

is free to remedy them. Its creed, however vaguely stated or understood, will stand strains that other creeds cannot. The belief of the young fascist in the infallible wisdom of Hitler or the invincibility of the divine emperor of Japan is, to say the least, shaken when Hitler brings his country and himself to complete disaster, or the American fleet appears off Japan. But, for those who believe in freedom, its desirability is not diminished when they are conquered—rather the contrary.

Few of us trouble to think all this out. Probably we are definite about our aim of freedom largely because it is so clearly stated in the one national creed that we know and recite—"Rule, Britannia." Whether it is an adequate creed, and whether it will change in future—these questions I must leave for my next talk.

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"What Will Future Australians Believe In?"

By DR. C. E. W. BEAN

LAST week we asked, "What do Australians believe in?", and I suggested that, although we think little and vaguely about the matter, most of us have in our minds as the pattern of the man or woman that we would like to resemble, a pattern partly made of the tradition of our back country, partly of old British tradition—not much affected, yet, I think, by Hollywood; a free, courageous, comradely pattern, despising blatherskite and "side" but, in the case of our men, strongly coloured by our particular Australian notion of manliness; and prizing, probably above all else, a "freedom" which most Australians believe to be something even beyond that which we sing of in "Rule, Britannia."

This week I have to ask, "Is that belief enough?" Can it provide the guiding star which is lacking nowadays in so many lives? Isn't our belief in "freedom" or "democracy" too vague to help us? And, if so, what of our future?

Well, the first thing that strikes me about all this is that "democracy" and even "freedom" are not adequate ends in themselves; they are rather the means to other ends. And if we are ready, as we undoubtedly are, to fight for freedom and democracy, it is because we feel—though perhaps only half consciously—that those other ends are vital for us; "freedom" is a very vague word. You or I cannot be completely free; it would mean the slavery of all other men. Even Hitler isn't completely free. Whenever we say we want freedom, we mean freedom to do or get particular things; and when we say freedom is vital to us we mean that those particular things are vital. We believe in democracy because we know it is the only safe way to the particular freedom that we want; and we say freedom is vital because it is the only means to . . . what?

If what we wanted was, say, to obtain food without having to work for it, or to revel in unlimited horse- and dog-racing—if that was what we wanted, we should not want democracy in order to obtain it. The most impressive example of a people's obtaining free bread and unlimited horse-racing that the world has ever experienced was provided by the Roman emperors, who for hundreds of years used these means for satisfying their people and at the same time keeping them in subjection. Yes, humanity did actually see an age in which great public horse-races seemed the most important thing in the life of the civilized world—when whole peoples were split into sections favouring the various chariot teams, and these sections murdered one another, on occasions, by the thousand, perverted the law courts, killed or expelled governors, and almost drove the great emperor Justinian to flee from Constantinople. All this happened when freedom, such as we value, was perhaps at the lowest ebb it has ever reached in civilized times.

No; the freedom for which we are quite definitely aiming is, when we think it out in the light of such examples, a freedom for something much higher than easy and exciting living. The freedom we cannot live without will, I think, if we carefully analyse our thoughts, be found to be a freedom to struggle towards the truth; freedom to think; freedom to seek truth wherever we believe it to exist; freedom to exhibit to others whatever ray of truth we believe ourselves to have caught—so that we may help others in the search for truth and be helped by them.

At bottom what we aim at is—truth. We Australians do, I think, believe that truth must ultimately come to light, and that the sooner it comes, the better for mankind. Truth has this quality—that, provided you leave men free to seek it, it will prevail. There will arise all sorts of errors—a million of them, it may be, for every grain of truth. But just because truth is truth, because it represents a law of the universe, or perhaps, as many would state it, a law of the great mind which, they believe, created and is the universe, that grain of truth will find its way to the light eventually while the million falsehoods fade. Even in the minds of animals truth quickly prevails; watch a horse, or a dog, learn from experience to avoid the mistakes that have caused him pain or failure. With men, no matter how backward their community, or how oppressive the authority that controls it, there has always been this hope, that first one ray of truth and then another will get through to their minds; in the long run the light is always increasing. We have our dark ages, but illumination is only a question of sooner or later. Eventually truth will win. It is the one great hope of humanity.

I believe that Australians realize this; that they cling to democracy and freedom because of a recognition, however dim, that they cannot have truth without them. They have a hatred of being humbugged. Even Australian children constantly want to know if what you tell them is "dinkum." I firmly believe that, as a nation, we are marked by a desire to face facts, not illusions. Of course, it is not enough merely to resent humbug. We have to set ourselves to the difficult task of actively discovering truth. The Australian child, and the Australian soldier as I know him, are incurably inquisitive, and may heaven keep them so! Inquisitiveness is, after all, an effort to find truth.

But is our impulse powerful enough to overcome all the influences that are against it? Civilizations, quite as wonderful as ours in their way, have disappeared. The marvellous civilization of Greece and that of Rome were eclipsed for ages by more or less the same agency that is trying to eclipse our humane civilization to-day. There are black gaps in the history of civilization—in the history of the City of London, for example, there is a time extending to at least a generation as to which no authority can tell you what happened to the remains of the rich Roman city that once stood there; whether it was merely a place of ghostly ruins, where wolves, perhaps, prowled in the old gardens and orchards, and herons and other wild fowl lived in the deserted swimming baths and fountains; or whether some remnants of a human community, perhaps almost as wild, made use of the wrecked villas and shops.

It is still all too possible for truth to be thwarted and the world to slip back into a lifeless civilization when truth almost dies before mankind makes its next step. Even when truth seems to flourish there are all sorts of obstacles raised in its way by not only nature but man. Wherever some section of men has established an advantage for itself over others—wherever what we call a "vested interest" has grown—the persons who have that interest tend to suppress any truth which they, rightly or wrongly, think may shake their position. Often they do not realize that they are suppressing truth. To quite good and even great men, what we recognize to-day to be true has often appeared to be false—probably this happens daily to every one of us. Not only kings, aristocracies, capitalists, churches and other ruling powers have at one time or another been guilty of trying to crush the truth; so have the opponents of the churches, and the leaders of the Left, Right, and Middle. Democracy is the form of government least likely to suppress truth, but even in our most modern democracy, with all the arts that vested interests use to pervert truth, with propaganda of pressure groups, and commercial advertising and other agencies some of which will try to persuade the public that almost anything is true provided that they are paid or profited in doing so, with all this pressure brought to bear it is hard enough for the citizen even in our democracy to judge what is true and what false. Our universities have been justified to the hilt in standing as they have, even against a Parliament, for the right freely to seek and speak truth.

After all, the search for truth is the condition fundamental to all human progress; it is that which helps man on his slow journey from the animal towards—towards whatever higher form mankind will eventually take on. Here is an objective clearly worth living and dying for: to help the advance of life towards a splendid future; to endeavour to understand the great beneficent plan that guides the universe—if, as most men believe, there is such a plan, or, if there were not, to play even the smallest part in creating and ensuring such a plan within the limit of our daily increasing powers. This is an aim that can serve as a guiding star, shining above each citizen and the nation. I believe there are signs that Australians do dimly see that star, and very good hopes that, if our people, young and old, can get the kind of education for which they show many signs of craving, this nation may yet be a great one in the only sense in which greatness is worth striving for.