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COMING!
in an early issue
**Why I Don't Believe in
Capital Punishment**
By E. Haldeman-Julius

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AUGUST 31, 1929

Why I Do Not Fear Death

E. Haldeman-Julius

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If any man might be expected to have an earnest concern for an assurance of something beyond death, that man would at first glance seem to be the one who has lived out the greatest part of his years and who is facing death in more than the rhetorical or philosophical sense of the word. We must agree that when such a man faces death with a disillusioned realism, calmly deciding that immortality is an empty dream, his words bear the impressive stamp of sincerity; for he is not speaking of a prospect that is possibly thirty or forty years distant, but one that is perhaps only five or ten years away and that is certainly not so very far away; he knows that he is (as counted in years) at the small end of life and it may be said that he is weighing the evidence in a last decision or, as it were, intellectually a last testament not lightly to be made.

Joseph McCabe, past sixty though still vigorous and, we hope, with a goodly sum of vital years before him, is not playing with words about a mere image of distant unreality when he speaks of death as "the last anesthetic." At the age of seventy-two, Clarence Darrow speaks as honestly and fearlessly of the finality of death as he spoke thirty years ago. Anatole France at eighty was serene in his skepticism. Skeptics are not weakened in their views, they do not try to hide from the truth, at the approach of death. The tales about the deathbed recantations of celebrated skeptics are simply commercialized lies which preachers have circulated to stimulate their superstitious trade. One would not say that it is impossible for a skeptic to snatch at the faintest illusion of immortality when he is dying. The factor of wishfulness would tend to be powerfully on the side of a belief in immortality so that if a man does not hold this belief it is because he cannot in face of the evidence, because the thing is rationally impossible to him, and no man who has the least integrity of intellect can deliberately make himself believe a falsehood, however pleasant that falsehood may be.

But it does not affect the truth if a skeptic, on the one hand, expresses a weak, illogical hope on his deathbed, or if a Christian, on the other hand, is stricken by doubts and, with life slipping from him, feels that it is indeed the end; one could find at least as many instances of the one attitude as of the other, or let us say that skeptics die as bravely without faith as Christians die with faith; for that matter, Jesus is said to have cried out on the cross, "My God, why hast thou forsaken me!" It is not unusual for men to meet death with courage or resignation; martyrs have done so, and criminals, and the despised of earth; men who were convinced that they were merely returning to senseless dust and men who have believed that they were on the threshold of Paradise. One's deathbed manner has nothing to do with belief or character; we all make the best of it, for that is the only thing we

can do, as the inevitable knows no temporizing; again, as a rule when men are really so close to death they have such a faint hold on life that the thread is easily broken. It is when the tide of vitality and hope runs strong in us that we most resist the thought of dissolution. The love of life is naturally very great, save when life is so weak within us as to be almost unrealizable. Probably the sinner has more reason to love life (not to fear death) than the saint; although Christians show no desire nor especial willingness to die and foregather with the angels.

Old men seem to appreciate life, though perhaps in a quieter way, as much as far younger men; nor do they seem to have a greater fear of death because of its more calculable imminence. Young men, in whom life is fresh and upon whom the genuine realization of the universal fact of death is newly borne (for children think little or briefly and forgetfully about death), have the most violent feeling of rebellion when they reflect that this form of beauty and energy is fated "to lie in cold obstruction and to rot." When a man enters middle life, he takes stock of life with a new clearness and feels with a more intimate consciousness the passing of things and the unarguable finality of death. In old age, men know that they have soon to die but they cling to life with interest and enjoyment, depending in degree upon their health and other circumstances, and they do not worry about the inevitable.

Taking a realistic view of human nature, one can say that the question of our attitude toward death is largely theoretical—in this sense, that we all have a common love of life and aversion from death (which is not to be confused with the fear of death, religiously speaking), that we all have the strong natural instinct to go on living as long as we can and that we all must die without any great originality. More precisely, our beliefs about death do not affect our will to live and the idea of immortality does not furnish any inspiration to life, nor is it a genuine or necessary consolation. It is not any profound conviction that he will live forever which reassures a man when he thinks of death. In the first place, death is a passing and not personal thought with most of us. The man who is actively and hopefully full of life cannot realize death as something personal to him, although he may be ever so familiar with it as a common happening. While he lives, it is life, not death, that matters to him. Is the Christian, for example, actually inspired with trust and resignation by his belief in immortality? No—his strongest assurance lies in the feeling that he is definitely among the living and that his death is a thing remote.

Immortality is a fine, large, vague notion—as vague as the idea of death, in a personal sense, to the man in bounding health—and it cannot have the effective force of reality or, I should say, of an intense, very personally felt conviction. Does a man in good health think with gladness or even with resigned peace of mind of himself as enjoying an immortality in some fanciful realm beyond the earth? Surely he does not; he thinks of himself as going right on living amid these familiar earthly scenes. Tell him that he must die tomorrow and the belief in immortality will be far less real to him than the rebellious realization

that he must quit the only life he certainly knows. The thought of immortality is not as convincing (to the Christian, for of course it is not at all convincing to the skeptic) as life is nor as death is. These are the great realities by which the feelings and activities of all men are actually determined. No man, in other words, acts as if he believed in immortality; such a belief does not make any man indifferent to life or wishful of death or even resigned to death, save in the way that all must be resigned to it as something they cannot help.

It is perfectly ridiculous to say, as often it is said, that without the inspiration of immortality men would not have any reason for living and the energies and plans of the race would be seriously impaired. We are not encouraged to live by any such vague, faroff vision of reward. We live, even amid great difficulties, because it is natural for us to do so; because it is the mechanism of our nature to keep going and to keep going as long and as pleasantly as we can; it is foolish to say that we breathe and eat and sleep and play and work only because we believe that our consciousness will be continued in another sphere of life beyond the grave; these actions of life are natural and pleasant to us and in themselves they have a sufficient, strong attraction and meaning—whereas the conjecture or hope of immortality can never be strong enough to take the place of the consciousness of life. Certainly it seems that even the most muddled-headed Christian must have sense enough to know that a man does not cut his throat simply because he ceases to believe in the fiction that he will live forever. That would be as preposterous as to believe that a man would immediately resolve to contract a disease because he will in all probability be seriously ill at some future time, or that he will give away all his possessions because he may some day lose them, or that he will have all his teeth extracted at the age of thirty and get a false set because he will probably depend upon such artificial equipment at the age of sixty. It is natural for us to defend our interests and persist in our labors and enjoyments, and life is the sum of all pleasure and hope for us, so we cling to it until the end, and even when we are no longer active we have satisfaction in the sensation of being alive and in watching the activities of others.

So it is with all life, simply because it is alive and has a strong instinct to maintain the pleasurable consciousness or the instinctive urge of living. Animals certainly have no belief in immortality, yet they instinctively hold to life. The idea of immortality was unknown to human beings during prehistoric ages, yet they continued to go through the natural motions of living. If it be said that the intelligence of man places before him a clearer realization of death as his fate, and that the hope of immortality must rescue him from the despair of knowing that he must die, we can only reply that the human realization of the brevity of life and the finality of death should inspire us with all the more determination to reap the full harvest of living. Actually, the philosophy that makes life most interesting and that stimulates us to take the fullest advantage of our years is the skeptical philosophy; this has always been the philosophy of most intense, attractive,

and warm - visioned humanism; whereas Christianity called upon men to despise life and even today preachers speak (to unbelieving congregations of the equivocally or figuratively devout) of this world as a vain show—as, at any rate, the minor and least-to-be-prized scene of the "soul's" life—and the Christian "nowhere" of immortality as the grand purpose and hope of our being.

Humanism—the philosophy that encourages us to cultivate the best values of life here and now—is the natural product of skepticism; and we find that the skeptics have been, in the drama of human progress, the protagonists of every brave, clear struggle for better conditions of life. Men have never helped themselves on earth by thinking of heaven. They have not been uplifted by the thought of immortality to a vision of wiser and more hopeful living. Only by attending to human, earthly interests—only by acting as if this life were the only important concern, which has implied at least a pragmatic skepticism—have men achieved for their personal or for the common good. Obviously, to despise or to disregard the interests of life is to cheat ourselves of life—and only a few crack-brained fanatics have ever felt that a promise of immortality was a really trustworthy reward for neglect of this life. The average Christian avails himself of this life just as eagerly and sticks to it just as desirously as if he, like the skeptic, recognized it as his only chance; he makes hay while the sun shines and is not inspired by the rainbow of a remotely, fancifully promised Paradise.

