

Missionary Methods: St. Paul's or Satan's? an Infernal Dialogue

[This 'Socratic dialogue' was drafted whilst Roland was still living in Beaconsfield, probably in about 1930; but he did not even offer it to his traditional publishers, being convinced that they would think it either too flippant or too aggressive. John suggested publication in the early 1940s: but then the idea was dropped, probably because the dialogue might well have seemed to be no more than a plagiarism of C. S. Lewis' similar idea in The Screwtape Letters, published in 1942.]

You remark how Plato describes Socrates standing at nightfall in the camp of the Greeks, lost in meditation, and how his fellow soldiers went to bed by the camp fires and lay watching him till they dropped off to sleep; and how in the morning when they woke they saw him still standing motionless just as he had been standing when they went to sleep. And how the sun rose, and then at last he moved, bowed himself down, and prayed, and went away.

I saw Satan standing just like that, and the leaders of the infernal hosts were watching him, just as the Greeks watched Socrates, only they were impatient and not merely curious; and at last Beelzebub could contain himself no longer:

Beelzebub: *What is the matter, Satan?* — he asked.

Satan: I was thinking about those Christian Missions.

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- B: *What about them? I have been away a long time: you know where. Nothing unusual has happened, has it? The Christians are still divided, aren't they? That was our trump suit. We always depended on that: internecine quarrels over Church doctrine and customs, words, and clothes, and ornaments and things like that, any number of them, something new every few years. They have not ceased, have they? You used to say that you were afraid that the vision of a world to be won for Christ would silence disputes and unite them. That hasn't happened, has it?*
- S: *No, it hasn't. Look at England today. The Church there is as excited about Tabernacles as if no one could be saved without them. Look at the world. The Christians, if they were united, would be only a small body in the midst of vast heathen populations; but they are not united. Those big-titled National Christian Councils do not matter. The separate missions go their own way in practice, and the Christians are all labelled *something* Christians: Roman Catholic Christians, Anglican Christians, Wesleyan Christians, Baptist Christians, and so on; and they more often drop the 'Christian' than the qualifying term, and are simply Roman Catholics, or Wesleyans, or Baptists, never simply Christians. They are scattered in these groups all over the countries, so that in many places, not only in whole provinces or in large towns, but even in little villages, there may be fragments of several groups. So there are dozens of organizations each providing for the welfare of its members scattered over wide areas, each doing the same or very much the same thing in the same places. That still holds up the procession.*
- B: *Well, you can always multiply divisions, can't you? You have never had much difficulty hitherto; and you have had plenty of experience. Twenty centuries have gone by and the Christians, taken all together, are still a comparatively small body in the world, and are divided as you say. Their missions will not do us much harm.*

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- S: I tell you they will. It is written: *'The earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea'*. We cannot stop it, and these missions will assist it, and are assisting it.
- B: *But we are hindering it, and we are fouling those waters.*
- S: That is true. We are fouling them, sure enough. These people take their divisions abroad and the nations eat that which they have fouled with their feet and drink that which they have fouled with their feet: but still, it is time we did something.
- B: *Wasn't it your idea to hand over the situation to Mammon? Didn't you put him in charge? What did he do about it?*
- S: He did good work, very good work. He taught the zealots to put money in the first place.
- B: *Money in the first place! They don't call that 'worshipping Mammon', do they?*
- S: Of course not. They don't call it anything, they don't like to think about it; they just do it: we know what to call it. Mammon has always had individual Christians to worship him in plenty; but now he has fairly collared the machine.
- B: *How did he do it?*
- S: He *designed* the machine. You know what trouble we used to have with Christians. We had to be everywhere at once to keep an eye on them. The moment one left home on business, we never knew what might happen. A Church sprang up here, another there. And then evangelists went about wherever they liked, and we couldn't keep pace with them. Now in these days, if Christians acted like that, they go about in such numbers that we should never be able to keep in touch.
- B: *Happily they don't. I am told that in religion as in everything*

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else, these modern Western peoples have a strong caste feeling, and they do not like what they call inferior races to share their religion with them, if they have any. And the less they have, the less they like any of the other races to adopt a religion which is still nominally their own.

