

# BIRDS OF PRAY:

*A DISCURSIVE SERIES OF MONOGRAPHS,*

BY

W. STEWART ROSS,

AUTHOR OF

"JANET SMITH," "THE BOTTOMLESS PIT," ETC., ETC.

*IRAS ET VERBA LOCANT.*—MARTIAL.

*"The priests thereof teach for hire, and the prophets thereof divine for money."*—MICAH iii. 11.

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# BIRDS OF PRAY.



## CHAPTER I.

### SERMONS IN STONES.

“SERMONS in stones!” There are, indeed, of a verity. On the sea-shore there is no particle of sand on which is not written, if we could only read it, the history of the world, and in which is not hidden the cryptogram of OM—yea, of GOD. The *matter* of that particle of sand always was, and there, in its amorphous microcosm, it records the energy of mutation which sent the avalanche crashing down the mountain, which hurled the volcano’s red lava into the welkin, which sunk the hill into the ocean’s bed, and raised the ocean’s bed into the hill. “Before Adam was, I was,” is the genealogical vaunt of every atom of dust. And its shape and weight and location have all been irrevocably fixed by the “decrees of God;” by the unalterable, inexorable process of the cosmic law, which is as unmoved by the submerging of a continent as by the fall of a sparrow. With Nature there is no great, no small—no essential, no non-essential; there is only the harmonious homogeneity of the All.

In an Oxford museum may be seen a certain stone. It is composed of carbonate of lime, and was taken from a pipe which carries off drain water in a colliery. The stone consists of alternate layers of black and white, so that it has

a striped appearance. This peculiarity was caused in the following way:—When the miners were at work the water contained a good deal of coal-dust, and so left a black deposit in the pipe. But when no work was going on—as, for instance, in the night—the water was clean, and so a white layer was formed. In time these deposits quite filled the pipe, and it was therefore taken up. Then it was found that the black and white layers had formed quite a calendar. Small streaks, alternately black and white, showed a week, and then came a white streak of twice the usual size. This was Sabbath, during which there was, of course, no work for twenty-four hours. But in the middle of one week there came a white streak of twice the usual size. On inquiry it was found that on that day a large fair had been held in the neighbourhood, and no work had been done at the colliery. Every change in the ordinary course of work had left its mark on this strange mineral, to which has been given the title of “the Sunday Stone.”

There is no layer of the lowest *grauwacke* rock that does not tell a tale as intelligible, if we had only the skill to read it; each atom is eloquent of the great Saturday and Sunday of the universe. There is a reason for the fine detritus, a cause for the rough conglomerate. In words that cannot lie, we have the record of the vanished monocotyledons; of the mare's tail that grew ere as yet there was human eye to behold it; of the club-mosses that ran prostrate millions of years before the pyramids were founded; of ferns that waved their fronds æons before “history” had begun. Trilobite and ammonite have died, although the whole earth once was theirs; and they testify inexpugnably to the former universality of their empire by the present universality of their graves—their graves are the saxiferous backbone and rock-ribs of the earth. From the air-cells and eyes of stone we read that countless chiliads before it was first written down, “God said, ‘Let there be light,’” light and

air were, essentially, the same as now; and while as yet this planet's fauna was represented by the polypi which fastened themselves to the sea-bottom by stalks and stretched out branch-like arms for prey, and the radiated lily encrinite that, with its capsule and petals closed, has found its statue in stone imperishable, while of the proudest columns of "ancient" king and conqueror there is left nor capital nor shaft nor plinth. And away behind the *grauwacke* there are the Plutonic rocks, the granite whose cryptograph we cannot decipher by the alphabet of fossils, the unsculptured granite of Criffel, the hewn granite of Memnon's head and Pompey's Pillar.

One of the most curious rock formations in the world is to be seen in Arizona. It is a short distance east of the stage road between Tuscon and Oracle, and stands on a knoll several feet above the surrounding sand-hills. When first seen the effect is startling, and the mind has to recover from a shock before the peculiar object can be comprehended. It is a most perfect representation of a camel, and is formed of one piece of granite. This curiosity is of colossal size, but perfectly proportioned. It is about sixty feet high, and is white and smooth. There are very few fissures on the surface, and they, strangely, are in the proper places to form features. The only real projection from the surface is exactly placed for an eyebrow. The two humps are plainly to be seen, and the neck is curved beautifully. The rock is really a solid piece rising from the ground; but the effect of legs is produced by a clump of dark-coloured brush that grows beside the stone. The white mass shows plainly at both sides of the brush, and the effect of the legs is unmistakably produced. The strangest fact is that the object looks like a camel from all sides, and at all times of the day or night. There is no disguising the resemblance.

Similarly, Arthur's Seat, Edinburgh, bears a striking resemblance to a couchant lion of most tremendous

proportions; and, all over the world, there are similar phenomena. Does the rock of Arizona resemble a camel, and the rock of Midlothian a lion? Shallow comparison! Countless ages before the foot of camel had touched the desert sand, and before the roar of the lion had shaken the forest solitude, those mute *idola* from the chisel of God loomed up in a desolate world. The camel and the lion are, relatively, the fleeting shadows of the passing hour; those rocks the immobile and permanent landmarks of Eternity, set there by the cranes of mystery impenetrable, sculpted by the Praxiteles of ontology, scarred by volcano, earthquake, and glazier, and all the known and unknown cosmic energies; they stand there waiting the entrance and exit of the camel and the lion—aye, and of man and all his marvels—as unmoved as the Pyramid of Cephrenes waits the flight of a summer cloud over its apex. And they bear no mark, however faint, of lightning, or earthquake, or glacier, that is not imprinted there by law as inevitable, as irrevocable as that by which the world has being. And so it is with the rocks of eternity, with the insect of an hour, and with man himself. As Hawthorne remarks: "As busts in the block of marble, so does our individual fate exist in the limestone of time. We fancy that we carve it out; but its ultimate shape is prior to all our action." Let us pause. Prolonged pursuit in this direction has a tendency—

"So horribly to shake our disposition

With thoughts beyond the reaches of our soul."

In all the world there is no hill that owes even the slightest modification of its mass, composition, and outline to what the non-scientific call chance. On the Grampians there is not a rock-ridge, a bracken, or a blue-bell but is as inevitably there as are the successive black and white strata in the "Sunday Stone." It is easy to account for a peculiarity in the configuration of a church, difficult to

account for a peculiarity in the configuration of a hill. On the fields of Touraine, more than 1,100 years ago, a battle was raging thick and bloody. Now the Cross rose over the conflict, and anon the Crescent blazed over the reeling carnage. Rang the blast of the Christian bugle and the yell of the Paynim tekbir; mingled, pell-mell, in crash and clang the helmet of the paladin and the turban of the emir, the straight sword of the West, and the curved scimitar of the East.

Which priestcraft is to dominate Europe—that of the carpenter of Nazareth, or that of the camel-driver of Mecca? The game that will decide that question is being played on that grassy plain between Poitiers and Tours. Charles the Hammer (Martel) leads the brood of the carpenter. After three mortal days of slaughter the scales of Fate sway in his favour. The carpenter is up, the camel-driver is down, and 300,000 of the partizans of these two hierophants are lying stiff, stark, and gory, and the gizzard of the kite is glutted, and the talons of the raven are red. And this triumph for the gentle Jesus is commemorated on one of the hills he turned off the lath when he and his father "created" the world. On the side of this hill overlooking Tours, and so situated that it may be seen for miles in at least two different directions, is a rude figure of a gigantic hammer roughly sculptured in the rocks. It is the memorial of the victory of Charles Martel (Hammer) over the Saracens in the year 732.

It is a far cry from Touraine to Berkshire; but here also one of God's hills has been sculpted into a memento of slaughter, again in the name of that son of his, that "Prince of Peace" who brought "not peace but a sword." In this Vale of the White Horse Alfred won a signal victory over the Danes in 871. It was a dance of Death, the two fiddlers being "the White Christ" and "Odin the Bloody;" and the White Christ (always a fiend to slash and stab) had the

best of it. The Saxon Standard of the White Horse triumphed over the Danish Standard of the Raven; and to this day, the figure of a colossal horse in a galloping posture is discernible on the side of that chalky English hill. There are the Hill of the Hammer and the Hill of the Horse, monuments of triumphs won in Christ's name. Hammer and Horse alike limned in blood: God's hills dishonoured to do God honour! But there is not a hill on earth with a single hue or mark upon it, from the grey of the lichen to the whiteness of the glacier, from the shedding of the worm to the chasm rent by the earthquake, but tells its own history, if we could only read it as we can the story of the Hammer or the Horse.

Two stone hills have read us their riddle. Now let us turn for another sermon to a stone lady of the eleventh or twelfth century, who, as far as her revelation is concerned, resembles—

“ Him who left half told  
The story of Cambuskin bold.”

In the studio of Herr Stienne, in Strasburg, was placed on exhibition recently the bust of a woman which has attracted widespread attention in Germany, and been the subject of numerous articles by archæologists, and of much study by scientists and physicians. In the spring of 1892 workmen were employed to repair the famous old church of St. Fides, in Schlettstadt, Alsace. The church was founded by Hohenstaufen in 1094, and was long the burial place of the great families of the city and neighbourhood. Under the choir, in a part of the church built originally in 1094 by Hildegarde von Schwaben, the wife of Frederic Von Bueren, and the grandmother of Frederick Barbarossa, the labourers came upon a number of tombs. One of these was apparently of a much later construction than the others, dating from sometime in the seventeenth century. Upon opening it a body in a most remarkable state of preservation was found. The

face and bust had become petrified, and the features were as natural as life. Unfortunately, the lower part of the figure could not be found. The right arm was pressed tightly against the breast, and the left hand was perfectly preserved. The clothing of the statue-corpse showed that the woman was one of quality of the eleventh century, so that the discovery was interesting from an historical and archæological, as well as from a physical, point of view.

"According to the report of Herr Winkler, Council of Buildings in Kolmar," says Dr. Gustav A. Müller, in a recent article on the subject, "we can say with certainty that the body was placed originally in a wooden coffin, and that soon after the woman's death mortar of some kind had been poured over her. This soon hardened, as the marvellous preservation of the facial features shows. The reason for this use of mortar, or cement, was, without much doubt, because the woman had died from some contagious disease, although lime was used also for purely sanitary reasons in many cloister vaults.

"Mr. Stienne.....has done excellent work in restoring this natural bust, especially its left side, which was worn. Professor Anton Seder, as we are convinced by a personal examination, does not say too much when he writes: 'What a deep impression this figure made upon me I cannot describe. Renunciation of all worldly passions is the chief characteristic of this beautiful face, which, to an observer of fine feeling, seems, the longer he looks at it, to be a vision from the other world.'

"Who is this woman with her noble features, the two braids of hair wound about her head, the long white chemise of the finest linen, the beautiful woollen jacket, the linen underclothing, and the costly mantle resembling that of a nun? From the clothing, and the way the hair is worn, Professor Seder has proved that the woman lived in the eleventh or twelfth century. He estimates the age of the

noble figure at from 38 to 45 years. This estimate precludes the possibility that it is the body of Hildegarde, the founder of churches, who died at a much greater age. It is much more probably that of Hildegarde's noble daughter, the Duchess Adelheid, who acted as a nurse in the days of the plague. History also tells us that Hildegarde (as also, in all probability, her daughter) died from the plague, and tradition says that she was buried in Schlettstadt."

Here, indeed, is a sermon in stone, solemn and eloquent beyond the medium of language. Death, or rather Immortality, is the text, and the far echoes from the abyss of seven centuries wander like the cadence of a solemn *Amen* through the sanctuary of the soul. Sweet Adelheid, who died in saving life, not in destroying it, heaven were heaven indeed did it involve listening to the music of thy voice, feeling the pressure of thy hand, the warmth of thy breath, and wandering among beds of asphodel with thee !

It is subtly human still, that sweet face of the long ago. That the blood no longer courses warm under that pale cheek dissevers not the links of our sympathy with our sister of the dead. What although the mode has passed when the blue veins in those temples pulsed with the blood of kings, when princes knelt as suitors at those knees of stone, when a kiss from those now cold lips was the guerdon of the loved and brave, and one pouting word from their rosy warmth would have made the steel flash like lightning from the thighs of a thousand knights burning to seek in the tourney ring the meed of laurels or death !

I confess to a profound sympathy with the dead. They are not dissevered from us. They have ascended to a Pisgah height from which they see what we cannot see ; they have eaten of a Tree of Knowledge by which they know what we cannot know ; on the ladder of Evolution they have taken a step which we have not taken, but must take. And in extreme moments in our destiny they come



down and are with us : their spirit is in our soul, even as their blood is in our veins. Who that is susceptible of the keener and more subtle of human yearnings has not experienced moments when the dead were with him : when he was about to ruin woman, and his mother intervened from the tomb ; when he was about to wrong man, and his father spake from the grave ? This world would be intolerable if, besides being the location of the commonplace living, it were not also the haunt of the sublimer dead ; I have less ear for its sermons from the pulpit than for its voices from the dust.

As the credists and dogmatists understand it, I pray not ; but if prayer be ever a soul-force and a reality, it is in the uttered or unexpressed intercourse between him who stands on the grass and him who moulders below it. One of our few living poets\* has embodied something akin to this conception in the following exquisite lines :—

- “ O'er land and sea love follows with fond prayers  
 Its dear ones in their troubles, griefs, and cares ;  
     There is no spot  
 On which it does not drop this tender dew  
 Except the grave, and there it bids adieu,  
     And prayeth not.
- “ Why should that be the only place uncheered  
 By prayer, which to our hearts is most endeared  
     And sacred grown ?  
 Living, we sought for blessing on their head ;  
 Why should our lips be sealed when they are dead,  
     And we alone ?
- “ Idle ? Their doom is fixed ? Ah, who can tell ?  
 Yet, were it so, I think no harm could well  
     Come of a prayer ;  
 And oh, the heart o'erburdened with its grief  
 This comfort needs, and finds therein relief  
     From its despair.
- \*            \*            \*            \*

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\*Dr. Walter C. Smith, in *Edinburgh Evening Dispatch*, December 2nd, 1893.

- “ Nay, I will not believe it—I will pray  
(As for the living) for the dead each day ;  
    They will not grow  
Less meet for heaven when followed by a prayer,  
To speed them home like summer-scented air,  
    From long ago.
- “ Who shall forbid the heart's desires to flow  
Beyond the limits of the things we know ?  
    In heaven above  
The incense that the golden censors bear  
Is the sweet perfume from the saintly prayer  
    Of truth and love ”

## CHAPTER II.

### DOG-IN-THE-PEW.

Dogs go to church, or were wont to. In my boyhood I have seen them there. They generally slept through the service—by far the most sensible thing they could possibly have done, under the circumstances. The dog's master often slept too; but he had to pretend to be awake, while the dog made no such pretence. Let the human be a hypocrite, the canine was not; he just placed his nose near the base of his tail, wheeled three times round in a half-couchant attitude, and then flopped down on his side with a low, short whine of impious satisfaction.

A man is said to be happy when he is an item of his family circle; but a dog has the advantage that he can make a circle all by himself. He sticks his nose in beneath the root of his tail and makes ends meet—which, in another and more abominable sense, I have occasionally been unable to do—and he is happy. The circle he makes may not be a family circle, in the conventional sense of the term; but I am bound to say that there is more happiness in it than there has been in the majority of family circles I have seen.

In the days when I was a quite young and callow fledgling in the talons of the birds of pray I was wont to concentrate a good deal of my attention upon a dog called "Tweed," who attended "divine service" with commendable regularity. Often I found myself watching Tweed and stealthily tickling his ears with the corner of my Testament,

when, of course, I should have been giving absorbing attention to the saving of my soul, and to the fossil who was up in the pulpit earning his stipend by attempting to save my said soul with a muddy, misty rivulet of theological clap-trap and pulpy commonplace. When our bucolic soul-saver came near the subject of hell he fired up a little; and he came near hell pretty often, as he discovered that it was the only topic upon which he touched that really arrested the attention of his hearers. Hell may drive the educated and refined out of the church, but, undoubtedly, it drives the uneducated and unrefined into the church. There are those who understand no argument that is not accompanied by a kick on the shins, and can accept of no theology that is not hell-iocentric. And, if they were as honest as they are educated and refined, the educated and refined would not be found in church at all. Those who are too æsthetic to stand brimstone should keep away from the public ordinances of a creed that is, essentially, brimstone or nothing.

But here I am, inadvertently, tumbling into brimstone and neglecting Tweed. When he went to church he took all his retinue with him—a busy, if not brilliant, retinue of fleas. Tweed had the unspeakable advantage of being in a land with an open Bible and a free Gospel—and so had the fleas. He slept under the sermon; but they did not. They were up and in earnest, making their calling and election sure; and they were wont to get up the inside of the legs of my inexpressibles; and, when I should have been thinking of Zion, they caused me to think of them. It is difficult even for one more devout than ever I was to think of a holy martyr and an energetic flea at one and the same time. But this was the ordeal I had to face in the first kirk I ever attended, away among the Galloway hills and shepherds, and not far from a loch that, to this hour, bears a name which it derived from King Arthur. This was the first

considerable sheet of water I had ever beheld, and I used to wonder and speculate as to whether it were larger or smaller than the Sea of Galilee, and as to whether or not the hero of the Gospels could have walked on *it*. And often I was wont to look on Lochbank hill and assure myself that it must bear a remarkable resemblance to the "steep place" down which the pigs with the devil in them ran into the sea and were choked.

One day another pious urchin and I found a number of laird Smith's pigs on this Lochbank hill, and we did our best to drive them into the loch and drown them, just that we might the more clearly understand the fate that, long ago, had befallen the pigs of Gadarea. The laird and one of his ploughmen caught "Gallahorn"—that was the boy's nickname—and me in the act of coercing the pigs to commit suicide. And laird Smith and his bucolic rewarded Gallahorn and myself for our pious endeavour. For a day or two afterwards Gallahorn and I could stand up pretty well; but we had some difficulty in sitting down. This was a decided check to my early piety. To this day I have doubts anent the suicide of the bedevilled pigs of the Gadareans. O had I had the privilege, while an urchin, of beholding laird Smith's pigs drowning in Loch Arthur! But, as it is, lack-a-day, what an opportunity I lost! Laird Smith and his bucolic arrested the development of my faith. They are responsible for a great deal. Over the affair Gallahorn and I were baulked of evidential pig-drowning experience; but we, a day or two subsequently, met and agreed that we had now a pretty shrewd idea as to how martyrdom would feel. Had we not each been laid over a granite boulder while a denuded region—a sensitive, if not over-intellectual, region—had been well welted with a pair of cowskin braces? Laird Smith has, long since, gone to his account, and I should not wonder if he had to give account of his checking Gallahorn's early piety and mine. In

after life Gallahorn took to drink, and I—have taken to writing this.

But, again, I am wandering away from Tweed. One day, and, by significant coincidence, while the Meenister was dilating upon a terrible fight between the Israelites and the Philistines, "Clyde," a cantankerous collie, that liked neither Tweed nor myself, had been lying fairly quiescent for some time under the influence of an open Bible and a free Gospel, which facts appeared to give him very little concern. But, ever and anon, he was awakened by some more than ordinarily energetic flea who had been born to make his mark in the world. The borings and excoriations of this extremely energetic insect elicited from the suddenly awakened Clyde a start and a growl, succeeded by a furious nibbling and biting at the spot on which the flea had been distinguishing himself. Clyde held back his lips and displayed his white and formidable teeth while wreaking, as he imagined, destruction upon the insect that had disregarded the adage anent letting a sleeping dog lie. He was mistaken. No sooner had he burrowed his nose comfortably in under the root of his tail and whispered to himself in dog Latin, "*Now* I'll have a comfortable forty winks!" than that irrepressible flea burst upon him again, apparently with even more than his previous vigour. Just at the moment the preacher was talking of the children of Israel, and how "their cry went up unto—," when, lo, the cry of Clyde went up like a cry from Avernus. He sprang to his feet, gave one indignant and abortive snap at the flea, and then, in his desperation, made a spring at the slumbering Tweed, as if he, poor canine, had been in some way responsible for the mischief. Tweed, although thus basely attacked in his sleep, was engaged in instant and gallant fight. The desperate vigour of the conflict seemed as if it would break the pews into splinters, and the snarls and roars and yelps and growls were terrific, perhaps such as had seldom been

heard before since the dogs in Holy Writ fought over the tit-bits of Jezebel, wife of Ahab.

Before you could have said "Nebuchadnezzar," three or four other dogs had joined in the fray, apparently without any kind of conception as to who was in the right or who in the wrong, or even the remotest idea as to what the uproar was all about. "My brethren—My dear brethren—My Christian brethren—Brothers in Christ," quoth the bird of pray, going up another note in the gamut each time he attempted, but in vain, to secure an audience. The "brothers in Christ" had now all gone to the dogs, and the dogs were making parasols and hats and walking-sticks and Testaments fly about like distraction. My heart jumped to my mouth when I saw Tweed, my dog, in the fight, bleeding in the mouth and on one of the shoulders, while he was flecked all over with foam from the mouths of his mad and unchivalrous antagonists.

One ugly canine named "Banyall" seized my favourite but unfortunate friend by the throat, and kept his grip most savagely. A gruesome brute was this Banyall. He had had a greyhound for a dad and a bull-bitch for a dam, and he was an execrable mongrel. Tweed was being garotted. With my right foot, shod with a formidable "clog," lined on the tip with iron, I dealt Banyall a kick on the skull which I doubt not he remembered till his dying day. He relaxed his grip upon Tweed's wind-pipe, and that half-strangled worthy at once sprang upon Clyde, the guilty originator of the riot. Clyde's master hurled a heavy Bible with strong brass facings and clasps at Tweed, and caught him right between the eyes; and I, in retaliation, dealt a vigorous clog-kick at Clyde's master's shins. Then a general *mêlée* ensued, in which I got knocked down, and the dogs, one and all, got kicked outside the house of prayer, where they were left to settle their unconsecrated dispute on unconsecrated ground. We of the congregation collected

our wildly-scattered hats and Testaments, soiled with dogs feet, flecked with froth, and here and there spotted with blood. And the "brothers in Christ" were shortly again decorous or asleep, or both.

An ancient party, with the blue bonnet of his country on his head, and a profusion of white hair hanging down to his shoulders, had, during the dog-fight, been conspicuous by his excited shouts and strenuous gesticulations. In the heat of partizanship he had kicked a tyke called "Laddie" on the face, accompanying the kick with a shout of "The sword of the Lord and of Gideon." "Laddie" uttered no Scriptural battle-word in return. He was husbanding all his breath for deeds, and had none for words or barks. He seized "~~the-sword-of-the-Lord-and-of-Gideon~~" fiercely by the kicking boot, and yerked his under-teeth half way through the sole, and his upper teeth completely through the leather of the upper. He of the blue bonnet and white hair groaned "Dawm!" and fell back into the ranks of the non-combatants. When the dogs were finally ejected and the door closed he gazed ruefully down at the teeth-holes through the leather of his boot, and through which the blood was oozing, and *dranted* out the apt enough quotation: "How dreadful is this place; this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven." Our worshipper with the blue bonnet and frill of white hair was one of a numerous class, who boasted that there was no possible emergency in life in which they might be placed in which they could not find an appropriate and relevant quotation from Holy Writ.

Some have had more curious experience than ever I had of Dog in the house of prayer. Yarrow, besides having its "dowie dens" and wealth of tragic ballad and legend, has a Dog and Gospel record which, although now nearly a hundred years old, is veracious. In the Parish Church of Yarrow, in an early year of this century, a Dumfries-shire



minister was officiating for the Rev. Dr. Russell. It was the custom at that time for the farmers and shepherds to take their dogs to church with them, that they might look at their flock in going and returning, thus felling twa dogs wi' ae stane, having one eye on heaven and another on their hirsels. On this particular day two dogs, possibly excited to bellicose fury by contemplating *re* the sword of the Lord and of Gideon, fell upon each other like two fiends from the pit, and completely drowned the voice of the professional soul-saver from Dumfries-shire who was officiating for the Rev. Dr. Russell. They tore and bit and yelled and yelped, and sent a furious snarl through Yarrow. The preacher stopped in the middle of his "And, thirteenthly, my dear Christian brethren," and like his congregation, beheld the conflict with absorbing, if not sacred, interest. One of the combatants was a yellow dog, the other a black one. The soul-saver, his martial ardour reaching the boiling point, forgot all about his humdrum, "And thirteenthly, my dear Christian brethren," and exclaimed, "*Six to one on the yellow one.*" A farmer called out, "I take it," and in about three minutes the minister's dog lost. He called out, "I'll pay you after the kirk scails,"\* continued his sermon, and settled his score when the service was over.

In the Highlands of Scotland I am told that dogs still, occasionally at least, do not neglect the assembling of themselves together under the auspices of the mean and maundering service, which is in contrast with, and a disgrace to, the terrific grandeur of the hills and the holy solemnity of the glens in the region of Ossian and Fingal. But the only modern English dog I have heard of who had any idea of keeping the Sabbath holy, came to an untimely end. "Speakin' of smart dogs," said his master, a Gloucestershire farmer, "reminds me of a dog I owned t'other year. That

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\**Scails* = disperses.

'ere dog knowed when it was Sunday, an' went to church reg'lar, an' wouldn't chase a rabbit to save your life on that day if one went skippin' by right under his nose. He was the best rabbit dog in the country, too, an' loved the sport amazin'ly. But he knowed the Sabbath, an' kept it 'oly. He knowed 'God Save the Queen' from 'Rule Britannia,' an' would keep time with his tail on the floor when I was playin' of 'em on my fiddle.

That pup could just do anything you told him. I never seed his equal. I was in hopes of teaching him to talk when he met his death; he had already learned to howl two or three tunes, an' knowed his alphabet. But, one mornin' the poor pup was practisin' a new trick he intended to astonish the world with, an' came to his death very unexpected like. He was behind the barn when it happened. I seed him with my eyes curlin' his tail over his back, an' jumpin' through the curl. In one of his leaps he broke his neck an' died." And thus perished, while jumping through the curl of his own tail, the only English pup I have heard of who frequented the sanctuary and kept the Sabbath 'oly. Let us drop a tear over the tragic fate of this example of early piety.

Puppies still go to church, but dogs now, except on rare occasions, absent themselves, even in the hill districts of Scotland. In Covenanting times, of course, the "Tweeds" and "Clydes" and "Laddies" and "Banyalls" of the period attended the conventicles. There was no way of excluding them, no door out at which they could be kicked. It was, peradventure, from this troublous period the Scots collie inherited his kirk-going propensities. The very Tweed who at Loch Arthur, in my urchinhood, nearly got his skull split with a Bible may have been a lineal descendant of a towsy tyke who had smelt powder and beheld the gleam of steel in the grim old days of Alexander Peden and Donald Cargill. Peradventure, with his tail

cocked and his mouth open, had Tweed's ancestor, on the sequestered moor, listened to the gospel,—

“By Cameron thundered, or by Renwick poured  
In gentle stream.”

Peradventure, driven by hunger, he had lapped a mouthful or two of blood from the wild heather coves of Air's Moss and kept holy vigil over a decaying Covenanter, driving away the hill-fox and the gled, and frightening the circling pee-wheets with their weird, incessant, and monotonous cry.

## CHAPTER III.

### BRIMSTONE.

THE book through which man was first privileged to hear of the brimstone bonfire, and learn how to get to it, has had a big circulation ; but my book, " Janet Smith," would have had as big had it had equal extrinsic advantages. In Scotland, in my boyhood, I never saw a cot or inhabited hut or cowshed too poor to possess a copy of the Bible. I have found, here and there, that the possessor of the volume was too illiterate to be able to read it ; but that was a small matter. He could glower at it with a holy glower, such as he bestowed on nothing else. This was better than reading it. They who could give the book only a holy glower never fell away from grace ; they never doubted. The ranks of the " Infidel " were not recruited from such as they. Almost as soon as I had fairly mastered my A B C I commenced to *read* the book. If my soul was to be " saved," this learning to read was a misfortune. No doubt, to this hour, I should have been a believer if I could have satisfied myself with bestowing upon the book only a holy glower. But, like Timothy, I knew it from a child ; not with the same result, however, I am afraid, as I will discover mournfully when I find myself in Beelzebub's bosom and look up and see Timothy in Abraham's.

Was this presence of the Bible in the huts and hovels of the Lowlands quite voluntary on the part of the tenants thereof ? Not by any means. I never think of the Bible and its circulation, but I think in connection therewith of

Dunbar's "Greek Lexicon," a very paunchy and thick-set tome which stands before me on my shelves while I write, and over which, in my boyish days, I received sundry spankings; for, as far as Scottish urchindom was concerned, this well-known "Lexicon" and the *tawse* kept up a pretty close acquaintance. Before my day the Dunbar of this portly book had been Professor of Greek in the University of Edinburgh. His "chair" was not over remunerative; and he was the lord and master, more or less, of an extravagant Janet, and the father of quite a *cleckin* of wee lads and lassocks. The only means he had of augmenting his income was by the sale of his "Lexicon;" and unless he has been badly belied, he rammed the necessity of purchasing that "Lexicon," an expensive item, down the financial throat of every student in the class. Woe be to him who used any other "Lexicon;" and double woe be to him who studied along with some other student and made one "Lexicon serve the two!" Such reprobates could never win the professorial favour; such certificates as they could obtain were shockingly bad, and, when they went up for their degree, they were "ploughed" in Greek! So the "Lexicon" sold rapidly, if ruefully, and Dunbar got bannocks for himself and duds for his bairns.

But the volume attributed to Jehovah-jireth had far more vigorous extrinsic pushing than the tome compiled by George Dunbar. "The High and Mighty Prince James," to whom the Bible is dedicated, evidently deemed it incumbent upon him to recognise the compliment that had been paid to him in the matter of the dedication by pushing the sales of the book with all his royal might. The King of Heaven wrote the book, and the King of Scotland pushed it. How the former sovereign wrote it we all know, but how the latter sovereign pushed it is not so well known. Here is the enactment:\* "All gentlemen, householders;

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\* 6 James VI., 70.

and substantial burgesses are ordained to have a Bible and Psalm Book in the vulgar language in their houses, under the pain of six pounds of fine. Magistrates to search houses, and apply the fines ; a third of each fine to be their own, and two-thirds to go to the poor of the parish."

In those days it was a case of he that hath no Bible let him sell his sark and buy one ; for better go to heaven without a sark than to hell with one. It does not seem from the enactment that the poor gomeril who had not a sark to sell was compelled by statute to have a Bible ; but then the very poor have such a proneness to ape their "betters," and they, too, in the course of time, possessed themselves of copies of the volume written by King Jehovah and dedicated to King James. And thus the book came to have such a sale as "Janet Smith," not having a king to write it, and another king to push it, has not yet attained to.

Even at this hour the Emperor of Germany is at much pains to push the sales of the book by the King of Heaven. This Emperor is a strong believer in big armies ; but so, according to his book, is the King of Heaven. There is apparently a good deal in common between the sovereigns of Germany and Heaven, and they have struck up a policy of reciprocity, or of what would be called in Scotland "Claw me, and I'll claw you." Of course it is a great matter for a man who has had a bullet-hole drilled into him to feel certain that from that bullet-hole, from his having read Genesis and the like, his soul will flash upwards to heaven. A Berlin correspondent writes : "Kaiser Wilhelm takes a great interest in a German Society occupied with the distribution of Bibles to soldiers in the army. The management is now in the hands of a retired colonel, who has calculated that, since the plan was inaugurated, 1,030,000 copies of the Holy Scriptures have been sold at a reduced price to privates." Thus does the Emperor of

Germany push the book by the King of Heaven. The Bible and fighting go very well together. Cromwell's Ironsides fought like Trojans, and, pointed with quotations from Deuteronomy, drove the sword point through the corslet of the cavaliers of "The Man of Sin;" and there are, perhaps, no sturdier fighters on this planet than the items of the army of this Kaiser Wilhelm, who eat their hard blood-sausage and read their cheap Bible.

Priestcraft has always leant upon, not only an impeccable god, but upon infallible books. With the Protestants the infallible book is the incoherent jumble of short treatises, evidently thrown together in the dark with a pitchfork, and known as "the Scriptures." But, before Protestantism was invented, Christian priestcraft had an infallible author—his name was Aristotle. He was only a heathen; but the priests of the Middle Ages swore by this Aristotle, and knew little or nothing about what the Lord God had written. Luther himself, who had been trained a monk, had reached the years of tough maturity before he had his first glance at the Bible. Time was when you would have been very well burnt for doubting the truth of the Bible; but, before that, there was a time when you were liable to be pretty well burnt for questioning Aristotle. Cornelius Agrippa, a scholar, born at Cologne in 1486, wrote: "In almoste all places of studie a damnable custom is grown, in that they binde with an othe the schollers which they receive, never to speake against Aristotle, Boëtius, Albert, or any other of their schollers, being accompted a God, from whom, if a man differs a finger's breadth in thought, immediately they will call him heritike and worthy to be burned."

Burning has always been a great feature in the priestly scheme. You could get burnt over Aristotle, you could get burnt over the Bible. These burnings were in wood, more or less dry. Now, to burn you over the *Organon* of Aristotle or the *Genesis* of Moses is gone out of fashion; but, by the

priestly scheme, you have still to get burnt, not in wood now, however, but in brimstone, a very useful article in the choking of bees and the burning of sinners. Hell is now the only fire that is left at the disposal of the Church; and even it is getting colder and colder every decade. Brimstone is as useful to the theologian as coal is to the iron-founder. If you refuse to be cured by him who has "the cure of souls," you will subsequently, in consequence, be pickled in sulphur. And this threat of being pickled in sulphur terrorises many into paying the cleric to have their souls "cured." It is not easy to get money out of the ordinary world-worm, either over his "soul" or anything else. But he cannot stand the thought of *post-mortem* brimstone; and, to escape it, he disburses. Hence the indispensability of brimstone to the Church. Sapient was the remark of the auld Scotch elder: "A kirk without a hell isna worth a damn."

Brimstone is the paying item in theology. When Sir Charles Lyell, the eminent geologist, was in America, he had certain advice given to him about travelling on the Mississippi steamboats.

"Never pay your fare until you are compelled to," was the first piece of wisdom thrown at him.

"And, pray, why not?" he asked.

"Because your chances are better in case of trouble."

"Will you kindly explain yourself, Sir?" said Lyell.

"Well," answered the American, "when I was travelling up the river last March somebody cried out, 'Passenger overboard!' The captain hurried to the office and asked, 'Has the man overboard paid his fare?' On being answered in the affirmative, he turned to the pilot, and said, very indifferently, 'Go ahead, it's all right.'"

The bird of pray too asks, just as that Mississippi captain did, but not nearly so honestly and frankly, "Has the man paid his fare?" If all has been got out of him



that can be got, let him and his soul go hang. And there is no way of screwing the money out of him so efficaciously as the threatening him with *post-mortem* brimstone and a gridiron. The Ghebers are fire-worshippers; but ours is the religion of fire, if, indeed, it be not the religion of blood, for, as Erasmus wrote, "*Sanguine fundata est ecclesia, sanguine crevit, sanguine succrevit, sanguine erit.*"

But people with good constitutions were apt to think the brimstone a good way off, and make up their minds to give it some attention when they might reach seventy or eighty and feel frail. The clerics, however, had a way of dealing with such sinful recalcitrants. The brimstone was, indeed, a damnable business by-and-bye; but, although brimstone, without treacle, was the principal prescription of Dr. Flamen, he was not quite without other drugs in his pharmacopœa. If you would not be constrained to be priest-ridden for fear of the hot by-and-bye, he had ways of making it hot for you even now while you were as yet in the flesh. Go to Scotland, for instance, and watch his mode of operations there among the whaups, the heather, the bastards, the psalms, and the whiskey. "The Scotch clergy," writes Buckle,\* "taught their hearers that the Almighty was so sanguinary, and so prone to anger, that he raged even against walls and houses and senseless creatures, wreaking his fury more than ever, and scattering desolation on every side. Sooner than miss his fell and malignant purpose, he would, they said, let loose his avenging angels to fall upon men and upon their families. Independently of this resource, he had various ways whereby he could at once content himself and plague his creatures, as was particularly shown in the devices which he employed to bring a famine on a people. When a country was starving, it was because God in his anger had smitten the soil, had stopped the clouds from yielding their moisture, and thus

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\* "History of Civilisation."

made the fruits of the earth to wither. All the intolerable sufferings caused by a want of food, the slow deaths, the agonies, the general misery, the crimes which that misery produced, the anguish of the mother as she saw her children wasting away and could give them no bread—all this was his act and the work of his hands. In his anger he would sometimes injure the crops by making the spring so backward, and the weather so cold and rainy, as to insure deficiency in the coming harvest. Or else he would deceive men by sending them a favourable season ; and, after letting them toil and sweat in the hope of an abundant supply, he would, at the last moment, suddenly step in and destroy the corn, just as it was fit to be reaped. For the God of the Scottish kirk was a God who Tantalised his creatures as well as punished them ; and, when he was provoked, he would first allure men by encouraging their expectations, in order that their subsequent misery might be more poignant."

To get you well indoctrinated with a horror of brimstone it was necessary for the bird of pray to get hold of you while you were, as yet, very young. Had he allowed you to reach twenty before he commenced this training, ten to one if brimstone would have frightened you. Consequently, when you were only a few days old, and, practically, little more than a piece of dough upon which he could leave the horrible impression of his craft even as the cross is stamped upon an unbaked bun, he received you into the Church through that archaic incantation known as baptism. He terrified your parents into having you baptised in the name of a three-pronged deity, not a three-legged stool ; for, according to him, if you died before you were damped, you would certainly be damned. Over and above this he circulated, or, at all events, allowed to be circulated, a belief that, while as yet you remained undamped by him in the name of the three-pronged deity, you were liable to be carried away by wicked spirits, who would leave one of

their own offspring in the cradle in your stead. But once the incantation of damping you had been gone through, you incurred no risk of being borne away, and an imp of the Evil One left in your place, who, first time it was applied to your mother's breast, would bite her nipple off, and, with bloody and leering mouth, disappear up the chimney with the scream of a curlew and the smell of saltpetre.

In Scotland, children borne away before baptism by unearthly hands were known as *tarans*, and were supposed to wander in the woods and solitudes, lamenting their horrible fate. It was deemed unlucky to walk over their graves, commonly called "unchristened ground," to which fact Ramsay, in "The Gentle Shepherd," speaking of a witch, thus alludes :—

" At midnight hours, o'er the kirkyard she raves,  
And howks unchristen'd bairns out of their graves."

Of the superstitions of the peasantry with regard to fairies exchanging their own sickly offspring for the better-favoured children of mortals, the pages of Keightley's "Faery Mythology" and Brand's "Popular Antiquities" afford numberless anecdotes; but this supernatural exchange, it will be seen, could only be effected before baptism—hence the watchfulness with which the child was tended, and the singular charms with which it was guarded, prior to that incantation. There were various methods of discovering whether the suspected child was a changeling; and Pennant, in his account of "The Fairy Oak," relates how some poor cottagers, living near it, fancied that, because their child grew uncommonly peevish, it had been changed by the elves or fairy folk. In hopes that these wicked fays would restore them their own child and take back their changeling, they put it in a cradle and left it beneath the oak-tree all night. In the morning they found the child quite quiet, and so went home with it, perfectly assured that it had been

returned to them during the night, and the fairy child taken back.

