

The Independent Thinker.

HENRY FRANK, EDITOR.

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No. 2.

The April issue of THE INDEPENDENT THINKER will contain delightful letters from Col. T. W. Higginson, Rev. Dr. R. Heber Newton, Dr. Paul Carus, Rev. H. W. Thomas and other distinguished publicists, in praise of the good work we are doing in the Metropolitan Independent Church. Don't fail to get the April copy and read these letters. They contain not only praise but instruction.

THE PSYCHIC STUDY SOCIETY, which was inaugurated last May, resumed its labors in the month of October, after the usual summer vacation. It has enjoyed lectures by Dr. John D. Quackenbos, emeritus professor of Columbia University, on "Hypnotism and Christianity," by Sadikichi Hartman, the poet, on Cremation; by Santanelli, the hypnotist, on the Psychology of Hypnotism, accompanied by many experimental illustrations; by Dr. C. O. Sahler, of Kingston, proprietor of the Suggestive Therapeutical Institute of that place. All of which proved to be highly instructive and enjoyable.

At a special meeting Mrs. M. A. Frank, who recently came to us from St. Louis, Mo., where she graduated from Dr. Spitzer's Institute for Suggestive Therapeutics, and is now successfully practicing the science of "Suggestion," read a very able paper of "Telepathy," which we expect soon to reproduce in THE INDEPENDENT THINKER.

Under the auspices of the Independent Literature Association, several delightful entertainments have been given. This is a growing organization, having for its purpose the publication of this journal. It should receive the ardent support of all sympathizers and co-workers.

One of the most interesting entertainments of the winter was given gratuitously by Dr. W. G. Ferris, of the School of Hypnosis, 251 Fifth Avenue, for the benefit of the minister of this church. Financially it proved very satisfactory. But in point of interest and edification it was especially gratifying. Dr. Ferris gave some dozen or more illustrations of the somnambulistic powers of subjects whom he was able to develop to that exalted state of "Suggestion," and to those who had never witnessed such scientific performances, his feats were truly bewildering.

He is doubtless one of the most successful teachers and practitioners of Scientific Suggestion in America.

On February 13, Mrs. Cassius Macdonald gave a brilliant and entertaining lecture on "Liquid Air," which was not so well patronized as the merit and instructiveness of the lecture warranted. Mrs. Macdonald may repeat this lecture. If so everybody who has not been made aware of the wonders of Liquid Air should not fail to attend.

The last lecture in the Psychic Study Society Course this season will be delivered by Dr. Reinhold, of the Water Cure and Hygienic Institute, 823 Lexington Avenue, this city. His subject is "Ghosts," which will be treated in a thoroughly scientific manner, illustrating by large charts the deception of optical illusions and proving that most of the apparitions supposed to be veritable ghosts may be psychologically analyzed into mere figments of the imagination. Don't fail to attend this lecture on Friday, March 2, 8 o'clock P.M., at 27 West 42d St. The hall should be crowded. All regular members of P. S. S. are admitted by card. The admission price for this lecture will be only 50 cts., instead of \$1, formerly charged; in order to give all a chance to attend who may wish to.

MEDITATION.

Man is the climax and culmination of forces which for ages have been seeking harmonious expression. Freedom bespeaks contention. Nothing is free which has not fought for independence. Nature's primal harmony consisted in homogeneous monotony. All things were similar because individuality had not yet been evolved. Without individuality, itself the result of struggle, there can be no order. Before the individual form, chaos prevailed. Hence the preservation of Order depends upon the persistency of individuality. This is true of all Nature as well as of Man. When the ever contending forces of Nature attain the point of repose, then manifold forms evolve, struggling upward, from molecule to mammal, from mammal to man. Hence repose, or the perfect balance between opposing forces, is the pivot of harmony, the basis of individuality. Repose is oscillation—the even swing between outlying extremes. This swing is the natural vibration which constitutes the invisible chain that binds the universe together, constructs each form of life, and evolves the complex brain of man from the lowly cell that quivers beneath the microscope.

