

People to people calls. With massive speed
The flood goes northward, foaming through despair,
To burst the dams of hate. "Our leaders lead,
But no man tells us where!"

The parsons paddle in their pools of talk;
They pass iniquity a fancy name,
Implore the populace with them to walk
And share their shame!

There was a Heaven once. Where seraphs sang
And God's cool judgment calmed man's querulousness,
Looms now a gibbet huge enough to hang
These parsons and this press.

Along the ruined whiteness of the High
Loop-shadows wait, a sombre gallows tree
Directs the doomed apostles of the Lie
To their last Calvary.

Who knew the ultimate way? Who held the light?
Judges and priests forgot and calmly threw
Their weight behind the wicked prince of Might—
And yet, the people knew!

They knew, perhaps they prayed. The smoky screen
Of sacerdotal blindness held them till
Hope breathed upon their souls and made them clean,
And Truth came laughing over a green hill.

There's gladness in Truth's sunken eyes, maybe,
Confined to miry roads and days of dearth,
She grows a little happier to see
One green spot on a scorched and blasted earth.

—FURNLEY MAURICE.

"The Commonweal"—An Australian Monthly Journal of Progressive Religious and Social Life, and of International Peace and Goodwill. Edited and published by Rev. Charles Strong, D.D. Subscription, 3/6 per annum. Obtainable at Cole's, or at The Australian Church. Free specimen copies on application.

THE FUTURE.

(Substance of New Year's address by Charles Strong, D.D., Minister of the Australian Church, Melbourne.)

Are we going to return to the same old selfish struggle, the same old mammon-worship, the same old jealousy and rivalry, the same old game of "beggar my neighbour," the same old nationalism with its war disguised as peace, its great fleets and armies, its great cities seething with poverty and vice, the same old class war and industrial chaos, the same old restless pleasure-seeking, selfishness, and sordidness? If so, there can be no "new year" for us. A Russian gentleman, who had been living in Australia for some time, said to me lately, when asked what he thought of Australia, "You have no future." I hope he was wrong. But one must honestly admit that if the future of a people, like that of an individual, lies in its ideal, which is labouring to embody and realise, then there is much in our social life to justify the sweeping criticism. They are no friends to Australians who hide the truth from them.

But if the social ideal of Australia and of the world is to be created, must not religion be reconstructed and reorganised on higher lines? We cannot rise to a higher individual and social level, without the lever of a larger and loftier faith. Agnosticism and atheism will not save us. That seems clear. And neither will the old religious ideal of salvation, or the old despotic and dogmatic forms of religion.

Some tell us we are to have a new world after the war, especially if all peoples get political freedom. One recalls a saying of Carlyle, that of more consequence than freedom is to be worthy of it. And I hardly think that a religionless people is a people worthy of freedom. For when we lose faith and hope in God, what remains? What foundation is there for a human life and for human progress? What bond is there binding human lives and hearts? An empty universe is not inspiring, and to regard ourselves with all our ideals of reason and love, as "epiphenomena," dreams within a dream, is not likely to lift us out of the slough of irrationalism, selfishness, and pessimism. And yet is it not towards something of this kind that many have been drifting?

We seem to have reached a great religious crisis. We must either renounce religion, and all so great and good for which it stands, or else go on to a better, higher, more spiritual interpretation of religion. There can be no future for Australia, or for Britain, or for the world, until religion is reformed, and is felt to be the great reality and soul of life individual and social. This is the best service we can render to our country and to mankind to breathe into religion such a new "Christ"-spirit that will put heart and soul into us to work for social reconstruction and reorganisation, on lines of goodwill and brotherhood. The late Prime Minister of England is said to be going on a lecturing tour advocating the formation of a League of Peace. Maybe the time has come when a great Religious League should be organised for the reform of religious life, and the promotion of a nobler, and larger, and more spiritual ideal than is presented by official Christianity.