Waldron, in his description of the Isle of Man, written rather more than a century ago, affirms that "the old story of unbaptised infants being changed in their cradles is here in such credit that mothers are in continual terror at the thought of it. I was prevailed upon myself to go and see a child who, they told me, was one of these changelings." And then he proceeds to give an account in a manner which shows that he fully believed in the truth of the theory. Shakspeare makes Henry IV., speaking of Hotspur, and comparing him with his own profligate son, wish that it could be proved some—

"Fairy hand exchanged,  
In cradle clothes, our children where they lay,  
And called mine Percy—his Plantagenet!"

Such a puerile absurdity as the rite of baptism would surely have been extinct ages ago if this wild superstition and other influences had not been applied to the end of making it indispensably obligatory. Baptism is a sacrament—save the mark!—of the Catholic faith, and "Whosoever will be saved, before all things it is necessary that he hold the Catholic faith, which faith, except every one do keep whole and undefiled, without doubt he shall perish everlastingly."

To order men, under penalty of brimstone, to think all alike, and that upon a superlatively abstruse subject, is just as sane as it would be to decree that all men should be of the same stature. And yet it is wonderful what uniformity of "thought" the threat of brimstone produced on a worldful of terrified blockheads! Quoth the foreman of the locked-up jury, impatiently: "The rest of us are agreed, and you would see the case as we do if you had an ounce of brains." The one obstinate juror replied, reflectively: "But that's just the difficulty. I've got more than an ounce."

And that is just the difficulty with the brimstone. As regards brains, some folk have now actually more than an ounce, and, consequently, cannot see eye to eye with the multitude.

To those who *do* see with the multitude, and who earnestly and sincerely realise what they see, what an unspeakable prospect! Well might Burns exclaim in tragic irony: "Ye sons and daughters of affliction, to whom day brings no pleasure and night yields no rest, be comforted! 'Tis one to but nineteen hundred thousand that your situation will mend in this world, and it is nineteen hundred thousand to one, by the dogmas of theology, that you will be damned eternally in the world to come."

## CHAPTER IV.

### A CAPRICE OF FAME.

MUCH is made of the allegation that the Prophet of Nazareth suffered innocently. On this account, accentuated by some minor incidents, his execution is, with pompous magniloquence, referred to as the "World Tragedy;" and, such as it is, it has been said and sung and preached till all other martyrdoms are minimised and all glory-halos which ever lighted the perspiring brow of agony pale in comparison. And yet hardly anything in life is more common than the innocent suffering in place of the guilty—of clean hands being suspected of blood-stains, and of hands as incarnadined as those of Lady Macbeth never falling under suspicion. We need not go back to the year A.D. 33, or thereabouts, to find an example of how—

"Guiltless blood for guilty man was shed."

France, during the Reign of Terror, witnessed the agonies of ten thousand Gethsemanes. Multitudes of the guiltless died; and when is remedial justice to be accorded them at the bar of Man or God? By what caprice of Fate is it that the world has been directed to overlook the really sublime and terrible dramas of Humanity, and to fix its adoring gaze upon puny Palestine? The innocent dying for the guilty! One day, in the prison of the Luxembourg, one of Fouquier Tinville's agents could make up only seventeen convicts out of the list of eighteen which had been given him. "I want one more," he said. He asked the first suspect who passed by his name, and, on hearing it, cried:

"Yes, it is you." He had him carried off, and next day he was guillotined. On another occasion a warder called out the name of an aged prisoner. A lad who was playing at ball in the gallery mistook the name for his own, and asked if he was wanted. "Yes," was the answer; "come along;" and next day the boy was guillotined instead of the man. At Bordeaux a boy of sixteen, named Mellet, was guillotined instead of an old man of eighty, named Bellay. On objecting, he was told that it was all right, for he was certainly eighty years old in wickedness.

There have been abundant wrong convictions in the present century. A record of the same would fill a portly volume of woe. Only an instance or two:—

In 1880 two Staffordshire farmers, Clowes and Johnson, were sentenced to ten years' penal servitude for an alleged outrage on a man named Brooks. In 1882 the latter, on his death-bed, confessed that both men were innocent, and that the charge had been trumped up. The Government re-investigated the case, and the innocence of both persons was proved. They then received a free pardon and £500 each by way of compensation.

In 1844 a London solicitor, Mr. W. H. Barber, was transported for an alleged forgery, of which he was, in 1848, proved innocent. The Government granted him a free pardon and £5,000 as compensation.

In 1881 the English Government awarded £1,000 as compensation, with a free pardon, to Edmund Galley, who had been sentenced to death, at Exeter, for a murder in 1836. After more than forty years' transportation, he found, among his fellow convicts, a person able to establish his own innocence.

True, for the wrongful punishment, Edmund Galley received £1,000, and the Prophet of Nazareth did not get a red cent. But what of that? Edmund Galley has got Oblivion, and the Prophet of Nazareth has got "a name

that is above every name." To a man with an ambition superior to that of a creeper on a beggar's wallet what is £1,000, or what is a £100,000,000, to life for one day in the blaze of posthumous fame in which the Syrian carpenter's son has shone resplendent for well nigh twenty centuries? All other instances of devotion and self-sacrifice, even that of Damon and Pythias, are nowhere beside Jesus and his cross—a mere farthing rushlight glimmering in a sepulchre as contrasted with the meridian sun blazing over the equator.

Tens of thousands, as well as Jesus of Nazareth, have been crucified; but he has more celebrity than the whole of them put together, and all that have been burnt added to them. Even the couple of rascals who were crucified, one on each side of him, simply because they were crucified in his company, are famous beyond the lot of mortals. Alexander is not as frequently referred to as the thief that died penitent, nor Cæsar as often as he who died impenitent. Strange! Of the most celebrated mortal—or, if you like, immortal—that ever trod this planet, nobody knows anything except what he or she cares to excogitate or conceive. For, of a verity, of Jesus next to nothing is known, and even that next to nothing is not known for certain. He did less and said less than any other person who has attained to even a billionth part of his celebrity. Thousands of stalwarts have been hitting at the nail of Fame, but he alone has struck it fairly on the head; and the stars are likely to grow dim with age, and Nature sink in years, before any one so hits it again.

The poet, Auguste Brieuse, has attempted to sing into renown another carpenter, or something of that sort, who showed heroic self-devotion. This artizan and several others were aloft upon a scaffolding where they had barely discovered that the situation was dangerous before the main support gave way, and all the workmen, save two, fell to



the ground and were killed. The two had laid desperate hold upon a beam which remained. But this beam was discovered to be seriously fractured and just about to give way under their weight.

"John, we are too heavy for this beam," said one of the men; "only one of us can hope to be saved by it."

"That is true, Peter," replied his companion in peril; "but which of us is the one to be killed?"

"I have four children," sighed Peter.

"Then, farewell," said John, and he let himself fall, after one appealing glance upward to heaven. Another instant, and his mangled remains lay quivering below on the stones.

But this John the carpenter has not "caught on," and this Jesus the carpenter has. The one is so human and obscure, and the other so divine and illustrious, that there are millions who, if they read this monograph, would set me down as an impious blasphemer for thus referring to the two carpenters on the same page. Nay, the more celebrated carpenter of the two has even at this hour admirers who would burn me to death at the stake for mentioning the hero of Matthew and Luke alongside the hero of Auguste Brieuse. Even I, with a thousand years of Jesus bred into my blood and bones, am not wholly without my compunctions. But I dare to be true to myself, and to rend the closely-fitting shirt of priestly superstition from my back, even if along with it I have to tear off the flesh and skin. When men like John Stuart Mill see qualities in this latter carpenter which honestly cannot be found in the story of the Gospels, it is necessary that some one should tell the truth, however painful the task, and discount the glamour of "religious" romance that has bewildered, imposed upon, and stultified some of the noblest in whose veins human blood has ever flowed.

I admit that I myself stand too close to the crowning and master superstition of my time to assume without

compunction the position I take. Voices that taught me what the multitude take to be "the oracles of God," and which have long been dumb in death, whisper to me in sad remonstrance, and the eyes of the loved and lost look up into mine from the grave in sorrow. But reverent as I am to the past, full as I am of the historic spirit and instinct, I feel I must do my duty in this terrible matter. I say it with reverence, to do this duty I am impelled by an impulse as sacred and as unequivocal as prophet or apostle of old ever felt to be "a call from the Lord."

And yet this very Jesus that, with one breath, has been lifted out of and placed far above the pale of humanity is, with the other, made weakly, nay, objectionably, human. In a certain temple of "Science" so-called, and in which the only specimen of scientific apparatus was a beer-engine, I was wont to hear the Pale Galilean coarsely twitted with having for his most prominent lady friend a notorious prostitute. This made me *scunner*, and I could not but extend my pity to one who had been treated as never any one in fact or fiction had been treated before, or has ever been treated since. He has been hotch-patched into a perfect *olla podrida* of incongruities. Orthodoxy has attributed to him transcendently virtuous qualities for which the Gospels give no sanction, and has, on the other hand, placed him in equivocal lights for which the Gospels afford no warrant. The Church in its gracious gallantry, without rhyme or reason, set down Mary Magdalene as a courtesan; and a courtesan she has been branded for century upon century. What an irreparable wrong may have been done to her memory? She is the most famous prostitute the world has ever heard of. Phryne is not a patch upon her, Rahab is an obscurity, and even Aholibah a mere nobody. She is conspicuous even to that perilous point where black infamy bids fair to blaze into glory.

And yet, reader, peradventure no sister of your

affection, no somebody else's sister of your love, can possibly be purer than was this maligned Mary ! She has come down through the ages as a strumpet on evidence that would be insufficient to hang a cat. The dew-drop on the lips of the rose may not have been purer than her heart, and the stainless blanch of the cup of the lily may not have been more immaculate than her life. The Church made saints and devils in the reckless irresponsibility of clerical caprice. I, a forlorn knight, lingering in a prosaic world long after the age of chivalry has passed away, here ride my destril through the barriers, hang my battered shield in the lists, and, with lance in rest, I wait the challenge of the antagonist who will asperse the fair fame of Mary Magdalene.

When the London Asylum for fallen women was formed, Dr. Nathaniel Lardner, of "The Credibility of the Gospel History" celebrity, pointed out how false was the assumption on which Mary Magdalene's previous life and character was popularly based. He protested in vain against her name being attached to the institution. This unjust opinion of her prevails chiefly in the Western Church. It is rejected or mentioned with hesitation by the Greek and Latin fathers. It was stamped with the authority of Gregory the Great, and sanctioned by the Roman Breviary. The woman who was a sinner (a sinner of a particular kind), referred to in Luke vii., is strictly anonymous. Mary Magdalene's name, being mentioned in the next chapter, caused the rash assumption to have its origin. Roman Catholic theologians have adhered to the popular assumption on this subject, relying on the generally-received opinion, backed by the authority of the Church. It may be mentioned that Clement of Alexandria holds it in the first paragraph of the eighth chapter of the second book of his "Pædagogus."

The orthodox have the very maddest ways of "honouring" Jesus. They, for instance, love him so well that they

eat him; and they persist in regarding his chief female friend, his dearest Janet, as a lady of the pavement! The whole thing is mad from beginning to end. Popular theology is only an euphuism for popular lunacy. This Mary was the friend of Jesus during life, and pathetically, in the early morning, she visited the tomb in which they had laid him. She was a woman; and, even if she had been "a sinner," as they say, is it gallant, is it generous, are we so pure ourselves, that we can afford, even after the lapse of nearly twenty centuries, to keep constantly referring to the fact of her human weakness? Is it right of us to erect hospitals and give them a name that perpetuates the story of her alleged impurity? For shame, ye orthodox! Have two thousand years in the grave not cooled the passion out of the blood of this damsel of Palestine? At all events, has the black gulf of centuries that lies between her era and yours not swallowed up your remembrance of her human frailties, so that—

"All that is left of her  
Now is pure womanly?"

Is it respectful to the memory of your dead Lord to remember so insistently that his lady friend, in the days of her unthinking and giddy girlhood, impatient of the restraint of social circumspectness, reached forth her warm and pulsing hand, and plucked the blossoms of the tree of Love? Supposing that fifty years after the sod had been laid upon my breast some human being should remember me with affectionate respect for what in my day I had done or attempted to do, I should deem that he took a perverse way of manifesting that respect if he kept referring to the fact that some woman who had had my friendship had stepped aside from the path of conventional virtue. To the pure in heart all things are pure. Ye who really love the name of Jesus resent, for his sake, for hers, and for your

own, all imputations upon the maiden fame of Mary of Magdala, the last at his cross, the first at his tomb.

And another thing I would do if I were a Christian. I should respect Jesus too much to permit him to pay the whole of my indebtedness. I think it the meanest and most sycophantish attitude possible to go about singing—

“Nothing in my hands I bring ;  
Simply to thy cross I cling.”

A man who could submit to be “saved” by such a passive process is certainly not worth the “saving.” Man *is* simply what he *can do*. If he can *do* nothing, he *is* nothing. Man may yet be “saved” by self-respect ; but certainly never by self-abasement. The nailing of all the rest of creation up to trees would not help you one iota. Salvation—and damnation, too—is personal, not vicarious. When I hear of saints mean enough to try in their own selfish interest to ignore the law of inexorable destiny by which every physical, mental, and moral tub must stand on its own bottom, I am reminded of the following incident.

The famous surgeon, Velpeau, was visited one day at his house, during the consultation hour, by a marquis renowned for his meanness. Velpeau informed the marquis that an operation was urgent, and that the fee would amount to 4,000 francs. At this the marquis made a wry face, and left. A fortnight later Dr. Velpeau, while making his rounds in the Hospital de la Charité, had his attention attracted by a face that seemed familiar to him. In answer to his inquiry, it was stated that the patient was a footman of a nobleman in the Faubourg Saint Germain. The surgeon found that his case resembled in every particular the somewhat unusual one for which the marquis had consulted him a fortnight previously. He refrained, however, from making any comment.

Three weeks after the operation, when the patient was about to be discharged, Dr. Velpeau called him aside, and

exclaimed: "Monsieur, I am extremely flattered and pleased to have been able to cure you. There is, however, a small formality with which you will have to comply before I can sign your exeat; that is, you will have to write a cheque for 10,000 francs on behalf of the public charity bureau of our metropolitan districts." The patient's face became livid. "You can do what you like about it," continued the doctor; "but, if you refuse, all Paris will know to-morrow that the Marquis de D—— adopted the disguise of a footman in order to secure free treatment at this hospital, and to usurp the place which belongs by right to a pauper." To be cured on the cheap, this marquis assumed the guise of a footman. To be "saved" on the cheap, the orthodox betakes himself to the attitude of a louse.

## CHAPTER V.

### "NOT PEACE BUT A SWORD."

To every sane person who is able to think without shrinking back in terror from the trend of his own thought it must, over and over again, have occurred that, if he were sane, the vast mass of mankind must be lunatics, otherwise that he himself must be a lunatic, and the mass of mankind sane. Honestly, I myself have often had my misgivings as to my own mental balance; for certainly I felt it so utterly impossible to believe what those around me believed, or pretended to believe, that both they and myself could not be sane. And as I was in a minority of one—one solitary, dreamy boy against a whole community—it was only in sublimely audacious moments that I ventured to surmise that I alone was sane, the one keeper, as it were, in a vast herd of lunatics at large.

Mr. J. Smith—nay, my very father and mother and brothers and sisters—believed that the whale swallowed Jonah, and not one of them had been in a lunatic asylum; the family did not suffer from the suspicion of even a taint of insanity in its blood from the days of William the Lion downward. I, who did not believe that Jonah used the whale's inside as a Ranter chapel, was the first lunatic the family had produced. My whole soul rose in revolt against "religion's" intolerance and pitiless persecution, and I was answered by being looked upon by the thoughtlessly devout as "cracked."

"Man's chief end," in the past, has *not* been "to glorify God," with the view of enjoying him forever. Man's

chief end has been breeding and killing. He has given himself up to the fine arts of love and war, to kissing the lips of Janet and breaking the scone of John. Possibly, in the vanished ages, Janet's lips were worth the kissing ; but, surely John's head was seldom worth the cracking, he being "cracked," more or less, from his cradle downward. Originally, while as yet nothing better had been contrived, a club was good enough to crack John's head with. But, by and bye, it was the correct thing to crack it with a stone axe. As the head slightly improved, a bronze axe was used ; and, as the cranium became less and less simian, an iron axe was the weapon with which to strike it. The reason the heads were cracked in millions, and that head-cracking was, for centuries, the staple industry, was that there were little or no brains in the said heads. Heads with brains require no helmets. Men cease to fight when they really begin to think. War is not now, as formerly, the absorbing vocation of the entire community. Now-a-days a specialised set make their living by fighting, just as another makes its living by street-sweeping, and another by hair-cutting. Every man is not now a soldier. Now we have a State army of schoolmasters to knock something into the brains of the community, and this has more public sympathy than the State army of soldiers, whose business is not to knock something into the brains, but to knock the brains out. And this is an improvement, more or less.

Men's business in the past was to make a Hell-upon-Earth for each other ; and they pretty well succeeded. The greatest success men have yet achieved on this planet has been in this direction. To make Heaven-upon-Earth has not, as yet, been seriously attempted. The making of Hell-upon-Earth was accomplished most effectively under the auspices of what is called "religion." Man, as if tacitly ashamed of his own infamies, saddled them on the back of "God." The "Mouthopener" was invented for him ; and



it was to win favour in his sight that the "Iron Virgin" of Nuremberg displayed her vestal charms. "I used to read in books," says Colonel Ingersoll, "how our fathers persecuted mankind; but I never appreciated it. I read it, but it did not burn itself into my soul. I did not really appreciate the infamies that have been committed in the name of religion until I saw the iron arguments that Christians used. I saw the 'Thumb-screw'—two little pieces of iron, armed on the inner surfaces with protuberances to prevent their slipping; through each end a screw uniting the two pieces. And when some man denied the efficacy of baptism, or, may be, said, 'I do not believe that a fish ever swallowed a man to keep him from drowning,' then they put his thumb between these pieces of iron, and, in the name of universal love and forgiveness, began to screw these pieces together. When this was done most men said, 'I will recant.' The man who would not recant was not forgiven. They screwed the thumbscrews down to the last pang, and then threw their victim into some dungeon, where, in the throbbing silence and darkness, he might suffer the agonies of the fabled damned.

"This was done in the name of love, in the name of mercy, in the name of the compassionate Christ. I saw, too, what they called the 'Collar of Torture.' Imagine a circle of iron, and on the inside a hundred points almost as sharp as needles. This argument was fastened about the throat of the sufferer. Then he could not walk, nor sit down nor stir without the neck being punctured by these points. In a little while the throat would begin to swell, and suffocation would end the agonies of that man. This man, it may be, had committed the crime of saying, with tears upon his cheeks, 'I do not believe that God, the father of us all, will damn to eternal perdition any of the children of men.' I saw another instrument called the 'Scavenger's daughter.' Think of a pair of shears with handles, not only

where they now are, but at the points as well, and just above the pivot that unites the blades a circle of iron. In the upper handles the hands would be placed, in the lower the feet, and through the ring at the centre the head of the victim would be forced. In this condition he would be thrown prone upon the earth, and the strain upon the muscles produced such agony that insanity would in pity end his pain. I saw the 'Rack.' This was a box like the bed of a wagon, with a windlass at each end, with levers and rackets to prevent slipping. Over each windlass went chains; some were fastened to the ankles of the sufferer, others to his wrists. And then priests, clergymen, divines, saints, began turning these windlasses, and kept turning until the ankles, the knees, the hips, the shoulders, the elbows, the wrists of the victim, were all dislocated, and the sufferer was wet with the sweat of agony. And they had standing by a physician to feel his pulse. What for? To save his life? Yes. In mercy? No; simply that they might rack him once again."

In the Ages of Faith, which were specially the ages of Hell-upon-Earth, improvements on the Thumb-screw occupied the amount of public attention that improvements on the Steam-engine do in our day. The "Scavenger's Daughter" was the nearest our fathers had to the Printing Press, and the "Leg-crusher" was their set-off against our Electric Telegraph. The Rack was the nearest they had to the Newspaper—it was replete with the pæans of pain and redolent of the epics of agony. The Martyr-fagots were their closest approach to our Blast-furnaces. The Martyr-fires made heaven lurid with their flames and the earth black with their ashes, and burnt into the archives of our race the stigma of immortal infamy. Our flesh still "creeps" on our bones as we tread over sites where burning human flesh once writhed in torment in the terrestrial vestibule of the hell that awaited on the further and still hotter side of the grave.

And the temple-gate of Janus stood open forever. We had been "redeemed" in blood; and in blood we were damned. Carnage sat on the one end and Lust on the other end of the great see-saw of the world. The neo-Malthusian "appliance" was the sword. The land lay in darkness under the shadow of the abbey. The rain wept in grief, the wind howled in misery. The darkness of Egypt was in every head; sorrow for the loss of the first-born—and the second—in every heart; and man became suddenly reconciled to the fact of earth being woe on the promise that heaven was joy.

We have, at length, permitted our mechanical triumphs of many centuries to sink into rust and dust and gruesome relics in museums. But, even yet, we have not beaten our swords into ploughshares, and our spears into pruning hooks. On the contrary, we have now instruments of slaughter that would have made Troy a dust-heap in ten minutes, have finished the Punic war in half-an-hour, and, in that space of time, have annihilated the forces of both William and Harold at Hastings. The Lebel musket of the French infantry can be used with deadly effect from a distance of two English miles, and the target practice of the Austrian regulars proves that the projectiles of the Mannlicher rifle will penetrate a four-inch plank of sound oak wood at a distance of 2,000 yards, and at that range would pass through a man's body as an arrow would pierce a paper screen. "The wars of the future will tax the capacity of our field hospitals," says Dr. Endermann, of Prague; "and it is a question if all the enormous levies of modern Europe would enable us to fight more than three or four pitched battles on our present system of tactics. At the usual range of 1,000 to 1,500 yards for infantry engagements, an army standing four deep would lose 5,000 men in ten minutes, and would be speedily reduced to the alternative of surrender [since fight would avail little in an open plain], or of carrying on a war

of cripples. Men prostrated by wounds might continue to discharge their repeating rifles, but not ten men in a thousand could hope to maintain a stand up fight for more than a quarter of an hour in a bullet shower of that sort."

We have practically arrived at the time when we have a machine into which, at the one end, we can put in the entire armament of a nation, and in ten minutes bring it out at the other end as cat's meat. All the romance and pride of personal prowess that kept the mad and bloody game of War alive has gone. If Roland were among us now, he would not be a soldier; he would as soon think of being a maker of saveloys; and Oliver would find as much chivalry in campaigning as he would in turning the handle of a sausage-machine.

And the sword which the Nazarene said he came to bring, and *did* bring, is being broken. As his cross recedes from our gaze his sword falls in impotence. The most "religious" ages were the bloodiest; the era of scepticism is the era of peace. Duelling got laughed out of England by a tailor getting mixed up with an "affair of honour." War bids fair to get laughed out of Europe by a bit tailor body inventing a coat that will resist the most deadly bullet yet known to militarism. Germany is, *par excellence*, the realm of Christ, his cross and his sword; and even there a bit tailor body (nine such and a cur-dog required to make a man) is, with his needle, about to foil the sword of Mars.

Experts in military affairs, not only in Berlin, but throughout Europe, are discussing the recent experiments made with the bullet-proof coat invented by Herr Dowe, the Mannheim tailor. There seems to be no longer any doubt that Dowe's invention is a most important one, and that he was justified in refusing the princely offers made to him by firms of army contractors and others who are desirous of purchasing his rights. The Russian ambassador, Count von Schouvaloff, at the Russian embassy, fired two shots at

the tailor while the latter was encased in his bullet-proof coat, and, as Dowe sustained absolutely no injury, the Russian ambassador pronounced himself satisfied with the experiment.

The experiments before Count von Schouvaloff began with a thorough test of the new rifle in use in the German army. From a box of cartridges one was selected at random, and the rifle was fired at a block of solid oak, which was pierced by a small steel-like bullet. After the shot at the block of oak, Dowe dressed himself in his bullet-proof coat and offered himself as a target. While the rifle was being aimed at the tailor, the spectators were strung to an extreme state of nervousness, and instinctively closed their eyes in anticipation of seeing Dowe killed on the spot. But after the report of the rifle rang out, and the tailor was seen standing apparently unhurt, there was a feeling of immense relief among all present. Dowe evidently noticed the state of excitement produced by the experiment, for he smiled, much to the relief of the onlookers, and said, "I feel nothing." A second shot was then fired directly at the tailor's heart, but it had the same effect as the first; he was absolutely unhurt, and both bullets were found imbedded in the bullet-proof coat which covered his breast and body in the manner which it is proposed to adopt for soldiers, leaving the arms and legs, as well as the head, without protection.

Then commenced a series of experiments which were even more interesting than the first. A horse was covered with a bullet-proof coat, for it is proposed that the cavalry of the future shall be protected by the wonderful material invented by the tailor of Mannheim. In this case a number of shots were fired in quick succession at the animal while it was quietly eating oats from a manger. The horse, a well-trained cavalry mount, started slightly at the first shot, apparently, however, only disturbed by the unexpected report of the rifle. Then other shots were fired as quickly as

possible, some of them striking almost in the same place as previous bullets; but the horse continued eating as if nothing extraordinary were happening. The new garment is described as looking like ordinary army clothing material, the resisting secret substance being placed beneath the outside cloth. The garment is in the nature of a breast-plate, and is fastened to the side buttons of the soldier's uniform. It is to be used only in actual warfare, and weighs about six pounds.

Representatives of several foreign Governments have been making strong efforts to obtain Herr Dowe's invention; but it is said that these efforts have failed. Patriotic Germans express the desire that the German Government should secure the invulnerable coat, so that the bullet-proof armour may be used by the German army alone. It is said that 3,000,000 marks have been offered to Herr Dowe by the German Government for his invention.

The "God of Battles" is the father of the "Prince of Peace," and the two are one. I am mistaken if the Mannheim tailor does not prove the ruin of the two of them, as far as their "battles" are concerned. The "holy coat" at Trèves may be important, but the coat invented by Herr Dowe is a holier coat than that, and I should go further to see it. It is a war coat; but it is an omen of peace, not of war. Let us have done with this devilry, which began with the cutting off of the right ear of Malchus, and which has gone on regularly down till yesterday, when we were mowing down the braves of Lobengula with Maxim guns in the interests of "Christian civilisation."

## CHAPTER VI.

### HOC EST ENIM CORPUS MEUM.

O THAT we could see ourselves as others see us ! O that we could cast aside the coloured spectacles of prejudice, and recognise that our so-called sacred things are the most profane of all the things that enter into our cognisance ! While Stanley's career in Africa was an absorbing topic of conversation in this country, a statement was whispered to the effect that in a certain part of the Dark Continent slaves were not only captured and brutally used, but were sold in the self-same fashion as butcher-meat is sold in our own country—a leg to this customer, a shoulder to that, and so on ; and this while the party to be eaten was yet alive. The victim was exhibited naked, and a customer's teeth would water for, say, his fellow human being's thighs. He did not care for the rest of the carcase, but he thought the thighs would be specially toothsome, and he dug his thumbs into the said thighs to ascertain, as far as such a test was available, the quality of flesh and the quantity of bone. Then he would give a bid of so much for the thighs.

There would be a haggie about the price, which, however, would ultimately be mutually agreed upon. Then the thighs would be marked off with a white pigment, as "sold," and the victim would be led to another part of the market, his owner announcing that the thighs were sold, but that the rest of the body was still for sale, and in really excellent condition. By and bye a second customer, who could purchase only in a small way, would bid for the right arm.

As soon as his offer was accepted, this limb would, with the white pigment, on the black skin, be marked off as sold. A third customer would buy the left arm right up to the shoulder.

A fourth customer would bid for the heart, which would ultimately be knocked down to him at the African equivalent of a "ridiculously low figure." And so the man would be sold, bit by bit in succession, till every part of his body had found a purchaser. Then, every part of his body marked and apportioned out with white paint, the human edible is beheaded, and the bloody, yet quivering sections of his carcase, fresh from the knife, are handed out to the customers in the rotation in which they were purchased. This picture, it came from the Dark Continent, of which the missionary zealots of England were prepared to believe anything horrible, yet over this representation they shrugged their shoulders in incredulity—this was too horrible.

But no brute is so brutal as man. There is a trite proverb, "Dog does not eat dog." But man eats man. Yes, and if you are to believe his own assertion, man eats God ! Horrible or not horrible, the shrugged at and discredited report from Africa turns out to be true ! Monsignor Augouard, the Vicar-Apostolic of the Obanghi Region of Central Africa, confirms it in an article contributed to the *Missions Catholiques*. "We had, indeed," says the writer, "seen slaves sold wholesale, if I may so express it ; but we had never seen them sold piecemeal, and chopped up on the spot. But slaves are brought to the market, and, if a person does not wish to purchase an entire mare, he selects a limb, which he chooses to his taste. He demands, for example, an arm ; and the salesman marks it with a kind of white chalk. Another person will buy the second arm, another the leg, another the breast, and so forth. When the whole slave has been thus marked off, he is decapitated, and the parts are distributed "



And why should Englishmen have doubted the report which reached them during the last Stanley expedition as too horrible to be true? Were they themselves such strangers to cannibalism and anthropophagy in every form that the novelty of the report from Africa should have impressed them with the fact of its impossibility? We are a nation of hypocrites, who have canted so long and systematically that we are only dimly conscious of our own hypocrisy. As a nation we are Christians, and Christianity is cannibal to the backbone. We have it on as irrefragable evidence as we have any fact whatever in regard to the prophet of Nazareth that he said: "Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, ye have no life in you." \* What does this mean? Look at the text, O orthodox worshipper, so anxious that the cruel and horrible "heathen" should be converted from his sanguinary ways. In the light of that text and others which support it, what is your opinion of your ethical and æsthetical superiority to the African aborigines who, on the living victim, had the portions they had purchased marked out with chalk? The deity ye pretend to worship has evidently believed in the virtues of anthropophagy. He evidently would not have been horrified, as you pretend to be, to have seen that African marked and mapped out with chalk, and the ripping-knife following the chalk lines with deep and keen incision, and dissecting the respective portions of the body for which the different purchasers had paid. Are you more refined and dainty than your deity? Are you ashamed of the coarse savagery of your "creator" and "redeemer?" No. The truth is you never really thought out the matter. You are not exactly a hypocrite—you are more of a humbug. The priest told your mother, and your mother told you, and without troubling your head you believed like a fool, and a dastardly lazy one.

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\* John vi. 53

"Except ye eat the flesh," etc.—what does the passage mean? Well, it just means what it says. If it does not, it means anything or nothing. The most powerful section of the Christian Church, the Papal, has been honest and straightforward enough to, all along, insist that the passage just means what it says. Ignatius the Martyr, "disciple of St. John the Evangelist," is explicit on this point, and is supported by others of the fathers. And the teaching of the Church is direct and unequivocal. Council of Trent, Holy Sacrament of the Eucharist, canon i., says: "If any-one shall say that Christ, as exhibited in the Eucharist, is only *spiritually* eaten, and not also *sacramentally* and *really*, let him be accursed." Canon ii., says: "And that in the most holy sacrifice of the Eucharist there is truly, really, and substantially the body and blood, together with the soul and divinity, of our Lord Jesus Christ, and that there is made a conversion of the whole substance of the bread into the body, and of the whole substance of the wine into the blood, which conversion the Catholic Church calls Transubstantiation."

In the words of another authorised document, the Catechism of the Council of Trent: "Jam vero hoc loco a pastoribus explicandum est non solum verum Christi corpus et quidquid ad verum corporis rationem pertinet *velute ossa et nervos* sed etiam totum Christum in hoc sacramento contineri" ("De Sacramento Eucharistiæ," p. 341, Venetiis, apud Aldum, 1582).\*

Rome, it will be noted, insists upon taking Jesus at his word. Protestantism has the same passages to deal with. She dare not leave Jesus to himself and the responsibility for his own expression. The position practically is:

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\* "It is also in this place to be explained by the pastors that there is contained not only the true body of Christ and whatever belongs to a true condition (or definition) of a body, such as *bones and nerves*, but also a whole Christ."

Jesus uttered the words attributed to him, but he did not mean what he said. He was, with reverence be it admitted, apt to open his mouth and put his foot in it. He did not mean you were actually to eat him, *ossa et nervos, jecur et coccyx*, knee-caps and toe-nails; but you were to hocus-pocus bread and wine into flesh and blood that was not flesh and blood, and you were to eat—no one knows what you were to eat—something which was neither “fish, flesh, nor good red herring.”

Catholicism with its *Transubstantiation* is intelligible, even if incredible. Protestantism with its *Consubstantiation* is neither intelligible nor credible; it is a select specimen of cant, hiding its shame in a dense cloud of metaphysic; it is a cowardly shuffle and another shuffle, and then a double shuffle. If whatever it is you have eaten you have eaten it “unworthily,” you have “eaten and drunken damnation” to yourself! In the Romish Church, if you have only faith, you have, at least, the advantage of knowing for certain what you have eaten—not the chalk-marked members of an African from Obanghi, but the flesh and blood and skin and hair and bones and harns of an ancient Jew, for whose biography we are dependent upon four “Gospels” written nobody knows by whom, nobody knows when, and nobody knows where. Only faith is wanted for the due performance of this Papist feat; but there is more wanted for the due performance of the Protestant feat. To perform it, besides having faith, you must have insanity, and, if, besides, a leavening of dishonesty is forthcoming, so much the better.

When I was a Protestant—I am a Protestant now, but believed to *protest* too much—I ate something in Caerlaverock Kirk. I eagerly read the “Westminster Confession” to find out what it was I had really eaten. I found I had eaten raw flesh and blood, which, however, was *not* raw flesh and blood; no, nor cooked flesh and blood, nor flesh and blood at all; and yet it *was* flesh and blood. I gave

up thinking any further about what was in my stomach, for fear of endangering what was in my head. If I had eaten merely transubstantiated flesh, I would have known myself to be a cannibal, and there would have been an end of it; but I had eaten consubstantiated something or other—goodness knows what! I was not a cannibal, but I felt a tendency to becoming a lunatic. I looked at myself in the glass, and caught myself muttering: “Not so bad-looking for a creature who lives by eating porridge and deity.” By-and-bye, for conscience’ sake, I left the latter esculent out of my regimen, and immediately found I could not get the former. It was a case of no god, no porridge; if you declined to eat the former, the unco guid took care that you should not have it in your power to eat the latter. The former I utterly refused to eat, and with a full head for my years, but with empty pockets, I fled into England.

The English, too, eat deity, and much more frequently than the Scots do; but they insist less that *you* should eat: you may please yourself. In England I have always been provided with some sort of thing, good, bad, or indifferent, to eat; but in Scotland, if you decline to turn up the whites of your eyes and eat deity, they take care that you shall eat nothing else. No employer will employ you, and no Janet will accept of you, even as a gift. I am in some respects the most Scottish of the Scots; but I failed in two particulars: I would neither eat deity nor drink whisky. Most of my school and college intimates could do both. More than one or two of them have drunk themselves to death; but, as they made no scruple as to eating deity—or would have made none as to eating the devil either, had he been the orthodox personage to eat—they are, most likely, in glory.

Do you tell me that the eating of Jesus is a rite with an esoteric significance and astronomical interpretation? Fiddlesticks! I have, in my time, gone into that matter

till I have been well-nigh as insane as the writer of "The Revelation of St. John the Divine." The lugging in of esoterics is a priestly device to make the palpably absurd seem the abysmally profound. I have for long had a keen nostril for clerical red-herrings drawn across the path of hagiographical absurdity. It is very convenient, when hagiography commits itself to indefensible nonsense or reprehensible truculence, for the bird of pray to step in with his dishonest croak, "Oh, but the passage does not mean what it says." Then why, in the name of verity, does it not mean what it says? If a book does not mean what it says, you, or somebody for you, have to determine what it means. And if you, not the book, have to fix the meaning, what, in the name of Cadmus, is the use of the book? Shun the book that palters, and the man who does not mean what he says. Such a man, if he is not a liar, is something so alarmingly near it that I suspect he is, in a more or less remote degree, of the blood and lineage of Ananias. The esoterics were not had recourse to till the exoterics, which had satisfied uncritical and utterly undisciplined credulity, had become impossible to be sustained in the light of scientific rationalism. Formerly, to non-thinkers, the faith was proved by miracles; now, to half-thinkers, it is supported by esoterics.

The naked and exoteric truth is, the Eucharist is only a survival of primæval cannibalism, added to the widely prevailing idea that the eater inherited the qualities of the person whom he ate, and even of the thing he ate. This idea obtains widely among savages, even to the present hour. Only the other day the Reverend Mark Guy Pearse, one of the custodians of the "Non-conformist Conscience," told a characteristic story, at a meeting of the Peace Society, about "the influence of Christianity upon one of the poor heathen." So greatly impressed was this convert with Christianity that he was very anxious because his

large, fierce dog had chewed two leaves of the Bible, and therefore his master feared that he would henceforth be too mild, and would not defend his sheep against the lions.

Even yet anthropophagy is not by any means extinct. In the northern parts of Canada there are still several Indian tribes who eat human flesh. In Guiana and on the Orinoco we still find Carribeans, who have the honour of having furnished the name for that terrible custom of eating human flesh. Cannibal comes from Caribs or Caribales, corruptions of Galibis or Canibis, the name of the inhabitants of the Antilles when Columbus arrived there. On the Upper Amazon, between this river and the borders of Bolivia, live the Tupis Guaraniens, who manifest a liking for human flesh. Cannibals are common in Australasia, the Papuans, Kanakiens, and Battakiens being the most distinguished. Cannibalism is, however, considered the main trait of the New Hebrides. There are more human flesh-eaters in Africa than anywhere else. Cannibalism is not necessarily a sign of the lowest state of civilisation, for many cannibal races stand higher in culture than others that abhor the custom. Many cannibals live in regions full of ordinary food ; but they prefer human flesh as a delicacy, the men forbidding their wives and slaves to eat it. In Northern Australia it seems that the dead are eaten. Herodotus tells us that it was the custom in India for the young to kill the old and eat them, to ensure their future salvation ; and we are told that the old folks desired to be killed before they grew too old and their flesh less appetising.

"A very wide-spread idea in early times," writes Richard Harte,\* "and still to be met with in children and in mystics, is that the eater acquires the qualities of the thing eaten. The child laughingly says to its little

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\* "The New Theology."

companion, 'If you eat so much goose, you will become a goose yourself,' and the mystic expresses the same idea very seriously when he declares that animal food excites the passional nature. This conception has certainly helped to keep up human sacrifice, apart from any religious bearing it may have. For instance, Parkinson, in his 'Jesuits in Canada,' says that, 'if the victim (who has been tortured to death) has shown courage, the heart was first roasted, cut into small pieces, and given to the young men and boys, who devoured it to increase their courage.' For this notion, which is apparently instinctive in the childhood of the individual and of the race, there is probably some basis in the shape of a natural law, as yet uninvestigated; and the idea has played a prominent part in religious dramas, and is at the bottom of the Sacrament of the Eucharist. I have said that the idea of fetishism is that, by ceremonies or otherwise, a portion of the all-pervading Divine Power can be so concentrated in particular things or persons as to be able to come into touch with men. If you combine that idea with the notion that the eater acquires the properties of the thing eaten, you have the explanation of the Eucharist."