Only, then, is man fully himself, when in Perfect Repose. In the Secret Silence he attains Complete Consciousness, oblivious of conflict, aloof from discord, swinging as a bird upon a lofty branch, far removed from what distracts the soul from the symphonies of peace. To attain this triumph is the supreme desideratum of the human heart. Thus shalt thou attain who seekest not in vain, and thus shall be thy song of triumph: "I am the culmination of perfecting powers. In me blind

forces attain to consciousness: the Infinite becomes self-conscious. I am the seer and the knower; the soul and sense of things, the magnet of all harmony. I am Peace, Perfection, Patience and Power. I am the Central Point on which converge the contending energies of space, fusing in me the Human and Divine. I am all-informing, all sufficient. I draw unto myself all that I need out of the abundance of Nature, as the seed gathers from the sun and soil the essence of flower and fruit that lies within its bosom. I am Harmony, Happiness, Health. I wait, serenely, and all things come unto me. I am Conqueror, Owner, Sovereign. I *will* and it is done! Amen.

Referring to the above "Meditation," I received the following communication from a critical and esteemed correspondent:

January 24, 1900.

DEAR MR. FRANK: I have inadvertently mailed to various friends all my copies of your last Sunday's "Meditation;" but, if I remember aright it mentioned Chaos as the primordial condition out of which the Universe had evolved, and man as the culmination of such evolutionary process.

From a strictly Pantheistic point of view does not primordial Chaos—the antithesis of Cosmos—appear to be an anomalous postulate, inasmuch as it implies an unpantheistic condition in which fortuity or accident may have had as much to do with the development of the laws which govern the Universe as law and order? and does it not afford ground for believing that selfishness, oppression, injustice, wrong, crime and all that is nefarious in this world, exist now because the primordial Pantheistic jumble is not yet quite straightened out?

Some philosophies teach that man is an offshoot, a splinter, a chip of the old block "as 'twere," from the One Great Reality, which has been compelled to descend into various planes of matter of gradually increasing density until, having reached the limit of materiality, he is now reascending and gradually regaining his primal spirituality.

If there be any truth in the legendary stories of wars in heaven, rebellion of angels and the casting out of the malefactors, (more or less common to all religions, ancient as well as modern), may it not be that we are the incarnations of the archaic rebels working our way back home again? My main contention is that if Pantheism be true, there never can have been a time when Chaos prevailed.

Yours respectfully,

T. B. CLATWORTHY.

In truth there never was such a thing as chaos. What we regard as chaos is but potential order. The differentiated substances which now constitute the forms and phenomena of nature were originally diffused. That primordial diffusion we regard as chaos. But the same tendency which exists in substances to-day, to aggregate and constitute special forms, existed in primitive matter. We have no more right to speak of a

primordial universe as chaotic than we have right to speak of our atmosphere as such. In this atmosphere are diffused the substances of nature—the carbon, nitrogen and hydrogen, as well as the innumerable solutions which exhale from the earth into the air. While in this diffused state these substances constitute no distinct tangible forms, and do not seem to manifest a tendency to inherent order. They fly hither and thither mingling in a thousand invisible admixtures of which the eye is not cognizant. And yet, we know the oxygen and the hydrogen are constantly forming the vapor of the air. The carbon is sinking into earth and again manifesting itself in herb, foliage and tree.

What seems therefore to be disorderly and undirected, because we cannot discern the processes of transformation, is, in truth, merely a suspended status of matter awaiting the direction of the potential energy to transform it into visible aggregations. Chaos simply refers to the manifestation. Order relates to the potential energy. This energy is always orderly, directive, and marked with purpose. The processes through which the substances, guided by this force, must needs pass, seem sometimes disorderly and irregular. That stage, however, is but transitional; the purpose, or, at least, the tendency, is orderly; and ultimately a cosmos develops from a chaos.

Therefore the logic of pantheism is not affected by the assertion that primordial chaos exists; for, as we have said, chaos is but the visible transition from apparent disorder to manifest order. Pantheism implies the God-directing presence in every ultimate atom. The very tendency of atoms to aggregate, that is, to wrest themselves from their diffused and separate conditions into orderly relationship, bespeaks the in-dwelling power through all the universe that compels and ultimates all phenomenal aggregations of matter.