- S: That is one of the facts on which Mammon relied. It seemed to them absolutely vain to imagine that the Christians would propagate the Gospel as the natural and inevitable effect of their scattering all over the world. No one even dreamed of attempting to arouse the Church, so that her children might do that.
- B: *What else could they do?*
- S: Look out for men who *did* understand the necessity for expansion, and *pay* them to go.
- B: *You mean, create a class of professional missionaries?*
- S: Precisely. That is what Mammon did. He persuaded the people who were keen on extending the Church, or propagating the Gospel, or whatever they call it, to *begin* by collecting money and then paying professionals.
- B: *Jolly for the pros! As long as they kept out of reach of their own people, life might be tolerable; but when the vast majority of the people who professed their religion either scoffed at them as fools, or refused to treat any converts as brethren, it must have made things difficult. It reminds me of the way in which we set those Judaizers in early years following Saul of Tarsus, and telling everybody he was a fraud.*
- S: That was not such a big success as we thought it at the time. But at any rate they could not accuse Saul of Tarsus of being a pro. He took good care to avoid that. Mammon's great stroke consisted in creating a class of professionals, and putting the missionaries into it. Even if some had private means, and did not take any pay, Mammon got

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them all into the same class, and built a wall of separation between that class and the ordinary Christians. That, and setting the people at home to believe that without money and professionals they would do nothing, was Mammon's great stroke.

- B:** *Then, I suppose, the well-disposed generally left everything to the pro. They would naturally do that.*
- S:** They generally did. All the bigwigs in the Church told them that it was their duty to support the professionals, and most of them satisfied their consciences by a subscription. And the people at home created great offices and organizations for collecting money, and issued appeal after appeal, and preached everywhere that nothing could be done without money.
- B:** *Did they get money?*
- S:** Mammon took a long view. He argued that the more they got, the more devoted they would be to money, and the more they would rely on it, and the more they would need it. And he was right.
- B:** *But if they got a lot of money, they would be able to support a host of evangelists.*
- S:** So they might have done, if I had not invented the Mission Station. But, even apart from that, they found it easier to get money than to get men. It is not everybody, who is really keen on propagating the Gospel, who wants to be a missionary pro. They never quite understood that, and they don't now. Of course you and I know that, to propagate a religion, *voluntary* service, which is obviously and unmistakably voluntary, is the strong weapon. No religion advances unless its adherents are keen to propagate it personally. We do not let our people employ many professionals to preach agnosticism or atheism, do we?

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But an office, and an organization, and the collection of funds are wonderful things to blind the eyes. Still, I saw at once that there would be too many evangelists going about the world establishing Churches, unless we did something which would at once immobilize them, and use up large sums of money, and give them something *else* to establish. So I used the money to immobilize the men and, as I say, I invented the Mission Station, and let the establishment of mission stations take the place of establishing Churches. The professionals went out, and began buying land and houses, often in the face of local opposition which I encouraged. They built foreign churches and houses, and they established large institutions, all foreign of course. Whenever they made any converts, they settled down to look after them, and established these Stations. Then they wanted more money, and more, and more, and appealed perpetually to the people at home for it; and so the Societies never had enough. That had three great advantages: it bound the whole movement to the chariot wheels of Mammon, it misrepresented the purpose and work of the Christian missionaries, and it immobilized them and tied them up. I reckon that that one stroke put off the coming of Christ's kingdom for a millenium.

- B:** *I don't quite see that. Surely these mission stations were centres of light?*
- S:** You do not think that I was such a fool as to let it appear otherwise? Besides, I could not have helped it, if I had tried. All that I could do was to check them as far as possible. Do you think it was no gain to immobilize Christian missionaries, and especially Christian evangelists, and to get them well tied up in the business side of large stations? Do you think it was nothing to guide them gently into feeling more and more the need of money, and to start them on a road which meant no advance without *more* money? Do you think it was no advantage to make all

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the people round them suspicious of them, wondering what on earth they spent all that money on land and buildings for, and imagining all sorts of horrors, as that they were supported by their governments to get a footing in the country for political aggression? What do you think? Was all that nothing?

