

# The Open Court

A MONTHLY MAGAZINE

Devoted to the Science of Religion, the Religion of Science, and the  
Extension of the Religious Parliament Idea

Editor: DR. PAUL CARUS.

Associates: } E. C. HEGELER.  
                  } MARY CARUS.

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VOL. XVII. (NO. 8)

AUGUST, 1903.

NO. 567

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CHICAGO


The Open Court Publishing Company

LONDON: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., Ltd.

Per copy, 10 cents (sixpence). Yearly, \$1.00 (in the U. P. U., 5s. 6d.).

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# The Science of Mechanics

A Critical and Historical Account of Its Development

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THE OPEN COURT PUBLISHING CO., CHICAGO, 324 Dearborn St.

LONDON: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., Ltd.





HERMES

EURIDICE

ORPHEUS

BAS-RELIEF OF AN ANCIENT SARCOPHAGUS.

Reproduced from a photograph.

*Frontispiece to The Open Court.*

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## LEO TOLSTOY'S APPEAL TO THE CLERGY.<sup>1</sup>

(Condensed for *The Open Court*.)

WHOEVER you may be: popes, cardinals, bishops, or pastors, of whatever Church, forego for a while your assurance that you are the only true disciples of the God Christ, and remember that you are first of all men: that is, according to your own teaching, beings sent into this world by God to fulfil His will; remember this, and ask yourselves what you are doing. Your whole life is devoted to preaching, maintaining, and spreading among men a teaching which you say was revealed to you by God Himself, and is, therefore, the only one that is true, and brings redemption.

In what, then, does this one true and redeeming doctrine that you preach, consist? To whichever one of the so-called Christian Churches you may belong, you acknowledge that your teaching is quite accurately expressed in the articles of belief formulated at the Council of Nicæa 1,600 years ago. Those articles of belief are as follows:

*First:* There is a God the Father (the first person of a Trinity), who has created the sky and the earth, and all the angels who live in the sky.<sup>2</sup>

*Second:* There is only one Son of God the Father, not created, but born (the second person of the Trinity). Through this Son the world was made.

*Third:* This Son, to save people from sin and death (by which

<sup>1</sup> Translated by Aylmer Maude.

<sup>2</sup> In English, we should here say "heaven" for "the sky," but we allow the translation to stand because both words are identical not only in the continental languages of Europe but also in the Greek of the New Testament, and certainly the ideas were so in the ancient conception.—*Editor.*

they were all punished for the disobedience of their forefather Adam), came down to the earth, was made flesh by the Holy Ghost and the virgin Mary, and became a man.

*Fourth:* This Son was crucified for the sins of men.

*Fifth:* He suffered and was buried, and rose on the third day, as had been foretold in Hebrew books.

*Sixth:* Having gone up into the sky, the Son seated himself at his Father's right side.

*Seventh:* This Son of God will, in due time, come again to the earth to judge the living and the dead.

*Eighth:* There is a Holy Ghost (the third person of the Trinity) who is equal to the Father, and who spoke through the prophets.

*Ninth:* (held by some of the largest Churches): There is one holy, infallible Church (or, more exactly the Church to which he who makes the confession belongs is held to be unique, holy, and infallible). This Church consists of all who believe in it, living or dead.

*Tenth* (also for some of the largest Churches): There exists a sacrament of baptism, by means of which the power of the Holy Ghost is communicated to those who are baptised.

*Eleventh:* At the second coming of Christ the souls of the dead will re-enter their bodies, and these bodies will be immortal; and

*Twelfth:* After the second coming, the just will have eternal life in paradise on a new earth under a new sky, and sinners will have eternal life in the torments of hell.

Not to speak of things taught by some of your largest Churches (the Roman Catholic and Russo-Greek Orthodox)—such as the belief in saints, and in the good effects of bowing to their bodily remains, and to representations of them, as well as of Jesus and the mother of God—the above twelve points embrace the fundamental positions of that truth which you say has been revealed to you by God himself for the redemption of man. Some of you preach these doctrines simply as they are expressed; others try to give them an allegorical meaning, more or less in accord with present-day knowledge and common sense; but you all alike are bound to confess, and do confess, these statements to be the exact expression of that unique truth which God himself has revealed to you, and which you preach to men for their salvation.