Because God is in all, it does not necessarily follow that all is God. The potentiality of energy can be mentally distinguished from the energy itself. The inherent tendency of atoms to congregate with other atoms is distinguishable from the crude atom itself. The affinity between chemical molecules is easily distinguishable from the molecules. Now it is the indwelling tendency, directiveness and affinity, existing in all things, which is the prophecy of final order and the secret of the universal harmony, which I regard [as the pantheistic essence of nature—the all Power—the ceaseless motor—the spiritual energizer. This is the

pantheos, inseparable from all that is: and yet, distinguishable in thought.

We do not regard heat and motion as absolutely one and the same thing. Heat may be a mode of motion, but as heat, it is distinguishable through its effects from motion, because motion is variously manifested, and produces various results. Now, the motion which constitutes the basis of heat, light, sound and electricity, is one and the same, but in manifestation it is variable, dissimilar. Because motion at one time causes heat and at another time causes electricity, shall we say that motion is a thing in itself, separate from either of these effects? Not at all. Motion, in thought, is separable; that is, distinguishable from its effects; but in point of fact, it is always identical in its nature.

Precisely such is the pantheos of the universe. It is the ultimate source of primordial power, from which the multiform manifestations of nature proceed. Each one of these manifestations is distinguished from the other, and yet the source of each is identical and undistinguishable. That original source may, in its primordial phases, manifest what we denominate the phases of chaos, but that is not saying that the source itself is chaotic. Because motion may be heat or light, it does not necessarily follow that motion, in its principle, is not always the same. So, though the pantheos may move through multiform phases of unfoldment, one of which must necessarily be that of chaos, it does not follow that chaos is a reality or a principle in nature, but that it is simply a temporary and necessary phase through which ultimate order must proceed in order to reach its far-off end.

As to whether man is the result of a pantheistic process, slowly evolving to individual consciousness from primordial diffusion, or whether there exists a perfected and all-conscious Reality, out of which man primarily sprung, and into which he shall be finally absorbed, there may be opposite opinions. The pantheos, as I have already said, is the all-forming, inherent energy which, pervading all substances and proceeding through infinite stages of apparent chaos, finally results in that mode of self-consciousness which we call the human being.

Now we know that in practical matters this human being must necessarily pass through nameless stages of moral evolution, from the

most degrading tendencies of the flesh to the most exalted attainments of the soul. We know, taking humanity as a whole, that there does pervade the race a power which tends to purity, righteousness and justice; just as in the material substances of the universe there exists an all-harmonizing and perfecting tendency which effectuates a final cosmos.

By way of illustration:—the sun-ray produces one effect when it passes through a prism, and scatters its broken beams upon a screen; another effect when it penetrates the substances of the soil, releases the oxygen and causes the carbon to be absorbed in foliage and flower; still another effect when it penetrates the living substances of the human body and operates its physical machinery, so that the foreign substances that enter it become absorbed and transmuted into the living blood which can drink in the oxygenized air, quickened by the sun-beams.

We might go on to show how the sun-ray exercises its potency in a thousand different methods. Now, that particular thing in nature which we call a sun-beam is always identical, being in itself but a determinative mode of motion. Now, it is not correct to say because the sun-beam first penetrates the diffusive atmosphere and disperses the congregating elements into chaotic confusion, which results in the activity that finally builds up the forms of vegetable and animal life, that, therefore, the sun-beam is responsible (speaking ethically) for the original elemental confusion. The final triumph of the sun-beam is illustrated in the variegated flora and the diversified fauna of the planet.

In the old theology critics complained of God as being an unethical deity, because he permitted the existence of evil. This is a justifiable complaint, if we postulate in our theology a perfect, omnipotent, all-good and conscious Being. But this same criticism does not hold against the theory of an universal, all-pervasive, unconscious Power which blindly operates to the end of the final harmony, because of the *inherent tendency of that power to ultimately establish a cosmos*. Therefore, I think it is a more acceptable and logical philosophy to postulate the original unconsciousness of the all-pervading power, out of which evolves a final consciousness, which passes temporarily through minor stages in the physical world, and thence through the higher modes of consciousness in which all individualized forms of life ultimately participate.

