

- BOOK REVIEW -

EUGENE BAGGER:

FOR THE HEATHEN ARE WRONG

(Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1941)

For the Heathen Are Wrong is really two books with one cover, and two intensely interesting, thoughtful, and thought-provoking books. The first is both timely and timeless. It is timely because it is another eye-witness account of the fall of France, but much more than just another one. At the time of the disaster, and for several years before it, Mr. Bagger was living, not in the whirl of Paris as a foreign correspondent, but near a little Provençal village as a thinker and an observer of men and their ways. The France he knew and loved so well, and in whose destiny he retains an invincible faith, was not the France of the politicians and the financiers and the generals, but the real France of the little shopkeepers and the housemaids and the farmers. He saw and lived their confusion and bewilderment and betrayal, and etches poignantly and unforgettable the horrors of flight over refugee-crowded roads. The author professes no "inside" knowledge, but he was inside the minds of ordinary French people and so inside the soul of France as few, if any, of his fellow observers were. From this point of view **For the Heathen Are Wrong** ranks with Jacques Maritain's **France, My Country**.

The timeless element of this first book arises from the fact that Mr. Bagger is a philosopher. He is interested not only in facts but in their relations and implications, and in the universally valid conclusions to which their observation and combination can lead a thoughtful man. He is not content to see and to report; he also draws from these facts a philosophy of history. Like Spengler, he discusses the phenomenon of the rise and decay of civilizations; but, unlike the author of **The Decline of the West**, he reaches the conclusion that a civilization dies when its religion dies. Our western civilization has been more firmly based than any, for its religion was Christianity, the only true religion. But at the end of the Middle Ages western man turned from the truth that God was the centre of the universe and tried to make himself that centre; he became an individualist, and played at being God. For four centuries his religion has been the

false one of material progress and material success; and now that religion has failed him, as every false religion must. Like Nicholas Berdyaev in *The End of Our Time* and Peter Wust in *Crisis in the West*, Eugene Bagger sees our day as the end of one era and the beginning of another, and urges a return to true Christianity as the only sure foundation on which to build.

The second of the books within *For the Heathen Are Wrong* is an account of the author's life, from his boyhood in Budapest to later years in Copenhagen, London, New York, Vienna, and Paris. But the stress is not on places or people or things; it is on ideas. Bagger's physical travels were more than matched by his journeys in the realms of the spirit, and in the latter he did not merely move from place to place—he progressed. In the course of this interesting and even exciting narrative we are led along charming little by-paths that deal, as the jacket advertisement tells us, with “Freud and Adler, Stendhal and detective stories, landscapes and food and wine”, but always we return to the main theme, the author's search for and discovery of truth.

To those who are interested in the historical events of our time, and all of us are, this book is recommended; to those who are interested in ideas that are of all time, and all of us should be, this book is also recommended.

A. J. CRONIN: THE KEYS OF THE KINGDOM

(Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1941)

Since the day of its publication, *The Keys of the Kingdom* has been the subject of more widespread discussion and controversy than falls to the lot of most best-sellers. From the point of view of technical performance, Dr. Cronin has produced a highly satisfactory piece of work. The narrative really grips the reader's interest, and he follows with absorption the record of the hero's life as a boy in Scotland, as a young priest near his native district, and as a missionary in China.

The characters, too, are vivid as individuals, although generally inaccurate as types. Father Francis Chisholm, the central figure of the novel, is a most interesting and lovable person. Most of the other characters are far from lovable, but contrive to be interesting. Each is described so

vividly that an almost pictorial representation springs to the reader's imagination. Dr. Cronin is a master of the deft touch, of the inevitable word. **The Keys of the Kingdom** is a well written book, a well executed piece of art, if that word is taken in the sense of artistry and even artfulness.

