

# DEBUNKING: Its Purpose and Progress

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A few brief years ago W. E. Woodward—he of the human biographies—coined the word “debunking”—at least he claims credit for it. We pounced upon the new-born word and popularized it, for it fitted so exactly the very thing we had been doing for years. And today our monthly publication: THE DEBUNKER is America's premier debunking agent. Other magazines may publish articles of exposure every now and then; THE DEBUNKER is the only magazine exclusively devoted to debunking.

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## Our View of the Nature of Things

By E. Haldeman-Julius

### 1. Man and His Knowledge

It has been said that every man has a philosophy of life: that is to say, his general view of nature, man, and society—the way in which he looks, whether or not with very precise and conscious thought, at the world he lives in—or his feeling about life, which takes the place of thought, or which is a vague and disordered kind of thought. That seems a large statement and a dubious one, when we call to mind many persons who seem really to have no view of life and whose talk and reading and range of interests to appear absurdly inadequate to support the dignity of such a term as “philosophy.” Yet we may take it loosely that everyone not an imbecile has, by the time he reaches maturity, got a haphazard, disjointed view of life, it may be superficial, and with enormous gaps, and composed of contradictory ideas, and but ill of expression: press the average man, and you will find that he has a set of opinions strung together, with some, though slight, connection. It is, of course, this connection and orderly grasp of ideas which is commonly lacking, tenuous or pretty ragged. Among men there are all degrees and varieties of “philosophy” in this use of the term, and I shall not attempt the encyclopedic task of tracing them in their tortuous courses. But I shall take an impersonal figure of Man, and ask what is the importance to him of a philosophy of life and what, in some points—or in a broad way—that philosophy should be.

It is the business of man to know this world. “The proper study of mankind is man”—man and nature and all things which come within the scope of man's intelligible thinking and acting. From birth to death (or, let us say, until we—if we do—reach that period of being “set in our ways”) we are busily receiving impressions of the world about us and in some sort thinking about those impressions, and following the guidance of experience and reflection, whether faintly or clearly, in all the affairs of life. If one observes correctly (and widely) and thinks intelligently, one lives, subject to the chances of character and circumstance, a reasonable life: the provisional phrase refers to the well-known fact that we cannot always—or not all of us—follow our finest, truest vision and that we do not act precisely in the light of the best knowledge we have: for that matter, nine men among ten regularly violate, in some way or ways, the rules of common sense. But let us not digress; let us return to the question of how man should look at his world.

It will help us to glance briefly at the record of man's knowledge. The world was a mystery to primitive man—infinite more a mystery than it is to us—although it is probable that very primitive people were not given much to reflection or to the feeling of the mystery of things. But, at any rate, the earliest gropings of man—his earliest attempts at thought—or his earliest stirrings of fancy were, indeed, gropings in the dark. With sharpening sensitivity, he was certainly very much impressed by the operations of nature, by his own self, and by the unimaginable blankness of all he didn't know. He wondered. He marveled. He guessed. He did a great deal of guessing, and weird fancies were conceived by him, and religions banking from the crude to the elaborate. Evolving man, more notably from the beginning of civilization, learned more about his world but he learned slowly and inaccurately—enough to survive, and to form societies, and to proceed in acquiring more knowledge, chiefly how to build and how to destroy what he built, how to sow and reap, how to identify familiar objects, how to carry on social intercourse, and how to pray properly—a number of things, indeed, but not how to think scientifically.

When we come to the beginnings of what really may be called the intellectual life of man, our minds turn at once to “the glory

that was Greece”: a glory of art and intellect that will command the admiration of men throughout all civilized time. The Greeks were full of intellectual curiosity and they reflected profoundly upon the nature of life. They had a lofty order of ideas, they speculated boldly and ingeniously about the What, How, and Why of things, and modern thought, looking back through the centuries, recognizes kinship with the best and soundest (which was a great deal) of Greek thought. Truth-seekers they were, the Greeks, and with much brilliantly to show for their efforts. Their chief distinction, intellectually, was in studying the nature of thought itself and in the clarification of human nature. Nature, more largely speaking, they knew less well, albeit the Greek thinkers hit upon ideas that were centuries later to be developed soundly by evolutionary science: the idea of evolution, by the way, was known to the Greek thinkers, although they had not the means (nor the right direction of aim) for carrying it far and providing for it the immense and sound basis of fact which we have in modern science. The Greeks were too enamored of abstract thought—thought for its own sake, thought sublime and introspective but not scientific: it may be said that they speculated rather than observed, regarding the origin, nature, and meaning of the universe. The Greeks and Romans had literary and philosophic and humanistic knowledge—but they did not develop that most amazingly successful and unimpeachable kind of knowledge, namely, science.

Inspired by the humanism of the Greeks and Romans, mankind came slowly out of the medieval night, in which the attitude toward nature was incredibly and wholly superstitious. By little man gained a knowledge of his world, of nature, although learning himself (and therefore the intelligent management of his social life) last of all. He began to put the universe, so to speak, into an intellectually orderly shape. (When one says that man did this, one means, to be sure, that a few men thus studied the causes of things and with the advancement of scientific knowledge light spread through the world of common men who had darkly plodded and stumbled in the midst of forces they did not understand and to which, save in phrases of terror and legend, they were indifferent.) Doubt and the desire to know were, as they still are, the incentives that effectively most stimulated the mind of man. Skepticism, candidly confessing that it does not know the whole truth—not pretending that the last depths of mystery has been plumbed (this pretense is reserved for the faith-mongering dogmatists)—is, after all, the only safe attitude. The skeptic does not embrace reckless assumptions and leap blindly without looking for the direction of the evidence: the mark of the skeptic is a careful mind: he has, let us say, an intellectual conscience, his attitude toward truth being neither the loose attitude of the easy conformist nor the perverse and specious attitude of the unyielding dogmatist.

And the skeptic agrees with Locke in his “sensational” theory of knowledge: i. e., that the mind has no thought and contains no understanding of things which is not the result of impressions coming through the five senses. You can say that the mind is acted upon by the things of the sensory world (what other, independent world is or can there be?) or that the mind acts upon these things—but something must be there, since evidently the mind cannot spin ideas out of some secret store within itself. Philosophically, a good many fine hairs have been split and twisted and curlycued into curious shapes in dispute of this “sensational” theory—yet it stands today a plain theory, the view of common sense, incontrovertible save by a strange species of romantic “reasoning.” It is certainly this theory which directs the triumphant work of science. To be sure, science theorizes and engages in abstract speculation, but always beginning at and re-

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turning to the facts: there is combined speculation and observation, but observation is the first and last test.

Not all of us can be scientists, although we can be scientific as far as we go. The average man can do no better than apply, within his sphere of daily experience, the methods of the scientist. We can, all of us, at least avoid a great deal of bunk by simply checking up theories, assumptions, illusions, and the like, by the plain facts of life. I do not pretend to discuss science in any but a superficial way—its general principles and its attitude toward the understanding of life, its broad intellectual conclusions, so to speak—but it is enough to bring home the thought that science provides an impregnable ground of rationalism, which in its common range of significance is not beyond the comprehension of the average man who will use his mind freely. Man can recognize, in a scientific but not a sentimental way, his true relation to all life, the material elements that compose his being, the story of his evolution, and the fact that he is a creature who responds definitely to certain physical stimuli.

Is man a machine? To pose that question—even to suggest it, tentatively, as a possible and plausible attitude of thought—is to offend the pride of the average man. HE a machine! He is a “soul”—or something: yes, he must be something. Yet it is clear that man's actions can be convincingly explained in mechanical terms, action and reaction, cause and effect: we seem to have no choice save between two alternatives, either the exploded free-will theory or the mechanistic theory: the former is impossible, and the latter is in many respects not satisfying—but it is strongly favored by all the evidence we have, real evidence at hand, and not the supposition of evidence still to come.

What is true is that from the simplest actions of daily life to the formation of a philosophy of

life, man can see that the method of science is more enlightening and efficient than that of guesswork or faith. In his work, his simple functions of keeping alive, and his going about the world man behaves on the realistic principle, seeing things as they are (or if he does not thus see them he suffers in consequence) and not letting every sort of chimerical notion divert him from reality. What is the difference, concerning the ordinary business of life, between the same man and the insane? It is the difference, is it not, between the realist and the man whose mind is dizzy with chimeras?

Yet when he comes to the larger questions of thought, the average (same) man abandons his day-by-day rule of realism, and thinks incoherently, without rhyme or reason—oh, perhaps with rhyme!—not testing an idea as he would test a simple personal action. Practically, he learns by his mistakes and, even when he repeats such mistakes, he acknowledges that he knows better and is merely led astray by his desires.

