

## II

### HUMANISM

**I**N the last lecture we saw that there is one fundamental problem behind all the greater philosophies and behind all the religions of the world, the problem which is set man by the existence of his personality within the world of Nature. It is both an intellectual and a practical problem. On the one hand man has to try to explain the strange mystery that Nature seems to have produced a kind of being higher than herself whom she yet means completely to destroy; on the other he has to do his utmost, if he is to be true to what he knows to be the higher element in him, to "overcome the world." The test, therefore, which we must apply to every new philosophy or type of thought is whether or not it grapples with this fundamental problem, or whether it evades it. Here is the acid test, by which we distinguish between the deep and the shallow, the evanescent and the permanent, the false and the true in philosophy and in the realm of faith. It is obvious that the intellectual and the practical solutions are different methods of dealing with the same problem. If a man refuses to face the practical risks of overcoming the world it is certain that the world will overcome him. The animal element in him will submerge the higher, he will lose his sense of moral values, will accept the

lower standards of the society around him, and gradually lose all perception that there is any intellectual problem at all. Inevitably this will determine all his philosophy of life. On the other hand, if he starts with a spiritual view of life this will react upon all his moral standards. That which we think to be real invariably determines our views of that which we believe to be good or right, and nerves us to struggle for its victory. The intellectual task of explaining the world and the practical task of overcoming it are therefore vitally related to each other. To every projected solution we must apply the double test: Does it explain the mystery? Does it work in the domain of character?

To-day, in our Western world at least, we cannot say that there is any dominant philosophy. The older Materialism has been discredited by recent advances in the physical science on which it leaned, and the Absolute Idealism which prevailed in the universities of Great Britain up to the close of the nineteenth century has failed to hold the mind of the world which emerged from the War, which has made it but too plain that the theory of a merely immanent Reason of the world is insufficient either to explain or to save it. Moreover, Pragmatism, however useful it may have been as a protest against the opiate of Absolute Idealism, has never been able to capture the thought of Great Britain, and seems to be on the wane in America. We are living amid the wreck of the philosophies of the Victorian Age, in a period, it may be hoped, of transition to something deeper and truer to all the realities of human experience. Meantime there

has arisen a new version of a philosophy of last century which the Idealists prematurely believed they had destroyed, the philosophy of Positivism. The reappearance of Positivism under the more attractive name of Humanism has been one of the most interesting features of the last decade. The main focus of the movement has been in the United States, but it has not a few representatives also in England, and as we shall see it has still wider affiliations. In America we have to distinguish between the Humanism of such writers as the late Irving Babbitt and the Humanism of Lippmann, Krutch, Ames, Eustace Haydon, John Dewey and others. These are quite distinct movements. They ought indeed to be considered as two different types of thought contending for the right to use an attractive name, rather than as two varieties of a species. Both lay great emphasis on Humanity, but the former thinks mainly of Humanity as distinct from Nature, and the latter of Humanity as distinct from God, and as the true object of man's reverence and love.

We are concerned here wholly with the second kind of Humanism, and the group of talented writers who have given it expression in books which are nearly all admirably written, and have had a very wide circulation. They are books written for the *intelligentsia* rather than for the specialist, but all reveal a wide knowledge and a grave sense of the dangers confronting society from the existing anarchy of belief. In the books of Krutch and Lippmann in particular we find a deep and sad conviction that with the decay of religion and of idealism in philosophy a glory is departing from

the world that can never return. What are the essential features of American Humanism? To put the matter briefly, the common groundwork of thought may be thus described. (1) The basis of Theism and of Christianity has once for all been destroyed by science. Nature is the foundation of everything. The only trustworthy knowledge of the universe which we have comes from science, which is our only pathway to Reality.

