

TRITE

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"Everything is trite; nothing is new."

Such is the expression of opinion I have heard in regard to all written and spoken thought — barring science. Who told that to me? Was it Miss Beuret? Have I heard it or read it from some other source? Never mind, the opinion probably is true.

From the dawn of civilization — a trite phrase — there have been countless thousands — another trite phrase — of wonderers who have been more curious than I am, and who have delved deeper into philosophical thought than I do.

For instance, take the very few philosophers with whom I am at all acquainted: Plato, Voltaire, J. S. Mill, Hazlitt, Newman, Thoreau, Emerson, Bertrand Russell — I can't recall any more without fudging and going to an encyclopedia. To me, all these men seem eminent — there's a good word, but trite — thinkers. They have thought and written on a multitude of subjects. Some of them I have not understood, with others I have not agreed. The point is this: all my philosophical thought — if any — has been along lines already traversed by these eminent thinkers, with several of whom I have agreed; and they have said it much better than I.

My first attempt tonight was upon a most vital subject — a most vital subject; where have you heard that before? — the subject of God. I was very serious in my attempt, but by the time I had spent thirty minutes writing nine lines, I realized two things; first, that I had not read enough and thought enough to treat the subject fairly, and second, that there has been a great deal of literature published on the subject and that this literature was much more profound and learned than anything I could

compose. Thus I would not only be trite, but also I would make a fool of myself with my beggarly attempt.

My second effort was along similar lines to my first, and it fared me no better. The subject was Religion. I marshaled a few choice gems of cogitation such as these two: (1) The bill of rights in our Constitution guarantees freedom to worship as we please. Thus our individual religion or lack thereof depends upon our discretion and our conscience. (2) There are some persons who do not attend church who are in reality more religious than some who do attend church and give only lip-service.

When I noted that these ideas were not only trite themselves, but also were composed of trite expressions, I gave up and here I am.

I have used the word so often, perhaps I should refer to the dictionary to see what it means. Trite — "Used until so common as to have lost novelty and interest; hackneyed; stale." From this definition it follows that I should not have used the word "trite" in connection with the subject of God, Religion, or any of the other subjects treated by the philosophers. For these subjects never become stale and hackneyed because of their very nature. They are timeless and timely. In other words, I should not have used "trite" in my first statement.

Then it is not my choice of subject-matter which is at fault, but my mood and my shallow choice of words. A person who has only a shallow vocabulary can think neither deeply nor well.