Yet logically it is the Christian believer in immortality who should be the most indifferent to life and who should, at any rate, look forward eagerly and joyfully to the moment that will mark his translation to a perfect, blissful sphere where there will be no longer any sorrow nor care nor uncertainty. It is the Christian in whom we should expect the regard for life and the earnestness of earthly endeavor to be weakened, if he really believes in the promises of his religion: for if his belief is true it is only through death that he can attain to ideal and abundant life; only through death that his "soul" can find release from the prisonhouse of the flesh; only through death that he can be triumphant over the limitations of what we merely rational humans recognize in their unequivocal character as life and death.

We need not ask whether this is the attitude of Christians; we know that it is not. These good people show a singular disinclination to accept what they claim to regard devoutly as the greatest prize except to man—singular, that is, except from the quite reasonable inference that they do not look upon immortality as an entirely dependable and sure reward and have no clear, convincing, consoling idea of the possibility or the nature of immortality. They try to put off that supposedly glorious, victorious moment as long as possible; and human science, although they may sometimes speak of it critically as an interference with God's plans, is nevertheless very welcome to them in their extremities of suffering and danger. The attitude of Christians when their loved ones die is, too, a contradiction of their professed belief in immortality. They may speak of death, in piously parroting

accents, as only a brief parting; but their real grief betrays their avowal of hope and belief. Not so would they feel and act if one dear to them were set upon an earthly journey but certainly to be met again within a number of years: people endure years of separation yet do not grieve, because they know that they can meet again; and if Christians knew that they were sure to have a reunion with their loved ones infinitely more wonderful than any earthly reunion, it stands to reason that they would be undismayed by the separation of death. At heart they have no such assurance; they have only a form of belief, which may be sincere enough in its way, but is after all superficial and contrary to their deepest feeling. Death is to them, as it is to unbelievers, a sad and solemn and absolutely final event. And in the very moment of asserting that death is not final Christians show plainly enough that they do not feel so serene and trusting about it—for a man may profess to believe anything that can be put into a form of words, yet respond to a real situation in a way that shows the mockery of his belief. When a Christian says that he is prepared to die, that can only really mean that he will accept the inevitable when it comes; and so may a skeptic say truthfully enough, in a general and not immediate sense, that he is ready to die—yet not be willing to lose one moment of possible life.

The way a man dies proves nothing, of course, as to the truth of his beliefs; yet men face death bravely enough when the final moment comes, for many reasons both good and bad, and it is the speculation about it that fills men with imaginary terrors; the common attitude toward death is really no more than an assertion of the will to live and no faith nor theory can make the thought of death pleasant to us while we have a strong impetus and possibility of life. At the moment of death, facing it with "one last glance, any faith or theory will prove meaningless: all that we can do, whatever our beliefs, is to die because we must. We cannot put ourselves in the position of welcoming death except as a relief from intolerable pain or weariness from which we can escape in no other way. Confronted with danger when we are strong in health and hope, we act instinctively to protect the life within us and we have not mind for speculation as to the meaning of death. Facing death on a sickbed, if we are clear in mind we shall probably, each according to his belief, act in familiar character; the Christian will speak of his hope of heaven, the skeptic will bid a regretful or a resigned farewell to earth; one will die as surely and as easily as the other, but neither will have the will to die although they may be so tired, so ill, so faintly aware of what is happening that the will to live is practically absent.

It is certain, anyway, that the hope of immortality has not been demonstrated as having even pragmatic value either in the fullness of life or in the moment of death. There is no proof that men are aided in facing death hopefully and courageously by the thought of immortality or that men cannot as easily submit to "the last anesthetic" without the hope of living beyond the grave (a grimly contradictory phrase indeed—"life beyond the grave"). For it is not enough to say that Christians die without a distressing ex-

hibition of fear; it is not proved that their religion is responsible for this attitude, which is familiar enough among men of varying beliefs and characters, which is after all nothing more than a submission to the inevitable; pain, danger, sorrow—much as we all dread these experiences, we bear them surprisingly well when we must; the anticipation, if it be near and convincing, is worse than the reality. Skeptics die as peacefully and bravely as Christians—to claim no more than that—and that, a general and indisputable fact, is proof enough that religion has really no bearing in the last analysis on the attitude toward death. We do not need religion to help us to die any more than we need religion to help us to live. If religion could show us how to prolong life—but that has been done by science, not religion, and it is also science which provides the only definite easement for the dying hour.

It is clear enough, too, that religion does not make the thought of death more pleasant to us while we are yet actively in the midst of life. We do not need religion, for example, to impress us with any "spiritual" attitude toward death, to remind us for our "souls" good that we must die. We know the common fate and we know further that it is idle and senseless to dwell upon it; what the preacher means when he tells us that we should bear solemnly in mind that "in the midst of life we are in death" and that we must "prepare for death" is that we should believe his doctrine and be ready to square accounts with his mythical God. But most men, Christians and skeptics alike, seem practically agreed that the best way to "prepare for death" is to carry life insurance and be careful of their health and watch their steps so that they may live or, if they die, leave behind them worldly protection for their dependents rather than seek celestial protection for their corpse-shuffling "spirit."

Facing death fearlessly cannot, of course, mean within reason an attitude of indifference to death: certainly not to a man who is vital with life and hope. It does not mean that one justifies death; there is no question of justification or of blame with regard to the blind processes of nature—although the theological attempt at justification, we may say, is hopelessly illogical. For if there is an intelligent will behind this tragedy-comedy of life, we must denounce that will as malicious and cruel. Life is too full of pain, evil, and malign chance to justify its praise as the grand scheme of a divine architect of fate. But of course the skeptic does not think of any divine scheme or any purpose of nature; he does not think of life as having been arranged in any way, save as man has imported into it for himself a social arrangement; he looks at life realistically, neither blaming nor justifying in the ordinary sense, recognizing that it has aspects of beauty and ugliness, solace and terror, pleasure and pain, toward which we can have only two rational attitudes: namely, an attitude of acceptance toward the inexorable courses of nature and an attitude of scientific control and alleviation where that is within the bounds of human ingenuity.

Nor does it help to delude ourselves (or to try deluding ourselves) as to the nature of things with an intellectually childish show of optimism or pious hope. Certainly while we are thoroughly alive and

the red blood runs strong in our veins and our loved ones are buried, death seems a real tragedy. It seems hard then that we must be thrust from out the familiar, warm, bright scene of our living home and become dust for the feet of others. For one, I should not pretend a philosophic indifference to that fate. The thought of death is unpleasant and grim and shockingly opposed to our instincts of life. Perhaps I shall live long enough to become more or less indifferent to life—paradoxically, I hope that I shall. I may some day think of death as easily as I think of sleep. If I think of death easily now, it is because death seems remote. On the other hand, it has no superstitious terrors for me. I do not fear it in the sense that Christians use the word. If death comes to me prematurely, I shall do as others do—that is, I shall cease to live because I can't help myself. No Christian can do more. The thought of immortality does not weigh a feather's weight with me. My attitude toward life and death is simply a natural attitude, and I may call it philosophic only in the sense that I recognize the nature of life and death and refuse to delude myself concerning these realities.

More properly, it seems to me, the business of philosophy or wisdom is to prepare us for life and not death. Preparation for death is simple enough: when your time comes, die with as little fuss as possible, free alike from vain hopes and stupid fears. But it is life that wisdom serves to make more interesting and intelligible for us. It is life that we should make the most of and that we should the more carefully appreciate and utilize according to its true values because we know that death will end it for each of us absolutely.

