

TRUTH
5 MAY 1905

AN APOSTLE OF RELIGIOUS TRUTH.

In the early part of this year the colleges of Oxford and Cambridge were deluged with circulars offering a prize of £100 for the best essay upon the works of one Aleister Crowley, with a further intimation that "consolation prizes, value under £10, according to the merit of the MSS., may be awarded." Appended to the circular was a list of the works of Mr. Aleister Crowley, together with an order form for volume I. of the said works, price 5s. The circular was got up much in the style of an advertisement of a tradesman's bogus competition, and the whole thing was obviously simply a dodge for selling a few copies of the books in question. Not the least curious feature in it, therefore, was that the only address given was that of "The Secretary, Society for the Propagation of Religious Truth, Boleskine, Foyers, Inverness," to whom all communications in connection with the competition were to be addressed.

The distribution of these circulars was noticed in TRUTH at the time, with a suggestion that Mr. Crowley and the Society for the Propagation of Religious Truth must be somewhat intimately connected. Shortly afterwards Mr. Crowley himself wrote to me from St. Moritz with the information that the relation in question was simply that of author and publisher. He also mentioned, in reply to another remark in my paragraph, that if he was unknown to fame as an author, as was suggested in the paragraph, it might be due to the fact that, although copies of his books had been sent to this office for review, no notice of them had up to that date appeared. This led me to institute a search for any Crowleynan productions that might have come into my possession under such circumstances; and the result was the discovery of one of them, a poem of such objectionable character that there was no difficulty in understanding why it had not been noticed. All this was likewise mentioned in TRUTH at the time. Shortly afterwards I received the following letter:—

Without Prejudice.

From the S.P.R.T., Boleskine, Foyers, Inverness.

March 3, 1905.

To the Editor of TRUTH.

SIR,—Of the three volumes from Mr. Crowley's pen which we have issued hitherto, none can by any reasonable possibility be described as "a little poem." We are therefore completely at a loss to understand the allusions in your issue of the 23rd ult., a cutting from which has just reached us.

We shall be glad if you will retract the statement that we are publishing, or pushing the sale of, any volume as you describe.

—Yours truly,

THE S.P.R.T.

pp. R. B.

The ominous words "without prejudice" at the head of this communication naturally alarmed me seriously, more especially as the preface to a request for the retraction of a statement, it being my experience that "without prejudice" in such a connection means that dire consequences are likely to follow if the request is not complied with. This may or may not have been in the mind of the writer when he started with this sinister phrase. I noticed, however, that the envelope in which the letter arrived had been posted in Camberwell, which is a long way from Foyers, and as the letter itself was not written on the official paper of the Society, nor signed by any responsible individual, I thought it desirable to know a little more about the party or parties who were communicating with me before retracting anything that I had said. I therefore wrote again to the Society for the Propagation of Religious Truth, and asked them whether they were the publishers of the work to which I had referred, including a certain publisher's note which appeared in it. I then received the following letter, this time on the official paper of the Society, and apparently not posted at Camberwell, though the postmark is illegible:—

SOCIETY FOR THE PROPAGATION OF RELIGIOUS TRUTH.

Letters and Telegrams: Boleskine, Foyers, is sufficient address.

Parcels and Goods: INVERFARIGAIG PIER, LOCH NESS.

Gentlemen,—We are the publishers of the work you speak of. The "Publisher's Note" was written by the Editor.

We have not laid the question of its propriety before anybody else.

We have severely reprimanded our Hon. Secretary for his most suspicious, if not actually criminal, conduct in attending to the correspondence of the Society during his absence in London, and beg you to accept our humblest apologies for the same.

A subscriber has called our attention to your description of our title as sanctimonious, which we should not ourselves have noticed, as we do not object to impoliteness, but only to perversions of fact. However, we volunteer the following explanation, as our more sensitive members resent your epithet:—

Religious Truth should be distinguished from Religious Folly and Religious Fraud. Further, it contains two elements: the negative and the positive. From the former standpoint we are agnostic: from the latter, we hope to attain to spiritual fact by scientific method.

The first article of the memorandum of association, which is in course of preparation, contains words to this effect.

To call us sanctimonious, therefore, is as if a Tory paper complained of your Free Trade articles appearing "in a paper with this fine Protectionist title."

Pray reflect that at the present time opinions have such fundamental diversity that no abstract word has any signification out of its context.—We are, yours faithfully,

THE S.P.R.T.

