

THE BIGOT

Bigotry is an incapacity to conceive seriously the alternative to a proposition (writes Mr. G. K. Chesterton). It has nothing whatever to do with belief in the proposition itself. A man may be sure enough of something to be burned for it or to make war on the world, and yet be no inch nearer to being a bigot. He is only a bigot if he cannot understand that his dogma is a dogma, even if it is true. Persecution may be immoral, but is not necessarily irrational; the prosecutor may comprehend with his intellect the errors that he drives forth with his spear. It is not bigoted, for instance, to treat the Koran as supernatural. But it is bigoted to treat the Koran as natural as obvious to anybody and common to everybody. It is not bigoted for a Christian to regard Chinamen as heathens. It is rather when he insists on regarding them as Christians that his bigotry begins.

One of the fashionable forms of bigotry exhibit itself in the discovery of fantastic and trivial explanations of things that need no explanation. We are in this cloud-land of prejudice (for example) when we say that a man becomes an atheist because he wants to go on the spree; or that a man becomes a Roman Catholic because the priests have trapped him; or that a man becomes a Socialist because he envies the rich. For all these random and remote explanations show that we have never seen, like a clear diagram, the real explanation: that Atheism, Catholicism, and Socialism are all quite plausible philosophies. A man does not need to be driven or trapped or bribed into them: because a man can be converted to them.

Again, it is not impossible (though it is now rare) for an intelligent man to feel certain that Irish Home Rule would be disastrous. But it is impossible for an intelligent man to maintain seriously that the desire for it was imposed upon the Irish by 'agitators.' An intelligent man need not gratify the Irish national sentiment; he need not even admire it; but he must see that in such a case a national sentiment would exist, or he is not an intelligent man at all.

True liberality, in short, consists of being able to imagine the enemy. The free man is not he who thinks all opinions equally true or false; that is not freedom, but feeble-mindedness. The free man is he who sees the errors as clearly as he sees the truth.

The more solidly convinced a man really is, the less he will use phrases like 'No enlightened person can really hold—' or 'I cannot understand how Mr. Jones can possibly maintain—' followed by some very old, mild, and defensible opinion. A progressive person may hold anything he likes. I do understand quite well how Mr. Jones maintains those maniacal opinions which he does maintain. If a man sincerely believes that he has the map of the maze, it must show the wrong paths just as much as the right. He should be able to imagine the whole plan of an error: the complete logic of a fallacy. He must be able to think it if he does not believe it.

It is admitted, even in dictionaries, that an example assists a definition. I take an instance of the error of bigotry out of my own biography, so to speak. Nothing is more marked in strange epoch of ours than the combination of an exquisite tact and a sympathy in things of taste and artistic style, with an almost brutal stupidity in the things of abstract thought. There are no great fighting philosophers to-day; because we care only about tastes; and there is no disputing about tastes. A principal critic on the *New Age*, who reviews books over the signature of 'Jacob Tonson,' which covers (I believe) the identity of one of our ablest younger writers, made a remark about me a little while ago which amused me very much. After saying many things much too complimentary, but marvellously sympathetic and offering many criticisms which were really delicate and true, he ended up (as far as I remember) with these astounding words: 'But I never can really feel a man to be my intellectual equal who believes in any dogma.' It was like seeing a fine alpine climber fall five hundred feet into the mud.

For this last sentence is the old, innocent, and stale thing called Bigotry: it is the failure of the mind to imagine any other mind. The unhappy Mr. Tonson is among the poorest of the children of men; he has only one universe. Everyone, of course, must see one cosmos as the true cosmos; but Mr. Tonson cannot see any other cosmos even as a hypothesis.

My own intelligence is less fine, but at least it is much more free. I can see six or seven universes quite plain. I can see the spiral world up which Mrs. Besant hopefully crawls; I can see the clockwork cosmos in time with which Mr. McCabe's brain ticks so accurately; I can see the nightmare world of Mr. Hardy, its creator cruel and half-witted like a village idiot; I can see the illusive world of Mr. Yeats, a gorgeous curtain that covers only darkness; and I have no doubt that I shall be able to see Mr. Tonson's philosophy also, if he should ever give himself the trouble to express it in intelligent terms. But as the expression 'anyone who believes in any dogma' means to a rational mind no more or rather less than 'Yip-i-addy-i-ay,' I regret I can only at present include Mr. Tonson among the great bigots of history.