WHAT IS SIN?*

Theological notions have in all ages affected the morals of the race. However we may imagine that a theological conception or belief is merely a mental supposition,—a passing dream of the mind,—we know both theoretically and by experience that it in time becomes fixed in the human consciousness and works out in the activities of the race. Man's conscious or unconscious ideas about God are, after all, at the basis of his ethics. As he thinks he acts. As he believes he achieves.

Whether this is the highest moral incentive of which the race is capable may be a question; but certain it is that at present and for all the past ages of human experience it is the basis on which human progress has rested. It is sometimes argued that we must divorce the ethical idea from the specifically religious, because the latter is ever varying, and therefore while morals rest on such a basis no permanent standard can be discovered for them.

But the truth is, though we may think we separate the religious or theological from the ethical, we cannot really do so. For the philosophical basis will still be the criterion and there is no philosophy which is really and essentially untheological or unreligious. For in seeking an absolute ethical basis devoid of all theological notions we are merely basing our ethical on a negative theological basis instead of an affirmative. If we deny the existence of God and say man's ethics must be patterned after the results and practices of human experience, we do nothing more than substitute the experience and philosophical conclusion of this class for the hypothetical and superstitious authority of the other. The element of authority necessarily enters if we seek a permanent standard. That which stands as authority, whether it be Love or Duty, or Justice, or what not, substitutes in the utilitarian system of ethics the dictum of God, or Revelation, or whatever be the standard in the theological system. In all systems of thought something must stand for the notion of Deity; something must represent the theological attitude of authority.

Without authority there can be no fixed standard; with authority it matters not what is accepted as the criterion, whether theological revelation or utilitarian evolution; whether a supernatural Deity or the postulates of human philosophy. Hence to remove the theological basis of ethics, does not by any means make such ethics scientific. It still rests

* Second discourse in series on Christian Science compared with Christian Creed.

upon some authority ; and, in the end, it will be found that such authority emanates from an oligarchy of intellectual aristocrats whose consensus is the creed which all their followers must obey or be ostracised.

Ethicists, in my judgment, greatly err if they think they remove the theological odium while they still allow the authority of opinion, from whatever source it may emanate.

In short, in my opinion, the individual is the only arbiter of his own moral acts ; he alone is the judge ; he alone is responsible.

Hence, I repeat, man's ethical conceptions are continually varying with his theological. Are his ideas of God or the gods base and demoralizing, as sometimes the Homeric deities are depicted ? They are but the reflections of human morals at the period which such ideas represent.

Are his religious conceptions martial, brutal and predatory, as sometimes they are pictured in Old Testament scenes ? They but reflect the Jewish type of life at the period of selfish contention and national aggrandisement. Are they bigoted, narrow and severe, as sometimes portrayed in Mahometan writings or in Christian mediæval literature ? They but expose the real moral characteristics of those half evolved periods of human progress ; and while in all such illustrations the effort of man fails to reveal the real Deity, it does invariably and accurately reveal the real Man.

The nobler and loftier men's morals are, the holier and more exalted their dream of Deity. The gods never precede, but always follow, human attainments. The noblest man that ever lived, entertained the loftiest idea of Deity. But he was himself noble before he conceived a noble God.

Thus in dreaming of Deity he is really dreaming of the Ideal Man. When he conceives a sinless and perfect God, he has so far evolved in human possibilities that he is really conceiving of the Sinless and Perfect Man. He well knows the perfect God, whatever that may be, is beyond him—unattainable. Still, he pushes on in his effort to realize him, for instinctively he feels that the God of whom he dreams is only that Ideal into which he himself may develop.

Hence, philosophically speaking, the doctrine that man is without sin is true. For when we have discerned the Ideal Man we have found him that is without sin. As between the two doctrines of "total depravity" on the one hand, and the theory of ideal human sinlessness on the other, I would unhesitatingly proclaim the latter. The former doctrine, preached so vigorously for many ages, resulted in the deterioration of human morals, because it was pessimistic and disheartening. It taught

man that he was by nature full of sin and the seed of destruction, and by no effort of his own could he ever lift himself above his innate degradation. Only by an exercise of irrational and blind faith in some inscrutable Power could he ever be redeemed, and that only by supernatural interference.

The result was that man's will power was weakened; his native timidity and terror in the presence of the unknown and incomprehensible were intensified, till he sunk into the cowardice of religious resignation and shallow stupidity.