It's a real world, and the same world, that we all live in. After all, spite of the many theories “spiritual” and otherwise, everybody lives in this one undeniable world of familiar objects and actions, and no amount of rignarele will change the facts. To deny realities, or to speciously “interpret” them, does not alter their character and their operation. This attitude, fundamentally, a man should cultivate: namely, to see things as they really are and to ask of every theory or assumption, “How does it correspond with the observable facts?”

We need also to keep carefully in mind the necessity of suspended judgment when we are not familiar with many facts bearing upon a certain question. How can one have an opinion of the least value unless one is acquainted with the facts, out of which material all opinion must substantially form itself? Ordinarily, men have a poor regard for anyone who

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"shoots off his mouth," as they say, without knowing whereof he speaks: every village has a character who is notorious for telling everything and knowing nothing. Yet in very important matters of opinion, how common is this habit of positive assertion without information or judgment!

"Believe only what you see" has a strong element of truth, if taken liberally: believe at least only what *man* has seen, done, learned and reliably, reasonably reported. Certainly, man should not go perversely counter to the testimony of his senses, nor should he run loose amid theories without sufficient knowledge. If anyone extends his curiosity beyond what a well-read man, cultured but not thoroughly scientific, knows—let him go to the scientists who, and who only, can furnish him valuable knowledge.

It is true that we can ask many "Why?" but at last come to a "Why?" that is unanswerable. Let us recognize the mysterious character of life, at bottom, not in the spirit of mysticism but that of honest skepticism or agnosticism. The farthest reach of scientific knowledge does not mean a complete explanation of life and the universe. Nor do scientists make any such claim of all-knowingness. But this is no objection to science or the attitude of sticking to observable facts and the rule of reason. It is not so very long that science—especially science in its great modern organization—has been exploring the nature of things. For centuries men, save a few here and there with poor equipment working in a world hostile to their labors, were incurious about the natural world or were satisfied with the most childish guesses and fancies. Within the past two centuries, or mainly within the past century, science has successfully established itself as the true explorer and interpreter of life, and in that time it has accomplished wonders which would have seemed incredible to our pre-scientific ancestors. At any rate, all that we reliably know and that our transformed world of mechanical and efficient action guides itself by, we owe to the methods of science: the method of realism, of looking at the facts, which every man should apply to his whole life and all of his ideas. And if not to science, where then shall we look for still greater knowledge? It is man's business to know the world, and he can only do that by observing the world, by keeping in touch with reality, by sticking close to facts.

It is sometimes objected that science does not deal with the meaning, or the nature, of things but only describes their appearance and behavior. This argument comes from poets who must have a beautiful inexpressibility to lend wings to their fancy, and from metaphysicians, who have the itch to be "profound"—i. e., to construct imaginary thought-worlds all their own. In fact, philosophy has been led astray by seeking vaguely behind the realities that the scientist (and within his limits the average man) can correctly observe, for some hidden, undefinable, inconceivable "thing-in-itself"—for something, one would suggest, that is "spiritually" superior to mere facts. Yet, after all, the truth about things is just what we can know about their characteristics, their shapes and colors and elements, etc., and their ways of behaving. If we fall short of knowing the whole truth about any phenomenon or any process of nature, this simply means that we have yet to learn other characteristics which have so far eluded scientific research. What is the "nature" of fire? of water? of an animal body? of any familiar thing in our world? When we know its use and behavior, and the like, do we not know its "nature"? No man would think of performing his morning ablutions in a bowl of fire, nor of keeping warm by lighting a match to a furnace full of water, nor of setting a man to pull a railroad train. The scientific attitude is that of perceiving things clearly, knowing how they work, and placing (or seeing) them in their true relation to other things. We are always trying to know more about things in this way, but man should not make the mistake of thinking that a fantastic image or set of words has the validity of real knowledge. An idea that does not square with the facts of life, or that has no evidential basis in life (a fantasy or dogma), is an unscientific idea. In many of his actions, man is roughly scientific but in his

ideas he is capable of any folly. Up to a certain point he is scientific about death, for example—he has to be—but then he turns to the unscientific belief in immortality.

## 2. Has Life Any Meaning?

Was it Spinoza who wrote that if a stone on its way through the air could speak it would exclaim, "How free I am"? So men, not realizing the motivation of their acts, talk about free will; and so, explaining their lives in terms of effort and desire, they talk largely—and vaguely—of a "meaning" in life. What life means in rational, active significance to the race or the individual is not enough for these idealists (or these egoists?), but they would have it that man the sublimest agent in the working of a cosmically arranged destiny, plotted and manipulated from Olympus, Valhalla or Heaven; or as Emerson expressed it, that life means the "Inworking of the All," which is precisely as transparent as the side of a brick building.

Here is a question that men have argued for ages and that they will probably continue to vex their brains about until the last of the human chronicle. They must be something more than merely human beings fretting their brief hour upon the stage of time. Usually men have given temperamental meanings to life: well enough, if they correctly limit this meaning each to himself; but scarcely convincing when they assert this or that meaning, reflecting their own personal bias, to be the universally true and predestined scheme of life. In truth, the many differences about the meaning of life are enough to show that it has no meaning beyond what men, in varying circumstances, give to it. "Life is real, life is earnest": it is real, surely, but its earnestness takes many forms and is a product of human social evolution. The poet, let us say, makes a meaning for life that is beautiful to him; it is not the meaning of life to the common man, nor to a financier, nor to a military leader, nor to an evangelical savior of souls. And men have the quite understandable aim of satisfying or supporting their egoism, their moral sense, their fears and hopes and what-not: so they idealize life to reassure them in some such pre-conceived attitude. Take a man who is burdened with the moral sense: he must imagine to himself a universe of meaningful moral law, purposefully ordained and carried out from the beginning of time. In a word, life "means" what any man wishes it to "mean."

This idea of a plan or destiny in life—something, you understand, that is supposed to be superior yet ennobling to man—is not exactly the same as the old dispute between pessimism and optimism, the argument as to whether there is more pain or pleasure in life: a life of predominating pain might have a meaning, in the sense insisted upon by the believers in an "intelligent universe" of grand and conscious design—for instance, if there were a God, he might be a malignant ruler of the cosmos and his celestial hobby the making sport of men. But with this question, as with others, we have to take the attitude of common sense. It may seem a pretty humble or homely attitude, yet it has its compensations, being safe and at least enabling us to get somewhere in our discussions. We must not try to be too "profound" and thus neglect obvious facts, ignoring, to paraphrase an old figure of speech, both the wood and the trees for something ethereally beyond the human perception or conception.

Philosophically (or religiously) those who say that life has a meaning have in mind a principle of design imposed upon the universe and upon man from somewhere, by somebody, somehow—which, if you ask me, is some Chinese puzzle. As a general idea, it is away up in the air; and in detail, nobody has ever been able to do much toward working it out. These would-be subtle and really opaque thinkers have in mind a "far off divine event toward which the whole creation moves," Tennyson's "one increasing purpose" that runs magically through the ages. We are asked to conceive of an absolutely patterned order and aim of life, although the pattern is inscrutable to man: to all except Fundamentalist preachers, we might cautiously add. Inscrutable, yes: your true hifalutin devotee of this design theory says nothing, after all, about the design except that it is perfectly wise and good and will some day be complete for the men of an unimaginably remote future age to

see. "We're here because we're here" seems to be a much better way of looking at it, for at least it does not claim so much on so slender a basis—on no basis whatever that we can see.

For in this sense life has no meaning that man has been able to discover. Here verily are words without sense, although they be pretty and clever words. Oh, it is easy to spin these words of glittering and insinuating sophistry and the agile wits of man can make out some sort of case for any theory. Put your mind firmly to the task of finding a solid, tangible, usable idea in the midst of these fine words, and you must quickly perceive that it is all simply idealism, sentiment, wish-thinking. There is nothing plainly, convincingly evident in life to show that it has a meaning, beyond what you and I have been led to trace upon its surface for our own satisfaction.