This letter does not read precisely like a business communication from a firm of publishers; and it increased my desire to know more of this curious religious society, which is, from the negative standpoint of religious truth, agnostic. I therefore wrote again and asked the Society if I might have the name of the honorable secretary, and the individuals responsible for its management. This letter was duly posted on March 30. I waited patiently for an answer for upwards of three weeks, when I received the following, dated April 22:—

Sir,—Having had no reply to our letter of nearly a month ago, we may, I suppose, take it that the incident is closed.—We are yours very truly.

THE S.P.R.T.

Considering that the Society had called on me to retract a statement, with the threatening intimation that the demand was made "without prejudice," and that I had up to this time failed to comply with the demand, it would only have been a relief to my mind to know that the incident was closed. However, as I did not want to be under the imputation of not having replied to the Society's last letter, I explained that I was waiting for a reply on my side, and sent them a copy of my last letter. I then received the following, dated May 4:—

Sir,—Your letter, with a copy of one which miscarried, to hand.

We observe that your letter is said to be "in answer to" our last. As it consists only of a question, we will content ourselves with the observation that we have no branch in Ireland.

Before I can take upon myself the responsibility of forwarding your query to our head branch, through whom alone I can obtain authorization to reply to it, I must ask your reasons for wishing to know. Should they appear to me to be of a satisfactory nature, I will at once forward your communication to India.—We beg to remain, yours obediently.

S.P.R.T.

per —

There are some hieroglyphics at the end of the letter, which is typewritten, but neither I nor my printers are able to decipher them. I have not thought it necessary to pursue this singular correspondence further, as it is evident to my mind that the writer is only playing the fool; and I therefore publish it as it stands up to this point, together with such information as I have of this interesting "society."

It appears that Boleskine is the name of a house with a few acres attached to it, near Foyers, where Mr. Aleister Crowley has resided for the last two or three years. He is, I believe, the owner of the property. He is described by those who know him as a gentleman of somewhat eccentric tastes and habits, particularly in the matter of dress. When he came to Foyers he adopted the name of MacGregor. This, however, does not seem to have been sufficiently distinguished, and he subsequently changed it for that of Lord Boleskine. He married about two years ago, and his wife is, I suppose, Lady Boleskine. The Peer and Peeress are not very regularly in residence at the

place, and have sometimes been absent for months at a time. No one else resides there. It is therefore pretty evident that the Society for the Propagation of Religious Truth which is domiciled at Boleskine, is nothing more than an association of Crowley, MacGregor, and Lord Boleskine, with a possible addition of her ladyship. In other words it is simply one more of Mr. Crowley's aliases. It follows that when Mr. Crowley wrote to me from St. Moritz that the only relation between himself and the society was that of author and publisher, he was not telling the truth as ordinarily understood. As mentioned in one of the above letters, religious truth—which I suppose embraces all truth—contains two elements, the negative and the positive, and Mr. Crowley's statement about his publishers is evidently an example of the negative element. So also, I take it, is the suggestion in his last letter that the writer is merely the local representative of an organization with its headquarters in India, to which my communication will be forwarded in the event of its being deemed worthy of that honour. Separating for the moment the negative from the positive elements of truth in the whole correspondence, I conclude that Mr. Crowley, or Lord Boleskine, or whatever he wishes to call himself, is his own publisher, and that it is he, and nobody else, who is responsible for the distribution of the aforesaid advertisements of his works at Oxford and Cambridge in January last.

It is, of course, no reproach to any man to be his own publisher, especially if his works are of such a nature that no business firm would take the risk of putting them on the market. I do not, therefore, desire to lay any stress upon that point, nor upon the fact that in his character of a publisher Mr. Crowley assumes the designation of a "society." But it is a different matter when a gentleman who avows himself an agnostic, as I understand this gentleman to do in the above correspondence, assumes the title of a "Society for the Propagation of Religious Truth," and in that character offers to the public works of the nature of Mr. Crowley's. The particular volume to which reference has been made above is frankly and grossly immoral, and it speaks plainly enough for the tastes and opinions of the author. I gather that this gentleman is at war, not only with what is ordinarily known as religion, but also with what is ordinarily known as virtue; and when he masquerades as a propagator of religious truth, and in that character offers his works, including the one to which I have particularly referred, to young men at Oxford and Cambridge,

with the stimulus of a £100 prize for the best essay on their contents, he is doing a very mischievous thing in a very dishonest way. While, therefore, Mr. Crowley is propagating the truth about religion, as he understands it, I think it desirable to propagate the truth about Mr. Crowley as I understand it. He is anxious for a notice, and here it is. As will be gathered from the letters given above, he is clever enough at handling his pen, and it is a pity that his talents are not employed to better purpose than he appears to have found for them at present.