But in our day the older optimistic theory of man's native and persistent purity has been revived, and with it all the concomitant cheer and hopefulness for which humanity yearns. Because the expression "There is no sin" has been perverted by the ignorant or the vicious, it has been denounced as the revival of diabolism, and throughout Christendom hands of "holy horror" have been lifted against it. But serious and sincere thinkers cannot be so easily deceived or discouraged.

To the sinless man there is indeed no sin. To that Ideal Man of whom the race has ever vaguely or vividly dreamed, the idea of sin is never present. To approach that Ideal, to seek day by day and hour by hour to realize it—that is the trend of this new-old philosophy;—that is the force of this seemingly latitudinarian doctrine.

But, as I have above intimated, the theory of sin has been rendered unscientific and unphilosophical, because the standard of judgment has been perverted. Man has assumed a definition of Deity (purely hypothetical) and then undertaken to judge every human action by comparison with this artificial standard. Here was an effort to establish in morals as well as religion the rule of the majority, which here as elsewhere proved to be a tyranny.

Each man's understanding and definition of God is different from that of his fellows. Every man who thinks has his individual God. Even he who imagines he has no God at all is mistaken. For his very negation is an affirmation. His No God is but another God. The reason for this is simple. Man's thoughts of being all point to an end, a goal, a something not yet attained, but believed to be realizable. He is constantly dreaming of some Ideal. It has been his custom to project this idea beyond himself and believe that it exists in the distant skies. Thus he anthropomorphosizes his Deity; that is, thinks of a God as only a bigger man.

Hence the different gods of different times and religions have been diverse and contradictory. But as these gods have differed in their moral

aspects man's ethics have correspondingly changed. What is virtue to the Mussulman is vice to the Christian. What was vice to the Jew was enlightened morality to the Greek. The solemnity of the Egyptian temple was scandalized by the voluptuous abandon of the Corinthian worship.

The conception of sin has always been complexioned by climate. The social freedom of the tropics shocks the denizens of the colder zones. In the far isles of the Pacific the inhabitants are sufficiently clad, beneath the burning suns, with naught but nature's raiment. The bliss of innocence sits undisturbed on their uneducated brows. But, where northern tempests howl, where snow and ice imprison earth for half the year, exposure is a vice, because it is an inconvenience; and habit has crystalized the notion into a religious conviction.

To the eye of the voluptuary the nude is debasing; to the artist it is exalting.

What sin is, therefore, cannot be decided by any fixed or positive standard. Sin is not an abstract quality; it is purely relative, and dependent alone on the judgment of the individual. Sin is a subject of education and environment; not of authority or imposition. No man may justly declare another to be a sinner. He who declares another to be a sinner reveals himself as such. No other rational meaning can be attached to the words of the Great Master, "Judge not lest ye be judged." That is, declare not what you think another's motives to be, for in doing so you expose the fact that you yourself, if similarly situated, would be inspired by such motives. The other, however, may be wholly ignorant of your vicious motive and be spurred by really noble thoughts. If you judge another to be a liar you expose the fact that you yourself are acquainted with the art of lying. It takes a rogue to catch a rogue. A pure and innocent man is a bad detective. The Just cannot understand the motives of injustice. Brutus was so noble a character that he could not conceive how men could be inspired by ignoble motives.

"I know that virtue to be in you, Brutus," says Cassius, "as well as I do know your outward favor. Well, *honor* is the subject of my story." If he had sought to discourse to Brutus about dishonor his words would have fallen on inappreciative ears. Therefore, while Brutus was a far nobler man than Cassius, he was the poorer detective; he was the weaker in the presence of evil powers. Cassius was sufficiently evil to recognize it when he saw it.

Hence, you can only recognize that as sin in another which has become a sin in yourself. But you cannot see that it is a sin until you

have experienced it as such. You may long have innocently practiced it without pricking your conscience; but one day you feel unwonted compunction when you think to repeat it. Your horizon has been widened. Your judgment has become keen. Your conscience has broadened its scope of vision. What yesterday was a virtue is to-day a vice. But it can only become a vice to you when you have learned that you cannot practice it innocently or with impunity.