As a matter of fact, the thought of immortality has ominously overshadowed and confused this life for millions of Christians. They have been roundly cheated by "threats of Hell and hopes of Paradise," and for the empty promise of salvation, unsupported by the least intelligible or demonstrable authority, they have denied themselves a number of very pleasant possibilities immediately and substantially within their reach. I refer here to the traditional Christian attitude of severity on moral questions, to restrictions that have been placed by theology rather than common sense upon behavior, to the fiction of a divine lawgiver who has seemed in too many instances to bear a malicious grudge against the happy, wholesome desires of men; and I refer also to the Christian attitude of intolerance and obscurantism in which socially we can trace a pitifully, indeed a tragically, large history of needless suffering. In Bertrand Russell's brilliant summary of the effects of religion upon progress (*Has Religion Made Useful Contributions to Civilization?* Little Blue Book No. 1463), he shows that religion has operated against the plain social interests of men and that it has cheated men, especially its credulous adherents, out of the hope and happiness that a rational view of life would have given them; and that, moreover, life has been made more interesting in modern times when science has largely taken over from religion the intellectual as well as the practical guidance of human affairs.

It is significant, at any rate, that

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The Moving Finger Writes

Informal Comment on
Developments of the Week
Lloyd E. Smith

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GEORGE JEAN NATHAN
George Jean Nathan, outspoken dramatic critic and author of such characteristic books on the theater as *The House of Satan* and *The World in Falseface*, has just returned from Europe. He hastens to send a comment for the Jubilee Celebration of the attainment of 1,500 different titles in the Little Blue Books. It deserves to be set off in italics, like this:

Ten years of high enterprise and ten years of very excellent result.—
GEORGE JEAN NATHAN.
I should add that Dr. Isaac Goldberg, long familiar to H.-J. readers, has written a delightful critical biography of George Jean Nathan, entitled *The Theater of George Jean Nathan* (\$3.15 postpaid).

PRISONERS' SONGS
The talking-singing movie *Weary River*, featuring Richard Barthelme (who, it is acknowledged, did not do the singing), had for the basis of its plot the conditions

of a convict. This prisoner secured popular approval over the radio, from within the prison walls. Later, of course, he makes good.

It may be something of a surprise to many to learn that there are actual prisoners who have written successful songs. Daniel McCarthy, No. 12265, Drawer N, Trenton, N. J., sends us a copy of *I'm Tired of Being a Fool*, by Vincent Shannon, Anna Hannay and Cliff Cole, published by Shannon and Cole, 28 Lincoln St., Jersey City, N. J. This is only one of several songs composed by Shannon and Cole—who are convicts in the State Prison at Trenton, N. J. In spite of their handicaps, they have succeeded in forming their own publishing house outside, address noted above. Popular song lovers should investigate these prisoners' compositions.

MARK TWAIN, CYNIC
I have noticed that several readers have ordered copies of Mark Twain's *Mysterious Stranger*, the posthumous work in which the noted humorist expresses his deep pessimism. *The Mysterious Stranger*, though written in what has often been a misleading fairy-tale style, is a devastating book. It is as bitterly cynical as the Connecticut Yankee is hilariously comic. It expresses the agnostic's objections to theology in a literary manner. Every freethinker should read it; it should be on the required reading list of every rationalist's children as they grow up. If any-

one asks for *The Mysterious Stranger*, by Mark Twain. Charles J. Finger discusses the book at some length in his *Mark Twain, the Philosopher Who Laughed at the World* (Little Blue Book No. 517).

COLETTE
New York publishers—Albert and Charles Boni—are boasting that they will introduce Colette, a modern Frenchwoman who writes sophisticated fiction, to America, in a novel, *Cheri*. H.-J. readers should recall that some excellent short stories by Colette, imitatively translated by Keene Wallis, are available in *Some Polite Scandals of Parisian Life* (Little Blue Book No. 810). Some of them originally appeared in the *Haldeman-Julius Quarterly*.

Colette's *Cheri*, translated by Janet Flanner, will be ready the last of August, price to be announced. In boosting the book it is said of Colette that "since George Sand no other woman writer in France has so enthralled a large public by her accurate observations and frankness." Marcel Proust, just before he died, wrote Colette that no other living author had made him weep. Meanwhile, get Little Blue Book No. 810—and also the other translations from the French by Keene Wallis: *Amorous Misadventures* (No. 410); *Romances of Paris* (No. 404); *Her Burning Secret* (No. 817); and *Pollies of Lovers* (No. 892). Remember, too, that *Bands and Rebels*, a book of poems by Keene Wallis, is still available (\$2.00 postpaid).

NOT ONLY THE DEVIL

Captain Gleb Post, of the Salvation Army, 1841 Curtis St., Denver, Colo., criticizes us severely after this fashion: "It has occurred to me that you, who in your catalogs are so apt to feature the atheist and the agnostic (at every so low a price) have yet to provide for us a Bible at low cost. Why discriminate? You've sure given the devil his due, why not impartially build sales with the books of the Old and New Testaments at nickel a book?"

Anyone who has read E. Haldeman-Julius' *First Hundred Million* (\$1.98 postpaid) knows the answer to this. The devil is simply more popular than Jehovah. The Bible will not sell in blue covers at a nickel a volume. But—just to keep the list representative—the Little Blue Books have available the following strictly Christian titles, so to speak, which are printed quite without critical accompaniment. I am surprised that Captain Post has not examined our catalog carefully enough to see these titles for himself. Here they are:

600 Essence of the Bible
111 Sermon on the Mount and Other Sayings of Jesus
624 The Gospel of Luke
743 Great Christian Hymns
848 Poems About Jesus
170 Story of the Ancient Christian Church
67 Story of the Medieval Christian Church
169 Story of the Modern Christian Church

76 The Prince of Peace. William Jennings Bryan.

All ten of these books are now in print and available, like all the other Little Blue Books, at five cents apiece postpaid to any address in the world.

LETTERS

Many letters arrive in Girard which encourage the staff of the Haldeman-Julius Publications to redouble their efforts. It is a temptation to print them all; that is impossible, because of limitations of space. But a few must be quoted.

Thomas F. Harrison, Shelbyville, Tenn., writes: "I have enjoyed your reply to Rev. Holmes (referring to E. H.-J.'s reply to John Haynes Holmes in the August *Edgington*), and your reply to Prof. Edgington (in *The American Freeman*). I started in underscoring the strong points in your reply to Rev. Holmes for convenience in re-reading, but found that it was so near all underscored that the underscoring was useless. I regret that so few who need it will read it or heed it."

Arthur R. Anderson, East Boston, Mass., is enthusiastic about the High School Educational Course in 60 handy volumes (\$2.98 postpaid): "Allow me to express my deep appreciation and gratitude for having the High School Educational Course. I have studied over half the contents of this remarkable set of instructive books and am most pleased with my progress, having spent only two years in the local high school."

Felix Parentila, Chicago, Ill., likes this weekly: "I have received the first issue of *The American Freeman*. After reading it, I have noticed it's vitally important in my daily experience and in my study of life. I congratulate the authors of the different articles and thank the publishers for including them."

Wilbur Lichtwadt, Newport, Ky., writes about the Jubilee celebration of 1,500 different Little Blue Books: "My sincere congratulations on attaining 1,500 titles in the Little Blue Books. For these publications the human race owes you a debt which cannot be measured in dollars and cents. Superstition and ignorance are flying fast before the assault of the Little Blue Books, but the fight is hardly started. May your enterprise live long and prosper."

L. C. Liversay, East St. Louis, Ill., is one of the Oldest Readers. He has some reminiscences which should interest old-timers. He writes on an old letterhead of The New Fargo House (steam heat, electric light, free bus, stable in connection, rates \$1 to \$1.25 per day). Fargo, N. D.—dating from 1900. Mr. Liversay comments: "I was traveling for the Milwaukee Harvester Company. I put up at this house. It came very near costing me my job, when they learned where I was stopping. They at once sent a man to question me—and move me to another hotel."
Anent the *Appeal to Reason*, Mr. Liversay goes on to say: "I think

it was in 1900 that Mr. Wayland sent the *Appeal* to all the local editors in the U. S. I was looking through my papers for the oldest *Appeal* I could find. I found Nos. 228 and 274. I was also a subscriber to *The Coming Nation* from start to finish. Among my old 'laid-aways' I find the old *Rip-Saw*, by Dick Maple, *Melting Pot*, by Tichenor, *The Chicago Daily Socialist* as well as *The White House* by M. Langham, and *Anastarta* or *A Trip to Old Nick's Land*."

