

# FALSE GODS

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THE statement recently made that Frazer's *Golden Bough* has influenced the younger writers of this generation more than any other book, sets one thinking. Having considered this work for years as a ready reference in Anthropology and Ethnology, one has the feeling of finding Euclid doing duty for the Bible!

It is true, Frazer's work was ostensibly a study of comparative religion, for its author started out to prove that the strange priesthood of the Alban Hills, centred in the King of the Grove of Aricia or Nemi, was the incarnation of the tree spirit or spirit of vegetation. Obsessed by the search on which he was launched, by way of getting his facts, Frazer covered practically the whole world of mythology. Incidentally, he proved several other theses, and among them showed that, in its evolution, science had its beginning in the observations by the savage of natural phenomena:

The stars that singly, then in flocks, appear,  
Like jets of silver from the violet dome.

So magic—the experiment that failed in the test of elemental forces; religion in the course of history eclipsed by science, though now about to be reconciled, alike had their moment in human history. For we did not need Einstein to tell us that, “At the root of both science and artistic creation lies a profound religious impulse.” All theories of thought carry us on to a goal which is ever receding. Science more than any other has shown this tendency in human affairs:

“Come wander with me”, she said,  
“Into regions yet untrod,  
And read what is still unread  
In the manuscript of God.”

But to what extent are these young writers, who were born just prior to the courtship of religion and science, preoccupied with the facts which Frazer culled to prove his thesis, or with the thesis itself? As one reviewer put it, “*The Golden Bough* is a well of empirical fecundity,” but this does not seem to have

affected youthful writers of this generation as, for instance, Greek mythology did those of the nineteenth century. If the title of Frazer's book took their fancy—for it has its arresting qualities—there is little to be found in the new literature of the Druids or the mistletoe. It is true, there is some mention of the "Myth", by which is meant apparently the ever-recurring springtime myth of Adonis, whose blood fertilizing the anemone or wind flower thus typifies the return of vegetation.

Then there is that other associated story of Pluto's realm which might be used as a prototype of our modern aviation. None of them seem to have seen this vision of Triptolemus grown to manhood riding through the heavens on the chariot of Ceres drawn by the winged dragons, sowing seeds through all the world. One wonders, but searching does not find. They seem rather preoccupied, these young poets and versifiers, with the gruesome side of the dark earth. The magic of fertility, if it touches them, leaves them cold to its magic side. Rather are they searching some autopsy room of the soul for startling contrasts. The *Golden Bough* may have been used as a fetish, perhaps, but certainly not as an inspiration. Such a massive work, if it had been carefully perused, should show more traces in the work of its neophytes. Can it be that they have but lightly skimmed its surface?

The works of Karl Marx seem to have been used in somewhat similar manner. For it comes as a surprise that it is but rarely that the economic side of Socialism and Communism appeals to them, but only its religious or moral side—the ideology—is their guide. In this connection it will be well to remember that there are two meanings to this word. So has it come to this, that there has arisen a generation which would run the world on a metaphysical basis? Or is it concerned rather with idle theorizing? Cecil Day Lewis recently asked: "Can you solve psychological problems by economic means?" Well, you must have an economic basis before you seriously have any problem at all. The two appear to be interactive. Man may not live by bread alone, but he certainly cannot be active as an earthly soul without it. Descartes sought to explain everything in the interests of pure reason, but he failed to allow for the mind that he was using.

Examples might be multiplied of how the surface of life is being skimmed for its ideas, but there is little probing of the depths. It is chiefly since the Great War that there has been a growing consciousness that something was wrong with our

modern education, and the war gets blamed for that which by no means began with it. For the roots of the trouble lie in pre-war days.

There has always been the complaint that mass education has its very serious defects. This has been an excuse for private as opposed to government schools, in order to train individuals rather than the group. Outstanding scholars and geniuses like George Eliot are pointed out as having been self educated. Unfortunately we are not all geniuses, and mass education is a necessity, but it can still be sane education.

What do we find of teaching trends in the years just prior to the war? By that time we were just getting through the troubles with spelling, for instance, that a too slavish following of an unrelieved phonic system had brought us. With the rise of the new psychology we were again launched on a series of experiments. Everything must be done for the child. The amount of home work that the teachers of that day were supposed to do was tremendous. The child need make little effort to acquire knowledge, having merely to drink what was offered him. Here and there teachers who dared were modifying this dosage, and within the limits of the law were making Johnny do a little digging of his own. And this method, to which was added a growing disregard of the value of mathematics, will be found to have resulted in a lack of concentration, for Johnny could easily close his mind to the subject of the hour and let little or much trickle in. He was allowed to grow as a bee flits from flower to flower, and the result gave him honey, perhaps, but no bread!

Similar methods survive in the colleges to-day in the outlines for lectures which teachers pass around to their students, as though every student gets the same thing out of a lecture that every other does. Of course these outlines have their uses in examination time, for a rapid survey of the subject, a skimming of the cream in order to make the mark. But of what use are marks even of the *A plus* order if they give, not a test of the student's knowledge, but a synopsis by the teacher which he memorizes enough or skims over enough to answer questions to-day which he promptly forgets to-morrow?

