Studies in Rationalism

E. Haldeman-Julius

HALDEMAN-JULIUS COMPANY
GIRARD, KANSAS
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STUDIES IN RATIONALISM

THE ORDEAL OF INGERSOLL

A LIE can travel halfway around the world, said Mark Twain, while the truth is getting its clothes on. Robert G. Ingersoll, who began each day with an answer to a lie, put it this way: "It is almost impossible to overtake, and kill, and bury a lie. If you do, some one will erect a monument over the grave, and the lie is born again as an epitaph." We cannot at once point to a man who was more a victim of the ubiquitous, irrepressible lie than was Ingersoll: and, while Ingersoll was too big a man to be destroyed by the liars, the latter were not dismayed but kept up their foolish, hateful gabble in the face of the strongest words of truth. A slight review of the trail of falsehood that wound itself crazily across the career of the agnostic orator reminds us forcibly that nothing can equal the recklessness and the hardihood of religious lying: nothing, unless it be the patriotic lying that is so notorious an instrument of Christian warfare. It is true that men will lie more contemptibly and more conscientiously—with less restraint of common honesty and a greater abandon of virtue—for God or country than for any other cause.

The lie for God or country is unique in the low demand of plausibility: really, any sort of lie will pass, and it appears indeed that the silliest and crudest lies are the most popular. The patriot is guarded carefully from contact with the lies of the enemy and is restricted, quite simply, to the home product of falsehood. God's own liars have the advantage that their opponents, on the whole, do not try to retaliate with false weapons. For example, Ingersoll, although he was pursued and pestered all of his active life by liars and their lies, never stooped to lie in return. Of course, there was another reason for this than the fact that Ingersoll was naturally a truthful man. It was not simply forbearance that prevented him from trying to out-lie the religious liars. He had, in the long run, better weapons. He had wit, eloquence, intelligence, charm and force of personality far beyond those who spread the calumnies about him.

The ordeal of falsehood, tireless and unrestrained, through which Ingersoll passed is full of interest; and it is peculiarly interesting in that it reflects at its extreme the willingness of man to lie, as he persuades himself, for God. The facts of Ingersoll's character and life were ill-suited to the aims of those who wished to attack him personally. The truth absolutely would not serve to oppose the man. He was beyond the reproach, as he was generally beyond the record, of the most righteous in honesty, honor, humanity—in his daily mode of life, public and private. He was a better man, every day and in every way, than most of the preachers who fulminated against him, who delighted
to stick a coat of holy blacking upon his name, and who envied "Royal Bob" his power and fortune. We know that Ingersoll's opinions would have been no less true if his character had been less good: as the rain falls upon the just and the unjust, so is truth open to all men without regard to their morals. It happened, however, that the limit of truth which could be urged against Ingersoll was what a village gossip said about a neighbor: "He was a bad man, who deceived everybody by leading a good life."

On the other hand, had Ingersoll been a reprobate, a fool, and a hypocrite of the worst type, it is doubtful if the mere record of truth could have outrun the inventions of slander. There was no accusation so bad or so ridiculous that the pious haters of Ingersoll would falter in its utterance. The bigger the lie, the bolder was the assertion of it. It is remarkable how busy Ingersoll was, nearly his whole life, in answering the liars. He was like a giant fighting a swarm of vicious insects. The man could hardly turn around without running against a new or a vigorously repeated old lie. Friends were constantly defending him. Almost the chief task of the propagandists of rationalism was to deny, in season and out, that Ingersoll was a false-hearted, wicked man. The Daily Transcript of Peoria, Ill., and John Warner, for a number of years mayor of that city, where Ingersoll was long a distinguished citizen, were more than once called upon to deny the most far-fetched tales of Ingersoll's depravity.

It was common for preachers to devote long sermons to ranting, rancorous attacks upon Ingersoll. A fair example is the tirade of a South Dakota pulpit-pounder, who declared that the famous agnostic "was profane in a large degree, vicious and depraved." He was, in the bitter words of this follower of Jesus, a drunkard, a mixer in saloon brawls, "a drinking character." As a young man he had been so unfortunately entangled in a saloon fight as to have received a cut on the forehead from a beer glass "in the hands of some man as low as himself." He had once, in a very abandon of blasphemous immorality, mockingly baptized a little child with a glassful of beer. Often he had been so drunk that he could not lecture. His daughters had imbibed so liberally of wine at the Ingersoll family table that they had needed a guiding hand to lead them from the room. Again, as the last word in damnation, it was alleged that Ingersoll was not respected by his old neighbors in the city of Peoria. Yet, comically enough, the preachers resented a word by Ingersoll in behalf of temperance. A bit of oratory on the evils of excessive drinking, which Ingersoll used in a legal role, was attacked far and wide as being a plagiarism. The truth was that a lesser light stole Ingersoll's words, adding to them with clumsy flights of piety, in which liquor was branded as "God's worst enemy." Yet again, when Ingersoll presented a bottle of whiskey to a sick friend, with a poetic eulogy of the "imprisoned light," this was denounced as a vile encouragement to Demon Rum. Ingersoll was neither a puritan nor a sot. He was equally opposed to prohibition and drunkenness. He believed, quite sensibly, in a temperate use of the joys of life. Ingersoll drank, but he was not a worse man for that. The preachers who spat venom at him would, no doubt, have been more honest and genial if they had now and then felt
a little the glow of alcohol. Ingersoll was not a whiskey drunkard; and, better still, he was not in the habit of getting drunk on hatred and superstition—a kind of intoxication from which ecclesiastics who berated him were seldom free.

Stories of the picturesque sinfulness of Ingersoll’s domestic life did not cease to circulate, although the true atmosphere of that life was frequently and finely described by men who were too big for slander. The truth of Ingersoll’s relations with his family was indeed well enough and easily to be learned by any one who was not inclined to falsehood by the force of prejudice. There was a flood of testimonials from journalists, public men, fellow citizens, emphatic in personal tribute to Ingersoll: but these did not serve to abate the mendacious industry of the clergy and their pious, easily duped flocks. The majority of the faithful agreed with the statement of one preacher that “Infidelity never had and never could produce a model, moral man.” Was it possible that a man who disputed the divine authority of the Bible could be a gentleman? a man of kindly courtesy and broad generosity in his home life? a man indeed who lived according to an exemplary code of domestic ideals? It simply could not be. He was an infidel, and, by the same token, a sinner of scarlet dye in all things. And, worst of all, wasn’t it known that he had damned (or helped God to damn) the souls of his wife and daughters with his infidelity? It did not matter that Mrs. Ingersoll had been “the skeptic daughter of a skeptic father”; or that the Ingersoll girls, having been left entirely free to form their own beliefs, had followed the ways of intelligence. Fearful pictures were drawn of how Ingersoll had seduced his family into the downward path. The Christian liars were so eager to defame their most brilliant foe in his character as a father that they spread the tale that his son had lost his mind by reading fiction and had died in an asylum for the insane. Ingersoll’s reply to this yarn was amusingly complete: “1. My only son was not a great novel reader. 2. He did not go insane. 3. He was not sent to an asylum. 4. He did not die. 5. I never had a son.”

A lie that was often repeated and as often refuted, but never quite killed, was that of Ingersoll’s cowardice as a Union colonel in the Civil War. The preacher who descended to abuse of the Prince of Pagans, and who left this story untold, felt that he had been remiss in his duty. The story was that Ingersoll had been in a single fight only—a skirmish of little importance—and that he had ingloriously surrendered himself to a sixteen-year-old boy. Officers and men of Colonel Ingersoll’s regiment of Illinois cavalry came forward with the truth again and again. The Colonel was engaged ably and bravely in battle at Shiloh and at Corinth, led his cavalry as a scouting force, and at length, with six hundred men, was overwhelmed by ten thousand men under command of General Forrest; Ingersoll and a number of his men were inevitably captured, and the Colonel was placed in charge of a parole camp at St. Louis; when exchange finally appeared impossible, the Colonel left the army and served with immense effectiveness as an orator for the Union cause. From both Union and Confederate sources there was plenty of evidence of Ingersoll’s true war record, but this weighed less than nothing with the firm religious liars. It was also declared, with as
little truth, that Ingersoll had been a loud pro-slavery man early in the
war.

It was persistently charged that Ingersoll was led by greed alone to
attack God. It is a stock-in-trade of ecclesiastical "argument" that any
one who fights the church is simply trying to fill his pockets. It is per-
haps as idle, but also fully as true and cogent, to retort that many
preachers make ample, easy livings by talking for God. Quite often the
statement cheerfully went the rounds that Ingersoll had candidly told a
friend that he didn't believe his own teachings and was an agnostic for
profit only. Thus the pious not only wished to regard the man as a
hypocrite but as an absolute fool to boot. It did not occur to their credu-
lous minds that the agnostic, if he were so mercenary, would not be so
blind to his own interests as to admit such a motive. One is reminded
of a story told by Ingersoll. He was advised by a preacher that, even
if he did believe as he talked, he should for policy's sake hide that belief.
Ingersoll aptly retorted that, in the light of such advice, he was bound
to doubt the sincerity of the preacher. As a matter of fact, Ingersoll,
as any well-informed man of the day knew, was able as a lawyer to
make a very good living. He could have gained high (and probably the
highest) political office had he been willing to keep quiet about his
beliefs on religion. The extraordinary generosity of the man ran counter
to the view that he was impelled by love of money. The theory of greed
fails sharply to explain Ingersoll's gift of the copyright of his works to
his rationalist publishers. His many free lectures for charitable purposes,
in behalf of associations and individuals, would hardly have been ex-
pected from a greedy man. There are innumerable stories of Ingersoll's
warm and ready generosity. He had a far better heart than most of the
preachers who mouthed hypocritically about the love of Jesus. One
preacher, indeed, described Ingersoll as a man who had "the heart of a
Christian and the head of an atheist." But as a rule the preachers could
not bear to hear stories of the Pagan's kindness to his fellow men: it was
especially unpleasant for them to hear a story of the Pagan's extending
succor when preachers coldly ignored the sufferer. They would not
even let it pass that Ingersoll was decent to members of his own family.
It was said that he had been so indifferent to a sister, Mrs. Black, as
to let her die in poverty. The truth was, as declared among others by
Mrs. Black's attorney, that for years Ingersoll had given his sister the
sum of fifty dollars a month; and that, upon her death, he provided
for her burial; he was with her when she died, and her dying words did
not point to neglect by an unkind brother: "I would like to live, but die
content, thanks to your philosophy."

Now and then a preacher would smugly accuse Ingersoll of having
slandered the memory of his own father. The elder Ingersoll was a
minister, who eventually turned to the belief, or lack of belief, of his
eloquent son: and who, dying, asked that son to read for his comfort
Plato on immortality and breathed his last in "the happiness of believ-
ing that God was almost as good and generous as he was himself." In-
gersoll, the clergy charged, had laid the blame for his infidelity upon
his father, and had insisted that the harshness of Ingersoll the divine
had been responsible for the ungodly development of Ingersoll the skep-
tic. Ingersoll denied this lie often, but to little purpose in forcing upon
the pulpit a respect for the truth. "My father," said Ingersoll, "was
infinitely better than the God he worshipped." What he did say re-
garding the example of his father was exactly the opposite of the version
that the holy liars put into his mouth. It was the very kindness and
humanity of the Rev. Ingersoll that suggested to the young Robert the
badness of orthodox theology. Thus: "He believed the Bible, and in the
shadow of that frightful book he passed his life. He believed in the
truth of its horrors, and for years, thinking of the fate of the human
race, his eyes were filled with tears." And so it was that Robert grew
to hate a religion that was so cruel and hopeless that it condemned his
good father to such unhappiness.

As to Ingersoll's charity, which stung uncharitable divines to mean
and snarling falsehood, it was said that he kept thirty families and gave
away from $25,000 to $40,000 a year. At any rate, whatever the exact
figures of his munificence, there can be no question in the mind of a
candid reader of Ingersoll's life that he was one of the most generous
of men. Yet one tale circulated, in spite of its palpable absurdity, was
that Ingersoll had cruelly struck a beggar who had approached him for
assistance. This story was not quite a complete fabrication, having had
its origin in the report of a Chicago paper that Ingersoll had defended
himself against a burglar. There were also tales, springing up at every
change of the wind, about occasions when Ingersoll refused to speak
before free-thought gatherings until money was put into his hands. The
only foundation for these reports was that Ingersoll, far from making
a dramatic demand for money on the spot, did time and again lecture
without pay for benevolent or propaganda purposes. It was never denied
that Ingersoll earned a great deal of money by lecturing. He was not
ashamed of it, nor worried by sarcastic comments on his earning power.
He declared that "it is a frightful commentary on the average intellect
of the pulpit that a minister can't get so large an audience when he
preaches for nothing as an infidel can draw at a dollar a head." It was
ture, as the Pagan orator remarked with too painful accuracy, that the
preachers were angry to see crowds flocking to hear the Bible attacked;
and that their wrath was increased by the reflection that the multitude
was willing to pay for the evil, blasphemous show.

An obvious and ludicrous lie, that appeared in all manner of guises,
was that Ingersoll had been converted to the Christian religion. It did
not matter that such a story was contrary—absurdly so—to the reports
of the Colonel's hypocrisy; that, placed side by side, the story that he
was in the habit of weeping bitter tears just before he walked upon the
stage toorate against the God of his belief did not quite fit the tale
that he had been turned from paganism to piety. At times one lie was
in favor, at times another: and the "conversion" lie, even as the others,
would be apparently killed only to spring into life more lustily than
ever within a few years. One lie of this latter type was particularly
futious. It was told, and the report found its way imposingly into print,
that Ingersoll had been made a Christian, and specifically an Episco-
palian, by the preaching of one Hine. This Hine was a freak hailing
from England, who had a theory that the Englishmen were the lost tribes
of Israel. It was this wild and woolly notion, that would not impress any one above the level of a moron, that was supposed to have knocked the props from under the celebrated exponent of agnosticism. Ingersoll had carefully studied and had riddled the most powerful arguments of Christianity. He was familiar with all the subtleties, with the labyrinthine logic, of the theologians. He had come through all this with intellect firm and unimpaired, only to fall prey to the crack-brained speculation of a Hine that, in the words of Ingersoll, "Englishmen and Americans are simply Jews in disguise." Toward the end of his life, Ingersoll commended the aims and activities of the People's Church, Kalamazoo, Mich. And this, too, grew into a story of Infidel Bob's bowing the knee to God. The truth was that this institution was a church, judged by the ordinary use of the word, in name only. It demanded no kind of belief in its members. An atheist could belong to it as readily as a literal swallow of Genesis. It was an open forum, community hall, free educational institution and charitable society. It was no more tainted with Christian doctrine than an Ingersoll lecture. It was simply devoted to that religion of humanity (but why "religion"?) which Ingersoll had often praised as far better than the orthodox religion. When Ingersoll was not being "saved" by a Christian lie, his daughters were subject to these imaginary conversions. Five times, Miss Eva Ingersoll told a reporter, she had been "saved in print": the story was very unconvincing, and it did not improve with age. It was also said, after Ingersoll's death, that his wife was a Baptist—a lie which was evidently regarded as sublime proof of the error of Ingersoll's philosophy of life.

The liars about Ingersoll never wearied in their inventions. At least, they never stopped, although some of the tales were symptomatic of brain-fag. It was undoubtedly a lie of sheer fatigue that Ingersoll gave Guitreau the money to buy the pistol with which he killed President Garfield. It was also an unconvincing though a typically Christian lie to accuse the Colonel of encouraging suicide: as if, when any one lost the belief in hell, he was robbed of the greatest joy in life. A sentimental, puerile tale was that the orator had been driven from the stage in one city when his Christian audience sang "Hold the Fort." Again, it was said that Ingersoll, with tears streaming down his cheeks, had exclaimed to a good Christian lady that he would give anything in the world if he could be enfolded in the arms of her faith. It was a lean year in falsehood when a story was not produced about the alleged, and wholly fabricated, police record of Ingersoll as a young man. It was related that Henry Ward Beecher once jumped upon the Colonel with the assertion that the latter, in fighting the faith, was robbing Christian cripples of their crutches: and that the Colonel had been utterly flabbergasted by this witty, weighty, wonderful "argument." Beecher promptly denied the lie—and no wonder. Beecher, of course, was too big a man to meet an opponent with falsehood; he would not be flattered by having petty, nonsensical dodges of Christian sophistry put down to his credit; he was in truth a great admirer of Ingersoll, saying of him: "He is the most brilliant speaker of the English tongue of all men on this globe." A story of less pretension (though it is hard to measure the degrees of importance of such lies) had it that Ingersoll was keeping a record of
all preachers who had fallen into sin or crime and who had landed in the penitentiary. Another tale was that Ingersoll had backed out of a discussion, in the *North American Review*, with a Judge Black. As a matter of fact, as stated by Allen Thorndike Rice, editor of the *Review*, Judge Black, after replying to Ingersoll’s first article, refused to reply to the second article. Another man, one George P. Fisher, wrote the reply, on the pledge (not complimentary to Christian courage) that it would end the controversy.

The final lie—the inevitable lie—was that Ingersoll repented, bewailed his misspent life, and embraced the Christian faith on his deathbed. Ingersoll naturally foresaw that such a lie would be told. He often expressed the wish that he might die slowly, conscious of the approaching end, and show the world that an agnostic could die as serene and steady in his belief as any Christian. It happened that Ingersoll died, in a chair and not in bed, suddenly of heart disease. He had known (though his family had not) for several years that he might die any minute—but he continued to lecture against religion. Ingersoll had no opportunity in death to reafﬁrm or recant his beliefs. There is on record an affidavit of Mrs. Ingersoll and two friends, who were the only persons present, stating the very simple facts of Ingersoll’s last moments. This lie, as were the other lies, was immediately denounced. The truth was revealed for all honest men who wished to know it. Yet no one knew better than Ingersoll that a lie is deathless. Today one may hear a revivalist crying out in a backwoods tabernacle that Ingersoll died a fearful, sin-conscious penitent: almost the whole catalogue of lies about Ingersoll are, with very little refurbishing, occasionally put to use even in this day. They are not so popular, nor so powerful, as once they were. The story of Ingersoll’s ordeal reads, indeed, like an incredible tale out of a dark, remote, uncivilized past. But it is still true that lurid deathbed tales, and puerile personal attacks upon so-called infidels, are sweetly solemn and reassuring to the faithful. And perhaps another Ingersoll, or another Voltaire, will be assailed by such a host of liars as yelped upon the trail of Ingersoll. Such immense phenomena of falsehood, like miracles, are too extraordinary for everyday occurrence. The liars must have a rest. They cannot, in human nature, keep it up year after year with never a pause. They have tremendous, but surely not infinite, endurance. It must have been a relief to the liars when Ingersoll died. They could enjoy a long vacation, with merely an occasional, small, limited lie for the sake of keeping in practice.

