, but inner realization is the key of the new gospel of deliverance.

Here is a radical and revolutionary departure from the old system and methods of religion!

Here is a new revelation! a new light revealing a new path! opening a new door.

But—here also is the beginning of a great conflict between the old Pagan shadow of corruption and superstition leading to bondage and death—and—this new radiant light of essential Christianity, this divine light of deliverance and salvation leading unto life and liberty!

The early Christian church spread that light. It was a church rich in the nearness and fullness of the Spirit, free and untrammelled.

Its utterance was spontaneous—it was with power.

Every student knows what happened when Christianity became the state religion of the Roman Empire.

He knows what happened at the Council of Nicea.

How the true light became hidden beneath the old bushel of Pagan formalism.

How the new wine was forced into old bottles, etc., etc.

He also knows what the conditions were in Christendom during the Middle Ages and how and why these became known as the Dark Ages.

The deeper significance of the Protestant Reformation and the causes which led to the same, are well known.

It was a later outbreak of the same old conflict between the same old Pagan power of darkness and the new Christian light!

And the same old struggle is going on still—and—must continue to go on until men shall be free from all bondage of fear and superstition; until corruption, greed and poverty shall be overcome; until justice shall be established in society; until the Golden Rule shall rule! until in the Unity of the Spirit the world shall have found the lasting blessings of Peace; until the love of human brotherhood shall unite the peoples of the earth in the promotion of the best interests and holiest hopes of life through knowledge of truth; by the power of love.

To do all the good you can is to be a saint in the highest sense. To do all the good you can; this is to be really and truly spiritual. To relieve suffering, to put the star of hope in the midnight of despair, this is true holiness. This is the religion of science.

The accumulated experience of the world is a power and force that works for righteousness.

What is Religion.

A judge should either sit beyond the reach of prejudice, in some calm that storms cannot invade, or he should be a kind of oak, so that before any blast he would stand erect.

Interviews.

A great man does not seek applause or place; he seeks for truth; he seeks the road to happiness, and what he ascertains he gives to others.

Voltaire.

REPLY TO MATERIALISTS

By Guy Fitch Phelps.

In The Silvertown Journal of November 13th appear several articles by Olin Ross in reply to several of mine. These replies are characterized by the presence of the usual "straw men" which infidels are determined to set up. I will answer what is worth while in his articles.

He finds fault because I write in a "mob fashion." But he will know the reason why my articles are without order when I remind him that I have been trying to follow the vagaries of materialists. I did not say that all the scientists named upheld the Bible account of creation, but that they believed an Infinite God manipulated the whole scheme of creation. Darwin believed this in part. There are many evolutionists who are not materialistic infidels. My quotations are correct, and the fact that Mr. Ross chooses to doubt them is not to the point. I did not say that Mr. Huxley denied evolution; I said that he was opposed to Darwin's teaching on the origin of species, which is true. I will quote Huxley on that point. He says: "After much consideration, and with assuredly no bias against Mr. Darwin's views, it is my clear conviction that . . . the group of animals having all the characteristics exhibited by species in nature ever has been originated by selection, whether artificial or natural." There you have it, and materialists are asked to be consistent and tell us which prophet they follow, Darwin or Huxley? Let me ask materialists to explain why, with the reason of man to aid, it has been impossible to produce one single species of original characteristics? Since man began to cultivate grain he has tried to improve it, but wheat is still wheat, oats are oats, turnips are still turnips, and so on to end. Why don't evolutionists settle the case by helping matter produce an eye or a fin or a tail of something. They have all the aid of science at their command, and all the laboratories are open to them; let them compound living matter from dead matter. Go at it, Mr. Ross, and produce the tip of a toe, and we will believe. Why is nature impotent to produce with all the aid of accumulated science the least tip of a hair, or make the smallest cell to divide, with man to aid, while she birthed the endless forms of nature without aid? Such utter foolishness! Will materialists please explain this inability?