Like most examples of good art, however, it is something more; it is a vehicle for the artist's ideas. And the two chief ideas in the book are a false theology and a false picture of the Catholic clergy. Dr. Cronin sums up his theology in two short sentences: "Tolerance is the highest virtue. Humility comes next." There come immediately to mind the words of St. Paul, "The greatest of these is charity." It would be no answer to say that the words of St. Paul and those of Dr. Cronin mean the same thing, for they do not. Tolerance is not charity; and Dr. Cronin's tolerance, far from even resembling charity, amounts to religious indifference, which is not only uncharitable but unjust. He does not specifically state that one religion—or no religion—is as good as another; he does not in so many words adopt the modern reversal of Lutheranism and say that it makes no difference what a man believes as long as he acts rightly; but he makes his characters, in what they say and do, shout the false doctrine from every chapter of his novel. He would, like others for whom dogma is a term of reproach, have a man act rightly without first knowing what is right. It is one thing to emphasize the Catholic teaching that all those in good faith may save their soul; it is another thing to pervert that doctrine and imply that we should be so tolerant, that is, indifferent, as to make no effort to change the views of those who are in error. Dr. Cronin's tolerance comes to confusion between right and wrong on the most important matter in men's lives, and, what is worse, indifference to that confusion. Not only are "the keys of the kingdom" multitudinous, but any key you may happen to fancy will serve the purpose. But where there are keys there is generally a lock, and it is a peculiar lock that opens to any and every key.

Dr. Cronin manages the matter very cleverly. He puts his doctrine into the mouth of Father Francis Chisholm, a truly beautiful character whom every reader will love. But Father Chisholm is saintly and lovable, not because he is tolerant in Dr. Cronin's sense of that word, but because he is charitable in St. Paul's sense of that word. The author's aim is to make us so admire Father Chisholm's saintly life that we shall also accept without question the words that he

makes him utter. But it is still necessary to distinguish between right and wrong, between right action and wrong teaching, between a charitable life and the preaching of "tolerance". Charity does cover a multitude of sins, but it was never meant to be a cloak for religious indifference.

The author makes criticism still more difficult by further confusing the issue. In the course of the story Father Chisholm is criticized frequently, often unjustly, and always by vastly inferior and unworthy men. He is accused of lack of zeal by those who are obviously interested only in their own material advantage: he is accused of lack of orthodoxy by those who are obviously stupid and bigoted. And we, by inference, are identified with his unworthy critics if we complain of Dr. Cronin's false teaching. The method of presentation, relying on an appeal to emotion against reason, is clever. But the teaching remains false.

The second great falsehood in *The Keys of the Kingdom* is its picture of the Catholic clergy. With one exception besides that of the hero, the priests who pass in review are narrow, prejudiced, gross, and worldly, regarding the priesthood as a profession rather than as a vocation. The picture is not too obviously overdrawn; Father Tarrant, Monsignor Sleeth, even Dean Fitzgerald, are led to admit that, on certain points at least, they were wrong and Father Chisholm was right. But by that time the damage has been done, and the reader carries away with him an impression of the Catholic clergy as a pack of unlovely rascals. That impression is further thrown into relief by the contrast between the lives of Francis Chisholm and Anselm Mealey, who begin life together in the same town, attend the seminary together, and are priest in the same parish. A selfish, canting hypocrite, full of worldly ambition, Anselm Mealey carves himself out a successful career in the Church and becomes a bishop; a humble, charitable, saintly man, Francis Chisholm devotes his life to the service of God and the salvation of souls, is consistently misjudged and unappreciated, and finally is almost ousted from the parish that is his combined work and refuge in a worn-out old age. The deduction is obvious; and the deduction is false. Dr. Cronin's experience with the clergy may have been particularly unfortunate, but this reviewer has met a considerable number of Francis Chisholms and not a single Anselm Mealey; and he has known many priests.

Such is *The Keys of the Kingdom*. It is a splendidly

written book, an absorbing book, a clever book; but cleverness in the presentation of falsehood leads to harm rather than to good. To a world which turns a deaf ear to the message of the Church and an abnormally sensitive one to any criticism of Her teaching or Her members, this book, written by a man who himself enjoys all the spiritual benefits of Catholicism, will come as a confirmation of what that world earnestly wishes to believe.



Slander, that worst of poisons, ever finds an easy entrance to ignoble minds.

—*Juvenal*

Education begins a gentleman, conversation completes him.

If wisdom's ways you wisely seek,
Five things observe with care:
To whom you speak, of whom you speak,
And how, and when, and where.

Speak clearly if you speak at all,
Carve every word before you let it fall.

—*Holmes*