"SOMETHING IN IT"

We only half live when we only half think.—Voltaire.

Clinging to the outskirts of every sham is a host of half-hearted fellows, who cannot quite think their way completely free from sham, and who are not so constituted as to be energetic adherents—but who still, as you will observe, hover around the edges of popular fooleries, ready in any little crisis of discussion to pipe: "There’s something in
it." What may surprise you is that they do not have a timid or blurred tone; but that an accent of strange if not thorough conviction is evident in their utterance, growing perceptibly in ardent in response to the hoot of the skeptic: until, having started out with a leaning, they end with a fall plump into the arms of sham. It is human nature (though not the wisest nor the noblest human nature) to defend a position taken, or even suggested as desirable; and the "something in it" fellow is driven, by the logic of illogical argumentation, farther into the heart of doubtful belief than he would venture solitary.

One smiles, even so, to see "Something-In-It" visibly take on flesh, fill out the hollows of uncertainty, describe curves of nicely fashioned credulity, reveal the color and sparkle of an intenser faith—and stand out, apparently, in the very body of a proselyte that has conned well its rigmarole: Something turns by seeming magic into Everything; from "It May Be" we arrive at the explicit "It Is."

Time and again, I have observed this process, and it has never ceased to amuse me. In my library not long ago a little group was galloping in talk; and it was not until well toward the close of this talktest that the controversial note was struck. It was, let me say, a sudden and surprising note. We had been talking about shams and indeed destroying them (for the nonce) at a lively and friendly rate; and we were, one and all, agreed that Smashing Shams was the purpose for which the human mind was evolved in all its deadly cleverness. "Perhaps," said I, in that spirit of levity which is the distraction of the pious, "it is a game invented for the sport of God, to amuse God and save him from boredom. God moulds certain minds to put up shams in order that other minds, also moulded by him, can have the fun of knocking them down. And God is vastly entertained, so to speak, by this continual sham battle." And then—hold your breath!—up spake one Yorick, a gravedigger, who had a mind to contemplate the skull of Astrology, whose carcass has long rotted in the world's intellectual graveyard, side by side with other storied shams, but whose ghost indeed lurked still in dark corners.

God, weary of the harmonious atmosphere of enlightenment, jerked himself into a posture of attention. Here was a pretty show, One of the Sham Smashers immediately stood up and, said he, "There's something in it"—It, of course, being Astrology. This dead one—this ghost of the superstitious past—put life into a peacefully expiring conclave.

Treason! Well, traitors must die. We leaped upon the base deserter. We reminded him that astrology was as archaic as alchemy—that astronomy had scientifically supplanted the one as had chemistry the other. We urged him to look carefully to the fact that no scientist of the slightest repute could be persuaded to offer a word in behalf of this mouldered corpse of Astrology—the scientific world condemned it to a man. We pointed out derisively that the books of astrology revealed contradictions—oh, the most absurd!—on every page; and that the list of supposed characteristics for one lunar type could not possibly be contained in fewer than a
dozen persons. We told our erstwhile friend that a philosopher had quite simply exposed the folly of the zodiacal theory with a single, obvious, devastating illustration: he had mentioned a certain battle in which some thousands of poor souls, all born under numerous signs, had fallen under the arms of the enemy on a single day. It might as well have been another battle; it might indeed have been any situation, any path, any field of life. Whatever the sign, the men and women born under it will be found to have the most widely varying fortunes and characteristics. The world, in short, is full of failures born under the sign of success; slaves born under the sign of leadership; fools born under the sign of wisdom. A theory that showed itself to be manifestly false at least as often as it appeared to be true—a theory that did not and could not work—was full of sham and nothing else.

And, despite our talk, the man held to this medieval magic. Opposition stirred and spurred him. He had said, “There’s something in it.” It was not long before we perceived that he was really a downright believer in astrology. He had himself been marked from the glittering heavens at the hour of his birth as a leader of men—and such indeed he had proved to be. The moon influenced the tides—and, by the same plain and infallible token, the stars did influence the individual dispositions and destinies of men. It was hopeless. The stars, if they could not win, could not absolutely lose.

Other shams, you will hear, are to be defended by that vague “something” which pretends to much more importance than inherently belongs to it—and which so often throws caution to the winds, ceases to be a “something” and reveals its true identity of unashamed and unquestioning sham. There is “something in” palmistry—and the pretty stenographer, in the temporary role of scientist, will tell your fortune. There is no less—always “something” at the very least—in phrenology: and the bumps in your head will prophesy and classify the bumps you are due to get in life. There is “something” in this superstition, about the weather or warts; and in that popular notion, which, to be sure, is distinctly apart from the world’s recognized and trustworthy knowledge, but which still entertains the fancy of those who are bound to believe that there is “something” in something. And this “something,” unless it steps boldly into the pose of being a great deal indeed, is not defined. WHAT is in this or that sham if it is worth an inch of standing room in the world of truth and reality? Give us, we implore, a real image that will fix this Something usefully or at least understandably in our minds. We get nothing—unless it be a retreat to the most interior defenses of sham and a struggle to uphold sham in toto.

A great deal of the strength of religion lies in the “something in it” tribe. There are men who disclaim the brand of orthodoxy, who ostensibly are of different mettle than the devout and the hymnsinging elect of the Lord, and who may even wear on occasion an air of skepticism. Yet they stand just outside the church door, as it were; they are ready to defend the altar if it is actually jeopard-
ized; they are quick to protest, when some thinker asks why religion should continue to hold any degree of influence over the thoughts of mankind, that “There is something in it.” “Hold!” they cry. “We have followed you thus far in the attack on sham. We are against superstition. We are against theology. We are against Churchianity. But leave us religion—a little of it, for God’s sake. Something—for pity and a fair chance leave us something.” We are familiar with the man who cries that—after all—there must have been something before the first cradle and there must be something beyond the last grave. They ask—oh! unansweredly: Who started this ball of mud to rolling? Who or what raised the curtain for the cosmic show? What is the spirit of man and whither goeth it? They ask as ineffectually as the poet struggling with the impene-trable. They know nothing and, by a queer stroke of logic, this becomes that Something which is the last refuge of the half-thinkers.

These men who are afraid to think straight through sham and emerge, wholly stripped of illusion and compromise, into the fresh air of reality—these men who cry “There is something in it” help perhaps more than they realize to make the wheels of sham go round. Full many and loud and earnest as are the shouters of religion, sufficient and sinister menace that they are, they alone could not maintain the sham of religion. God would be ill defended if he had to rest his safety with the prayer band and the altar crowd. He depends, as does all hokum from the highest to the lowest, upon the innumerable reserves who are full of faint-hearted reservations, who are not willing to burn their bridges of belief and go boldly forth in quest of the truth whatever it may be—looking without fear, and with all honesty, upon a Nothing rather than leaning upon a vague, tricky, sham-serving Something.

This Something is simply the entering wedge of sham. It is the weak cry, and withal the insidious gesture, of the apologist of sham—who, however unsuspectingly, plays into the hands of the charlatans and the fanatics.

Something in it—It is sham. The something that is in it is the drug of credulity that has cultivated the worst habits known to man. “Something in it” is the slogan of the half-thinkers.

A POCKETFUL OF PREACHERS

“Preachers come out every night
And tell us what’s wrong and what’s right—”

The “inspirational” preacher; the preacher who is a “power”; the preacher who is noted for his “heart talks”; the preacher who is a “man among men”; the preacher who advocates “muscular Christianity”; the preacher who is “Christlike”; each helps to uphold the faith and the prestige and the business organization of Christianity in this modern day of doubt and sin. They are not content to be known simply as
preachers; they call themselves teachers also. Solemnly they will quote: “Where there is no vision, the people perish.” They give vision to the people, thus assuring them life and safety from a retrogression to barbarism. These preachers are, by way of courtesy, known as leaders of community life; they are even regarded—as courteously—as intellectual lights; they are presumably the guardians of morality. One who seeks the best, in the way of thought and of ethics, will be directed to a church. Simply listen to a preacher—a preacher who is respectable, holding by a superstition that is dignified by a few centuries of age—and you will hear wisdom that is not in the books nor on the tongues of other men; and that is not to be won by any degree of self-culture outside the church.

What do the preachers teach? What sort of wisdom do they offer? What is the truth back of this pretension of the great intellect, the great vision, the great ethical insight of the so-called man of God? We can learn in church; or by the radio; or in the newspapers. These are days of slack churchliness; and preachers try in other ways than the censorship of theaters and amusements generally to stimulate the trade of holiness; one of the most popular means, and very modern, being the press. So that on Saturday there is a page of advertisements urging the people to worship in the various temples; and on Monday there is a page of sermon-synopses, whereby those who were indifferent to the call may still receive the message. Thus I am able to learn from the Kansas City Times (any paper in any city will do for the purpose) what the leading preachers have delivered by way of revelation and healing and uplift. The “high lights” of the sermons are, I presume, spread before me: the very essence of ecclesiastical wisdom. Looking over a page of preachments in the Times of Monday, February 2, I observe (with such astonishment as I can easily control) that this supreme intelligence, this brilliant guidance, of the pulpit consists of the dreariest, emptiest platitudes—flights of bunk—appeals to credulity—emphasis upon the unreal, the unimportant and the uninteresting. We will be diverted, I believe, by a review of this symposium of “wit, wisdom and eloquence” on The Things Worth-While.

The moral influence of the church is revealed in the words of Rev. John W. Bradbury, Bales Baptist church. Being a Baptist rather than a Christian Scientist, he admits that “sin is real.” So, he adds, is forgiveness—that is to say, God’s forgiveness. Wisely and profoundly, he asks and answers: “How can a man relive his life? Or rebuild his career? He cannot.” We tremble at this thought, but we are at once reassured that “forgiveness will take care of it.” Again: “Sin is a thing that stands between us and God. But the barrier is removed by God’s mercy and forgiveness.” We are punished if we transgress the laws of nature or of man; but God is the great forgiver. It seems to me that Rev. Bradbury confuses the ethical issue; that his moral instruction is false and weak. Is it wise to point men to the easy way of throwing their burdens upon God? Is not this, at bottom, a teaching of irresponsibility? I am not precisely a moralist—certainly not as a judge of my fellows—but I do say that the highest morality is that which bids a man look to his own acts, to their effects upon his own
character, and to their validity in the light of his own reason and conscience. The true ethic is that not all our piety or wit can turn back the clock, erase a word, nor find an escape from reality. We must pay and collect, learn and unlearn, suffer and enjoy in this life and not in another; we cannot let God “take care of it.” The man who looks, not to God, but to himself; who strives to pay, in character and effort, his way through life rather than to pray himself into heaven; who realizes that he will play out his role, for good or ill, in the real world and that no God, in a world beyond the sky, will enable him to “relive his life”—such a man is supported by a sounder morality than is the man who feels that a God is standing back of him to redeem his false promises, his poor character, his failure to recognize that he alone, and not another, must live his life. Self-reliance, in other words, is far better counsel than reliance on any man or any God. It is better to respect your own character and your neighbor’s rights than to put aside spiritual credit with a God as a means of paying, in the sweet bye-and-bye, for your lack of character and your offense against neighbors. Fine words may roll off the preacher’s tongue—but they are false words; they weaken character; they turn the individual’s gaze from himself, and from the real theater of his actions, to God and Paradise; they suggest to a man that he can pile up a mountain of debts to life, and that God will “take care of it.” Such is Christian morality, as Rev. Bradbury presents it brilliantly to view.

The “Reds” in politics and religion are the targets of Dr. Harry C. Rogers, Linwood Presbyterian church. Religiously speaking, a “Red” is one who scoffs at, regards lightly, or attacks creeds in general and, we suppose, the Presbyterian creed in particular. “A creed,” says the Doctor, with an ineffable air of wisdom, “is simply a statement of what one believes.” Very simple indeed—and quite meaningless. The important questions are how we arrive at a belief; what foundation there is for a belief; what purpose is served by a belief. In short, a creed is not to be defended by saying that it is what one believes. Is the belief true? Is it important? And is the belief held as sacred, beyond question or dispute, not to be profaned by the hand of reason? Again, to use the word “creed” more carefully, is our belief merely a formula? a little trick of words and symbols that we mumble and imagine that we have intoned the last phrase of truth? Does a creed mean a few narrow notions—hardly to be called ideas—that we are bent upon holding fast, not letting them go for any offer of truth in exchange? Apparently this is the sort of creed that Dr. Rogers would defend. He warns—this intellectual and spiritual leader—against the “open mind.” “On certain things,” he says, “a man ought to close his mind.” Undoubtedly, among the things on which a man should close his mind, the Presbyterian creed stands first. “There is no intellectual chaos,” we are told, “worse than always to have ‘an open mind.’” The good Doctor puzzles me. We can agree that a man who never has an opinion is a man who never uses his mind to very definite advantage. But does it follow that a man who is never willing to change an opinion is a wise man? Has Dr. Rogers, by chance, never heard the simple old adage, “A wise man changes his mind, a fool never does”? This, you observe, is the kind
of wisdom that ennobled the minds, this the kind of ethical teaching that broadened the characters, of Presbyterian pewholders in Kansas City on the first Sunday in February. Hang for dear life to a dead creed—and don't think! Be a Presbyterian—and keep your mind closed on that subject! The man who urges you to beware falling into a rut—who points out the folly of narrow creeds that exclude the broad possibilities and the meaning of life—who says that thinking is a good employment for the human mind: such a man is a "Red." Dr. Rogers is the kind of teacher who advises his pupils to throw their books into the fire when they have learned the first lesson; or, worse, who reads the lesson aloud to them and tells them not to look inside the book to see whether he is right.

The best we can make of the words of Rev. J. W. Abel, Trinity Methodist Episcopal church, is that knowledge, intelligence, a good mind will not suffice to make one a Christian; and that one may be without these qualities and still be a Christian. Indeed this is true; and Rev. Abel goes even further and declares joyfully that it is a wonderful gift of Jesus to mankind. And, too, they are the "fundamental things," which the ignorant may gain—merely through belief that asks few questions—and which the "wise and prudent" may lose by refusing to believe too easily. "Humbler minds" may believe in God, while this marvel of theology may not impress great minds. The joy of belief in miracles is not denied to the most illiterate; but intellectuals, skeptics of the Voltaire type, wander in the bleak fields of mere human wisdom; limited, indeed, as these men will admit; but there is no despondency and no fear in their admission. We know, too, that "visions" of the end of this world and of the wonders of another world are invariably vouchedsafed to lunatics, and withheld from sound-minded persons who are not sufficiently spiritual to be senseless. Rev. Abel, instead of bringing wisdom, comforts the ignorant by telling them that this ignorance is illuminated by the light and love of Jesus. Self-culture is not so important as self-surrender to the mouldy myth of God. Genius may have its triumphs of the spirit and intellect; mediocrity and stupidity have—priceless possessions!—that "spirituality" which is synonymous with superstition. Yawn, ye jolly skeptics; and perceive wearily that, while Rev. Abel may be able in belief and full to overflowing with Jesus, there is no wisdom in him. As a teacher, he is simply a pathetic example of the need of teaching—and, first, self-teaching.

"The sacred torch of truth"—this is held aloft by Rev. George Elton Harris, Calvary Baptist church. To be sure, Rev. Harris is not the original torch-bearer. He has but caught the torch as it fell from other hands. Yet he is modest—and careful not to arouse undue expectations. "The torch," says he, "is not a flaring beacon light." Not always. "There are times when it seems to be a flickering candle"—for example, at the present moment, with the Reverend waving it feebly with a hand that shakes, perhaps not from an excitement of desire to discover more truth, but in fear that the torch may flare up too cruelly and reveal truth that the Reverend cannot use in his business. And who, down the ages, have successively held this torch of truth that
has finally fallen into the hands of Rev. Harris? Be slow to answer; you are likely to be wrong. These men were not Plato, Aristotle, Bruno, Voltaire, Diderot, Locke, Bacon, Schopenhauer, Goethe—no, nor any men in a list that might resemble them. They were—Paul, Augustine, Athanasius, Savonarola, Wycliffe, Huss, Waldo, Zwingli, Luther, Calvin, Wesley. These men held the torch—and indeed, so eager they were, sometimes a torch did not satisfy them and they had need of a large stake, a fire of considerable size, and the best of human fuel to light the world with truth. Others suffered martyrdom for holding aloft the torch—Of truth? No; of theology; of church doctrine; of speculations about God and the way to commune with God. Athanasius is known, not as the Father of Truth, but as the “Father of Orthodoxy.” John Wesley, while he did not discover, stoutly upheld the great truth of witchcraft. Calvin served truth by advocating that Servetus be put to death, not by burning—an “atrocitiy”—but by the sword; and he was not content with this limited chore for the truth, but engaged in a manly struggle with the Lutherans on the question of the Lord’s Supper—one side “holding that in the eucharist the body and blood of Christ are objectively and consubstantially present,” etc., and the other side that “there is only a virtual presence of the body and blood of Christ,” etc. I could tell you who believed which—but what does it matter? The point is that these fanatics, and not the great thinkers, have been responsible for the passage of the torch of truth from hand to hand along the centuries—and, when the torch flickered, they replenished its light at the next stake that marked a victory for truth. Now, in Rev. Harris’ hands, it flickers as you have seen. But hold! and despair not! for another light shines: “The true light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.” This light is the Lord Jesus Christ.