How many are there, mayhap, who to-day rest in the shoes in which you stood yesterday. They still are innocent and unaffected. They can only become sinners with reference to such problems of conscience when they have been awakened as you have been. Till they are thus awakened they are not sinful or guilty.

You may be justified in instructing them; in persuading them from their dangerous course; in seeking to lift them to the plane of vision where you dwell; but you have no right to declare that, because they do not occupy the same plane, because their outward acts do not accord with yours, they are therefore sinful and to be condemned.

This seems to me to be the clear meaning of the teaching of Jesus, to say nothing of the force of the philosophy itself.

In the realm of individual morals the autocrat has no place. To teach, to seek to elevate and exalt, is one thing; but to dictate; to prescribe; to judge; to condemn; that is another thing and wholly wrong.

That only can be declared to be a sin which is done contrary to the individual's own highest and clearest moral judgment. The individual judgment must not be measured by the average judgment of the times or by the prescribed judgment of alleged authority. His own light is his only Conscience. His own conviction is his only Authority!

At this juncture, for the sake of avoiding misinterpretation, a careful distinction must be drawn between sin and crime. The latter is a product of human laws. The violation of the social customs, crystallized in legal enactments, is a crime. A crime is not necessarily a sin; vice versa, a sin is not essentially a crime.

If, however, we assume that there is a revealed, divine legal authority, then every sin becomes a crime against the author of the revealed law. In this sense Paul asserts, "I had not known sin but by the law; for I had not known lust except the law had said 'thou shalt not covet.'"

Here Paul clearly construes sin as crime, for he asserts that he has received the law against covetousness directly from the Law-giver.

But such an interpretation of sin can be accepted only by those

who believe in an infallible and supernatural revelation. The weakness of this position is, however, that a catalogue of sins is not published with the law, and consequently its subjects are left in sad doubt concerning the thousands of moral problems that present themselves for solution during one's life.

A still further weakness in this attitude is demonstrated by the fact that many of the world's greatest criminals were, in fact, its greatest liberators and benefactors. Socrates, who devoted his life to the sincere instruction and uplifting of his contemporaries; whose ideals were the sublimest; whose purpose was the loftiest; was condemned to drink the fatal hemlock, and pass from the view of his countrymen as an outcast and a felon. Jesus Christ, who if we can believe the records, was the manifestation of the supremest and most adorable character that human history has yet engendered, was nailed to the "accursed tree" between two felonious convicts—a spectacular demonstration for all mankind, of the reception which an honest reformer will receive at the hands of his savage persecutors.

Savonarola, who moved among his people as some mysterious apparition, and solemnly deprecated the evils of his generation; who though an obscure monk rose to an authority that dared defy even the Pope of Rome; who was pure in heart, sincere, exalted; was consumed by the angry flames to satisfy the bloodthirstiness of the faction that succeeded in dragging him under the condemnation of the law, as a convict, to the culprit's doom!

Dante, immortal poet and soul of sincerity; born a patrician, espouser of the cause of the popolani—the degraded and downcast people,—was hurled from the confines of his native Florence to wander a condemned and exiled criminal; none the less degraded under the law because he could by the force of his genius expose in undying words the moral deformities of the age that despised him.

Robert Emmett, who fought and bled and died for the cause of his native Ireland, hoping to wrest its bleeding body from the grasp of merciless tyranny; fell a criminal in the light of the law, but an angel in the light of truth, liberty and justice.

John Brown, of Ossawatimie, in his own day was one of our country's most debased criminals; but by the voice of all humanity he is now acclaimed a liberator, humanitarian and priceless benefactor.

I merely cite these cases to prove that what an age may construe a crime on the part of an individual, need not be in his own life an act that blackens his soul with even a tinge of sin.

A crime is a public question with which society is concerned. A sin is purely a private matter with which no one has any concern (unless by indirection it causes another some injury) save the individual himself.

If a man chooses to perform what society calls a sin, the responsibility falls on him alone; if he is wise he will discern the moral light that informs him whether his act be to him a sin or not, and will act accordingly; if he is foolish he will plunge heedlessly on, accepting whatever fate may befall him.