The latest Humanist book, Professor John Dewey's volume on *A Common Faith*, is quite explicit on this point, and as the issue is fundamental I shall quote it at length. After stating that "Protestantism has largely abandoned the idea that particular ecclesiastical sources can authoritatively determine cosmic, historic and theological beliefs," he goes on to say of modern Christians that "with certain exceptions numerically insignificant they have retained a certain indispensable minimum of intellectual content. . . . Even when they have greatly reduced the bulk of intellectual content to be accepted, they have insisted at least upon theism and the immortality of the individual soul." He then goes on to say that the progress of science "has sapped and undermined every kind of religious belief to which intellectual assent" is required. Astronomy has broken up all religious cosmologies and the Christian idea of ascent to Heaven. Geology has displaced all myths of creation. Biology has disintegrated old ideas of soul and mind, and has thus "made a profound impression upon ideas of sin, redemption and immortality." Anthropology, history and literary criticism have produced a radically new historical account of the

Christian origin. Finally, psychology bids fair to explain everything in human life that once seemed "supernatural."

Mr Dewey then proceeds to sum up his conclusions from these facts, and in so doing discloses his fundamental theory of true knowledge and the foundations of the Humanist system. "The significant bearing for my purpose of all this is that new methods of inquiry and reflection have become, for the educated man to-day, the final arbiter of all questions of fact, existence and intellectual assent. Nothing less than a revolution in the seat of intellectual authority has taken place." "The mind of man is being habituated to a new method and ideal: there is but one sure road of access to truth—the road of patient co-operative inquiry, operating by means of observation, experiment, record and controlled reflection. The scope of the change is well illustrated by the fact that wherever a particular outpost is surrendered it is usually met by the remark from a liberal theologian that the particular doctrine or supposed literary or historical tenet surrendered was never, after all, an intrinsic part of religious belief, and that without it the true nature of religion stands out more clearly than before. Equally significant is the growing gulf between fundamentalists and liberals in the Church. What is not realised—although perhaps it is more definitely seen by fundamentalists than by liberals—is that the issue does not concern this or that piecemeal item of belief, but enters into the question of the method by which any and every item of intellectual belief is to be arrived at and justified. The positive lesson is that religious qualities and values, if they

are real at all, are not bound up with any item of intellectual assent, not even that of the existence of the God of Theism; and that under existing conditions the religious function in experience can be emancipated only through surrender of the whole notion of special truths that are religious by their own nature, together with the idea of peculiar avenues of access to such truths. For were we to admit that there is but one method for ascertaining fact and truth—that conveyed by the word 'scientific' in its most general and generous sense—no discovery in any branch of knowledge and inquiry could then disturb the faith that is religious. I should describe this faith as the unification of the self through allegiance to inclusive ideal ends, which imagination presents to us and to which the human will responds as worthy of controlling our desires and choices."

The position that science is the only pathway to Reality, and that the scientific account of Reality is in radical contradiction to the religious interpretation of the world, is more briefly expressed in a passage in the autobiographical section of Mr Julian Huxley's *Religion without Revelation*. Like Mr Dewey he is in quest of "a common faith" which will endure, and like him he believes that he has found it in the worship of "ideals which imagination presents to us" ("values which we create"), and to which the human will responds as worthy of controlling our desires and choices. In describing how he built up this faith for himself, he says, "I set myself in the intervals of military training to read a number of books of a theological character, with the intention of seeing how much of them I

could grasp in terms of the evolutionary rationalistic scheme at which I had then arrived." He goes on to say that one of these books was *Lux Mundi*, and that he was at once fascinated and repelled by it, fascinated by the delicacy and beauty of character which it revealed, and repelled by the sheer intellectual perversity of its attitude. We have the whole situation here disclosed with a most disarming and ingenuous candour! The foundation of all the Humanist books is this wholesale acceptance of the purely scientific account of the universe as complete finality. These writers have said explicitly what is implied in all the Humanist writings. The fundamental assumption, indeed, on which they all proceed is that science is the sole pathway to Reality, and that the scientific interpretation of the world is in radical contradiction with the interpretation of faith.