So far, it appears, we have gained little wisdom. The intellect, the vision, and the ethics of the pulpit have shown themselves as very feeble, very hazy, very petty. We are led to believe that Kansas City is poorly guided indeed, and we do not wonder that a modicum of sin is to be found in a city that has this kind of “spiritual” leadership. It is not such a bad city, however, we are assured by Dr. Samuel D. Harkness; and, it being the seventy-fifth anniversary of the city, the Doctor entertains us with a booster sermon. Are there harlots, bandits and bootleggers in the metropolis? Even so, are there—not also the Y.M.C.A., the Art Institute, the Kansas City Theater, a Little Symphony Orchestra, newspapers, allied charities, etc.? And do not “the Catholic bishop and his priests, the Jewish rabbis and the ministers of Protestantism sit in council with the business and professional men of the city and work together for the common good”? There is the war memorial, too, though the Doctor forgets to include it; and, with a reliable weather man, the climate is good; and there are boulevards—although Dr. Andreas Bard, St. Mark’s Lutheran church, warns us that they are ill used for “joyrides and jazz tunes on the Lord’s day.” Dr. Bard further says that “As a matter of self-preservation we must hold on to the Gospel.” If “we” are the preachers, we in a manner agree. The divine Doctor, by the way, has a simple (and, of course, infallible) test of truth: Time is the Test of Truth. “The survival of Christian
teaching through almost twenty centuries of struggle proves that it contains eternal elements of truth." It is obvious, therefore, that Buddhism, being some centuries older, contains more of these elements—more eternal and more true; and that Mohammedanism, being a few centuries younger, is a little shorter on truth—eternal truth, at any rate—than is Christianity. ... And if Rev. Harkness did not convince you that Kansas City, as a Kiwanis orator might declare, is "a mighty good little town," then how can you doubt it when Rev. W. A. Tetley, Westport Methodist church, pays tribute to the city's "atmosphere of spirituality"? Rev. Tetley has been preaching "Christ and His crucified" for twenty-one years: and his contribution to civic boosting is to say that in Kansas City it is "much easier to influence a man to accept Christ" than anywhere else that he wots of personally. This is the best, the subtlest, the most far-reaching tribute of all—the fact that Christ stands high in Kansas City and is almost as popular as Coolidge. ... Interesting, if not exactly belonging under the head of wisdom, is the statement by Dr. James Edward Congdon, First Presbyterian church, that Judas betrayed Jesus of his own free will. God knew he would do it, but had no hand in it; although it was God's whole purpose to get Jesus crucified and, as Dr. Congdon tells us, the damnation of Judas was the salvation of all mankind. One reflects that it is still an open question whether mankind owes more in this matter to Jesus or to Judas. The ineffable-wise teaching, the sublime philosophy and ethics, that Dr. Congdon has to offer is perhaps best revealed when he says: "When God created man with a likeness unto Himself He imparted to man a will. God never overrides that will. When in His foreknowledge He sees that man will destroy himself by choosing wrongly, He provides in advance for man's protection and for recovery of the wreckage." Obviously, it would be impolite and impertinent and irrelevant to inquire why God refuses or neglects or is unable to provide for man before rather than after the latter destroys himself. ... I select a single bright and beautiful gem from the sermon of Dr. Clarence Reidenback, Westminster Congregational church: "The best people are Christian people." ... Rev. V. C. Clark, Agnes Avenue Methodist Episcopal church, sermonized on the subject: "How to Fish for Men." He says: "We do not fish for men as we do for fish. ... The end in view is not to benefit the fish." On the contrary, what is the object in fishing for men? This: "We try to catch men because they will be a help to our church." Rev. Clark praises Jesus for having been a good fisherman—a man who knew how to bait his hook, as it were. "Jesus caught men by giving them something. He gave the blind eyes, the deaf ears, the sick health, the poor riches, the idle work, the weary rest, the sinful forgiveness." Oh! the clever Jesus, who always knew what a man wanted most; and gave it to him on the spot; and caught him. ... Yes—

"Preachers come out every night,  
And tell us what's wrong and what's right—"
JIM-JAM EVANGELISM

If there is anything lower, anything more contemptible, anything more offensive to the nostrils of intelligence and sheer, downright decency than evangelism as it disports itself at an American crossroads, I want—no, please, I don’t want—to be told of it.

In the first place, we have an imitator of Billy Sunday viliness come to raise the roof for God. And for the worst God, too, that man ever invented: the God of the Old Testament who, if the accounts be true as Bryan says, was guilty of more crimes than are mentioned in his own Decalogue. Before and after the Ten Commandments, this God gave his chosen tribe of savages commandments to kill, rape and steal without let or hindrance. He kept them in hot water, on the warpath and in a savage, superstitious furore continually. It is a God of jealousy, of hate, of slaughter, of chicanery—a God who is a firebrand, a pestilence and a terror—that our modern John the Baptist, who has subsisted on something wilder than wild honey, brings to the yokelry of Village Corners. Without the false excuse of religion, or the excuse of patriotism in wartime, any man exhibiting such a mad performance would be viewed correctly as an inciter to all possible crimes, a disturber of the peace on a tremendous scale. But in God’s behalf, Hell is freely realized.

We have in this evangelist, if he is typical of the tribe, an insane ignoramus. A ranter of the worst type, verbally shelling the woods for God. A man who cannot be described as primitive, without injustice to our remote ancestors. A man who belongs somewhere—his God, if any one, alone knows where—in “the dark backward and abysm of time.” A man who has as little respect for as he has knowledge of any civilized emotion or way of thought. A man who, himself incapable of thought, is filled with hate of all thinking men. A man who has every trick of the charlatan armed with every impulse of the fanatic. A man, too, who cheaply and vulgarly attracts the crowd by his alleged reputation as a sinner of the most scarlet dye. Sin, in every crude or lurid or-fantastic shape, is the head and front of the man’s appeal to these yeoman of the hinterland who are moved by enormous titillations at the vision of the glory and wickedness that is Babylon. The morbidity and hysteria of the Christian appeal is fully displayed as the people of the country-side sweat and tremble and listen, prurient and pop-eyed, in the tabernacle. Culture, if she wandered into this tabernacle, would be torn to pieces by the jackals driven crazy by frantic imaginings of sin and salvation. The evangelist, God’s mob orator, rules the roost of Yahoos.

This sin-killer’s stock in trade is every Christian trick and lie
and miserable degradation of thought. There is hardly any varia-
tion of the performances of these men. Year after year, as they go
the gaping, grovelling rounds, they bedevil the mob in the old,
fearful, ranting style. There are denunciations of great free-thinkers.
And in this, too, there is partly the appeal of the sinful and forbidden.
As one mentions the Devil with bated breath at the crossroads, so
does one utter the awful names of Voltaire, Tom Paine, Bob Ingers-
oll. What an unholy delight it is to hear these men named openly,
with appropriate biblical curses. Damn them all! All of them
wicked infidels, emissaries of the Devil, men who plucked God's
beard. Voltaire—as terrible and tantalizing a mouthful as the Scarlet
Woman or the Demon Rum. Tom Paine—ah, here is witchcraft, here's
a potion brewed by Satan himself. Bob Ingersoll—verily God thunders
in his wrath and the Devil chortles and puffs sulphuriously in his glee.

The "arguments" are the old ones, conditioned by the absolute
absence of thought. First and last, here's the Bible—and damn any
man who doesn't believe it, every word. God has spoken. John the
Baptist repeats him. Of course, there is no room for doubt—and
Hell is for the doubters. But—Suppose we agree with Bob Ingersoll
—just to show him up—and say that we don't know? Then
why take a chance with your future? Play safe. As an ex-gambler,
the evangelist can tell his crowd that no clever man overlooks a
cinch. Believe in God, and you can't lose. If the Bible is right—
as every man not depraved by sin and crime knows it is—then the
Christian yokelet draws the winning number. And the infidel Vol-
taire loses. If there is nothing after death, who has lost? Voltaire
and the village idiot will sleep side by side in equal nothingness.
Faith? We take everything on faith. We don't know that such a
man as Napoleon ever lived. Yet we believe it. We don't know
that there's such a country as India. By the power of faith, oh
brethren, do we believe it. Undoubtedly Christ was the Son of
God: else why do we at the crossroads worship him as such? What
better proof does any man want than the Bible? There the whole
story is written, in black and white, and if a man is so illiterate as
not to be able to read it, he can hearken to the preacher and still be
saved. People want immortality. This is proof that they will get
it. The Bible has lived. Tom Paine couldn't destroy it. Then it
must indeed be the Word of God. Man hasn't written another Bible.
Therefore God wrote it, and it is irreplaceable save by the divine
hand. Did Ingersoll prove that there is no God? Then, by his fail-
ure to prove that there isn't, he proved that there is a God. Out of
his own mouth is he condemned.

But the supreme proof! The tales of deathbed repentance!
Every wandering prophet and Bible-thumper has a quiver full of
them. The infidel always gets cold feet when, dying, he thinks of
Hell. Old sinners, who have denied God their lives long, on their
deathbeds cry out for God's mercy. Smart men, who have been
puffed up by their intellects and sneered at the simple faith of the
morons, have at last yielded up the ghost with a prayer and wildly
imploring gesture. The infidel who has impiously read the books
forgets them all when old Death stalks upon him, and he remembers then the lessons taught him at his mother’s knee. Or the reprobate who has rioted with the temptations of thought, as he kneels at the bedside of a dying loved one—daughter, sister or wife—sees a vision of The Pearly Gates Ajar. And along with these cheap, silly tales we have the old lies about Tom Paine and Bob Ingersoll. They repented at the last, the gaping mob is told. They denied their teachings. They wished to burn their books. They were not saved—oh, no. They were simply cowards, who tried at the last moment to cheat Hell of its human, heretic fuel. How this apostle of the jim-jams does heap filth and falsehood upon the graves of the free-thinkers! These were monsters, who dared to think contrary to the jumping, jabbering witch-doctors. What’s a murderer, or any malefactor of the most vicious stripe, by the side of the infidel who has disputed the word of God and this hell-raising zealot? who has tried to liberate the human mind from the slavery of superstition? This rat of an evangelist gnaws furiously at the imaginary forms of dead men who, by his side, loom as very colossi of intellect and nobility. For a performance equal to this, we must turn to Swift’s Yahoos.

The evangelist, too, may confront man with God in a crudely melodramatic gesture. Brann tells how a preacher in a Texas city resorted to this trick of histrionic befuddlement. This iconoclast of the Texan wilds was writing editorials on a San Antonio or Houston paper; and he was laboring to inculcate a few religious notions slightly above those of human brutes. The man of God objected to this interference with his fetching vaudeville act and devoted a sermon to this villain of godless journalism. As a climax, the preacher suddenly waved before the mob a copy of the paper and a copy of the Bible, shouting: “Whom will you believe? Brann or God?” This is a perfect example of the methods of the evangelist. He is a trickster, a cheap befooler of the multitude, in every word and gesture. He is an actor, who is methodically mad. He plays every possible note upon the name and fame of God, the Devil, the Paines and the Ingersolls. He pours forth an endless stream of billingsgate. He spits upon truth. He kicks reason. He turns on the sewers of holiness and decent men fly to escape the spectacle and the stench. Like the vile Yahoos, he treats man, proud man, to a bath of filth. He uses every trick of crude, bucolic bombast, stinking Billy Sunday invective, dodgings and twistings not sufficiently agile and robust to be called sophistry, sentimental drivel that would make the angels weep but not in grief, threats and blustering that only a yokel would heed.

Above all, this evangelist uses the trick of terror. He is appealing to ignorant people. Therefore he is appealing to people who can be moved powerfully by fear of the unknown. And this fear he gives them in tremendous doses. From first to last, Hell is the main attraction and repulsion. It both attracts and repels. And it unfailingly terrifies. It drives men and women to their knees. There is crying aloud, rending of garments, rolling in agony. Always, this evangelist cracks the Devil’s whip over the heads of the mob. The
roaring and crackling of the eternal flames, the terrible fumes that rise from the pit, Satan in his orthodox theological presentation—these are the devices that draw the shouts and the shekels. After weeks spent in giving the people Hell in exchange for a guarantee and the freewill offering, the evangelist chars the rafters and cracks the walls of the temple with a final sermon on Hell which will beat the Devil if anything will. Those who have held out thus long are not likely to show further hesitation. Whoever does fail to step lively in this great crisis is lost beyond the possibility of redemption. If a man doesn't repent when the Devil actually sings his whiskers, so to speak, it's dead certain that he's bound in a bee-line for the land where Bob Ingersoll will go. As fear is the great, saving influence of religion, so the man who is unafraid, who can look calmly upon the contortions of the holy howlers, is proof against the religious spell.

Not calmly, though without the authentically God-inspired excitement of fear, do we look upon the spectacle. We react to it in varying moods. Disgust is what we most often and most strongly feel. And shame perhaps—shame for Man, to see him thus mocked and presented as worse than ape-like in the antics of this creature. We may see it humorously as an uproarious joke, or as a grim and ugly joke, a satire on man that no Swift with deadly pen could portray. And we may, quite properly, ponder certain of its social consequences—as a joke that should be laughed at with intent to kill. For it is an evil thing, and it has echoes and manifestations, not so obviously farcical, that extend far beyond the crossroads and are involved in shams of the most respectable and dignified type.

Perhaps we should waste our pity to bestow it upon the yokelry who are visited by these calamities known as camp meetings or revivals or orgies of evangelism. They enjoy it. It is a great show to them. No doubt they regard it somewhat as they do the circus or the travelling medicine fakir or the Uncle Tom's Cabin company. It is the show of shows that fills the barren life of the crossroads with hectic, shivering joy. There is a type of mind that revels in the emotion of fear, that when drunk with the ecstasy of terror is happy in contrast with its usual dull functioning. This craziness of religion is a relief to the dullness of ordinary life. And there is plenty of company; it's a herd debauch; all are fear-stricken, all shout when they see God face to face, and one witnesses the fears and the miraculous wild-eyed conversions of others. A simple, unimportant fellow may even win a moment's glory by "pinch-hitting" at the mourners' bench and yanking a neighbor out of Hell by his dangerously scorched coat-tails. And while sin is not unknown in this bare, weather-beaten environment, it is a crude, commonplace sort of sin, the very elemental unadorned sordidness of man the animal; but from this John the Baptist, who hails from the halls of Babylon and beyond, there can be heard tales of strange, gaudy, whirling sins that reveal amazingly the ingenuity of the Devil. One can hear scandals about the wicked doings of the outer world—not to forget the immemorial, never-old scandals about the skeptics (short, ugly
"infidels" in the evangelist's lexicon) who wallowed in intellectual and other kinds of dissipation.

So on the whole, though the spectacle of men crazy and fear-struck and babbling of Gods and of moons made of green cheese is not an inspiring one, it is no doubt true that those whom the evangelist hits in the very bowels of superstition enjoy the blow. Yet if the community be large enough to contain a small body of intelligent men and women (and indeed the revivalist rage strikes towns that are higher in the scale than Dutch Hollow or Village Corners) one cannot but feel the distress of this majority that is exposed to weeks of the idiocy and savagery of old-fashioned religion. There are towns, too, in which the majority, if not downright unbelievers, are too civilized to practice religion to the full. It is not pleasant for them to have the fanatics stirred and the community torn emotionally asunder by the invasion of one hundred per cent religion with blood in its eye. They feel the blasts of hate. They are drawn, willy-nilly, into this feud between God and the Devil, between the sinners and the saved who can hardly restrain the impulse to anticipate the Devil and go after every sinner with a pitchfork and a flaming brand. The man who as a rule, whether unbelieving or faintly believing or indifferent, goes about his business without molestation is now liable to the interference (he being a foe or a possible convert) of every pious meddler and missionary who feels the gripe of God in his gizzard. He may be let alone personally, but he must live in this community that has suddenly reverted to pre-Voltairean type. And as there is the atmosphere of hate which no man can escape wholly, as there is the spectacle of emotional insanity which must impinge unpleasantly upon any civilized man, so there is always an extraordinary impulse of bigotry aroused by these outbursts and inundations of evangelism. The evangelist, in short, arouses the worst impulses of the herd in a community, so that they are articulate and menacing to a degree beyond their everyday, smug, pious habitude. A church-ridden bailiwick is bad enough; but when the bigots start on the warpath, when God actually appears in person at the First Metho-Bap Church, Hell's to pay and the quiet, decent, self-respecting sinner may have a little of the pitch splashed upon him.

IS SCIENCE A SHAM?

What's a sham? I'd really like to know. I have always had a rough, simple notion of what is sham. I have regarded as sham that which is false and hollow, which pretends (usually with much pomp and with stiff neck and bloodshot eye) to be what it is not, as something which may glitter deceptively but which is not gold, as mere "sound and fury" trying to pass itself off as wisdom.

An idea is a sham, I take it, when it claims to be the embodiment of eternal truth yet cannot stand the light of even temporary reason.
A man is a sham, in my humble view, when he claims to have virtue and knowledge that are not even faintly concealed about his person and that may indeed be out of reach of the wisest men. A sham is a lie, it may be crude or clever, that appeals to the passionately prejudiced and uninstructed minds of men.

For example, patriotism is a sham when it lets out the howl that the people of another nation are a pack of beasts and criminals, unrelated to the human family, and unmoved by such motives as animate the breasts of the patriots that sweat and breed in our noble country. Politics is a sham when it is a mere trick of playing on the stupidity of the masses, of promising a new heaven and earth beyond the power or purpose of the glib politicians: when it spreads broadcast such a bald slogan as "Coolidge or Chaos"; when a Dawes rallies the right-thinking masses to protect the tyranny of the courts, pretending that these courts are the bulwarks of liberty.

Religion is a sham when it claims to reveal the secret of life and death, to possess the eternal supreme truth, when it says that he who does not believe shall be damned.

Words are a sham when they make a great display but mean nothing.

Actions are a sham when they parade themselves in dishonest motives: when the petty pretends to be noble, the selfish pretends to be altruistic, the shrewd and calculating pretends to be naive.

Sham is a windbag pretending to have guts and arteries, castor oil pretending to be champagne, a dunghill pretending to be a diamond mine.

I ruminate thus about sham, trying honestly to define the thing for myself, because I receive now and then a letter from a reader who seems to have quite another view of sham: a view, however, that is not at all clear to me. As an instance, here is a reader who tells me I shall do well to smash shams, but he adds that I should not forget to smash the sham of science while I am about it.