In this age of Sham, which finds it its mission to resist the tendency to Transition, the hideous conceptions that were all but universal when our "religion" was constructed and fossilised are utterly out of harmony with the more humane instincts of the modern era. But there are birds of pray who retain heavy vested interests in the ancient blood orgies of our savage ancestors. And now that the ancient flesh and blood cannot be swallowed in their primitive horror and hideousness, they must be swallowed somehow or the vested interests of Priestcraft will encounter disastrous collapse. And so the gory old horrors of bloody sacrifice and cannibalism are sugared over with a coating of esotericism, and seasoned with recondite moonshine anent

planets and constellations and zodiacs and the precession of the equinox. We have apparently passed the era when we can without disgust take a spoon and sup blood, and have reached the epoch when we are, more or less, content to take a knife and fork and eat moonshine. And many of the rank and file of communicants are too practical and unabstract to eat moonshine. At the sacrament a priest recently gave, without perceiving it, a bone counter instead of the wafer. The communicant, expecting it to melt in his mouth, patiently waited and sucked, but without effect. The priest, seeing him hesitate, inquired what was the matter. "Matter," said he, "I hope your reverence has not made a mistake and given me God the Father instead of God the Son? He is so hard and tough there is no swallowing him." O Religion, what burlesques have been perpetrated in thy name!



## CHAPTER VII.

### GO TO THE ANT—THE FAST DAY.

IN the name of Sir John Lubbock, what next? We were wont to be sent to the ant to get sharpened up a bit when we felt lazy—"Go to the ant, thou sluggard." But, in spite of this authoratative edict, I have always seen the sluggard more apt to go to his "uncle" than to the ant—his "uncle" of the three brass balls. I have heard, however, that, once upon a time, a very sluggish and sleepy-headed sort of preacher actually did—although unwittingly—go to the ant; and she did sharpen him up considerably. It was "Holy Fair" time, and this Caledonian bird of pray had to croak in the open air. The Scots eat Jesus very sparingly once or twice a year, and not every Sunday, as the Anglicans and the Papists do. The Scots are a frugal people, and they hain—that is economise—Jesus, just as they hain most things: it would be real extravagance to eat him every Sunday. In New Abbey, Caerlaverock, Dunscore, and such parishes as I was wont to eat him in, he was eaten only twice a year. But, then, there was a most fearful fuss made about this bi-annual eating. You had to "examine" yourself, and that microscopically.

To leave sufficient leisure for this "examining" you were given a "Fast Day," on which to do nothing else but "examine" yourself; and this Fast Day was the slowest day ever mortal man could possibly pass in this Vale of Tears. It was a sin to cook on this day, and plaguey near a sin to eat. I had to regale myself on cold porridge and

St. Paul's Epistles to the Corinthians, till I was wont to wish the cold porridge with the pigs, and St. Paul and his Epistles in Hades. But this desire, on my part, was wicked, the prompting of the evil one who was lying in wait for my soul. I was assured that all the wishing I could wish would never succeed in landing St. Paul in Hades, but that my impious volitions would certainly succeed in landing myself there. And I was rebuked with long and lugubrious texts for daring to turn up my nose at the cold porridge and ram-horn spoon that the Lord had given me. And then I would feel bitter, and wish the Lord had the cold porridge in his wame and the ram-horn spoon down his back.

It occurred to me that it was strange that to please deity I should have to make myself miserable. I could not believe, and I dared not doubt; and I often sought solitude, burst into tears, and wished I had never been born. I was wont to look at the cabbages and earnestly wish I had been a cabbage instead of a human being. A cabbage got his head cut off; and this head was boiled, and there was an end of it. But I—but I—no boiling my head and an end of it for me! I could not "examine" myself properly on the Fast Day. I did not like the cold porridge, I did not like St. Paul, and I utterly hated a book by an ancient soul-saver of Dundee, of the name of Willison; and yet not a hatred, but a love, of this book, and a spiritual absorption of its contents, were necessary to everyone who would not in eating Jesus "eat and drink damnation" to himself. O happy, happy cabbage to have your head boiled for an hour! For *me* there is no head-boiling for an hour; there is in inevitable store for me an infernal and eternal roasting in brimstone, over my carnal-mindedness evinced in my aversion to Paul of Tarsus, Willison of Dundee, and the cold porridge of Dunscore.

But I have left the ant with which I set out in this

monograph, and also the Caledonian bird of pray who, on the Fast Day, was doing his croaking in the open air. Begging the pardon of his reverence for my rudeness in leaving him, I will return to him first. I left him in the good old days, when the floor of the kirk was frequently, on sacramental occasions, the green sward or the brown heather, and its roof the stormy sky of Scotland, full of glint and gloom and red and angry fringes on the outlines of flying clouds. It was in the days of what Burns with graphic but impious levity called the "Holy Fair," when only a mere morsel of Jesus was eaten, and then a copious libation of whisky sent down after him to keep him warm. On this particular occasion the bird of pray, in order to be a little higher than the congregation he addressed, stood on old Elspeth Glendinning's grave. A tombstone asserting that it was hers rose at the head of the green mound under which she mouldered; and it, further, averred that the said Elspeth had fallen asleep in "lively faith." The Rev. Ebenezer MacHellcinder stood with his divine soles right over Elspeth's mouldering face, and opened the Book and began to save the souls of those assembled round him in their plaids, and accompanied by their Janets and their dogs. He "gave out" one of the psalms attributed to David of Israel, but which, all the same, referred to events some five centuries subsequent to the period in which the said David had lived, if, indeed, he ever lived at all outside the pages of hagiographical romance.

As the psalm was being sung it did not escape observation that the usually sluggish bird of pray was abnormally lively. He mercilessly trod and trod on the turf over the face of the saintly Elspeth Glendinning, and emphasised the cadences at the end of certain of the lines with what appeared to his congregation an almost impious vigour. The psalm over, MacHellcinder began to dispense in pailfuls "the pure milk of the word." Previously he had

been known to dispense this "pure milk" only in languid dribbles. Now, however, he tore away like a veritable prophet of fire, giving certain unimportant words—mere particles—curious, furious, and inappropriate vocal emphasis, besides a redundancy of strenuous, if awkward, pedal gesticulation. Then he once actually stooped down and *scarted* his right tibial bone, and spasmodically jerked himself up and rubbed his bifurcation regions against the edge of the saintly Elspeth's tombstone. The congregation saw in the unwonted vitality of the preacher evidence of quite an exceptional and pentecostal outpouring of the Holy Spirit. "Brethren, brethren!" ejaculated the bird of pray with singular emphasis; "brethren, the word of the Lord is in my mouth—the word of the Lord is in my mouth—but, but"—and here he scratched vigorously at his uplifted right shin, and all but completely overbalanced himself—"the word of the Lord is in my mouth, *but I think the very devil has got into my breeches!*"

The naked truth now struck the flock. Their shepherd had been standing on an ant-hill! The industrious insects had found wicked scope for their industry by crawling up the inside of the holy man's garments, even as far as the buttons of his braces—yea, further, even from the Dan to the Beersheba of his person. As a preacher he was a well-known sluggard; and he had gone to the ant, and the ant had sharpened him up. In anything but a prayerful mood, he tucked his Bible under his arm and went home to his Janet. She rubbed the holy man all over with borax and honey—the latter is mentioned often in the holy Book, the former never; and that is, peradventure, the reason that the two combined gave but little relief to the holy man. For once in his life he had been made lively, and perhaps it dawned upon him what the tombstone meant by asserting that Elspeth Glendinning had died in "*lively* faith." Now, you see, I have redeemed my promise by returning to both

the ant and the bird of pray I left standing on Elspeth Glendinning's tomb.

But, even yet, I have not said what I had intended to have said about the ant. I cannot, and I would not if I could, write with ice-cold method and precision like—

“ An every-day young man,  
A common-place type,  
With a stick and a pipe,  
And a half-bred black-an'-tan.”

And I have to write, as the Quaker preaches, just as the spirit moves me. I had intended to tell how going to the ant can smarten up plants before telling you how it smartened up the Rev. Ebenezer MacHellcinder. I find that a French scientist, M. Ragonneau, has just discovered how to make a plant grow from the seed in thirty minutes as much as under ordinary circumstances it would grow in as many days. Heretofore Nature had shared this secret with the Yoghis of India alone, and the methods pursued by these magicians in performing their vegetal feats have been often described. They plant a seed in the earth and cover it with a cloth. In a few moments the cloth begins to be pushed upward by the growing plant, which in a short time attains the height of several feet. Various theories have been advanced as to the *modus operandi* of this miracle, one of the most generally received being that the spectators are all hypnotised.

During his travels in India M. Ragonneau saw this feat performed frequently, and noticed that the Hindoos always imbedded the seed in soil which they brought with them, especially for the purpose. At last he learned that they obtained this earth from ant-hills. Now, as everyone knows who has inadvertently eaten one of these industrious insects, ants contain a large proportion of formic acid, with which in time the soil of their habitation becomes charged. This acid has the power of quickly dissolving the integument

surrounding a seed, and of greatly stimulating the growth of the germ within. After a little experimenting with the acid, the learned Frenchman was able to duplicate perfectly the Yoghi feat of making a plant grow as fast as Jonah's gourd. His further researches have led him to believe that this discovery may be profitably applied to agriculture. By infusing ants in boiling water acid as strong as vinegar may be obtained. M. Ragonneau has achieved the best results and most perfect growth by using earth moistened with a solution of 5,000 parts of water to one of acid.

So, you see, going to the ant can sharpen up a kidney bean, even as it sharpened up the Rev. Ebenezer MacHellcinder. An ounce of fact is worth a ton of faith. Jonah's gourd was wont to puzzle me. It grew up in a single night and sheltered the prophet effectively. It must have been simply a Virginia-creeper with  $\text{HCO.OH}$  applied to the root of it. The son of Amittai must have boiled a hatful of ants before starting for Tarshish, and have taken with him on board ship a bottle of the water in which they had been boiled. How wonderfully modern science comes to the elucidation and support of ancient theology! What ages Providence has permitted to elapse before, in the fulness of time, *I* was raised up to show the connection of Jonah's gourd and *formica herculanea*! But all's well that ends well.

By the way, missionaries who now, Jonah-like, go to evangelise the heathen do not take formic acid with them; they take instead, alcoholic stimulants. Says a religious journal: "It has been estimated that Christendom has introduced 70,000 gallons of rum to every missionary! In the great Congo Free State there are 101 drunkards to one convert. Under the maddening influence of intoxicating drink sent from New England, 200 Congoans slaughtered each other. One gallon of rum caused a fight in which fifty were slain."

Another missionary matter has taken a new complexion since Jonah's days. Nineveh was to be destroyed; but the king thereof, when he heard of the impending destruction of the city, ordered: "Let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily unto God." And it was so; every chappie, draped in sackcloth, cried "Lord, preserve us!" and every ass, also draped in sackcloth, cried "Ye-aw!" And this howling of "Lord, preserve us!" and "Ye-aw!" caused the Unchangeable to change his mind and save Nineveh, in spite of its having been visited by Jonah the missionary.

But it is different with heathen countries now visited by missionaries, however loudly the men may cry, "Lord, preserve us!" and the asses, "Ye-aw!" On this head let the Congoans speak and the remnant of the Maoris lift up their voice. Missions now spare neither Nineveh nor aught else. They who send out the missionaries do not spare even each other. Since the beginning of the Christian era there has been, according to Professor Leoni Levi, 286 wars in which Christian nations have participated. Of these 286 wars, 44 were promoted by ambition and desire for increase of territory; 22 were simply for robbery; 24 for revenge; 8 for honour's sake; 41 for "title and crown;" 6 concerning disputed inheritance; 30 in assisting an ally; 23 grew out of political jealousy; 5 were for commerce's sake; 55 were rebellions; and 28 religious wars, in which latter category is included the longest and most destructive of all, the Thirty Years' War.

Cannot we, as a people, obtain a solution of formic acid, and apply it to the roots of our common sense, and, above all, to the very much underground root of the Tree of Liberty? For, above all things, we are slaves, and, bitterest fact, slaves who think and actually sing that they are free. We are slaves to old ideas, old myths, and old cruelties, and the man among us who assaults them is

charged with blasphemy. O for one drop of moral formic acid to apply to the all but dried up root of the Tree of Liberty ! The nations must yet stand on the ant-hill of some fearful catastrophe before they are wakened up to a recognition of the real meaning and significance of individual and national life.

O those Fast Days, how their ascetic memory haunts me still ! Practically, five days of the week were occupied over the eating of a sorry morsel of stale bread *consubstantiated* into the body of Jesus. Thursday was the Fast Day proper, taken up entirely with preaching, praying, psalm-singing, and cold porridge. On Friday you were, ostensibly, permitted to pursue your secular vocations ; but somehow you could not : it was wedged in so sacredly between the Thursday and the Saturday, both devoted not to the eating of Jesus consubstantiated, but to the most intensely morbid consideration as to how you were to eat him without thereby eating and drinking personal perdition. The Sabbath came, and, with slavish solemnity, he was eaten in the shape of a morsel of wheaten loaf—not oat-cake—which you held between your finger and thumb. Then Monday came, and it was devoted to the spiritual and stomachic digesting of Jesus ; and, on this day, the dead weight of asceticism was lifted up to the extent that, instead of cold porridge, you had cold porridge warmed up, and generally singed in the process, perhaps intentionally, for the mortification of the world, the flesh, and the devil.

The Scots, in spite of their gallant struggles for independence, had helotry in their blood, or they never could have permitted Presbyterianism to have exercised as it did—and to a great extent still does—its crushing despotism over their souls and bodies. The birds of pray could have preyed as they did only on a nation in which veritable and legalised slavery still obtained, or had only recently relaxed its grip upon soul and thew. Although Buckle has



reminded us of it, we are apt to lose sight of the fact that the colliers and salters—*i.e.*, salt-miners of East Lothian—were actually slaves till 1775. If they deserted their service, anyone harbouring them was liable to a penalty of five pounds if he did not restore them in twenty-four hours. In 1675 Lord Wintoun brought an action against W. Baillie for detaining three “coal-heavers.” The colliers did not want to be made free, and actually petitioned against the Act of 1775. They had the heavy, sullen, oppressed look we see in savages. The last slave was not freed completely till 1799, and in 1842 there was a collier living who, as well as his father and grandfather, had worked as a slave in a pit at Musselburgh. Only over the spawn of such serfs could that blackest and ugliest of the nightmares of Theology, the Scottish Fast Day, have been permitted to trample. Scottish freemen, wherever they are found, have torn the gizzard out of their bird of pray; but the foul fowl still sits croaking “Nevermore!” on the chest of the Scottish slave.

## CHAPTER VIII.

GOSPEL, JANET, AND GIN.

ARISTIPPUS, the Greek philosopher, was once asked by a friend what sort of a woman he ought to choose for a wife. His answer was: "I cannot recommend any sort; for if she is fair, she will deceive you; if plain, you will dislike her. If she is poor, she will ruin you; if rich, you will be her slave. If she is clever she will despise you; if ignorant, she will bore you; and if she is spiteful, she will torment you." Aristippus expressed himself thus before the Christian bird of pray had been invented, or he might have added with bitter truth: "If she be the parson's, she is not yours, nor her children's; she belongs to that *epicene* gender creature which, unfortunately, is not of neuter sex, but, in the interests of mankind, should be so." Aristippus knew only the Pagan priesthood, and lived and died before the cowled goat of the Church had stood upon the earth, and remarked in bitterly veracious vaunt to the layman:—

"Your God, I hold him in my hand;  
Your wife, I have her at my feet."

To support the most appalling allegation of how Janet can be conjured with "Jesus," there is, as every student of ecclesiastical annals knows, a perfect worldful of evidence at hand, which, even if it could be discounted to a far greater extent than it has ever been, would more than suffice to establish the damning proof. One of the most recent exposures that has come under public notice is that of the ex-Jesuit, Count Hoensbroech, who was once the great

spokesman for the Order in German periodical literature. He is now its assailant, through the same vehicle, and had a remarkable essay on "Jesuit Morals" in a recent number of the *Preussische Jahrbucher*. His accounts of the amazing solutions of "cases of conscience" by his former colleagues would be thought incredible if they had come from a Protestant source. He confirms, from his own experience, all that Dollinger and Reusch stated in their severe book on "The Moral Controversies" of the Jesuit Order. Here is one of his instances: "Anna, who has committed adultery, is accused of it by her husband. She flatly denies her guilt." Then she goes to confession, and is absolved of all her sins, including the lie. "The second time, upon being accused by her husband, she can answer, 'I am not guilty of any such sin.' Why? Because she has been absolved from the guilt of it."

The ex-Jesuit shows, from accepted Jesuit authorities, especially from Gury (in his "*Casus Conscientiæ*"\*) that Anna is justified in each of these cases, and in a third case, which I will not specify, in persuading herself that she has not told a lie at all. Count Hoensbroech's object seems to be more political than directly religious. His essay is likely to be much used by those who are contending against the agitation for the re-admission of the Jesuits into the German Empire. That his impeachment rests on ignorance of the Order cannot possibly be urged, since only a few years ago he was put to the front as one of the most capable of its advocates. His moral is that a witness educated upon Jesuit principles cannot be trusted to give true evidence, since his "moral" teaching impresses upon him or her not the duty of telling the truth, but the duty of juggling with it. And he says no more than was said by Pope Clement XIV. when he dissolved the Order by his famous Bull of July 21st, 1773.

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\*Ed. 8; Paris, 1891; vol. i. p. 182, 183,

The man who, for wife, takes a clerically-trained liar to his bosom takes a potential, if not an actual prostitute. And, from the Papist confession-box to the Evangelical love-feast, the whole clerical aim is to get the women under clerical influence ; for, for ages past the entire fabric nicknamed of Christ has hung from apron-strings. The castle of Jesus is built on the bustle of Janet. Atlas bore the globe on his shoulders. Janet carries heaven on her head, and her head is not a strong one. All men who have thought at all have thought heaven into thin mist, and the bird of pray into as archaic a monster as would be a Roman augur. But he does not tell Janet this. He does not think it would be good for her to be told the truth. He does not attend church himself, but he allows her to attend—nay, prefers that she should attend. A man may do what he pleases, but a woman *should* go to church. It is good for her to go, and good that the children should. A woman that does not go to church is dangerous. This is the popular fiction with men who should know better. There is a venerable, but not respectable, prejudice that a woman, to be chaste, must be ignorant ; to have a pure heart, must have an empty head ; that she *must* be priestridden in some form in order to be a good wife and mother. Among their male friends men confess themselves heretics, but at home they keep their heresies to themselves.

A man who can witness his wife doing homage to an outworn creed which he himself despises, by implication thereby despises his wife. To consider that Darwin, Huxley, and Spencer are for him, but that fables that eighteen centuries ago were on a level with the credence of Galilean peasants are good enough for her, is a poor compliment to pay her. Who is he that he should keep the doctrine of Evolution to himself, and give her the story of the Gadarean swine ? Who is he who knows that his only redemption lies in virtuous effort in the Here and Now,

yet allows her to feel certain that redemption is possible only through belief in the murder of an ancient Jew? He deems it *safer* that she should believe these things. He believes it safer to live with an imbecile than with an intellectual and moral companion. He finds his companions and friends outside ; at home he keeps a thing to attend to shirt-collars and Schumann ; a thing he has to keep ignorant in order to keep it *safe*; a thing that, if not taught that the whale swallowed Jonah, might give him arsenic to swallow in his tea.

I have known of men who had given up all faith whatever in the Church, yet go to church to get married. The reason alleged was: "Janet did not think it would be a *proper* marriage if it were not celebrated in church." And the inference was that, if Janet did not think it a *proper* marriage, she would not consider herself under any peculiarly sacred obligation to properly observe it. And thus, next to his birth, the most important event in his life a man permits to be celebrated with a sham and a fraud. He permits a functionary which should long ago have been as obsolete as the soothsayer to perform his mummeries and pocket his fee. To secure that your wife may be true you deem it expedient to wed her with a lie, providing only that the lie be perpetrated in church. Should the marriage be ever so indecent, if it be only celebrated at the altar, all is well. Only the other day a Bradford lady wrote to a Yorkshire paper: "There is an opinion generally prevalent in Staffordshire that, if a woman should marry a man in distressed circumstances, none of his creditors can touch her property if she should be *in puris naturalibus* while the marriage ceremony is being performed. In consequence of this prejudice, a woman of some property lately came with her intended husband into the vestry of the great church of Birmingham, and, the moment she understood that the priest was ready at the altar, she threw off a large cloak,

and, in the exact state of Eve in Paradise, walked deliberately to the spot, and remained in that state till the ceremony ended. This circumstance has naturally excited much noise in the neighbourhood, and various opinions prevail respecting the conduct of the clergyman. Some vehemently condemn him as having given sanction to an act of indecency, and others think, as nothing is said relative to dress in the nuptial ceremony, that he had no power to refuse the rite." Peradventure the clergyman, about whom the lady seems to be concerned, would not a whit object if all the brides came before him in the raiment of Eve before the Fall; but, chemise or no chemise, the parson's prime consideration is the fee.

A marriage such as the Bradford lady refers to had, some years ago, attention drawn to it thus in a well-known London periodical\*: "Banns of marriage were published in the parish church of St. Martin, Birmingham, between Joseph Bennett and Ann Archer on Sundays, April 9th, 16th, and 23rd, 1797, and no impediment alleged. On August 4th, the above couple were married by the Rev. Mr. Blackham, after morning service. The woman went into a seat and stripped off all her clothes except her shift. Meanwhile William Loynes, the clerk, drew all the curtains and locked the church door, then placed the couple in their proper places, and put the woman who came with them to stand between Mr. Blackham and Ann Archer during the whole ceremony. After Mr. Blackham had gone by them into the chancel, the bride let her shift fall off, stood upon it during the service, and then dressed herself in fresh apparel." On this occasion the nude bride stood upon her own chemise; but the thing was all right, seeing that the Rev. Mr. Blackham was there. That was enough. With a woman no evil can be done by a parson. The most saintly registrar that ever walked in black leather boots

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\* *Notes and Queries*, December 19th, 1885.

would not thus be privileged to stand by Ann Archer in her costume of Eden before the Fall.

Talking of registrars, the birds of pray of all denominations hate them. They are trade rivals, who divert to themselves a portion of the perquisites which were formerly in undisputed possession of church and chapel. While I write the keen competition which obtains all over the country between the cleric and the registrar over the matter of marriage fees has accentuated itself at Shields. The State Churches say that marriage at the Registry Office rests under God's curse. What a Parliament, then, must we have, which has legalised a system of marriage so offensive to God? And this in spite of the fact that Parliament is so much prayed for, and actually has a chaplain all to itself to keep its account with heaven square and satisfactory! But this is all a part of the ignorant cant of the pulpit. Marriage in church was unknown in Apostolic times, and was not regarded as a religious ceremony. Many years afterwards, when Ecclesiasticism began to build up its throne, marriages were converted into Church services. Really it is disgraceful to let birds of pray loose upon the world without any real knowledge of the doctrines they profess to croak, or of the history of even their own Church—the blood-blurred edifice of superstition by which they make their living.

There have been instances quite recently in which the bird of pray mixed up the Marriage with the Burial Service—the result, presumably, of his having mixed his drinks; but, if your ordinary Janet gets buried when she ought to have been married, or married when she ought to have been buried, it is all well, providing only, “our own darling duck of a vicar” has had a hand in the matter. Better be really buried by a parson than married by a registrar.

Marital eccentricities under sacerdotal auspices do not seem to be confined to recent times. In an old parish register of Hackney we find the following entry: “John

Griffin and Ann Hayley were joyned in matrimonie the 30th of July, by licence from the Faculties, 1633 ; Michael Cox and Margery Winsmore were joyned in the same tyme by like licence ; for these two beinge very loveinge frendes, the said John gave Michael his bryde, and the said Michael gave unto John his bryde, which was the cause they were married both at one time, and became father each to other ; a thing not done before in our parish this fourscore and fifteen years." What actually happened on this ancient occasion I cannot quite make out, and what mutual interchange of courtesies took place between these two "loveinge frendes." But I do know that the Fleet marriages, which were under clerical auspices, and, as usual, with a view to "oof," were most accommodating. If while you were being married you were too drunk to know exactly which Janet you were being married to, when you sobered a little you could pick out the Janet you thought you should have been married to. And, if some one should object and assert that *he* had been married to her, you could run him through the body. Failing this, he could run you through the body, and send you to heaven, where there is neither marrying nor giving in marriage. The reason *why* there are no marriages in that elevated region has been pungently suggested by Swift :—

"Said Celia to a reverend dean,  
What reason can be given,  
Since marriage is a holy thing,  
That they have none in heaven?"

"'They have,' says he, 'no women there.'  
She quick returns the jest :  
'Women there are, but I'm afraid  
They cannot find a priest.'"

If, indeed, there are no priests in heaven, the place may be worth going to after all.

"What riches we have acquired by this fable of Jesus Christ," remarked Pope Leo X. to Cardinal Bembo. In the name of a poor preacher who had as much difficulty in



paying his taxes as though he were an Agnostic editor, and once had to extract the necessary amount out of a fish's mouth, clericalism has built a fabric, the brute wealth of which overshadows and menaces the world. The gross Mammon worship of the age may well point to the Christian Church for sanction and example; for that Temple of the Golden Calf is sordid, from the archbishop down to the crone who dusts the pews. In godly Scotland the election of a minister to the vacant parish of B—— was keenly contested. It was observed that the beadle of the church took a very active interest in the success of one of the candidates, who, to that official's satisfaction, headed the poll on the voting day. The minister after his ordination was told how much he was indebted to his beadle for his good fortune; he felt that he ought to make himself agreeable to his supporter, and, accordingly, he said to him one Sabbath morning: "Sandy, what was it in my sermon that led you to prefer me to Mr. W——?" "Naethin' in yer sermon ava, man; you being just aboot ma ain size, an' Maister W—— sae wee, I thocht yer auld claes wad fit me better."

And when, in the words of Pope Leo, the "fable of Jesus Christ" does not yield enough to satisfy clerical cupidity, the ministers claiming to be of Christ are wont to take to dealing in the liquid fire, the use of which they denounce from their pulpits, possibly by way of advertising it. Their income from the spiritual they eke out with profits from the spirituous. The amount of public-house property owned in England by the Church is notorious; and even in canting Scotland there is a wonderfully friendly connection between dram and divinity, whisky and the "Confession of Faith." In glancing over a recent Parliamentary return for Scotland, giving the names of owners of property licensed for the sale of intoxicating liquors, you will find the names of a disreputable list of birds of pray.

As far as I can make out from the Directory, five of these whisky ministers belong to the Established Church, four to the U.P. Church, three to the Roman Catholic Church, two to the Free Church, one to the Original Secession Church, and one to the Episcopalian Church. I am unable to trace the Church connection of the other four.

So much for humble workers in the Lord's Vineyard and the Devil's Distillery. They are generally so obscure that it is a pity to drag them out into the public gaze from the "dim religious light" of their sermons and their shandy-gaff. They are parties exemplary in their efforts to make the best of both worlds. Why do they not sell whisky openly in their churches to wash down their extremely dry sermons? If I were one of them, I should rather endure the shame than perpetrate the sham. Will such be surprised to find that, when they reach their destination, they will be burnt, not in brimstone, but in brandy!

## CHAPTER IX.

### PRECATIONS.

BETTER to have no notion whatever of a deity than to have notions which would demean rather than exalt him. The ordinary conventional Christian's notion of a god is a great big something set up at a distance to be prayed at, just as a target is a great big something set up at a distance to be shot at. I am not an Atheist—quite the reverse; but Atheism is an exalted attitude compared with Theism like this. Even as a boy at school it occurred to me that I should rather be the old sign-board the boys threw stones at than the old deity the boys threw prayers at—prayers because they *must* pray or get spanked. "Old Keate" once delivered himself: "Boys, you must be pure in heart. If there be any boy here whose heart is not pure, I will thrash him within an inch of his life." I never attended a school so aristocratic as Eton; but, all the same, I came in contact with a pedagogue who flogged me unmercifully if he detected me in possession of either a dirty soul or a dirty face. When the clock struck one thing, I had to blaze away at arithmetic; when it struck another thing, I had to peg away and pray: if I failed to do either with promptitude, the *tawse* did not fail to peg away at me. Now they flogged into me that three was equal to three; anon they admonished me that three was equal to one. I had to believe the *ipse dixit* of both human and divine arithmetic. The one was for counting herrings, the other for counting deities; and the same *tawse* enjoined both.

School prayers, like "the heathen Chinee," are "peculiar." In sturdy Caledonian fashion we did not kneel, but stood up while the pedagogue—the late James MacDonald, of Hutton Hall, near Dumfries—offered up for us his matutinal orison. Reverence enjoined upon him to close the one eye, and to seem even to close the other, when he prayed. But woe be unto him who forgot that, while the praying dominie might have one eye on heaven, he had certainly one on earth—was, in fact looking after two worlds at a time. Bargain for marbles while he prayed; or, to escape future vengeance, glance at the Latin declensions you had neglected. The prayer would go on quietly and evenly enough to the end. Listening deity was to suffer no interruptions for the like of you and your marbles or declensions. But, the *Amen* once pronounced (and occasionally it was pronounced with a spasmodic and avenging jerk, prognosticative of coming disasters), you found yourself seized by the collar and dancing a violent and involuntary reel, almost upon nothing. You had desecrated the sanctuary with your marbles or declensions, and now the sword of the Lord and of Gideon be upon you. You had offended the Lord of Heaven, or the Lord of the School, at all events, and you were threatened with Hades hereafter, and given a little foretaste of it then and there.

When I myself became a dominie I was quite a great hand at praying. My prayers were very fine in their way. Possibly they did not reach any higher than the roof. I am certain they reached that height at least, for I had excellent lungs, and did not spare them. If the prayers indeed reached Heaven and were taken down, they must, I flatter myself, have created some interest, as they were carefully prepared beforehand in Hutton Hall wood; and one of them was ornamented with a verse from Horace, in which I made doubly sure of the quantities. I did not feel quite certain the Lord would approve of the introduction of the Latin

lines from a pagan poet ; but I took care he should have no cause to allege that I was not well up in my spondees and trochees and dactyls, and even my amphibrachs.

A good deal of the style for which I have since become distinguished I first practised on the Lord. I do not know whether he liked it. Some of his creatures do. And some of them do not. I addressed him with great freedom ; and it is so I address his creatures. He never, as far as I could discover, objected to my speaking what seemed to me the naked truth ; but some of his creatures do so object. Peradventure Heaven liked prayers which were like no other person's. But Earth would like my essays better if they were a trifle more conventional. I will, nevertheless, remain true to the *shekinah* light of my own idiosyncratic intuitions, and let Heaven and Earth go hang.

The English Act-of-Parliament Christians pray by book, and this leaves them no room for originality. How England was to pray, what she was to pray for, what she was not to pray for, and the exact words in which she was to pray, were all settled in the time of Edward VI. For the last century or two the Lord has known all the prayers England, through her Church, can bother him with. They are all printed in a book, which is published at about sixpence for paupers, and at a guinea for swells. You would think that there would be no use in wasting breath in praying them, as the Lord could read them out of the book at sixpence or at a guinea (according to his means), and have done by simply observing : " Now, sinners of England, I know all your prayers ; keep your wind to blow your whistles, and stop whining and howling at me." But then England goes on reading her prayers to deity as if he could not read them for himself once and for all, and make up his mind which of them he would answer and which he would not. When that Book of Common Prayer was soldered together England herself, with the

exception of a number of her clergy, could not read, and she took her deity to be as illiterate as herself. It surely must be on the assumption that Jehovah-jireth is unable to read that England's clerics read her prayers in the presence of her fools.

In Caledonia you have no book to pray from. You have just to clasp your hands, shut your eyes, open your mouth, and blaze away. The Lord cannot know the Scots prayers off by rote, as he must have known the English ones for the last century or two, unless he have a very bad memory. As the Anglican places the book before him and opens his jaws we can fancy the Lord observing: "I know all this idiot is about to say. I have heard it, word for word, millions upon millions of times. Astonishing how I do not put an end to a nuisance of this sort! I could excuse the English for being sinners; but they are such incomparable fools!"

But, as the Presbyterian stands up to pray with no book or paper whatever before him, and his eyes resignedly closed like those of a dying duck, we can fancy deity interested, and observing: "Be quiet there with your harps. I expect some amusement out of this ass. You can never tell what a Presbyterian will have the impudence to ask for. The Scots are, to me, the most amusing people in Europe. I throw them bits of answers now and again, just to encourage them to keep going. Giving them a wet day at times if they ask for it, or a barrel or two of oatmeal, or a few mutchins of whiskey, does not cost me much, and pleases them immensely. They are a funny people when they joke; but funnier still when they pray."

The Lord is not far wrong. About the beginning of the present century the ancient burgh of Lochmaben had a minister noted for his pawky, homely sermons and the highly original character of his prayers. On one occasion he ostentatiously ascended the pulpit with his fiddle—his

inseparable companion—under his arm. He then very devoutly set about aiding the precentor, by means of the instrument, in raising the tune. Observing some little tittering among the congregation—for the vigilance of his suspicion was extreme—he took occasion in his prayer, where, as he often said, he found himself least straitened, to express himself in these or the like terms :—

“Good Lord, Thy people—Thine own peculiar, chosen people of old—were wont to praise Thee with tabour and with harp, with sackbut and with psaltery ; and Thy douce and loyal servants were seen dancing and skipping and snapping their fingers to Thy praise, and weel were they rewarded for it. But now-a-days nothing will serve us but sighing and groaning, and squealing and howling out dismal psalm-tunes, wi’ feet nailed to the yird, and faces an ell lang, and muckle disloyalty in our hearts, after a’ ! Gif Thy blessing reach us, it maun surely be mair by Thy favour than our ain guid guiding, I trow, O Lord.”

His prayer for the magistracy of Lochmaben was formerly far famed :—

“Lord,” said he, “we pray Thee to remember the magistrates of Lochmaben, *such as they are !*”

The said magistrates of Lochmaben did not approve of being brought under the attention of the Lord in this way ; for the bailie of a Scotch burgh, never to speak of the provost, considers himself an almost greater personage than the very Lord himself.

A notice of a somewhat similar petition to that for the civic dignitaries of Lochmaben is to be found in a volume published in Edinburgh in 1693, entitled “Scotch Presbyterian Eloquence” :—

“Mr. Areskin prayed in the Iron Kirk last year, ‘Lord have mercy on all fools and idiots, and particular on the magistrates of Edinburgh.’”

A student, delivering a probationary prayer before the

professors who had the appointment in their gift, implored :  
“ O Lord, give wisdom to thy servants, the professors, for they stand sorely in need of it.” He was not appointed.

Another minister of the last century famed for his peculiar prayers was the Rev. Peter Glass, the minister of Crail. The Rev. Peter invariably preached and prayed in good broad Scotch, using all the homely technical terms appropriate to the subjects he happened to have in hand. His parishioners being mostly fishermen, he was praying one day “ that the Lord would fill the men’s boats wi’ herrin’ up to the very towholes ” (*i.e.* rowlocks), when one of the flock concerned roared out, “ Na, na, no’ that far, sir, or we wad a’ be sunk ! ”

An Argyllshire minister, noted for the same propensity as the Rev. Peter, began service one Sunday morning, after a spree the night before, with the following pithy and original prayer :—

“ O Lord, what are we this morning but a parcel o’ easy osies? Grant us a big meat house, an’ a wee wrought house, an’ mountains o’ preed an’ cheese, an’ whiskey like Loch Lomond, an’ puil’d a muckle dyke atween us an’ the tevil ! ”

Whatever may have been his other deficiencies, a former minister of the Cumbræes (two mere specks of islands in the Firth of Clyde) seems not to have been wanting in local patriotism, as he was wont to conclude his weekly Sunday prayer with the following petition :—

“ O Lord, have mercy on Thy servants, the denizens of Great and Little Cumbræe, as also the inhabitants of the adjacent islands of Great Britain and Ireland.”

A well-known Lanarkshire minister of the old school, recently deceased, was so sensitive to any suspicion of plagiarism that he never allowed himself to make the slightest quotation to the Lord without furnishing the said Lord with his authority. He was accustomed to assemble



his household every morning for family worship, and on one occasion he commenced his devotions thus :—

“O Lord, we heartily thank Thee that we have been awakened from the sleep which a writer in the *Edinburgh Review* has called the image of death.”

It was evidently taken for granted that the Lord is a reader of the *Edinburgh Review*. And a student praying that the Lord would destroy “him that had the power of death,” went on with the quotation, and added, “this is the Devil.” His Professor, looking gravely at him, said : “Do you not think that the Lord will know whom you mean?” This student was outdone by “an unsophisticated brother.” This brother, after pleading for the fulfilment of a promise, quoted chapter and verse, and then added, “Revised version, Lord!”

A well-known Glasgow D.D., in company with a brother minister, was spending a vacation in Cumberland, and on the first Sunday of the stay of the two worthies they attended the soul-saving function in a little Scots kirk in the vicinity, taking the precaution to sit in a remote corner, so that the officiating bird of pray should not notice them. But the eagle eye of the servant of the Lord detected them, and in the intercessory prayer he so expressed himself as to make quite sure of some aid from them. The canny man’s words were these : “Lord, have mercy on Thy ministering servants who have looked in upon us so unexpectedly ; one of whom, if it be Thy blessed will, will preach in the afternoon, and the other in the evening.”

The Lord himself has, it would seem, been known to throw some humour into the praying business. When Sir Cloudesley Shovel, the famous admiral, set out on his last expedition, there was a form of prayer composed by the Archbishop of Canterbury for the success of the fleet, in which his Grace made use of the expression, “that he begged God would be a *rock* of defence to the fleet ;” and

God, it would appear, with grim humour took him at his word, which occasioned the following lines to be put on the monument set up for Shovel in Westminster Abbey, he being cast away in that expedition on the rocks called "The Bishop and his Clerks":—

"As Lambeth prayed, such was the dire event,  
Else had we wanted now this monument,  
That God unto our fleet would be a rock;  
Nor did kind Heaven the wise petition mock.  
To what the Metropolitan said then  
'The Bishop and his Clerks' replied, 'Amen.'"

In a Scottish farm-house I have, with the candles out, knelt with the family and servants at "Family Worship," and heard the farmer bring into his "sooplication" a certain stirk that was ill with "reid-water," and then launch into matters which I doubt if any deity that was ever on Olympus could understand, far less answer. On one farm of not more than one hundred acres in all, I have heard deity requested to send at least two different kinds of weather at the same time—dry weather to dry the "stooks" of corn, and rain for the good of the turnips. The corn was in the one field, and the turnips were in the other; *and there was only a broken-down stone dyke between them.* The Lord was, this time, asked to perform a feat which he declined to have anything to do with, and which, as far as I am aware, no deity has yet accomplished. All things are, of course, possible with the Lord; but there are certain things he refuses to do lest he should make a fool of himself.

One old Scot in his canny way was wont to utilize prayer in giving visitors who had outstayed their welcome notice to depart. He would say in his family orison, after breakfast, "May the Lord also bless Brother M'Lean, who leaves us by the ten o'clock coach this morning."

Even mundane potentates have queer prayers preferred to them. A begging letter addressed to the Emperor

Napoleon III. began : "Sire,—I received under your late uncle two mortal wounds—one at Wagram, the other in the leg." Another ran thus : "Sire,—I have received two wounds under your dear uncle, which have been the ornament of my life, especially as they were mortal. If these wounds seem to you fit for a license for a tobacco shop, my hope and my life will be satisfied. Please prepay your answer."

More than one or two petitions, generally analagous to the foregoing, I have heard addressed to the Lord when the cottar's or farmer's Saturday night came round, and the worship of Bacchus had preceded the worship of the more modern deity. No doubt Burns had, in this regard, heard all I have heard, seen all I have seen. But he elected to make "The Cottar's Saturday Night" a serious and semi-devotional poem, and "The Holy Fair" a satire.