It comes again to the primary question of what is an education? Is it a fact finding process? It should not be, although it *is* largely that to-day, even in the elementary grades. Actually education should be a leading into knowledge by the process of building on the knowledge of the past. If it is to follow the

methods of evolution whose precedent Nature has set for us, at least in its elementary stages, it must follow that course accelerated which the mind of man has followed in its development through the ages. Has that been a fact finding process? Not by acquiring a mass of unrelated facts. Everything that primitive man noticed was of use to him. He learned to count, because he needed that in his trade and barter. He first drew his messages in the form of pictures, then he began to do them hurriedly as signs, which later became the letters of his alphabet. He speculated about things in Nature, it is true, but he did not see them all at once and so run into confusion. From magic he arrived at religion, according to Frazer, but the impressions on his mind were not criss-crossed this way and that as experimenters chose to carve the pristine surface of his brain. It is this natural method of education that we need to-day, especially in primary and elementary education. But can we ever get away from this fact gobbling method that we have set up? The life outside the school room has enough that is confusing for the child.

Our normal everyday life tends to the confusion of ideas by the very nature of the activities which we pursue. There are noises—necessary, often unnecessary—the visual confusion of the screen through which we get much of our entertainment which adds to the confusion. We are often surprised that these young people study better in an atmosphere of noises and confusion. They demand that the radio be turned on, so that they may have their “normal” amount of noise before getting on with their studies. Instead of being surprised at this phase of their development, and perhaps considering it the aberration of the adolescent, we should consider how far we are responsible for this condition. For there is little doubt that we are rearing generations with confused mentality.

Elective courses of study have added and are adding to the confusion. When President Eliot of Harvard set out his elective system of studies, if he stopped to picture the effect of it on anything other than the vocational education for which it was designed, he could hardly have realized then that the time would come when free electives would become a curse rather than a cure. Like Wilson and his League of Nations, he no doubt foresaw things far other than they ultimately became in other hands. It seemed a good thing until the pendulum swung too far out in the opposite direction and the liberal arts became all but a dead letter. There are, it is true, exceptions

here and there—small colleges which have held to their traditions instead of being carried away, which have insisted that a common language must mean a common curriculum.

Elective courses, too, have permitted lazy students to select what they found the easiest subjects with which to make up their grades, instead of having a course patterned for the development of their minds. The elective system has even penetrated the High Schools, and to some extent also the elementary schools. There used to be the objection in the days of the "little red school house" that too many changes of teachers were not good for the pupils, but what would they think to-day when the teacher changes with the subject?

All this has the effect of piling up the amount of study required of the child, until nothing but skimming is possible if the average child is to get through with it. We see the effect of this if we consider these young people when they come under the limelight of social study, by getting themselves either into the clutches of the law or merely into the welfare agencies through lack of work, which we tell them is no fault of their own, but merely a trend of the times. Here they show the same lack of mental development in not being able to think things through, in not facing facts. They will not put up their cards on the table, so that they may be subjected to the clear light of logic. It is even more apparent in their everyday life than in their poetry and art, and their thinking is superficial and of the skimming variety. Much of their attitude toward life is that of the child in the nursery, who having induced his nurse to build him a house of blocks, takes keen delight in kicking it over immediately to see how she will react. But having been delivered over to false gods in their childhood, they cannot reason properly, therefore cannot distinguish between the true and false in life.

Fortunately for the safety of the state, there are exceptions, but these are exceptions because of the home training which has supplemented what has been learned in the school, or where parents recognizing the weakness of the educational system have sought to correct those weaknesses. But when we think of the strange results of modern mass education and the form of standardization to which parents submit their children to-day, the result is pretty bad, any way you look at it.

As in many things in our modern civilization, the blame being borne by a great number becomes a bit diffused. But that does not alter results. Primarily, parents are responsible, since they are satisfied to accept what has been given them as desirable

without closely scrutinizing the methods and how they have worked. Perhaps they do not consider themselves competent judges, and so let the matter rest in the hands of the specialists. In much less degree teachers are to blame, because many of them have been at least protesting from time to time that something was wrong with the education machine. Being a part of the machine, they were the last people who could do anything radical. To some extent too we have been the victims of fashion, trying to keep up with the Joneses of education without considering the result. Those trained under this system must become adepts in continuing it, so it goes on.

And what is the solution? A complete overturn of the edifice, or what? Logical thinking has been developed in times past, so a return to the old system of three R's might not be so bad. It is largely a matter of subjects that train the mind, as opposed to mere fact collecting. Mathematics, therefore, must take a prominent place for both boys and girls. For mathematics is the basis of logic, and without logic there can be no systematic thinking. Without logical thinking, there can be no judgment developed. Above all in acquiring this training—not knowledge, note—there must be restful surroundings, in which character building can go on along lines required to develop the mind of man, not forgetting its past history.