There is a Moral Law in nature. But that law must be discovered. It is not written clearly on the face of things. The law exists before a human knowledge of it is acquired. It is the same with the moral as with all other natural laws. Before Newton generalized the great principle which revolutionized the teachings of physics, the law of gravitation was a universal fact in nature. Newton's discovery of it did not create the law.

Man's knowledge of all things is simply discovery of what already exists. Hence when men insist that men should be moral because Nature is moral, they put the "cart before the horse." Nature is neither moral nor immoral; nature may be said to be simply unmoral. She is not apparently concerned with teleological effects. She acts: man construes. Man reads his own ideas into nature; but nature has no concern about what man says of her. Nature creates and destroys; she organizes and dissolves. What we call death is a fact in nature as well as what we call life. She does not stop wars, pestilences or cataclysms, because they bring grief and anguish to human hearts. She is cold, merciless, unsympathetic.

But while nature is unmoral, man, who is himself a product of nature, possesses the moral sense.

Hence the moral sense is the fruit of evolution. The moral law is, therefore, a part of nature, because it has found expression in the mind of man. People sometimes speak as if man were himself out of nature and from a distance interprets her. Man is himself in and of nature. Therefore whatever comes to him and is of him is the outgrowth of natural principles. Hence, man cannot look to mother-nature as an instructress in ethics or morals; but he must look to himself as the child of nature in whom he will find nature's only statement or intimation of the moral law which she conserves.

Therefore, I say, the moral law is a permanent principle in nature which each man must discover for himself through suffering and experience. No man can safely or truly declare to another what the moral law

is; for that law is apprehended by each individual in the light of his own experience and developed wisdom. The world's hindsight may be a grievous bore to him who has a clarified foresight.

But in a general way each individual possesses a light that illumines for him the path of duty and defines constructive sin. Whatever impulse refuses to heed this light and pursues its way indifferently is for that individual a sin. For if he knows either by experience or observation that the indulgence is deteriorating and injurious, he yields with full knowledge of the consequences and must suffer. An injurious act, innocently performed, is a fault. An act whose injurious effects are foreknown, wilfully performed, is a sin. An act that injures another is a sin if the actor realizes in his own heart the moral consequences. To hate another is a sin, if once the heart has become acquainted with the efficacy and utility of the principle of love. To betray another is a sin when once the heart has known the force of the principle of honesty and trustworthiness. To lie is a sin when once the heart has learned the worth of the principles of truth.

Nevertheless, though it be a paradox, I would say that to hate, to betray, to lie, may under some circumstances not be sins at all in concrete relations, however much they may be abstractly construed as sins.

Unless experience has evolved in the heart of the individual the inner light that illumines the path of duty—that flashes on the moral principle and reveals it to the soul—he cannot be condemned of sin whose acts in another, of higher development, would be most worthy of condemnation.

Hence I say that sin is relative and dependent on the judgment of the individual. Of course sin is to be discouraged by example and instruction; but the public judgment, the average conscience, must not assume that what it calls sin in general is sin in fact to the individual.

Philosophically; then, we may say there is a sense in which the expression "there is no sin" is true. To him who views himself from the mountain height of his spiritual being; from that promontory where all the human qualities that have been registered in the normal consciousness are as clouds floating beneath his feet, leaving his unaffected soul clear in the light of truth, unsullied and intact; to such an one there is no sin in the sinless soul, whatever faults there may be in the mortal body.

Sin, to such a vision, is but human frailty—the incapacity of the mortal faculties to rightly express the thoughts of the glorified self. Sin is, from such a point of view, but the feeble and fruitless effort of

the real individual to find its true expression in the imperfect instrument of the body. When the sun is struggling through the morning clouds, its rays are refracted, and the effect produced, while glorious, is wholly different from that of the unobstructed sun shining in a cloudless sky. Sin is to the human consciousness, as it were, the refracted sunrays in the clouds. Because of the density and obstruction of the physical and unwieldy instrument of the flesh, the clear light of the soul—the supreme intelligence—cannot clearly shine, but manifests in broken, bedimmed, or falsely colored effects. Sin, then, is spiritual fever. It is the effort of the winged spirit of light to break through the chrysalis of darkness. The friction, the fever, the spiritual distress, incident to this struggle, is the only sin of which the soul condemns humanity.