## CHAPTER X.

### PRAISING AND PREDATION.

WITH the Presbyterians, among whom I was reared on "the pure milk of the word," which, however, disagreed with me, every man, as I have previously stated, did his own praying manfully, right out of his own wame. The Anglicans, among whom my lot is now cast, pray by book. Their prayers were all written out and printed for them ages before they were born; and all they have got to do is to take the book and read them, and thereby move heaven in the particular direction indicated in the particular prayer. This plan is easier for the cleric, and easier for the deity that has to listen to and attend to him.

The bird of pray reads his prayer; but all the while he may be thinking about his parsnips. He has read the prayer so often that he can read it mechanically. It is easier, too, for the deity, for he has heard it so often that he has it off by rote, and knows exactly what is expected of him to do—viz., *nothing*; and he does it. He, moreover, even if he have not a copy of the Book of Common Prayer by him, must know, through long experience, what day the Anglicans are sure to bother him on a certain point. He is aware beforehand precisely what they are about to ask for, and the exact words in which they are about to ask for it—not in good modern English, but in the now somewhat archaic diction of the time of Cranmer. He is an old deity to whom the prayers are addressed, and is supposed to like the old-fashioned forms of expression which were prevalent

when he was a boy. Some regularly humour him so far as to pray to him in Latin. He is assumed to be a ripe classical scholar, to have mastered his declensions and conjugations long before the foundations of the earth were laid, and to have read Cicero before Adam was born. The plan of using the Prayer Book exonerates him from paying the slightest attention to the supplications. He knows them all beforehand, and the days on which, respectively, they have been said to him for the last three centuries.

It has often occurred to me that the Lord keeps his Episcopalian saints on the south side of the Tweed praying after one fashion, and his Presbyterian holy ones on the north side doing their orisons after quite another fashion, that thereby he may contrive to break, to some extent, the, in the very nature of things, inevitable monotony of heaven. From Carlisle he hears: "O Lord, we beseech thee to keep thy Church [a fiend, not a deity, if he do!] and household continually in thy true religion [that is, the one that pays best], and that they who do lean only upon the hope of thy heavenly grace may ever more be defended by thy mighty power." Weary of this, which he has heard word for word, whine for whine, fifty billion times, he turns his ear "owre the Border and awa" to Annan, and there he hears: "Haud still a wee. We're aye gawn an' we're aye gettin'; neverless, we're no drawin' near unto Thee as we ought. Be about this hoose, the barn an' the byre, the peat-stack and the kail yaird. May a' oor ewes hae twa lambs; may that auld ewe that's no worth five shillings be worth thretty shillings again the Lockerbie lamb-fair. Keep up a' oor fa' dykes till Martinmass, an' the tod frae the fauld. I forgie a' men an' women their trespasses again me, but the twa auld wives o' Cummertrees brae. The tane stealt my tobacco spluchan, an' the tither brak my shins wi' the airn tings. O Lord, turn Thou the wicked frae troublin' me, an' my son Jock frae his evil ways wi' the hizzies and the jill. Jenny,

ca' the hens oot o' the parritch. An' a' the glory shall be Thine. Amen."

The Anglican clerics are of opinion that deity likes no kind of prayers save theirs, and they try to prevent his being annoyed by the supplications of Dissenters. Only the other day the Lord's Anglican servant, the Rev. Austin West, of Allestree Vicarage, Derbyshire, was going to and fro in the Lord's vineyard, pruning off this twig and nailing up that tendril, when, passing a certain cottage, he heard—what *did* he hear? The tenant of the cottage was Mrs. Thirza Pegg, a Methodist lady. She had one or two Methodist friends there, and she was praying—tickling up heaven by giving it a little bit of her mind. This performance may or may not have pleased Jah; but it certainly displeased Jah's servant, the Rev. Austin West. "Petticoats and prayer don't go well together," thought he. "Just fancy Mrs. Pegg having the impudence to get down on her knees and peg away at heaven. I am the only person in this parish who holds a proper license in the praying business. I'll see to this!" So he hurried home, got ready his holy ink and his sanctified pen, and wrote a divinely-inspired letter to Mrs. Thirza Pegg. He requested this lady to discontinue these praying-matches unless they were conducted, first, with his approval, and secondly, according to the formularies of the Act of Parliament Church. "Otherwise," he wrote, "I cannot consent to any such meeting being held by you in this parish, and I certainly refuse to allow a cottage which is Church property to be used for that purpose." Of course, if the Anglicans could contrive that there should be no prayers whatever except their own, their own might stand a better chance of getting answered.

Deity might easily, if his ways were as man's ways, get "riled" at the meaningless and incessant importuning, and cry, "Stop it, for goodness sake!" But he knows he is dealing with fools, and he good-naturedly lets them go on.

Well, he knows that their praying is just about as rational as much else they do, and it keeps them out of graver mischief. They have prayed to him countless millions of times for rain, and, in answer to their prayer, he has never given them even one drop of rain in his life. They have asked him numberless trillions of times for sunshine, and never yet has one solitary sunbeam warmed one solitary blade of grass as the result. But they go on all the same. They will *not* understand that rain and sunshine are regulated by laws outside the pale of prayer. But, if they like to go on making *stulti* of themselves forever, that is their affair, not his. Should he make them sane, peradventure they should not be so happy, and certainly he should not get as much amusement out of them.

The more blockheaded portion of the community have not only printed and stereotyped the prayers they address to heaven, but even the letters they write to each other. Among worthy people, but inclining to belly rather than to brain, I have often found copies of "The Complete Letter Writer." Lately a young male biped, whose amorous heart was doing the double-tattoo, and with no head above it to correct it, possessed this estimable volume, and searched it diligently for a copy of a letter by which he might propose to Mary Ann. His search was rewarded with success. The letter bore the title: "From a young gentleman to a young lady, making an ardent but dignified offer of marriage." He copied out the letter, signed it with his name, and sent it to Mary Ann. After some days of anxious waiting, he received a reply. He tore it open and read: "Turn over the leaf in your manual; you will find my answer at the top of the opposite page." He seized his manual, and, in the place indicated, found a brief and sharply formal letter, entitled: "From a young lady to a gentleman, peremptorily refusing an offer of marriage." She

was the possessor of a copy of the same manual from which he had extracted.

Now, this was clever on the part of Mary Ann. If this sort of thing can be done with the manual which contains a set form of Letters, why not with the manual which contains a set form of Prayers? I make the Anglican and his deity a present of the suggestion. Each or both are welcome to use it. And, if neither use it, I will not feel in the least affronted. Many a piece of advice I have given to both of them, and I had just as well have spared my pains. It is not on the basis of any very exceptional claims to wisdom that I have ventured to tender the advice; but it is on the assumption that I am certainly wiser than the majority of the birds of pray in this country, and assuredly wiser than the deity they pray to—an anthropomorphic imbecile, born of their own flatulent imaginings. God is. But he is not to be anthropomorphosed by dolts; and blockheads cannot persuade him to make a water-hose of himself to alter the entire cosmic plan of eternity and specially irrigate the back-garden of Buggins—because Buggins prays!

The following was overheard recently in the street of a Yorkshire town:—

Boy No. 1 was thoroughly enjoying a large apple, with profound indifference to the admiring silence of his two companions.

Boy No. 2's endurance at last gave way under the extreme pressure, and he said, "Give us a bit, Jack."

"Nay," replied No. 1, "tha's greedy; I niver give nowt to them as axes."

Here No. 3 broke in eagerly, "I didn't ax tha for any, did I, Jack, lad?"

"No," said Jack; "tha's a good lad; tha doesn't want any."

The deity the chapels pray to appears to have been got up on the plan of that juvenile Yorkshire tyke. He seems



to consider praying to him impudence, which he resents by taking no notice of the petition. On the other hand, if the chapel asks nothing, he takes it for granted it wants nothing, and acts accordingly. And thus praying and non-praying amount to exactly the same thing—namely, nothing at all.

But, however it may affect deity, praying is of the utmost importance to the birds of pray. It is in their interest, and not in that of the deity, that the institution is kept up. Once give up praying, and you give up them; and, instead of living lazily on your credulity, they would have to live industriously on their wits—say as fiddlers and hair-cutters. Their cue is to inspire you with the notion that you can pray for yourself—say for trumpery things like tape and cheese and herrings; but that, if you want anything really mighty, like escape from rape and war and thunder, you must get *them* to pray, and pay them. If you have only a boil under your armpit, you can enter your closet, get upon your knees, and take deity into confidence on the subject of the said boil, asking him to do away with it at his own convenience—the sooner the better—still, you do not wish to unduly hurry him. But if, on the other hand, you particularly want a good harvest, you must not have the presumption to enter your closet and to discuss with heaven on a subject so vast. This is just where the bird of pray comes in useful. A good harvest is not a little closet affair. You must go to church on the matter, and get the cleric to do the praying for you. Boils may be, but harvests are not, in your laic line of prayer. In a little County Court action you may be able to conduct your own case; but in an important action in the Queen's Bench you must employ counsel. Even so if it is only a boil you want cured, you may be able to do your own praying; but, if you want to have a good harvest, and to escape war and earthquakes, you must employ clerical aid.

Deity is well known never to give a good crop of wheat over England unless flattered and tickled up by the clergy. In short, all our harvests are just as the clergy see fit to make them. It is not a matter of ploughing, but of praying. If it be a poor harvest, we have not tickled up the clergy sufficiently with the edges of bank-notes; and, in consequence, they have not tickled up deity sufficiently with the edges of hymn-books.

Another matter. If ever you give anything to a cleric, or if, in his sleek way, he cozen it from you, never attempt to get it back again. It is exceedingly wicked to do so. What you have given to the cleric, or allowed him to sneak, you have "given to the Lord," or allowed him to sneak. To even think of taking it back is sacrilege; and in this England, when the clerical business was in a more flourishing condition than it is now, for sacrilege you were skinned alive, and your skin was nailed to the door of the church. But, even if you kept out of the way, so that outraged piety could neither skin you nor put salt on your tail, something must be done, by "the angels above or the demons down under the sea," to emphasize how enormous was the sin of sacrilege—that is, of meddling with aught that belonged to "the Lord;" that is, the clerics. For example, I will give an instance of how certain church bells, belonging to "the Lord," were once seized, and what happened, because it was not convenient to skin alive those who seized them.

Many years ago the twelve parish churches in Jersey each possessed a beautiful and valuable peal of bells; but during a long civil war the States determined on selling these bells to defray the heavy expense of the army. The bells were accordingly collected and sent to France for that purpose; but, on the passage, the ship foundered, and everything was lost, to show the wrath of heaven at the sacrilege. Ever since then, before a storm, these bells ring

up from the deep ; and, to this day, the fishermen of St. Ouen's Bay always go to the edge of the water before embarking, to listen if they can hear "the bells upon the wind ;" and, if those warning notes are heard, nothing will induce them to leave the shore ; if all is quiet they fearlessly set sail. But the bells never ring but they ring the death-dirge of some hapless wight. As a writer who has versified the legend says :—

“ 'Tis an omen of death to the mariner  
Who wearily fights with the sea,  
For the foaming surge is his winding-sheet,  
And his funeral knell are we ;  
His funeral knell our passing bells beat,  
And his winding-sheet's the sea.”

You may wonder why, because the parties who seized these bells could not be captured and skinned, that parties ages after should be drowned to atone for the sin. But this is a mere commonplace in theology. If you cannot punish the proper parties properly, punish somebody else, even to the third and fourth generation.

Although you must take nothing from the Lord—that is the cleric—he might, with impunity, take almost anything he liked from you. He could do this while as yet the clerical business was in its prime. The priest had no wife, but he scrupled not to take the loan of yours. Or he could take your horse, or he could take both your wife and your horse. And he could have your throat cut if you objected. Then he could be punished of course? Not so fast. No, he could not. He could plead "Benefit of clergy," and evade justice. If he could *read*, he could not be hanged. And the cleric generally could read just a little, and for long he took special care that no other person could read at all. With him was the "little learning ;" with the laity was the vast illiteracy. If the clerical culprit could only repeat the Fiftieth Psalm in the Vulgate version, the Fifty-first in ours,

he was set free. The first verse of that Psalm, beginning *Miserere mei, Deus, secundum magnam misericordiam tuam*, was called the "neck verse;" and, as the old song had it:—

" If a monk has been taken  
For stealing of bacon,  
For burglary, murder, or rape,  
If he could but rehearse  
(Well prompt) his neck-verse,  
He never would fail to escape."

So it was a difficult matter to hang "the Lord"—that is the cleric. He had only to rattle off his *miserere mei*, and, with your wife in his chamber, your horse in his stable, and your life's blood on his hands, go off scot-free to find another victim. But, of course, there was far more than a mere set-off against all this. He took your wife and your horse and your life; but by his prayers he guarded you against plague, earthquake, and thunder; and, if you paid him sufficiently, he kept you out of hell after you had left the earth. Let us hope, in the interests of fair-play, that he did not keep himself out of it!

## CHAPTER XI.

### “WHAT IS THE CHIEF END OF MAN?”

I HAVE asked before, I ask again: “What is man’s chief end?” The question keeps persistently insisting for solution; and turn where I may, and do whatever I can, I can find no satisfactory answer. True, the Presbyterian Catechism tells me right off-hand and with oracular cock-sureness: “Man’s chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.” This satisfied me while, as yet, I was innocent enough to believe all I saw in print; while, as yet, as a geographical fact, I should have received with implicit trust the statement, “The Atlantic Ocean is of butter-milk,” and as an astronomical truth, “The moon is made out of green cheese.” If one could remain always a child, he could retain his child-like faith. How sad it is that, as you furnish your head, you lose your soul. No turnip does any thinking. Are all turnips saved?

On this globe the condition of man, in the mass, is the condition of helotry.—

“The rights of helots, what are they?

The rights to labour and to pray.”

Speculative moralists may tell you what they may; but observation of Humanity as it actually is answers: “Man’s chief end is to be a helot.” We have invented fine phrases in economics and philanthropy; but, in sardonic mockery, they strike against the angles of the inexorable facts of poverty, slavery, and ignorance, which seem to form man’s

only inalienable inheritance in the past, in the present, in the future, world without end. There is a general consensus of admission that the labourer and artizan class are poor, and such as are honest enough and fearless enough admit that they are, as the result of their poverty, coarse, ignorant, and degraded. But it always seems to me that, if you want the best specimen of a stunted and dwarfed human being, of an unvirile, soulless automaton, you could do wiser than look for him in the ranks of the "rough."

Walk out on a Sunday afternoon in one of the poor but "respectable" districts of this Babylon the Damnable, among the £28 houses which paterfamilias leases, most mighty enterprise, with the view that he may be able to pay the rent by letting the most eligible part of the tenement to "a young man lodger," which economical feat can be accomplished by packing his children together in the coal-cellar, or anywhere, to sleep the sleep of the just, albeit the dirty. The prevailing window ornament in the district is a Bible, covered with an antimacassar, and surmounted with a fivepenny vase, holding a threepenny posy of artificial flowers.

Walk slowly. Take notes, tenderly, sympathetically, but mercilessly true to fact, even if fact be hideous. There is a group on the pavement. The vanguard is a rickety perambulator. One wheel bevels outward inelegantly; another, at a point in each revolution, squeals for grease. In the perambulator, covered up to the neck with the American cloth "apron," sits a child, a puny and putty one, half begotten, and munching with its poor gums the bone muzzle of a sucking-bottle, the discoloured india-rubber tube of which obtrudes from under the apron like part of the person of a dilapidated snake. Great heaven, there is already a shadow as of care and evil doom on that baby's face, and a hard haggardness about that all but empty sucking bottle, that are prophetic. Weak thing to enter

ere long in competition for bread upon an overcrowded and cruel world !

Who is this that wheels the perambulator? The he sparrow of the "respectable" but parsimonious nest. He is in his best Lord's day suit ; and he is making his stateliest stride, and turning his toes out with extra elegance. His shoulders are narrow, somewhat stooped, and across the stoop and the edges of the two projecting shoulder blades the old but carefully brushed coat is bare and shiny. No irregular feature redeems his face from mediocre, "respectable" inanity. He is a desk drudge, or a counter-slave, at a "respectable" pittance a week. If he ever had any "noble rage," "chill penury" has "repressed" it long ago, and you might as well expect, as from him, romance out of a jelly-fish or enthusiasm out of a clam.

He is an engine, fed not with coal, but with tea and fried haddock, and wound up to keep alive "the missus and the kids." He once loved, or heaven knows what he did, to get himself bound to "the missus." He is bound to her, as Prometheus was bound to his rock ; and the incessant care and toil to keep up the status of seedy-genteel is the vulture which is eating out his liver, and has already eaten out almost all his heart. He goes to chapel. He could not otherwise be "respectable." He has a god whom he involuntarily serves day and night. His god is a trinitarian one. His three persons are grub, togs, and rent. He is no idolater. He has no god but this. He knows of no other, far less does he bow down to them and serve them. A "kid" toddles on each side of the perambulator. On the left is a female "kid," and on the right a male. Neat, but colourless, children, with a career before them--the blessed prospect and privilege of walking in the steps of their parents. To prevent their walking in any higher path there is an antagonism more formidable than was Eden's cherubim with the flaming sword.

A few yards behind walks "the missus," a wan, wearied, devitalised-looking woman. She leads one "kid" by the hand, and the other holds on by her skirt. This offspring, besides one or two items which are happily in the grave, she has borne and suckled. She is old before her time. Her brain is acute in its way, although her mind has never ascended to loftier heights than her own attic, or to profounder depths than the floor of her own kitchen. Through her waking life, and even in her dreams, she is engaged in the solution of one all-engrossing problem, *How am I to make ninepence do the work of a shilling?* Give a man and woman some years of this, and it will unfit them to deal with any other problem whatever. The prismatic lights of humanity, of the commonweal, all converge into the bitter little focus of the individual. You may, with the whip of "respectability," drive them through the rites, ceremonies, and ordinances of public worship; but, in the more divine and spiritual sense of the terms, you may as well expect devotion from a set of fire-irons, or to rouse religious feeling in the soul of a mangle.

"Janet dear, here are the Joneses," signals the husband to his wife in an emphatic whisper. The Joneses are acquaintances and neighbours—also of the class seedy, also genteel. The wife thus signalled to is, in a moment, in an energetic flurry. She rapidly adjusts her bonnet, tightens her shabby gloves up into the furcations of her thin and nervous hands. Little Bertie, who is holding on by her skirts with one hand, is eating an orange. That is *too* vulgar! She snatches it from him, flings it down an area, and hurriedly wipes the juice from his face and breast with her handkerchief. "Quiet for God's sake!" she exclaims in whispered vehemence, as Bertie raises a howl over the sudden disappearance of his orange. "Quiet for heaven's sake, or when I get you home I'll, I'll—skin you!" But Bertie yells, and great tears roll down his face, which he



rub with his dirty hands till he presents the appearance of a lachrymose and amateur chimney-sweep—"Quiet!" No use. The Joneses are upon them with much How-dye-doing, and handshaking, and raising of hats! And, through all the fussy but hollow ceremony, Bertie had been vociferously and industriously laying up for himself a whacking as soon as he returns to the paternal roof. And, oh, aren't the Smiths affronted that the Joneses should have come upon them under such disadvantages! Besides, if it had only been *next* Sunday, Mrs. Smith would have been wearing her new bonnet, and little Ethel her new pinafore! How unfortunate!

Ah, poor souls, I pity you. These little trifles are the component parts which make up the sum-total of your lives. And, oh, harsh and mysterious Destiny, what lives! They are made up, my reader, of considerations which you, born under happier stars, may regard as beneath contempt. But contempt for any of the small details of humanity denotes only a lop-sided experience and insight, and a lack of breadth and depth of human sympathy. There is a worse phase than the poor little efforts of Smith to seem "respectable." This very foible renders him self-supporting, self-sustained. His incessant effort is to appear to be better off than he really is. He has not abandoned decency; he is not lost to his own estimate of self-respect. But there is a class which is, upon the whole, better off than is Smith, and who has no line of "respectability" it attempts to toe. With more to eat than poor Smith has, and with less than half of his responsibility and worry, it shouts and roars that it is starving; it strikes, it sponges, it throws itself upon the rates, it "demonstrates," it howls, it waddles in processions under red rags streaming from poles and blazoned with the watchwords of sedition. It does what it can to shake to its basis the fabric of human society. Smith, with honest pride, keeps the fact of his poverty to himself; but Buggins

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howls the fact of his from the house-top, and has a tendency to waste his time in wailing about it rather than to employ his time in removing it.

O it is a mad world this, with the thread of its awful weird being wound and forever wound from the distaff of the Parcæ. O Clotho, O Lachesis, O Atropos, ye are the goddesses indeed and of a verity, and all the other claimants to the Pantheon are only shadows, visions, and wraiths. Ye have wound up the clock of the universe; ye alone know how it is destined to strike. Ye have constructed the music box; with you alone, and not with us, it rests whether it shall give forth dirge or ditty. Behind the footlights of life we, the puppets, do the dance; but it is you who pull the strings which make us skip to mirth or march to misery. We know that we are here, but for what purpose is inscrutable. "What is the chief end of man?"

## CHAPTER XII.

### PRIESTRIDDEN.

IN an old-world legend in Herodotus we read of the doom of Atys, the son of Croesus. It was revealed to the father in a dream that his darling son should die by an iron weapon. Immense were the pains the father took to belie the dream that Destiny had vouchsafed. A beautiful bride was given to the lad to keep him at home. He was not permitted to go near the field of battle, and no martial weapon was allowed to hang on the walls of his palace, lest it might fall upon him by accident and verify the prediction of Fate. "Father, if I cannot go to the wars, let me go to the chase," importuned the youth; the wild boar has no iron weapon and no hand to wield one." To the chase he went, and fell under the javelin of his own friend, Adrastus, who missed the boar and mortally wounded Atys.

Priestcraft is the Atys of to-day. Terrible, occasionally almost frantic, are the efforts made to shield her from death—from the javelin of Doom. Demetrius, the silver-smith, who makes shrines for her; the politician who obtains from her a bit and a bridle for the goaded asses of democracy; and the whole swarm of self-interested Priests and Levites throw themselves between her and the iron javelin; but it shall yet quiver in the vitals of the more hateful than Lernian snake, the monster that is said but falsely to have been incubated in that antique stable in Bethlehem. And, like Atys, Priestcraft will perish under the weapon of a friend. Few of us, in the charging vanguard of the assailing host, are strong enough to bend the

bow of Ulysses. The wealth of ancient endowments is not ours ; the learning of the universities only few among us can claim, or the social status which would give authority and weight to our teachings. But the learning and research of the most scholarly and honest of the Christian divines are on our side. Cicero opined that two augurs could not meet without laughing at how they gulled the multitude. Neither, I apprehend, can two learned and intelligent orthodox clerics.

But, down to comparatively recent times, many laborious works written by divines, and dealing honestly with the difficulties of their creed, never got outside the circle of clerics, so that the divines had the doubt and the difficulty and the laugh all to themselves. These, for the priest, halcyon days have passed away, and the weapons he has forged are now grasped by the red right hand of the "Infidel" assailant, and wielded with an intensity, irony, and righteous bitterness unparalleled in the denunciatory literature of any age. The bolts already forged by the admissions of such Christian scholars and thinkers as Lardner, Dupin, Colenso, and the Tübingen school are alone sufficient to strike Sacerdotalism through her triple mail. I hurl my javelins in my own fashion, and the flaming lint dipped in pitch which is tied to them all is specially mine ; but many of the javelins have been fashioned by the Church's own sons. Alas for the eagle that, stricken on the cliff, sees his own feather fledging the arrow that quivers in his heart ! Alas for the Atys whose life's blood reddens the blade of Adrastus, his friend !

"And what will the masses take to next ?" I think I hear you inquire, with a tone of remonstrance. "The study of Positive Science is arduous, the pursuit of Rationalistic Philosophy is abstruse. Man, in the mass, is an eating, not a thinking, animal. He will never suffer himself to be subjected to the educational discipline which will enable

him to *know* and *understand* the position occupied by those in the first rank of present-day scholars, specialists, and thinkers." I reply: The masses, as the masses, never really *knew* or *understood* anything whatever. They understand Huxley of Eastbourne quite as well as they understand Saul of Tarsus. In fact, they believe most zealously what they understand least. They are perpetual worshippers in the abbey of "The Abbot of Unreason." What they believe to-day they believe because, in the past it was burnt into them with fagots, and rammed down their throats with swords. That is the atavistic basis of their belief; and the complement is that it is "respectable," exonerates the credist from the labour of thinking and the trouble of inquiry, and gets him through life on the plane of the least resistance. The masses have never made it their business to think. It is theirs to believe what the thinkers wish them to believe, and they always do so as soon as the thinkers win the ear of the ruling classes. The "religion" that gives least trouble and by which you "get on" best is the "religion" for the multitude. They can have it changed for them as often as their rulers may deem expedient, which, however, is not frequent, for changing his "religion" might induce the helot to think; and thinking would certainly upset the Castle of the Robbers which his "betters" have raised upon his shoulders. The substitution of one religion for another is, as far as the unthinking masses are concerned, simply a matter in the hands of their "betters." Defoe knew of "20,000 stout fellows ready to fight to the death against Popery, without knowing whether Popery were a horse or a cow."

The leaders of the great French Revolution abolished Christianity, and Napoleon, by his "Concordat," restored it. Men who have the proclivity and leisure to think, and have the resolution to act, simply wait their opportunity. Seed such as that they sow grows with terrible rapidity in

the furrows torn open by the bloody plough-share of revolution. May they never again have to sow in such furrows. France, glorious, mercureal France, has led the forlorn-hopes of Europe, and has seldom been permitted to share in the loot when she rent her way through the breach in the rampart of use and wont. Sluggish England is a century behind. On her mills and tills she has supported the old notions and the old gods. France had her revolution at the end of the eighteenth century; Britain's cataclysm must come in some shape about the end of the nineteenth, in social earthquake or military disaster. Republicanism, Socialism, Anarchism, Nihilism, Salvationism, "Blasphemy," and Dynamitardism dog, like hell-hounds, the years of the expiring century.

As regards priestcraft, tens of thousands pay so heavily to have their heads empty that their stomachs are empty as a consequence. Thousands of honest but simple laymen starve in order that it may not be possible there can be such a thing as a starving bishop. The very ass will have his thistles, or know why; and if you deny the pig his trough full of pabulum, he will remonstrate in a voice like to split your tympanum. But you can quiet the starving human biped by assuring him that he will eat manna in heaven; you can reconcile him to his rags by telling him he will yet have wings. I write in the interests of those of the mettle to think and to dare, but with a full recognition of the fact that they are few, and that, with the overwhelming majority of mankind, priests, and kings ever have obtained and ever will. Whenever, on any large scale, the attempt has been made to do without both, or even without either, I have been far from satisfied with the experiment. It is only the few who have been or can be priest and king unto themselves—strong, self-governing, self-reliant, who regard only as necessary goads and burdens for the herd the sceptre of the Romanoff and the cross of the Christ.

Human perfectibility ! the enthusiast's vision, the fanatic's phrenzy, the problem of Godwin, and the dream of Shelley. Civilisation is humanity's path, not to perfectibility, but to extinction. Read Rollin's "Ancient History" from end to end, and you will find that, forever and forever, it is the same old story : the hand of the semi-savage plucks the beard of the Roman senator, and the gold of sybaritic opulence is flung in vain into the balance against the sword of Brennus. If it were otherwise, civilisation would still beckon on the race to extinction. Men would become so "perfect" that they could not be born. Parturition is no painful ordeal with the uncivilised mother. But with the civilised mother, it is a laying of the hand upon the bolt of the gate of Death.

The head of the child of civilisation is large, and the pelvis of the mother is small ; and as the ages roll on the head becomes larger and larger, and the pelvis smaller and smaller. This can end only at one point—practical sterility. Well meaning, but not otherwise, people who dare the gaol in pushing pamphlets on the population question would do well to dispose of this aspect of the case before going further. Man is only an animal—in many respects an uncommonly nasty one ; and no animal, not even the fox, does all his work with his head. When man does so he becomes an abnormality and a monster, just as the mule is ; and men like Kant, Mill, Grote, and Carlyle are as sterile as the mule. The genteel classes, the lawyer and the governess, are nowhere in fecundity beside the Irish navy and Dorothy Draggletail. It may be because I am only half civilised ; but in the days when I was proud of anything I was prouder of my leaping and wrestling than of my Latin and Greek, philosophy or mathematics ; and I have a horror of civilisation's insipid smoothness and sordid meanness. Humanity has made little progress in a thousand years if she has gained Herbert Spencer and lost

Sir Galahad, has won the real in Egyptian bonds, and lost the ideal in the Holy Grail.

What, then, is the moral? We need not work for the refulgent day that will never dawn; but we can work to prevent the grey twilight we have from melting away into rayless darkness. In the world's work we will lose nothing from our aim being practical rather than Utopian. It is ours to do the best we can, but despairing of absolute success. Man, upon the whole, is a creature that aspires to little more than something to eat and somewhere to sleep, and the recognition of this plain, bald truth is honest to him, if it is not flattering to him. If it were not for religion, in its highest sense, man would be the meanest and unhappiest of the beasts that walk on two legs or on four.

And, intent on a lazy living and aflame with the lust for power, Ecclesiasticism has seized on Humanity's divinest instinct and cursed it into a cruel gag for the mouth, and fetters for the limbs. The holy aspirations of the soul that should attune man to the vast universe, making him kin to the nearest grass-blade and kith to the furthest star, have by Priestcraft been turned instead into a bane and a curse ineffable, into narrow dogma and fiendish rancour, instigated by which the human hand has applied the torch that set the flames to exulting over human agony. Smithfield, in the name of Christ, no more glares like Gehenna. The fires have died out, the ashes have been swept away. But still, in this England in which Smithfield stands, there are millions of men and women with altar-stones lying heavy on their hearts, with the darkness of the Middle Ages brooding upon their souls. In the name of Righteousness, come to the rescue! Help, in the name of Mercy! Help! Where the mind is in bondage it is but mockery that the limbs are free!

"The survival of the fittest" may be fit for tigers; but man, "whose heaven-erected face the smiles of love



adorn," should ascend to the moral elevation of helping the helpless and raising the fallen. If we want a high and holy ideal, it is here—here in man-service, not in god-worship. Be this our aim. We can have no higher which is not altogether impracticable and visionary. Our altruistic aspiration is our highest; it involves the conquest of the kingdom of self. Aim high :—

" Life is a sheet of paper white,  
Whercon each one of us may write  
His word or two—and then comes night.

" 'Lo, time and space enough' we cry,  
'To write an epic!' So we try  
Our nibs upon the edge—and die.

" Muse not which way the pen to hold,  
Luck hates the slow and loves the bold ;  
Soon comes the darkness and the cold.

" Greatly begin. Though thou hast time  
But for a line, be that sublime.  
Not failure, but low aim, is crime."

## CHAPTER XIII.

### CONVERSION.

PROFESSOR EDWIN JOHNSON remarks most pertinently : "It is an utter falsehood to pretend that the common people were ever self-inflamed with zeal for Christianity and against Paganism, if for no other reason than that they could not understand, and never have understood, the former ; while the latter was part of the long-descended customs of their sociality. The tales of martyr-soldiers in ' Eusebius,' and others of the same gang, are simply absurd on the face of them. As if illiterate people would insanely cast their lives away for the sake of a book-religion and the abstract propositions of a *credo* ! I should deny that any person in his senses has ever faced his doom in the interests of any theology whatever."

Quite likely no "person in his senses" ever threw away his life for a theological doctrine or dogma. But, then, there are not over many among us fairly in possession of their "senses." As regards a man's head, when theology goes in at the one ear his senses goes out at the other. *Then* the man is quite prepared to die for a *credo*. Dying, however, for the *credo* is not quite so much in his line as is making *you* die for not subscribing to it. The more ignorant the man is, the more vehemently he believes. The more intelligent he is, the more he doubts. The man who firmly believes in hell has a tendency to send you there for not believing in it. The man who has doubts about hell has doubts about the expediency of sending you off before your time to look for it.

Bigotry is the eldest daughter of Ignorance ; Tolerance is the child of Intelligence. You will never persecute your neighbour for not knowing what you recognise no mortal can possibly know ; you will not burn him at the stake for not believing that upon which, to him at least, there is no evidence to base belief. It is when you have no brains in your head that you take a battle-axe and go anxiously to work to find out therewith whether your neighbour has any brains in his. Had there been only more sense and less theology in human heads, millions of said heads would have escaped being damaged by battle-axes and rifle bullets. When theology goes into a head, figuratively the brains go out, and there is a powerful tendency to knock them out literally. Deduct the "religious" wars from our human annals, and we shall be found to have been a comparatively pacific race.

Let us see. It is estimated that one million of persons perished as victims to the Arian schism ; another million lost their lives in the Carthaginian struggle ; seven millions during the Saracen conflicts in Spain ; five millions during the eight crusades ; two millions of Saxons and Scandinavians ; one million in the wars against the Netherlands, Albigenses, Waldenses ; and one hundred millions during the Justinian wars. And this leaves entirely out of account such comparative trifles as the massacre of the Irish Catholics and the persecution of the Scottish Covenanters, and says nothing of the Christian extermination of from twenty to thirty millions of Peruvians and Mexicans. The titanic Christianiser, Charlemagne, baptised and beheaded 4,500 Germans in a single day.

If Constantine had not had a bitter feud against Licinius, there would have been no more worship in any Christian temple to-day than there is among the Standing Stones of Stennes. By declaring for Christianity, Constantine flung into the wavering balance the brute force of a ferocious,

fanatical, and bloodthirsty mob, and thus turned the scale against his rival, Licinius, who, in 324, was defeated and dethroned, and afterwards basely murdered for the greater glory of God and of his Christ. That Christianity exists to-day is not owing to any crucifixion on Calvary, but to the bloody and victorious swords of the Milvian Bridge which won the purple of the Cæsars for the despicable Constantine.

Give us of the minority an emperor on our side, exultant in the flush of military conquest, and our minority would, in the twinkling of an eye, be transformed, as if by an enchanter's wand, into an overwhelming majority. But the mere brute numbers that go to the support of any creed really count for nothing. Over the, to them, intellectually barren wilderness of the world the uneducated millions have ever drifted in the direction of throne and mitre and exchequer. Truth cares nothing for mere numbers. The illiterate herd is accounted by the Church as adherents; by why does the Church not go to the Cheviot Hills and throw its baptismal liquid upon the heads or tails of 50,000 sheep, and claim them as Churchmen every one? When Christianity was introduced into this island, we have it on the Church's own authority, that thousands of converts were baptised at Canterbury in a single day. There are tens of thousands in England now who, were the "consideration" satisfactory, could be *unbaptised* in a single day, and induced to spurn the Prayer Book and burn it, and pin their destinies for life and death to whatever paid better. The Church has no *real* hold; but it has a spurious one, mockingly conventional and morally pernicious. The *real* strength of the State Church in England may be judged by the fact that in the year 1893, there were only 1,500,000 communicants. The Sunday-schools were attended by 2,000,000 children. To this let us add 500,000 baptised Church infants, and we have a total of 4,000,000, out of a population of 30,000,000 in England and Wales. From State sources the Church

derives an income of £6,000,000 annually, and from voluntary contributions about £5,500,000. What a big and baleful sham !

As it was it is and ever shall be, world without end, *Amen*. The masses will ever be the masses, while the hills continue to be the hills. All the thinking they can afford to do is to think how to exist. With the man possessing no taste or opportunity for speculative and abstract thought, one god is as good as another—his business is not gods, but bread.

Unlike the priest, I will not prate to any man about the Trinity when I know that, by the direst and most inexorable necessity, the man's spoon is the father, the fork the son, and the knife the paraclete. Kings and priests between them have fixed these wide gulfs between man and man, have dug these unbridgeable chasms, and, over the abyss, to their forlorn and trampled fellow men, they shout their heartless mockery. Lessen the hours of the poor helot's labour ; give him bread to eat, and, at least, some of the conditions of social and moral decency, and *then* bother him, if you dare, by the whining about your gods, *père et fils*.

Canterbury, in the days of Augustine, presented no spectacle of "revival" that unthinking mobs have not presented in all regions and in all times. After Constantine had firmly in his hand the sceptre of empire the conversions to Christianity were multitudinous. "As the lower ranks of society," remarks Gibbon,\* "are governed by imitation, the conversion of those who possessed any eminence of birth or power or riches was soon followed by dependent multitudes. The salvation of the common people was purchased at an easy rate, if it be true that, in one year, 12,000 men were baptised in Rome, besides a proportionable number of women and children ; and that a white garment, with twenty

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\* "Decline and Fall," vol. ii., pp. 472, 473.

pieces of gold, had been promised by the emperor to every convert."

I hereby promise to obtain an avowed anti-Christian for every white night-shirt and a sovereign that the Church will give me, if it take up my challenge. So much for the depth and fervency of "religious" zeal. If you appeal to man's brain and heart, the process of winning soldiers for Truth is slow. But plenty of such soldiers could be enlisted for a shirt and a sovereign; but Truth would rather have one such aspirant as she has at present than wave her arm in command at the head of as many brainless hirelings as could find standing room on Salisbury Plain. So much for Orthodoxy's taunt, that Rationalism's overt adherents are few. Give her funds to found a college to train and salary *her* ministry, and she will dismantle Cambridge and shake Oxford to its foundations, in spite of all the orisons in Christendom and all the hosts of heaven. Under the banner of anti-orthodox revolt rank a band of heroes who have brought to the Cause their intellects, and, if need be, their lives; but no adherent has, as yet, brought a heavy purse and thrown it into the scale, like the sword of Brennus, to turn the balance against the gods.

Hardly a week passes but some rich, albeit obscure person gives his body to the worms and a large slice of his fortune to the Church. And in this age, when there is, in reality, no god but Mammon—worshipped not under his own name, however, but under that of Christ—it becomes increasingly difficult to stand up and do battle for naked, purseless, scripless Truth. The voice of one crying in the wilderness of Engedi is clearly heard and understood as compared with the voice of one crying in the wilderness of London, when the voice is that of one who despises shibboleths, and whose knee stubbornly refuses to bow at the altar of popular prejudice. Hard is the fate of him who is the unyielding votary of an as yet faneless and

ungilded goddess, for whom no Demetrius maketh silver shrines !

The Church against which I buffet has had no end of the most splendid enthusiasts, from Peter the Hermit to Francis Xavier—no end of men of the most heroic mould, of romantic elevation of character and generous singleness of soul. But we have now, to a lamentable extent, fallen upon the days of flat Nothingarianism. We have few Christians proper to combat, and few “Infidels” proper to bring against them. The Cross has no Richard Plantagenet, and the Crescent no Saladin Ben Ayub.

All is flat and stale, and bounded by the Procrustean bed of Mammon and Respectability. The poetry and glow and glory and glamour of the old legends and heroes are dying away, and polite inanity, and arrogant taxonomy, dubbing itself science, clambers to the high places from which the mighty have fallen. Now-a-days, to be desperately in earnest is vulgar. In an olden invasion of Ireland legend saith that the leader of the expedition declared that he who should first touch the shore of Ulster should be prince of that kingdom. There was a desperate tugging at the oars. O'Neill perceived that another boat, not the one in which he was, bade fair to land first. He hewed off his right hand and hurled it ashore. It touched the land, and the prize was won.\* There is now to be had for the winning a fairer kingdom than that of Ulster—the kingdom of Vanquished Error and Ransomed Man. Where is the O'Neill to fling his hand ashore? Hand, indeed ! You can hardly find anyone who would throw even the parings of his finger nails ashore for anything under the sun, without a year's calculation as to whether it would not be possible to find a better investment. Soldiering is laziness at thirteen pence a day, love is lust, and the age of chivalry is gone. Extraordinary

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\* The *Red Hand* was assigned by James I. as the badge of the family of O'Neill.