- B:** *I can see how it immobilized the sort of missionary who would enjoy running an institution, but you said it immobilized evangelists? I thought evangelists were essentially men who did not sit still. They did not in the early days. They were always on the move. If one of them stayed in a place two years, we used to think it a long time.*
- S:** The Evangelist—the real evangelist—is like that. He used to be always off creating a new Church somewhere. But you must remember that these men were agents of a Society which planted *stations*, not Churches. The difference between a Church and a mission station lies just here, that a Church can run itself, and a station cannot. The Station, when once established, must be looked after; and when the man in charge dies, or goes home, someone has to take charge, and if no one else is at hand they have to call in the evangelist and put *him* in charge, and the charge of a Station is no small work. It involves endless accounts and no end of petty business. A man is not free, when he has one of these Stations to look after. Consequently the evangelists—the *real* evangelists—often eat their hearts out running institutions and Stations. We cannot stop *all*: but you would be delighted to see how many we *do* stop, and how many we spoil. We immobilize the missionaries fairly well, considering. You have only to open up one of their own modern Surveys or Reports to see how many of the missionaries are tied up—four-fifths of them, or even nine-tenths of them, clustered in some two or three cities, or a few big stations. It's not bad.

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- B:** *But you said that the mission stations misrepresented the Gospel of the missionaries, and made the people suspicious. How was that? Didn't the mission station bring immense advantages to the people? I thought they were the places where hospitals and schools and industrial workshops and all that sort of thing flourished?*
- S:** That is true. In dealing with things like Christian missions you cannot have it all your own way. All that you can do is to make as much mischief as possible. These mission stations involve the missionaries in worldly business; that is something; but in addition they do rouse suspicion. You can see for yourself. Suppose missionaries of a new Faith appear from a foreign land, and begin by buying land and houses, and settling down, don't you see that the people generally—especially if they have any reason to think that these foreigners are an aggressive race—must look at the proceeding with some suspicion? And if there is local opposition to begin with, and they overrule it, or get round it, either by offering a good price, or by appealing to treaty rights, or by insisting on their own governments supporting them: isn't it quite obvious that the people will wonder what they are really aiming at? They may do a lot of charity, and win the hearts of many, but there will always be a large majority who will remain suspicious, and believe that these foreigners are really playing the game of their own governments. They will say: 'Religion is not propagated in this way: the Buddhists did not propagate their religion like that, the Moslems do not: they taught the people what they believed, and men who were attracted by their teaching handed it on; but they did not come in and establish stations, like military outposts in other people's territory. There is more than religion behind all this.' That sort of suspicion dies hard. At intervals they butter up the missionaries who really do show charity and multiply good works; but the suspicion is always ready to

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break out into a flame at any provocation. To buy land and build houses and spend pots of money is such a strange way of propagating a religion that it is bound to create suspicion. And it has. Propagation of religion by the sword is intelligible; propagation by persuasion is intelligible; but this sort of thing is to most men quite *unintelligible*.

- B: *But they don't think they can convert a nation by establishing these stations, do they? Why, they would need millions of money and hosts of men to do that!*
- S: They are always saying that they do *not* expect to do that, but that is how they act. In spite of the obvious fact that their present stations are understaffed, and they are always crying out for more men and more money to maintain them, in spite of the fact that at intervals they have to close stations in order to spend more on great institutions, they still talk of any new advance as a matter of establishing a new Station.
- B: *And do they not read the history of the early expansion of the Church? Those Christians, with whom we had to deal in early days, did not establish costly Stations, they established Churches; and a nice job we had with them.*
- S: That is out of date today. Remember how we riddled those churches with heresies and schisms? *That* is what they read today, and they are afraid of it. I did not realize at the time what a victory we were winning. I didn't think that nineteen centuries later Christians would be dominated by the terror of it. Did you?
- B: *But do they not preach Christ in these Stations?*
- S: They do; but I took jolly good care they should preach something else as well.
- B: *What?*
- S: Oh, the old wheeze. "The kingdom of God a kingdom to be

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established by social advancement and intellectual enlightenment' and such like. Muddle up a lot of philanthropy in a bottle and label it 'Christian' and they will swallow it like . . . like gin. No—they wouldn't like that word: some of them are total abstainers or anti-alcoholists; we had better say 'like the sincere milk of the Word'. Anyway, they swallow it. And I have got missionaries, supported by these Societies, teaching the Chinese how to farm! Plenty of them are busy attacking social evils in detail. *That keeps them busy.*

B: *But didn't they make any converts?*

S: I couldn't help that. You know as well as I know that nothing stops Christ.