Rather we conclude the opposite: think of the infinitely slow, bloody, wretched, blundering course of evolution, the "trial and error" of nature, the terrible penalties life has had to endure, the rise and fall of civilizations, the follies man has innumerable committed against himself—think of this and then ask yourself where is that perfect guidance. Evolution (and evolution is only one aspect of life, for there are also retrogression and stagnation) is indeed contradictory to the idea of intelligent design. If there were a divine designer, what a botched and wobbly design would he be responsible for! Evolution? Preachers have seized upon that truth—when they could no longer combat it with their ancient dogmas—as wonderful evidence of the handiwork of God, the master builder and artist. They do not dwell, however, upon the ghastliness of the evolutionary story (if we look at it, as scientifically we should not, from a moral point of view) and the fact that in the succession of forms of life, struggling and dying, and a few finally surviving (for how long, even man, who can authoritatively say? save that they will all be dead with the dying earth, subject to mortality as man is) no intelligence has been manifest: only the slow and uncertain operation of natural forces.

Nor can the history of man, a mere flash compared with geological time, be regarded idealistically from the viewpoint of the theorists of intelligent design and "one increasing purpose." Only within the past few centuries have we had a steady progress of mankind, broadly speaking—yet, even so, retrogression and smash-up here and there—and today how sad and disorderly the world still is. And in man's past—what lack of intelligence, what insensate disasters, what tragic conflicts and ruins! Take but one great historic example: If there is an intelligent planner and an intelligent purpose behind human life, why should the brilliant Greek civilization—the ancient world so full of hope and culture and capable of all good things (assuming, with all its logical implies, the theory of a purpose of intelligent earth-superior power in life)—have died? Why should mankind have suffered the darkness and terror of the Middle Ages? Why any of the catastrophes and insanities of history? It is all very well to talk about inscrutability, and say that we don't understand (we don't) the universal plan, but these facts are plainly contradictory to the notion of an all-ruling intelligence. If anything seems to be indicated relentlessly by the record of man, it is that there is no intelligence in this philosophic or religious sense but a natural play, good and evil (or perhaps we should say beyond good and evil), of events. We seek in history, as in the larger field of science, not for some hidden, all-wise, all-powerful purpose but for soundly efficient and, once traced, plainly explicable causes.

As for evolution, it is not a perfect, infallible "law." There is nothing inevitable about it. Forms of life have evolved when changes in their environment compelled such evolution or made it easy and desirable; otherwise, they have been fixed—that is to say, satisfactorily adapted—at certain stages. Not everything evolves; some things do, given the right conditions. It happens that in man we have had most powerfully the conditions of evolution. From the higher mammals to the lowest forms of life we see countless instances of interrupted evolution. Nature is blind and purposeless—that is the best way we can ex-

press it; it is an accurate way; and when nature behaves "intelligently" it is under the direction of man. Nature acts unintelligently in certain ways (not always orderly ways) regardless of consequences to life.

Nature is quite indifferent to man, and at times it may well strike the imagination that nature is inexorably the foe of man: the truth appears to be that nature, being unconscious, doesn't care one way or the other. Calamitous forces repeatedly destroy the proudest works of man—the intelligence of nature colliding with the creative intelligence which, so far as we know, only man possesses. Life has no cosmic, no perfectly patterned and precise, "meaning." It is not true that all things work infallibly together for a certain aim—there is no aim or, if so, what is it? None can say. There is a meaning, we are told by various soothsayers, but what meaning they cannot agree nor clearly indicate. Of all the philosophies, all the religions, all the forms of idealism, which one may be the true discovery or interpretation of life's meaning? Echo returns its usual answer, simply the question thrown back to us unsatisfyingly.

Such meaning as, in another and more limited and more temporary sense, there is in life has been written or worked into life by man himself. We have objects, desires, ideas in this life of ours, but their meaning, their significance, begins and ends with ourselves. There are nations, groups, individuals that have certain humanly considered meanings in life, and these meanings—or aims—often conflict in a tragic way. As men have highly developed emotions, very active senses, and reasoning power which somehow they use, it follows that they give what they call a "meaning" to their lives. They may be foolish, they may have a very poor idea what they are about, they may end in failure; yet, as they think and feel, they ascribe their different purposes and draw their patterns, drab or gaudy or really beautiful, for this earthly show. They strive variously toward goals near and far, small and large, foolish and wise—but what does nature care? what reckons the universe of this striving? what intelligent meaning, applying to the whole of life and time, is discernible?

Yet this is not pessimism. Man's conception of the meaning of life is important to man, but to him alone. Progress is real and desirable. The ideal of the civilized life is just as fine and worthy of our efforts, regardless of the indifference of nature or the absence of an all-seeing mind planning the whole. If we work toward human, not divine plans—toward limited, not absolute plans—what then? There is still as truly the element of choice, the intelligent conception of values, the possibility of a happy and significant life. I live a few years and then I die: certainly when I am dead life has no meaning for me: yet while living I have not the less a desire to express my aliveness in certain ways. We must reduce this question of the meaning of life to a rational, human scale. If life, philosophically speaking, is indifferent to us, it does not follow that we should or that humanly we could be indifferent to life.

## 3. The Futility of Mysticism

Some time ago I read a criticism of Voltaire, not the vituperative outburst so frequently heard from preachers, but on the whole a sympathetic and intelligent account: that Voltaire's great weakness was that he lacked the tone, the outlook, or perhaps it was the "insight" of "spirituality." In other words, he meant to say that Voltaire was not a mystic. The sage of Ferney (his home in the latter years on the French-Swiss border)—the most directly and widely effective thinker of the eighteenth century—was a rationalist of keen and balanced mind, who did not swamp his intelligence with moonshiny speculations about the "substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." Why play idly with words (in the realm of ideas) when one could deal with facts and with ideas that were realistic? That was Voltaire's—and is consistently the rationalist's—attitude. It was fortunate for his age that Voltaire was not "spiritual," which is not the same thing as to say that he was deficient in human feelings; but he discussed life as it concretely appeared and moved before him, he had a lucid grasp of ideas,

and he looked straight at the common facts of life: nor was his range of vision narrow, but was as wide as the world.

What, after all, is mysticism? It is an attempt to go beyond the realities of life and to transcend the power of reason. One might say that it is a fantastic effort to "feel" what the mystic calls truth without the mental labor of seeking it by means of observation and reason. The mystic may sometimes be a poet but he is not a thinker. And no procedure or product of thought—no explanation of things, however intellectually sound and satisfying—is acceptable to the man who flies off on a tangent of mysticism. Indeed, it seems that he will go far out of his way to avoid contact with a reasonable and simple idea. The firm and noble and wholesomely earth-wise simplicity of reason is not for him: he really does not believe that it is noble. When he speaks of the sublime, you may be sure that he means "such stuff as dreams are made of," something (or a shadowy, insubstantial nothing) which is utterly remote from life, the pale ghostly fluttering of an idea that is too esoteric and pointless for mortal comprehension, let alone mortal use.

At bottom, mysticism is a turn-away from life. He who seeks this sort of escape is by no means unaware of the very material and factual order of things which the rest of us know. He can train himself to be less sharply aware of, or less clearly efficient in, real life: the true mystic can do this, although the charlatan who peddles some new cult is exceedingly efficient in gathering material riches. But the true mystic knows reality well enough to dislike it and his poetic or theoretic vaporizing is a cloud placed between him and the facts which he does not like to gaze upon. Pore over all the volumes written by those who pretend that, through some magic in their own minds, they have discovered the "secret truth" of life: and you will end your reading without having gained any real knowledge of life.

Now, it is clear enough that the important affairs of mankind, both material and cultural, depend upon men who have a grasp of realities, who know and who are intelligently interested in life, who think and act in a rationalistic spirit. Great ideas that have enlightened the world have been the product of rationalism. "Life is real, life is earnest"—but it is not real to the mystic, who is engaged in earnestly persuading himself that what is real is therefore false and that truth is synonymous with a "soulful" unreality. Imagine a world entirely given over to mystical belief and rule! It requires no great effort of the imagination, for we need only glance at the Middle Ages, when mysticism thrived in the rank darkness and ugliness and wretchedness of a semi-barbaric Europe; then the mad devotees of a somber and terrible faith went into well-nigh incredible excesses of self-torture, superstition-mongering, contempt for themselves and for mankind and for all life. In that time of extreme faith and mysticism, when the gospel of unreality and "unworldliness" (actually, ugliness and worldliness) was widespread, there was overwhelming, unrelieved filth, disease, ignorance, cruelty—in short, not any less real a world but a terribly, hopelessly real world. And naturally so: for what had mystics, contemplating their crazy "souls," to do with light and health and sanity in the world? Again naturally, the decline of medievalism and mysticism and the growth of the rationalistic spirit made the world a more and more decent place to live in.