(2) That is the negative side of Humanism. Mr Dewey has also stated its positive side. Humanism teaches "allegiance to inclusive ideal ends, which imagination presents to us, and to which the human will responds as worthy of controlling our desires and choices." All the other Humanists agree with him here that science alone can tell us about Reality, and Reality is always measurable, whether it be space or time or energy or space-time. But over and above that world, they admit, there is the world of values and ideals which Mr Huxley says we "create" and which, according to Mr Dewey, we owe to man's "imagination." The supreme necessity to-day is for man to preserve as much as possible of this realm of values, as much, that is to say, as is rationally possible for him on the natural-

istic basis which has become inevitable for every man who will fearlessly use his reason. Much, no doubt, of that realm of values must go with the disappearance of God and the hope of immortality, but the very science which has destroyed that old mythology has put in our hands immeasurable new powers for the service of man. We are bidden, as it were, to turn aside from futile worship of heavens that are empty, and from hopes of a future life that are vain, to fix our thoughts upon Man as "the true Shekinah," the most wonderful being in the universe, who is worthy alike of our compassion, our reverence and our devoted service. This is in effect the "message" of American Humanism which is put with real distinction by Lippmann and Krutch.

Haydon's book, *The Quest of the Ages*, which has been called the "Bible of Humanism," while it shows a wider knowledge of the details of the history of religion, is not on the same plane of insight or distinction. It combines with the general Humanist position the impossible thesis that devotion to the social welfare of man has always been the essence of religion, that everything else has been accidental, and that the "Quest of the Ages," having reached the stage of discovery that all the gods and all the hopes of immortality in a transcendent world which have hitherto cumbered religion are illusions, must now get down to its real work, the betterment of man's social life. He urges this with an eloquence which can only be called torrential, and appeals to the churches to give up their obsolete faiths and divisions and to lead the "impassioned youth" of to-day on to

victory, instead of being left behind by them in the march of progress.

In Mr Huxley's genial and copious book, written in entire independence of the American movement, the word "Humanism" rarely occurs, and that only incidentally, but its fundamental positions are one with those of the transatlantic writers, and its spirit of earnest desire to use all the resources of science for the betterment of the life of man as the culminating and highest product of the evolutionary purpose, is the same. Like the American writers, Huxley starts from the assumption that science has definitely made an end of revelation, of faith in a personal God, and of hope of a life to come. Yet he recognises the great Christian "values," and endeavours to conserve them as far as the naturalistic scheme of thought will allow. In the endeavour to do this he is led into a private theological enterprise of his own, and presents us with his own version of the Trinity, "new gods for old." He is led, indeed, unawares into metaphysic. Behind Nature the world as revealed to the senses is a great "substance." This substance has a threefold manifestation: (1) the "Power of Nature"; (2) the ideal goals of the human mind; (3) actual humanity. The first corresponds to the Father, the second to the Holy Spirit, the third to the Son. The hidden reality or substance behind the three aspects is the true object of religion, and is to be worshipped as "sacred." How this is to be achieved when its first aspect, the power of Nature—"external Nature"—is said to be arbitrary, and indifferent to human life, and the third member of the Trinity, empirical mankind,

includes within it the egoist, the murderer, the sadist, and the sex pervert, as well as the hero and the saint, is left unexplained. Indeed, I fear it must be said that the writer has no real understanding of the reasons and the values which led the Christian Church to formulate its doctrine of the Trinity.

I have selected but a few of these Humanist writings as typical of a much larger number. They show a wide range of culture, a genuine love of humanity and a high *morale*. It is not doing them any disparagement to say that none of them are in the first flight as serious enterprises of constructive thought. They do not really get to grips with that fundamental problem which I have outlined in the opening lecture, which I believe to be the problem of our age. If I am right in so believing, then every thinker of our own and coming generations must take rank by the measure in which he has faced and solved it. Failing that, his dimension must be measured by the extent to which he has at least realised it. Of the Humanist writers whom I have quoted Mr Lippmann and Mr Krutch do in some measure realise its gravity more fully than does Mr Huxley, and certainly much more fully than the eloquent Mr Haydon. But while the first has described something of the tragedy of man's case as, stripped of the faith that he once had, he faces the ambiguous and tremendous world of Nature, and realises the shortness of life's little day, none of them seem to realise the radical incoherence of the position in which they stand, the impossibility of combining that high estimate of man which is common to

them all with that naturalistic conception of the world which they all take for granted. This is the vulnerable point which the great philosophies at least face, and in their own way try to solve. Humanism is little better than a restatement of the problem brought up to date, and the very gifts of exposition which these writers possess serve but to disclose more plainly the true elements of the mystery which some philosophers at least have been able to evade by a cloud of technical verbiage.