Now just what does my friend mean? Frankly, I am puzzled. Here is a vast body of knowledge, brought together from the ends of the earth—knowledge that is the result of careful thought and research, that has been acquired slowly a little at a time, that has tested itself, that is indeed a guide and servant to men in the practical affairs of life—and what is here that can be denominated sham? Grant that it is imperfect knowledge—still, it is the very best knowledge we have, and it is very useful knowledge, knowledge that we constantly employ and could not get along without. Admit that this knowledge leaves a large territory that must be marked as Unknown—still, that territory is smaller than it was a hundred or fifty years ago, and we have at least learned, thanks to science, not to be so terrified by it as our ancestors were.

Science has changed the face of this earth: it has harnessed the forces of Nature—forces whose secret laws it had first to discover—it has created practically a new world within the memory of men living: and is this, then, to be called sham?
There is a lot of theory in science: well, my friend, theory is an indispensable tool of the human mind: and so long as a theory works, why complain? And remember this: when a theory ceases to work, when newly discovered facts rob it of its usefulness, science drops it or trims it a little here and there, and goes ahead with the quiet and business-like air that distinguishes it from hollow, high-sounding fanaticism.

Science—the scientists—doesn't pretend to have grasped in its fingers the Eternal Truth. Science doesn't throw a God at one's head. Science doesn't demand that one believe or be damned. Science reasons. Science investigates. Science tests itself. The scientist is engaged in a constant search for truth; and being the servant of truth, and not of a creed or a myth, he is always ready to confess an error, is indeed scrupulous to detect an error in his own thought and investigation.

Science is not a sham but a tremendous reality. Science works—builds—quietly prevails—promises little and performs much.

What, I ask you, has religion accomplished that can stand fittingly by the work of science? If religion had done one-half for the human race what science has done—and were it ever so imperfect, ever so tentative, ever so far from any final goal of all Good and all Truth—still, you would not find me calling religion a sham or attacking it as such. Religion has given nothing to the world, excepting tears and groans and cries of hate and gibberings of superstition. It has been a fraud, a parasite upon the human race, an enormous windbag gathering the millions who fondly imagine they shall discover treasures within. Religion is a sham. Science has paid its way—it has been a useful and brilliant and tireless worker—it has poured wealth and knowledge into the lap of the human race.

Science is not a sham.

RELIGION—A PILE OF GARBAGE

Religion, says H. L. Mencken, deserves no more respect than a pile of garbage. He says it with an eye that is fixed in particular disgust upon the rampant native Christianity that has bred such monstrosities as Cotton Mather, Sam Jones and Billy Sunday and that regularly produces its Talmadges and Parkhursts to boot. The kind of religion that flourishes at the crossroads is a subject for a Rabelais, forgetting his gusto in a sense of social duty, to handle with averted nostrils and a ten-foot pen. And the religion that displays itself elegantly in the city temple is different only in that it walks on soft carpets and knows how to use its knife and fork and mingles the terrible odor of sanctity with a dash of Parisian perfume. But religion, let us say (using Christianity not as the sole but only the worst and contiguous example) is exactly deserving in the manner and degree allotted to it by the just Mr.
Mencken. Fine words are no strangers to Mencken, but he will not waste sweet adjectives upon rottenness. Contrary to statements that have been made, I say that Mencken is a master of literary style in that he uses words with a thought of their meaning. What better example could we have of Mr. Mencken's stylistic aptness, honesty and vigor than his use of the phrase, "a pile of garbage"? The rhetoric of that statement can be defended as almost perfect: and indeed I would suggest only a slight change. Why not say that religion is a pile of garbage?

We shall have to look at this pile of garbage—not stir it to the bottom nor ram our noses into it but poke investigatively around the edges. It is not likely that you will find in a pile of garbage any fresh, savory, wholesome food. A bit of good food, accidentally dumped upon the garbage pile, instantly loses its virtue. Garbage spoils whatever it touches. In the garbage pile of religion you will see, in the first place, certain messes that have been cooked and chewed over, and most gastrically used, until there is left in them nothing that well-regulated palate or stomach or a sane mind can find pleasant or useful. The dietitian has no place here, and only the scavenger is needed. Whether this food, when it was food, was good, healthful, natural food, who will bother to say? Formerly it may have been a gastric offense: now it is a ghastly offense. It may have been hard to digest: now it is hardly possible to see or smell, and it temporarily paralyzes the appetite.

This garbage of religion, we can plainly see, is full of the stuff of superstitious leaves and fishes that have cursed man with a vile, perpetual bellyache since prehistoric times. What old food is this that was a raw, bloody meal thousands of years ago when man lived precariously, filled with panic, mumbling his food and his fear-thoughts in terror! These are the endless regurgitated and rechewed remnants of the victuals of medicine men and myth-makers who subsisted as best they could in a strange world long before Christ appeared to feed the multitude, still hungry for signs and wonders. Holy hermits eating to grow thin, and holy-hilarious monks eating that flesh might follow gorging, rolled this religious stew on their tongues. Flea-bitten fanatics in the Dark Ages ground their teeth over this very flesh, slightly burnt in those days. And as men with enormous, panic-driven appetite and no taste have in every age slung this food into them as ravenously as a hobo dripping mulligan from his jaws: so we remember that honest, intelligent men in every age have ventured to try a spoonful of the mess and quickly spat it out in disgust.

In short, we observe that this garbage of religion consists largely of the oldest superstition known to man; that it is a brew and batch of creeds and myths and fear-thoughts and stupid, servile worship that have been guzzled and gnawed over wherever man has mistaken the rumble of an aching, empty belly for the voice of God; that when this slumgullion, which has gone down so many throats and along the way of all flesh, was first concocted both man's culinary and his culture were in a crude, savage state. We think we know garbage when we see it—when we smell it. There is more than one kind of garbage, though in truth the garbage pile and the dunghill are death to all distinction, being not readily measured except by the shovelful: but obvi-
ously a thing that belongs on the garbage pile—that indeed a thrust of the stick turns up for our unpleasant gaze—is the stuff that is mixed with the saliva and bile of greasy-fingered generations, the fear of God in their bowels.

Among other things that we recognize in the garbage pile, there are bunches of decayed food—food that has missed its purpose of proper nourishment and that has rotted until it is no longer good in the eyes of sensible people. We agree that food is good only when it is not too far removed from a fresh state, when it has a right honest flavor. Vegetables that have grown stale and bitter to the taste—the blighted cabbage, the shrivelled carrot and the feeble, rancid tomato—are fit only to repose amid the corruption of the garbage pile. Yet many people, who will not eat decayed food, will swallow decayed notions and call themselves pious in the act: and they have only praise for the faculties of man as corrupted from their respectable, sensible and noble uses.

This decay of faculties, this corruption of the intellectual food of man, is rank in the pile of holy garbage that goes by the name of religion. Wherever it has touched the human mind, religion has, after the manner of garbage, spoiled what is good. So infinite in faculty is man, as the melancholy Dane did observe, but also how infinitely base or miserable or pitiful is man when his faculties have been decayed by religion. What shall we say of the man who, for love of God, hates and persecutes his fellow men? The touch of religion kills the generous enthusiasm in man and in its place we have fanaticism. The sense of wonder, while it now and then inspires a poet, more widely impels the poor millions in their folly to wriggle in the dust and mumble supplications to the Unknown. The poetry in man has been cheated by religion, which has given man the dry bones of faith to feed his sense of the mystery and mightiness of life and his hunger for the sublime. The man who falls into the spiritual decay of religion cannot see the real wonders of the universe. Beating his head at the altar, hiding in his pew with eyes cast down in prayer, he cannot look up at the stars. And if he happens to see the stars, the emotion that is proper to the beholding of grandeur decays in a pulpy reflection of piety.

There is in man a great capacity for admiring what seems greater than his individual self, what represents to him a certain loftiness and virtue. And how has religion treated this instinct of man to reach out to something better than himself? It has given man gods and foolish saints and madmen rending their garments: it has given him the admiration of an awful nothingness, a headful of chimerical images, a vain and worthless show of bubbles fit only to entertain children. This fraud of religion has persuaded men, not only that piety is a kind of excellence, but indeed that piety (especially the marauding brand of piety, armed with the dangerous zeal of the bigot) is the supreme virtue of man. The mind upon which the hypnotic spell of religion has been cast sees the preacher as greater than the philosopher: and sees the psalm-singing, shouting type of Christian as higher than the man who functions more quietly as a thinking animal.

The human imagination, with its creative possibilities, becomes a cowardly, contemptible thing when it is touched by the hand of religion.
Fasting and prayer give rise to the sort of visions that belong in the madhouse, yet that when cried up as sacred revelations meet with a success that is the envy of charlatans outside the church who are engaged in fooling the herd by the ways of man rather than the ways of God. Imagination may enable a Shakespeare to give us super-reality, an epitome of man, in art: or it may lead a Bunyan to give us Sunday-school morality in the guise of a Methodist fairy tale, a Swedeborg to give us wild visions of "the undiscovered country from whose bourne no traveler returns." The desire for a feeling of permanence, for something more than a passing puppet's role in life, which inspires a man uncorrupted by Christianity to build for the men of the future, to pass on his personality in a solid and splendid way to the coming race: this desire to escape being ignominiously snuffed out like a brief candle appears, in its perverted Christian form, as a petty longing for the prolongation of personal ineptitude into an endless Paradise beyond the grave: if a man is absolutely irreligious, he may want to give men culture, control of the forces of Nature, wiser and kinder laws of social life, the joys of art, philosophy to make the most of life: but the man whose mind has been wrung limp by the laying on of sacerdotal paws thinks of an eternity of vague, fatuous bliss and all he has to offer men is the choice of Heaven or Hell. So we observe that the man who tries to persuade his fellows that they can make this life somewhat more beautiful and intelligent is hooted by the mob; while the holy man who talks with a long face about mansions in the skies has no lack of a gaping audience.

We may be told that faith is the great gift of religion to man. Verily it is upon faith, as interpreted by Saint Paul and intended for simpletons, that religion finally pins its defense and justification and hope. Yet what an empty, trifling, purposeless faith! 'Tis a faith that is mere blind credulity, that demands the surrender of the human mind. This is a faith in ghosts, not in men: in foolish incantations, not in realistic effort: in sanctified mummeries and miracles, not in living possibilities. It is not the kind of faith or daring of the spirit which Napoleon expressed when he declared that nothing is impossible—that the human mind and will are instruments of marvellous, imitable uses. It is not faith in the purposes of life—the kind of faith avowed by a Goethe—that leads a man to noble achievements that satisfy the intelligence. Faith that means the will to live or the willingness to be used by life—that means a healthy sort of illusion, sufficiently earthy and holding to life—that means a certain egoistic belief in the importance of ourselves and our actions: this kind of faith may inspire men to work for ends that are beyond their immediate fleeting day, to build for ages unborn and possibly condemned to futility. This is the faith that dares and does things, the faith that labors with intelligent human tools for intelligent and worthy human purposes. But this heart of energy and wise illusion, this pragmatic spirit of intimacy and identification with life, is in its aspect of Christian decay the idle, ridiculous, meaningless bowing of heads and bending of knees in prayer: it is the attitude and the belief that moves the savage worshipping a wooden idol. It robs man of every vestige of dignity and intelligence.
The influence of religion, in all its manifestations, sends man flat in the dust, a pitiful, grovelling object. This lord of life, when religion gets hold of him, is the victim of decay and the slave of sickening superstition. The highest faculty of man—the reasoning faculty—is used (indeed abused) by religion to invent theological absurdities and monstrosities. What shameful things are the creeds of man, when seen clearly as perversions of the human intellect, as the distortion of the mind by visions of terror and stupid, saintly tricks, as the bending of the noble faculty of reason to the squinting consideration of quiddities and all manner of mad triffles! Imagine this human mind—that in a Diderot could produce an Encyclopedia, in a Bacon a Novum Organum, in a Goethe a Faust, in a Darwin or a Haeckel an immense structure of scientific knowledge—turning itself to farce in the skull of a Christian fanatic and gasping for divine light on the subject of baptism or witches or virgin birth or the divinity of Jesus! Think of men for ages wrangling about the quality of inspiration, human or divine, in a book—mere black on white—that is a jumble of concupiscence and murder and intrigue and the beliefs of half-civilized, wandering tribes who regarded this world as the footstool of a fatuous God, who never knew his own mind a week ahead, and who might kick the world over in a moment's celestial caprice! And man, proud man, who is distinguished from other animals by his ability to reason in lofty and tremendous and most intricate fashion, has argued interminably and shed blood and lit terrible, fantastic fires of martyrdom over the precise, piffling interpretation of little combinations of words in this so-called Holy Writ! This mighty being, Man, supreme on the earth, endowed with infinite faculties, wrestled through wretched centuries with imaginary angels and devils.

And the human mind today, in the midst of all the possibilities of culture and enlightenment, is still in millions of men and women wholly subject to the influence of terrors and triffles. The curse of religion still robs man of his reasoning faculty; of his potentially fine, artistic imagination; of his spirit of true poetry and of wonder that is not the mere witless gawking and trembling of holy-rolling morons; of his conception of the truly sublime, his admiration of great things, his impulse to seek higher levels of life and thought; of his sense of values, of his dignity and decent, true presentment as a human being, religion has robbed man in every phase and faculty of living.

We see in religion the decay of every good thing in this world. Mencken is right. He hit upon the very phrase—the very name and habitation of this holy fraud. It is a pile of garbage. It is the rechings of superstitions as old as the jungles. It is the dumping ground of decayed human faculties, wilted and sour and rancid, blasted in base usage—fit only to smear the hands of fanatics who wish to throw something at the heads of civilized men trying to guide to noble uses the capacities of thought and emotion that have been so fouly abused by religion.
THE UNHAPPY MAN

He had been well started in life, had not made too big a fool of himself, and now in his prime he was by every common rule a man who should be happy. He had money—neither too much nor too little; and he earned his money by interesting and not grinding activity. He was able to get a moderate, necessary leisure and he knew how to crowd that leisure with pleasant things. He had a very simple way of living, unnerved by complexities and too many vague yearnings and fierce inner struggles. He was a sort of unconscious philosopher, without being very much of a thinker; he was not “sicklied o’er with the pale cast of thought.” He was intelligent enough to get along in life, without wanting to know too much. He had that greatest of blessings: good health. The worst thing in his life was a sneaking belief in God, which both comforted and worried him at times. It was a comfort to reflect that he might be saved. It was a worry to reflect that he might be damned. Had he never believed in God, he would have been perfectly happy. As it was, the safest thing in his favor was that he had never really thought in a large, daring, God-defying way. One day a friend visited him, and he was struck by the man’s unwonted air and countenance. It was not melancholy. It was not sadness. It was the look of one who, utterly despairing, stares full in the face of doom. “My God!” exclaimed the friend. “What is wrong?” The unhappy man replied: “I am damned. I have just lost my immortal soul—yes, I felt it leave me, almost as a physical pain. I have just had a fatal attack of reason—a killing dose of thought—a real, honest, unmistakable idea. What a life! into which man is born only to reason and to die!”

EVIL SPIRITS

The bigots of olden times were not entirely wrong in their theory of evil spirits. They were right in the belief that a bad, devilish spirit could wriggle itself into a man’s belly and prompt him to strange, accursed ways. The only error of the bigots was in locating the evil spirits, which were inside the bigots rather than inside the victims of the bigots. We read of all sorts of demons that were terribly and picturesquely busy in those days, but the worst of the demons were not the subjects of crazy, pious nightmares but those of actual record: the churchmen who whipped, strangled, tore and burned the flesh of heretics. We have passed belief in demonology, and only a few Christians are left who cling to that cruel notion, but we have evil spirits
today no less surely than in the days when God was supposed to turn them loose in multitudes. The evil spirits of Ignorance and Intolerance are rampant, crawling inside the bigots, reverend and lay; and from the union of these evil spirits are born a host of others, all of them fanatically eager to persecute men and women who are free of demons. The spirits can't work quite the material harm they could in other days. They can't kill outright. They can, however, strike other blows at a free, intelligent life. They can fill people with hate; blind them with false, petty, mean notions; paralyze them with superstition, or give them blind staggers of prejudice, or lead them into shambles produced by their own terror and stupidity. We have too few intelligent persons: intelligence is too little effective in life. We must rescue the mass from their false, evil leaders. We must drive out of them the evil spirits of Ignorance and Intolerance.

SKY PILOTS

I like the term "sky pilot": although it is true that the common run of preachers know little even about the sky, as compared with the astronomers; and one could not safely trust a preacher to guide one along the Milky Way. Yet the term "sky pilot" is vivid and amusing in reflecting the practical futility of the preaching fraternity. The man who offers to show one around in those blue regions is holding out empty, ethereal promises. We are, for better or worse, earth creatures; and what can interest us in talk about how to behave in the sky? We do not make our livings in the sky. Our work, our friends, our thoughts, our pleasures, our ambitions are not in the sky. Our philosophy, our ethics and our daily habits must be in some fashion possible for earthly practice and realization; and it is idle for our purposes whether they would fit into a life in the starry vastness. A "sky pilot," then, is a man who offers to tell us something that is of no earthly use to us. He is a man who vainly and pompously beats the wind. He can tell us nothing important or useful about this life; he is of no account as an earth pilot; when he attempts to be worldly, he falls into silly platitudes. We can go to the scientists, the artists, the thinkers and get wisdom that we can use here and now, that we can live by and follow the real ways of the earth by. They are earth pilots. The preachers—"sky pilots"—can shout themselves hoarse about what is in or beyond the sky, and the only result is to confuse men in their earthly walks. The Christian who is full of the bunk of the preachers, and who keeps his gaze too piously on the sky, is bound to stumble and find himself in a very earthly ditch. "Sky pilots" on earth are incongruous, and are separated from their jobs by many, many light years.
WHY I AM A SINNER

The up-and-coming Christians, girding their loins and slipping into their pretty party dresses, have been taking a religious census: that is to say, roughly speaking, they have been checking up on who is going to Heaven and who is going to Hell. A wierd business to the impious, worldly observer, but one that the pewholders (chiefly those of the feminine persuasion) despatch with much apparent joy and zeal.

At this writing I have not been approached by an inquisitor. And it may well be that these good people, sure of my fate, will leave me to the comminatory awfulness of the Judgment Day. Perhaps, without inquiry, they have marked me down for a lower berth, so to speak. Musing in an amused vein, I visualize a note in the little black book of Sister Prayloud, as follows: "E. Haldeman-Julius. No church. No god. No soul. Sinner; Sabbath-breaker; infidel. A reader of wicked books. A writer of wickeder blasphemy. Has sinned the sin against the Holy Ghost, therefore is damned beyond hope. Hell for him." Freely translated, I suppose that is the way I am recorded in the holy archives of Christianity.