Mr. Liversay says he has some 100 pounds of these old papers, and wonders what he could do with them to benefit humanity. If any reader knows of a library which would be glad to accept and preserve them, will he please write to Mr. L. C. Liversay, East St. Louis, Ill.?

John U. D. Pleasants, Aldan, Pa., likes Marcell Haldeman-Julius' *Biography of a St. Bernard in The Debunker*: "Your Little Blue Books have enabled me to secure the benefits of literature I would never have been able to have otherwise. They have given me a more wholesome outlook on life and its problems. I welcome the *American Freeman* and the *Debunker* with pleasure, and devour every bit of them—with an appetite comparable to that of big yellow Ajax Simba. Mrs. Haldeman-Julius' descriptions of home life are so real that I feel as if I knew you as friends, and wish I could call on you, and meet Bo-Peep, and dear little Alice, and the rest."

How to Deal With Crime

Henry Elmer Barnes

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(Continued from last week)

Our prisons are equally fatal in their effect on those who have not passed through reform schools and reformatories. An adult first offender, while awaiting trial, may be thrown into a miserable county jail where he is compelled to associate with hardened criminals awaiting trial like himself, or with the degraded scum of the delinquent and pauper groups who make up that portion of the jail population who are actually serving time under a jail sentence. Convicted and sentenced to state prison, the first offender proceeds with the process of adjusting himself to association with crooks and to existence within a type of society characterized by corruption, intrigue and obscenity. The contemporary prison debases everyone who has any association with it. The prisoner is depressed by the isolation and the general cage-like structure of the prison, and by the punitive and regimentative psychology which permeates the institution. He is terrified by the strangeness and monotony of the environment, and by the general situation of hopelessness in which he finds himself. If he holds himself to be unjustly convicted, he tends to look upon himself as a victim of social injustice and develops a compensatory feeling of revenge, thus building up the basis for a deliberate and determined career of crime after release. Even if guilty of the crime, he regards himself, often quite correctly, as a less serious offender against social welfare than many highly esteemed and privileged citizens whose acts are not even condemned by society as anti-social. Individuals entertaining these views inevitably develop the determination to seek revenge upon society for this unfair discrimination. The more decent elements in the prison population inevitably sink to the level of the lower strata through common association. Those who have come into prison through inferior technique naturally consult more successful and experienced criminals and thereby protect themselves to a considerable degree against the dangers of future arrest and reconviction.

Inasmuch as most of the practical supervision and direction of prisoners is in the hands of the guards and certain trusted and privileged prisoners, the life of the inmate can be rendered tolerable only through acquiescence in the system of intrigue, "squealing," graft, bootlicking, and corruption which characterizes the various competing prison gangs and their relations with prison authorities. The person who participates in these organizations of intrigue and dishonesty, in order to advance his physical and mental comforts while in prison, is obviously being trained for a thoroughly anti-social mode of life. The prisoner who remains outside of these gangs and cliques of prison life finds his condition so intolerable as to threaten or actually produce both physical and mental disintegration. The total absence of normal sex life in prison inevitably develops a vast range of abnormalities, perversions, and even more serious mental and nervous symptoms. Hence, nearly everything which could destroy any of the better tendencies in human nature operates freely and powerfully within the prison, while there is an almost complete absence of anything designed to induce a determination upon reformation or to give any adequate guidance and encouragement to any such salutary decision on the part of the convict. Prison life also degrades the prison officials. Having as their chief practical function the maintaining of the inmates in custody, they quickly develop the psychology of the animal-tender in the zoo, with even less solicitude for the comfort and happiness of the particular animal entrusted to their care. In order to simplify and render more certain this task of keeping the prisoner safely caged, rules of prison discipline have evolved which furnish the basis for prison cruelty and for the inevitably savage or sullen reaction of the inmates to such rules. These rules, basic in prison administration, invariably have as an object the facilitating of safe and permanent incarceration but rarely, if ever, the encouragement of efforts at reformation. Added to this cage psychosis, which operates equally disastrously upon guard and inmate, there is the unspeakable monotony of prison life which bears nearly as heavily upon the guards as upon the convicts. This situation tends to make the prison guards ever more impatient, surly and inhuman, while their conduct makes the prisoners ever more resentful of their treatment, in this way increasing the problems of discipline and stimulating further official savagery. Thus the vicious circle goes ever on.

Modern methods of prison discipline and administration would degrade even the highest type of human personality, whereas the average prison official is drawn from below the average of human ability, honesty and culture, and is usually only a minor cog in the political machine. There is rarely, if ever, any special training for this profession, and almost never does a prison official, with the possible exception of a few wardens or parole officers, possess the slightest knowledge of the science of criminology. It is literally true that the qualifications for a prison guard are often no higher than are required for those who carry food and water to the animals in a first-class metropolitan zoo. The technical preparation demanded of a prison official is obviously far inferior to that which is required of an animal trainer in a first-class circus.

Even the public does not escape from the degrading influence of penal administration. Though it is usually overlooked in discussions of the psychological effects of prison administration, it is probable that some of the most serious and disastrous aspects of modern prison cruelty are not those evils which affect the prisoners or the prison officials but are rather the outgrowth of the effect of this system upon the public mind. In the first place, imprisonment supplies the

present method of carrying out the revengeful spirit of outraged society, which thus secures satisfaction for the wrongs, real or alleged, that are brought upon it by the convict. In an earlier period of criminal justice culprits were punished by mob vengeance, and imprisonment is the present substitute for this more primitive technique. Along with this element of social protection expressed in a crude psychological form, there must be taken into consideration the fundamentally cruel and sadistic tendencies of human groups, well analyzed by S. Sighele, E. D. Martin and others. The savagery of contemporary imprisonment offers a vicarious release of these sadistic traits under respectable and approved circumstances, whereas relatively few individuals would personally and individually find themselves able to carry out, or would admit themselves subject to, such obviously sadistic impulses when openly expressed in a lynching.

To this function of imprisonment as a means of manifesting social revenge and securing social protection, and as an "elegant" method of expressing collective sadism, there should be added the powerful factor of social catharsis which rests upon the age-old notion and symbol of the scapegoat. Our individual sense of guilt is drained off, and we inevitably feel a certain vicarious release and satisfaction at the conviction and imprisonment of an alleged culprit, who symbolically bears to the prison the sins of his social group. The insistence of those who wreck corporations, banks and railroads, leaving a train of poverty-stricken widows and orphans, upon the necessity of solemn severity in the punishment of a man who has stolen a few dollars' worth of bread or cloth or has failed to pay his milk bill admirably illustrates the operation of this mechanism.

It is frequently charged by lawyers and judges who recognize the failures of our contemporary methods of repressing crime, but who are unwilling to admit their own primary responsibility for this condition, that the present crime wave is due to the fact that we are coddling prisoners in our penal institutions. It is a cheap and easy allegation of such individuals that our prisons are being made over into attractive men's clubs for admission to which free individuals might well clamor in droves. The writer recalls hearing one well-known lawyer refer to Sing Sing as perhaps the finest men's club in New York state. How utterly absurd and baseless this charge may be discovered by even a casual perusal of such works as Mrs. O'Hare's *In Prison*, Tannenbaum's *Wall Shadows*, or Fishman's *Crucifix of Crime*. It is worthy of note that none of the eminent jurists who proclaim the attractiveness of Sing Sing have been known to make any effort to spend their week-ends within its environs. The fact is that, with the exception of the highly temporary service of a few men, such as Dr. Kirchwey at Sing Sing, and Mr. Stutsman at Rockview, Pennsylvania, few modern prisons have ever been under the control of a man who might be called in any technical sense a trained and informed criminologist. In its funda-

mentals the prison system is still as savage and repressive and as far removed from a direct stimulation of reformatory efforts as it was seventy-five years ago. If our present prisons fail to reform prisoners it is obviously because of the inadequacy of the whole spirit and procedure of the repressive and punitive system of discipline which has thus far prevailed in penal institutions, and not because modern criminologists have mitigated or demoralized the earlier savagery.