\* \* \*

Very well. You have had the one truth capable of saving mankind revealed to you by God himself. It is natural for men to



strive towards truth, and when it is clearly presented to them they are always glad to accept it, and be guided by it.

And, therefore, to impart this saving truth revealed to you by God himself, it would seem sufficient, plainly and simply, verbally, and through the Press, to communicate it with reasonable persuasion to those capable of receiving it.

But how have you preached this truth?

From the time a society calling itself the Church was formed, your predecessors taught this truth chiefly by violence. They laid down the truth, and punished those who did not accept it. This method, which was evidently not suited to its purpose, came, in course of time, to be less and less employed, and is now, of all the Christian Churches, used, I think, only in Russia.

Another means was through external action on people's feelings—by solemnity of setting, pictures, music, even dramatic performances, and oratorical art. In time this method, also, began to be less and less used. In Protestant countries—except the orator's art—it is now but little used.

But all the strength of the clergy is now directed to a third and most powerful method, which has always been used, and is now with special jealousy retained by the clergy in their own hands. This method is that of instilling Church doctrine into people who are not in a position to judge of what is given them: for instance, into quite uneducated working people who have no time for thought, and chiefly into children, who accept indiscriminately what is imparted to them and on whose minds it remains permanently impressed.

So that in our day your chief method of imparting to men the truth God has revealed to you, consists in teaching this truth to uneducated adults, and to children who do not reason but who accept everything.

This teaching generally begins with what is called Scripture History: that is to say, with selected passages from the Bible: the Hebrew books of the Old Testament, which according to your teaching are the work of the Holy Ghost, and are therefore not only unquestionably true, but also holy. From this history your pupil draws his first notions of the world, of the life of man, of good and evil, and of God.

This Scripture History begins with a description of how God, the ever-living, created the sky and the earth 6,000 years ago out of nothing; how he afterwards created beasts, fishes, plants, and finally man: Adam, and Adam's wife, who was made of one of

Adam's ribs. Then it describes how, fearing lest the man and his wife should eat an apple which had the magic quality of giving knowledge, he forbade them to eat that apple; how, notwithstanding this prohibition, the first people ate the apple, and were therefore expelled from Paradise; and how all their descendants were therefore cursed, and the earth was cursed also, so that since then it has produced weeds. Then the life of Adam's descendants is described: how they became so perverted that God not only drowned them all, but drowned all the animals with them, and left alive only Noah and his family and the animals he took into the ark. Then it is described how God chose Abraham alone of all people, and made an agreement with him; which agreement was that Abraham was to consider God to be God, and, as a sign of this, was to be circumcised. On his side, God undertook to give Abraham a numerous progeny, and to patronise him and all his offspring. Then it tells how God, patronising Abraham and his descendants, performed on their behalf most unnatural actions called miracles, and most terrible cruelties. So that the whole of this history—excepting certain stories, which are sometimes naïve (as the visit of God with two angels to Abraham, the marriage of Isaac, and others), and are sometimes innocent, but are often immoral (as the swindles of God's favorite, Jacob, the cruelties of Samson, and the cunning of Joseph),—the whole of this history, from the plagues Moses called down upon the Egyptians, and the murder by an angel of all their first-born, to the fire that destroyed 250 conspirators, and the tumbling into the ground of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, and the Destruction of 14,700 men in a few minutes, and on to the sawing in pieces of enemies with saws, and the execution of the priests who did not agree with him by Elijah (who rode up into the sky), and to the story of Elisha, who cursed the boys that laughed at him, so that they were torn in pieces, and eaten by two bears,—all this history is a series of miraculous occurrences and of terrible crimes, committed by the Hebrew people, by their leaders, and by God himself.

Your teaching of the New Testament consists not in its moral teaching, not in the Sermon on the Mount, but in conformity of the Gospels with the stories of the Old Testament, in the fulfilment of prophecies, and in miracles, the movement of a star, songs from the sky, talk with the devil, the turning of water into wine, walking on the water, healings, calling people back to life, and, finally, the resurrection of Jesus Himself, and His flying up into the sky.