England produced Bacon! but the only bacon ordinary England knows is that which is eaten with eggs. The deglutition of pig's flesh is John Bull's conception of the inductive philosophy. John Locke! Who the sorrow was he? But Chubb's lock is well known.



## CHAPTER XIV.

### MAN MADE MISERABLE TO MAKE DEITY HAPPY.

THE latest report of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children reveals in a compact form some of the devices of certain of our English race. What shall we say of a parent who punished a child by putting pins into its nostrils? Of another who put lighted matches up them? Of another who bit the child's wrist till a gash was made, and then burnt the wound with lighted matches? Of another who left a baby in its cradle for weeks, till toadstools grew out of the rottenness of its horrible bed? Of another whose bed-mattress was a living mass of maggots? Of another who allowed the amputated limbs of her child to remain raw in order to extract money from sympathetic passers by? But not one of these parents had his son nailed to a stick to appease the parental ire roused over the eating of an apple by a poor silly Janet and her gomeril of a husband. Such a parent is not to be found in England, but only in Heaven, which, fortunately, is very far away, and, as yet, unrecognisable by the telescope.

Some years since Judge Porter was prosecuting an individual of most daring and reckless character for burning the gins, and otherwise injuring and destroying the property of his client; and, in the fearless and independent discharge of that duty, it became necessary to comment in strong terms on the conduct and habits of the defendant. The evidence, however, was not sufficiently strong to bring the facts directly home to him, and he was acquitted. On the

evening after the trial the judge was sitting on the piazza of the tavern, entertaining the court, the jury, and the bar with recitals from his inexhaustible fund of anecdotes, when the defendant, looking black as a thundercloud ready to burst on his devoted head, requested a moment's private conversation with him. The judge, though fully anticipating the nature of this conversation, instantly followed him to a retired spot, under the shade of some lilac trees, when the substance of the following conversation was overheard :—

"Sir, you used such expressions to-day about me as no gentleman can stand, and I am determined to have an apology, or to take instant satisfaction."

"Why, sir," said the judge, "my client instructed and paid me to say these things, and you had better see him; and you ought to be satisfied that he did not prove them."

"Sir, your client is a pitiful, sneaking scoundrel, and I have thrashed him three times, and I intend to thrash all the endorsers of his lies."

"Well," said the judge, "do you know what you remind me of?"

"No! and I don't want to know."

"But hear me—you have plenty of time."

"Say on then; be quick."

"Why, you remind me of a dog"—here defendant made an involuntary motion with his hand—"of a dog who pursued and bit the stone that hit him, instead of the hand which threw it."

Defendant scratched his head: "I wish I may be shot if I don't believe you are half right;" and, turning away: "I must go and whip that fellow again!"

In the bloody burlesque known as "the scheme of redemption" the dog has bitten the stone that hit him, not the hand that threw it. "Our father which art in heaven" made the apple; he made the Janet—out of a rib; he made the chappie—out of dust. Yes, he was the author of

all three. And the Janet and her chappie could no more help eating the apple than the apple could help being eaten. The entire event lay inevitably in "the decrees of God, whereby, for his own glory according to his eternal purpose, he hath foreordained whatsoever comes to pass." It was really deity himself who ate the apple. To appease his indignation he should have nailed up himself. Half-a-dozen tenpenny nails and a good hammer might have brought such a deity to his senses. We once beheld, with considerable interest, one of this deity's creatures, with a strong dash of his deity in his character. Through his carelessness, he tore his coat upon a nail in an old field gate. He lost his temper, swore mightily, called the gate "a—— old wooden soul," and kicked it till he barked his own shins.

His own son was not the only victim to the orthodox deity's morbid caprice for cruelty. To please him *you* had to make yourself miserable. Laughter is, apparently, not in his line; he prefers groans—that is, if his Church represent his disposition correctly. He does not approve of fine sartorials; rags or nakedness are more to his liking. Do not wash yourself; he is fond of dirt, if his saints are to be trusted. It was the boast of many of them that they had not washed even their feet for many years. None of your nicely-ironed linen shirts for him, with jewelled studs on the breast and gold links at the wrists; a shirt of horse-hair is his delight. Keep no small tooth-comb and use no precipitate ointment—what Burns calls "fell red smeddum"—he dearly likes vermin; and even if your sores, which are self-inflicted for his sake, are crawling with maggots, do not destroy them: his dear saint, Simeon Stylites, lifted a worm which had fallen out of his festering flesh and replaced it there, addressing it, "Eat the food which God hath provided for thee."

Let us see a specimen of a sample Christian saint. We will take Alphonso Maria Liguori, the founder of the sect

known as the Redemptionists. The members of a monastery he founded were yclept of the *Order of the most Holy Redeemer* ! This Liguori of "Holy Redeemer" celebrity is the author of the dirtiest book on earth, and it is a text-book in Maynooth College, and has its principles taught at the expense of the British taxpayer. I have given certain extracts from it, in Latin, in my *brochure*, "The Confessional : Romish and Anglican." It is fit only for a "religious" seminary, being too "blue" a type of literature for any ordinary *numero*. It is the work of a man whom "the Church of Christ" has canonised. Four popes lauded this worthy, who died as recently as 1787 ; and Father Dominic Corsano bore the following testimony in regard to him before the Sacred Congregation of Rites, testifying as to how he made himself miserable that his maker might be happy. Corsano speaks :—

"I know for a certainty that this servant of God constantly scourged himself, unbloodily and bloodily ; and, besides the unbloody scourgings enjoined by his rule, he was wont to punish himself every day, in the morning before the usual hour of rising, and in the evening after the signal for repose. On Saturdays he scourged himself till the blood flowed ; and these scourgings were so violent, and caused so much blood to gush from his limbs, that not only was his linen always covered with it, but you might even see the walls of his small room stained, and even books which he kept in it were sprinkled with it.

"Also, from what I have seen with my own eyes, and have heard declared by certain fathers, who are worthy of credit, I know that this servant of God macerated his body, also, with haircloth with sharp points in it, and with chains, as well on the arms as on the legs, which he carried with him till dinner-time ; and these were for the most part so armed with sharp points that they filled with horror all who ever saw them. I have heard say, also, that he had a dress filled

with a coat of mail with iron points ; that he had bandages of camel's hair ; and other instruments of penance were casually seen by me, and by others of my companions, notwithstanding his zealous and circumspect secrecy."

And here is the way a certain holy Janet took of pleasing the deity, who was not pleased with even his own son till he had got a nail or two knocked into him. The holy Janet I will select almost at random from many of her class is Saint Rosa, canonised by Pope Clement X. in 1673. It is from an authoritative papal work\* I extract the following *re* this holy beauty in her cutty sark of horse-hair, with a nice comfortable lining of nettles and briars :—

"She changed the stones and crosses, with which, when going to prayer, in her childhood, and as yet ignorant of the use of whips, she was loaded by her maid Marianne, who was almost the only person conscious of her mortifications, into iron chains, which she prepared as scourges, with which, after the example of St. Dominick, every night she offered herself a bloody victim to God to avert his just anger, even to the copious effusion of streams of blood, either for the sorrows of the holy Church, or for the necessities of the endangered kingdom or the city of Lima, or *compensating the wrongs of sinners, or for making an expiation for the souls of the dead*, or for obtaining divine aid for those who were in their last agonies, the servants being sometimes horror-struck at such dreadful blows of the chains. And, when the use of these was forbidden to her, she privately encircled her waist with one of them bound thrice round her, so that it never was apparent that she wore it, except

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\* The Collection of the Constitutions published by the Popes at the solemn canonisation of saints from John XV. to Benedict XIV.—that is, from the year of our Lord 998 to the year 1729. Superintended by Justus Fontaninus, Archbishop of Ancyra. Printed at Rome, 1729, at the press of the Revd. Apostolic Chamber.—*From the Bull of Canonisation.*

when she was under the tortures of the sciatica ; which chain was afterwards loosened only by a miracle, and its links after the virgin's death were found to emit a wondrous and indescribably sweet odour. Lest any part of her innocent body should be free from suffering, she tortured her arms and limbs with penal chains, and stuffed her breast and sides with handfuls of nettles and small briars. She afterwards increased the sharpness of the haircloth, which reached from her neck beneath her knees, by needles mixed up with it, which she used for many years, until she was ordered to put it off on account of the frequent vomiting of blood. When she laid aside this punishment she substituted another garment less injurious to her health, but not less troublesome. For beneath it every movement was painful to her. Her feet only were free from these sufferings, which, either by hitting them with stones or by the burning of an oven, she did not suffer to be free from torture.....

“She fixed upon her head a tin crown, with sharp little nails in it, and for many years never put it on without receiving wounds ; when she grew older, this was replaced by one which was armed with ninety-nine points.

“She desired the hardness of her bed to be such that it should rather drive away than invite sleep, so that, when about to sleep, the same would be both a bed to her and an instrument of torture. Her pillow was either an unpolished trunk, or stones concealed for this purpose ; which bed she afterwards so filled with sharp pieces of tiles and triangular pieces of broken jugs that the sharp points of each should be turned to her body ; nor did she try to sleep until she had embittered her mouth with a draught of gall.

“Near the time of her death Rosa, throughout Lent, alternately sang the canticles and praises of God every day for a whole hour with a very melodious bird, in so orderly a manner that, when the bird sang, the virgin was silent, and when the virgin sang the bird, who was most attentive,

ceased to sing. She invited, moreover, the inanimate plants, after an unheard-of fashion, to praise and to pray to God, pronouncing the verse, ' Bless the Lord all ye things which bud on the earth ; ' and she so visibly persuaded them that *the tops of the trees touched the earth*, as if adoring their Creator with a solemn veneration."

Can we not contrive a divinity that we can make happy without making ourselves miserable? As for the present one, how joyous he must feel when he beholds us squirming with the toothache ! And how rapturously delighted he would be if he could only see us fill our mouth with cold water and sit down upon the fire till the water boils ; a process which I have heard cures toothache—and I believe the report ! This deity we affectedly refer to as our " heavenly father." Surely he cannot be more at most than our heavenly step-father. He liked the sharp points which turned inward in the shirt of his servant, Liguori. How pleased he must feel to see you sit down upon the business end of a tin-tack ! He was gratified by the floggings which his holy saint, Rosa, inflicted upon her back. How vexed he must have been that flogging was abolished in the army ! How supremely he must have been glorified by the cat-o'-nine-tails !

Say you, these ascetic saints were mistaken, and that deity does not like flogged backs? Very good. *Their* deity did. If yours does not, so much the better for you. The deity of each of us is just what we make him. Man created God, in the image of man created he him. I am glad you have thrown off allegiance to an ascetic deity. If any deity say to you, " You can enter heaven only if you keep a whip, and occasionally—nay, pretty frequently—give yourself a sound thrashing," say to him, " Thank you ; but, if I cannot get into heaven with the skin on my back, will you permit me to stay outside ? " I am no atheist ; but the kind of God I believe in does not want the skin off my back.

My deity has no delight in seeing my shoulders skinless; but that these shoulders should bear the burdens of others who may be weaker than I am is pleasing in his sight. This hand of mine he cares not to see laying a scourge upon either my own body or that of my neighbour; but he likes to see that hand reached forward to help to lift those that are fallen, to succour those ready to perish; and he rejoices to see it bestow such a small but honestly-won coin as I may possess upon some poor brother whose misfortunes have been even greater than mine.



## CHAPTER XV.

### "HEDICATION."

EVEN the little learning we mortals have been able to snatch from the ruins of the mighty Past and mix up with our own paltry noetic accretions is more than can be assimilated by the best Smith among us; and if the learning of the ancients in its magnificent mass had come down to us, Smith might have been found bursting his head where he now bursts only his belly. And yet who can say? For even the trumpery scraps and fag-ends which we offer at the taxpayers' expense to 'Arry and 'Arriet are of so little account to those worthies that they will not voluntarily send to the Board Schools to accept them as a present, and it requires the services of hundreds of officers to compel 'Arry to accept of so much as even the three /'s when they are offered him for nothing.

Persons who hate writing, and detest trying it, yet set themselves resolutely to write when it seems to them that they may thereby save their little Bills and Peters from coming under the full influence of that detested ogre, "Hedication." Here are a few specimens of parental correspondence recently published by one who, in his official capacity, made inquiries as to the absence of certain gutter-snipes:—

"Sir peter is not butter yet but will come in the moaning."

"The raisin is becars tomerds dood has bun apent is becars the childerens had upen coofe."

"Plese excuse the barer robert who is come this mornin for been off bekase he had the tooack."

"I am sorey that jon is of skule as he is verry porely and his not hable to sit up from his muther."

"This is to certify that the bearer is absent owing to no fault of anybody but the *snowstorm*."

"Do not kane our joe has he as been bad and it as cost me a lot of docters bills to the head master."

"Sur Tom has been sick and bad, all night with been very poorely and have had to pulticer his back, and help him to keep his heart up, for you know he frets a lot to hisself."

"Sir I ave to kepe georg of schol on friday Afternoon has I wash on saterdays."

"Sir i am sorrey that Harry was hapsent but if he is hapsent agane I will let you know."

"Sir the reiaison my boy was hapsent was becaurse I oversleep myself and was not well myself with pains in his head."

"Plese excuse little davy beeing of, as I had to mind the baby."

"You will see by this that I certify that our John cannot come because he is bad, and I am fritened he is going to take something very smittle like fever."

"Sir I think that children are worked over hard like and so I thought I would keep him off to carry and chop the wood and clean up."

None of the "peters" would, if they were left to themselves, go to school till they were "butter," and they are not likely ever to become anything so useful. Hence the "moaning" of those who wish them well. If, instead of schooling, Thomas Dodd (parentally described as "tomerds dood") had been offered half-an-ounce of candy, he would not have been absent "becors" all creation had "upen

coofe." Ignorance is earnestly invoked and zealously propitiated, that he may make—

"The sun like blood, the earth a tomb,  
The tomb a hell, and hell itself a murkier gloom."

And, after all this jumbling up of heaven, earth, and hell on the floor of the Board school and in the little muddled noddle of the "kid," we wonder that England contains so many millions of people "mostly fools." How "slowly the Bible of the race is writ!" Anthropologically, how lately have we scraped together even the few senses and perceptions that we have! It is well that, say, 7,000 years ago we had no lamp-posts, for I doubt whether we had at that time sufficient brains to have prevented our running against them. In our conceit we seldom realise how our poor little senses upon which we lay such stress have come to us bit by bit in our æons of devotion to what Carlyle called "the potato gospel." Homer himself was blind, and may, consequently, be excused for never having beheld the colour blue; but it is doubtful if that colour had been seen by any of his contemporaries, never to speak of his predecessors. "From the rarity," writes Sir John Lubbock,\* "and in many cases the entire absence, of reference to blue in ancient literature, Geiger—adopting and extending a suggestion first thrown out by Mr. Gladstone—has maintained that, even as recently as the time of Homer, our ancestors were blue-blind. Though for my part I am unable to adopt this view, it is certainly very remarkable that neither the Rig-veda, which consists almost entirely of hymns to heaven, nor the Zend-avesta, the Bible of the Parsees, or Fire-Worshippers, nor the earlier books of the Old Testament, nor the Homeric poems, ever allude to the sky as blue."

But when "peter" and "tomerds dood, *et hoc genus omne*, do go to school, when they have no "upen coofe" or "tooack," what prodigies of erudition they become!

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\* "Half Century of Science."

We are told on distinguished authority, that "The fear of God is the beginning of wisdom." The fear of God being a euphemism for the fear of the bird of pray. The fear, however, of anything whatever is the beginning of folly, and the middle and end of it as well. And the fear of God is the most culpable of all fear. If God is to be not an object of *Love*, but of *Fear*, the existence of God is the curse of the universe. "Peter" and "tomerds" are, however, at school, where "Religious Instruction," as well as Secular, is given them, terrestrial arithmetic in which three times one are three, and celestial arithmetic in which three times one is one. And here are some answers which "peter" and others gave, mixing up madly the vile things of earth with the beauties of heaven.

"Faith is belief in what can't happen; hope is belief in what won't happen; and charity is belief in what does happen."

"The Act of Uniformity," said a little girl, "was to make everybody go to bed at the same time."

"The kings of Israel," said a budding theologian to a reverend examiner, "must have been poor, because it is stated that they slept with their fathers. If they had been rich, they would have had beds of their own."

"Why is it wicked to cut off dogs' tails?" asked the teacher. "Because what God has joined let not man pull asunder," came the reply.

"Jerusalem was surrounded by walls to keep the milk and honey out."

"The cities of refuge were intended for those who had unintentionally committed suicide."

"Titus was an apostle who wrote epistles. He was the Emperor of Rome, and his surname was Oates."

"The hydra," said a little Janet of five once, "was wedded to Henry VIII. When he cut off her head, another one sprang up."

"The United States is governed by machinery."

"St. Peter was crucified head downwards, because he mentions it."

"What were the Jewish feasts?" "Beanfeasts," was the prompt reply.

"Mention an instance of charity in the Bible." "They brought him a penny, and he said, 'Whose subscription is this?'"

Had blue not as yet been "created" in the days of Homer; or did blue exist, but had man not then been sufficiently developed to appreciate its existence? If, as I apprehend, the latter alternative be the correct one, what *is* the universe *per se*, and apart from our perception of it? Is not each one of us the "creator" of his own universe, and does it not contain only as many colours, as many sounds, as many perfumes, etc., as each "creator" has gumption to put into it—only this and nothing more? Why have real existence, and then perception to make phantasmagoria of it, when the phantasmagoria may be forthcoming without the real existence? Why have a dualistic system when a monistic would answer the purpose?

But, in the name of sanity, what wild examples of bungling are we! When Agamemnon could not see blue, what could the miry and recently decaudalised savage see that then wallowed and ate fish in the swamp where London now stands? His English descendant of to-day is proud of a rag on which he recognises red, white, and blue. But what sort of rag or flag had he at the time when Helen broke men's hearts and Achilles broke their heads? Doubtful if, by way of gonfalon, he had anything as civilised as even a wisp of straw on the upper end of an unbarked pole.

If Hector was not sufficiently developed to see blue, what red, white, and blue could there be for the savage on the Thames? I doubt whether he had a vocabulary of one hundred words; and I doubt whether the wide universe had

for him more colours than one—one only, and that the stale and uninteresting hue of the back of a jackass. Yee-aw ! We have learnt something since the days of the grandfather of Galgacus ; but we have still a little to learn and—a *prodigious amount to unlearn*. Better, even yet, have only one colour, and that the colour of an ass's back, than be inoculated with a crazy belief that our temporal welfare and eternal destiny are absolutely dependent upon the corpse of a carpenter that became revived in Jerusalem nearly two thousand years ago.

Open a free soup-kitchen, and it requires no salaried officer to compel 'Arry to avail himself of the benefaction. O that "hedication" could be furnished in the shape of a beef-steak ! What intellectual prodigies and moral paragons would then walk the earth and face the heaven and realise an *ante-mortem* Elysium !

Whatever can be the cosmic purpose in making the only visible aim and end of man the alternate filling and emptying of his internal cavity ? Humanity, ay, in its every individual, has been set to roll the stone of Sisypheus. In vain we ask why Smith was not so constructed that he required a basin of soup on the day he was born, but never again bite or sup—all his years being left free to be devoted to work. As it is, his years are not devoted to work, but to slavery, for his stomachic demands are such that he must do something whether the task he is at be one he takes to or one he detests, and practically whether he is well or ill. This is slavery under the cruel whip of that most truculent of slave-drivers—an empty stomach. A man is happy when he works for the love of work, and then he does it well. But if he be destined to be the galley slave of his own æsophagus, surely it is better that he had never been born.

There are, of course, men of mean talent and unambitious temperament who smile all day as they stand inside

a certain railway station convenience with a broom in the one hand and a key in the other. But there are vocations that are literally unhuman, and unhuman is the stomach that compels anyone in human shape to engage in them.

Would any man, to whom fate left the choice of being born or not being born, deliberately elect to be born if it were explained to him that his remorseless stomach would drive him to be, for instance, a "legger" for life? As to what a "legger" is, I permit a recent observer to speak:—

"Of all the wretched occupations—and I have seen a great many in the course of my travelling about—I think the most abjectly miserable is that of a 'legger' in a canal tunnel.

"There is one very long tunnel in Lancashire, and another of about a mile in length in Staffordshire, in the Potteries. The barges which go through them are small ones, almost of the breadth of the canal tunnel itself, and, of course, horses cannot draw the barges through, there being no towing path. The horses which have previously been drawing the boats are unharnessed when the entrance to the tunnel is reached, and are walked over the intervening hills to the other end, men called "leggers" being employed to take the boats through.

"These men lie on their backs on a board, specially fitted on the barge, and, working the legs from the hips, push the boat along by treading with their feet upwards on the low, slimy roof of the tunnel. In semi-darkness, in ooze, and in a stifling, foetid atmosphere do these men toil, and the effect of the peculiar working from the hips is to make them appear almost as cripples when they stand on their feet again.

"Work often falls off with them, too, for sometimes traffic is light, and, at other times, as last winter, the canals are ice-blocked, and even when they are doing a full share of labour they earn only about 3s. 6d. a day. Anything

more hideously gloomy and miserable than their duties cannot be conceived. Of a truth, theirs is a dog's life."

Of a truth, theirs is *not* a dog's life. No dog on God's earth had ever to do such drudgery for his bone. Penal servitude is light, and I had almost said "respectable," as compared with the function of a "legger," lying on his back in the darkness and stench, and, with his feet turned upward, walking like grim death on the curve of the arch to drag the heavy barge through the sluggish water. No Virgil, nor Dante, nor Milton had the ingenuity to allocate such employment to the damned. Who knows that the poor mill-girl sins in smothering her babe between two pillows? Is this euthanasia not merciful compared with letting him live till his stomach curses him into a "legger"? Mill submitted that if you, by education, raise a man to a moderately high mental and moral standard, he will demand a moderately high share of social comforts and amenities. He will inexorably decline to be a "legger." If it were not that children, and a good many who are not children in years at least, have such a rooted aversion to "hedication," and that the bird of pray has been permitted to croak for centuries anent slavery to your "betters," that is "pastors and masters," we would not have a "legger" on the face of the earth, or rather in the bowels of it, with his feet kicking upward to heaven and eternity.



## CHAPTER XVI.

### THE SNAKE-AND-APPLE STORY.

IN spite of the Mosaic statement to the effect that it was only some 6,000 years since the *elohim* first tried their hand at "creating" the world, scientists have been impious enough to come to a far other conclusion. But when mere science is pitted against an infallible Book, of course every one who does not intend to pass all his post-mortal life in hell (where, in spite of Mivart, there does not seem to be much happiness) knows that science must go to the wall if his soul is to be "saved." Such as have souls that can be "saved" or "lost" by attention or non-attention to theologians and their deity are hereby warned to skip this monograph, but such as feel that Ignorance is not the only road to heaven will suffer no harm from its perusal.

"In making soundings in the stony soil of the Nile Valley two baked bricks were discovered, one at the depth of twenty, the other at twenty-five yards. If we estimate the thickness of the annual deposit formed by the river at eight inches per century (more careful calculations have shown no more than from three to five per century) we must assign to the first of these bricks 12,000 years, and to the second 14,000 years. By means of analogous calculations, Burmeister supposes 72,000 years to have elapsed since the first appearance of man on the soil of Egypt, and Draper attributes to the European man who witnessed the last glacial epoch an antiquity of more than 250,000 years."\*

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\* M. Joly, in "Man before Metals," page 183.

Sir Charles Lyell estimated that 240,000,000 years were required for the disposition of the sedimentary rocks of this globe, and Darwin asked 200,000,000 years for the development of plants and animals ; but Lord Kelvin showed that some twenty to fifty million years ago the earth must have been a red-hot ball. Since then geologists have moderated their demands, and Mr. Clarence King is content with twenty to thirty million years for the making of the sedimentary rocks. Professor C. D. Walcott, another eminent American geologist, now raises the estimates to about 45,000,000 years. Professor Walcott's figures are based on the American deposits, and it is an ascertained fact that America, as a continent, has changed much in configuration since archaic times. The Cainozoic or New Life period (including the Pleistocene) he puts at 2,900,000 years, the Mezozoic or Middle Life period at 7,240,000, and the Palæozoic or Old Life period at 17,500,000 years. The American Algonkian period, which preceded the Palæozoic, was, he thinks, about the same length as the Palæozoic.

So much for those who have undertaken the subject of cosmogony without acknowledging any indebtedness to the Holy Ghost—by far the greatest, or, at all events, by far the most generally accepted, authority on the subject. Here are some of the figurings of those who are inclined to the opinion of "Inspiration," that the Lord did not vary the monotony of eternity by trying world-making till about sixty centuries ago. Jewish tradition fixed the creation at 3760 B.C., which, added to the number of years that have elapsed since the commencement of the vulgar era, gives the date of the present year as 5654 A.M. Archbishop Usher's chronology differs from this by 244 years. He gives the date of creation as 4004 B.C. There are no fewer than 144 variations upon this point. I will sight a few of them. The Indian chronology gives the date of the creation at 6174 B.C. ; the Babylonian, 6158 ; the Chinese,

6157; Abulfaragius, 6508; Julius Africanus, 5500; the Anglo-Saxon Chroniclers, 5199; Kepler, 3984; Scaliger, 3050. Rabbi Lipman makes the date to be only 3616, so that, according to him, the world would be 5511 years old at present, or 145 years less than the currently-accepted number.

Although Usher's chronology differs, as we have seen, from the traditional computation by 244 years, he is usually represented as following the authority of the Hebrew text. Other chronologists follow the LXX. and Josephus, while they maintain that the Hebrew text has been greatly vitiated in the matter of chronology, implying herein that someone has had the audacity to tamper with the statements of Holy Writ, and thereby endanger the "salvation" of countless millions. It may be said that there are three principal systems in vogue—the Long System, the Short, and the Rabbinical. The first of these, represented by Hales, adopts the LXX.'s figures for the lives of the patriarchal generations, and the long interval from the Exodus to the foundation of Solomon's temple. The interval is computed at 648 years (632 according to Josephus), and is arrived at by the addition of a number of detailed intervals. The Short System of Usher rests, like the mundane era of Hillel, on the passage in 1 Kings vi. 1, which states explicitly that the number of years from the Exodus to the building of the Temple was 480, for which the LXX. has 440.

The Lord did the whole job in six days. He has done nothing since—at least, nothing of which we have been privileged to hear. In fact, we should know nothing of him whatever if it were not that we are constantly being reminded of him by his servants, who, in spite of their being *his* servants, come to *us* for their pay; and overwhelming importance they attach to it. Six days for such a very considerable performance! The master can evidently get through his work; the servants cannot get

through theirs. There was a short creation and snake-and-apple incident ; but, over them and the like, we have ever since had to listen to long sermons, and often very dry ones. Creation was not a dry job, as there is about three times as much water as land ; but I have listened to sundry exceedingly dry sermons upon it—aye, and long ones too—although soul-saving before I was born seems to have been a somewhat more prolonged process than it is in my time.

Burnet speaks of Bishop Forbes, of Edinburgh, who officiated at the Scottish coronation of Charles I. (1633), that he had a “strange faculty” of preaching five or six hours at a time. Dr. Burgess and Mr. Marshall one fast-day, before the House of Commons (November, 1640), occupied, it is asserted, at least seven hours between them. South once went *incognita* to hear a certain Mr. Lobb, a dissenting bird of pray, who, after giving out his text, split it up into twenty-six divisions, whereupon the doctor rose, and, nudging a friend who accompanied him, said : “ Let us go home for our gowns and slippers, for I see this man will make a night of it.”

The men of now-a-days will let their souls go to Sathanus rather than endure such long sermons as their fathers endured. Instantaneous photography and instantaneous conversions are two great facts of the age. The late Charles Haddon Spurgeon placed it on record that he was converted by a ranting flapdoodle throwing up his hands and opening his jaws, and crying three times, “ Look ! look ! look ! ” This did the trick. C. H. S. had “ found Jesus.” Queer notion this finding Jesus. Is he addicted to playing at the game of hide-and-seek ? Had the flapdoodle, instead of “ Look ! look ! look ! ” cried “ Think ! think ! think ! ” C. H. S. might have left the world a wiser, if not, according to his lights, a worthier man. But “ Think ! think ! think ! ” is the recipe for losing Jesus, not for finding him. A certain American stepped into a chapel in

Boston to find Jesus. Away cantered the preacher till he got as far as "and fourthly, my brethren," when this American looked at his watch, and rose and walked out. "Hulloa! out already?" remarked a friend who met him outside. "Yes," quoth the deserter; "I'm darned if I have not set for twenty minutes, and I feel no effect. If a man cannot strike ile in twenty minutes, he's either got an uncommon bad location, or he's boring with the wrong tool." The instantaneous process is all the vogue now-a-days, both as regards photography and salvation.

Of course, if you know the particular type of sinner you have before you, you have a great advantage if you wish to try the instantaneous process. If you can look dramatically in the direction in which some particular delinquent sits and cry, "Thou murderer!" or "Thou adulterer!" or "Thou swindler!" as the case may be, and you just hit the nail on the head, the one preached at may "find Jesus" before you could say Jack Robson. But there are more difficult cases. A missionary was recently sent to a mining village in Lancashire to try to raise the moral tone of the people. He was a stranger to miners, and, wishing to find out the more important sins of his new congregation, he questioned the keeper of the mission hall. "If you will kindly tell me," he asked, "in what course of iniquity these people's inclinations run, I shall be the better able to point out the errors of their ways." To this the hall-keeper replied, "Oh, ye can fire away at them just how you like; they are all-round sinners, and ye can't miss them!" In a case of this kind it may be true that you "can't miss them;" but, in another sense, you can't hit them. The target is too general. Bad material upon which to try the instantaneous process.

All this "saving," instantaneous and otherwise, is to indemnify us against the paying of a debt which was contracted very long ago by an ancestor of ours, but which

is not yet barred by the Statute of Limitations. One merciful thing is that our creditor is no small and obscure person that our non-payment of the debt is likely to bring to ruin. Dr. Charters, the Border antiquary, had lent five pounds to a Hawick carter, who evidently had not the slightest intention of repaying the money. Several years afterwards the two met face to face on the Auld Brig, and the doctor craved his long-lent sum from the debtor. Imagine his surprise, however, when the carter answered him thus: "I hae mony creditors, and I mak' three classes o' them, doctor. In the first place, I hae them that canna want it; secondly, I hae them that neither can nor will want it; and, thirdly, I hae them that baith can and will want it." "Then, I suppose," said the doctor, "that I am included in the third class?" "'Deed are ye, sir," was the ready answer of the carter, as he proceeded on his way, to the utter dumfounderment of his creditor. As far as our debt to him is concerned, our creditor both can and will want it.

You might hope that we might get rid of this debt by getting more into our heads. Of course we might; but then the getting of anything into our heads is just where the difficulty lies. We have a system of national education which costs a good deal, and you would think we might soon, as a people, have sufficient brains to wipe out the old debt incurred so very long ago in Eden by a Janet and a snake. But no, the debt bids fair to stand against us for a long time yet unliquidated. Smith's children as we shewed in last chapter are stomachically, but far from intellectually, hungry. From reliable returns we find that the ignorance of children in the elementary schools as to some of the simplest facts of existence is appalling. And, with reference to any possible existence after death, the character of the "knowledge" is no less vague and grotesque. An author on education,

President Stanley Hall, who has made the study of childhood a speciality, found that a large proportion of children of six years had never seen the stars—that is, had never observed them—and had no idea about them; thirty-five per cent. of the number examined had never been in the country; twenty per cent. did not know that milk came from the cow; more than half were unaware that wooden things were made from trees; many had no idea of colour, others had never seen pigs or a robin; and, actually, a large proportion could not tell where the different members of their face and limbs were. Their notions on spiritual subjects were still more absurd. God to them was, variously, a big blue man, who poured rain out of great buckets, thumped clouds to make thunder, put the sun and moon to bed, took dead people, birds, and broken dolls up to the sky, and deposited babies on the earth.

Certain of the "Progressists" want to give the young at the elementary schools "Free Breakfasts." I will guarantee that these breakfasts will have ample justice done to them. They who take as little free geography as possible will take as much free coffee as they can get. If learning could be put into a bun, just as currants are, we should have this England of ours swarming with perfect prodigies of erudition. We have two sets of viscera, the occipital and the abdominal. And, as a race, it may be truly predicated of us that the former is supinely sluggish, and the latter most rapaciously active. Over the door of the former is inscribed, "Thank you, I have enough." Over the portal of the latter blazes the horse-leach's motto, "Give! Give! Give!"

Is there somebody walking in front of you on the street? Do you wish to sum him up epigrammatically? Just say to yourself: "There goes a lazy brain and an active belly." You may be wrong, say twenty times—not oftener—in a lifetime. When you say, "There goes a lazy brain and an active belly," say it to yourself, not to the

person so described ; for the person so described hates nothing so much as the truth ; and, in proof of his hatred of it, if he hear your remark, he will turn round upon you, and try to convince you that he is a most intelligent person by thrashing enlightenment into your head with his umbrella, till there is nothing left of that utensil except the central stick, a few broken ribs, and a number of flying tatters. Belly-over-Brain always argues thus : individually, with an umbrella ; collectively, with a battery of Maxim guns. With him, his brains are used only to fill his belly ; and, with him, any person who uses his brains for aught other and higher is a crank and a fool.

If Belly-over-Brain reads books, they are books connected with his "profession"—that is, connected with the particular method by which he assuages the cravings of his belly. With him it is all belly, a wretched prostration before the *æsophagus*, a degrading worship of the *duodenum* and the *colon-transverse*. Does his "profession," for which he has made himself a lop-sided automaton, bring him more than his belly can hold ? Then the surplus goes upon whigmaleeries for his "establishment," and *fal-de-ral*s for his Janets. And this is "success," in this acceptation one of the most abominable words in the English language.

These things being so, there is likely to be a good deal of preaching yet before the crack of doom, and a good deal of money is likely to go into the pockets of the clergy ; and the old debt incurred in Eden over the affair between the Janet and the snake is likely to be as far as ever from being settled.

By the bye, it is as well to be particular in a matter like this, since from it such weighty issues hang. What was the fruit to which the snake tempted the Janet, and to which the Janet tempted the John ? The apple is usually spoken of as the "forbidden fruit" of Eden ; but the idea is by no means universal. Painters have generally introduced a



fruit resembling the apple in picturing the scene in Paradise; and Milton, in his sublime epic, expressly mentions this fruit in a passage where the tempter, in the form of a serpent, addresses Eve thus:—

“ I was at first as other beasts that graze  
 The trodden herb, of abject thoughts and low,  
 As was my food, nor aught but food discerned,  
 Or sex, and apprehended nothing high :  
 Till on a day, roving the field, I chanced  
 A goodly tree far distant to behold,  
 Loaded with fruit of fairest colours mixed,  
 Ruddy and gold. I nearer drew to gaze ;  
 When from the boughs a savoury odour blown,  
 Grateful to appetite, more pleased my sense  
 Than smell of sweetest fennel, or the teats  
 Of ewe or goat dropping with milk at even,  
 Unsucked of lamb or kid that tend their play—  
 To satisfy the sharp desire I had  
 Of tasting those fair *apples*, I resolved  
 Not to defer.” . . . .

Neither in the Bible nor in the Koran is the name of the forbidden fruit mentioned ; but in a note to the second chapter of the latter book Sale says the Mohammedans have various opinions. “Some say it was an ear of wheat ; some will have it to have been a fig tree, and others a vine.”

The priest’s “profession” is to expound the book that contains the snake-and-apple story. Millions upon millions of money have been made out of that snake and apple. The story has been vastly profitable for a period of nearly 2,000 years. If it were not for the heavy preponderance of belly-over-brain, it would not last a semi-decade. Through all these 2,000 years, if anyone with more brain than belly and more valour than discretion dared to openly doubt about that snake, or to turn up his nose at that apple, Priestcraft was down upon him like an avalanche ; for empty would soon be the belly of the priest if aught serious

should happen to that lucrative snake or that most profitable apple.

And Statecraft allied itself with Priestcraft. Priestcraft said to Statecraft: "If you keep the crown of Heaven on Jehovah, I will keep the crown of England on you." And Statecraft shook hands with Priestcraft, and said: "Done! It is a bargain!" And they became tyrants both. Interfere with the Church! What would happen you? Let the shade of Cranmer tell. Interfere with the State! Let the *manes* of Leighton speak. In a catalogue of a library lately offered by public auction, we find the following: "Leighton (A.), 'An Appeal to Parliament' (1628). For writing this book the author was twice publicly whipped and pilloried in Cheapside, his ears cut off, his nose twice slit, his cheeks branded with a red-hot iron, and was eleven years imprisoned in the Fleet."

In this world of Belly-over-Brain what horrors that must have made hell shudder have been enacted under the auspices of that snake and that apple, and the man-god that came to set right what they had put wrong! Are the inhabitants of the other planets sane, and does Providence reserve this as the Idiot Asylum of the universe?

## CHAPTER XVII.

### THE LAST WILL AND TESTAMENT.

THE New Testament—that is, the New Will—is the only will under which the vast majority of us have, or shall have, any claim whatever as legatees. And Satan has entered a *caveat*, and we have got nothing; neither are we likely to get anything—except mischief. There is now a good deal of doubt as to the genuineness of the will; and, even assuming it to be genuine, there has been a question raised by Jules Soury and others as to the mental state of the testator—in short, the question is raised, Was he “of a disposing state of mind?” in blunt and in brief, Was he *sane*? The document (of which the counsel on neither side have seen the original, but only alleged copies) purports to be the Last Will and Testament of a man without a shirt. Now, nobody pretends that he has seen the signature of this said man. Certain among the Fathers have denied that he could write.

There are no signatures of witnesses to this Will and Testament. Those alleged to have been most intimately concerned with it and its testator are described as “unlearned and ignorant men,” eel and gudgeon fishers, and the like, not one of whom could have written, “This is my here lobster,” to have saved his life. Great Croesus, what a will! And yet, as I have remarked, it is the only will under which the vast majority of us inherit anything whatever.

And what have we inherited under it? Well, I can tell you. For far over a thousand years, over this will, we

have had our heads split and our buttocks burnt. Over the propounding of it we have inherited much of a sort. We have had the foulest cells in dungeons ; we have writhed on the rack, we have agonised on the wheel.

Over disputes in the propounding of this will the roofs of earth's fairest cities have thundered down in flame ; and earth's greenest plains have reeked up bloody red to the blue of heaven. We have, in the name of "the Prince of Peace," had peace driven from the world. We have had the reign of hatred, and, over this unsigned, unwitnessed will, we have had "a man's enemies those of his own household." We have had, over this testament, the husband bring the wife of his bosom, and the father his own daughters to the stake. We have had unborn babes ripped from the womb and tossed on spears. We have, over this alleged testator and his will had the inmost sanctities of home life violated, and outraged and slaughtered women left to be devoured by dogs and sows. Over this alleged testator and his will we have had the living babe flung into the grave of his murdered mother, and covered over by the turf, clapped down by a spade that clapped for Christ's sake. We have had dark centuries of Ignorance treading on the heels of centuries of black Bigotry. We have had the art, literature, and science of the preceding pagan civilisation banned and execrated. Plato was suppressed to make room for Tertullian, an ignorant negro. Cicero was forbidden that stress might be laid upon Eusebius, a liar who could have lied the soles off the boots of Ananias.