The soul itself sins not. The human judgment sins, or errs, in its incapacity rightly to express the soul's desire. Even the Scriptural writers carry out this idea. For when they sought to express the word *sin* in the Greek they employed a term which means literally "to miss the mark; to err; to fail." (That word is *hemartema*.) The mental picture which this term incites is that of an archer sending his arrow toward a target and falling short of it. Thus the soul—the perfect intelligence—using the frail arrow of the human judgment and conscience, and seeking to hit the mark of perfection, falls often short; and in thus failing, misses the mark—errs. Hence men say the soul sins. But in truth it is not the soul that sins; i. e. (keeping up the metaphor) that aims not perfectly; but it is the frailty and faultiness of the human faculties that swerve the arrow from its appointed track and miss the mark beyond.

In the light of such analysis sin is but the spiritual fog that darkens human judgment. It is not inherent evil; it is not radically destructive; it is not annihilative. It is but a part of Nature's constructive method of building up by tearing down; of assimilating by first disintegrating. Sin is to the human soul what the decaying seed is to the fruit and flower within. First the "body of death" must dissolve, before the immortal self can be revealed. Sin is to the individual that process by which Nature evolves him from the lower to the higher plane of his being. This is, indeed, the history of human sin reviewed collectively. Man's deeds in any period of history, reviewed in the light of one more advanced, have always been acts of sin. From this point of view man has never ceased to sin and probably never will. Thus exclaims the pessimistic prophet of old, "There is not one that is good; no, not one."

If, then, sin were in itself an evil—destructive and disintegrating—the human race instead of advancing would be continually retrograding and deteriorating. The fact that man continually conquers his moral

frailties; succeeds in rising to a higher standard from age to age, condemning the innocent acts of one epoch as sins in another; proves that in itself sin is not destructive; but is merely incidental to the outgoing of the soul's forces through material media—the soul itself ever maintaining its primitive purity and sublime ideals.

Two diverse doctrines of sin have developed from opposite theories of man's origin. One doctrine teaches that man was originally pure and perfect, but through experience fell to the opposite extreme; and now is, and forever will be, totally depraved, till restored by some miraculous and supernatural agency.

The other doctrine is that man arose from the base material elements of phenomenal nature, and evolved through varying experiences to his present exalted spiritual and intellectual state.

According to the first doctrine sin is an inherent and almost ineradicable element in human nature. According to the other, sin is merely the incidental accompaniment of man's natural development, and the necessary process of his higher education. The latter is the view which appeals to the scientific, and the rational, religious mind. It exalts man because it places before him an Eternal Ideal of Purity. He discovers within himself the "Kingdom of God"—the immortal glory of his immaculate self. He sees within himself the revealed Divinity, and worship becomes an illumination, an aspiration, an absorption. He reads anew the text, "The pure in heart shall see God," and knows that it means the pure in heart see the *pure god within*. He is redeemed, exalted, glorified. Himself, he recognizes, immortal, unsullied, immaculate. No sin (or error of judgment) can pierce through the outer wall of his human ignorance and pollute the inner citadel. There all is pure and white as the stainless snows.

"There is no sin," is true of the immortal self; whose immortality can be tasted and realized this side the darkling grave.

Should this interpretation of sin become the popular standard, charity would supplant condemning; hope illumine the night of despair. The "unco guid" would occupy no more the topmost seats and sit in judgment on their fellows. Honesty would supplant hypocrisy, and introspection would search for a god within and not a devil. They who have long felt the curse of the religious condemnation would seek salvation, not in some miraculous sacrament, but in self-discovery; not in search for a Christ on Golgotha, but for a transfigured Lord of Light on the Golgotha of the human heart. Then would the soul take wings and fly, and freedom become the boon and blessing of every human creature. Then would each man judge himself alone, as the light of wisdom fluttered through the windows of his being. Then would duty be a true standard of ethics, because duty would be a child of love, and love the offspring of liberty. Then would mankind be one, and humanity a brotherhood; for hate and envy, jealousy and suspicion would be banished; while love and forgiveness, mercy and forbearance, would be the angels to roll away the stone of despair from the tomb of human suffering.

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