VI. A SCIENTIFIC PLAN FOR THE REPRESSION OF CRIME.

Some who accept the validity of this indictment of the modern prison system might ask what we have to substitute. The answer is easy in theory, but the possibility of introducing a rational system of treating the criminal in the face of public ignorance and bias is highly remote. As crime is a medical problem, we should, as in general medicine, lay primary stress upon preventative therapy. As far as possible, we should prevent the procreation of types likely to be unusually predisposed toward anti-social conduct. Here we have the field of negative eugenics and sterilization. Juvenile courts and child guidance clinics, thoroughly linked up with the public school system, will enable us to discover sufficiently early those types which, through an unfavorable environment, with resulting bad habits, or through various nervous or mental difficulties, seem headed toward a criminal career. By careful attention to these cases we may certainly save many from disaster and fit them for constructive and law-abiding social existence. Highly unfortunate living conditions, which generate these bad habits that lead to crime, should be rapidly and thoroughly eliminated. This would require not only better housing conditions, better facilities for recreation, and better educational methods, but also such a fundamental reorganization of economic life and motives as would lead to the possibility for every able-bodied individual to earn a decent livelihood.

In the case of those convicted of crime, all who have not been guilty of the more serious types of crimes, or who, upon examination, do not reveal highly defective, abnormal, or dangerous personalities, should not be incarcerated in any type of institution, but should be released on probation under a suspended sentence. In this situation they should have the most careful and sympathetic assistance of psychiatric clinics and well trained social workers, from whom both practical guidance and encouragement to reform may be secured. Thorough going examination of those who seem to require incarceration should be provided. Such obviously non-reformable types as low-grade feeble-minded prisoners, parietic convicts, and insane convicts, suffering from other incurable psychoses should be remanded to the proper institutions for permanent segregation irrespective of the crime committed.

We would then have remaining the group which could not be safely entrusted at the outset of probation and apparently does not require permanent segregation. This group should be classified and subjected to the desirable form of medical

treatment and social reeducation. Physical health should be restored and maintained at the highest possible level. Neuroses and psychoses should be treated through psychoanalysis and other psychiatric methods. Social reeducation along such lines as Mr. Osborne's *Mutual Welfare League* should be introduced in order to create the proper social habits of trust and responsibility. The possibility of maintaining one's self through lawful modes of activity should be assured by the teaching of a trade or profession to those not already thus equipped. After such a scheme of treatment the individual convict would then be in a position to be subjected to experimental release. There should be as thorough after-care for the discharged criminal as now accompanies the release of the inmate of a psychopathic hospital. Every effort should be made to secure employment for the discharged convict and to bring about adequate readjustment to normal social existence. In the case of a relapse, as demonstrated by the repetition of criminal conduct, the individual should be taken back for further treatment. If repeated experiments in this respect prove unsuccessful, then the individual should be permanently segregated.

Such a scheme as we have outlined above would really secure that reformation and social protection which the present prison system assumes to achieve but fails to execute to any significant degree whatever. In the case of those on probation it would provide guidance and encouragement toward reformation and would avert the degrading influence of jail or prison life. By bringing about the permanent segregation of non-reformable types, irrespective of the seriousness of the crime, we should protect society permanently from the potentially dangerous group who are today released to prey upon society. With respect to treatment in institutions set aside for the handling of the criminal classes, every expedient and device to bring about reformation would be actually applied, and the failure of such efforts would be adequate indication of the necessity for that permanent segregation which would give complete protection from the recidivist criminal who now carries on his deprecations as long as his life goes on.

In the place of the contemporary prison, which does nothing to reform the convict and does everything to degrade and destroy his personality, we should have institutions presided over by socially-minded experts who would do everything possible to promote reformation and nothing to produce mental, moral, and physical disintegration. The present system neither protects nor reforms, while the system proposed would achieve both to the highest possible degree consistent with the defects inherent in any scheme devised by man or applied to human material. If it be objected that this plan would be so pleasant that penal institutions would be swamped with voluntary applicants, one might ask the disconcerting question as to whether any great mobs have yet been observed clamoring for admission to state hospitals for the

insane or to colonies for the feeble-minded? The prison of the future, whether called a prison or not, would bear a close resemblance in its objectives and methods to the better state hospitals for the insane which now exist. Certainty of apprehension and treatment according to scientific methods would act as a deterrent to a far greater degree than the present slight prospect of subjection to contemporary prison savagery, and it would possess the enormous advantage of bringing the resources of modern science to bear upon the task of protecting society from the anti-social classes.

Those who advocate a continuation or increase of the savage contemporary system of repression as the best method of eliminating crime, point to the Baumes Laws in New York State and to the allegation—possibly true—that these laws have notably diminished crime. In the first place, we cannot be sure that they have actually diminished anti-social action, as many have been driven into borderline activity not yet branded as overtly criminal. The one great lesson of criminological history is that severity of punishment is not an adequate deterrent, as proved by such facts as that the public hangings of pick-pockets had to be discontinued in England because of the great increase of pocket picking at such occasions. There is no doubt that severe punishments have some effect. The amount of pneumonia would probably be reduced by making its contraction a crime punishable by imprisonment for five years, but one would not contend on that account that this would be the best possible preventive for this particular disorder.

Let us see what actually happens under the dispensation of the Baumes Law. In order to receive the life sentence, which is the core of the Baumes Laws, the offender must have been convicted four times of a felony. Under average circumstances this would mean that such a person had committed from ten to fifteen crimes. Hence his deprecations upon society would be enormous before the protection—expensive to maintain—is secured at all. Under the system which we have outlined as the program of scientific criminology, the protection would have been secured much earlier and at less expense. In the first place, most of the fourth offenders would, under a scientifically guided system, never become criminals but would be detected in childhood and either cured by clinics or segregated in the proper institutions. In the case of those committing crime we should not wait until the fourth offense, but would take the individual in hand at approximately his first offense and either treat or segregate him so as to render him no longer a menace to society. We cannot expect one hundred percent success with such a scheme, but we should escape the near hundred percent failure of the present system.

VII. THE OUTLOOK

In conclusion, we may consider the question as to whether there is any hope of introducing such a scientific mode of coping with the crime problem. It may be answered at the outset that there is not the slightest possibility of such a comprehensive and thoroughgoing plan being

adopted as a whole. The best that can be hoped for is piecemeal progress. Occasionally, we shall get the invaluable exact information as to the extent of crime and the modes of dealing with it in certain important metropolitan areas. Examples of such progress are the recent survey of the crime situation in Cleveland, carried out under the direction of the Harvard Law School faculty, the Missouri Criminal Survey, the Illinois Crime Survey, and the proposed investigation of the crime situation in Boston under the auspices of the group of progressive lawyers in the Harvard Law School. Negative eugenics and sterilization may slowly and gradually be introduced for application to the lowest grades of human delinquents. Rather extensive progress may be hoped for with respect to child guidance clinics and the growing reliance of judges in juvenile courts upon the expert advice of psychiatrists and sociologists. From time to time a progressive judge in a criminal court may be induced to stretch the law and practice sufficiently to take into consideration the advice of medical and psychological experts, with respect to both the conduct of the trial and the determination of sentence. A few progressive states, following the lead of Massachusetts, may provide for the mental and physical examination of criminals and ultimately make some practical use of the information thus obtained. A few intelligent and independent prison wardens may in the future be converted to some such scheme of inmate self-government as that devised at the George Junior Republic and applied for the first time in a penal institution for adults by Mr. Osborne. The progress of education in the field of criminology may slowly but surely bring society to a point where it will be as willing to hand over the control of the criminal to experts as it has become in the last century to entrust the treatment of the insane to those technically competent in the premises.