It is the business of man to know his world, to live intelligently in his world, and he can do this only in a realistic way: mysticism is not only worthless as an attitude toward truth but it is absolutely incompatible with a safe, orderly, efficient, civilized life. It has given nothing in sound culture or comfort or common good to the race. It is not only absurd; it is pernicious; in a word, it tells man to wallow in the mire and fix his gaze upon the stars—although individual mystics would revolt at going so far and indeed (consider the Christian Scientists or any of the non-materialists) do not live according to their own creeds—that, logically, is the outcome of mysticism; and it was the actual condition of life in Europe when mysticism thrived most noxiously.

# Creeds Are Mental Slavery and Faith Is the Jailer of Reason

By E. HALDEMAN-JULIUS

## 1. Chains for the Mind

Free thinking does not apply alone to religion but it is in this connection that it is best known or, as the man of piety would say, notorious. It means a reasonable attitude toward all things: morals, politics, human nature, common beliefs and every problem, small or large, that concerns life. And it is impossible to have the right use of reason when one has dogmatically fixed ideas in any field of opinion. Nor is dogmatism confined to religion. A man may be free from all the restrictions of religious belief and his mind may confront things directly and judge of them without the confusion or interference of illogical creeds, yet be the narrow adherent of a party in political affairs or have an intolerant view of morals or have the mind of a censor in considering literature or hold stubbornly to intense racial prejudices. The converse sort of inconsistency is not so likely to be met: intolerance in religion seems to rule out the possibility of toleration on any other subject.

There are many chains for the mind other than the chains of religion. Granted: yet religion, having for many centuries—throughout historic time—indeed until its lessening influence in our time—sensationally oppressed the human mind and being today a very lively source of dispute, it is important to say something about it from the viewpoint of a free-minded individual. It is the more important when we reflect that the first necessary step toward intellectual freedom is to throw off this bondage of the superstitious past: to face life without any illusions of faith or dogma. It is not an exaggeration to say that the man who binds himself mentally by a pious creed, by a supernatural view of the universe, by any doctrinal fetters of theology is in comparable case with the man who should let himself be tied down physically so that he could not move.

For it is obvious that such creeds confine opinion within certain very narrow channels and on the subjects which the creeds touch they stop thought almost entirely. Once a man has subscribed to a set of arbitrary notions about God, the Bible, immortality, sin, and righteousness—once he has surrendered to the "conviction," as the preachers say, that this is the last word of truth—his mind ceases really to act in this field: of course one might add fairly enough that his mind did not exhibit any considerable signs of action in the first place, since much activity of reason would make the acceptance of such creeds impossible: and it is true

that the emotions have greatly an influence in persuading to religious credulity. Or if some believers may be said to reason after a fashion, they but repeat well-worn formulas, echoing what others have asserted without proving, relying as it were upon texts rather than real thought: saying, for example, that there must be a Supreme Power to account for the universe, that religion has been so immemorably and widely believed that it must be true, that the fact of man's having the hope and idea of immortality proves the wish to be true, that, to gaze upon nature is to have belief and faith—and so on.

This is simply repeating a lesson without inquiring into its soundness or into the intellectual qualifications of the teacher. Try to lead the believer into a discussion of the validity of these glib assertions: he will not follow such a lead—or if he does follow, finding himself quickly involved in contradictions and most annoying dilemmas, he falls back upon his original assertions, perversely refusing to be moved. One might think from his attitude that he is announcing self-evident truths: yet these ideas are not, after all, evident to him. He is taking them on trust—very poor trust. He is letting his mind be overborne by the prestige of solemn ceremony and time-heavy authority instead of bringing his mind independently to bear upon the subject.

If the man who is a believer after this decidedly careless fashion of thinking were to do some genuine reasoning—if he were, in short, to take the attitude of a free man instead of an easily impressed slave of creeds—he would ask himself a few questions that go to the very heart of the matter: What does the idea of God mean? Who or what is it? How does anybody know it and how can anybody explain it? And what value does it possess as a solution of the mystery of life? If one must think of a God as having made the universe, if one demands logically the conception of a creative force, what can one say to the question of God's own origin? (Yes, I know it is an old question very easily asked—obvious indeed but strangely overlooked by those who affirm the dogma of a God—and how difficult to answer! No matter how often it has been asked, this question has not lost its original force in knocking over the notion that to imagine a God is any solution or simplification of the Riddle of the Universe. Its simplicity does not take away from its effectiveness. Let him who calls it a foolish question be wise

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*The Story of a Terrible Life*, \$2.65 postpaid

Haldean-Julius Publications, Girard, Kansas



and obliging enough to point out exactly what is its foolishness.)

If this hypothetical believer should apply individual, realistic thought to religion instead of learning somewhat dumbly by rote the official arguments, he would realize that because millions have held a certain belief or kind of belief that can be no evidence of truth-yielding value. It would rather occur to him forcibly that what has been believed so widely as a matter of custom is likely, by that same token, to be untrue; the exceptional thinker is more apt to have sound ideas than the many who are not skilled in the use of reason and who are more easily influenced by the pomp and threats and foolish dogmas of religion.

It would, again, be clearly recognizable in the light of free thought that hope is no guaranty of fulfillment. The reflection would be unavoidable that men do not always get what they wish and that immortality, like other wishes, is subject to the laws of real life and probability—that if a man cannot have riches or power or genius merely by wishing, he would have even less chance of wishing himself into enjoyment of the dreamy prize of immortality. And, of course, if this man looked at religion thoughtfully he would be impressed by the fact that never has there been exhibited the faintest trace of evidence for immortality—that it is only an assertion, unproved and unreasonable. To be sure, the average believer knows well enough that none has ever returned from the grave to tell us about a future life other than the one we now know. If he is a Fundamentalist he refers us to certain texts in the Bible, as his proof of immortality, which are worthless because their authority—their source of knowledge—has to be proved in the first place and that is quite impossible. And speaking of the Bible, what a fettering weight and constriction upon the mind is belief in the "inspired truth" of this collection of ancient fables, prophecies and dogmas!

The Fundamentalist, the type of believer who in the extent and rigidity of his belief prevailed until recent years, is the horrible example of slavery and Stygian darkness of mind associated with creeds. The modern tendency of rationalism has destroyed the old, terror-striking authority of religion. The pall of ecclesiasticism has been lifted from civilization, which it once covered so somberly and stiflingly—the creedal fetters have been broken in many places and weakened in others—even though we are still plagued by preachers and Christianity cannot be regarded as quite dead, although it exhibits moribund symptoms that he who runs may see. From present-day Fundamentalism to that religious attitude

which is just as oddly called Modernism, there is a confused medley of beliefs: a little here and a little there is lopped off from what preachers sonorously declaim to be the "sacred heritage" of religion, until finally a number of believers retain only the dogma of a God.

Yet the man who holds partly to any creed or mystical belief, although it may not be so binding nor offensive to the mind as the literal, extreme dogmatism and pietism of the "old-time religion," is not in a position to think freely—not quite. He has thrown off this chain, but he hugs that chain. He has opened one eye a little, but he keeps the other eye tightly shut. So far he may be willing to reason, but then he stops short at an assumption that he insists blindly upon believing. He may believe only in a God—he may reject the entire bundle of Christian doctrines—yet this theistic dogma can only be held in violation of reason: let us say, by an affirmation of something for which the believer has no evidence nor rational basis, which he can defend only by the declaration of faith: and to say that one has faith in an opinion simply means that otherwise the opinion is baseless. Consider any religious doctrine, and you cannot think about it—you cannot deliberately subject it to the process of reasoning—without the perception that it is only a chain of mental servitude.

You understand I am not saying that everyone who has credence or sympathy for some aspects of religion is an abject, complete mental slave—nothing so melodramatic as that. There are degrees of submission to forms of belief or traditional, sentimental attitudes which cannot be reasonably maintained; the fact that a man is intelligent doesn't mean that he invariably uses his reason on a subject; he may be for the most part a civilized and rational being with spots of bunkistic susceptibility. And, without particularly worrying over the idea of a perfect and bunkless world, we may yet agree that as an ideal the reasonable attitude is always desirable. Our best thought should go to the consideration of any subject that is worth thinking about. If religion has no reasonable basis, and if otherwise reasonable men nevertheless have some sort of belief in religion, we have to record the fact and point out the contradiction.