Arabic astronomy and Jewish medical science were stamped out to make room for Thomas Aquinas with his "Let us discourse on the substance of absolute and relative angels : in whatever relation they stand to time and space, and how many may concentrate on the tip of a needle. Whether they are of matter, and what kind ; whether they can think ; whether they delight in carnal or only

spiritual enjoyments; whether they can multiply; whether they are proud and argumentative." This indicates the species of *learning* that concentrated round Jesus and his last will and testament—a will unsigned, unwitnessed, and so higgledy-piggledy, incongruous, unsystematic, confused, nonsensical, and self-contradictory that it is excessively difficult to find in it anything definite and sane, more difficult than to find a needle lost in a hay-stack. Could the bitter irony of Fate not have left us paupers without an interest in any will whatever, rather than have made us legatees under a will like this! True, under it, in this era, we have not our heads split or our buttocks burnt. Nevertheless, we are still, in other ways, recipients of its *benefits*. We have a hireling and State-subsidised clergy tugging at our attenuated purses. We have Science stultified by the antithesis of all Science. We have seas of cant and oceans of hypocrisy. Into the new bottles of England we cork the mad and muddy wine of ancient Judæa. And, impelled by "respectability" and slavish conventionality, we drink the foetid dregs till our moral backbone is as limp as a tape-worm, and our shambling moral shins are carious with theological syphilis. O that that man or deity, or whatever he was—masculine, feminine, or epicene—had left us alone, had taken his will in his pocket and gone to Hades with it, inflicting upon the cacodæmons what he and it have wreaked upon the sons of men!

Elsewhere\* I have given an account of the will of Huolarinen, the Finn who devised a certain track of landed estate to the devil. Impious on the face of it as this will may appear, it has, in its effects, been singularly innocuous, as contrasted with the will under which we were all, every mother's son of us, to inherit "eternal life," but by which we have inherited only eternal worry and contention, and the infliction upon our race of thousands upon thousands of

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\* "The Bottomless Pit," chapter iv.

miles of sermons, the weariest and dreariest, most inane, and most insane order of compositions ever poured forth upon a world lying in lunacy. Even the "penny bloods," specially printed and illustrated for larrikins, are more meritorious compositions than are sermons. Sermons, too, are "bloods," but not penny ones; *blood* is their burden and over-word. They harp on the story of the ugly murder of a preaching mechanic, and insist that "without the shedding of blood there is no remission." The cleric has two strings to his bow—the one is *blood*, the other is *brimstone*; and he finds them both in the last will and testament of a person who had nothing to leave, who was afflicted with the ordinary ignorance of an ordinary Syrian peasant of his time. And what he made a will for, if indeed he ever did make a will, if indeed he ever existed to make a will or anything else, Omniscience only knows. There is much din and no wool—only bristles, and exceedingly prickly ones. In spite of this loudly-extolled will having been made in our favour long before we were born, we are all born in a destitute state; in the words of the old rhyme,

"They're a' born without the breeks,†  
They're a' born bare;  
They're a' born without the breeks,  
The merry lads o' Ayr."

The next will in unintelligibility and stupidity to that to which I have referred, and in which we are *all* legatees, is that left by Mr. Zalesky, a rich Polish landed proprietor, who died in the province of Taurida, in March, 1889, and which was recently published at St. Petersburg. The property left by the deceased was valued at 100,000 roubles, and his will was enclosed in an envelope bearing the words, "To be opened after my death." On this envelope being opened the executors found a second envelope on which was written, "To be opened six weeks after my death." The

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† Breeks = trousers.

stipulated time having elapsed, the second envelope was opened, and a third was found with the words, "To be opened a year after my death." At the end of a year a fourth envelope was discovered, which was to be opened two years after the death of the deceased. This continued for five years, and when at length, in 1894, the actual will was read it was found to be as eccentric in its dispositions as in the directions attaching to its opening. The testator had bequeathed half of his fortune to such one of his heirs as has the greatest number of children. The rest of his money he directed to be placed in a bank, and at the end of a hundred years distributed, with the accumulated interest, among the descendants of the testator. The heirs of the deceased, however, took proceedings to test the legality of the will, on the ground that M. Zalesky was not in a sound disposing mind. And if M. Zalesky was not "in a sound disposing mind," what was the state of mind of the party who made the will that has puzzled Europe for over a thousand years, leaving men to enlighten each other on it with hatchets and to punch holes in regard to it into each other's abdomens with swords?

"Ah, but," sighs the orthodoxist, "it is clear you do not understand the will; you must spiritualise it." Spiritualise fiddle-sticks. If we have to find the spiritualising, why do we lavish the spiritualising upon the will at all, and not, say, upon a broom-handle? *The will should spiritualise us, not we the will.*

This cant about spiritualising reminds me that not only God's book, but "the Devil's book"—a pack of playing-cards—has been spiritualised. According to a newspaper account of the time, in the year 1773 Richard Lane, a private soldier, belonging to a regiment stationed in Glasgow, was taken before the Major for playing cards during divine service.

The sergeant marched the soldiers to church, and when

the parson read the prayers and announced his text, those who had a Bible took it out; but this soldier had neither a Bible nor a Common Prayer Book, but, pulling out a pack of cards, he spread them before him. He first looked at one card, and then at another.

The sergeant of the company saw him, and said :

"Richard, put up the cards; this is no place for them."

"Never mind that," said Richard.

When the service was over, Richard was arrested and brought before the Major.

"Well," said the Major, "what have you brought this soldier here for?"

"For playing cards in church."

"Well, soldier, what have you to say for yourself?"

"Much, sir, I hope."

"Very good; if not, I will punish you severely."

"I have been," said the soldier, "about six weeks on the march; I have neither Bible nor Common Prayer Book; I have nothing but a common pack of cards, and I hope to satisfy you of the purity of my intentions."

"Very good," said the Major.

Then, spreading the cards before the Major, he began with the ace.

"When I see the ace, it reminds me there is but one God.

"When I see the deuce, it reminds me of Father and Son.

"When I see the trey, it reminds me of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

"When I see the four, it reminds me of the four Evangelists—viz., Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

"When I see the five, it reminds me of the five wise virgins that trimmed their lamps. There were ten, but five were fools.

"When I see the six, it reminds me that in six days the Lord made heaven and earth.



"When I see the seven, it reminds me that on the seventh day God rested from the works he had made.

"When I see the eight, it reminds me of the eight righteous persons who were saved when God drowned the world—viz., Noah and his wife, his three sons and their wives.

"When I see the nine, it reminds me of the nine lepers that were cleansed by our Saviour. There were ten, but nine never returned thanks.

"When I see the ten, it reminds me of the Ten Commandments, which God handed down to Moses.

"When I see the king, it reminds me of the great King of Heaven, which is God Almighty.

"When I see the queen, it reminds me of the Queen of Sheba, who went to hear the wisdom of Solomon, for she was as wise a woman as he a man. She brought with her fifty boys and fifty girls, all dressed in boys' apparel, for King Solomon to tell which were girls. King Solomon sent for water for them to wash themselves; the girls washed to the elbows, and the boys only to the wrists, so King Solomon told by this."

"Well," said the Major, "you have given a description of every card in the pack except one."

"What is that?" asked the soldier.

"The knave," said the Major.

"I will give you a description of that, too, if you will not be angry."

"I will not," said the Major, "if you will not term me a knave."

"Well," said the soldier, "the greatest knave that I know of is he who brought me here."

"I do not know," said the Major, "whether he is the greatest knave, but I know he's the greatest fool."

"When I count how many spots there are in a pack," continued the soldier, "I find three hundred and sixty-five—as many as there are days in the year.

"When I count the number of cards in a pack, I find there are fifty-two—as many weeks as there are in a year; and I find four suits—the number of weeks in a month.

"I find there are twelve picture cards in the pack, representing the number of months in the year; and, counting the tricks, I find thirteen—the number of weeks in a quarter. So you see, sir, the pack of cards serves for a Bible, Almanack, and Common Prayer Book to me."

So much for the practicability of spiritualising broom-handles, boot-laces, packs of playing-cards, or what you like.

Then what should we do with this last will and testament? When Pope Urban sent to Barnabus Visconti, who was raising trouble in Tuscany, a bull of excommunication by the hands of two legates, Barnabus actually compelled them, in his presence, to eat the parchment on which the bull was written, together with the leaden seal and the silken string, and, telling them he hoped it would sit as lightly on their stomachs as it did on his, sent them back to their master! \* When the bird of pray would push his spurious will down our throats metaphorically, let us insist on pushing it down his throat literally. He should be made to swallow the baleful thing, paper and boards and gilt and brass clasp and book-marker and all. For giving me this hint I thank thee, Barnabus Visconti.

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\* Draper's "History of the Intellectual Development of Europe," vol. iii., pp. 95, 96.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### THE "SICK" TELEPHONE.

YAHVEH is now an ancient institution, so ancient that many of his *fin de siècle* philosophers and scientists consider him mildewed, mouldy, and effete, and contrive to think of the cosmos originating and evolving with him altogether eliminated. The elimination of him, however, cannot, in the existing condition of things, be thought of. It would paralyse a huge institution, the soul-saving industry. And so the monstrously moribund has to be moulded and tinkered into some approach to the requirements of the age in which we live. The old fire-and-fagot faith of Innocent III. has to be puttied and whitewashed, and the ugliest of its dogmas have to be carried down to the cellars, instead of being, as formerly, displayed on the battlements; and its racks and iron virgin (I suspect the iron virgin was almost the only virgin a libidinous priesthood permitted to remain a virgin) have to be stored away in the dungeons. The Bride of Christ, as the Church calls herself, no longer proves the doctrine of the Trinity by breaking your legs, and establishes that of the Immaculate Conception by smashing your thumbs. The rack, with its wheels and pulleys, was the most intricate machine the Church had head enough to understand. It was the Church's mill—in fact, the Church's Mill's Logic. The cogged wheel was the predicate, the rope the middle term, the lever the syllogism, and the frame the copula. They were most convincing. No one who had a fair application of them

ever opened his mouth more against orthodoxy—or aught else.

Like the conventional sermon — another species of torture—the torture-logic of the Bride of Christ was divided into heads. It had a firstly, my brethren; a secondly, a thirdly, a fourthly, and a fifthly, my dear Christian brethren. Firstly was being threatened with the torture; secondly was being carried to the place of torture; thirdly was being stripped and bound; fourthly was being hoisted on the rack; fifthly was squassation—and a most terrible fifthly it was, my Christian brethren. “The stripping is performed without regard to humanity or honour, not only to men but to women and virgins. As to squassation, it is thus performed: The prisoner has his hands tied behind his back, and weights tied to his feet, and then he is drawn up on high, till his head reaches the very pulley. He is kept hanging in this manner for some time, that by the greatness of the weight hanging at his feet all his joints and limbs may be dreadfully stretched, and on a sudden he is let down with a jerk, by slackening the rope, but kept from coming quite to the ground; by which terrible shake his arms and legs are all disjoined, whereby he is put to the most exquisite pain; the shock which he receives by the sudden stop put to his fall, and the weight at his feet, stretching his whole body more intensely and cruelly. According to the orders of the Inquisition, the squassation is repeated once, twice, or three times in the space of an hour.”\*

There were some whom the Bride of Christ thought she might more readily convince and convert by another course of torture-logic than the rack. One other pretty effective argument against such as might be shaky on transubstantiation, or unsound on the trinity, was simplicity's very self. It consisted of a wet handkerchief and plenty of cruelty. This close and cogent line of argument was conducted, says

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\* Howitt's “Priestcraft in all Ages,” pp. 133-4.

Howitt, "by covering the mouth and nostrils with a thin cloth, so that the victim is scarcely able to breathe through them; then letting fall from on high water, drop by drop, on his mouth, which so easily sinks through the cloth to the bottom of his throat, so that it is impossible for him to breathe, his mouth being filled with water, his nostrils with the cloth, so that the poor wretch is in the agony of death. When this cloth is pulled out of his mouth, as it often is in order that he may answer questions, it is saturated with water and blood. All this time he is lying in what is called the wooden horse—that is, a trough, across which a bar is placed, on which his back rests, instead of on the bottom, while his arms, shins, and thighs are tied round with small cords, drawn tight by screws, till they cut to the very bones."

But the world moves, and the Bride of Christ has, reluctantly, to move along with it. She has, several times, tried to stop the world's movement. She tucked up her blood-bedragged skirts over her shrivelled legs and straddled wide, and tried to stop the revolution of this planet in the days of Galileo, and proved that the earth stood still by breaking that star-gazer's telescope, and by throwing himself into a dungeon. She objected to geographical discovery, because, if men were found on continents not known to her, her husband had not died for them, and that would be awkward. She shrieked out against medical research, she foresaw in it ultimate ruin to cures by her shrines, holy wells, devout pilgrimages, spells, and questionable saints. Furthermore, this ignorant beldame, the Bride of Christ, opened her cruel lips, displaying her black and broken teeth, and shrieked out against the printing-press. She had a sharp enough eye to her own selfish interests to recognise that the printing-press and the rack were two machines that could not well exist simultaneously on the same planet. And, for her part, she vastly preferred the

rack. No wonder. The rack exterminated heretics; the printing-press creates them.

Bride of Christ, I have registered a vow to do my best to keep in motion, on my account, the printing-press—the machine you hate. Every page I write shall aim at your destruction. Every book I publish shall be issued of set and desperate purpose to effect your ruin. Let others take to political or to social reform. Bride, my *rôle* is to reform *you* off the face of the earth. Neither political nor social reform is practicable while your influence to any considerable extent remains. Let others hack at the twigs of the upas; stripped to the waist, with clenched teeth and every muscle braced, I lay my axe to the root. Bride, you know well that there can be no real reform for a people addled with fable and filled with folly, hanging on by the coat-tails of your husband, and paying millions a year for the maintenance of certain rites and ceremonies of primeval superstition and barbarism. Bride, I am a reformer, who would make the masses sane before I should set them free. And they will never be really sane while there is a syllable from your lying lips, while there is a touch of your guilty hands, while there is a rag of your blood-soaked petticoat left on the face of the earth.

But the Church, although it is stereotyped and unalterable as the laws of the Medes and Persians, one section of it bound by an infallible Pope and the other by an infallible Book, has yet to pretend to march with the times. With its infallible Pontiff and infallible Bible, it can march nowhere except to its own perdition; but, as it is from the crown of the head to the sole of the foot a sham, it is quite conformable with its character that it should do some sham marching forward. This spavined Bride can no more walk forward, or backward, or side-wise, than can the marble statue of Queen Anne that stands in front of St. Paul's. But her "forward" pretences are, in their way, as wonderful,

as ludicrous, as her miracles were in the ages of faith. Her miracles with the blood of St. Januarius or the arm of St. Fillan were not more grotesque quackery than are her "higher criticism" on the one hand, and her "reconciliation with science" on the other. In naked truth, she can sustain no criticism whatever, "higher" or lower; and she can by no means be "reconciled" with even the very rudiments of science, physical, mental, or moral. She is an illiterate beldame, who has come down to us from the days of opaque ignorance before Criticism had been born, before Science had been heard of. She lives simply because an interested clergy have heavy vested interests in maintaining her existence, and have contrived, through the ages, so to mix up her chemise and petticoat, and garters with the masonry of our political constitution and the fabric of our social and domestic system that we are practically powerless to assault her. We have allowed the flamenical tares to grow up so rankly among the secular wheat that there is no separating of them till the harvest—and the harvest is not yet.

Once this Bride was a Sarah Siddons, acting tragedy earnest and terrible. Now she has degenerated into a Marie Lloyd, a grotesque minx of legs, high kicking, and popular buffoonery. Once her husband, or her husband's father, Jah, was a tremendous thaumaturge sitting on the throne of heaven, and blasting with lightning the Cities of the Plain, or whatever else in his opinion might merit a blasting. The lightning and all electrical phenomena were his special preserve. True, if you were one of his sycophants, and asked him sycophantishly enough to give you the loan of the lightning a minute or two to make your enemy into a corpse, Jah, the father of Christ, and father-in-law of the Bride of Christ, would kindly oblige. The Bride's earliest biographer of note is Eusebius. He gives a literally striking example of how the Bride's father-in-law, in reply

to prayer, obliged with a few flashes of lightning. The parties who prayed were a number of soldiers belonging to the Melitine legion. They, under Marcus Aurelius Cæsar, were drawn up in battle array against the Germans.

Before these soldiers began the slaughtering they tried a little praying: slaughtering and praying have always gone well together. When Richard Cameron's head was carried from Airs Moss to Edinburgh, the bearer handed it to the Council with the remark that it was the head of a man who had lived praying and had died fighting. Cameron was a pronounced type of a very numerous species. Well, before drawing their swords those soldiers of the Melitine division, of which I have been speaking, deemed it would just be as well to try to get Jah, the Bride's father-in-law, on their side by edging in the proper sort of prayer. Jah was immensely pleased. He at once, and in the most handsome manner, let them have the loan of the lightning. With the levin bolts he let fly at the Germans. These worthies took to their heels, at least such of them as the lightning left heels to take to. And the name of the division was changed from the Melitine to the "Thundering Legion"—all of which story is a thundering lie; but it had the advantage of being told for the greater glory of God.

But time rolled on, and it actually came to pass that one Benjamin Franklin, when he wanted lightning, did not pray for it, but brought it down from the clouds with a salted string, and crammed it into a bottle and corked it, and put it in his pocket and walked off, without ever saying even as much as, "Jah, by your leave."

Men had got into the habit of building tall shafts, called spires, to their sinner-factories. Jah never took kindly to those spires. They furnished excellent target-practice. He was constantly taking his lightning and letting fly at them; and he often hit them, long practice



rendering him expert. Mr. Smith did not like to see the spires knocked about, even by Jehovah-jireth, the father-in-law of the Bride in whose interests the spires had been built. Smith had got beyond the "Thundering Legion" era of ignorance and faith. He stuck a lightning-rod up the spire from top to bottom, insulated it in gutta-percha, and introduced the nether end of it, not into the Bottomless Pit, but into a pit in the ground, filled with carbon. Then Smith opened his mouth, and said unto Jah, "Blaze away!" And every season Jah blazes away; but all the lightning he has in heaven will not shatter that steeple to which Smith has properly attached the lightning-rod.

So the said Mr. J. Smith can now sit down in his pew and have his soul saved without running the risk he formerly did of having his body calcined to a cinder. Science generously furnishes means to Faith to, with impunity, get down on its craven knees and grovel before the altar of Ignorance. This is a transition period, and it is grotesque enough. Formerly we were in the tadpole stage of development. The tadpole gets legs before it loses its tail. The legs strengthen and the tail decays and drops off, and the creature is a perfect frog. When we go to our sinner-factories and pray for the kind of weather we desire, all the while having the steeple of the very edifice in which we are praying protected by a lightning-rod from the fulminations of the very deity to whom we are praying, we are, indeed, grotesque enough. We have not attained to froghood, only to the stage of the tadpole with legs.

But the Bride, the most anachronistic frump now on earth, still further uses electricity or electro-magnetism as a means of grace—utilises the ripest development of modern Science in the interests of the superstitious platitudes of primitive Barbarism. I recently, from Manchester, received a begging circular, soliciting contributions towards establishing "A Telephone to be used in the service of Jesus

Christ!" It is not a healthy instrument that "Yours faithfully, Arnold Streuli," begs for, but, as he phrases it, "A 'Sick' Telephone." And he thus dilates:—

"We purpose to bring the services of the sanctuaries to the invalid's couch by the use of the '*Sick*' Telephone (or phonograph, if, in the near future, the last-named should be so much improved as to receive and deliver a *full* service), and by these means to relieve the monotony of the sick chambers.

"This project has been in the hearts and minds of a few Christian persons for some time, but from the want of funds they have been unable to take any practical steps in this matter.

"An experimental 'wire' or telephone, with all the necessary appliances, could be placed in position, ready for use, at about the cost of *forty pounds* (more or less), according to the distance from the invalid's couch to the (or any) public place of divine service.

"A somewhat similar amount would be required for every additional '*Sick*' telephone and the needful appliances. As soon as the required funds are subscribed, it is proposed to have some *ten*, or more, '*Sick*' telephones in active service in about twelve months or so, after the *first* '*Sick*' *telephone* is established, and thereby we may be enabled to meet the pressing requirements of the permanently sick and incapacitated people.

"Therefore, a sum of about four hundred pounds would be required to establish the aforesaid number of '*Sick*' telephones and the necessary requisites.

"The *current expenses* caused by the removal of *wires* from one sick room to a distant or other sick room, and also from one place of public worship to another similar place (if not permanent wires), could in most cases be *covered* by having collections once a year, morning and evening, during the day when the services are being held,

and from where they are telephoned to the permanent invalids.

“It is proposed that out of any such *collections* or *contributions* that the ‘*Sick*’ Telephone Committee (when established), or other permanent subscribers, shall have the power to give *one-tenth*, or a less sum, to any one or more necessitous cases that they may consider it to be expedient to assist.

“The permanently ‘sick’ persons, or other incapacitated invalids, would, in due rotation, according to the length of time that they have been afflicted, have offered to each such person the choice of the place of worship from where they severally desired to have the services telephoned to them; but some *fourteen days*’ notice thereof would be required and forwarded to the secretary to enable him to make all the necessary arrangements.

“*The sphere* of the purposed *introduction* of the services of the ‘*Sick*’ telephone for the use of the sick persons or others incapacitated would be *about a three miles radius* (or some eighteen miles circle) from the *Royal Exchange* at Manchester, but extended as required.

“A small committee of Christian persons could undertake the introduction of this business promptly, and the committee might be enlarged, when required, from the subscribers (or others) as the extensions of the ‘*Sick*’ Telephone services demanded.”

We live and learn. I have lived to learn that the ingenuity of such scientists as Hughes, Graham-Bell, and Edison is to be forced into service to bring into the bed-room of a sick superstitionist the glad tidings of the drowning of the swine of Gadarea!

## CHAPTER XIX.

### MORE "SICK" TELEPHONE.

"A NEW commandment give I unto thee." Worship thou the Lord thy God with a Leclanché Battery. Praise ye the Lord with a carbon plate. Let a mixture of carbon fragments and peroxide of manganese be your Nay or negative, and a zinc rod be your Yea or positive element. And place these in a solution of salammoniac, ammonium chloride, originally obtained by heating the soot of camel's dung with salt, and now a means of grace, an affair of soul-saving and the sanctuary. Moreover, etymologically at least, this solution is related to the Pagan deity, Jupiter Ammon. Such is the muddled salmagundi of "a telephone to be used in the service of Jesus Christ." By an electro-magnet are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, but through the salt and the soot of camel's dung; and this solution named in honour of Jupiter Ammon. To which I would say *Amen*; but *Amen* is really idolatry as introduced into Christian worship. It is part of the name of the old Egyptian god, Amen-Ra; and yet we utter it constantly in the worship of quite another deity who has strictly enjoined, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me." "No other gods before me;" and yet we insult him at every turn by referring to Amen-Ra, a much earlier, and, let us trust, a much more reputable deity than he. Can the flight of blasphemous blockheadism further go?

Is there any shred or vestige of an orthodox ritual or ceremonial which is not a glaring evidence of our religious

superstition and historical ignorance? Is any man or woman who conforms to such rite and ceremony both honest and wholly sane? If sane, he cannot be honest. If honest, he cannot be sane. Who are they who attend public service without mental or conscientious demur? They are those ignorant and stupid enough to do anything they have been told, just through the blind and unreasoning force of use and wont. The best specimens of the parson's dupes are to be found in the rural districts. Speaking of the religiosity of towns, Father Ignatius only the other day remarked: "There is more pig-headed religiousness in the country; for numbers of mangel-wurtzels go to church on Sunday just as pigs go into the sty. It is a kind of rustic religious heredity." And it is by cultivating these mangel-wurtzels, and carefully preserving them in their mangel-wurtzelism, that this Father Ignatius and other birds of pray like him, make their living.

And the clerics live their terms at the universities, and make believe that it requires a scholarly training and a spotless moral reputation to fit them for the business of cultivating the hereditary mangel-wurtzels. And the calling of cleric is highly respectable! Not nearly so respectable as it is to make a living by going into public-houses to sell boot-laces, carrying them over your arm and drinking out any dregs of beer that may have been left by customers in the bottoms of their glasses or pewter pots. Better sell boot-laces and drink degraded dregs, and walk home to your doss-house on your weary feet, than drive luxuriously your carriage by dint of the disgraceful gains you have made out of the ignorance of hereditary mangel-wurtzels.

In urban churches and chapels there are not many mangel-wurtzels. There are chickweed and paddock-stools. Max O'Rell puts on record: "I heard the clergyman of a church in Devonshire exclaim one day from the pulpit: 'I will tell you the reason why you attend church. Some of

you come to look as good as your neighbours, or better; you farmers, my Lord's tenants, come to please your landlord; you tradespeople, to inspire your customers with confidence in you; you young women, to display your new dresses; in fact, you all go to church because you know you're nothing if you don't go to church.' " The sermon, ostensibly, touches on soul-saving; but the congregation is there, not with a view to soul-saving, but with an eye to money-winning. The real god of the fane is Mammon, three gods in one, *£ s. d.* It is no crime to give this deity a reasonable degree of obeisance; but there is a crime, and a flagrant one, in the sham of pretending to worship quite another deity "invisible in the heavens," while you are really worshipping this Mammon who is of the earth earthy. All make-believe and false pretence and hypocrisy is crime—crime against the highest influence you can possibly conceive the integrity of your own soul.

" Sincerity !

Thou first of virtues, let no mortal leave  
Thy onward path, though, from the gulf of hell,  
Destruction cry to take Dissimulation's winding way."

Let us get nearer to our "sick telephone." I can see how it is that those confined to their room, and who feel they would be all the better for being prayed for, would like a professional prayer laid on by wire, rather than trouble their heads to spin a prayer themselves for themselves. A prayer by a professional soul-saver and a home-made prayer are exactly equal in their efficacy. But, then, why should a lay person who can have a professional prayer brought into his room by wire be at the bother of tugging a home-made one out of his own hypogastrium? It is foolish to keep a dog and do the barking yourself, and equally foolish to keep a parson and do the praying yourself. He who is his own lawyer has a fool for a client; and he who is his own parson has a dolt for a congregation. One of the most

striking specimens of a home-made prayer it has possibly been deity's lot to listen to reached him from the parish of Coylton, in Ayrshire, some years ago. A maternal Janet manufactured it. She was a poor woman, inhabiting a cot in which neither gas, water, nor prayer was laid on. The occasion was the night previous to the trial of her daughter before the sheriff on the charge of stealing turnips from a field. The "D. B." she referred the Lord to was one David Bone, from whom the turnips had been stolen. "M. B." was her daughter: she and the Lord would likely know the daughter's name in full, but I do not. Feeling the truth of the adage, "A twopenny cat may look at the king," she boldly brought the turnip affair under the direct notice of the Lord of Hosts.

"O Lord! in despair I cry unto Thee this nicht that Thou may come down frae Thy dwallin' far ayont the sterns, and in fire and brimstone destroy thae graceless vagabon's wha are set in array against my puir lassie. O Lord! I hae meikle need for your help in a tryin' time like this. Ye hae been a wonnerfu' kind an' obleeing Being unto me, an' as yet hae winked at a' my transgressions. Through a weakness o' my nerves I hae been guilty o' monie a sinfu' action that nane kens o' but yoursel', wha kens everything. Sair, sair, against my wull this sinfu' body o' mine is daily offending Thee mair ways than ane, enough to mak' Thee awfu' angry at me. I warsel wi' the foul thief every nicht and mornin', but he's owre yawl for me to get the better o'. Atween him an' Sousie thegither I whiles put out my han' to things that I'm unco spited about afterhin'. I may say that maist a' my days this sinfu' tabernacle o' mine has aye been daublin' in some mire; and I earnestly pray that a' my blunners may turn out to be the yedification o' my puir soul. I'm aye sinnin' an' aye repentin', and ye're aye forgettin' an' aye forgien me. But, O Lord! among the multitude o' my innumerable sins—

sins oot o' the body or in o' the body—they ne'er carried a load o' grief alang wi' them like this turnip affair, bein' ken'd to the hale neighbourhood; a' the rest o' blunners put thegither are but like a flea bite to this. My worn-out frame maun sink beneath the burden. It's haulin' the flesh aff my banes; I'm gane a' to a vision, and by a' appearance ere lang I'll be mixed wi' the mools.

“The morn! the morn! O Lord! that awfu' morn! when my helpless, hairmless, innocent, faitherless, puir M—— B—— will be torn frae the airms o' her ain auld mither, an' flung into a cauld damp talbooth either to dee or turn daft in a place bigget only for thieves an' vagabon's! O Lord! do Thou muzzle the mouths o' her pursuers. Throw Thy mantle o' protection around her. May she be like Thy servant Daniel when cast into the den o' lions—the vile filthy brutes durstna touch him. I pray that my dear lamb, by Thy power, may escape frae the jaws o' her pursuers, and without spot or blemish come whitterin' hame to her ain sheep-fauld, and join in the evening exercise wi' the ewes and the lambs o' Thy favoured and beloved flock.

“O Lord! do Thou in a particular manner visit that bundle—or I may rather say that sackfu'—o' iniquity, D. B., wha is the cause o' a' this evil comin' on us. And I earnestly pray, if it please Thee, to cut him aff frae being a tiller in the vineyard, and not let him encumber the grund ony langer; if not, may the springtide o' misfortune overwhelm him. May evils spring up like mushrooms around him. May he be fried in the frying pan o' Thy indignation, and tho' he cry unto Thee for help—like Jonah frae the whale's belly—O Lord! for my sake, never let on ye hear him. Do Thou loose Satan upon him in the form o' a ring-tailed gled, to claw the remainin' hairs aff his auld bald pow. And as a mark o' Thy anger for the unheard-o-way he is for usin' us, may he ever after remain as bare as the turnips



for which he persecutes my dear wean, the innocent offspring of my early and first love. I likewise entreat Thee to bring Thy avenging rod across him in his garden and in his fields. May his corn stick in the shot blade ; his turnips grow nae bigger than grozets ; his potatoes than marbles ; his green-kail grow dockans ; and his cabbage grow paddock-stools ; his hens and ducks (instead of eggs) lay chuckie-stanes.

“It would please me if it would please Thee to comply with my earnest request ; and hymns o’ praise and sangs o’ thankfulness will be heard in every corner o’ my dwallin’ while I remain in this yirthly tabernacle. Glory, honour, and praise ! Amen.”

This prayer is well enough in its way if petitioning heaven were as exoteric a matter as at dinner, “Pray pass the wine,” “Might I trouble you for the salt ?” But, on the contrary, praying to deities must always have something about it of the “awfully deep, my boy, awfully deep.” You must ask deity for something, through a paid proxy—for something so abstrusely that you have no clear idea what on earth you are asking for ; so that, when you get the answer, you have no idea whether you have got it or not. Personally you know what you want, and you are apt to ask for it right out. This would never do. This is not the way intercourse between earth and heaven is carried on. When you want the loan of Mr. J. Smith’s saw you say, “Smith, lend me your saw.” But when you want, say, a pair of new boots, and apply to deity for them, you must not say to him straight out, “Oblige with a pair of new boots—elastic sides and heel-plates preferred, O Lord.” This would be blunt enough to be blasphemy. You must not even mention boots, far less heel-plates. You must not even think of boots while you are praying. You must lift up your thoughts and desires above this world lying in wickedness to a realm where there are neither boots, nor marrying, nor giving in marriage.

And if, after the praying, you actually get boots, well and good—glory in the highest. But if, on the contrary, you get no new boots, and your great toes stick through your old ones and through your stockings as well, it is still glory in the highest. The party you prayed to “knows better what to give than you know what to ask,” and he has given you a pair of great toes free from the thralldom of both boot and stocking. And you never asked for boots (Lord knows what you asked for!), and, therefore, your prayer is answered! If only vague and indefinite enough, *all* prayers are answered. Do not do your own praying. You know too well what you personally want, and you are not mysterious enough. Go to church and get prayed for by a professional. If you cannot go, have the service laid on by telephone if you want to keep your immortal soul all right—and your wooden head sufficiently empty. A recondite and metaphysical cleric in Scotland once invited Bishop Selwyn to preach in his church. As usual, his lordship gave an impressive and beautiful sermon, which at the same time was perfectly plain and simple. The rector was delighted, and said as much on meeting one of the most regular members of his congregation. “Well, sir, I don’t think so much of it,” rejoined the man; “it was so simple, any child could have understood it. For my part, I like a sermon which confuses your head for a week. I don’t know any which beat yours for that, sir.”

No; home-made prayers will not answer the purpose. The mystery must be kept up; and for the future all well-appointed houses must have their supplies of gas, water, and prayers laid on from the main. If the Protestant’s fetish-book had not been in great measure incomprehensible, it could not possibly have answered its purpose. It was, mercifully for the divines, made inextricably obscure, that tens of thousands of them might earn their living by explaining it, and then by—more difficult task still—

explaining their explanation. Hermeneutics is the very life-blood of priestcraft.

In his youth Sir Richard Phillips edited and published a paper at Leicester called the *Herald*. One day an article appeared in it headed "Dutch Mail," and added to it was an announcement that it had arrived too late for translation, and so had been set up and printed in the original. This article drove many people crazy, and for years scholars squabbled and pored over it without being able to arrive at any definite idea as to what it meant. The "Dutch Mail" was in reality a column of "pie." "Pie," it may be as well to explain, is a jumble of odd letters gathered up and set on end so as to save their faces from being scraped, to be distributed at the leisure of the printers into their proper places. Some letters are upside down, often ten or twelve consonants or as many vowels come together, and the whole is peppered with punctuations, dashes, and so on, till it might pass for poetry by a lunatic Choctaw or the writer of "Revelation," but become even more hopelessly cracked than ever. The story Sir Richard tells of the particular "pie" he had not a finger, but a whole hand in, is this: "One evening, before one of our publications, my men and a boy overturned two or three columns of the paper in type. We had to get ready in some way for the coaches, which, at four in the morning, required four or five hundred papers. After every exertion we were short nearly a column; but there stood on the galleys a tempting column of 'pie.' It suddenly struck me that this might be thought Dutch. I made up the column, overcame the scruples of the foreman, and so away the country edition went, with its philological puzzle, to worry the honest agricultural reader's head. There was plenty of time to set up a column of plain English for the local edition." Sir Richard tells of one man, whom he met in Nottingham, who for thirty-four years preserved a copy of the

*Leicester Herald*, hoping that some day the letter would be explained.

If Sir Richard Phillips had only, instead of "Dutch Mail," headed the article "Divine Message," and scrupulously held his peace about its being "pie," devout wrong-headedness might, by this time, have had another gospel. And the whirling Maelstrom of "religious" gullibility is liable to suck into its vortex now and again a specimen of a strong, sea-worthy craft, but with a bolt loose. If Sir Richard Phillips had only done with his "pie" as I have suggested he might have done, we might have had Mr. Gladstone writing upon the "Message" with acute obtuseness in the pages of the *Nineteenth Century*. As it is, he dealt with the "Atonement" and other such vestiges of barbarism, and worse. Perhaps one of the prime monstrosities of insisting upon the Atonement, as far as Protestantism is concerned, lies in the fact that the Scriptures themselves can hardly be said to manifest any such insistence. William Rathbone Greg\* puts the point thus: "The doctrine of the Atonement, of Christ's death having been a sacrifice in expiation of the sins of mankind, is the keystone of the common form of modern orthodoxy. It takes its origin from the Epistles, and we believe can appeal to only *three* texts in the Evangelists for even partial confirmation. In Matthew xx. 28 it is said: 'The Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many'—an expression which may *countenance* the doctrine, but assuredly does not contain it. Again, in Matthew xxvi. 28 we find: 'This is my blood of the New Testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.' Mark xiv. 24 and Luke xxii. 20, however, who give the same sentence, *both omit the significant expression*; while John omits, not only the expression, but the entire narrative of the institution of the Eucharist,

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\* "Creed of Christendom."

which is said elsewhere to have been the occasion of it. In the Fourth Gospel John the Baptist is represented as saying of Jesus (i. 29): 'Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world'—an expression which may possibly be intended to convey the doctrine, but which occurs in what we have already shown to be the most apocryphal portion of the whole gospel.'" The Atonement doctrine was invented by Paul, or by the monks who invented Paul.

But the absurdity of the orthodox Atonement doctrine is no match for its immorality ; yet here we find Mr. Gladstone, one of the last of the old-time Titans, standing up for it, a melancholy phenomenon, as was the spectacle of Lord Bacon and Sir Matthew Hale standing up for Witchcraft. But Witchcraft (by the way, more certainly Scriptural than is the Atonement) had to be given up in spite of Bacon, and the Atonement will have to be abandoned in spite of Gladstone. The telephone may, in this acutely transitional period, carry the sacerdotal echoes of past and barbaric times into the sick room ; but it is certain, ere long, to carry them into the dead room, to the black and voiceless cave of Oblivion. Ere many generations pass the Atonement, Witchcraft, and much else akin to them, shall be known only to students of the British Museum and Bodleian Library order, and shall be reverted to with mingled curiosity, incredulity, and horror.

## CHAPTER XX.

### “REDEEMED” AND STARVED.

AMONG our Anglo-Saxon ancestors, for instance, every part of the body had its price ; and the price, upon the whole, was not very high. If, for example, a man knocked out one of the front teeth of his neighbour, he had to pay him six shillings as a compensation ; but, if he destroyed his beard, he had to hand over no less than twenty shillings. He might, however, break his countryman's thigh-bone for twelve shillings and his ribs for three shillings a piece. He was allowed, of course, to smash up the members of an outlaw or of an enemy of his country gratis ; and, as there were always plenty of outlaws and enemies, he could always have plenty of teeth to knock out without paying six shillings a piece for them, abundance of ribs to crack without paying three shillings a rib, and plenty of back-bones to hack in two, legs to chop off, and skulls to split, just for the love of the thing.

In England, down through the Norman and Plantagenet periods, a man was not nearly of the value of a stag, although Jahveh had never laid any stress on the value of stags, not even to the extent of sending down the meanest boot-black of an angel in all heaven to be nailed to a stick for them. Under the House of Normandy a man was not worth a deer ; under the House of Brunswick a man is not worth a hare, for it is by no means infrequent that a man is practically (though indirectly) killed, and his family too, over the illegal netting of one. And yet deity never sent down

the humblest pot-scraping cherub in all heaven to be nailed to a stick for the benefit of hares. Deity set one value upon Man, a very high one; Man puts another value upon himself, an exceedingly light one; and I am inclined to the opinion that Man is right.

And yet, paradoxically, deity, quite apparently, sets as light a value upon Man as Man can possibly place upon himself. He died for him; but he will not give him something to eat. A paterfamilias asked his would-be son-in-law: "Are you quite sure you love my daughter?"

"Love her!" exclaimed the swain, "love her! I could lie down and die for her!"

"Yes," observed paterfamilias quietly; "but could you stand up and work for her?"

This is precisely the sort of question that should be put to the popular deity of this time and clime. It is vain vapouring on his part to go about singing:—

"And, for bonnie Smith and Higgins,  
I wad lay me doon and dee."