Such a brief note, of course, does not fully cover the ground that separates the saintly-robed crowd and mine humble, Hell-going self. It is at once too vague and too absolute. There are subtleties here, little matters of definition, certain assumptions to be scrutinized, and searchings of the heart that must be prayerfully conducted. Chiefly, there is a terrific soundless chasm that yawns between the knowledge of these Christians and my own knowledge. Sister Holybe and Brother Yeslord have the advantage of me. They know God. They have talked with Him. They have felt the hem of His robe. They have had whispered into their receptive ears, in that hollow, sepulchral tone which infallibly denotes the utterance of the Most High, certain items of celestial gossip and guidance that have been withheld from me. Sister H. and Brother Y. have not only picked out their mansions in the skies, but they have spotted the precise well-illuminated and steam-heated corner of Hell that is reserved (that, in truth, has been waiting for countless ages) for me, a sinner.

There, you see, I am in a way at the mercy of the sister and brother. I stand here with only a few stray, futile, corrupt bits of worldly wisdom, while there are piously entrenched those beloved of the Lord, wearing the shining armor of other-worldly wisdom. To be sure, I am forewarned. The confidants of God eagerly shout to me the dreadful tidings that have been conveyed to them. They make no secret of the facts. Yet, though forewarned in such wise, still am I not adequately forearmed. For it doth haplessly befall that I am un-convinced, unmoved by the alarms and antics of these human megaphones of divine omniscience. God, while He has put them wise, has not given them the power to convince others. What help or heavenly
hope for me is in their wailing and warning, when I, little skeptical earthworm that I am, stand carefully on one side, out of reach of their gesticulating paws, and regard them as poor, deluded objects who are blasted, Hamlet-wise, with an ecstasy that is unearthly though not divine?

They say, do they, that God, bending perilously low from His exalted throne, has muttered into their ears, private-like, thus and so and so forth? By the gods (being a polytheistic pagan), I do not believe them. Don't I know that Sister Holybe is the worst old gossip in town? That her chief mission in life is to lie about her neighbors? That, aside from a depraved appetite for scandalous falsehood, she is the most treacherously inaccurate reporter in the whole township? Why, nobody ever knew the old lady to get a fact straight. She can't speak truthfully and sensibly about conditions in her own block (where, by the way, she objects to a decent bit of street paving, the while she hallelujahs about the gold-paved streets of God's capital and playground). These being the true inward peculiarities of Sister H., how can I lend credence or even respectful attention to any narrative she unfolds about the Other World and the Next Life? She is a totally incompetent witness, and I know it, and so does everybody, saint and sinner, in this Christian town of Girard. Brother Yeslord isn't any better. If Brother Y.'s word is as good as his bond, that's merely because his word is never taken unless it's backed by his bond. The old brother is a skinflint of the first class, and I suspiciously observe that, notwithstanding his notorious ineradicable laziness, he bears the repute of one who is always briskly on hand to pass the collection box (or plate, or basket, or shovel, or whatever is used in this well-known sanctified rite). A word from Sister H. or Brother Y. concerning any matter of secular import is full and precise circumstantial evidence of the truth of the other side. As in matters secular, so in matters sacred. God may indeed have breathed upon them solemn confidence, but their word for it is not enough. They must arrange an interview at which I can be present or I shall continue stoutly in my disbelief.

Anyway, why doesn't God enter my private office, where the acoustics are absolutely perfect, and speak unto me regarding strange things that shall come to pass? I can understand English. I regard it as a strict piece of discretion to recognize a fact, whether it pleases me or not. It's more unpleasant, in the long run, to ignore facts—even unpleasant, or especially unpleasant facts. If God has important and true information (it must be both) regarding my fate, He can tell it to no more logical person than I. I am the one most interested. It's a matter, one would hazard, between God and me—not between Brother Y. and me. I'd believe God—if I knew it was He talking. He could order me around pretty much as He pleased—if I were sure it was none other than the lawful, awful Czar of the Universe issuing the orders.

But alas!—no, by Jupiter, hurrah!—all this is idle, fatuous speculation. God has left me alone. He has left me sound in wind and limb that He might communicate the camp-meeting jerks to Sister Holybe and Brother Yeslord. I am, within the limits set by the secular authorities, my own boss; and I am, within such limits as my intelli-
gence sees fit and proper to confess, my own thinker. I may decently plagiarize Thomas Paine, and say: "My own mind is my church." I can be faithful only to my own convictions, wrong though they be and sinful.

Here is another distinction, and one to be put deftly in italics, between the elect and me. We have quite sharply contrasted attitudes toward the business of human thought. Truth to tell, they appear at times to regard this business as illicit and criminal, one that calls for the righteous suppressing arm of church and state. They strike a pose and hurl at me the unmannernly, opprobrious term of "infidel." That is to say, I am guilty of infidelity: again, this means that I am unfaithful. Unfaithful to what, forsooth? It's very simple. Foolishly simple. I am, to speak directly to the point, unfaithful to certain beliefs of other people.

I don't believe that God has spoken out of a burning bush to any burning bigot—therefore I am an "infidel." I don't believe that a Hell of fire and brimstone and other disagreeable phenomena yawns for the honest thinkers—therefore I am an "infidel." I don't believe that certain ancient soothsayers and lurid chroniclers and Holy-Roller epileptics recorded their superstitions and delirious fancies at the personal dictation of a god—therefore I am an "infidel." I don't believe in tales of ghosts and goblins, whether professedly written by God or Grimm—therefore I am an "infidel." I don't believe that I am "saved" by what I happen to believe nor that other men are "damned" by what they happen to believe—therefore I am an "infidel." I don't believe in, and subscribe utterly to, the curious doctrines that are expounded from the eminent pulpit of the First Baptist Church—therefore I am an "infidel."

Now I am just perverse enough to regard this theological slant of "infidelity" as an assumption that drips the very essence of gall. Why should some illiterate, terror-stricken husbandman, full of prunes, piety and poison-grace, regard his cowed belief as a sign of faithfulness and my free disbelief as a sign of unfaithfulness? And why should the sleek Rev. Sinswatter, whose thinking life oscillates cautiously between Genesis and chicken gravy, feel qualified to pronounce me an unfaithful fellow because I think my own thoughts?

You see, the Rev. and the Bro. do not look upon the human mind as a relatively free and noble and withal most curious mechanism. They regard it as a sort of prison and gloomy vault in which to lock cadavers of belief, a special black hole of a dungeon being reserved for those lively criminals of thought-and-doubt impulse that may beset even the purely and only faithful. They have no conception of intellectual integrity, of free and fearless thought. It has never occurred to them that the man who will not use his mind is an intellectual bum or coward; and that the man who will not follow or acknowledge the light of his own mind is the real hypocrite and infidel. They cannot understand—they do not suspect the real nature of—that high moral compulsion that forces a man to be true to his own thoughts and to pray to other gods or to no gods as seemeth best to him. They do not understand the kind of mind that can find greater satisfaction in an honest confession of uncertainty than in a glib, silly profession of certainty. They do
not understand the kind of mind that refuses to stultify itself; the kind of mind that glorifies in freedom; the kind of mind that is not afraid to stand alone if need be; the kind of mind that delights in growth, in natural activity, in the stimulation of new ideas, in wider fields of thought-sensation. They do not understand the kind of mind that is glowingly alive, infinitely curious, uncompromisingly simple and truthful with itself. They do not understand any kind of mind that is not a mausoleum of mummery.

These Gideonites do not, on the other hand, comprehend the workings of a mind that can humbly, but not servilely, acknowledge its limitations: that can recognize with emotions of awe and of vast, suspended drama the mystery of life: that can look without too much illusion at this crazy world and frankly confess that it doesn’t know the absolute first-and-last meaning of it all. The human mind, in its own sound and proper disposition and faculties, simply doesn’t exist in the view of these followers of an unknown God. Wherefore the thinker, as opposed to the believer, is an “infidel.” Wherefore, again, “he that believeth not shall be damned.”

Oh, yes, there are seas and continents of infinite difference between the prayer band and me. Saint and sinner, Christian and heathen, Heaven-bound and Hell-bound—these terms, so convenient and commonplace, are useful only to suggest the difference. For example, the sheep of God baa-baa that I have no “soul.” Strictly speaking, they recognize that I do have a “soul,” else I could not be condemned to the everlasting flames. Had I no “soul,” I should be equally without the jurisdiction of God and of Satan. Still I am almost as if I had no “soul”—I am soulless, in a manner of speaking. Or, to put it in the usual and accepted Christian way, I am not “spiritually minded.” This is the good, gray gabble upon which the Christians fall when they can no longer stand up for Jesus in a pretense of proper argument.

The Christian is never really beaten by logic. He avoids such defeat by ignoring logic. And, when he cannot argue, he can readily close the discussion and win a Pyrrhic victory by declaring, sadly or sternly as it may be, that his opponent lacks the “spiritual mind” which is required to discern the Truth of God. That, of course, is another way of saying what I have already confessed—that the little group around the altar know things that I don’t know. They see, not with the human mind’s eye, but with a sort of early Pleistocene instinct. This “spiritual-mindedness” is truly a wonderful faculty. It is the faculty of grasping the secrets of the vast Unknown as the result of fifteen minutes’ prayer. It is the faculty of triumphing by an ecstatic “Praise the Lord” over the limitations of the human mind and, borne on a vague blissful tide of belief, floating dreamily to a Patmos where a miracle pops every minute. “Spiritual-mindedness” is really hard for a human-minded fellow to define, and the best I can do is to call it a faculty for “seeing things.” Of course, the drunkard “sees things.” And perhaps the faculty of “seeing things” is to be observed at its highest, outside the tabernacles, in a lunatic asylum. The insane, suffering from wild obsessions, are in their way quite “spiritually minded.” They see and live in a world that is not visible to normal, uninspired
human eyes. And they regard pitifully or scornfully the poor fellow on the other side of the concrete wall who sees only the ordinary earthly scene.

Now I am not suggesting that Christians are insane. The man who kneels at the padded altar doesn't see the same things as the man who dwells, spiritually apart, in a padded cell. The Christian doesn't imagine that he is God. He merely sees God and hears Him and talks with Him and, in an all-round way, knows Him. He doesn't imagine that he's in Heaven now—but knows that he's going to Heaven. And he knows, and sings, "Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so." No: the Christian is not insane. I don't say this as a joke. I mean it. The Christian simply has an infinite faculty of deluding himself. That is "spiritual-mindedness." It is precisely identical with the kind of "spiritual-mindedness" that enables the child to believe in fairy tales.

Of course, there is another faculty of the mind that might at a venture be called "spiritual-mindedness"—that may be so called for the sake of contrast. This is the faculty which enables the mind to rise superior to ham and eggs, and to feel the aesthetic and emotional significance of art and poetry and drama; as well as to feel the subtleties of human relations, to see tragic depths beneath the surface of the obvious, to perceive the element of comedy in a seemingly serious situation, and to recognize pathos in a smile. One might say, using words in this free un-Christian way, that the man of lofty ideals and of ardent, sympathetic, penetrating emotions—the lover of beauty and joy—the man who has felt the poignancy of the sublime, has more or less of a "spiritual mind." But, you see, when the Christian refers to the "spirit" he doesn't mean the human spirit. He may be quite unsympathetic to that. He doesn't mean the spirit of art and poetry. He may be untouched by that spirit, preferring Maggie and Jiggs and Eddie Guest. He doesn't mean the spirit of things sublime. He may have felt nothing more sublime than the emotion of voting for Coolidge. What the Christian means is the Spirit of God. If you have not the vague, peculiar and often terribly manifested Spirit of God, no other kind of spirit, however authentic or fine, will serve to put you in the class of the "spiritually minded."

Suppose you do find delight in great books, in great thoughts, in great emotions? Why, that in itself marks you as a soulless pagan. One reason why I am going to Hell is that I read wicked books. I read Voltaire. And what does it signify that this man Voltaire had a wonderful mind, a precious gift of art, an inspired vision of great things, a passion for justice and toleration? Voltaire didn't let a priest do his thinking—he opposed the Christian sport of making bloody sacrifices to God—therefore he was not "spiritually minded": and to read him is to damn oneself to torment. And I read Rabelais, Goethe, Heine, Oscar Wilde, Samuel Butler, Bernard Shaw, Anatole France, Ibsen, Huxley—oh, why extend the horrible list! These, you observe, are all wicked scribblers. They are full of wit and blasphemy, paranoia and pagan immorality, thought and infidelity. There is nothing more sinful, nothing more significant of one's utter damnation, in the eyes of the simon-
pure, "spiritually minded" Christian—of the kind that one observes in this Ku Klux Klan belt—than a library such as that in which Haldeman-Julius holds nightly converse with the Devil. The very bindings of these books seem to cry aloud their sinful nature. And the names on the shelves—nearly all of them—are the names of godless thinkers who didn't believe in Santa Claus, godless artists whose quest of beauty led them far from the mourners' bench, godless poets who didn't write about the friend we have in Jesus, godless humorists and satirists who hooted at the craziness of this Christian world, godless historians who wrote the truth about Christian burnings and butcheries. Well does the "Amen" type of Christian know or instinctively feel the danger of such books. They stimulate thought. They appeal to joyous, adventurous, un-Christian emotions. They lubricate the facile hinges of the wit that incredulity may follow scoffing. They produce rational fellows who are not easily thrown into fits by the ecstatic hosannas of the camp-meeting. They record all the evil of this world. They destroy faith. And can you wonder that the kind of Christian who wears a halo as a charm against thinking regards me with horror when he observes that I circulate such wicked books by the million?

Thus, and thus, do I stand forth as a man of lurid and assertive wickedness. I am ashamed to mention the other sins, the other damnable differences, that mark me as the heathen opposite of Sister Holybe. There is the matter of Sabbath-breaking, for example. I have never been able to think of a single reason why I should go to church. No matter how I feel: I have risen from my couch on Sunday mornings, time and again, countless times, and with the clearest head in the world I have faced this kind of intellectual bankruptcy, this loss of wit, this flight of reason. My mind simply won't work on the question of why I should go to church. The result is that, for sheer lack of any reason or impulse in that direction, I don't go to church. I may go so far as to read Sterne or Swift: but, though each was a preacher, neither was a bore. It may be—and this is the climax of my iniquity—that I shall take advantage of the reflective mood that comes even to a lost soul on a quiet Sunday morning, and prepare a sermon of my very own: a strange sort of sermon, perhaps this very sermon that I am now passionately urging to the "Amen" finish. Then I read and smoke, and play chess if a fellow-sinner drops in. And I wish there could be one Anatole France for every hundred preachers, and one Little Blue Book Shop for every hundred churches. I really manage, on the whole, to spend a very peaceful and interesting day. Not until I am on the verge of slumber, and, half between waking and sleeping, am more "spiritually minded" than usual, do I remember that in the religious census being taken in Girard I am marked for the chutes. It is only then that I reflect how little I know about God: how unfaithful I am to Brother Yeslord's little bundle of beliefs: what a false, fatal step I made when I read that page of Voltaire: how I have sinned by letting my honest thoughts get the better of me, disarm me and escape into the freedom of print. Then, being "spiritually minded" and therefore not mentally alert, I commit the sin against the Holy Ghost—and darkness completely enfolds me.
SCIENCE AND FAITH

No doubt the doctrinal points of theology are among the wonders of man's contriving and capering intellect: but when one seduces the churchmen to a consideration of fundamentals, one is amazed at the childish folly of their attempts at reasoning. For example, I have before me a clipping from a California paper—a state that is notoriously a rich harvest field for all sorts of religious freaks.

This paper (the San Bernardino Evening Telegram) defends religious faith by saying that most things in life are based on faith. Science, it amazingly says, is based ninety-five per cent on faith. It is plain that the California editor is not a scientist. It is one thing to state that there is a point where scientific observation merges into hypotheses: quite another to state that almost the whole of scientific knowledge is but a matter of faith. One may admit that science does not know everything: but no intelligent man will fly to the ridiculous extreme of asserting that science knows next to nothing.

The study of natural phenomena and communion with a supernatural god are comparable only to a man who knows far less about science, and the real achievements of the human intellect, than he imagines that he knows about a god. This editor displays another pearl of scientific wisdom, as follows: "Studying chemistry, we are told that water is a combination of hydrogen and oxygen—and we accept this as true, on faith." As if any high school student could not verify this piece of knowledge in the laboratory! And can this editor possibly believe that a statement about the composition of water demands faith similar and equal to a statement about the attributes of God? Evidently he does so believe: evidently, again, he knows less than nothing about either.

This editor defends his own self-deception (not, however, recognized by him as such) by saying that even scientists can be deceived. We are told: "Scientists 'swore by' the authenticity of the Cardiff Giant—believed in it, many of them, because they had faith in it—until the giant was exposed as a 'planted' hoax of P. T. Barnum." The point is that those scientists were not long in detecting the fake, and were promptly honest in confessing their mistake. They were respecters of truth, even though it involved recognition of their own error. Can as much be said for the churchmen? God, a more obvious hoax than the Cardiff Giant, has been exposed repeatedly: yet the churchmen still insist upon the divine truth of this hoax and continue to wax fat upon the follies of human credulity. Nor was there any blood shed, nor men subjected to fiendish tortures, over differing interpretations of the Cardiff Giant, as these horrors have resulted from conflicting opinions about the unknown God.

Now comes the classic "argument" of this California editorial philosopher. With a smile of weary patience, he asks: "How do you
know that there's a country called China? Were you ever there to see with your own eyes? Most of us have never seen China, but we believe in it."

One might reply that it is fully as reasonable and easy for the hardest-headed man to believe that there is a land of America. There is nothing strange nor supernatural about land, trees, grass, water, buildings, people. We see them all around us. And this is not all, nor half. Suppose I go to the railroad station in Girard and ask the agent for a ticket to China? Will he argue with me, telling me that I must accept the existence of China on faith? Will he soothe me with the mere assurance that I will go to China when I die? He will not. He will sell me a ticket to China quicker than you can say "Jack Robinson." I can climb aboard the 4:40 train and, with the scientific aid of train and boat, it will not be many days before I can see China and know what the California editor implies that he believes only in the way of Christian faith. So much for the reasonable, demonstrable, personally verifiable existence of China.