To the writer the whole matter seems primarily to be the issue as to whether this piecemeal progress in applying the essentials of criminal science will be able to outrun the increasing incitement to crime inevitable in the growing complexities and temptations of contemporary civilization. If we can introduce science into the repression of crime more rapidly than contemporary civilization increases the crime rate, we may look forward with optimism to the future. If the ignorance of the public and the bigotry, intolerance and stupidity of lawyers and judges so obstructs the progress of intelligence and science in the field of the repression of crime that the increase of crime comes to be markedly greater than the advance of science in this field, we may well expect the ultimate extinction of the social order and the gradual disappearance of human society. Hence, the worst enemies of society would appear to the modern criminologist to be, not so much the degraded felon as the conventional jurist and lawyer who consciously or unconsciously is doing his level best, through defending archaic methods, to increase the number and permanence of the delinquent class in contemporary society.

they have less concern about a future life. For Christianity never made death more attractive, but it did unnecessarily surround the event of death with doubts and fears.

After all, the question of immortality is to be settled by the evidence. It is a begging of the question to say that it is a pleasant belief; it is a fallacy to argue that it is needed as an inspiration or a moral control in life; and it has not been shown that men die more willingly and easily with the belief than without it. What really should be considered, first and last, is whether the idea is true. If it is not true, then it has absolutely no value; and certainly it is only through the conviction that it is true that men can draw from it any of the assumed inspiration or consolation. It is idle to tell a man that he should believe in immortality, not because it is true, but because it is more pleasant; such an invitation to belief is entirely too doubtful; and while the belief in immortality is at bottom a wish-belief, the believers are persuaded first of all in some fashion (so illogical and tricky in the mind) that it is true. A belief which a man admits to be false or very doubtful could not be a very encouraging belief; the wish may be father to the thought, but the thought must be confidently held else it means nothing.

And so Christians must discuss immortality on the ground of its assumed truthfulness; they must submit evidence, offer proof, and meet arguments exactly as in the discussion of any idea; of course they cannot successfully do this, but upon them nevertheless rests the burden of maintaining the truth, not the attractiveness or the reassurance of immortality. They do indeed claim that it is a true idea, that it is as real as life and death, and their other arguments are but sophistical dodges and quibbles into which they are driven by the weakness of their logical position. If it could be proved that immortality were absolutely true, obviously it would not

be thought necessary to fall back upon any less direct and intellectual appeal. The sophistry that is so curiously displayed in discussing this idea is a sign of the shaky intellectual basis upon which it rests—or, let us say, a significant reminder that it rests upon no basis of definite and assured fact, but is merely a theory that is animated by a wish and set forth in pointless, proofless words.

Just how much real belief there has ever been in immortality is difficult to say. Belief is such an uncertain quantity; a man may formally profess a belief and be quite sincere yet it may not have the full, simple convincingness of reality; a man may honestly argue in behalf of the theory of immortality but he knows life and he knows death as a fact. It is doubtful that very many ever believed in immortality in the sense that they had a profound and serene and sure conviction; they have believed in it superstitiously, theoretically, and often reservedly but it has not had the simple, undeniable force of realism. That it has been believed to any extent illustrates how credulous is the human mind, how superficial, and how careless or indifferent in actual reasoning.

What the reasoning man asks in the first place is some good evidence for the assumption. Unless such evidence is forthcoming, the assumption remains—merely an assumption, a dogmatic assertion which has nothing in it but the mere word of the believer. Obviously, the only real proof of immortality would have to be supplied by the dead themselves—and, it is needless to say, the dead have never spoken on the subject. The knowledge of the living is confined to the great realities of life and death. Every word spoken on behalf of the dogma of immortality has been spoken by men who had obviously no way of knowing about any life beyond death. They could only depend upon faith, upon Scripture, or upon that



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Why I Do Not Fear Death

E. Haldeman-Julius

Continued from page one

as the dogma of immortality has lost force in the thoughts of men—as the skeptical attitude toward life has grown—our social conditions and our personal attitude toward the interests of this human world have brightly improved. Even Christians who profess as firmly as ever to believe in immortality have a far less definite hope of heaven than did their devout prototypes of a century ago; but they enjoy life a great deal more, for it is the reality before us and not the illusive fiction of a future life that calls forth the more profound and genuine response. No effort of faith can supply the place of the vital assurances that we have while we cling solidly to the life we know. Few people nowadays try to live in submission to religious dictates if that religion means any considerable denial of the good things of life; and we can easily judge by their actions that Christians are not inspired in any real way by the thought of immortality; they react naturally to life and they distinguish practically between life and death, taking life on the best realistic terms they can arrange and accepting death on none except forced terms, just as the rest of us do. Those Christians (one assumes that such rare animals can still be found) who really try to live as if the eye of a God were upon them and their salvation in a future life were at stake miss a great deal in life that a sane attitude and a fuller understanding would give them and they do not have a better approach to death than the rest of us; they die unwillingly through the same processes of nature and any feeling of

hope which they may have (which cannot be very strong when the feeling of life is so weak) is no better than a feeble, transitory, grasping at a shadow when there is no longer any substance upon which they retain their hold.

And when the Christian faces death courageously (though not more courageously than the skeptic), we are to reflect that—if his courage be due to his belief in immortality—his attitude partakes more of hopeful credulity than real fortitude. There is nothing of bravery in a man's dying with a good grace when he thinks that death is but the change from an imperfect to a perfect life. One should expect the Christian to show gladness rather than courage in facing death. It is a fine bargain for him, if his belief is correct. We are familiar with the Christian hymns that tell of promises and glories to come and mansions in heaven and the like—all bribes, it would seem, to induce a false courage or rather, in theory at least, a joyful expectancy. One suspects the weakness of belief in these promises, inasmuch as they do not give the Christian a unique attitude toward death while he is actively in the midst of life: then he is just as strongly attached to life and as anxious to keep death at a distance as other men are. So long as the Christian can choose, he does not choose death and celestial glory; when he cannot help himself he turns to the thought of immortality, not because it is so brilliant and assuring, but because it is the only hope that he can see.

On the other hand, the skeptic is upheld by no such false courage or childishly deluding hope. He is who faces death with entire, genuine courage, realizing clearly the nature of death, not bribed into submission but taking his fate like a man, dying as he has lived with a realism that is uncompromising. He has no fear of death; he is not in the position of the believing "sinner" who may fearfully seek repentance when he thinks that at

last he is in immediate danger of descending into eternal torment for his "sins." It is the "sinner" who believes in future rewards and punishments who might logically be expected to fear death—or rather not death itself but what he thinks may follow death. According to his belief, he has transgressed divine laws and must suffer the penalty. He has not the Christian's hope that death means celestial glory nor the skeptic's certainty that death is but a painless extinction.

Yet there is no evidence that "sinners" are commonly reduced to such a condition of fear. Although they have no reasoned attitude of skepticism, the threat of future punishment seems to have made no impression of deep reality upon them; if anything, they are more likely to regret that they must part with pleasant "sins." When a man does feel terrified at the end of life, we can see in that fact only a bitter condemnation of religion. It is a black shadow of falsehood and intimidation that religion has thrown across the grave. There is no doubt that in the past the Christian doctrine of future rewards and punishments has impressed more of terror than of hope upon susceptible minds. Both the terror and the hope have faded in modern times, since heaven and hell have come to be regarded generally as mere figures of speech and the stark definiteness of the old-time religion has been necessarily modified by the influence of modern culture even upon Christians who, if they are not fully abreast of intellectual progress, find the theology of a century ago quite untenable today. There is no question that immortality is a less vivid and literal belief today than it was during the centuries of triumphant orthodox faith and dogma; yet life is more stimulated by intelligent human purpose, our activities are wider and more ambitious and more humane too, and the interest of life (unshaded by creeds of supernaturalism) was never so strong; while men die more peacefully when

they have less concern about a future life. For Christianity never made death more attractive, but it did unnecessarily surround the event of death with doubts and fears.

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treacherous and misleading kind of argument, analogy.

Faith, of course, is an admission of a lack of knowledge. It must, too, be faith in something or someone. If the Christian declares that he has faith in a God, he must first of all prove his God: if he says that he has faith in the Bible, we reply that the Bible was written by men who knew no more about the subject than our next-door neighbor; if he argues that he has faith in a purpose of nature, we reply that nature has no purpose but that the way of nature is that the individual shall die. However, immortality requires the assumption of a God: men who reject supernaturalism, who profess to believe in immortality from a purely rational standpoint, are inconsistent; it is a religious idea and cannot be defended on philosophic or natural grounds.