Far nobler of him to stand up and work for them, give them some clothes to wear; something, in quantity and quality, respectable to eat; stick better brains into their heads, and give them better abodes to live in. We have had enough now of this "lay me doon and dee" business. We have had no advantage from it. It has afforded a theme for priests, and over it they have been peculiarly able to stultify and swindle us. Thousands have died as foolishly as did the diver immortalised by Schiller, and among these thousands was the myth who died to "redeem" Smith and Higgins from the effects of the Janet-and-snake concern in Eden. We did not want any "redeeming" over an incident that never occurred, and in a place which had no existence. Let somebody take the trouble to forfeit us before anybody is at the cost of "redeeming" us. Let us have done with some fifteen centuries of solemn and tragic fooling,

and begin to show some symptoms of racial sanity. While I write to-day's newspaper lies before me, and in it I read : " 'Two handfuls of potato peelings, and not a particle of fat anywhere on the body.' That is the record of a poor creature who fell dead on the pavement of Tower Hill in the centre of the richest city in the world." And this person was as well "redeemed" as the best of us—"redeemed," but starved. Plenty of the "atoning blood," but only "two handfuls of potato peelings."

From what have we been "redeemed"? From damnation down amid fire and brimstone. Oh, indeed! We will require to die in order to find out whether or no that be true; and we have given too much attention to *dying*. Let us turn our energies in the direction of ameliorating the conditions of *living*. Any fool can die. Indeed, all fools have to die, *nolens volens*; and heretofore, few but fools have died; for, with hardly an exception, the planet has brought forth naught save fools. From death let us turn to life. One world at a time. Hell will be soon enough when we come to it. Let us turn our reformatory efforts in the direction of the hell in our midst—the hell of cruel and merciless struggle for bread, in which, as a rule, earth's greediest and coarsest brood come uppermost, and her divinest and most pure-souled are trampled in the dust. Yahveh himself would be preferable to the god that is worshipped in our midst, the god "Success":—

"It is success that colours all in life;  
 Success makes fools admired, makes villains honest;  
 All the proud virtue of this vaunting world  
 Fawns on success and power, howe'er acquired." \*

The modern deity is not Fame, not an honourable Ambition, only vulgar, obese, aldermanic "Success," the most despicable and contemptible deity ever worshipped since the day the earth made her first revolution round the



sun. The old red-handed goddess, Ambition, stood high on the carnage-wreck of battle-fields, and crowned her brow with laurels dipped in gore. The barbaric was blent with the heroic. If this goddess produced the ruthless blade of Hector, she likewise called forth the ruthless tears of Andromeda, tragically, tenderly, passionately human. Better have Ambition towering over the red ruin of war than have "Success" straddling over "leggers"\* and trampling down under her vulgar feet the stupid serf of the ploughed field, the hungry army of the unemployed, and the grimy helots of the mine. We will forego your interested and designing promises of everlasting life if you, ye priests and "betters," will permit us to indemnify ourselves against death by starvation. Even for the barest sustenance, only enough to vouchsafe us from day to day the poor grubbing boon of existence, there are those among us who resort to wickednesses which the most ingenious of fiends, if not driven by hunger, would not have the wit to invent.

And, apart from the thieves and scourges of the order of society that has made them Ishmaelites, we have the poor submissive victims who, in the desperate scramble for bread, work life out to keep life in—die that they may live. Recently one of the medical officers of the County Asylum, Lancaster, contributed to the *Lancet* an account of an operation upon a patient from whose incoherent statements it was suspected that he had swallowed a quantity of nails. Forceps passed into the stomach having failed to extract any foreign bodies, though they could be felt from the outside, it was decided to attempt to relieve the man by operation. On incision the stomach was found to be occupied by a mass of rusty nails, many of them nearly three inches in length, and some very sharp, bent, and twisted. Their removal, naturally, was tedious, as many of them could be extracted one only at a time. A piece of matted hair, nearly

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\* See Chapter XIV.

two inches in length, was found. In all, there were removed from the stomach 192 nails (the majority being two and a-half inches in length, and many even longer), half a screw nail, a piece of brass wire, a carpet tack, several small pieces of stick, a button, and the mass of hair already mentioned. The whole weighed one pound, nine and a half ounces. The public swallowing of nails and knives and swords and flaming tow, in order to be able to obtain a few pence to buy bread, is too common to excite a remunerative curiosity on the part of the spectators. I am not interested in the subject of nails being hammered through the hands of a divinity; but I *am* interested in the fact of nails being introduced into a human stomach as evidence of the intensity of the life-struggle—as an oblation laid on the guilty throne of that despicable deity, “Success.”

Possibly nowhere in the world does man in the mass still need so much “redeeming” as he does in Christian countries, the only countries in which he has been “redeemed.” Nowhere else is wealth so colossal, nowhere else is squalor so abject. What mockery to take the trouble to “redeem” a man, and then give him nothing to eat! When the city of Haerlem surrendered to the terrible Duke of Alva, on condition that he should save the lives of the captured, he commanded certain of the principal burghers and soldiers to be starved to death, saying that, “though he had promised them their lives, he had not promised to find them food.” So appalling was his reputation that the Netherlandish women many years after his death were wont to scare their children by saying, “Alva is coming.” Alva-like, the party who “redeemed” us practically remarks: “Though I redeem you, I did not promise to find you food.” And yet he was, according to report, far more competent to find food for all of us, had he so desired, than Alva was to find food for the surrendered burghers of Haerlem. He could, when he liked, make a few little loaves and a small

quantity of fish—a penny roll and a sprat—form a feast for a vast multitude, and twelve basketsful of fragments therefrom be left over and to spare.

He could do and can do this sort of thing if he like, for with him “all things are possible,” and yet, in order to get a crust to eat, he allows men to become “leggers,” and he permitted this wretch at Lancaster to swallow nails in order that he might obtain the means to indulge in the luxury of a penny saveloy! Nevertheless, he is applauded and eulogised in the highest, in a hundred thousand churches, while Alva is forgotten, or only remembered to be vilified and execrated! How is this? Simply because we are a race of priest-ridden simpletons. There is an adage, “Get a reputation for rising in the morning, and you may lie all day.” This applies to the party who “redeemed” us and starves us. There is another adage, “As well hang a dog as give him an ill name.” This with qualifications, is applicable to the Duke of Alva.

On the supreme subjects of existence we have done no thinking; we have paid the birds of pray to do the thinking for us, and they have done as little thinking as possible, and, for that little, they have received the highest payment they could contrive to extract and extort. They have, to our degradation, and in their own sordid interests, subordinated judgment and exalted jaw.

Wullie Grant, the minister’s man, of Kirknewton, a village near Edinburgh, was famous for miles round for the splendid vegetables he grew. Through many years of close association the minister and Wullie had become well acquainted with each other’s weaknesses, and at times, when they disagreed, they did not scruple to point out each other’s failings in very plain language.

Wullie’s hair on his head was quite grey, while his whiskers were as black as jet. The minister, on the contrary, had a black head and grey whiskers.

During one of their disputes the minister pointed out his grey head to Wullie as an evidence of inferiority.

"Man," replied Wullie, "in my profession I hae tae use my brains, an' that has turned my hair grey; but it's different wi' you, because ye only need tae use yer jaws."

Well may the whiskers of the entire clerical profession become white while, as yet, the head does not show a solitary white hair! With sacerdotalism the less thinking the better. Thinking leads to scepticism. A clergyman who really reads and thinks can only remain in the Church and become a hypocrite, or leave it and become a beggar. It is only human to prefer the former alternative to the latter. And it is peculiarly human to eschew reading and thinking, and thus escape having to resort to either hypocrisy on the one hand or beggary on the other. Thus it becomes incumbent upon the cleric simply to use his jaws in masticating his victuals and in gulling his dupes, and this however white in consequence his whiskers may become. As a rule, it is safest to keep the jaws moving in the utterance of mere platitude and twaddle; but it is politic to occasionally vary the twaddle with a stroke of designing sophistry—for instance, to the effect that the common people should submit to being starved in England now, because they were "redeemed" in Judæa some eighteen centuries ago.

No doubt, when we feel we are being starved it is a great comfort, as an offset, to know that we have been "redeemed"—redeemed by the murder of an ancient lay preacher, and saved by the croaking of a modern bird of pray. A friend gives me a specimen of the sort of thing that was tried upon him and his soul once when he so far forgot himself as to sit down in a pew. Years ago very much the same sort of thing was lavished upon me to keep me out of the Pit. The text was, "On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets" (Matt. xxii. 40). And here is an extract from the sermon which was intended

to save my friend's soul, but did not: "To make the text clearer to you, my hearers, I will ask you to fix your minds on an imaginary picture. Imagine, if you please, a man, a man suspended; for the Greek word which means to hang signifies also to suspend. Imagine, then, a man suspended from one of the rafters of this building, one of the beams of this structure. See him suspended by his arms—his two arms, which represent respectively the two commandments referred to in my text. His suspended body represents *the law* and *the prophets*, which the text tells us hang on these two rafters—these two arms I should have said, my brethren—the right arm symbolising the *law* and the left arm the *prophets*, and his body the two commandments—the two laws—the two prophets, I should say, my hearers, and his suspended body symbolising the—the text—the commandments—the two laws—the structure, my brethren. His two arms, I say, suspending the structure, for the Greek word which means to beam signifies also to rafter—I say, my hearers, the Greek word which means to hang signifies also to suspender; therefore, the rafter suspended by this man—the man, I should say hanging by his suspender symbolises the prophet, the two prophets spoken of in my commandments which symbolise the text; and when you bear in mind that the Greek word which means to signify hangs also to suspend, you have the picture."

Stuff like this—and it is quite common in the pulpits—stuff like this would not save the soul of a pig. Yet there are those who are content to pay for it, and to pay for it liberally. It is the starved—especially the starved in intellect—that lay such overwhelming stress upon being "redeemed." Pity the infatuated wretch who dreams that the destinies of his immortal soul can be in any way influenced by the preaching of the kind of sermon that brings white whiskers upon the preacher, and addled pates upon the congregation.

## CHAPTER XXI.

### "THE LORD."

THAT, after the arid Ages of Ignorance, we are on the confines of the fruitful Age of Science we have, as sign and earnest, on the horizon, a cloud now considerably larger than a man's hand, as descried by the Hebrew prophet of old. Like a Roman augur, I ascend the Palatine and take my auguries. I gaze as far as not altogether unprophetic eye may peer into the arcana of Fate. Day dies into night, and the stars arise and write on the concave, in cold, weird runes, the hermeneutical oracles of Destiny. He whose soul is finely touched, and to fine issues, has found, as it were, the Rosetta stone that furnishes the key to the stellar cryptograms which enables him to read the handwriting, the very holograph of God, in the Moon's solemn light, the steady fire of Arcturus, and the glimmer of the Evening Star.

There are times when we become impatient of so-called "science," with elaborate and technical peddling, and turn, rapt, to gaze at the stars through the eyes of a seer of Chaldea, and to look at the sun as known to and apostrophised by Ossian. I scout not the science of research and experience; but there is a profounder insight in poetry, revelation, and vision. The psychic, the essential ego, in normal mood, investigates through quintuple sensation; but there are crises when it stands not wholly outside the veil, and, overleaping mere sensation, the eye of the soul is flooded with the light of the Eternal. That this

is truth must be insisted on, although to the Boeotian it is a stumbling-block, and to the Philistine foolishness.

In the face of "Science so-called," I lament not that the popular creed is dying, but I should sincerely mourn should the religious instinct—of which the popular creed is an incredible and repulsive expression—be dying with it. It is a poor outlook for the race of man if all spiritual aspiration is to sink into chonchology, and all devotional reverence into logarithms. The old book was not so benighted when it spoke of man as only a little lower than the angels, and, by the right hand of the Eternal, crowned with glory and honour. Even in Elizabethan literature we find: "What a piece of work is man! How noble in reason! How infinite in faculties! In form and moving, how express and admirable! In action how like an angel! In apprehension, how like a god!" Elizabethan Nescience, on the subject of man, so voiced itself. Victorian Science, on the same subject, is too apt to voice itself thus:—An interesting exhibit, at the National Museum, shows the physical ingredients which go to make up the average man weighing 154 lbs. A large glass jar holds the 96 lbs. of water which his body contains. In other receptacles are 3 lbs. of white of egg, a little less than 10 lbs. of pure glue,  $34\frac{1}{2}$  lbs. of fat,  $8\frac{1}{4}$  lbs. of phosphates of lime, 1 lb. of carbonate of lime, 3 ozs. of sugar and starch, 7 ozs. of fluoride of calcium, 6 ozs. of phosphate of magnesia, and a little ordinary table-salt. Divided up into his primary chemical elements, the same man is found to contain 97 lbs. of oxygen, enough to take up, under ordinary atmospheric pressure, the space of a room 10 feet long, 10 feet wide, and 10 feet high. His body holds 15 lbs. of hydrogen, which, under similar conditions, would occupy somewhat more than two such rooms as that described. To these must be added 13 lbs. 13 ozs. of nitrogen. The carbon in the corpus of the individual referred to is represented by a foot cube of coal.

It ought to be a diamond of the same size, because the stone is pure carbon ; but the National Museum has not such a gem in its possession. A row of bottles contains the other elements going to make up the man. There are 4 ozs. of chlorine,  $3\frac{1}{2}$  ozs. of fluorine, 8 ozs. of phosphorus,  $3\frac{1}{2}$  ozs. of brimstone,  $2\frac{1}{2}$  ozs. of sodium,  $2\frac{1}{2}$  ozs. of potassium, one-tenth of an oz. of iron, 2 ozs. of magnesium, and 3 lbs. 13 ozs. of calcium.

To a certain, but happily diminishing, school of "thinkers," this is all. And, of course, this is nothing ; all men, like Southey's alderman, are made only of "dirt." According to what Carlyle dubbed "the Gospel of Dirt," you are only one and the same with the dust on your boots. "Matter contains in itself the potentialities of *all* phenomena—physical, mental, and moral." So the instinct of self-preservation depends on the 10 lbs. of glue which keeps body and soul together. The "little ordinary table-salt" is the basis of Attic wit. Hope and buoyancy are supported on the 15 lbs. of hydrogen. The valour of Achilles was based upon 4 ozs. of chlorine. The patience of Penelope lay in  $3\frac{1}{2}$  ozs. of fluorine. Kant's "Kritik" resulted from 8 ozs. of phosphorus. Athanasias's creed was inspired by  $3\frac{1}{2}$  ozs. of brimstone. The love of Pocahontas lay in  $2\frac{1}{2}$  ozs. of sodium. It took  $2\frac{1}{2}$  ozs. of potassium to produce "Hamlet ;" and but for the one-tenth of an ounce of iron there would have been no "Macbeth." Scott's "Fair Maid of Perth" would never have seen the light but for the 2 ozs. of magnesium ; and this monograph is inspired by 3 lbs. 13 ozs. of calcium.

This settles the matter. The arcana of the heaven above, the earth beneath, and the waters under the earth are hereby solved by a creature, like Polyphemus, with one eye, and that one eye grievously afflicted with both myopia and strabismus. The Almighty has his height measured with a tailor's tape. Nay, the tape will not measure him ;



so the tailor gathers up his cross legs from the table and kicks the creator out of creation, leaving in it nothing that the tape cannot measure. Heaven knows that in no orthodox sense of the word am I a religionist ; but ten times over would I wear the red jersey and thump the Salvation Army's biggest drum—empty as the heads of those who follow it—than be the “scientist” that finds in Nature no province for psychism, for transcendent mystery, for immortality.

The Lord of Hosts had a hand, of yore, in all the onsets among Christian nations. He placed a cross most opportunely in the sky to encourage the cut-throat soldiery of Constantine the Great ; and he continued his sky-signs on the eve of great conflicts down to 1746, when an inverted thistle and a broken broad-sword were visible in the heavens over Windsor, just before the battle of Culloden. Since ballooning became an adjunct of warfare, “the Lord” appears to have discontinued his sky-signs, although he still takes deep interest in carnage ; you will remember that his modern Joshua, the late Kaiser William, during the Franco-German war, from an Aceldema of hideous slaughter, sent a telegram home to the Empress, that was aptly enough paraphrased in *Punch* into something of this sort :—

“ I wire to say, my dear Auguster,  
That we have had another buster ;  
Ten thousand Frenchmen gone below—  
Praise God from whom all blessings flow ! ”

But, since the Lord stopped scrolling over the sky with such artistic mementoes as crucifixes and inverted thistles, men, to some extent, have taken to cutting each other's throats without asking him to do even so much as turn the grindstone while they are sharpening their knives. In the American Civil War, in a certain engagement, a Federal chaplain happened to get into the vicinity of a battery of

artillery which was hotly engaged. The Confederate shells were ploughing furrows about the guns, and the cannoneers were grimly and actively at work to answer shot for shot. The chaplain addressed himself to a sergeant, who was very efficient, but, at the same time, very profane, in the following words: "My friend, if you go on this way, can you expect the support of Divine Providence?" "Ain't expectin' it," said the sergeant; "the Ninth New Jersey has been ordered to support this battery."

Now, "Divine Providence" is a hackneyed and not over-exact definition of the influence one instinctively expects to support him, or, at all events, to approve him, in a portentous crisis of peril and doom, when he risks wounds, agony, and the grave for principle, for benefit to survivors, and, may be, to unborn generations; but for himself, only the Jews breaking his jaws to get his teeth,\* only the ravens tearing his flesh, only a stench and maggots, only the rain washing and the sun bleaching his bones. Who would die on such terms? Man was wont to die—

"For the ashes of his fathers  
And the temples of his gods."

But what will he die for when there are no tombs and sepulchres, when his effectively cremated father has no appreciable ashes, and when he has no gods of any sort, much less temples to them?

The Crusaders who fell in battle against the Moham-medans were to have *post-mortem* golden harps and white wings; and the Mohammedans who fell in battle against the Crusaders were privileged to lay their heads on the blossoms of the dark-eyed Janets of Paradise. And so the straight sword split the head of the followers of the Soldan

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\* In the Peninsular War the drilling of the teeth out of the jaws of the fallen, and disposing of them to dentists, was a recognised calling, principally followed by Jews.

of Egypt, and the curved sword cleft the heart of the followers of Godfrey of Bouillon. And he who had his skull split went to Paradise and his girl, and he who had his heart cleft went to Heaven and his wings. And thus the game went on merrily. It was a case of all prizes, no blanks, and each, eagerly, into the bran of the lucky-tub thrust his arm to the elbow.

With "the Lord" or "Allah" thrown in one can conceive war as intelligible. With such factors eliminated, the continuance of militarism beyond a temporary transition period is all but inconceivable. But, Odin, how swords go ding-dong, and how blood flows plish-plash when "the Lord" fairly identifies himself with the struggle! From the siege of Troy downward we have telling evidence of this fact. But it was never more graphically illustrated than in our own great Civil War of the seventeenth century. If you really did wish the flesh hacked off your bones, you could not have had the feat accomplished with more bloody zest than by Cromwell's *Flie-Fornication-and-All-Uncleanness Jones*, or Ireton's *Jeshuran-out-of-the-Ashes Higgins*. Then was the time to have your throat cut to the accompaniment of a text appropriate to the occasion, or to be accurately shot (by way of parenthesis) in the singing of a psalm. And, to get nearer to "the Lord," their opponents, the Scots Covenanters, under Leslie, gentle and simple of them, doffed their serviceable helmets and donned blue bonnets instead, with a knot of blue ribbons above the left ear. And why the blue ribbons? Well, as they phrased it, to "be in accord with Holy Scripture," and the "Holy Scripture" they relied on was: "Speak unto the children of Israel, and bid them that they make them fringes in the borders of their garments, throughout their generations, and that they put upon the fringe of the borders a ribband of blue."\*

Now, when the song, "All the Blue Bonnets are Over

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\* Numbers xv. 38.

the Border," is sung, it is only Scots with the historical and national instinct who remember that the "blue bonnets" referred to were suggested by Numbers xv., and that the—

"England shall many a day,  
Tell of the bloody fray

When the Blue Bonnets came over the Border "

has special reference to the battle of Newburn, in Northumberland, with its brilliant and desperate encounter between the Royalist and Covenanting cavalry. That day a Royal Standard of England fell into the hands of the skilled and ferocious swordsmen of Numbers xv. and 38.

Favourite texts from which sermons breathing carnage and fire were thundered forth were: "And I will feed them that oppress thee with their own flesh; and they shall be drunken with their own blood, as with sweet wine; and all flesh shall know that I, the Lord, am thy Saviour and thy Redeemer, the mighty one of Jacob."

"The Lord hath a sacrifice in Bozrah, and a great slaughter in the land of Idumea."

"Cursed be he who keepeth back his sword from blood."

"Thus saith the Lord God of Israel: Put every man his sword by his side, and go in and out, from gate to gate, throughout the camp, and slay every man his brother, and every man his companion, and every man his neighbour."

There is no Papist Massacre of St. Bartholomew more terrible in its way than was the Presbyterian Massacre of the troops of Montrose taken prisoner at Philiphaugh. Whether the massacre might be at Paris or Newark, by Papist or by Protestant, be sure it would be specially merciless and revolting if "the Lord" were fairly in it. The defeated musketeers, two miles from the battlefield, were pent up in the courtyard of Newark Castle. Leslie, an experienced and able general, who had served under the great Gustavus Adolphus, and who was certainly the military genius of the

Covenant, would have spared the lives of the prisoners. But "the Lord" had determined the captives should perish to a man.

The Presbyterian ministers were ravenous for blood, and sent up a clamour of texts red and ruthless. The favourite passage of the occasion was from 1 Samuel xv.: "Now go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not; but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass. And Saul gathered the people together, and numbered them in Telaim, two hundred thousand footmen, and ten thousand men of Judah. And the Lord sent thee on a journey and said, Go and utterly destroy the sinners, the Amalekites, and fight against them until they be consumed." And, urged and incited by torrents of fiery and fanatical exhortation, a squadron of Covenanting dragoons dismounted, and, into the castle yard, poured volley after volley of shot upon the defenceless mass of prisoners of war, till not a man of them was left standing.

So much for the men. But "the Lord" had not yet done. There were the women, 300 in number, and their helpless children. Had not "the Lord" commanded, "Slay both man and woman, infant and suckling"? He would be obeyed to the letter. An eye-witness\* thus refers to the butchery of the women: "Many there ware bigge with child, yet non of them were spared, but all were cutte in pieces with such savage and inhuman crueltie as neither Turk nor Scithean was ever heard to have done. For they ripped vp the bellies of the woemen with their swordes, till the fruit of their wombe (some in the embrion, some perfectly formed, some craulng for lyfe, and some ready for birth) fell upon the ground, weltering in the gorie blood of their mangled mothers." Eighty more women and children were overtaken at Linlithgow, and done to death,

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\* Patrick Gordon, of Ruthven.

the preachers vociferously insisting that, as of old, the wrath of heaven would be wreaked upon such as held back his sword from the slaughter and suffered aught of the seed of Amalek to live.

With "the Lord" and his clergy left out, the hapless women and children, and possibly the prisoners of war, would have been spared. When the lion lies down with the lamb—unless with the latter inside the former—"the Lord" must have gone the way of the gods of Olympus. While *he* lives swords shall never be beat into ploughshares and spears into pruning-hooks. "The Lord" had a hand in the very first murder upon earth. He preferred Abel's mince collops to Cain's spring onions, and thereby set the one brother to slaying the other, with the first spilling of blood giving the green grass of the virgin earth its first red blush of shame. Since then, for "the Lord," the earth has seen so much of shame that, like a battered harlot, she can blush no more.

The best augury that war is on its last legs is that "the Lord" is leaving it. True, Kaiser William, with a fine instinct for the apposite, is strenuously cramming "the Lord," and the book he is said to have dictated to amanuenses, down the throats of the armaments of Germany; and our own bishops still bless regimental colours, and hang up blood-stained and shot-riddled rags in their cathedrals and churches; and, furthermore, we pay for the maintenance of army chaplains. But all this is only the after-glow; the bloody sun of sacerdotalism has set. As sacerdotalism dies, religion is beginning to live; and religion, instead of sanctifying a policy of carnage, will extirpate it. As the Synoptic Gospels fade away we are having, by way of instalment, a few pages of the Gospel of Humanity. One self-sacrificial exercise of brotherly love is worth all that Priestcraft has ever told us about "the love of God." Whatsoever is honest and of good report among us shall

remain, and the Gospel of Humanity shall hallow it. But war shall not remain. The Gospel of Ecclesiasticism blest the banners. The Gospel of Humanity shall burn them. The Prayer-Book hath it:—

“O all ye green things upon earth, bless ye the Lord, praise him and magnify him forever.”

Ere a long time pass it will be only the “green things”—yea, the exceedingly “green things”—that will concern themselves with “the Lord,” or contribute a sixpence to the support of his birds of pray!

## CHAPTER XXII.

### PROFESSIONAL SOUL-SAVING.

NUMEROUS profane jibes have been flung at the head of the Holloway of his time who invented a pill to cure, or, rather, to prevent, earthquakes. There are but few jibes, as yet, at the quack who has invented a form of prayer to cure, or, rather, to prevent, earthquakes. And yet the time is not so far in the future that will recognise that earthquakes are impervious to pills and prayers alike—to Professor Seismology's earthquake pills, only 1s 1½d. a box, and the Rev. Thaddeus O'Thunder's prayers, admission free—but a collection at the door.

The earthquake pills have been discarded, but the earthquake prayers still obtain. *Teste*: In March of the year of our Lord, 1895—I often wonder if we had reckoned instead “in the year of our Devil” if things had been quite as stupid—the old volcano of Orizaba, in the State of Vera Cruz, Mexico, broke forth. For one hundred miles around the earth was shaken with subterranean vibrations. The volcano is in the heart of the most improved coffee district in Mexico. Masses were said in all the churches in the vicinity to ward off the impending danger. Just fancy earthquakes being amenable to prayer! It is as scientific to imagine them amenable to mustard, or to pitch and toss. On Priestcraft's theory, Sodom and Gomorrah, Admah, Zeboim, and Zoar might all, at this hour, have been standing on the Plain, if somebody or other had only prayed properly and at the proper time! If prayer could



have saved them, cannot prayer restore them? Set all the prayer-power, united to all the horse-power, of Europe to the task, and see whether, in their combination of the precatory and the equine, they can bring back and place upon solid ground even the little town of Zoar.

The man who makes his living by praying certainly makes it by preying. The deity who will give you what you want because you pay the Rev. Jabez Jabber to ask it for you is a contemptible pander, who, instead of being prayed to, should have his neck twisted. You pay this Jabez Jabber a "screw;" for this he screws for you favours out of Jehovah. Jehovah had not from all eternity resolved to extend those favours to you. In fact, he had made up his mind to bestow them upon Brown and Higgins; but, then, he little anticipated how he should be importuned and dunned by your paid advocate, Jabez Jabber; so he changes his unchangeable mind, and bestows the blessings upon *you*. If this be not a fair statement of the case, pray tell me in what respect it is not. If Jehovah had resolved to bestow the blessings upon you, what was the use of Jabber asking him to do so? If Jehovah had resolved to bestow those blessings upon you, what need was there for you to bother him by setting Jabez upon him? Can Jabez, by his praying, alter the decrees of Fate? If not, why does he pray? He cannot alter the decrees of Fate; but he prays because you pay. Soul-curing is a business, just as bacon-curing is—only not half so honest. Any rough sort of a "bloke," who is not drunk and incapable more than three days a week, can be a bacon-curer. Albeit it takes a polished "bloke" to be a soul-curer; but he may be drunk—or, at least incapable—every day of the week; the more incapable the better soul-curer he will be. Proverbially, middle-class parents with sons train the capable ones to secular professions, and dedicate the dunce to the Church.

True, the young soul-curer is sent to the University

while the young bacon-curer is sent, say, to crossing-sweeping. And much benefit accrues from sending a dunce to college! I have been to the University, and have been made aware of its atmosphere of erudite nescience. While the populace was as yet wholly illiterate, one who had been to college was looked upon as if he had been elevated above the rank of mortals. "Latin names for horns and stools" stun the sacerdotal dupe into reverence, and "words of wondrous length and thundering sound" chloroform the "sheep" while the "shepherds" are shearing off their fleeces. There is no narrower man than your ordinary "'varsity man," and no more unmitigated cad. I should be the last writer in the world to underrate the discipline and culture involved in real classical lore; but I decry the ordinary college routine of the ordinary college homunculus. The mere grinding of Greek verbs will not make a man, any more than will the grinding of scissors. If souls be, how is their curing linked on to the second aorist or the paulo-post future? How few are capable of rising to the divine enthusiasm of the Hellenic ideal? How few are gifted with the poetic ecstasy to unloose the peplos from the chaste lines of the Greek Art goddess, letting it reveal—

" The grand cool flanks,  
The bossy hills of snow " ?

The vast majority in any college of which I have ever been a student, or of which I have in any way become cognisant, are not there for their love of learning, or through their thirst for knowledge; but are there simply to "grind" sufficient to pass the "exams." necessary to the profession they have selected, or which has been selected for them. Take your ordinary *alumnus*; his most distinguishing characteristic is his ignorance. He has some lamp learning, but no sun thought. He is a harmless drudge without a solitary idea that has not percolated down through the stale

academia of the ages. His whole mental equipment is blue-mouldy. He is a blear-eyed and hump-backed thing of declensions and trochees, of asymptotes and surds—and absurds. The truth is, at college you do not learn soul-curing, except in the wide sense of learning to be good for nothing. If you go to learn to be a tailor, you are taught how to sew on buttons; if you go to learn to be a soul-curer, you are not taught how to refute even the most elementary arguments of the educated unbeliever. Preaching is only possible when it is legally protected against attack, and while open and verbal criticism of a sermon is liable to be punished as “brawling.” How molluscously vulnerable your bird of pray is when he dares to step outside of that coward’s castle—the pulpit.

I have not half the antipathy to preaching in itself that I have to preaching as a profession. If a man is to rise to the dignity of being “a watchman on the watch-tower of the living God,” and all that kind of thing, let him take a biscuit and a bottle in his knapsack, and do the watching and vigil as long as he likes. If he has the ignorance to think God wants watching, and the impudence to think that he is the man to do that watching, why let him watch till he is black in the face, but always sustained by his own biscuit and bottle which he earned by honest mundane work before he took to bottling moonshine and to clipping the rainbow with his pocket scissors.

I have a sympathy with fanatics, even with stark, staring mad ones, when they are honest; when they are prepared to be at sacrifice for their fad, not make their living by it; when they are prepared to ride their hobby horse, and not disposed to ask somebody else to find the corn for it. But I abhor the sordidness that will not keep watch on the watch-tower of the living God without the *douceur* of a negotiable cheque and a penny stamp upon it. It is honourable enough to make a living even by blacking

boots, but it is absolutely dishonourable to make a living by being a watchman on the watch-tower of the living God. The bare contemplation of such sordid blasphemy is enough to make old Simon Magus turn in his grave. A man who would make his living by doing odd jobs for his God should require a fee to induce him to attempt to save his mother from drowning. Perhaps it may be demurred that I am hardly the person to decide as to what is Christian and what is not; nevertheless, I assert that this hyper-Simony which is so "respectable" in our rotten midst is not Christian. Christ was offered no stipend if he would devote his life to doing odd jobs for God. He gave up his joinery which had kept him in bannocks, and, for God's sake, submitted to be "an hungered." This was genuine, this was manly. It does not prove he was right, but it proves he was earnest. To no man is it given to be right; but to each man it should be possible to be earnest in regard to what appears to him to be right.

It is a divine feather in the cap of Jesus that he, presumably, had a comfortable sack stuffed with pine shavings, on which he was privileged to sleep while he confined himself to the making of three-legged stools; but that, when he left off the three-legged stools and took to preaching a three-pronged deity, he had not where to lay his head, although the foxes had their holes, and the birds of the air their nests. All honour to you, Jesus, and it requires the like of me to be in a position to do you honour. This is not a trait of your character upon which your priests and ministers dare dilate. You were noble enough to follow your convictions and starve; they are mean enough to follow you in order that they may make a living. Shame upon them; burning and unquenchable shame! They do *not* follow you. They have turned their backs upon you, and are going in the exactly opposite direction. One *servant* (!) of yours here among us has got £15,000 a year where you had

not a shirt, and, when you died, had to borrow even a grave.

And, Lord Jesus, to keep up this £15,000 person and the system he represents, even I have to pay out of my modest earnings or have my books sold, and, possibly, the basin out of which I eat my oat porridge, and the spoon with which I eat it; I have to pay tithes to a church dedicated to St. Sepulchre, and situated in Newgate Street. Can you tell me, Lord Jesus, who the mischief this St. Sepulchre was? I have not met anybody who knows, and yet I have to pay towards keeping up a church in his honour, a church I have never entered, nor ever will enter unless its functionaries may at length take my dead body inside, and bury it under the flagstones by way of giving me some sort of value for my money.

I wonder, Lord Jesus, how your £15,000 servant can look even your poor, sad, lean, weary picture in the face. I am only a heretic, but I can look it in the face, for I have not £15,000; but what I have to buy oatmeal and a herring with I have earned honestly, and right in the teeth of the way men earn money; for I cant not, I go to no church, I assail all churches, I do not take even the slightest pains to be "respectable;" and I drag my pen like a perfect hell-harrow over the hurdies of all the sorts of quacks and shams which you in your day inveighed against as "scribes and pharisees." I, too, have not had where to lay my head, and have slept in a haystack. A yokel came in the morning with a cart, and, I being yet asleep and covered over with hay, he was within an ace of inadvertently driving his hay-fork into my chest, and thereby introducing me to the world beyond the world of which I have no proof, but of which I have many an ecstatic dream. No one with sad eyes, and with a heart through which the surges of sorrow have swept, need turn aside from gazing on thy pictured face, O Jesus. There is a mystic affinity

between it and the soul of him who has played his earnest part in the tragedy of the world, who has recognised the eternal fruition of duty and the mocking hollowness of renown, and that—

“The rust will find the sword of fame;  
The dust will hide the crown;  
That none shall nail so high his name,  
Time will not tear it down,”

and works for the never-ending cosmic result which shall still obtain and advance when the concept of time has been superseded, and the postulate of space is no more.

But how can wordly-minded charlatans look in thy sincere and tragic eyes, O Jesus! Men who, in thy name, make a living by dealing with the things of the spirit, the deep things of God, are ironically blasphemous to a degree, the contemplation of which would make Simon Magus shudder, and a worse reprobate than Iscariot despair and hang himself. Centuries ago Thomas à Kempis wrote “*De Imitatione Christi* ;” but, in all the centuries since then, who has imitated Christ even in the rudimentary gist and plainest lesson of his example? Follow him, indeed, ye birds of pray, ye “generation of vipers,” as he would have called you; ye imitate him by doing your best to have your brow resplendent with a mitre where his bled under a crown of thorns. Verily, as Ruskin observes, “only those who have left their means of living that they may preach, and whose peace follows them as they wander and abides where they enter in, are of God’s ordaining; and, practically, until the Church insists that every one of her ministers shall either have an independent income or support himself for his ministry on Sunday . . . no word of the living Gospel will ever be spoken from her pulpits.”

A venal and hypocritical sacerdotalism poisons all with which it comes in contact, and vitiates the very well-springs of social life. Godliness is great gain in the pulpit, and the

observant and greedy take care that it is also great gain in the market. In one of our suburbs there died the other day a well-known and respected citizen, who had successfully failed in business four times, and whose widow, it is believed, is in consequence pretty liberally provided for. He was a pillar of the Church—in fact, an ostentatious and highly ornamental pillar, and the Church accorded him an elaborate funeral, tricked out with all the expensive panoply of woe. And he was committed to the dust “in the sure and certain hope of a glorious resurrection.” You can always rest assured you will be entombed in the certainty of quite a “glorious resurrection” if you leave sufficient to pay the glorious parrot to chatter over your remains.

A curious coincidence, if coincidence it was, made specially notable the burial of this worthy, who had been four times bankrupt, and who each time had got “white-washed,” and had recommenced swindling and canting on a bigger scale than before. As part of his obsequies, the audience sang the hymn, “Failing, Still Failing,” followed by “Jesus Paid it All”!

## CHAPTER XXIII.

### TWO TREES.

THE first and second chapters of Genesis must have been written by a priest—an antique but acute bird of pray. His objection to the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge being utilised is sufficient evidence of his ecclesiastical instinct. Knowledge and Priestcraft cannot exist together. The lion will, indeed, lie down with the lamb before the scientist and the flamen will dwell together in amity. True, in this sham of an age and realm we have not the flamen tearing the tongue out of the head of the scientist with pincers, as in more sincere times Vanini's was torn out for his hostility to the Church. True, in this epoch and region of hypocrisy and culpable civility the scientist is to be found who is polite and respectful to the Church. This is the age of peace with dishonour. Many who know the truth refrain from speaking it for fear of offending somebody. In this I differ from the spirit of the age in which I live ; I will speak the truth although thereby I offend all creation. I have never seen the Mr. J. Smith however "respectable," that I would not dare to offend rather than I would dare to palter with truth. If a man take offence at truth I care not whether I offend him or not. He may urge that I hurt his feelings. A man who is afraid of truth does not deserve that I should respect his feelings. There is much cant spoken about the "respecting of feelings"—a euphuism for the respecting of falsehood.

It is this canting and mawkish respecting of feelings—that is, respecting of superstitions and prejudices—that



makes error perennial. When the Christian Book and the heavy end of the Christian Church teach that the human race is destined to be burnt for ever and ever in hell, am I to hold my peace for fear of hurting somebody's feelings? When, on the same authority, I am assured that the burning brimstone can be slaked by blood, that you can escape perdition only by believing that a certain person was nailed to a tree, am I to withhold my protest for fear of hurting someone's feelings? The man who is so mentally lazy, so morally lethargic as to have his feelings hurt when I assail the burning that is to be prevented by the nailing is a criminal, and has forfeited the right that any earnest and honest man should respect his feelings.

When a man commits a murder we hang him irrespective of his feelings. But when a man, through indifference, insincerity, and self-interest, murders truth—far more sacred than the life of any man—we do not hang this sort of murderer. If he be "successful" and build spires upon, and put stained windows in, temples of Superstition, our baronetcies are for him, or even our peerages, placing him on a footing with our mighty mash-tubbers and coronetted soap-boilers. And truth is buried under the malt and the soap. Moreover, protests against this burial are to all appearance unavailing. He who flings himself against the serried ranks of hypocrisies and lies is swallowed up as completely as Empedocles was when he leapt into the crater of Etna. Only a sandal of the sage was ever erupted into the upper world, and the volcanic discharge continued in all its red and thunderous fury. Within the last half century more than one of the dauntless sons of the coming day has, with the romantic daring of the Agrigentine, leapt into the Malébolgé of our conventional frauds. No sandal of them remains; and the falsehoods are black as ever, and the vast majority of our race seethe and reek and rot in the clutches of tyranny, toil, and hunger.

Our "religion," so-called, a lie, and our pontifexes liars, what wonder that we are shams, that we are whited sepulchres and gilded hypocrites, that we prate of woman's honour while on the streets of our capital city there are every night 100,000 women ready to sell that honour for sixpence! Under the old system we had Feudalism's cringing serf; under the new system we have Capitalism's "sweated" slave. In a fine plight a chiliad and a half of our special brand of Priestcraft, with its bitter aversion to the Tree of Knowledge, has left us. "Between the two extremes of lazy refusal to work and of famishing inability to find any work," groans he of Ecclefechan, "what a world have we made of it with our fierce Mammon-worships, and our benevolent philanderings, and idle, godless nonsenses of one kind and another! Supply-and-demand, Leave-it-alone, Voluntary Principle, Time-will-mend-it, till British industrial existence seems fast becoming one huge poison-swamp of reeking pestilence, physical and moral; a hideous living Golgotha of souls and bodies buried alive, such a Curtius' Gulf, communicating with the Nether Deep, as the sun never saw till now . . . . Thirty thousand outcast needlewomen working themselves swiftly to death; three million paupers rotting in enforced idleness, *helping* said needlewomen to die—these are but items in the sad ledger of despair."