But if Humanism cannot thus take rank with the greater philosophies, and has little that is new to say on the problem of the ages, it has a very great value of quite another kind. I know nothing that so plainly or clearly discloses the troubled mind of our own age, or the intellectual causes at least which have produced its trouble. The Humanists are simply exponents of a condition of mind that is to-day as widely spread as Western civilisation itself. We get it not only in Thomas Hardy's writings, but in Galsworthy's *Forsyte Saga* as well. Bertrand Russell's *The Free Man's Worship* expresses it in prose that is as telling as literature as it is unimpressive as philosophy.<sup>1</sup> It is the working philosophy, unless I greatly misunderstand them, of a great many of our younger men and women of letters, poets, novelists and journalists of the higher class. It is a remarkable fact that whereas science on the whole has moved nearer to the spirit of Christianity, largely owing to a new recognition of its own limitations, literature is notably less Chris-

<sup>1</sup> Lord Russell in a preface to his collected *Essays* admits as much, and indicates that he has moved to a more consistent position than that which he held when he wrote this most eloquent of all his minor writings.

tian than it was fifty years ago. In short, I think that outside of the Churches the average mind of Western Christendom to-day tends to accept the scientific view of the world as the ultimate truth about it, while at the same time all its better spirits desire to conserve as much of the Christian values, especially its valuation of man, as is believed to be possible. And this, as I have said, is the fundamental idea of Humanism.

I would go farther. There is certainly a profound contrast between the reasonable and cultured books of the Humanism of the English-speaking lands, with their dignified and melancholy farewell to what they believe to be the departing faith of Christendom, and the fierce contempt and hatred of it expressed in the new literature of Soviet Russia. The social Utopia of transatlantic Humanism is in odd contrast, moreover, with that of Trotsky and Stalin, and some may think that to bring them together is a forced combination. But what is the motive power behind all the passion of the Soviet revolution in so far as that is a moral force and not a mere struggle for "a place in the sun"? Is it not the hope of an earthly Utopia to be won by the technical application of science to the economic needs of man? And though Bolshevism denies sin against God as an invention of the priesthood, it has a very definite sin against man on its black list from which all other sins flow. "The one evil" says Prince Mirsky in his *Life of Lenin*, "is the exploitation of man by man, the one task to build up a social order in which there will be no room for such exploitation, the one duty to contribute to the fight for such an order." Here

we have the real note of Humanism. Finally, both Bolshevism and Humanism alike have the same fundamental philosophy of the universe, that in the last resort it is a system of blind impersonal forces without a cosmic purpose or aim.

To-day this Western culture, which in both stated forms is based on a naturalistic version of science, is penetrating more or less into all lands. Missionary experts at the last Œcumenical Missionary Conference in Jerusalem were agreed that whereas twenty-five years ago the great opponents of Christianity in these lands were the ancient non-Christian religions, the new and more formidable antagonist to-day was this secular Western culture which among the educated classes was now rapidly disintegrating both these ancient pagan cultures and the moralities which were expressed in them.

But there is more to be said. The Naturalism which is for the moment triumphant in Russia, and which is acting as a powerful leaven in the form of Humanism in America, is also at work, though in a less conscious and vocal form, among the masses of our own people. I cannot but think that we have here one of the chief causes of the difficulty which in many parts of our own country the Churches find in holding the interests of the masses, or even of their own youth. I do not wish to exaggerate here. The position in Scotland at least is by no means so discouraging as it is often painted, and where there is real living conviction and sympathy in the preacher he can usually find a full response. But there is no doubt that whereas fifty or a hundred years ago there was a universally accepted background of conviction as to the elementary truths