We know what the defenders of religion will reply: take them at their best—those who do not pretend to argue dogmatically about the truth of religion—and what will they say? It will be alleged that religion—that a quality of faith or belief that may be called religious—is not only emotionally satisfying but inspiring. They will say further, these would-be "rational" religionists, that belief in religion is a vastly potent in-

fluence in upholding social morality: here a grossly superstitious Fundamentalist and an amiably sophisticated Modernist will indeed meet on common ground. As thinking men, however, we shall still insist that the truth of an idea is what interests us first and last. We cannot agree with any belief in compliance with the plea that it is somehow for the good of man in spite of its falsity: to do so would be a form of hypocrisy. But truth is not only intellectually compelling of our regard: it is also the best attitude toward life from the standpoint of the individual character and the social welfare. What has strewn history with the record of crimes, injustices and disasters? False ideas! Ideas of superstition: ideas of greed and conquest: ideas of hatred: ideas of fear: of intolerance, narrowness and truth-obscuring passion! Truth has never injured man.

The value of truth is, after all, that of a scientific attitude toward life. It brings us into correct relations with the things of our world. In any situation, the more clearly we understand it the better we can deal with it. Life, illumined by truth, can be more satisfactorily and efficiently lived by men. And surely there is enough to do with our lives in a realistic way that can be far better done than hugging to ourselves vain illusions. If wishing for immortality will not make it true, it is a fact on the other hand that the cultivation of an intelligent, well-rounded, ardent life is possible. It has undoubtedly been a marked evil of religion that it has turned men's thoughts too much away from the world—or twisted their attitude toward the world—and led them to neglect the real possibilities around them. I have often remarked that atheism is essentially an idea of progress. Once the idea of God and immortality and all the creeds are dismissed from the reckoning, man naturally turns his attention with all the clearer and stronger energy to the business of earthly, human life. The world has been getting away from the vapidity and vanities of religion for the past few centuries, and during this time the race has made its greatest progress.

So that, on the ground of expediency as well as truth (if we are to distinguish the two), the truth about religion is better than any false attitude of hope or belief. One way or another, false beliefs interfere with the business of living. Religion does not consist simply of abstract errors but it has a concretely unfortunate bearing upon the issues of immediate daily concern to mankind. It has a part in confusing our minds on social questions. It has made a most unscientific and unhappy mess of moral ideas, standing in the way of an enlightened whole-some joy in the natural expression of our humanity. It has been responsible for infinite distress among men and women who, taught falsely by religion as to what life is or should be, have come to the most bitter disillusionment. It has been an agency of sad repression and neglect, holding men and women back from happiness that lay within their grasp if they could have pierced with clear vision the shams of religion and realized their opportunities. To look at it most mildly, it is but a childish folly not fit for the maturity of human thought and action. It ministers to weakness, we are told; and we reply that it flatters and encourages weakness and what we regard as important is the cultivation of strength. A vain hope, once thrown aside and forgotten, simplifies and strengthens one's character. He who leans upon something, imaginary or real, other than himself undermines his own powers or prevents them from developing at all.

Is thought useful to life?—Is man a mere automaton? If he is a thinking creature, and if the activity of his mind is of the greatest significance in managing his affairs and guiding him along the various paths of life, then it is obvious that his mind should be free and strong and, in a word, an efficient machine. Growth is the ideal of life and the chains of religious belief prevent growth of the mind.

And, although beyond the appreciation of the average man (yet open to the discovery of any man who has the good fortune to be released from the fetters of dogma), there is a rare intellectual satisfaction in the truth. After all, life is never so fascinating and full of drama, zestful urge and

challenge, and solid significance as when one confronts it with a thoroughly active, free, realistic mind. Samuel Johnson remarked that there is as much difference between the lettered and unlettered as there is between the living and the dead; factually an exaggeration yet expressing the truth that we live very little or very much according to the extent of our mental horizons; and between the man who is sensitively and clearly thoughtful about life, and the man who merely exists inactively or who shuts himself away from the truth and wonder of life by a wall of illusion, what a vast difference! There is a parallel between the body that is crippled or chained and the mind that is motionlessly bound; between the blind and those who see; between those who live fully and those who go the petty, narrow way of creeds. The value of truth is that it adds immensely to the range and meaning of life.

## 2. What Use Religion?

If religion is not true—and the intellectual objections to it have never been cleared away but have become more formidable with the advance of science—what then can be said in its favor? There is, as I have mentioned, the dogmatic insistence upon the truth of religion as an absolute view of life and the opportunistic plea that religion is in certain ways useful to mankind regardless of its truth. Those who put the question on this ground of opportunism or pragmatism will have difficulty in finding any solid justification. For when we ask what in the light of our modern knowledge and needs is the value of religion, we can discover no answer that would be satisfactory to those who sentimentally wish to retain a kind of extra-rational faith as a comforting illusion or as an idealistic social influence.

What, for example—to put first things first—can religion tell us about the actual world? It offers no knowledge of the natural forces nor of the social elements that make our problems and that are the materials with which we must solve these problems. All that we know about nature, about how to use it for creative human purposes, and about how to survive in a world of reality (even though we insist upon living at the same time in a folly's paradise of pretty chimeras) is the result of scientific investigation. No creed has ever, in its character as a creed theological, extended the boundaries of culture, of science, or of human possibilities in doing things worth while. Indeed, religion has never been interested in the truth about phenomena upon which we perforce depend for wrestling with the problems that naturally and steadily confront us. It is not from this source of faith and folly that men have obtained knowledge to prevent and combat disease; nor has religion given them, to enumerate plainly, the facilities of travel and communication; nor has it enabled them to increase their productivity—their wealth and power and thus their joy in life; nor has it made possible for them any of the conveniences and comforts that distinguish our modern world; in short, religion has not been instrumental in teaching men how to live. In no way has this pompous and fallacious influence lightened the actual burdens of men or made life definitely easier and more understandable for them or helped them in the struggle for progress. Here—in practical, real-world use for living—religion is notoriously valueless. And the apologists for faith admit as much when they emphasize that religion reserves "spiritual" ministrations for its proper field of activity. Plainly stated, it offers us certain forms of belief that have nothing to do with reality or a tangible understanding of the nature of things and of ourselves.

What else then does religion perhaps give to man? Does it help man to understand himself? and how? As it gives no picture or a false one of nature, so it fills man to sanctimonious and gaseous repletion with bunk about himself. One thing which religion primarily does is to deny the truth of man's position in the world of nature. It insists that man is or has something called a "soul" and that this transcends his biological relation to the animal world; admitting perhaps that he is an animal, the "soul" illusionists add that he is something mystically more, namely a particularly favored and noble creature of God direct, having the divine implanted in his nature (so skilfully, it ap-

pears, that it cannot be discovered): that he is not just body and mind but an invisible, indefinable spirit. That is flabbergasting enough to the man who asks a concrete hold upon truth. Yet contradictorily religion teaches that man is nothing very much of his own self and right in the view of God, that he is chiefly here to swell with glorification the divine vanity, and that he cannot follow his own intelligence or his own impulses but must count himself subservient to a mysterious higher power. Neither the evolutionary truth about man, his animal origins and his material limitations, nor yet the truth that man represents the highest intelligence known in the universe and that, therefore he must make his own world and live independently of any imagined deity, is recognized by religion.

No, the tendency of religion is to apply arbitrary tests as to what is God's will and the revealed way of worshipful righteousness and similar bunk instead of thinking out things in a realistic, human way. The influences of heredity and environment, as well as the individual peculiarities and the subtly varied accidental circumstances, that govern human behavior are ignored fatuously by religion. For any real light on this most important problem, the understanding of human nature, we must turn in every instance to science. From religion we have a queer mixture of certain allegedly divine commands, certain precepts, certain assumptions about the nature and duty of man, which are baseless and many of which are quite foolish. At best, if it may be called a "best," religion when it enters the field of morality tells man to be good; but it doesn't tell him how to be good, nor teach him primarily to know himself, nor has it a convincing explanation of what constitutes goodness; even pious people among themselves, starting from the same dogmatic premises, reach different conclusions about what is virtue.

And religion does not confine itself to ordinary morality, to the common-sense field of behavior, but lays down a set of pietistic theological rules that are valid only if one admits the irrational ideas of religion by surrendering his reason into the keeping of the creeds. Religiously regarded, it is a virtue, for example, to believe in God and Jesus and heaven and so forth brain-distortingly, but this is utterly apart from the real question of what man is and what he should do. Belief is not a virtue in itself. If we should use the term virtue in connection with belief, we must say that only that belief is worthy and good and at all defensible which is arrived at by honest and freely employed reason. It is a virtue—if any virtue there be in the matter—for a man to believe what he thinks is true: this at least should be the justification of belief nor should a man refuse at any time to reconsider his belief in the light of a skeptical challenge to that belief. The Christian may be honest enough in lending credence to the rigmarole of theology; but so is the atheist perfectly honest and true to his highest conscience in rejecting the beliefs of the Christian. It is sufficiently evident that religion does not throw any useful light upon human nature. It has absolutely nothing to offer you or me in explanation of the working of our minds, the influences that direct us and mold our natures, the quality and guidance of our impulses, or the adjustment of ourselves individually to life.