And all this comes from sedulous watering of the Tree of Ignorance and the studious blighting of the Tree of Knowledge. The former tree has overshadowed the latter till this, the latter, is taken to be, not a figurative, but a literal tree. Thus, in this country, the *citrus paridisi*, a small-fruited variety of shaddock, which bears indentations strongly suggestive of tooth marks, is commonly reported to be a memorial of Eve's misbehaviour. In Ceylon the *tabernæmontana dichotoma* flourishes under a similar imputation. (The surviving traces of a considerable bite

somewhat mar the appearance of this still attractive-looking fruit. It is, moreover, harmful and disagreeable at the present time, but is supposed to have been very tasty before the serious occasion on which it was bitten by the world's first Janet.) It is held in France that a delicious sweet-skinned variety of the orange typifies the vitiate but yet most tempting fruit the first biting of which in Eden doomed every mother's son of us to blazes. How strange that no Scottish theologian has yet discovered that the Tree of Knowledge was a *kail runt*!

Woman at this hour is suffering from not having to a sufficient extent followed the serpent's salutary advice as to eating of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge. At this hour she is under the malign influence of the Tree of Ignorance, which Priestcraft—like the vast vegetal growths of the ocean bed—has nourished in darkness, and has cruelly watered with blood. Even now woman has only begun to struggle upward from the baleful effects of the fable of "the Fall," and but for which there is no necessity for the tragedy of "the Redemption." St. John Chrysostom voiced the Church of which he was an ornament when he wrote: "Through woman the devil has triumphed, through her Paradise has been lost: of all wild beasts the most dangerous is woman." And this miserable falsehood about "the Fall" and woman's initiative in it has been bred into the bone till we cannot get it out of the flesh. It is not till these latter times, when "the Fall" and "the Rise"—that is the Atonement—are losing their grip upon the credence and the conscience of the race, that woman is recognised, not as man's toy and bane and slave, but his equal and diviner partner. But saws and proverbs still current in Christendom show how deep and venomously the two-edged lie of "the Fall" cut into social and domestic life.

For instance, there is a proverb which says that a woman should go but thrice abroad—to be baptised, married, and

buried—and which Burton quotes in his “Anatomy of Melancholy.” Another of these masterful “Fall” proverbs is the well-known :

“A spaniel, a wife, and a walnut tree,  
The more you beat ’em, the better they be.”

Other theologic saws treat woman with absolute contempt. “Oons, sir,” says someone in Farquhar’s old play, “Love and a Bottle,” “let her go, and a fair riddance ! who throws away a tester and a mistress loses sixpence ;” and Swift uses the same masterpiece of proverbial contempt. Of the same class, although a little more respectful in phraseology, is the old adage of “A woman, and therefore to be won.” Shakespere alludes to it in “Titus Andronicus,” where Demetrius says :—

“She is a woman, therefore may be woo’d ;  
She is a woman, therefore may be won.”

It was in frequent use by Elizabethan writers. Another old saying, still often heard in country places, exhibits a most unfeeling disregard for woman’s tears : “It is as great a pity to see a woman weep as it is to see a goose go bare-foot.” And the Tree of Ignorance has been so successfully cultivated, and woman has been so long accustomed to be lashed to it with iron fetters, that she deems the hateful tree the divinest object in the universe, and the iron fetters the most brilliant jewels that ever flashed back the radiance of the sun—she is the last support and stay of that Priestcraft which, through all the ages, has been her blight and bane.

Over most of Europe many of the roots of the Tree of Ignorance have been torn up and burnt in the consuming fire which has evolutionary focus in the process and progress of the centuries. If you want to have an approximate idea as to what the Tree looked like before Priestcraft’s arm had been comparatively palsied, go to Spain. There you may still find not a few bottles of the utter darkness which of old formed one of the ten plagues of Egypt. The result of

sacerdotal domination is manifest in the fact that, out of 17,000,000 inhabitants, over 11,000,000 are ignorant of the art of reading and writing. The fiend does not hate holy water as Priestcraft hates popular enlightenment. Well spake the ecclesiastic of the Renaissance period to his brother priests : If we do not destroy the printing-press, the printing-press will destroy us.

With all our shortcomings, we are a fine race, and Omniscience only knows where we might have been to-day if, instead of being plunged into the Dark Ages, we had taken up the torch of the ancient classic civilisation and borne it forward, conquering and to conquer. But, alas, there was to be a different reading of the book of Fate ! "The literature of Europe, shortly before the final dissolution of the Roman Empire," writes Buckle,\* "fell entirely into the hands of the clergy, who were long venerated as the sole instructors of mankind. For several centuries it was extremely rare to meet with a layman who could read or write ; and, of course, it was still rarer to meet with one able to compose a work. Literature, being thus monopolised by a single class, assumed the peculiarities natural to its new masters. And, as the clergy, taken as a body, looked on it as their business to enforce belief rather than to encourage inquiry, it is no wonder that they displayed in their writings the spirit incidental to the habits of their profession. Hence literature, during many ages, instead of benefiting society, injured it by increasing credulity, and thus stopping the progress of knowledge. Indeed, the aptitude for falsehood became so great that there was nothing men were unwilling to believe. Nothing came amiss to their greedy and credulous ears. Histories of omens, prodigies, apparitions, strange portents, monstrous appearances in the heavens, the wildest and most incoherent absurdities, were repeated from mouth to mouth, and copied from book to book, with

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\* "History of Civilisation," vol. i., p. 222.

as much care as if they were the choicest treasures of human wisdom. That Europe should have ever emerged from such a state is the most decisive proof of the extraordinary energy of man, since we cannot even conceive a condition of society more unfavourable to his progress." Ethnologically, we have still an astounding amount of stamina in us, considering the thousand years we have been in the house of bondage, the sunlight kept out by the black branches of the Tree of Ignorance, our daily food the apples of Sodom, our nightly repast the grapes of Gomorrah.

O Darkness, how, in thy foul night, divine dendritics were studied ! For centuries the science of arborology was exclusively concentrated on tending and nourishing the Tree of Ignorance. Its leaves were covered with the ashes of martyrs blown by the wind from the *auto-da-fé*, with its fire and agony. Its roots were rank with the blood, the red libation of the soldier's sword, and the gore that curdled on the saw-dust under the crunch of the headsman's axe. Referring to Priestcraft's hey-day, "a boundless intolerance of all divergence of opinion," writes Lecky,\* "was united with an equally boundless toleration of all falsehood and deliberate fraud that could favour received opinions. Credulity being taught as a virtue, and all conclusions dictated by authority, a deadly torpor sank upon the human mind, which, for many centuries, almost suspended its action, and was only effectually broken by the scrutinising innovation and free-thinking habits that accompanied the rise of the industrial republics in Italy. Few men who were not either priests or monks would not have preferred to live in the best days of the Athenian or of the Roman Republics, in the age of Augustus or in the age of the Antonines, rather than in any period that elapsed between the triumph of Christianity and the fourteenth century."

And the motto of the Church is *Semper Eadem*. What

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\* "History of European Morals," vol. ii., p. 13.

it was, to the very best of its ability, it is and ever shall be. We have heard from Buckle and Lecky what it was; and John Morley has *this* to say as regards what it is: "The Church, it has been truly said, has broken with knowledge, has taken her stand upon ignorance, and is striving with might and main, even in countries where she has no chance, to use the machinery of popular government to keep back education. The worst enemy of science is also the bitterest enemy of democracy; it is the priesthood!"

Through all the Dark Ages we had very cold cheer indeed, nothing particularly hot except the *auto-da-fé* and hell. The former has now cooled down into merely a horrible memory. The latter, wherever the Tree of Ignorance has the proper circumference of trunk and the necessary stretch of branches, is as hot as ever. I extract the following from a "book for children and young persons."\* The victims are under torture because they, when on earth, neglected to go to mass! "There will be a devil at your side to strike you. He will go on striking you every minute forever and ever without ever stopping. The first stroke will make your body as bad as the body of Job, covered from head to foot with sores and ulcers. The second stroke will make your body twice as bad as the body of Job. The third stroke will make your body three times as bad as the body of Job. The fourth stroke will make your body four times as bad as the body of Job. How, then, will your body be after the devil has been striking it every moment for a hundred million of years without stopping?.....If you cannot bear the sight of ugly vermin and creeping things on the earth, will you be content with the sight of the venomous things in hell which are a million times worse? The bite or the pricking of one insect on the earth sometimes keeps you awake and torments you for hours. How will you feel in hell when millions of them make their

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\* "The Sight of Hell," by the Rev. J. Furniss, C.C.S.R.

dwelling-place in your mouth and ears and eyes, and creep all over you, and sting you with their deadly stings through all eternity?.....All the body is salted with fire. The fire burns through every bone and every muscle. Every nerve is trembling and quivering with the sharp fire. The fire rages inside the skull, it shoots out through the eyes, it drops out through the ears, it roars in the throat as it roars up a chimney.....But what is the smell of death in hell? St. Bonaventure says that, if one single body was taken out of hell and laid on the earth, in that same moment every living creature on the earth would sicken and die. Such is the smell of death from one body in hell. What, then, will be the smell of death from countless millions and millions of bodies laid in hell like sheep?.....See, in the midst of it, there is a girl perhaps about eighteen years old. What a terrible dress she has on—her dress is made of fire. On her head she wears a bonnet of fire. It is pressed down close all over her head; it burns her head; it burns into the skin; it scorches the bone of the skull, and makes it smoke. The red-hot fiery heat burns into the brain and melts it..... There she stands burning and scorched; there she will stand forever burning and scorched! She counts with her fingers the moments as they pass away slowly, for each moment seems to her like a hundred years. As she counts the moments she remembers she will have to count them forever and ever."

The Papist scientist, St. George Mivart, argued for "happiness in Hell." His essay met with the disapproval of Mother Church. But Mother Church expresses no disapproval of the work by the Rev. Father Furniss from which I have just quoted. It is issued by one of the more reputable of Catholic publishers, and actually sets forth that it is "*permissu superiorum*." This not in the beginning of the fifteenth century, but at the end of the nineteenth! And I should be polite, and



make no reference to the matter, for fear of hurting somebody's feelings!

True, the Harlot of the Seven Hills is responsible for the exceedingly hot hell we have just had a "sight" of. But is hell much colder in England here in the Church that, for its initiation, hung from Anne Boleyn's garter? Here is an excerpt from a booklet\* issued under the auspices of the Church of the St. Anne who won King Hal and lost her head. "When they who have led lives of pleasure, of covetousness, of self-willed sin—when such, I say, come to lie upon their death-beds, they may perhaps feel that awful, impossible wish that they could pass into nothing, for to be nothing were better than to be in the strong grip of Satan, amid the intolerable heats of hell. Dying sinners may feel that their immortality is to be an unendingness of pain, of remorse, of despair; and the deadness and the dumbness of passing into nothing, though it would surely make even a dying sinner shudder, would be more bearable to think of than the life in hell—the living in fire, the feeding on fire, the breathing fire, the being clothed in fire, the thirsting for cool water where all, all is fire, above, beneath, on this side and on that side, a far-stretching country of burning fire." And that is not the Romish, but the Anglican hell. God keep us from both! And God give us sense to pull the gizzards out of the birds of pray who bake their bread in the ovens of hell, and keep hell burning that their bread may be baked. Shame! Let us, I say, tear the gizzards out of the birds of pray, and they will want no bread, and we shall be free at last from the bane of their brimstone bakery.

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\* "The Blessed Sacrament." (Mowbray & Co., Oxford and London.)

## CHAPTER XXIV.

### FOOLED AND ROBBED.

MAN's religion should be based upon his highest knowledge ; what has passed for his religion has been founded on his lowest ignorance. Our orthodox Priestcraft has flourished on keeping mankind, in the mass, chronically uneducated and miserable. It has ever preached, but never, except when it could not help it, practised, the "Blessed be ye poor" doctrine ; recognising that poor nourishment, attenuated nerve-power, and an oppressive load of common cares as to the sustaining of bare existence superinduce the type of mind that will accept of any kind of religion, except a high one. There is, alas, too much of melancholy fact in the remark of Condorcet : "The inhabitants of conquered nations, the children of misfortune, men of weak but sanguine imagination, would from perference attach themselves to the sacerdotal religions ; because the interest of the ruling priests dictated to them that very doctrine of equality in slavery, of the renunciation of temporal enjoyments, of rewards in heaven reserved for blind submission, for sufferings, for mortifications inflicted voluntarily, or endured without repining ; that doctrine so attractive, so consolatory to oppressed humanity !"

We constantly hear it urged : "But Christianity is suited to the multitude." True, and pity 'tis 'tis true. But the masses were made to suit ecclesiastical Christianity, and ecclesiastical Christianity was not made to suit the masses. The reputed founder of the Christian system is reported to have observed that the Sabbath was made for

man, not man for the Sabbath ; but, by a self-interested and selfish sacerdotalism, the Sabbath, and all that pertains to it of ritual and worship, so-called, were not made to fit man ; man on the contrary, was degenerated and degraded in order that he might fit them. The people had to be deeply steeped in servile credulity before the Church could make use of them to wipe her feet upon, while she filled her treasuries out of the earnings of their slavery. " A 'supernatural' religion—that is to say, a religion that is claimed to have been divinely founded, and to be authenticated by miracle—is much easier to establish among an ignorant people than any other ; and the more ignorant the people, the easier such a religion could be established. The reason for this is plain. All ignorant tribes, all savage men, believe in the miraculous, in the supernatural. The conception of uniformity, of what may be called the eternal consistency of nature, is an idea far above their comprehension. They are forced to think in accordance with their minds, and, as a consequence, they account for all phenomena by the acts of superior beings—that is to say, by the supernatural. In other words, that religion having most in common with the savage, having most that was satisfactory to his mind, or to his lack of mind, would stand the best chance of success."\*

And such a religion was the very one that had success. The laity were sufficiently miserable to possess a wild longing for better conditions ; they were sufficiently ignorant to believe whatever might be told them by their "betters." Accordingly, they were told that, although earth, about which everybody knew something, was miserable, yet heaven, about which nobody knew anything, was happy ; and that, practically, the more miserable you were on earth the more happy you would be in heaven. And this they were credulous enough to believe, and much else

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\* R. G. Ingersoll.

of a like character ; and the Church proceeded on the lines of marvel and fable and miracle till it had developed in Christendom a credulity that was absolutely omnivorous. No one who knows history can say that the world's happiest time has been in any period of her annals from the reign of Constantine downwards. If, writes Gibbon, a man were called upon to fix a time or period in the history of the world when the condition of the human race was most happy and prosperous, he would, without hesitation, name that which elapsed from the death of Domitian to the ascension of Commodus.

And this was a time during which, if Christianity did now and again bear the cross, she had not as yet the strength to take up the sword. Ever since she did have that strength there has but a small share of happiness fallen to the lot of mankind. As the Church advanced in influence humanity became more and more miserable till the Dark Ages set in, the gloomiest midnight hour of the human race. There was, in the hey-day of the Church, enough of Crusading and Flagellantism and Slavery and Jew-torturing and Black Death and Sweating Sickness and general madness and devilry ; but where any ray of happiness, or even rationality, came in it is not possible to discover. The halcyon age, stretching between Domitian and Commodus, was gone. There was now in full swing the Age of Terror and Misery. The work of the noble was to knock out his neighbour's brains—or what passed for such. The monk flogged the skin off his own back in the cell, and the lay-slave had his flesh scourged off his bones by the lash of his master. Europe and portions of Asia and Africa lay in a nightmare under the weight of the cross. And it was long before the morning of Science began to dawn and the shadows of Superstition to flee away.

Nay, even yet the clouds can hardly be said to have fled away. Of some of the more dismal of them the sun

of modern science has touched the fringe ; and this is all. Once establish Superstition, and she remains. Ignorance means lethargy. Well says Wendell Phillips : " Some talk of the rashness of the uneducated classes. Alas ! ignorance is far oftener obstinate than rash. Against one French Revolution — that scarecrow of the ages — weigh Asia, ' carved in stone,' and a thousand years of Europe, with her half-dozen nations meted out and trodden down to be the dull and contented footstools of priests and kings. The customs of a thousand years ago are the sheet-anchor of the passing generation, so deeply buried, so fixed, that the most violent efforts of the maddest fanatic can drag it but a hand's-breadth."

Yes, even yet the age is dark enough. The malefic shadow of the abbey could not be lifted from the land and leave no blight behind. The disease of Priestcraft, like many other diseases, leaves pestilent symptoms in its wake. We had the aristocrat with his castle on the crags ; now we have the plutocrat with his money in the bags—not a very immense improvement. Above all ages the world has ever seen, we, poor victims, have fallen upon the age of the worship of the Golden Calf. And every day that worship is becoming the more intensified. The rich are becoming richer, and the poor are becoming poorer. Even the age of steel had certain moral advantages over this age of gold. From England you may take anything you like, if you only leave her her money. You may take away the book of Shakspeare—yea, you may take away the book of God—but you must *not* take away the Cheque Book. This is not a thing of yesterday. Hallam remarks : " The two first of the Tudors rarely experienced opposition but when they endeavoured to levy money. When general subsidies were granted, the same people who would have seen an innocent man led to prison or the scaffold with little attention twice broke out into dangerous rebellions." But the curse of

purse has been steadily developing since the period of the early Tudors.

For generations subsequently birth could afford to look down upon mere wealth. Even the professions, however poor, could sneer at shop-keeping, however wealthy. All this is changed. Now birth with its *gules* and *argent* goes begging for the hand of the pork-curer's daughter. Barrels are exalted far over laurels, and the beerage vaults into the peerage. Formerly our aristocracy were those who had done much to make England glorious; now it is recruited by those who have done much to make England drunk. Blue blood and the Roll of Battle Abbey do not appear to be ashamed of this, so unreservedly have they lent themselves unto Mammon.

All honest sort of work is now done without Priestcraft; but, in swindling, it is still of great assistance. If you want, as a restaurant-keeper, to supply good, honest comestibles worth the price you charge, issue a plain bill of fare and have done with it, and the public will, quite likely, not enter your door, but leave you to eat all the dishes yourself. But if you wish to make money by getting the public to eat and pay for sausages stuffed with red ochre and rotten dog, set your wall aflame with illuminated Scripture texts, interspersed with announcements *re* the red ochre and rotten dog, and asseverating that the best pork and purest condiments only are used in your establishment. A certain American eating house has mural inscriptions as follows: "He shall feed his flock like a shepherd—Hot sausages, 10 cents." "If ye be obedient, ye shall eat of the fat of the land—Hot apple sauce, 5 cents." "God moves in a mysterious way—Hash, 10 cents." "Take no thought for the morrow—Coffee and cakes, 10 cents."

You can make money out of even such an impious thing as a dance if you can only contrive to trip on the light fantastic toe under pontifical auspices. One with an eye to

both worlds recently managed, under the same roof, to worship Jehovah and Terpsichore. A person standing in the passage between the two celebrations of devotion heard as follows :—

*Right Ear.*

Let us pray.  
O Lord !  
We beseech thee to  
draw near and  
listen to  
us as we  
kneel before thee and  
present our petition, etc.  
for Christ's sake,  
Amen.

*Left Ear.*

Choose your partners.  
All set.  
Join hands and  
circle to the left.  
Swing partners.  
First four forward and back.  
All promenadc.  
Balance all.  
Grand right and left.  
Seat your partners.

The worship of Terpsichore with John Smith, whirling round Janet Smith with her bare bosom and skirts of gauze, raised the "oof" to carry on the adjacent worship of the ancient Jahveh, the father of "our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ," and thereby maintained that idle imposter, the bird of pray, knight-errant of the harlot Ignorance, paid bully of the frump Superstition.

"Blessed be ye poor!" Never till "Cursed be ye poor" is recognised as having the true ring of Gospel about it will there be much hope for the sons of men. Well said Dugald Stewart: "How ineffectual are all our efforts to preserve the morals of a people if the laws which regulate the political order doom the one-half of mankind to indigence, to fraud, to servility, to ignorance, and superstition, and the other half to be the slaves of all the follies and vices which result from the insolence of rank and the selfishness of opulence."

I question if the Church, even when she stood with her triumphant foot on the prostrate body of mankind, ever oppressed the poor as does this adulterous mixture of God and Mammon which we have at this wretched hour of time.

In the Middle Ages, Savonarola, a progressive monk, who, of course, ended by getting burnt, instituted pawnbroking to prevent poor borrowers from being robbed by rapacious usurers. And, in 1495, a law was passed in Florence enacting that no pawnbroker should charge over a certain moderate rate of interest. An "uncle" may have been an "uncle," indeed, in Savonarola's day; but, as regulated by our English God and Mammon Parliament, he is now a veritable robber. A statistician recently\* worked out the following table, showing the graduated rate of interest upon a small loan, the interest being inordinately higher the shorter the period for which the loan is granted:—

Loan.			Period.			Interest per cent. per annum.
2s. od.	...	...	One year	...	...	27
2s. od.	...	...	One month	...	...	52
2s. 6d.	...	...	Two weeks	...	...	108½
2s. od.	...	...	One week	...	...	216½
2s. od.	...	...	Three days	...	...	505½
1s. 6d.	...	...	Five days	...	...	405½
1s. 6d.	...	...	Four days	...	...	507
1s. 6d.	...	...	Three days	...	...	576
1s. od.	...	...	Four days	...	...	760½
1s. od.	...	...	Three days	...	...	1,014

It is in the interest of the pawnbroker to go a little over the 2s. By making the loan 2s. 3d. he will add 171 per cent. to his profit for three days. 1s. and 1s. 6d. are very common amounts, and there are pawnshops at which loans of 9d., and even 6d., are given; and these small sums, when advanced for three days only, bring out the rate of interest at 2,068 per cent. per annum!

Comment on the above would be superfluous, would be an anti-climax, even if every word were written in vitriol. I have only to add that, if the nephew does not, within a year, redeem the article pledged, it becomes the property of the uncle, and he sells it for his own profit and advantage.

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\* In *London*.



Christianity has been in the world for well nigh 2,000 years, and the poorer districts of our great cities are teeming with pawnbrokers, publicans, and parsons, more intimately connected than would at first sight appear. "Blessed be ye poor!" In this polity of greedy and heartless sham there is certainly enough machinery for making you poor, and for keeping you so. The ironical adage will not much longer lull the nations into self-satisfied squalor. They who will not see to the signs of the times, who will not look at the sky, however black it scowl, however red it gleam, what doom awaits them? The old order will not last forever. Hungry helots will not always submit to the lack of bread on earth in the hope of eating manna in heaven. And they who will not set their house in order shall lie lifeless under the red embers of its ruin.

## CHAPTER XXV.

### SACRED RELICS.

LITTLE wonder if I have never been able to struggle far up the brow of Parnassus. Dietetically, my stimulant has been only a cup of cold water. Burns climbed the sublime mountain well-primed with Scottish whisky, Campbell mixed Glenlivet with his porridge, and, in latter days, he of "Dreadful Night" made remitting attempts to live on whisky alone. Christopher North took his whisky in bowls of milk, with all the flourish of a Norse hero drinking out of a Valhalla skull; and of a night Aytoun would *stot* about the streets of Auld Reekie, losing the power of his legs, but dreadful with the flaps of his poetic wings.

Still, I intend to stick by the water, and let the poetry take its chance. The world has two gods, Wealth and Fame; and, as a rule, neither of them waits upon the possessor of real and exalted poetic genius. Poetasters who can produce rhymes suitable to advertise a royal marriage or a tailor's new cut of waistcoats are most in requisition. The substantial prizes are for them. The following anecdote will give the poetic aspirant a useful hint as to the order of poetry which pays. Provost Anderson, of Dundee, when he departed this life, left behind him a sum of money to be expended in a poetical epitaph. The executors, colleagues of the deceased, instead of employing the local poet, economically resolved to make the epitaph themselves, and divide the money. They were not remarkable for talent in this line, but, setting "a stout heart to a stey brae," they ascended the

Parnassian mount. Executor number one contributed the first line :

“Here lies Anderson, Provost of Dundee.”

Number two added :

“Here lies him, here lies he.”

And number three, delighted with the success of their good work, devoutly exclaimed :

“Hallelujah, hallelujee.”

The thing was done. The poem was sculptured on the memorial stone, and may be seen to this day in the churchyard at Dundee. One great advantage of this style of poetry is the fact that it can be produced without either whisky or genius. All that is necessary to produce it is an empty head, a goose-quill, and a liberal supply of vulgarity and greed.

But the Dundee effort is commendable in at least one aspect. There is the sturdy independence of the executors, who resolved not to put the contract out, but to do their own poetry on their own premises. If they had gone to the expense of engaging the assistance of a professional poet, I think the last line of the elegy might have been improved. Instead of—

“Hallelujah ! Hallelujee !”

there would have been the sublimer refrain of—

“Tweedlededum ! Twiddlededee !”

“Hallelujee” is only a platitude caught from the jargon of the soul-saving line of business, which is falling into disuse, just as that of the handloom weaver did. “Hallelujah” is an un-English and almost infernal-looking word, and belongs to an occult study which, among thinking and educated people, is as dead as alchemy. It was never more than a priest’s conjuring word, with which to catch the vulgar. Devout illiterates howled it from generation to generation ; but without the ghost of an idea as to what barbarous language it belonged to, or as to what it really

signified. It was a grand big word in the howlings of devotional rant, and that was all they knew. Similarly, a certain old woman had her soul "saved" by the minister banging his clenched fist on the Bible, and crying solemnly, "Mes-o-pot-am-i-a!"

Besides the spell-words, there were many spell-objects in use in the soul-saving line of business. I know not if the finger of the Holy Ghost has vanished which was wont to be shown to the faithful in a church in Jerusalem. I know not if the chemise the Virgin Mary wore on the day of the Annunciation is still to be seen in the Cathedral of Chartres. But at Rome, in 1750, there were, and possibly still are, the hair of St. Mary Magdalene, some of the fat which dropped from St. Laurence when he was being roasted alive, the stones thrown at St. Stephen, some hay from the manger at Bethlehem, the head of the woman of Samaria, the tooth of St. Stephen, the bed of the Virgin, and St. Joseph's chain.

There are, or were, at Ovieden, some of the blessed Virgin's milk and hair, St. Peter's right foot shoe, a piece of the rock of Sinai, and manna rained from heaven.

At St. Peter's, at Rome, there are, or were, the cross on which the good thief was executed, Judas's lantern, the tail of Balaam's ass, the axe, saw, and hammer of St. Joseph, and a few nails which he had not driven.

In other Roman churches there were a few blossoms of Aaron's rod, one of the Virgin's combs, a piece of the Virgin's veil, a piece of the rope with which Judas hanged himself, and some butter and a small cheese made of the Virgin's milk.

There were, in various sacred centres, part of the place where the Lord was born; part of the cloth in which he was wrapped in the manger; two pieces of the said manger; some of the gold which the wise men brought to the Lord; some of the stones of the river Jordan, where

the Lord was baptised ; part of one of the pitchers in which Jesus converted the water into wine ; some of the stones respecting which it was said to Jesus by the Devil, Order those stones to become bread ; some of the fragments of the five barley loaves with which the Lord satisfied five thousand persons ; part of the spot on which he was transfigured ; part of the stone on which he stood in the temple ; some of his hair ; some of the hem of his garment ; some of the pebbles and of the earth where Holy Mary wept when she saw the Lord pierced with a lance, and her tears flowed upon the earth ; some of all her (the Virgin's) garments ; some of her tomb in the valley of Jehoshaphat ; the oil from a certain miraculous image of the blessed Mary ; some of the milk of the blessed Mary. Also the crystal cross which the blessed Virgin brought to the renowned King Arthur ; one thread from a certain garment of the Holy Virgin, and some of her hair ; a large bone of St. Peter, two of his teeth, some of his beard, some of his robe, a piece of his staff, a piece of his cross ; a tooth of St. Paul, some of his beard, some of his bones, some of his blood ; five small bones of St. Andrew, two teeth, and a piece of his cross ; some of the hair of St. John the Evangelist ; a bone of St. James the Elder ; a jaw-bone of St. Philip, with three teeth, also the half of one of his arms ; a bone of St. Bartholomew ; two thigh bones of St. Thomas. And this England had plenty of such relics as Thomas á Becket's pen-knife, parings of St. Edmund's toe-nails, relics that would bring rain, relics which would prevent rain, and relics which would prevent the growth of weeds. So much for certain items in the stock-in-trade of that foul, fowl, the bird of pray.

The birds of pray were wont to lay great stress upon those strange birds, the *real* sky-larks, the angels. Gabriel was among the foremost of those heavenly hens, and when Beckford, the author of "*Vathek*," visited Spain in 1797,

being armed with powerful letters of introduction, he was admitted into the Escorial and was shown everything there, including even a feather from the wing of the Angel Gabriel! The prior drew from a large cabinet a sliding-shelf, and displayed on a quilted silken mattress a feather quite three feet long, "of a blushing hue, more soft and delicate than that of the loveliest rose." Beckford longed to ask questions regarding the history of the feather, but wisely refrained.

England has still as a spell her "Infallible Book," which is sworn upon in the courts of law; and she has national prayers for rain, and prayers for dry weather, and prayers that bullets may hit our enemies and miss ourselves. We are a nation of over 20,000 parson-power, and every parson is, essentially, a spell-worker and relic-monger—a survival of the ages of superstition and ignorance. Everything we do as a nation or as individuals, even to this hour, is tainted with the canting "Hallelujah! Hallelujee!" of Provost Anderson's epitaph. We are the children of the dead, and, out of an immoral respect for them, we insist upon going about with our eyes bandaged with shreds of drapery torn from their winding-sheets. Even yet there is hardly a chicken among us who has not, sticking to his back, some part of the shell of the egg out of which he was hatched.

As our knowledge advances the wide difference between secular and sacred vanishes; and, as our knowledge advances further still, and our soul broadens out to the breadth of the universe, *all* things become sacred. Only ignorance can make, for instance, Genesis a more sacred book than "Ivanhoe." To ignorance the Bible is a fetish; to knowledge it is a book. It is all the more sacred because, instead of being a transcendental work written by a deity elevated above the range of human conception, it is a volume deeply human—a record of human meannesses

and human heroisms, the pathos of human vice and the pathos of human woe. Only books written by men can be read or understood by men. The gods, if such there be, have their own literature, naturally enough dealing with divine, not with human, experiences and aspirations. Should a god speak to me, I should not understand him. I have had no opportunity of learning the language of gods, and what right have I to the presumption that they have taken the trouble to learn mine?

Professor Moses Stuart, of Andover, a ripe Biblical scholar, observes: "In the Hebrew MSS. [of the Old Testament] which have been examined some *eight hundred thousand* various readings actually occur as to the Hebrew consonants. How many as to the vowel points and accents no man knows."\* As far as book-writing is concerned, this, I should think, is pretty human. Even in modern times, and after the art of printing had fixed versions, the Book for which such extraordinary claims are advanced by those who are *really*, although *not consciously*, its enemies, has run sundry escapes of being even ludicrously tampered with. For instance, the Breeches Bible contains the phrase, "They sewed figge-tree leaves together, and made themselves breeches" (Gen. iii. 7). Printed in 1506.

The Treacle Bible: "Is there not treacle at Gilead?" (Jer. viii. 22). Printed in 1568.

The Rosin Bible, printed in 1609, translates the same verse, "Is there no rosin in Gilead?"

The Place-maker's Bible: "Blessed are the place-makers" (Matt. v. 9). 1561-2.

The Wicked Bible contains a version of the Seventh Commandment which runs "Thou shalt commit adultery." Edition by Parker & Lucas, 1632.

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\* "Œdipus Judaicus," xvii., xviii.

The Unrighteous Bible contains the query, "Know ye not that the unrighteous shall inherit the kingdom of God?" Cambridge Press, 1653.

The Vinegar Bible: "The Parable of the Vinegar" appears instead of "The Parable of the Vineyard," as a chapter heading to Luke xx. in an Oxford edition, published in 1717.

The Ears-to-Ear Bible: "Who hath ears to ear, let him hear" (Matt. xiii. 43). 1810.

The Standing-fishes Bible: "And it shall come to pass that the fishes will stand upon it" (Ezek. xlvii. 10). 1806.

The Discharge Bible: "I discharge thee before God" (1 Tim. v. 21). 1806.

The Wife-hater Bible: "If any man come to me and hate not his father.....yea, and his own wife also," etc. (Luke xiv. 26). 1810.

Rebekah's Camels Bible: "And Rebekah arose, and her camels" (Gen. xxiv. 61). 1823.

To-Remain Bible: "Persecuted him that was born after the spirit to remain, even so it is now" (Gal. iv. 29).

Then, as to the sermons preached upon the texts found in the Book it is wonderful how cheaply a bird of pray can lay in a nestful of ready-made sermons now-a-days. An advertiser in the columns of a Church of England paper offers "fresh, vigorous, clearly-written sermons, with a good Church tone, at 12s. 6d. a dozen, post free." Another purveyor promises for 2s. 6d. to send a MS. sermon, "practical in style and liberal in tone," while for six extra stamps he will work in local allusions. Is it very sacred to have a pulpit hack pegging away at you Sunday after Sunday under the pretence of "saving your soul"—pegging away at you with sermons at 12s. 6d. a dozen, with local allusions worked in for 6d. extra?

What the copies of the Protestant fetish which reach the "poor heathen" are like may be inferred from the following



incident. While Eliot was engaged in translating the Bible into the Indian language he came to this passage: "The mother of Sisera looked out at the window, and cried through the lattice," etc. Not knowing an Indian word to signify lattice, he applied to several of the natives, and endeavoured to describe to them what a lattice resembled. He described it as a framework, netting, wicker, or whatever else occurred to him as illustrative; when they gave him a long, barbarous, and unpronounceable word, as are many of the words in their language. Some years after, when he had learned their dialect more correctly, he is said to have laughed outright upon finding that the Indians had given him the true term for eel-pot. "The mother of Sisera looked out at the window, and cried through the eel-pot." By-the-bye, the tribe for which Eliot translated the Bible is extinct—a significant commentary on the humane character of Indian missions.

When he tries, Mr. John Smith can write in a style so similar to that of deity, and the ordinary Mr. George Jones is so imperfectly acquainted with the writings imputed to deity, that for more than a hundred years past it has been customary to paste the following into a copy of the Bible, and read it aloud to the pious as Genesis li., a chapter which does not exist:—

1. And it came to pass after these things, that Abraham sat in the door of his tent, about the going down of the sun.

2. And behold a man, bowed with age, came from the way of the wilderness, leaning on a staff.

3. And Abraham arose and met him, and said unto him, Turn in I pray thee, and wash thy feet, and tarry all night, and thou shalt arise early on the morrow, and go thy way.

4. But the man said, Nay, for I will abide under this tree.

5. And Abraham pressed him greatly; so he turned, and they went into the tent, and Abraham baked unleavened bread, and they did eat.

6. And when Abraham saw that the man blessed not God, he said unto him, Wherefore dost thou not worship the most high God, Creator of heaven and earth?

7. And the man answered and said, I do not worship the God thou speakest of, neither do I call upon his name ; for I have made to myself a God, which abideth always in my house and provideth me with all things.

8. And Abraham's zeal was kindled against the man, and he arose and drove him forth with blows into the wilderness.

9. And at midnight God called unto Abraham, saying, Abraham, where is the stranger ?

10. And Abraham answered and said, Lord, he would not worship thee, neither would he call upon thy name ; therefore have I driven him out from before my face into the wilderness.

11. And God said, Have I not borne with him these hundred ninety and eight years, and nourished him, and clothed him, notwithstanding his rebellion against me, and couldst not thou, that art thyself a sinner, bear with him one night ?

12. And Abraham said, Let not the anger of my Lord wax against His servant ; lo ! I have sinned ; forgive me, I pray thee.

13. And Abraham arose and went forth into the wilderness, and sought diligently for the man, and found him and returned with him to the tent, and when he had entreated him kindly he sent him away on the morrow with gifts.

14. And God spake again unto Abraham, saying, For this thy sin shall thy seed be afflicted 400 years in a strange land.

15. But for thy repentance will I deliver them, and they shall come forth with power, and with gladness of heart, and with much substance.\*

And I doubt not this chapter has been as much the "means of grace" as any chapter in the "sacred" volume. So much for the mystically tremendous influence of "Hallelujah ! Hallelujee !"

This "Hallelujee" business is apt to turn the head of such as take to it too zealously. Only nobody with very much of a head ever does take to it zealously.

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\* In 1759, when in England as agent for the colony of Pennsylvania, Benjamin Franklin privately printed this "chapter," as he always termed it. Taking only a sheet of paper, he kept it laid in his Bible at the end of Genesis, and used to amuse himself by reading it aloud to his friends, and hearing them express their surprise that they had never recollected reading it ; and they openly expressed admiration of the moral it carried with it. Its origin is unknown.

## L'ENVOI.

Armed, in the vanguard of the New,  
Transfix the False, but shield the True ;  
With swinging hammer break the shrine,  
But kneel before the light divine ;  
Treading through Beulah, thunder-shod,  
Impale the Priest to save the GOD ;  
And, ere the trampling ages pass,  
Unfloor the Church, let in the grass ;  
And, ere the morning's splendours die,  
Unroof the Church, let in the sky :  
And earth and sea, and worship free,  
Man will be nearer, GOD, to thee.

Keep vigil, for the days are few  
Till noon's field sleeps in moonlit dew,  
Until the citron and the guava  
Grow on buried seas of lava,  
Till the Promethean fire is gone  
And the rapt soul subsides to stone,  
Till yearnings freeze, unknown, unnamed,  
And snow lies where the altar flamed.

Tread reverent where earth's heroes trod,  
Erase the lines that cancel GOD ;  
The word is writ with mountain scars  
Filled with the glory of the stars,  
And with the sempiternal rays  
The hills of earth are all ablaze ;  
And struggle up the rainbow's rim  
To kiss the handless hand of HIM  
Who fired that deathless altar coal,  
The yearnings of the human soul.

O give an ample time and season  
To thoughts that overleap all reason :  
Have faith, for there is gelt and treasure  
Our poor bushels cannot measure ;  
And all the paths thought ever trod  
Meet in the awful focus, GOD.

*BIRDS OF PRAY.*

And worship when His glory streams  
Adown the chariot track of dreams,  
And mark the reeking of His breath  
Upon the mirror-disc of death,  
And hope the hope sublimely brave  
That over-vaults the yawning grave.

I climb the heights, O GOD, to you,  
By paths that Reason never knew :  
There points unto the psychic pole  
The mystic magnet of the soul,  
And soars o'er what may be or seem  
The wings of longing and of dream,  
And Reason, laid low in his hearse,  
Lets light flash on the universe.

Go, teach the earthquake moral law,  
And mete the Andes with a straw.  
Go, stand you on some heaven-kissed hill,  
Where your rapt being roams at will,  
Leans wild o'er the horizon's bars  
To claim its kindred with the stars,  
And voiceless anthem chants in tune  
To the still pæan of the moon,  
While hieroglyphs of flags and shrouds  
Are written in the tome of clouds :  
And see the wreath Arcturus flings,  
And hear the hymn Orion sings,  
And hear the great drum of the sea  
Roll out the Has Been and To Be ;  
And hear the red lips of the sun  
Preach from the text, THE WORLD IS ONE ;

And, mode of the mysterious whole,  
Follow thine own unfettered soul—  
Know every path that e'er was trod  
Leads devious to the heart of GOD.