Next Mr. Ross notices my statement "that man has always been man," and seems to try to show that I contradicted myself by saying that men have grown shorter or were taller in this age or that. Will the readers of this debate please take note of this argument? It shows how utterly barren the desert fields of materialism are for a blade of reason. What I said was that wherever we find man, HE IS A MAN, not an ape or a half ape, and the fact that the race is getting shorter or were once quite tall, has no more to do with evolution from tadpoles (tadpoles!) than to say that Jones in the North end of town is taller than Smith in the South end. I wonder if Mr. Ross can see this? I call upon materialists to bring their evidence that there is a gradation of animals up to man; I call for the fossils from the rocks and the soil. If they have them let them produce them. They do not exist, and men who are read on the subject KNOW THEY DO NOT.

Ross knows it, if he is fit to be in a debate with a school boy. Haeckel said: "Perhaps the apes nearest to man may be discovered somewhere to show what the immediate progenitor of man was." In every relic of man, in every fossil of every living creature, beast or bush there is not the faintest evidence that it ever was in process of evolution. Such evidence is not found, it does not exist. Infidels have searched all earth for it, but it does not exist, and materialists know it. When they bring it we will have a little more respect for their views. But bald assertions from the haters of God will not go down; we demand more. Now while it is in my mind I will give Mr. Ross something he can get hold of, and will ask him to come on with his answer: WHAT HAS KILLED EVOLUTION AS A WORKING CREATING METHOD IN THE UNIVERSE? Things are not created that way now? If evolution ever was the order of the Cosmos it never could, in the very nature of the case, change. But materialists always speak of evolution in the past tense. Mr. Ross refers to the lowest heathen, the Negroes, etc., to prove that men do change. Marvelous! Does he mean by that that the worst forms are headed for monkeys and other animal forms? Does he reverse his own theory of evolution in order to say something for it? If Negroes and bush men are the products of evolution, the process being downward, what becomes of his claim that evolution always works from the less perfect to the perfect? How true it is that when a man starts with a false foundation every effort to establish truth in his theory will land him in difficulty. He goes

on to insist that wolves have become dogs (unproved) and that breeders change cattle and horses. All will be well for Mr. Ross, if he will go to his pasture and breed a horse into a cow, or a cow into a horse. That would forever establish evolution, but until he does he has no case, for that is exactly what evolution is claimed to have done. Materialists claim that an ape became a man, and that a fish became a creature with legs, and so the chain developed, till the thing that wasn't a man and wasn't an ape wanted to be a man, and simply gave a heave, leaped the gap and found himself a man. Then stranger still, that creature felt that strange thing which miracle-haters call "cosmic emotion" and by an "ineffable cleavage" (I should say so! he divided himself into a man and a woman, and immediately he dropped the old process, and went the tadpole method one better, and put evolution out of the universe by bringing on other men in the good old-fashioned way. But I protest that to change a cow into a horse is not so great a feat as to for an ape to make himself a man, and then make a woman out of himself. Talk about the rib story! Well, let materialistic God haters come on with a case of cow-horse and we will listen to them on the point of "cosmic emotion," etc.

As to the Neanderthal skull it proves nothing, for it has been matched among the degenerates of vice in any city slum, and Mr. Huxley does for the oldest skull discovered when he says that so far as "size and shape are concerned it might have been the brain of a philosopher." Dr. Pfaff, in an article: "When did man appear on the earth?" shows by a scientific table that the average size of the very first skulls was 18.877 as to 17.795, the first representing the most primitive skulls and the latter the skulls of the modern hottentots. And he shows that the skulls of the stone age were larger on the average than the skulls of modern Europe. In fact, the average size of skulls in the stone age in every land was larger than the average skulls of Europe, everything taken. This is a scientific fact, and seeing that Mr. Ross accuses me of not liking science, we will see how he takes to this bit of it? The Cro-magdon skull is a pattern of perfection (in heads) though it belonged to the earliest stone age.

His reference to the pests that are in the world is easy for a believer in the Bible. It says God cursed the earth because man had sinned. Sin and a curse always go together. It is up to materialists to show why evolution produced such things. Many of the things that curse men are brought upon them by their own deeds, such as insanity, physical disorders, etc.