In what other way may religion possibly be useful? Well, we have been told often enough that it is the necessary basis of morality in our social world; and that the individual cannot be good without the sacred fortitude of faith. In crude language the evangelist tells us and in more polished artful phrase the more intelligent defender of religion tells that society would speedily be corrupted or would go to smash if it were not for holiness doing business in its archaic temples—for the preachers—something, that is to say, besides reason and plain sensible morality and the motives of social welfare. Yet where is the authority for the notion that religion makes men better or that it is essential for social purposes? The very laws of human behavior and its scientifically traced ramifications are unknown to these religious apologists. Almost they seem to say in effect that men are good or bad according to whether or not they listen to the preachers. They are decidedly in error,

to begin with, in ignoring the social evolution and basis of morality and the realistic motives that impel human action. Does religion in any way clarify or even consider the economic, biological, cultural, emotional elements that make the nature of a man and determine his conduct? Does it offer us knowledge—or in its own favorite full-mouthed word, "inspiration"—to deal with the conditions of life and education of human beings so that we can develop toward civilized ways of living? It certainly does not; but on the contrary there is in religion a kind of thinking (or believing) incompatible with what modern science teaches us soundly regarding nature and nurture of man, concerning sociology and psychology, and concerning, first and last, the physiological responses of the human being. The morality of religion, insofar as it is religious, is quite arbitrary and unscientific; therefore it is not merely useless but harmful, diverting its followers from a true analysis of life.

It is, anyway, the primary mistake of these apologists—these men who, embarrassed in their defense of religion as thought, try to justify it as conduct—that they confuse morality with religion. Evidently they would persuade us that the two things are inseparable, that without one the other would perish. It seems indeed that almost everything, regardless of its plainly natural and non-religious source and significance, is by one man or another attributed to religion. Whatever man does—if he discovers a natural law or builds a skyscraper or writes a poem or composes a symphony or exhibits a sense of decency and order in his relations with his fellow man—it is absurdly alleged that he has been inspired thereto by religion. But morality, using that term in its broadest and not in a puritanical sense, is far too important to be confined to such a narrow field as that of religion. It is obviously indispensable to the life of any social organization.

Certain rules of behavior were evolved in human society as the necessary protection of men. Had men never been deluded by religious beliefs, were the whole record of religion absent from the human story, we should have morality (i. e., a naturally selective attitude toward conduct) just the same. Taking first place in morality, of course, is the prevention of actual injury by one man to another. "Thou shalt not kill" and all similar injunctions or laws against hurtful encroachment upon another's person or property or peaceful pursuits have no divine origin nor do they stand in need of any such origin, but are obviously and essentially human laws. There are again, the moral ideas of honesty, kindness, respect for the rights of one another's personality, and the like; and these again plainly have their social

origin and aim in making life more livable under social conditions. Inevitably where two men live together there is a code, written or understood, that guides their dealings one with another; and that will be the case if they never heard of religion. The man who runs amuck without any rational code of behavior injures not merely others but he is certain to bring himself to grief or ruin.

Surely the conduct of life is important and moral questions, properly considered, are of high concern. But it must be a sensible morality. It must be a consideration of human rights, definitely and fairly, and of rationally perceived effects in behavior. Morality, in short, must have a realistic and social sanction and we ignore what passes, under any other pretended sanction, in its name. I say only this much about morality (which I shall discuss more thoroughly at a later point in this study of a free man's beliefs) in order to show the baselessness of the familiar but never well supported claim that piety or faith in religion is essential to moral life.

A man's religious belief is certainly a poor guaranty of his moral nature and on the other hand many men get along very well without the least religious belief and manage to keep the very finest character. To picture a collapse of morality, of the social structure, with the downfall of religion is to imagine the incredible paradox that society would not be sufficiently interested nor able to maintain itself apart from religious influence. It is to imagine that if religion were to disappear men would at once set murderously upon each other, begin to cheat and lie without exception, and lose all traces of kindness and sociability. Even so—a simple fact that we should not overlook in this discussion—religion seems not to perform, so remarkably well its boasted mission of keeping up the moral tone and protecting the social order. We have a great deal of crime in the world, which is not effectively dealt with on any religious plan; what means of protection we have are realistic in their nature. Morals too are rather haphazard, but puritanical objections inspired by religion do not help us; and, anyway, there is room for a good deal of what is called "vice" in the world without a catastrophe such as tabernacle howlers love to prophesy.

And still we inquire vainly, "What use religion?" Oh, yes, we are assured that religion with its hope of immortality is actually a vital inspiration to man's carrying on his life at all. What keeps us working, loving, playing, thinking and planning in this theater of human action is the idea that we will be translated when we die into a heavenly sphere, so that we can believe our efforts here are not wasted; thus do the pious

## Sexual Apathy and Coldness in Women

By Walter M. Gallichan

THE author of this book has made a long and comprehensive study of the various causes and factors of an abnormality which is said to be increasing in the Western nations. Sexual apathy and coldness have far-reaching social consequences, and are the root-cause of much matrimonial unhappiness, separations, and divorce cases. This emotional resistance to conjugal love is chiefly the result of the misguidance of young women in the art of living, and of the lack of knowledge of the scientific bearings of sex, which is deplored by many leading thinkers and physicians of Europe and America. This volume is sympathetic in tone, and contains much valuable counsel for married persons.

Writing of this book, the "International Journal of Psycho-Analysis" (January, 1928), said:

"It is all to the good that laymen step in where doctors fear to tread, provided they write with the good sense and with the moderation of the writer of this book. That a good deal of marital discomfort and unhappiness could be removed by a better knowledge of our sexual life is undoubtedly true. His book should help the general woman—maid, matron or mother—to a better understanding of her emotional life, to a less hesitant and less shamefaced acceptance, for herself and her partner, of the facts of sex."

The Table of Contents includes the following chapters: (1) The Nature and Effects of Frigidity; (2) Various Causes of Apathy and Coldness; (3) Other Causes and Factors; (4) Innate and Acquired Frigidity; (5) Nervous Ailments and Sex Apathy; (6) Sexphobia; (7) The Miseducation of Women; (8) Sex Aberrations; (9) Man's Responsibility; (10) Sex Differences in Men and Women; (11) Frigidity in Men; (12) Psycho-Analysis and Frigidity; (13) Our Abnormal Love-Life. Also Bibliography and Index.

The 183 pages of this book contain information which is of value to everyone interested in a wide knowledge and fuller understanding of sexual problems. There can be no doubt of the book's outstanding authenticity. The subject is one that has been too often taboo, and that so many writers have been reluctant to touch upon. At last there is made available a sincere and truly searching investigation of the ever-present problem.

THE BOOK AND THE PRICE: "Sexual Apathy and Coldness in Women," by Walter M. Gallichan; 183 pp.; size 14x57½ inches—price \$2.65 postpaid.

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argue—without religion, man would simply lie down and "give up his ghost." Must one really take the trouble to knock over this childish argument? The will to live is so strong that even under the most difficult, painful and hopeless circumstances men still hang on to their brief but strangely precious mortality. Life instinctively fights for survival. The beasts in the field are not kept alive by the hope that they have a home ready in heaven, but they cling to life no less persistently. And with men there is additionally the awareness that life, after all, is intelligible and desirable and indeed, fascinating within the limits of mortal experience. Paraphrasing Shakespeare, we may say that men have died from time to time and worms have eaten them but they have not died in despair because they had ceased to believe in immortality. The reasonable view, of course, is that when a man realizes that this is the only life he will have he will be all the more desirous to make it yield him joy and significance and because, so to speak, it is his sole possession of certainty he will not therefore the more readily throw it away. On this ground, as on all other grounds, religion is seen to be of no value practically just as it is of no value intellectually.

### 3. Dead Faith and Living Truth

Yesterday belonged to religion. Today and tomorrow belong to science. And when I say "religion" I do not mean sentiment nor poetry nor ethics nor any emotional, moral sensitiveness with regard to life; religion is a mystical, irrational, dogmatic attitude toward man and nature—a pretended explanation of life which does not even faintly explain—a form of belief that is without intelligible basis or significance. Dead faiths—those old, rusty, heavy chains for the mind—those pre-scientific guesses and fears about the world—what have we to do with them in this insistently realistic modern age? We have no more use for the ideas of religion than we have for the old-fashioned stage coach and tallow candles.