of Biblical religion, that background has, for the younger generation at least, largely disappeared. Man's spiritual nature, his destiny, his sin, his responsibility to God, his need of divine grace, the certainty of a life to come, the providence of God, how far can we say that the masses of our people are possessed by these great convictions to-day? Once one could take them for granted. Can we do so any longer? I gravely doubt if we can, and I strongly suspect that here we have an explanation of at least part of that accusation of "unreality" in our teaching and worship which is so frequent among the non-churchgoing classes. If preachers reason from presuppositions which are not shared by those who hear them, their reasonings and appeals must necessarily seem "unreal." How far this state of things is due to the great increase in scientific teaching in all our schools is another question. Certainly this is a factor in the situation that cannot be ignored. Every human being, as G. K. Chesterton truly said, has some fundamental view of the nature of things, and if the scientific view of the world is taught more widely and efficiently than the religious view, and to its exclusion, I cannot but believe that we have here a factor in secularising the mind of our people that it would be folly to ignore. When taught and received to the exclusion of the religious interpretation of the world of human life, its whole tendency is to thin down the thought of God to a mere transparency and make dim and shadowy the hope of a life to come. The same outlines of a world-view run everywhere among these secularised and half-secularised multitudes to-day,

sometimes broken and worn and confused with other outlines.

The same general spectrum of thought, as I have said, goes all round the world though the colour bands vary from continent to continent. In these lectures, however, we are only concerned with the western half of that spectrum, the Humanism of America and Great Britain, and to that we now return.

As we who are Christians study this literature and endeavour to familiarise ourselves with its outlook on the world, one of the questions which inevitably arise in our minds is, How did this world-view come into being, and why does it seem to have so powerful an appeal to-day to many? The countries in which it has come into being have, with whatever qualifications we may use the term, been Christian countries. They have at least been parts of what is usually known as Christendom, in which the Christian view of the world of human life has long been in a predominant position. The new view of Humanism has, as it were, been superimposed upon that view and in the minds of many has completely displaced it. Now why is this? There are not a few Christians who will say that there is nothing surprising in it. Christianity, they say, makes great demands upon every human being. It asks for complete self-devotion to God. When human beings are unprepared to answer that demand, to give everything and to risk everything on Him, they must necessarily invent defence mechanisms of unbelief and half-belief if they are to keep their self-respect. This, as modern psychology has shown, can be done in perfect good

faith. So fresh critics would explain the entire phenomenon of Humanism and its widespread popularity in the modern world. They say that modern, like ancient men, often simply do not wish to believe in an almighty, pure and loving God, and that just as in the past they believed in many gods good and bad, so to-day they prefer to believe in an impersonal universe and to set man on the throne. They would, moreover, consider all further reasoning or endeavour to get at the heart of Humanism by intellectual processes, as beside the real mark. The reluctant human will, rather than the perplexed human understanding, is the real centre of the target.

Now I should never think of denying that there is some truth in this vigorous and rigorous dealing with modern "unbelief." Modern investigation has thrown new light on the great part which the will plays in the formation of all human thought, even on what used to be considered purely scientific thought, but especially on all thought which has to do with vital human interests; and, further, modern psychology has demonstrated the extraordinary power of self-deception latent in the subconscious mind, its powers of throwing out smoke-screens of defence against unpleasant realities. It may be noted, moreover, that it would hardly lie with the Humanists to object to such a summary treatment of their rejection of Theism as bigoted and unfair. For it is a peculiarity of the writers whom we are considering that they make abundant use of this same psychological material in disposing of the whole case for religious faith. To them the whole religious interpretation of the world and of

human life is simply so much "wishful thinking." The phrase is worked to death, especially by the American writers, and of course it is the very substance of the Bolshevist thinking that religion is "the opiate of the masses," a cunning and wicked invention of capitalists, imposed upon the soul of the working classes to dull their sorrows and make them content to submit to robbery and oppression by the promise of happiness in a future life.