If all these stories, both from the Old and New Testaments,

were taught as a series of fairy-tales, even then hardly any teacher would decide to tell them to children and adults he desired to enlighten. But these tales are imparted to people unable to reason, as though they were the most trustworthy description of the world and its laws, as if they gave the truest information about the lives of those who lived in former times, of what should be considered good and evil, of the existence and nature of God, and of the duties of man.

People talk of harmful books! But is there in Christendom a book that has done more harm to mankind than this terrible book, called "Scripture History from the Old and New Testaments"? And all the men and women of Christendom have to pass through a course of this Scripture History during their childhood, and this same history is also taught to ignorant adults as the first and most essential foundation of knowledge,—as the one, eternal, truth of God.

You cannot introduce a foreign substance into a living organism without the organism suffering, and sometimes perishing, from its efforts to rid itself of this foreign substance. What terrible evil to a man's mind must, then, result from this rendering of the teaching of the Old and New Testaments—foreign alike to present day knowledge, to common sense, and to moral feeling—and instilled into him at a time when he is unable to judge, but accepts all that is given him!

Every man comes into the world with a consciousness of his dependence on a mysterious, all-powerful Source which has given him life, and consciousness of his equality with all men, the equality of all men with one another, a desire to love and be loved, and consciousness of the need of striving towards perfection. But what do you instil into him?

Instead of the mysterious Source of which he thinks with reverence, you tell him of an angry, unjust God, who executes and torments people.

Instead of the equality of all men, which the child and the simple men recognise with all their being, you tell them that not only people, but nations, are unequal; that some of them are loved, and others are not loved, by God; and that some people are called by God to rule, others to submit.

Instead of that wish to love and to be loved which forms the strongest desire in the soul of every unperverted man, you teach him that the relations between men can only be based on violence, on threats, on executions; and you tell him that judicial and mili-

tary murders are committed not only with the sanction but at the command of God.

In place of the need of self-improvement, you tell him that man's salvation lies in belief in the Redemption, and that by improving himself by his own powers, without the aid of prayers, sacraments, and belief in the Redemption, man is guilty of sinful pride, and that for his salvation man must trust not to his own reason, but to the commands of the Church, and must do what she decrees.

It is terrible to think of the perversion of thought and feeling produced in the soul of a child or an ignorant adult by such teaching.

There were Christian customs: to have pity on a criminal or a wanderer, to give of one's last resources to a beggar, and to ask forgiveness of a man one has offended.

All this is now forgotten and discarded. It is now all replaced by learning by rote the catechism, the triune composition of the Trinity, prayers before lessons, and prayers for teachers and for the Tsar, etc. So, within my recollection, the people have grown ever religiously coarser.

One part—most of the women—remain as superstitious as they were six hundred years ago, but without that Christian spirit which formerly permeated their lives; the other part, which knows the catechism by heart, are absolute atheists. And all this is consciously brought about by the clergy.

“But that applies to Russia,” is what Western Europeans—Catholics and Protestants—will say. But I think that the same, if not worse, is happening in Catholicism, with its prohibition of the Gospels and its Notre-Dames; and in Protestantism, with its holy idleness on the Sabbath day, and its bibliolatry. I think, in one form or another, it is the same throughout the quasi-Christian world.

One may utter words that have no sense, but one cannot *believe* what has no sense.

The people of former ages who framed these dogmas, could believe in them, but you can no longer do so. If you say you have faith in them, you say so only because you use the word “faith” in one sense, while you apply it to another. One meaning of the word “faith” refers to a relation adopted by man towards God, which enables him to define the meaning of his whole life, and guides all his conscious actions. Another meaning of the word

“faith” is the credulous acceptance of assertions made by a certain person or persons.

The well-known preacher, Père Didon, in the introduction to his *Vie de Jésus-Christ*, announces that he believes, not in some allegorical sense but plainly, without explanations, that Christ, having risen, was carried up into the sky, and sits there at the right hand of his father.