What we must have is living truth for our very present and progressive needs. How pitifully ridiculous for a man to cling to the old, unscientific ways of judging life when science has revolutionized our conceptions and, however superficial our knowledge of science in detail, we can at least be familiar with its broad conclusions; and when too we can look critically and candidly at life for ourselves—a plain well-working faculty for observation and analysis being sufficient to expose for us the fallacies of religion.

We know that we must die, and to the best of our knowledge death is exactly what it seems to be—well, all the more reason why we should be zealous to live while we may. Thinking rationally, we can

realize that all the faith and mysticism and arbitrarily posed belief in the world will not bring us understanding nor assist us in the problems of life nor infinitesimally alter the facts with which we deal. Then what else remains but to employ our wits sanely, acquire all the knowledge and experience which we possibly can, stick to sound values and be no more idly and childishly deluded by hoary vanities that are but the shadows of the intellectually groping past.

Come, my beloved, fill the cup that clears  
Today of past regrets and future fears:  
Tomorrow? Why, tomorrow I shall be  
Myself with yesterday's seven thousand years.

In being oneself, free-minded and alert and resolute, is all that can or need be. Life has only a human significance, insofar as it is at all intelligible and purposeful. Judge all things in the light of this real world and its possible aims and evident limitations: only in this way can we enjoy to the full what life really has to offer; thus and not otherwise shall we function as reasonable beings. Are there limits to our knowledge? Well, it is only ignorantly that we can assume to go beyond these limits: we shall be neglecting what lies plainly before us for something that is less substantial than a shadow. Human knowledge has grown amazingly within the past hundred years. It will doubtless continue to grow during the next hundred years. Let us grow with the growth of knowledge—with the living truth—but let us not linger vainly over the relics of dead faith that mark where knowledge passed: where knowledge passed and continued triumphantly, realistically on its way.

### That Which We Call a Rose

Editorial Opinion of The New Republic (Jan. 9, 1929).

The recent confession of Mr. E. Haldeman-Julius, publisher of five-cent culture for the millions, added something modern and American to the philosophy which Shakespeare put into Juliet's speech in the balcony scene. The clever business man knows that the choice of a name for his flower or other commodity is quite as important as the quality of the commodity itself. That which he calls a cigarette or a cake of soap might smell as sweet by any other word, but he christens it Lucky Strike or Palmolive and walks away with the business. The science of advertising teaches us that it is not the *Ding an Sich* that the public likes, but the aroma of sexual or economic success with which it is surrounded. To popularize a rose we must link it with something else—with the charming lady whose bosom it graces, with the eminent executive who keeps one on his desk to sniff between his world-shaking decisions. Or we must hold up the

hideous spectacle of the pariah in the commuters' club car who has refused to buy a green-house and consequently is forced to go to his office roseless and shunned. It is one of Mr. Haldeman-Julius' contributions to popular education that he has discovered that in the matter of merchandising there is no essential difference between roses and cigarettes, cakes of soap and books.

Mr. Haldeman-Julius' titles are so numerous and the volume of his sales so fantastic as to make his business almost a barometer of plebeian taste. He does not appeal to those who buy literature by the yard or who regard it as a detail of interior decoration. Nor, apparently, do his clients often know exactly what they are buying when they purchase one of his five-cent Little Blue Books. They buy by the labels. There are, of course, exceptions. "The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam," which sells at the rate of 50,000 copies a year, obviously demands some previous acquaintance. This is also true of the plays of Shakespeare, which, incidentally, are headed by "Romeo and Juliet," with a sale of 14,500 copies, of "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde," of "The Man Without a Country," and of biographies in general. In such cases a certain amount of good will has already been created, either by school teachers or by quotations and references in the newspapers and popular periodicals. The motion picture may also have played its part. But as a rule, according to Mr. Haldeman-Julius' own testimony, which is amply borne out by his catalogue, it is the thing that a book is called that sells it.

Some easy conclusions may be drawn. "A Book of Comic Poems" is more than twice as good a seller as "A Book of Humorous Verse." The public likes slapstick and the belly laugh. It is not so fond of the quiet chuckle. Oscar Wilde's poems are twice as popular as those of Robert Burns, his nearest competitor on the list of British versifiers. Perhaps he would sell a little better, whatever the title, for the scandal of his later years encourages a reader to hope for some indecent passage. However, Mr. Haldeman-Julius makes certain of his 40,000 annual readers by calling the volume, not by what is probably Wilde's best known poem, "The Ballad of Reading Gaol," but "Harlot's House and Other Poems." Greek and Roman dramas are hard to sell, but "The Bacchantes" of Euripides goes into 12,000 pockets annually—obviously, thinks Mr. Haldeman-Julius, because "its title implies joyous dancers or some similar idea." Perhaps it is also bought as a gesture of defiance against the Volstead Act. Stevenson's "Apology for Idlers" is doing poorly. Mr. Haldeman-Julius decides that "America has no hankering to read about excuses for laziness," but believes he might put the book across if he could make a new title showing that "what Stevenson is really talking about is leisure for cultural betterment." Cellini sells well. Why shouldn't he? He is "described in the Little Blue Book catalogue and advertisements as a notorious murderer, lover and miscellaneous sinner." With that to recommend him the public can forgive him for being a great artist and making the Perseus. Of course, *Homo Sapiens Americus* is not exclusively interested in sin and vice. He likes philosophy, particularly if it has a bitter note: Nietzsche has 45,000 sales annually. He wants to improve himself and to succeed. E. W. Howe has contributed five titles to the Blue Book library. One book by E. W. Howe is probably about as good as another, for the flavor of the man is in all of them. But four of these booklets, with nondescript labels, sell respectively at the rate of 20,000, 13,000, 11,000 and 5,000 copies. The fifth, Mr. Howe wanted to call "Preaching of a Brother-in-Law of the Church." Mr. Haldeman-Julius tagged it, instead, as "Success Easier Than Failure," and now 77,000 Americans buy it every year.

One is reluctant to accuse Mr. Haldeman-Julius of selling his goods under false pretenses. Yet, if the phrase were not libellous, one would have to say that in some cases he does so. He sells, an article that is insidiously better than many of his readers would knowingly buy. He tricks the tabloid intelligence into accepting—perhaps even liking—a Harvard classic. This is more than a mere matter of titles, but the title is as good an illustration as any. There must be thousands of readers who pick up a Blue

Book with the hope of having their lower natures appealed to, and who find, perhaps when it is too late, that they are being educated and uplifted. Those who have had personal experience of the fear and loathing with which editors of magazines for Mr. Haldeman-Julius' public turn away from anything remotely suggesting the highbrow, can only marvel at the feat. Yet one suspects behind this experiment a glittering truth, of value to all who write and all who educate. How much of human thought and knowledge has been rendered unacceptable because it was wrongly labelled? How much has the snobbery of learning and culture done to betray its own cause? Mr. Haldeman-Julius has gone to an opposite extreme. His books go forth in overalls and in headgear with ravelled ribbons and stained sweat-bands. They drop in at the barber shop and are not above telling the kind of stories that used to be told in mixed company—or, more often, hinting slyly that they could tell such stories if they would. They are like preachers who button their collars in front and take the name of the Lord their God in vain. By doing this they get a hearing. Plato and Voltaire, Marcus Aurelius and Tolstoy thus speak to an audience which other-

wise would have none of them. One suffers occasional shocks in looking over Mr. Haldeman-Julius' lists and observing under what strange disguises some of one's literary heroes masquerade.

Yet it is perhaps not altogether a masquerade, after all. There is a vulgar vulgarity, an indecent indecency on which a whole classification of newspapers, magazines, books, plays and motion pictures thrive and multiply. There is another kind of vulgarity and indecency without which, one may venture to say, no great literature—nor even any great literary figure—ever existed. Mr. Haldeman-Julius' books and titles of course do not fall as a whole under either species. But where he makes what a cultured individual may consider a vulgar appeal, where he leads his prospective reader to hope for a lip-smacking passage or two, it may be that he is coming closer to the essence of literature than any of the professors. For literature is not what is found in libraries, it is what people read. If Mr. Haldeman-Julius invents a title for a book which makes his public read it, perhaps he has, better than most others, described that book. Apprentices could do worse than spend a year or two of graduate study in his culture factory.

## IN THE WORLD OF BOOKS

BY ISAAC GOLDBERG

### "THE END OF ST. PETERSBURG"

Advance reports of this picture had been so flattering that a large audience turned out for the first night in Boston. It almost filled, in fact, the large hall in which, weekly, the Boston Symphony Orchestra makes the air melodious—and sometimes cacophonous—with its musical adventures. That audience was predominantly Jewish, I should say; moreover, it was predominantly radical. You could, at short notice, have called a meeting of at least a half-dozen executive committees of the various trades and labor organizations of the city. As is the way, again, with Jewish audiences, they lingered until the final moment in the vestibules and the corridors; it must be a habit left over from synagogue days in the old country, when the beadle had to drive the congregation in for the services.