After all, the simplest kind of belief in immortality, intellectually worthless though it be, is that of the Christian who regards the Bible as the literal repository of divine truth: if a man believes the Bible tales about men who walked and talked with God, who had visions of heaven, who were visited by angels, and who were resurrected from the grave—if he accepts such fabulous stuff as serious evidence and does not proceed inquiringly beyond it—then he may feel that the question of immortality is settled for him. His appeal, to the authority of the Bible, however, can have absolutely no force except for men who hold a similar belief. This appeal is not of a general, convincing value in an age when the Bible itself has been riddled by relentless criticism and when men more widely than ever reject the assumption, on the ground of common sense as well as scientific criticism, that any collection of writings can pass as God's word.

If a Christian does not take the Bible literally but rests his belief in immortality upon a vague faith in God or the significance of the "spiritual" life, he has precisely no case at all: so long as a man insists that faith is a valid basis for belief, he cannot enter into an intelligent discussion. The philosophic argument for immortality is also vague and weak and unconvincing, taking for its starting point the purely fictitious assumption of a "spiritual" nature in man and of the death of the body as merely an incident in the eternal life of the "spirit." The philosopher who argues in behalf of immortality is at heart, by necessary implication, a believer in a God: talk about a purpose in nature and an eternally arranged destiny for an individual "soul" is meaningless without the assumption of a God.

The most popular argument for immortality is that the wish implies the fulfillment. It is of course absurd on the face of it that by wishing something to be so we can make it so: if that were the case, life would be all magic. Put the wish more definitely and it is easy to see how absurd it is: say that a Christian wishes to be an angel with harp and wings, and one sees how childish it is to argue that his wish carries with it inevitably its proof and realization. And, again, let us understand that there is no genuine universal wish for immortality as a future dream or theological doctrine. It is but a fantastic stretch-

ing of the simple, natural wish to live. Actually, if men expressed their real wish they would all be in favor of a continuation of their familiar life on this earth; as long as we are healthy and life is interesting to us we should naturally wish to continue our present existence. But we do not wish for an immortality after death. No Christian, if he were free to choose, would say that he prefers to die and take the chance of a more perfect life: his choice would be this life and not some other life. But of course he knows that he must quit this life, and so he clings to the belief that death is only a transition and a new beginning—yet the belief does not reconcile him to death. I have not the least doubt that any Christian would be glad to trade his interest in heaven for an extra ten or twenty years of life on earth. The reason is clear: this life is certain while the theory of a future life is only a theory and one which cannot even be framed in a vivid, conceivable way. Words of faith and dogma may be easily put together and intoned with solemn piety, but facts remain and they are perforce recognized by believers and unbelievers, who feel the force of them equally although they cannot be equally clear in their intellectual position.

The question of immortality is, after all, not to be decided by religious dogmas, but by metaphysical arguments, nor by unintelligent wishes. It is a scientific question and facts must decide it. Facts have decided it, for all who have the intellectual clarity and courage to recognize the simple truth and finality of the decision. There is the universal fact of death, from which no form of life is exempt. We know that men have always died, just as other animals, but we have no record of a single man ever returning to life from beyond the grave, nor have we the slightest bit of evidence that there is any life beyond the grave. Life in general is continually reproduced in new individual forms, but the individual dies and is no more. Our common knowledge of death should be enough to repudiate completely and finally the notion of immortality: and in practice this is the case, whatever men may profess in theory: practically, all men are certain that death is really the end of life and the fiction of immortality, however devoutly adhered to in formal belief, has no definite bearing upon our attitude toward death. It is of no use to try reasoning ourselves away from the facts: such reasoning, so called, is merely a metaphysical playing with words and abstract arrangements of logic that have no reality.

One little fact that could actually be produced in proof of immortality would be of infinitely more weight than all the metaphysical reasoning that one can find in the libraries. The reasoning may be very ingenious, the logic (provided one starts with unquestioned assumptions) may be strict and plausible, but it all falls to pieces when we confront the clear reality of death. Plato is no more reassuring than Jesus on the subject, and natural philosophy has nothing better to offer than religion with its dogmas. The intelligent man is not satisfied with this kind of reasoning; he is not impressed by mere declarations of faith; he finds it irrelevant to talk about the beauty of the idea of

immortality (it is, anyway, too vague and formless an idea to be spoken of as beautiful); what he wants is scientific evidence. But that evidence is not forthcoming; scientifically, we simply know that we die and that this is the end of life. The dead do not speak; and the knowledge of the living is brought to a sharp, realistic pause by the tangible fact of death; it is the end and we cannot deny it so ardently but that we still realize it to be the end. Curiously enough, while immortality is said to be a great eternal truth that men have always been certain of, we observe that under the examination of centuries during which men have been very eager to defend the idea and to place it in the most appealing and assuring light not a shadow of proof has been brought to view. It is the same with the idea of the "soul," upon which the idea of immortality depends: men have discussed it, argued about it, offered ingenious explanations of it, tried in every way to satisfy themselves of its existence and nature; but it has all been futile, and the idea of the "soul" is today as baseless and vague a fiction as it was when men first superstitiously conceived the fancy. One would say that the "soul" must first be demonstrated to our complete and clear satisfaction before the assumption of immortality is possible.

It is further significant that our ideas of the "soul" and immortality come from the crude, essentially primitive speculations of men in an early, unscientific stage of civilization: they are, in the very essential meaning of the word, superstitious; men forget their crude origin, because they have been put into refined metaphysical language and incorporated in the traditional dogmas of religion. These ideas have no place in a scientific culture and view of life. True, science does not concern itself directly with these fantastic speculations; it is concerned with the study of realities; but among the realities science does not find a "soul" or any shadow of a suggestion of immortality. We find no trace of a "soul" in the living, and of course it is impossible to find a trace of immortal "soul" life through which the dead are transformed into something else. There is no better reason for thinking that a human being has a "spirit" that mysteriously animates him than the savage had for thinking that a stream had a "spirit" that caused it to flow or that a tree had a "spirit" which caused its leaves to move and its branches to sway in the wind. "Spiritism" is a crude, primitive form of belief, superstitious rather than intellectual, superficial rather than profound, born of fear and ignorance and incompatible with a rational knowledge of things. And however imposing in language and theory the thought of immortality may be presented, it is nevertheless a feature of "spiritism."

There are, again, a number of practical questions that one naturally asks concerning the idea of immortality. (It is, of course, a kind of soliloquy to speak of taking a practical view of such an utterly impractical, unreal question—but there are criticisms that the practical intelligence will make.) We want to know, for one thing, what conceivable end could be served, in what way the purpose (assuming such a thing) of nature would be furthered, by such a solicitous care for individual consciousness. Evidently the essential thing in nature, or the tendency of nature under life-supporting conditions, is that life in general shall continue and reproduce itself in a succession of individual forms. There is no reason that any sane man can perceive or possibly figure out why the "I" that is a particular personal consciousness should live forever. Men live and die, and other men live and die in succeeding generations; the individual ceases to exist but life goes on without him; and for that matter there is no reason why life should go on forever, and indeed scientists tell us that in the faroff future our earth will be a frozen and lifeless planet.

It is ridiculous to argue that every human being has a precious "soul" that must and will be carefully preserved throughout eternity; and the idea of selective immortality, while one could make a fanciful argument for it (as one could for almost any idea), is not more reasonable; obviously, if one man has a "soul" the same is true of all men, and if the "soul" is immortal that truth would apply equally to all men, and the "soul" of a yokel would go deathlessly on just as the "soul" of a genius would. But why should there be such a concern for personal immortality? The average man is of very limited and temporary importance; and the usefulness of the genius lives on in the work that he bequeaths to posterity; it is not necessary, however, for any purpose of life that either the individual who is a genius or the individual who is merely commonplace should live for a certain length of time.