B: *Well, didn't those converts get on with the job, just as they used to do ages ago?*

S: I have learnt by experience, my friend! I didn't forget that lesson: you have forgotten Mammon, and his professionals.

B: *Did they make professionals of the converts?*

S: As many as they could. Enough to teach nearly all the converts to wait for the pro to act.

B: *Not all?*

S: No, not all. I tell you, I have had a difficult time. But still, the exceptions are comparatively rare.

B: *How did you manage it?*

S: They started, of course, as they had begun themselves. That was natural. They paid Christian workers to work for the Mission. That put off the lay Christian, who used to be our danger, wandering about and teaching others. Instead, he waited for the pro, or sent up a feeble bleat for one, because 'the propagation of the Gospel was not his

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- job'. But then I hammered it well in. The work was half done for me before I began, because these Western people have a natural tendency to worship what they call efficiency; and their efficiency is essentially something which can be measured in the scales of the world. They not only pay professionals to evangelize: they *train* them.
- B: *What? Western people train Indians and Chinese to propagate the faith of Christ in their own land! You don't mean that, surely?*
- S: I do. I mean just that. And, what is more, they set going the idea that men who have *not* been trained by them are not fit to propagate the Faith. They teach little boys in schools, and then catch as many of them as they can, and make them mission agents. In some schools they bind every boy who receives their money for his education under a contract to serve the mission as a teacher, or something of that kind, for a definite term of years.
- B: *And they expect to get men to propagate a religion like that!*
- S: They do. They are thoroughly convinced of it.
- B: *But a few years' experience must teach them?*
- S: Teach them what?
- B: *That boys caught and trained like that cannot be efficient, if the propagation of the Gospel is what they want. You said they worship efficiency.*
- S: Don't make any mistake here. You forget Christ. Some of these boys become really excellent and zealous evangelists and Christian teachers, because Christ lays hold of them.
- B: *Yes, but the majority? Mere humdrum, uninspired, paid workers. They must find that out.*
- S: They would, if they were not persuaded that, if the results are not what they would like, it is because the training has

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not been sufficiently thorough.

B: *So when things hang fire, they simply cry out for better training?*

S: That's it.

B: *Hooray! That puts the lid on it. A commercial mind applied to the propagation of a Faith! It's absolutely air-tight. The theory fits like the Gate of Hell: the more you try to escape, the closer you shut it; the more you open it, the less possible it is to pass out of it.*

S: Yes, that is so: but I am not easy in my mind. I saw a fellow once toiling and sweating at the Gate. I cheered him on. I said 'The only reason you fail lies in your lack of efficiency: you are strong enough; train harder; you have got hold of the right way to go to work: there's no doubt about that; just persevere.' I pointed out that the gate was actually opening. (You know that 'opening', which is really shutting). He went at it with all his might. And then, what do you think happened? Why, he suddenly turned round, and fled from it, crying: 'No hope'; and before you could wink he was *outside*; and the gate never opened at all, I swear it.

B: *Those gates never do open.*

S: Well, that is what I'm eternally afraid of with this Training Gate. It is all right at present. These missionaries are nearly all quite satisfied that all they need is more effort on their part, and greater efficiency in their training, and they think that the gate really is opening; but I have heard murmurings. I saw one man the other day scratching his head, and saying to himself: 'I wonder if this *is* the way?' And another went so far as to say: 'I wonder whether Christ does His *own* training?' I do not like it. That is what has set me musing.

B: *Cannot you keep them to the Training somehow? Why not try*

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enlarging the idea of Training?