The opening projection of "The End of St. Petersburg," then, was largely in the nature of a radical demonstration. It was not long before the presiding organist had swung into *The Internationale*; it was not long before eager hands were applauding the libertarian sentiments of the titles and of the protagonists. I dare say that more than one of the spectators went back to work next morning with a smoldering grudge against his employer, ready to behold in him the symbol of a blind, driving, headlong system of exploitation. Were the Boston censors wise—wise for their own and for their masters' interests—they might have considered forbidding the run of this picture. But who speaks of censors and wisdom in the same breath?

\* \* \* \* \*

The picture disavows Soviet propagandism; it is not, like "Potemkin," history, although it uses fiction to bring out the lessons of historical events. But one character, that of Kerensky, is taken from life. There is no Soviet propaganda, perhaps; the picture stops short of the Bolshevik triumph, when St. Petersburg becomes Leningrad. The undercurrent, however, is unmistakable.

The interest is centered, not upon persons but upon scenes and events. There is irony in the juxtaposition of the "shot." The director, intent upon creating an atmosphere of rebellion, rather than in exploiting his own personality, subordinated everything to the themes of revolt and liberation. The actors are amateurs, we are told; the acting is so vivid as to make one forget, at times, that this is merely a picture. There is no prettifying; the peasant women are peasant women, and not, as in our own pictures, haughty dames who have put on a very neatly laundered peasant costume, parading about in hygienic settings with patent-leather pumps and immaculate underwear (if they wear it). The war scenes make one squirm with uneasiness; by emphasis upon a concrete, yet symbolic, detail the impersonal cruelty of the whole madhouse is brought home to us. A face and arm protruding from a bed of thick mud . . . and you have the horror of death in the trenches. Pandemonium on the stock exchange. . . . A strike in the munitions factory. . . . Grinning torture in the police station. . . . Gaunt hunger in a workman's cellar. . . . The details are combined with skill.

As an artistic entity, however, the picture leaves much to be desired; so, for that matter, did "Potemkin." In the tale of the mutiny, however, there was a finer sense of crisis and climax. "The End of St. Petersburg" disregards crisis and climax; its transitions from proletarian slavery to the provisional government, and especially from the provisional government to the triumph of Lenin, are harsh; they come abruptly (unless the film has been tampered with), as if to say, "The outcome is the thing; all the rest is history."

The beauties of the film, then, are in its frequent photographic felicities, in its ironical contrasts, in its pictorial commentary. The director reveals himself as a fine technician, but he has deliberately, it would seem, shirked the problems and the finer victories of the cinema at its best. There is beauty in this material—more than he has captured. If, to their skill with detail, the Russian directors would aim at and achieve an organic, an interpenetrating unity, they would leave the rest of the cinematic world far in the rear.

### IN QUEST OF PERFECT TASTE

AN OUTLINE OF ESTHETICS. Edited with Introductory Notes by Philip N. Youtz, and consisting of the following volumes: "The World, The Arts and the Artist," by Irwin Edman; "The Judgment of Literature," by Henry Wells; "The Mirror of the Passing World," by M. Cecil Allen; "With Eyes of the Past," by Henry Ladd, and "Scientific Methods in Esthetics," by Thomas Munro. W. W. Norton & Company, New York. \$5 the set.

Let me begin by breaking the first rule of book-reviewing: that is, by reviewing the publisher's announcement rather than the works themselves. For the set, as a whole, is a fine one, and well worth owning by all who wish to penetrate behind the caprices of taste to their sources in the human personality. "The writers," says the jacket, "have abandoned the hackneyed jargon of the art book and taken a fresh approach to an old subject. . . . They speak simply without technical claptrap." And so on. Well, I have my doubts on that score. These five gentlemen, not to speak of their editor, go at their work with unrelieved earnestness; they are technical, and I don't see why they shouldn't be so, without apology. Nor do I see, for that matter, why the sound technical method should necessarily be coupled with the derogatory term of "claptrap." This may be a primer of esthetics, but it connotes a certain amount of abstract thinking, so why "kid" the prospective student? If there is anything that ill-adapted persons should keep away from it, is esthetic study. This is not a science; it can't be taken into the laboratory and measured off, although laboratory experiments are exceedingly valuable. It calls for

a peculiarly responsive temperament, not for the easy gushing of ready ravers.

The books are generally well written. Too much space, it seems to me, is given to painting, and certainly too little to music. The best rounded of the volumes is undoubtedly that by Professor Irwin Edman of Columbia, a gifted young man with the serenity of one twice his age. Mr. Munro is packed with meaty suggestion. The set as a whole is certainly not for the beginner; it has most value for one who has already been initiated into the contradictions of the subject. For such a one, however, it should prove especially valuable in opening up avenues of personal research.

### AN ANSWER TO 12,000 LETTERS

HOWS AND WHYS OF HUMAN BEHAVIOR. By George A. Dorsey, Ph.D. New York. Harper & Brothers. \$3.50.

After Dr. Dorsey had published his "Why We Behave Like Human Beings," some twelve regiments of them sat down to write him letters for further information. What did they ask him? Well, to judge from his chapter headings, they wanted to know all sorts of things: why they were gamblers by nature, why they fell for one another, why they slept so much, how they could be happy though married, why they weren't happy even if they were single, why they should try to control their emotions, and so on, through the list. Dorsey wrote the answers in a simple, easy style, carrying the information with wit and convincingness, and here it is, reprinted from the columns of the *Cosmopolitan* and the *American Magazines*.

The volume, taking it by and large, is "inspirational," but in a new, a scientific sense. Beyond a doubt we can get far more out of our bodies and our brains than we do. In fact, the book forms a fine antidote to the inferiority complex that so many men and women nurse affectionately through lives that should be fuller and happier.

## An Outline of Human Progress From a Debunker's Viewpoint

OUTLINES of various kinds have appeared, but E. Haldeman-Julius is the first to provide an Outline of Bunk. He is the first and the only writer to survey the entire history of man—all the activities of the human race—from a candid point of view which denounces bunk from beginning of recorded history until today. E. Haldeman-Julius, in his role of debunker extraordinary, is beyond a doubt the one person writing today who could have procured such a book as this Outline of Bunk—and he has written it, with a gusto which will invigorate and delight his readers, and all those who become his readers because of a deep-seated conviction that any war on bunk is a fight worth supporting.

The Outline of Bunk is something new in the field of popular surveys of the spectacle of man multiplying, living and dying on this little earth we call ours. It is a huge clothbound book of some 500 pages—142,000 words—which takes a vantage point such that the chronicle of mankind can be related with emphasis on the salient pieces of bunk which have made the story fraught with folly, falsehood, and failure. E. Haldeman-Julius is thoroughly frank. He makes no truce with any group or class. Whether it is bunk in politics, religion, sex, or whatever—he calls it by the only name it deserves and relegates it to the scrap-heap in his searching analysis for what is worth keeping and worth perpetuating in the long tale of man's rise to power on the earth.

Monumental is an adjective which fittingly describes this work. It is the culmination of E. Haldeman-Julius' career as an outspoken, straight-from-the-shoulder debunker. That he has long had such a work in mind there can now be no doubt, for the scope of this book is the result of long deliberation. The book stands out by its all-inclusiveness, its penetrating delving into the past for the roots, the origins, the ultimate vicious and pernicious sources of bunk in all its guises. For bunk has long been in the world under various names. Bunk has been hidden in many a poisonous pellet coated with a layer of sweet-tasting and outwardly harmless sugar. Even to those who have for a long time flattered themselves that they are debunkers, many of the more insidious and subtle forms of bunk may never have appeared as such.

The Outline of Bunk is a worthy epitome of E. Haldeman-Julius' own philosophy, which has matured and ripened into a confirmed hostility to all forms and varieties of bunk, but which includes as well a sincere appreciation of the beautiful, the meritorious, the admirable, as judged by the standards of a twentieth-century civilized citizen of the world. To all those who have so often belittled him for always crying, "Down with bunk!"—and, supposedly, denouncing him for tearing down without ever building up—E. Haldeman-Julius offers this book. Here, within the covers of one large volume, is the answer to any criticism of this kind. For it will be found that the second part of this imposing work has for its keynote, "Up with all that is truly worth while!"

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