Now suppose that I go to the Baptist synagogue in Girard and ask for a ticket to Heaven? It is held, I believe, as an article of Baptist faith, that Heaven truly and wonderfully exists. The preacher talks about it. The congregation sings joyfully and jazzily about it. You won't get to Heaven when you die, unless and unless— But when I ask for a ticket to Heaven, all I'll get will be the cold geological scrutiny. What then if I conclude that while China is, Heaven isn't? Am I just faithful in one case and faithless in the other? Ask your grocer. . . . Really, how can one help believing that Christians—downright, densely credulous Christians—are either hypocrites or mental babies? The fact that anybody past the age of ten believes in Christianity proves simply one thing—that in many, many cases mental growth stops at the age of ten. So one may say that the age of ten is the Christian age.

RUPERT HUGHES AND HIS ASSAULT ON CHRISTIANITY

Is religion a dead issue? A chorus of churchmen will respond with a hymn in the negative—the Fundamentalists thundering a heavy, ominous bass. Ranged opposite to the "Amen Corner," and no less prompt and emphatic, the rationalist group will declare the reality of religious influence. The one party is interested in keeping God alive, especially on Sundays. The other party is interested in killing God, on any bright day in the week: and the better the day, the better the deed. The quiet, impartial observer will testify according to his experience. If he has stood very much on one side, reflectively withdrawn from the heat and tumult, he may assert that religion belongs largely to the past of mankind: that, at least, it is no longer dominant nor compelling. On the contrary, he who has been thrown into more or less intimate contact with the popular mind—he who has looked closely at human passion and prejudice in the full blaze of action—especially, he who has been
schorched by the fire of mass superstition: this observer, whose observation has been part of an active role, will say that religion is a real and menacing force in this our day. Yet if alive, is it not possible that religion is on the defensive? If the churchmen seek to regain the whole power they enjoyed in other generations, may they not meet with resistance? with unexpected resistance?

Few can believe that religion is moribund, that it has a merely historical interest, after reading the article by Mr. Rupert Hughes in the October Cosmopolitan. As a popular novelist, Mr. Hughes may be assumed to know something of the gregarious human mind, and to have not recklessly concluded that religion is a living issue. There is the mark of decay upon it. There is more than a touch of fear in its aggressiveness. There is reason to believe that the churchmen feel themselves slipping, hence their renewed struggle for a stronger foothold. It is certain that they have not given up the disposition to rule. There is no doubt that they have still the immemorial will to power. Realizing this tendency and the necessity for opposing it, I believe that Mr. Hughes realizes no less that this is a favorable and indeed a logical moment in which to attack the plottings and pretensions of the churchmen.

It appears to me that this attack by Mr. Hughes is very, very significant. It is not simply a question of the personal courage of the writer. Other men have dared to attack the church: men, too, who were as fair targets, with as much of credit and fortune in the balance, as Mr. Hughes. Nor is the substance of Mr. Hughes' anti-Christian article to be regarded as of novel or essential importance, solely as an attack, apart from its source and circumstance. Greater attacks have been levelled at the party of churchmen. The bases of religion have been subjected to more severe and sustained examination. Had I written, precisely as Mr. Hughes wrote, in the Haldeman-Julius Weekly, the article—worthy of all praise as it is for itself alone—would have been, from any broader social point of view, rather commonplace. I am too well known as an intransigent foe of religious sham. The Weekly is too well known as a lively journal of free speech, where no viewpoint, be it ever such a terror to the faithful, is denied a hearing. I have spoken too freely, in season and out, to make free speaking by me an event. What I write interests, but does not quite absolutely surprise, my readers.

Not that Mr. Hughes wrote, nor that he wrote candidly and unreservedly, against religion: but that he wrote for the Cosmopolitan, among the most popular magazines, typically and unexceptionably American, and at the farthest remove from an iconoclastic tone or purpose: it is this which appeals to me as the significant circumstance. A few years ago it would not have been possible. No editor would have dared to print such an article. Perhaps Mr. Hughes would not have dared, or would have hesitated long, to have written it. Yet today we observe that a leading periodical of the country is willing to publish boldly an assault upon religion—Bible, God, Church and all—that is practically as complete as the stoutest unbeliever could desire: an
assault that is not intended for the delectation of a particular small group of free thinkers, but that is written frankly to be read and pondered widely by average Americans, of all classes and creeds, whatever their elevation of brow or bias of superstition and self-interest. It has the air of a challenge: not a foolish challenge, lightly attacking a helpless and trivial foe: but a challenge at once serious and hopeful, recognizing a real enemy but a fair field. A fair field? Yes—because the enemy is not all-powerful, is not in a position to close the field to its adversaries. New battalions of common sense, of scientific thought, of liberal impulse are available to be arrayed against the age-old, tireless, not dead nor yet sleeping enemy of human progress and freedom.

It is all the better for the purpose that Mr. Hughes has written as an ex-religionist. The church party would refer to him as a “backslider.” (Or do I use this elegant term correctly? Is a “backslider” one who has ceased to believe? or one who, still believing, is remiss in fearful practice?) He has been devout even as the elders. He has believed the Bible from the snake to the last trumpet, from Adam’s original sin to man’s ultimate damnation. Mr. Hughes was not raised in sin but has an unimpeachable, pious background. He is today a free thinker only because he has thought, not freely but painfully, against all the obstacles of dogma and in much turmoil of spirit. He had a great capacity for belief: but thought, simple thought, crowded out belief. The church had its opportunity with Mr. Hughes. It had him entirely within its grasp. He freed himself; and now he tells his fellow Americans the true nature of his spiritual prison-house. “Why I Quit Going to Church.” Thus he calls his article. He tells far more. He tells why he quit believing in the sham of religion.

It is interesting, but not important, to note that Mr. Hughes, having studied the so-called Word of God carefully, seizes the occasion to point out some very human inaccuracies therein. His references to the Bible, chapter and verse, will be productive of mirth in some quarters, possibly chagrin in others, and scandal in still others. They will appeal to the “sputers”—those to whom the minor points of theology are vital. Certain irreverent analysts of the Scriptures will chortle in triumphant glee. Fundamentalists will curse in spirit if not in sinful fact. Did God contradict himself when he declared that no man should see his face and live? afterwards letting Moses and an embassy of the leading lights of Israel gaze with impunity upon the divine countenance and corporosity? Did the snake speak the truth, and God predict falsely, concerning the consequences of Adam’s misconduct in the shade of the old apple tree? Were the four apostolic biographers at variance in their reports of Christ’s movements? Was John drunk or crazy or inspired when he stood on Patmos and did see most fearful and wonderful things? Is the Holy Word agreed upon the identity of the Twelve Apostles? These I regard as questions primarily for Bible scholars and wranglers—who are, of course, among those whom Mr. Hughes desired to reach. They will prove useful, doubtless, to certain persons. A very little starting point of doubt may lead one to profounder investigation and to freedom at last. And do not the Fundamentalists assert that if a single word, if the least pin-point of the faith, is proved to be
untrue the whole must fall thereby? So if a brick laid by Moses cracks, the Temple must totter and tumble.

These points, however, I pass cheerfully. I satisfy myself with admitting that Mr. Hughes is quite correct when he holds that God for a supposedly inspired writer, was very careless and contradictory and obscure and forgetful. It is rather more important, I believe, that Mr. Hughes emphasizes the falseness of the claim that Christianity worships only one god. This religion, boasting its pure singleness, in reality has a number of deities. There is the Holy Ghost, most fearful of all, to offend whom is beyond pardon. Jesus Christ is another god, and one of the vital points in the modern Fundamentalist controversy is that of the divine character of this Christ. The Virgin Mary is plainly a full-fledged goddess, most humbly worshipped by all true believers. Jehovah, instead of being the one and only god, is merely the chief, supreme, most prominent god. Yet this is not quite true. Jehovah is one of the two leading gods of Christianity, whose supremacy has ever been in doubt. God and the Devil are the two great supernatural foes. Do Christians worship the Devil? They fear him no less heartily than they fear God himself; and if fear of God be a proof of piety, what about fear of the Devil? We know that the Devil, in the mythology of the Christians, is endowed with rare, tremendous powers and attributes. He is a mighty god. So far as history appears, in the eyes of the profane observer, Satan has generally been on the winning side. The theologians acknowledge the triumph of Satan when they declare that man is immanently and irrevocably evil in his form and functions this side of Paradise: they acknowledge Jehovah's weakness and limitations when they assert that he could redeem man spiritually in another life only by dispatching his son to be killed physically in this life.

This Christian doctrine of evil leads to another thought, which has a keen edge of satire. What has religion accomplished in the way of tangible good? Has it lifted fallen man and improved the quality of human life and character? We are reminded by Mr. Hughes that the churchmen in no generation have admitted virtue in man. Whether in or out of power, the church has ever painted man as bad and this world as vale of sin and tears. That is to say, the efforts of the preachers have been of little—of no large or really hopeful—avail. They have railed at sin: and sin has thrived. Evil, and the Devil, are necessary to Christian conception of life. On the other hand, the churchmen warn us in solemn tones that if the church is removed, men will revert to utter and unmentionable wickedness. How man could be very much more wicked than the theologians are fond of portraying him, we may seriously ask ourselves. Evidently he is damned, whether in a church-ridden or a churchless state. Wherefore a blasphemer may inquire: Will it not be pleasant to go to hell along the road of freedom?

Nothing is, of course, more ridiculous than the assumption that the church, that religion, is the sole civilizing influence in the life of man. The truth is that it is opposed to the very influences that do actually civilize man. The church is the enemy of free thought. It is, spiritually and temporally, the foe of a great, true culture. Toleration, honest inquiry, the unimpeaded circulation of ideas are anathema to this
institution based upon dogma. He who enters the door of a church is
bidden to abandon his identity as a thinking being. That intellect which
renders man supreme, those impulses of art and thought that are his
glory, the church treats with fear and contempt and downright hostility.
When one glances back along the path of human history, observing the
church enlisted in every age against the forces of enlightenment, op-
posing darkly the liberation of the spirit of man, seeking to obscure the
truth and damn spiritually (when it has not been able to torture and
kill physically) the truth-seekers: then one wonders, not how far back-
ward humanity would slide, but how far forward it would leap, how
much it would grow in greatness and graciousness, if the church were
removed from the path.

The simple truth (which, obvious as it is to the reflecting mind,
Mr. Hughes has usefully pointed out) is that creed does not determine
conduct. The slightest knowledge of human nature enables us to realize
this truth. We know very well that churchmen are not generally better
in character than men and women outside of the church. The man
who believes in a god is not worthier of trust in the daily transactions
of this life than the man who disbelieves in a god. Industry and honor
and courage—all of the solid things of character—are not judged by a
man's profession of religious faith. If a man believes that I am to
burn forever in hell-fire if I differ from him in belief, am I therefore
to regard him as a specially good and trustworthy man? Absurd! you
will exclaim. Yet the question but reveals the general absurdity of
pretending that, as a man believes thus and so, he is more virtuous
and noble than another.

As a matter of fact, does not Christianity add to man's bad im-
pulses, intensifying them a thousandfold with the power of sanctity
and divine approval? "A man alone has evil impulses enough," says
Mr. Hughes, "but a man and a god are a thousand times as dangerous." A
man will do things in the name of God that he would not think of
doing for a merely human purpose. The fires of fanaticism, burning
for the glory of God, have wrought the most terrible havoc in history.
When he speaks of the record of religion in history, of the crimes of
churchmen in power, Mr. Hughes is moved to eloquence by his pity
and wrath. He, a recent churchman, barely escaped from the influence
of Christian dogma, was appalled at the cruelties that man has com-
mitt in the name of religion: and that the blackest portion of the
record is that which concerns the activities of the Christian religion.
The confession of Mr. Hughes on this point is peculiarly interesting.
A young man just out of college, he fell upon the fortunate assignment
of assisting to prepare a history of the world. Wonder of wonders!
he was paid a nice salary for going to a library, day after day, and
reading to his heart's content. Thus for a period of four years, he
tells us, he read steadily, from dim first to last, of the great adventure
of mankind. Not a wholly glorious adventure, however: often indeed
a thing of terror, of blood and hate, of bodies stretched on the rack and
perishing with howls of agony at the stake. And, wading with a shud-
der through the records of man's crimes, Mr. Hughes discovered that
Christian man stood forth as the biggest criminal of all. The followers
of Buddha had converted greater multitudes with less murder and destruction than the followers of Jesus. Iniquities more vile and monstrous had been perpetrated in the name of Christ than in the name of Mohammed. No savage deity had been so hard and mean and bloodthirsty as Jehovah. And what indeed is Jehovah but a savage god? And not the Catholics alone, Mr. Hughes is careful to impress upon his readers, have been the dreadful agents of death for professedly holy and God-inspired ends. Protestant fanaticism has left as red a stain as Catholic fanaticism. John Calvin was no kindlier a gentleman than Torquemada. Each was inhumanly bigoted and cruel for the glory of God and Christ and the rest of the jubilee of Christian deities. John Wesley believed in evil spirits, in the imbecile, monstrous doctrine of witchcraft, as devoutly as any priest of Rome. It was none other than the founder of Methodism who declared that one must believe in witches if one believed in the Bible.

Under whatever guise of creed, Christianity has been a cruel religion. Its cruelty has diminished, has assumed less physical characteristics, only as its power has waned. The only harmless churchman is the powerless churchman. The founders of the American Republic fully realized the perils of churchly domination. Free-thinking skeptics and deists, dwellers in an age of inquiry and enlightenment, believers in intellectual as well as political liberty, the first American statesmen insisted upon the complete and final separation of Church and State. This is merely a reminder to the patriotic. It is true that this government was strictly secular in its origin. According to spirit and letter, it was no more founded on Christianity than on Mohammedanism or atheism: and George Washington, as first President of the Republic, so informed the Mohammedan government of Tripoli. As Mr. Hughes reminds all Christian patriots, God was left out of the Constitution. The country had a healthy, godless start. It could breathe freely because the fingers of the Church Militant were not at its throat.

The danger of the Church Militant—that is the message of Mr. Hughes. It is not, after all, a mere question of exposing the errors and absurdities of the Bible or any supposedly sacred book, of ridiculing a creed, of attacking a supernatural belief. It is not what churchmen believe regarding another life, but what they believe and practice in this life, which is our true concern. We should remember the evidence of history and never for a moment lose sight and sufficient thought of the fact that the church is the irreconcilable enemy of human freedom: that the church in power is the church standing on the prostrate body of mankind: and that the church is forever striving, in ways insidious and shameless and aggressive, to win complete power. The church is intolerant. It would dominate our lives by sheer, cruel force. It will not let us be. This is the supreme reason why we must oppose the church, why we must be on our guard against the encroachments of a religious hierarchy. We might well laugh at, and play our logic merrily against, theology in the abstract. But we must maintain a more vigilant attitude toward theological narrowness and cruelty in the concrete. The churchman is a joke in the role of philosopher, but he is a terror in
the role of a policeman, a despot, a malicious, masquerading deity in our daily lives. God wouldn't bother us if he would stay in the sky and confine himself to the celestial business of bossing the angels. It's when He comes down to the earth, crawls into the hide of a fanatic and tries to boss and belabor us, that He raises hell.

A TALK WITH VOLTAIRE.

It seemed as natural as a thing could be. Here was I, stretched out on the couch—enjoying that lazy but reflective recumbence which is one of the chief delights of privacy: slightly back and to the left, the reading lamp and the smoking stand; and down the rest of the long room a dim beauty, with the shadowed shelves of books appearing almost alive in the darkness. Across the room, widthways and at this end and at the angle in which I happened to be gazing (next the fireplace, too—a broad solid glow of reminiscent red) was the only shelf of books whose titles I could make out; and that I could not have done had I not known them so well: a set of Voltaire in vari-colored bindings, rich as the man's mind was. Was? Of course—the true tense; though the creations of that great intellect live in a world that has forgotten the priests who cursed the skeptic. Yet there, too (and it is just this that, strangely enough, seemed to me most natural), sat the huddled figure of Voltaire close by the shelf of his very own books: looking, I am bound to say, vividly like the portrait on the front cover of the first number of the Monthly. The lean, sharp face of irony—the eyes like epigrams—the spare figure made for lightness and a swift, triumphant race in the world of thought: there sat the unmistakable man and it was not for me, tired from a long day's work of exploding bunk, to question how he came there.

"An interesting and timely hallucination," thought I. As I had driven from the office that evening, I had meditated on Voltaire in various attitudes—aflame with civilized, intellectual wrath over a Christian outrage; mocking priestly ignorance with a witticism that revealed truth in a smile; watching a bonfire of certain heresies from his pen, enjoying the joke of inwardly mocking at this folly while outwardly pretending to share it; in England, and not ungrateful for his brief exile to a land where thought could be free—and thinking what a difference of liberty and civilization the few miles across the Channel could make; at Ferney, talking with bold philosophers whom no power of Church or State could quite suppress, starting up thoughts which would soon run over France and all of Europe; digging in his garden and reflecting toward the end: "We shall leave the world as foolish and wicked as we found it." And that—this very reflection upon the future state of the world—fell in opportuneely with my thoughts: for I had been reading the letters of certain critics, who assured me that there is no need for a Voltaire in this age. Voltaire—so I was kindly told—had, once and for all, driven the bigots, like the haunted pigs,
down the hill and into the sea; and he had, for all practical purposes, won the fight against intolerance. Again, I had been told that only the ignorant mob is led by the fanatics today (but what of the mob in Voltaire’s day?) and that, as there are men of intelligence in the world, multi-headed ignorance may safely be left to work its mischief.

On the other hand, churchmen had written to warn me that Voltaire had not been able (nor Paine nor Ingersoll nor any other) to beat down the hosts of religion; that indeed (though they did not put it so) the world is almost as “foolish and wicked” as ever it was in Voltaire’s day; and that, with such examples before me, I should wisely refrain from trying my hand where these other men have failed. And so I had been prompted to ask myself: What really would Voltaire say about it? And now in answer to my thoughts (called forth illusorily but quite conveniently by these thoughts) Voltaire, as real as the very figure in a dream, sat in my library where he could reach easily behind him and discover how handsomely the modern printers have done by his books. He had, so to speak, and while my back was turned, stepped out of the cover page of the Monthly that lay near by.