- S: I *have* done that, and I *am* doing it. At first their work was looked at as pure evangelism, and the missionaries were mocked and jeered at. Then they opened their educational establishments, and admitted more non-Christians than Christians, and gave them a Western education which fitted them for all sorts of useful jobs from the traders' and the governments' points of view; and they became more or less popular, and their work was applauded by statesmen. It was efficient, from their point of view. That tied up a very large number of missionaries, and caused the Societies to employ many who believed in scientific education above all things. They train not only Christian evangelists, but non-Christians for every kind of work. They think now of training not only the future leaders of the Church, but the leaders of the country generally. I think it fairly safe to say that they are spending more time and thought and money on this grandiose idea that they will lead whole nations than on their evangelistic work. The last catch-words are 'character training', and 'cooperation with governments' in the training of whole nations. That will mean, I hope and expect, that the Societies will become more and more absorbed in this kind of work. They will spend their energy and money on it; and in the event the governments will take charge and the education will be undisguisedly in their hands: and governments are religiously neutral, and are certainly not Christian missionary societies. That is all good, so far as it goes: but still I am not satisfied.
- B: *Well, so far things seem to be going as well as you could expect. What was worrying you just now?*
- S: I was trying to think how to put *another* spoke in their wheel.
- B: *How?*

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- S: I want to exploit, for all it is worth, this new nationalist feeling.
- B: *That seems simple enough. These missionaries hold all the positions of authority in their own hands, don't they?*
- S: They ordain a certain few natives of the country after a long and careful training in their *own* way of doing things, and at rare intervals a Bishop, and they admit natives to councils, so long as there appears to be no danger of their doing anything but run the machine in the usual way. And the Christians everywhere depend very largely (thanks to Mammon) on supplies of money from abroad, and are always fearful lest the supplies may be cut off. Hitherto Mammon has urged that the money ought to be the bone of contention, and that I ought to encourage the native Christian leaders to seek after and covet the positions and stipends of the missionaries. He argued that the refusal of the missionaries to give up those positions and stipends to the natives, on the grounds that they were not sufficiently well trained, would cause a deep and growing discontent on the side of the native Christians of ability. I cannot deny that it is working well. The young Christian leaders trained in the missionary colleges are getting restive, and demanding the first places. Their minds are set on the positions and the stipends, and there is a good hope that they will make trouble before long. Money and position are without doubt splendid bones of contention. I do not want to drop that policy. But I want, if I can, to introduce another element of discord. If only the young native leaders were to see that money and position is of small importance compared with *spiritual* authority, they would accuse the missionaries of holding all spiritual authority in their own hands, and of dominating over them spiritually; and that would mean a first class row, and probably in the event a huge schism, on racial lines.

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- B:** *But most of these missionaries declare that they do not believe in any spiritual authority which they can give, or retain.*
- S:** That is all very fine. They talk like that. But indeed they act as if they had spiritual authority over their converts. They teach their own doctrine and their forms of worship and their Christian customs, and they generally dictate the terms on which converts are to be received; and they run their stations just as those who talk openly about having spiritual authority. The natives do not see much difference.
- B:** *Well then, the position and the salary involve the authority. If the native Christians fight for the position and salary, in effect they will be fighting for the authority.*
- S:** No, it is not quite the same thing. Outside some Protestant denominations all men know that an organized society must have officers with authority; and that officers in a spiritual society must have spiritual authority. Now, so long as they simply grumble because the foreigners retain positions which they covet, they think of the authority as a kind of social authority, just as men think of positions under the government: but if they come to think of spiritual authority in a spiritual society as a gift held by men who received it to hand it on; then all their highest and best instincts will be roused to furious indignation. I tell you, it makes a lot of difference whether they think of positions simply as positions of dignity and emoluments, or whether they think of spiritual power withheld.
- B:** *But you do not want them to have spiritual power? If they had it, they might escape out of that network of mission station control, which you have been saying has done our work so well, and has restricted the propagation of the Gospel so narrowly.*
- S:** I do not want them to *have* it; but I do want them to fight for it: for, as I said, no other conceivable cause of strife and

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division would drive them so mad.