Now, while it is quite clear that there is here in this deep and all-pervasive influence of a man's practical and emotional nature ground for continual vigilance lest he should deceive himself, it will not do to dispose either of belief or non-belief in this summary fashion. To do so would, for one thing, make an end of all reasonable discourse. If I were to point out to my opponent that his whole philosophy of life is simply a smoke-screen for his secret dishonesty and lust, and he were to retaliate that I am so feeble-minded that I believe only what I wish to believe because it will make me happier, we might on both sides be perfectly sincere, and there might be truth in both charges, but on both sides we should have shut off any chance of advancing our own thoughts and getting nearer to that Reality which is only another name for God. In fact, pushed to its logical conclusion, the method can only lead to brawling and complete scepticism. On the one hand the sincerely religious man must admit to the Humanist that there is real mystery in the universe for all mortal and sinful and intellectually limited men, himself included. On the other, it may be very respectfully pressed upon the Humanists, and here, one must regret to say that Mr Lippmann

is a chief offender, that it will hardly do to maintain that all religious faith is simply "wishful thinking," the implication being that he and his friends alone have minds of such disinterestedness, intellectual penetration and clarity that they can discern the ultimate nature of things, which is hidden, because of their emotional prejudices, from a Pascal or a Newton or a Kelvin. You wish to believe in God, and lo! you do believe. Is faith, then, so easy a matter? Alas, faith is not so common as all that! Can Mr Lippmann and his friends not imagine that there are men and women, not a few, whose very desire to believe in God makes them more and not less scrupulous in weighing every scrap of the evidence? One ought to be cautious surely in making such charges of "wishful thinking" against all religious faiths. It is hardly becoming when one remembers some of the great natures who have greatly believed because they have thought long and endured much. And the phrase becomes simply comic as one meets it in Mr Haydon's volume, after his whirlwind career down the ages and through the religions, seeking to prove that religion is simply the enthusiasm of humanity, and that its true nature is becoming clear to-day for the first time in the "Twilight of the Gods." If the facts of the history of religion can be made to prove that, they can be made to prove anything. Why Mr Haydon should wish to prove that is his own concern, but it certainly does not seem to me to lie with him to accuse other people of "wishful thinking."

I do not think that we shall really advance the question, however, by bringing such personal ques-

tions further into the field. It has been necessary to refer to them because the Humanist books make such liberal use of this particular phrase to discredit all religious thought. Leaving the matter behind for the time we shall proceed with our inquiry into the material grounds for the Humanist position.

What reasons do the Humanists give for their rejection of faith in the living God, and their acceptance instead of the belief that there is nothing transcending the world of Nature mechanically determined in every part and indifferent to good or evil ?

It is interesting to note that some of the stock difficulties of Theism discussed in theological text-books never appear in these writings. There are, so far as I can find, only two main reasons given :

The first is that no educated man or woman to-day can reject the scientific view of the world, and that the scientific view is plainly inconsistent with the Theistic interpretation.

The second is that the presence of evil in the world on so great a scale is plainly inconsistent with the view that it has been created and is maintained and governed by an almighty God of Love.

To these two broad and fundamental reasons Mr Haydon and Mr Huxley add a supplementary and practical reason for the rejection of Theism. They say that if men believe in a wise, good and almighty God, they must inevitably make this an excuse for their own apathy in social science and in social reform. Once the belief in God is dispelled, but not till then, will they feel their responsibility and put out their full strength.

We shall in what follows be concerned in the

main with the first two statements and shall deal only more briefly with the last. This, I think, is fair, because little emphasis is laid upon the third position. It is a kind of afterthought rather than a very real ground of rejection of belief in God.

I propose, then, in what follows to inquire whether Humanism is a coherent and satisfactory system of thought and, above all, whether it really solves the fundamental problem of all the greater philosophies and faiths as I have stated it in the opening lecture. The argument will involve, first of all, the consideration of whether the underlying assumption of all the Humanist writers, that science is the only pathway to Reality, is sound; secondly, whether belief in God promotes quietism and apathy; and thirdly, whether the fact of evil is fatal to faith in God. This will inevitably lead us to revelation and the Christian solution of the problem.