There was a feeling in the air that we knew one another quite well. And, just as simply as you please, I remarked:

“It’s a foolish and wicked world.”

“It is,” he replied, no less simply. “And—may I add—the wickedness is mostly foolishness.”

“I see—the only crime is stupidity. Didn’t you write that?”

“If I didn’t, it’s a wonder, for I had every reason to write it—with stupidity all about me; and, as you express the idea so readily, I perceive that stupidity is still at large in the world. It is plain that men still rely too much upon faith in a God, and the dream of a perfect future state, and too little upon intelligence. There is no delusion more crippling to the faculties of man than the notion that a God has an immortality of perfection in store for mankind—or, rather, for those who have been baptized. The world would be far better, and would go forward more rapidly in civilized ways, if men were less credulous of God’s system of reward and punishment. Is not progress—is not modern life—the result of the growth of doubt in my age? When men began to suspect the plans of Providence, they began more seriously to make quite worldly plans of their own. Thus skepticism would appear to be the real mother of invention; and better homes on earth, let us say, grew out of a declining faith in ‘mansions in the skies’; while you enjoy good roads in Kansas by virtue of the fact that, not so many years ago, men began rather generally to question the reality of golden streets in a New Jerusalem. Machinery is absolutely irreligious; and if the world were suddenly carried back to the pitch-dark, overwhelming superstition of the Middle Ages, it is not too much to believe that machinery would disappear in a century or two. May we not hope that as doubt grows, that as men turn more from the idea of a paternalistic God and from the idea of immortality to the real business of life, they will approach our ideal of a civilized world? Try to imagine what life could be if mankind as a whole turned its gaze from the sky and really
came down to earth—resolution, in a phrase, to apply earnestly the wisdom of Omar: ‘Take the Cash and let the Credit go.’"

I had known that Voltaire was a modern, and now I saw more clearly into the significance, the depth, the immensity, of his modernism; yes, I realized that his Pocket Theology was a direct step toward the invention of the steam engine and at least the efflorescence of all those elegant, comfortable devices that illustrate the advertising pages of the magazines and that make death less and less attractive to Christians. So impressed was I by this vein of discourse that I projected hazily an essay for the Monthly, with such a title (at a venture) as "Infidels and Bathtubs" or "The Relation of Voltaire to the Modern Furnace" or "Immortality and Electric Lights." I had in mind asking Voltaire to write the essay, but more urgently I craved light on another question.

"They say that you did your work, that your life and work are complete and closed, and that you are not needed in this age."

"Ah!" He smiled; but there was regret, too, in his voice as he flicked a misplaced residue of snuff from his shoulder. "No man ever lives long enough to do the work that he plans to do, that he feels he must do, and to which he would joyfully devote more than one lifetime. Every man who lives to any purpose, dies with a sense of incompletion. He wins victories, perhaps; and indeed it would not become me to deny that I snatched a few priests baldheaded and kicked over a silly, cruel altar here and there; but a man knows, even in the moment of his greatest triumph, that life goes on and that there will be other battles to fight—that other issues, similar if not exactly the same, will arise—that, in short, stupidity is not exclusive with an age, though it may reveal itself in a form peculiar to an age.

"Of course I did not do my work, in the long view, and the proof (if you require that sort of proof in a world that is still, as you say, foolish and wicked) is that men are still interested in me; and this interest is not merely curious but vital and hardly less fitted with a contemporary edge than the interest of Frenchmen while I lived. Had I succeeded—had I really destroyed, in every possible form and for all time, the evils that I fought—do you imagine that men would read my books with understanding today? that is to say, with that instant, acute realization which lights up talk of familiar things? The history of the world is a history of interesting failures—and that is why these men are interesting and full of point for posterity. Jesus, for example, has kept to the fore so long because he was an absolute failure; yes, his teachings failed quickly and dramatically and that, from the standpoint of fame, was fortunate for Jesus: it has never been possible for men to live up to his teachings, perhaps it will never be possible, but so long as it is impossible men will try it—or talk about it. Socrates has been dead these many years, and yet that portion of a stupid world that may be expected to have an interest in him, does regard him with a great deal of interest. You see, he discussed problems that mankind has not been quite able to solve—and that may not be worth solving. Still, as a philosopher who did not live long enough to discover truth, Socrates is interesting. What man failed more grandly than Nietzsche?
and what man more successfully intrigues, to this day, the thinking mind? Do men still read *Candide*? Do they still read *Micromegas*? Then it must be that life—that human nature—bears a marked resemblance to the look of it in my own day. Consider the field of art and you will observe that immortality follows in the footsteps of a sound mortality—that the artist who discloses the heart of man in any age speaks to the resemblance and recognition of man in all ages. Was it Turgenev (a Russian critic, I believe, but my memory is poor) who said there are two eternal types of humanity?—Hamlet and Don Quixote. Hamlet speaks directly to the soul of man—and not strangely, as his tragic cries and hesitations find their echo in the human soul today. It is of very little importance to us now that Don Quixote was a satire on the peculiar fashions of the age of chivalry; we perceive in it the satire on the eternal quixotism of man.

"The man who works only for a day, lives only for a day. The dramatist who shows merely the superficial customs of his age, and the fighter who directs his blows only at superficial, temporary evils of his age, are not the kind who quicken men's thoughts, search out the secrets of their souls, and put weapons into their hands in other, superficially different and remote ages. Every age is interested in itself, and it turns to the man who has had the foresight or instinctive art to project his interest into that age. I have a very real message for this age; therefore, this age reads me. My work, being in the Department of Stupidity (which is always a number of years behind with its work and seems never quite able or sufficiently manned to catch up), was not finished and it is still needed in a stupid world. Surely this age needs a Voltaire, and I only regret that my visit must be short. I assure myself, however, that others will continue the splendid, always necessary fight—the fight that is never quite won nor lost, that may win a victory for its time yet bequeaths a heritage of battle for the time to come; and I trust, as indeed I believe, that they will prefer to fail in great things, inspiring other men to emulate their failure, rather than to succeed in little things."

"One always thinks of you as the great foe of intolerance. You were much more than that, I know: wit, artist, historian, thinker of many thoughts. Yet it is your message of toleration that we have seen fit to emphasize and that we are eager to restate in terms of present-day issues. And, by the way, let me tell you that your essay on Tolerance was a good bit of work. The kind of horror that wrung that protest from you would not be likely to occur in this age—though there is a plenty of the kind of hate that drove men in your time to kill for religious opinion's sake. This, I am told, is a reason why the cry of toleration need not be revived. We are legally free and for the most part physically safe (so the argument runs) and the fact that the attitude of intolerance shows its ugly face on every hand should give us no concern. No man can force me to attend church. The vilest-livered bigot is without the power to kill me, with pomp and piety, for disagreeing with him regarding the habits and intentions of God. The law says that I can think, and utter my thoughts freely, on these matters. And this, I am told—in a word, the separation of Church and State—
was your important aim. So why worry about anything else? The rest the devil may take, and welcome. What do you think?

"Here, my dear fellow, is much confusion. Your critics forget one purpose in looking at another. Obviously, I wished to see the Church robbed of its power to torture unbelievers; to make superstition, as it were, shift for itself without the support of the State; to make safe the bodies of men, and free the thoughts of men, from the punishments of fanatical ignorance or cunning or self-interest. That much, I am glad to say, I fairly accomplished—not alone, to be sure. But my larger purpose was to free the human mind (yes, the minds of the bigots as well as their victims) and urge it to enjoy that freedom nobly. I fought intolerance, not simply as a physical and legal force, but as a social force that, without the stake and the captains of police to aid it, has power in a stupid world to obscure thought, howl down sensible ideas, strike fear into men’s hearts. It was my dream to see a civilized world arise upon the ruins of superstition—and that, I need hardly remind you, is not a simple question of laws. What! Is it only that men wish to be safe? Is our end attained when we have got the right to sit in peace, without fear of bodily injury, and gaze upon this foolish and wicked world?

“And, for the matter of that, are you safe? Are mobs unknown? Can fanaticism no longer raise up, in an awful moment, crazed followers to put it violently into effect? Nay; I observe that you still have wars, lynchings, race riots, feuds of hate both holy and unholy, mob violence. Did you not have a spectacle a few months ago, on the East Side of New York, that was very much like what occurred in my day and what prompted me to write that essay, _Toleration_, which you spoke of a moment ago? You recall the case of the Jewish girl who married a Catholic and, cruelly damned and disowned by her parents, embraced her husband’s religion. And you recall the terrible mobs that, when the girl died, thronged the street in front of the home with menacing cries and gestures—a scene of religious frenzy and race hatred that smacked to its very essence of the Middle Ages. A heavy guard of police was necessary to protect the body and to let the funeral be conducted in peace. Are we, then, to call heaven to witness our progress, since the police held back that mob? Or are we to shudder at this manifestation of the old, old stupidity and hate of man; and vow that we shall continue to hit, and hit hard, at such intolerance?

“How foolish it is to talk of the ‘ignorant mob’ as if it were unimportant! It is always full of menace. There it stands, inviting dumbly the charlatan to practice his legerdemain, his tricks, his degradation and murder—to use this mob against intelligent men and to defeat the purposes of civilization! One is indignant—and then one is amused to hear men refer with a light, casual, time-o’day air to this ‘ignorant mob’ as if it were merely a trifle, a bagatelle, an episode in the general tale. Truly, this is a way of thinking upside down. We may agree that it would be of small importance if a minority, a little curious crowd, of men were ignorant and intolerant. We cannot, however, see good logic in the opinion that an ignorant majority of mankind is too trivial for our consideration.
"It is this mass, stupidly prey to the charlatans, that we must (that you must, since I remember that I am only a momentary spectator) endeavor to reach with the very message, different only in details, that I gave to the France of my own age. You can see that, with rare exceptions, it will be idle to try any sort of persuasion with the leaders of the mob. They are self-interested. They are dishonest. Are you to expect them willingly to surrender their control of the mob? On the contrary, you can see plainly that they are seeking in every possible way to extend their control—to keep the mob in its ignorance, to fasten more cunningly upon it the spell of intolerance. No—damn the mob leaders; pardon me, I mean—literally—damn them. But turn your attention to the mob. Try you, with every weapon of wit and ridicule and thought, to get that mob away from its leaders. It will not be easy; and it is not for me, knowing this old world as I do, to say that you will be able to reclaim the mob entire. But it is not for you to falter in the timid doubt of how much you may accomplish. The worker—the fighter—who counts most in the long run is the man who is big enough to realize limitations and, admitting to himself the possibility of failure, still work and fight on.

"Do you think that I regarded myself as one who had a mission, and divine power, to save the world? Didn't I know that, with all my efforts, it would be necessary for you to declare war upon intolerance in this age? Yet should I, therefore, have withheld my hand? You say that this age needs a Voltaire—and I agree with you. This being true, was it any the less true that my age needed a Voltaire? And does it follow that a future age will not need a Voltaire? It is a most regrettable tendency of man to delude himself with the belief that progress is something that has already happened, that it is nicely complete and safe, and that it is simply a matter for congratulation. The apparent value of the freedom that has been won in the past is that it can be used to extend and more generously define freedom today. We enjoy a degree of intelligence, and there are a number of intelligent men in the world; and what better use can we make of it than to draft it into the fight to gain more intelligent things from life, to reach higher standards, to spread toleration in all ranks, and to multiply the number who are capable of playing civilized roles? I say regretfully—with deep regret—that I fought in vain if my having fought is to persuade the men of this age that fighting is no longer necessary. Every singer, artist, thinker is a reminder that song and art and thought are great possibilities of humanity and that no age can afford to be without them.

"But perhaps I have been too serious, too intense—for a visitor. One must not forget to smile. Fanaticism is, at bottom, a deficiency of the sense of humor. Toleration is the gift of realizing what a joke lies in the assumption that one man, so to speak, can do the thinking for the whole human race. Imagine what rare humor there would be in the spectacle of the Chinese sophist trying to compel the fish, in spite of a fervent piscatorial denial, to agree that it ought to be enjoying itself in the stream and, by the grace of God, was enjoying itself. Yes, we must always be sane and full of good, intelligent humor and hit intolerance—hit it hard, mind you, and curse it too—with a smile. Show the
world that nothing is more ridiculous than the various, wild tribes of intolerance. This foolish and wicked world...

The words trailed off almost inaudibly. When they had absolutely ceased—after a moment of listening for words that did not come—I looked up and saw that I was alone.

"Ah!" I exclaimed to myself. "The old philosopher didn't get to finish his talk, after all. He is right. Nothing is ever quite finished in this world. This foolish and wicked world needs, and perhaps always will need, a Voltaire."

**MY FRIEND, MR. JONES**

My friend Jones is regarded by his neighbors as a bad, immoral, dangerous man. They say this about him; they believe it somehow, or think they believe it; but on the other hand, they act in a manner quite contrary to their avowed estimate of Jones. Jones is an honest man, and is situated as independently in this respect as Longfellow's village smith. People trust him; his credit is generally high. He is a good, steady, useful worker, and no one has ever accused him of being a loafer. Jones, who is a carpenter, always has work; his neighbors know that he is industrious, efficient and perfectly trustworthy; he never scamps a job. He is a truthful man; in matters where the mere word is all-important, Jones' word is taken as being absolutely reliable. He is a kind man, and no one ever knew him to be guilty of a mean or cruel or ungenerous action. He is an easy man to live with, never quarrelling, never imposing upon others, never looking for trouble but on the contrary most happily disposed to ignore trouble. He is an able and resourceful and courageous man, as men go. In short, in their common daily relations with him, people are guided by this knowledge of the character of Jones. They trust him; they believe him; they employ him; they feel safe with him and will even impose upon his good nature; they get along with him; they depend upon him in emergencies. Yet, I repeat, with another side of their mentality they see Jones as a bad, immoral, dangerous man; and in times of public excitement, when the herd is rampant—such as the late war, for example—life is made very unpleasant for Jones.

The trouble is that Jones is unorthodox, a heretic, a rebel, an individual. And people who do not very carefully associate belief with conduct, who hold a mere difference to be immoral without going back of the difference to ask what it implies, who have very little understanding of motives—these people argue that Jones is immoral simply because he refuses to conform to the notions of the herd. But, after all, what is the reality behind this professed, pseudo-horror of and protest against exceptions to the current views?

Jones doesn't believe in God. He is irreligious, will not go to
church, never reads his Bible. But does that indicate a desire in Jones to violate any law, moral or statutory? Denying God, will he therefore be impelled to rob his neighbor's hen-roost? As the Bible does not interest him, will he therefore seek excitement in a life of crime? Having decided that the Garden of Eden is a myth, will Jones translate his belief logically into conduct by beating his grocer? It does not happen so. In fact, to be realistic, we must conclude that Jones is moral, not because God wants him to be or the Bible tells him to be, but because he wants to be. He is honest, let us say, because it is the simple, natural character of the man. It is very likely that even a belief in God would not destroy his honesty. He finds it safer and pleasanter to work for his living than to steal for it. He is a kind man, and therefore, regardless of God or the Devil, he is not inclined to injure others. The truth is that Jones is strong enough to stand alone; he is big enough to be moral without fear of Hell or hope of Heaven; he rests solidly upon his own character, not upon any faith. We see that it is no more immoral in fact or in tendency for Jones to dispute the existence of God than it was immoral, once upon a time, to dispute the flatness of the earth.

Again, Jones is not a patriot of the ordinary type. As the two seem to go together—a man's patriotism being dependent upon his approval of a war if his country happens to be in it—Jones is also a pacifist. Now to what sort of conduct does such a belief lead? Not, as we have seen, to dishonest or cruel or criminal conduct. And when I say that Jones is not a patriot, I do not mean to imply that he is an anarchist, or a nihilist, or a believer in no government. He is not out to destroy the state. He recognizes its present usefulness, along with its inevitable evils. No; Jones is not a patriot, chiefly because he does not agree that this country is the greatest of earth in all things, that it is perfect according to God and the Constitution, that whatever the men who run the country may do is bound to be right. The practical result of all this is highly moral. Jones, not being a patriot, is a better citizen than his patriotic neighbors. As he sees imperfections, evils and a lack of greatness in his country—and as he lives in this country, expects to continue living in it, and therefore wants it to be as good a country as possible—Jones is a worker for sound national progress. He does not let things run their course and say that, as they happen in his country, they are right. He denounces evils that threaten his country—even though those evils may be, as they certainly are, upheld by their interested promoters and beneficiaries as the essence of patriotism; he criticizes national defects, foolish national pride, national tendencies to elevate the mediocre, national habits of glorifying tradition and clinging to custom at the expense of real progress. And Jones, not believing that his country is always in the right, is sometimes able to see when it is in the wrong and try to put it right. On the whole, then, we see that Jones is a better influence than the patriot who exclaims against him with simulated horror; while as a pacifist, Jones is simply a man who believes in the highly moral condition of peace. He would have men do something better than kill one another. He would keep his country out of trouble. He is not, like some of his
neighbors, ready to fight—or to send others to fight—at the drop of a hat. He is far too civilized a man for that. Jones believes that passions—especially crowd passions—are dangerous; and that it is quite immoral for any man to pander to such passions; the better man, he will tell you, is he who never forgets that reason is man’s highest attribute—the man who tries to be always calm and fair and sensible.

There is worse. Jones is known as a radical. He believes that the forms of social organization that prevail in this day and generation are not the best that God or man can devise. He is really quite a rebel, quite completely at variance with the conforming faith of the herd, inasmuch as he believes that there is no human belief or institution regarding which the last word of wisdom has been enunciated. In politics, in economics, in ethics Jones is at odds with his neighbors. His neighbors, being moral in their own sight, accept whatever is as being all for the best, designed for all time and not susceptible of change. They have not thought the matter out carefully, but that is what they believe—largely because their fathers believed it before them. But why does Jones speak out against the order of things that constitutes society as we know it today? It is not that Jones wishes to see the principle of order abolished. Certain alarmed ones cry that Jones is out for the realization of chaos and old night, but that is not true. Neither is it true that Jones wants the race to go backward to some earlier system of things. It is Jones’ belief that society must and will go forward to a better system. He argues that our ideas and customs and institutions will be very different and very much better some time in the future. Being rather sensible, he admits that this future is probably remote. He does not envisage a sudden, amazing leap of progress, nor does he entertain himself with visions of the splendors of red revolution. Yet Jones holds that men can and must eventually improve their ways of running this business of life; that they will work out better methods of providing for the material well-being of the race—that, for example, the silly condition of poverty will disappear along with the absurd inequalities of our civilization; that men will learn to get along with fewer and saner laws, tending in the direction of less government and greater personal liberty; that men will do less fighting and more useful working and thinking in the future. These beliefs, you will observe, are essentially moral and they lead to a kind of moral conduct. Jones is a radical, not because he is worse or better than his neighbors in the ordinary moralities of daily life, but because he demands higher and better things from life. He has greater vision and that, indeed, is to have a greater morality.