There is also the practical question concerning the scene and the conditions of immortality. Where, to use the Christian term, is heaven located? What sort of place is it? How do we get there? What form do we assume there and what sort of life is waiting there for us? If these seem foolish questions, it is

only because the whole subject of immortality is essentially foolish. Certainly these are important questions if the hope of immortality is to have a satisfying shape and meaning in our minds. Yet of definite answers we have none save the most obviously childish and impossible. Even Christians are surrendering the old picture of a literal heaven of golden streets and angels flying aimlessly to and fro; and even that old heaven was never pictured clearly and completely but was no more than a fantastic sketch. It is natural also that we should be curious to inquire (if we seriously consider the question at all) in what form we shall live throughout eternity. Usually we are put off with the vague answer that we shall have a "spiritual" life—and that is no conceivable life at all; we shall, it seems, be as formless as the air and it would seem to be quite as satisfactory that our senseless dust should blow about the earth. We are given no hint of what our occupations and interests may likely be in that imaginary other world. Anyway, what could a "spirit" do to pass the slow eternity of time? Can a "spirit" eat, drink, love, and be merry? Can a "spirit" be said to think and hope and plan and surround itself with a particular environment that may seem personally desirable to it? Will we, as "spirits," continue the association and interests that we know in this life? That would seem to be in some sort implied by the promise of a reunion of friends and loved ones beyond the grave.

So do questions arise and there is nobody to answer them. Immortality remains only a word and we can spell it backwards or arrange the letters in any haphazard fashion and it will mean no more and no less. And yet we are told that this meaningless word, this vague notion, this insubstantial shadow of airy nothingness is an inspiration to us in life and a definite, helpful consolation in the hour of death. We are asked to believe that a man can be reconciled to the surrender of the solid, familiar delights of earth, to the loss of his real and definite form and consciousness, by the assurance that he will live forever in some unguessable, inconceivable way as a "spirit." Obviously such an assurance can mean nothing, can inspire no man with hope, cannot be taken as a promise of life that shall ease the mind in facing death. In fact, religion offers nothing but a senseless denial of death that cannot impress deep conviction upon any mind. In the fullness of life a man may profess to believe it but in the hour of death the belief is too thin, too formless, too doubtful: the great final reality thrusts aside all childish notions: then one can only die quite unoriginally, trusting in medical science to ease whatever pain there may be and in one's common sense to accept the inevitable.

After all, there is nothing better than an intelligent realism in facing death. We should face it just as (if we have strength of character and what one may call a healthy fatalism) we endure pain and grief and disappointment and the familiar contrasts of life. By the time we have reached years of mature intelligence, we should be thoroughly familiarized with the chances of life and the settled facts of nature and the inevitable end that is death. It is far better that we should see these things clearly than that we should delude ourselves with vain hopes or fears or imaginings. If we thus understand the terms of life and death, we shall be ready to meet them, not with indifference exactly, but with intelligence and courage. None can face death so simply as the skeptic, for he faces it truthfully and without the complications (rather than the consolations) of religion.

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ENGLAND HAS ITS DULLARDS

Whenever an American asks me if it would be possible to compile a series of "Anglicana" to set beside Mr. H. L. Mencken's monthly columns of "Americana" or notable idiocies in speech and writing, I say that I feel this would be difficult. But I hasten to add that I do not mean necessarily that we have not just as many fools in England in proportion to the population as there are in America, but that, thank heaven, our fools keep quiet.

But today I have been wondering whether in our own way we do not produce in our newspapers at least as odd a series of utterances as these gathered together by Mencken: the oddity is of a different type, that is all. I have been looking at that ancient British institution the "Agony Column" of the Times. That venerable paper does not start off on its front page with all the murders; it devotes the whole sheet to small advertisements. First come two columns of British Marriages and Deaths; and then the "Personal" advertisements, or as they are called "the agony column." This name, I suppose, alludes to the strange mixture of personal grievances, sorrows, fads and foibles which people pay a dollar a line to air. This morning we start off with "Appeal to new government. Pray, gentlemen, discountenance the Road Authorities' stark contempt for foot passengers. Give us a path beside the country road, and secure crossing in the cruel street." I wonder if Mr. Ramsay MacDonald will read and immediately concoct a bill for the establishment of aids to foot passengers! Then Mrs. X returns thanks, etc., and rewards are offered for lost diamond rings. "Sufferer from Nerves thanks those who kindly answered"; how cryptic that is! Perhaps "Sufferer from Nerves" advertised for advice; no doubt he, or probably she, got it.

Some excellent charities desire help and someone offers to send me a booklet on Osteopathy and then comes an example of the real agony classic, a classic form which appears day after day for generations: here are today's examples: "Dolly. What- ever happens will forgive and forget unconditionally. Start afresh. Joyce cries. B. O., and lower in the column "Jack. Do send your address. Westcliff" and then, "Only, always. Miss you dreadfully; come back soon; hope you'll see this. L. F."

Things, one is told, are seldom what they seem and there is a general impression that beneath these apparently broken hearted lovers' messages there is often something which does not appear on the surface. After all B. O. and L. F. and Jack's friend at Westcliff can hardly get anything worth having out of sending a check to the Times and trusting to their loved ones reading their rather dull expressions of regret. Whole books have been written to explain it all and it is actually suggested that all these advertisements are really code messages connected with the buying and selling of stocks and shares.

More akin to "Americana" than this peculiarly British "agony column," are the letters which people write to the Times and Morning Post; here we come across a genial stupidity which must amuse our American visitors. For some days a correspondence was published in the Times on whether you should take off your hat when interviewing your bank cashier; the matter was clinched by a clergyman who wrote, "I always take off my hat when interviewing bank officials as they cannot be considered to be tradesmen"; a delightful example of the intricate class system under which we live. A tradesman replied next day by reminding the minister of religion that there was a time when clergymen had to sit "below the salt" at table, and perhaps there would come a time when clergymen would remove their hats even in the presence of tradesmen.

This year the chief subjects occupying the correspondence columns of the Times have been whether there should be a larger hole in golf; what to do with the water famine; and of course the ever vital new prayerbook. The size of the golf hole generates a great deal of heat, while no one has been polite to anyone else about prayer books for several years; the only difference between the two topics is that while only golfers are interested in golf, the hottest and bitterest arguers about the prayer books have been people who being Baptists and Methodists have no intention of using either the old or the new ones. A third possible source of "Anglicana" is the accounts of royal and society functions. The King and Queen open a charity show; the Queen has her weight taken for six pence; someone asks to see the weight card; "Dear me no the Queen wittily replied" as one paper reports it. The "wit" is of course

very subtle and though I am English I cannot see it, perhaps because I am not sufficiently loyal. One paper, the Daily Express, has taken to providing its own society column on another page, thereby making the best of both worlds, that of the snobs and that of the anti-snobs. Other papers publish quite amazing accounts of the smallest actions of the royal family, but this is not so much English as international I feel, when I think of what I have read in American papers about the Prince of Wales. International also is the sort of information to be found in such, to me, frightening periodicals as "Home Chat"; where the other day I read "Aunt Agatha's" answer to "Isabel" in the etiquette columns, "No, Isabel, dear, there is no rule as to which glove should be put on first." I was relieved, for I feared for a second, that perhaps I had put on the wrong glove first all my life without knowing it.

But undoubtedly the American who wishes to know anything about England had better read "Punch" for a nation is never more revealing than when it is off its guard and making jokes. "Punch" is revealing because half the jokes are founded on snobbery and class feeling, just as "La Vie Parisienne" is revealing because of its insistence on sex. Punch is conservative England, self-satisfied, snobbish, well-mannered, determined to take nothing seriously: the reason why it has

no rival is that young, rebellious England is too hard up against it to make jokes. Indeed it is a curious thing that old-fashioned "England" is well represented by papers of all sorts, but the new England is almost unwritten: therefore the American gets a good picture of the England of country parsonages whose occupants write to say how many swallows are building this year in their eaves, or how to get rid of the plague of wasps, or what Cambridge scored in cricket against Oxford in 1879; but they should not forget the England which is fighting grimly against the folly and blindness of all these dear old gentlemen.

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