Interprovincial

Unusually heavy bookings for Sydney continue. The Union Company's steamer *Marama*, the largest passenger boat engaged in the inter-State service, which sailed from Wellington for Sydney on Friday last, was a 'full ship.' About 530 passengers booked from New Zealand ports for Sydney.

Experiments with gas and electricity as illuminants in the Wellington Hospital have recently been conducted for the Hospital committee. The lights were tested for consumption and other purposes. It is understood to be probable, after what has been ascertained by the committee, that the board will be recommended to adopt electric light.

'I cannot claim any exclusive knowledge about cats or any extensive knowledge,' said Mr. Bishop, S.M., at Christchurch, 'although I suppose I sometimes claim to know something of everything. But I do know that I have had five or six Persian kittens, and all have them have died. They are very difficult to rear.'

'We eat too much sugar,' declares Dr. Thacker, who is a candidate for the mayoralty of Christchurch. 'A tremendous amount of sugar is sold in this city, and if Sir Joseph Ward would put 6d per lb on the price of it he would do a good thing for New Zealand. Two-thirds of the shops in Christchurch sell sugar in some form or other, and in beer sugar does as much harm as alcohol.'

The grain-carrying season on the Southland railways is now in full swing, having set in rather earlier than usual. Already (reports the *Southland Times*), since the beginning of the year, 202,558 sacks have been carried, as against 167,016 sacks carried during the corresponding period of last year. During the week ended Saturday last 51,298 sacks were sent over the railway.

Evidence that pillaging on board steamers from Home is still being indulged in came prominently under the notice of a Christchurch firm a few days ago. On opening a case of good just received, it was found that it had been tampered with and about half of its contents had been extracted. The goods stolen were chiefly underclothing, and the pillagers had taken the articles out of the packages and left the wrappers in the case. The firm estimates that goods valued at about £10 were taken.

A rather important judgment was delivered by Dr. McArthur, S.M., at Petone on Saturday on the question as to whether or not it was legal for proprietors of tea rooms or small shops to supply people who find themselves away from home on Sunday with afternoon tea and other light refreshment. The police had prosecuted Sarah Snow for having kept her shop open on Sunday for the purpose alleged. The magistrate decided that the supply of afternoon tea for consumption on the premises came under the heading of 'necessity.' There had therefore been no infringement of the law. The information was dismissed, without costs.

There was a further big clearance of goods through the Customs Department at Dunedin on Monday (says the *Otago Daily Times*), following upon the removal of the surtax of 2½ per cent. During Saturday morning and Monday the amount of duty paid on goods cleared at Dunedin for home consumption was £3233 11s 3d. Our Christchurch correspondent states that inquiries made at the Customs Department on Monday in regard to the effect locally of the removal of the surtax of 2½ per cent. in increasing the quantity of goods taken out of bond showed that the increase as revealed in the business transacted on Saturday was not so large as might have been expected. The increase on Monday was not as much as £1000 as compared with the business that would have been put through on an ordinary Monday. Such increase as there was might, moreover, be partly due to the fact that it was the beginning of a new month, and to the near approach of the Easter holidays. Christchurch importers have not been doing what Wellington importers have done, namely, been bonding goods for some time past in order to escape the surtax by waiting until April 1 before removing them. The goods have not been kept back in bond in Christchurch to any great extent.

The kauri bedstead on which Royalty has slept, and over which at least one Auckland parliamentarian almost shed tears last session, has been returned to its resting-place at Government House, Auckland (says the *Otago Daily Times*). Nearly half a century ago the bed was built specially for the reception of the Duke of Edinburgh during his stay in Auckland, and a feature of the workmanship was the carving of a huge crown. When the Auckland vice-regal residence was dismantled last year this historic couch was sent, with other articles of furniture, to Wellington. Mr. A. E. Glover, M.P., in a somewhat lively speech in the House, declared that this sacred structure on which Royalty had reposed had not only been torn from its sanctuary in Auckland, but had been 'ignominiously committed to a stable for lack of other storage room in Wellington. Evidently the eloquence of the member for Auckland Central was not without avail, since the bed has been returned intact and placed in one of the best bedrooms of the newly-renovated residence for the Governor in Auckland.