An illiterate Samára peasant of my acquaintance, in reply to the question whether he believed in God, simply and firmly replied, as his priest told me: “No, sinner that I am, I don't believe.” His disbelief in God the peasant explained by saying that one could not live as he was living if one believed in God: “one scolds, and grudges help to a beggar, and envies, and over-eats and drinks. Could one do such things if one believed in God?”

Père Didon affirms that he has faith both in God and in the ascension of Jesus, while the Samára peasant says he does not believe in God, since he does not obey His commandments.

Evidently Père Didon does not even know what faith is, and only says he believes: while the Samára peasant knows what faith is, and, though he says he does not believe in God, really believes in him in the very way that is true faith.

\* \* \*

I hear the usual reply: “What will become of men if they cease to believe the Church doctrines? Will things not be worse than they are now?”

What will happen if the people of Christendom cease to believe in Church doctrine? The result will be—that not the Hebrew legends alone but the religious wisdom of the whole world will become accessible and intelligible to them. People will grow up and develop with unperverted understandings and feelings. Having discarded a teaching accepted credulously, people will order their relation towards God reasonably, in conformity with their knowledge; and will recognise the moral obligations that flow from that relation.

“But will not the results be worse?”

If the Church doctrine is not true—how can it be worse for men not to have falsehood preached to them as truth, especially in a way so unfair as is now adopted for the purpose?

“But,” some people say, “the common folk are coarse and uneducated, and what we, educated people, do not require, may yet be useful and even indispensable, for the masses.”

If all men are made alike, then all must travel one and the same path from darkness to light, from ignorance to knowledge, from falsehood to truth. You have travelled that road, and have attained consciousness of the unreliability of the belief in which you were trained. By what right will you check others from making the same advance?

You say that though you do not need such food, it is needed by the masses. But no wise man undertakes to decide the physical food another must eat; how then can it be decided—and who can decide—what spiritual food the masses of the people must have?

The fact that you notice among the people a demand for this doctrine in no way proves that the demand ought to be supplied. There exists a demand for intoxicants and tobacco—and other yet worse demands. And the fact is that you yourselves, by complex methods of hypnotisation, evoke this very demand, by the existence of which you try to justify your own occupation. Only cease to evoke the demand, and it will not exist; for, as in your own case so with everyone else, there can be no demand for lies, but all men have moved and still move from darkness to light; and you who stand nearer to the light should try to make it accessible to others, and not to hide it from them.

“But,” I hear a last objection, “will the result not be worse if we—educated, moral men, who desire to do good to the people—abandon our posts because of the doubts that have arisen in our souls, and let our places be taken by coarse, immoral men, indifferent to the people’s good?”

Undoubtedly the abandonment of the clerical profession by the best men, will have the effect that the ecclesiastical business passing into coarse, immoral hands, will more and more disintegrate, and expose its own falsity and harmfulness. But the result will not be worse, for the disintegration of ecclesiastical establishments is now going on, and is one of the means by which people are being liberated. And, therefore, the quicker this emancipation is accomplished, by enlightened and good men abandoning the clerical profession, the better it will be. And so, the greater the number of enlightened and good men who leave the clerical profession, the better.

I know that many of you are encumbered with families, or are dependent on parents who require you to follow the course you have begun; I know how difficult it is to abandon a post that brings honor or wealth or even gives a competence and enables

you and your families to continue a life to which you are accustomed, and I know how painful it is to go against relatives one loves. But anything is better than to do what destroys your own soul and injures your fellow-men.

Therefore, the sooner and more definitely you repent of your sin and cease your activity, the better it will be not only for others, but for yourselves.

That is what I—*standing now on the brink of my grave*, and clearly seeing the chief source of human ills—wished to say to you; and to say not in order to expose or condemn you, but in order to co-operate in the emancipation of men from the terrible evil which the preaching of your doctrine produces, and at the same time to help you to rouse yourselves from the hypnotic sleep in which now you often fail to understand all the wickedness of your own actions.

May God, who sees your hearts, help you in the effort!