Then comes a long overflow on what the church has done. This is one of the men of straw of which I spoke. All I said about the work of the church for the nations and the slums is true, and that is what made Mr. Ross desperate. And I repeat that if materialists have something better than Christianity to lift the heathen, let them bring it out: Let them go to some land AHEAD of the Christian missionary and civilize the heathen. Will they do this? Hardly. Why? ? ? If any one who may read this debate will mention a case where infidels started a rescue home for harlots, or opened a refuge for the down-and-outs I will be glad to get it. Does not the record of Girard College show that it takes Christianity to keep up an institution? We did have an infidel college at Silvertown, Ore. What is its record? Most of the leaders of that old infidel club have b'own their heads off with shot guns. The record shows for itself. The school? Gone where everything that rejects God will go. We had another materialistic school or information bureau at Forest Grove, Ore. What became of it? It danced and cursed and snarled itself to death, to the relief of a self-respecting community. All he has said about the church dwindles to nothing when I remind him that Christianity consists in doing and being what Christ taught. His word said: "He that committeth sin is of the devil." Infidels know this; that is why they club a hypocrite so mercilessly. Let those who snarl at an organization go to the New Testament and find what a man must be to be a Christian, just as Mr. Ross expects me to go to Darwin and Haeckel and Huxley for evolution. Let him be as honest as I am. I am taking his authorities, but I dare him to take mine. What would become of his man of straw if he tested the actions of an apostate hierarchy by the pure gospel of Christ? What do I prove? Simply that the Catholic Church is an apostate thing, the fearful falling away beginning far back in the first centuries. Has Mr. Ross never heard of Luther, or Huss, or Wycliffe? And by the by, "Brother" Ross, who was it that died in the Inquisition, and at the stake? CHRISTIANS! What infidel ever died for principle? But where did the Catholic

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Church get her seventy-one million martyrs? Answer it, please. I know the record of the Catholic beast, but please don't call that the Christian Church, and please meet the issue. You might as well charge the doings of Mohammed to the Christians (he believed in God) as to say that the true Christian church did what we all know the vice-rotting Catholic church has done. There is nothing to your point, Mr. Ross. We are still after the old harlot of the Seven Hills. The Bible prophesied that such would come. Read the seventeenth and eighteenth chapters of Revelations.

Then he says that Infidels have made this world worth living in, by fighting the Bible and God. That is certainly news. I wonder how Mr. Ross will account for the fact that Christianity is increasing in all the world. The man who launched the Chinese Republic was a Christian, who studied in America. Yuan-Shi-Kai said to the Christian missionaries: "In regard to your presence in this province I willingly testify that it makes for good, and that the teaching you impart is calculated to help all who embrace and follow its precepts. Moreover, its effects upon our people are BENEFICIAL." So they are. Try them, Mr. Ross. That is the testimony of a heathen to Christianity. But Christianity is increasing! It follows that either the world is getting worse, and evolution is a fake, or that Christianity is good and infidelity is a curse. Mr. Ross may choose his horn.

No, I do not dread science. I love every line of investigation. I love geology, botany, astronomy, and all the rest. They all reveal God to me. What I treat lightly is the silly notions of a lot of mud-mixers who tried to teach what they do not believe themselves,

and for which they have not produced a single case of proof. I happen to know that evolution has no foundation in fact. It is purely a theory, and I dare to look the man in the eye who calls me a fool because I will not accept his foolishness, and say so.

Then as usual comes the Tom Paine sop. It is amusing to find infidels, claiming Christian subjects, though it is not strange—they need them. Washington an Infidel! The man who prayed in the snow at Valley Forge; the man who was a strict member of the Episcopal church, and attended with his mother. Yet Mr. Ross says he was an infidel! Lincoln an infidel! The man who compounded a harmony of the New Testament books. We could loan infidelity these men were it not for the disgrace, and have plenty left, but Mr. Ross has stated what he ought to know is not true, and if he asserts it again I shall prove it so he will wish he had not made the assertion. And now as to Tom Paine. First he was not educated, that accounts for his statements on the Bible. He saw no schooling after he was thirteen. He was dismissed from being excise-man because of fraud (debt-dodging). He was discharged the second time for the same reason. He was dismissed from the Congressional Commission because he exposed his office. He made a bitter attack against Washington. (By the by, Ross, which infidel was right?) He conducted a tobacco shop at Lewes. On his return from France he became profligate in morals, and last, but not least, and worst of all, he PREACHED AS A METHODIST IN LONDON. That is enough to choke even Olin J. Ross himself, if he is a lawyer. This is about the cleanest thing Paine ever did. All of this you will find in the International Encyclopedia. Read it.