- B:** *You cannot do it. The missionaries might give way.*
- S:** Not for a long time. They are mightily afraid for their doctrine and their customs, and they are persuaded that any spiritual freedom of their converts would mean the destruction of both. Didn't you hear that man the other day arguing that missionaries must *control*? He was saying what nine-tenths of the missionaries think. They would not easily hand over spiritual authority, and they would use the power of the purse (again thanks to Mammon) to retain it, in fact, if not in appearance, in their own hands.
- B:** *But if these native Christians once saw what spiritual authority and freedom meant, they would not care a rap about the money.*
- S:** Of course they would not; but they will be divided. A few may see the spiritual authority, the majority will seek the material and social position all the time. What I want is to give that majority who are really seeking the stipends and position the support of a few men who really see the spiritual authority, and give them all a cry which will upset the foreign missionaries, and add that sting to their attack which is only found where spiritual issues are thought to be at stake. With one voice they will all cry: 'You retain all spiritual authority in your own hands, and strive to be Lords over God's heritage!'. That is a far better cry than 'You retain positions and stipends which we covet!'
- B:** *But the missionaries will foresee that, and—as they sincerely believe that they do not want to withhold anything that is good for their converts—they will hasten to give way.*
- S:** You are wrong on both points: the missionaries will *not* foresee it. They foresee nothing until it happens. They had very good reasons for foreseeing that the Chinese would resent their establishment of mission colleges in China: but when the Chinese Educational Associations passed reso-

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lutions demanding their registration under the Government, they were taken by surprise. And they may not want to withhold anything that is good, but they will withhold *this*, because they will not believe that the native Christians are sufficiently well trained to use it wisely. Did you never hear that playful answer to a child: 'Those who ask won't get; those who don't ask don't want'? If the natives are humble and wait, they may wait; if they ask, they show that they have not the humility which is the first virtue of men who hold spiritual power.

B: *But someone will point out to them that they are in danger of a serious setback to their highest hopes.*

S: Let him. If an angel from heaven told them what we have been saying, they would not believe him. They would accuse him of being an opponent of foreign missions, and an uncharitable and wicked critic of better men than himself. I am not afraid of that.

B: *Satan, I fear that you will overreach yourself. Mammon, you said, did well: yet just think of the prayerful giving by multitudes of pious people; think of the lives laid down. That is all terrible. That spirit of devotion and self-sacrificing charity will prevail. One day it will be made manifest, and it will work wonders, in spite of all that Mammon can do, or you either, for all your cunning. And here again you will fail. You may make trouble, but you will fail.*

S: No doubt I shall fail: we are fated to fail. If we can make trouble anywhere, and use the best spiritual aspirations of men to make trouble, that is all we can hope to do. And I can do it here. I will set these native Christians crying: 'You deny us that spiritual authority which alone can enable us to do our proper work as Christians'.

B: *If you do that, you will run an awful risk. Spiritual authority is a spiritual thing, and if they seek it, they will get it. It is not*

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simply a question here of a thing like a salary. Take my advice, and do not stir men up to seek spiritual gifts.

- S: I tell you, it is the only way. If I did not make it a bone of contention, if the authority were given freely, you know what would happen. If the Christians in China, or in India, or in Africa were really a *native* Church, endowed with spiritual authority which not only native Christians but *white men* must recognise, then we should be at our wits' end, progress would be so rapid. The only way to prevent that is to make spiritual authority a subject of dispute. That will at least produce a first-class schism, bigger than any that we have yet seen.
- B: *You will overreach yourself. I am certain of it. Schisms do not last for ever.*
- S: They last long; and they do no end of harm to the cause of Christ.
- B: *I give it up. I see that all things are in train for this. The hour for its coming is not far off. You were working while you were meditating all that long time. It will come; but it will work out very differently from your calculations.*
- S: Bunkum! In the long run, yes, I am bound to lose; but for this age I win.

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transcribed by Hubert Allen, with some expanded abbreviations and added punctuation, from the much corrected manuscript in Rhodes House, Oxford: March 1994