I don’t wish to make Jones out as too good a bad man to be true. Yet on other points he differs from the herd about him—and the difference, we find, is a moral difference in Jones’ favor. He believes that marriage is a matter of custom rather than morality in a higher sense, and that as women become freer, as the social attitude toward property changes, as the state increasingly recognizes its responsibility toward children, and as men gain better ideas of love, different marriage customs, and a different social and sexual life,
will follow upon this sounder and clearer morality. This does not prove Jones a libertine. The rake does not take the trouble to develop ideas and a philosophy regarding sex, nor does he throw himself passionately and purposefully into a movement to change standards or to force new light upon old standards. He takes his fun where he finds it, and lets ideas go hang.

Jones is a law-abiding fellow, and he has always managed to keep out of jail. Yet he has contempt for certain laws—laws which represent the tyranny of the herd and outrageously interfere with personal liberty—and he disputes the silly notion that a law must be respected and obeyed simply because it is a law. And Jones is as moral as Wendell Phillips, who declared that it is the duty of a good man to trample a bad law underfoot. Jones is a man who hates many forms of authority, and while his neighbors consider him immoral because of this, he believes that it is quite moral to hold such opinions. For example, he opposes the whole idea of censorship, and what his neighbors regard as indecency Jones merely regards as honest and the spirit of freedom. He believes in truth-telling in art, when it may be unpleasant—especially when it is sure to be unpleasant, as unpleasant ideas are necessary to progress, when most people are pleasantly resigned to folly.

I believe we must vote Jones as more moral than those who brand him as immoral. Those who fail to see Jones' morality, fail to consider ideas in their own proper sphere, do not relate them to reasonable actions that have to do with them and that might follow them. Chaos, moral or otherwise, does not follow upon the holding of ideas contrary to the herd. As a matter of fact, the average man is morally weak; that is why he fears new ideas and all thought which questions his laws, customs and institutions. He cannot act upon morality proved to himself by his own reason and humanity and enforced from within. Feeling that only by clinging to the safe, familiar things—God and country and all the rest—can he live morally in a moral, well-regulated world, the average man looks upon the man who seeks freedom as being an enemy of all morality.

Liberty is not license, says the good man of the herd; yet he is guilty of precisely that confusion. Smith, let us say, imagines that if his God were taken away, he would fall at once into a life of jolly, devil-may-care wickedness; perhaps he feels quite often that, if God didn't have such a pair of sharp, ubiquitous eyes in his head, he, Smith, would cut loose regardless. And it may be that Smith is consciously withheld from certain actions by the law more than is Jones, who would probably go along in the old way that commends itself to him if the law were silent on certain points of behavior. Thus we see that Smith, feeling that if he were free he would be licentious and unrestrained, puts Jones in his place and argues that Jones himself desires freedom that license may follow. It does not occur to him that Jones, even in this year of abundant religion and law, could behave much worse than he does; that he can, in fact, be as bad as he wants to be, law or no law. No doubt Smith himself is a better man than his fear of freedom would indicate; being free, it is quite likely that he would be no more tempted than now to commit murder.
nor to unduly covet his neighbor's goods nor to fling himself into unholy revelry.

For the sake of realism, it is well for all of us, Smiths and Joneses to bear in mind that there are kinds of morality. There is the everyday kind of morality, that is a matter of social safety, which sets its face against murder and robbery and arson, and which demands that a man be fairly honest and busy and peaceable; and this morality will be generally observed when God is forgotten and only one of a thousand foolish laws are retained on the books. As men cannot live together at all comfortably without such morality, it follows that it will be involved in any form of social life. Then there is what may be called a higher morality of ideas, of culture, of social vision, and of the less obvious, less commonplace, less easily acquired things of personal character. There is the kind of morality that lays stress upon intellectual and spiritual things as well as upon material things; that would no sooner steal a straw of another's liberty than it would steal a penny from his purse; that respects another's rights to his opinions even as it respects his right to his life and goods; that would not violate the rights of another's personality any more than it would violate the rights of his home. This kind of morality emphasizes the importance of a man's own character; it is a morality of intelligent individualism, of the finest and fullest self-realization, of the highest point of thought and conduct; it is a morality that believes in being, first of all, true to one's own self. This kind of morality is the morality of freedom—and of reason. It cannot be enforced from without. God has nothing to do with it. A million laws, framed by the wisest of the wise, would not create it. It must be developed from within. The point is that Jones' neighbors, when they call him an immoral man, confuse these two kinds of morality. They fail to see that Jones has achieved a better morality, which, whether as regards individual or collective murder, individual or collective theft, individual or collective oppression, actually renders him safer and more desirable as a member of society. As he has freed himself from slavery to an idea of God, he has given himself a higher idea of his own personal responsibility; as he has freed himself from slavery to an idea of the state, he has given himself a clearer sense of his importance as a citizen; as he has freed himself from slavery to an idea of society, he has given himself the impulse to seek for better social institutions. In short, the consequences of every one of Jones' supposed immoral beliefs, when examined in a spirit of realism, are seen to be nothing more than simply and sensibly moral.

JOSEPH SMITH, YOKEL PROPHET OF MORMONISM

Suppose I were to write: Moses was an illiterate country fellow of Vermont, born in 1805. He amounted to nothing, and moved inconspicuously among his neighbors, until the Fall of 1827. Then happened to him one of the greatest things in the history of Western civilization. The angel Moroni, straight from Heaven, appeared to
Moses and led him to a hill close by the temporary homestead of this vagrant and shiftless family of farmers: and there, under direction of the angel, Moses unearthed a book in golden plate, which he was miraculously made able to read; and these turned out to be a full writing of history and laws revealed by God to man, through the medium of Moses. Moses, of course, read the plates and translated their contents, whereupon the people believed him and the sayings, narration and laws that he had from the Lord God were accepted as truth and Moses was no longer a follower of the plow but a prophet whom men followed as faithfully as their plows.

A tale more than strange, you would say—for I am assuming that you, who read this, are too intelligent to believe such tales. Perhaps, despite your intelligence, you have little use for skeptics: but, as to the aforesaid story, a skeptic you would certainly be. It is crude, this story of mine. What! Angels, golden plates, strange tongues, visions and miraculous revelations in the nineteenth century! A prophet of Vermont and New York State, in jeans and brogans, who dug potatoes for twenty years and then dug God's word out of an ordinary, American hillside! Oh, how foolish! And it's not merely a question of belief. It happens that you know the facts. Moses, you will reply, was born thousands of years ago. He was a Hebrew, not a Vermonter or New Yorker. It was on Mount Sinai that this wonder happened. It was God himself, not an angel, who held converse with and proved himself such a splendid guide to Moses. And it was not on golden plates, but on stone tablets, that the laws were written.

Thus you might refute me. So I shall not pretend that Moses is the man of whom I write. It might have happened to Moses, at the time and in the manner that I have related. It is, indeed, an important article of Christian belief that a very similar thing did really happen to Moses; only we are told, and millions believe, that Moses did see and hear these miraculous things a long, long time ago—and so, of course, it is far more reasonable and more easily to be regarded as true.

Yet I am not entirely wrong in my tale. At least, it is not my invention. We are told that the experience, so like that of Moses, did befall, much as I have roughly sketched it, to one Joseph Smith in the place and in the year and in the manner I have written. Smith was the premier prophet and the founder of the Mormon religion. If you are not a Mormon, but a Christian of an old-fashioned or even slightly modern kind, you may ridicule the story of Mormonism. It is not so old as the story of Christianity, although the two have marks in common. Yet, if you are at all curious to see miracles in a modern light—if you are interested to observe the birth and growth of a religion in the near and familiar nineteenth century—you may well glance at the history of Mormonism. Here is a modern religion—an American religion—a religion with all of the holy, mysterious and prophetic trimmings. We can learn, from this history, something about the peculiar origins, aspects and pretensions of a religion. It is well, in this day of renewed sharp conflict among faithful believers
and higher critics and Voltairean skeptics with typewriters and huge printing presses, that the story of Mormonism is retold.*

There is another reason why we may look with more than ordinary interest at the story of Joseph Smith and the golden plates which constituted, as it were, the first edition (beyond the reach of bibliophiles, however) of the Book of Mormon. Four hundred thousand Mormons, or Latter Day Saints, today believe this story even as Christians who are content with the ancient faith believe the story of Moses and the stone tablets upon which the Ten Commandments were awfully and appropriately engraved.

People got along with the story of Moses, and the rest of the older, more respectable and less readily investigable Christian tales, for many centuries. It is true there were saints, with visions and powers befitting their great holiness. They were not, however, in the class of Moses and the early lights of Israel. Also, while the tales were believed, there was much spiritual pain in the various efforts to interpret these tales and laws. The vague style of God perplexed men. There was, again, a great deal of physical pain suffered by heretics who dared to consider and pass upon the holy tales without a quorum. There had been rude and even riotous handling of heretics, of which the less said the pleasanter. Yet even when the actual redhot fires of Christian zeal had died, the burning spirit of fanaticism and racking spiritual quest for the truth of God lingered in the human breast. And nowhere was religion more painfully prominent and perturbing than in New York State in the early years of the nineteenth century.

It was in New York, and the Eastern country, that the Millerites, about the middle of the nineteenth century, performed their queer antics in anticipation of the approaching end of the world. Revivals raged over the countryside in which Joseph Smith was born and lived. There was more interest in religion than in farming or politics. It was a terrible, crazy atmosphere. Imagine men spending hours and hours in a kind of holy self-torture of the spirit, and cudgeling their poor brains for days and weeks and months, trying to get close to God and find out what brand of theology would surely keep them from the flames of Hell! Think of people who knew the Bible as well as they knew the almanac!—yet who didn't really know it in their hearts and who prayed, stern and white-faced and anguished, for a sign from God! What was the true religion? What church was the right one, the very House of God? What did the Bible mean? Men who were illiterate citizens and indifferent, failing farmers were sedulous students of the Bible. Many, of course, were certain. Others, no less fanatical, were sorely uncertain and were trying to find a faith in whose behalf they could conscientiously persecute their fellows. "People changed their religion," says Werner, "with the arrival of new preachers."

Joseph Smith did not escape the excitement around him. As a boy of fifteen, he was worried about his soul. He recorded his perplexities at this age. He received a hint (it was a flat-footed state-

* "Brigham Young," by M. R. Werner.
ment, indeed) from the Epistle of James: “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God . . .” Assuredly Joseph lacked wisdom. He had not only missed being a thinker; but he was just barely—or not quite—on the right side of illiteracy; he cut a poor figure at reading and writing and only a fair-to-middling figure at figures. Yet this uncouth, ignorant lad (who was verily the father of the man) did not seek culture nor power of thought nor education per se. It was not man’s wisdom, but God’s that he craved in tribulation of spirit. He went into the woods “on the morning of a beautiful clear day,” and there he prayed with all the strength of a fifteen-year-old big-fisted Jake who had labored in the fields and had never been late to a meal. It was important to him that he be alone. He knew that God is a conversationalist and not an after-dinner speaker; and that the divine confidence can be obtained only in a tête-à-tête. Joseph tells us that he prayed to good purpose. He felt a power grip him; his tongue was tied; there was darkness, and then, when young Joe was beginning to shake in his boots, a light appeared (’exactly over my head”) that was brighter than the sun; and there were “two personages,” presumably angels in good standing, one of whom pointed to the other, saying: “THIS IS MY BELOVED SON, HEAR HIM.” Joseph was not too much awed, and in a moment he asked what church he should get into and be saved. The reply was that all of the professed plans of salvation then flourishing in the United States were “wrong and corrupt.” This seems to have ended the interview, as some time later Joseph awoke in a daze, stretched flat on his back. Tired and shaky, he made his way home. An hour’s intense vision was harder on a fellow than a day at the woodpile. And, after all, the young man had received only negative information.

Yet, with even this little to go on, Joseph was a different man. And the first effect of his vision was bad. He began to argue; worse, he argued with peripatetic evangelists who stopped under the Smith roof-tree; and for his pains, young Joe “was always reviled” and he was told that visions were not the vogue in that day. One can understand how a preacher who had the old visions, of Moses and the rest, down pat did not wish to bother with untangling a new vision. “But Orson Pratt,” says Werner, “one of Joseph Smith’s main adherents in later years, argued that angels were often in the habit of visiting the earth. Two angels, he pointed out, had taken dinner with Abraham; Jacob had wrestled with one all of a night; several stayed with Lot and his wife at their house . . . . In the old Bible times, a man who had not struck up acquaintance with an angel was of little account. And who could say that angels had forgotten how to travel and talk, or that they didn’t know the way to New York?

Joseph, in spite of his strange and powerful vision, went along as before, “with a charming sense of irresponsibility,” until September, 1823. Then one night his bedroom was magically illuminated, and there appeared one whom the young man knew to be an angel, for he was “standing in the air, his feet did not touch the floor.” Dressed in a white robe and, strange to say, with “naked hands,”
he introduced himself to the farm hand as the angel Moroni. Moroni was more communicative than the two angels who had previously visited Joseph. He told of a book written on golden plates, that revealed the history (a sacred one) of those who had lived in America many years ago: and, with these plates, Moroni explained, was a pair of magic spectacles ("Made in Heaven," of course), that would enable the finder to translate the book. In a vision within a vision, Joseph was made to see the place where the plates were buried. Having made himself clear, Moroni went up the flume—or, as Joseph tells it, "a conduit open right up to heaven." Queerly enough, the country lad informs us that, after Moroni took the elevator, he (Joseph) couldn't go to sleep right away but fell to "musing . . . and marveling greatly" at this thickening of the supernatural plot. It probably helped the interest that Moroni returned a couple of times, at last warning Joseph that the Devil himself would try to get him in the notion of prematurely seeking the valuable plates. He must, however, wait.

Joseph waited. Not to let him grow discouraged, Moroni came not long after when Joseph and his father were at work. To the normal eye, the young man merely had a fainting fit. There was, it appears, a human side to Moroni; and he apparently knew that Joseph could hardly keep his secret. He came back to tell the rustic hoe-expert, who was just on the verge of being a prophet, that he could tell the old man all about it. Daddy Smith, when he heard of these matters, ranged himself squarely on the side of the angels. It was, he told Joseph, a regular vision quite in the old style. And further, he didn't see the need of waiting indefinitely to dig up the plates. He persuaded Joseph, who perhaps was not so incuriously reluctant after all, that they should go at once to the sacred hill and solve the mystery.

The Smiths, father and son, went to the Hill of Cumorah, conveniently close, which Joseph had recognized in his bedroom vision. Surely enough, there was the golden box, and within were the golden plates, and by their side were the Urim and Thummim (the spectacles). A little earth removed, a stone not too large, and behold! another book of God. Yet the Devil must have been lurking nearby, and the Smiths, at his bidding, had acted too eagerly. They had no more than got their fingers on the golden box, when Moroni came on the scene with an injunction: the box was to be left until four years later, when the appointed hour would strike: and Moroni engaged to meet Joseph annually on this date at Cumorah Hill—trysts that Joseph did not fail to keep.

Neighbors, it is true, insisted that Joseph told a different story at the time: Moroni had lost his temper and twice knocked Joseph down: or perhaps the pugilist was the Spaniard, with bloody breast and beard from a completely cut throat, whom Joseph upon recovery saw and spoke with; and who declared that the young man should wait and get the plates with his wife along. As Joseph did not then know the woman who was to be his wife, this advice must have complicated matters. It was said that Smith pere, relating a similar
tale, added: "I weighed it [the book of golden plates] and it weighed thirty pounds." Whatever the true story, both stories agree that the plates were not then taken away.

Hard times in prophecy and farming shunted Joseph off to Pennsylvania, where he did supposed or hoped-for silver mining, and where he met and prudently claimed his wife. Whether he was upheld during these years by the certainty of his great fate, or whether he lived in a continual itch of impatience, at length the day came. He could drop the pick and the hoe and enfold himself in the prophet's mantle.

The day was September 22, 1827. Joseph went in the night to the hill; and the angel, true to his promise, was on hand to turn over the precious plates. Brigham Young, the genius and organizer of the Mormon religion, afterward said that he remembered that night. He lived some fifteen miles from the holy-historic place; and he declared that he and his wife had seen a supernatural light in the sky which formed itself into armies of men that marched from Northwest to the Southwest. "It was," he put it mildly, "a very remarkable occurrence."

Now began the work of translation. Of course, Joseph Smith did not even have a fair, working knowledge of the English language; and still less of the "reformed Egyptian language" in which he said the golden book was written; but he had the Urim and Thummim, so education was a trifle of absolutely no importance. (Indeed, the Mormons were later to consider their initial and major prophet's ignorance as being greatly in his favor—the proof that he had been divinely inspired. A smart, cultured man might write a Bible without the aid of God; but obviously a yokel like Prophet Smith could not get along without it.) One Martin Harris wrote down the Book of Mormon (in very bad English) as Smith translated it aloud; Harris being separated from Smith by a curtain—the plates, you see, were not for every eye. Harris was a married man. And Mrs. Harris seems to have pestered him about this strange job, and to have been a skeptic of sorts. At least, Harris wanted to carry the manuscript of the book, as far as it had gone, to his wife, that he might prove to her that the Bible-making was really on in earnest. Smith put the matter up to God. Twice God said, "No." Harris, however, was astoundingly importune in the face of God; and the third time Smith put the question, God had either a new or a tired mind on the subject, and he said, "Yes." And so Harris one evening went home to his spouse with the first one hundred and sixteen pages of the Book of Mormon tucked under his arm.

Three weeks went by, and Harris was still absent with the inspired pages. How careless! thought Smith—and indeed he was not merely annoyed; he was alarmed. He went to Harris' town and learned the worst. His amanuensis informed him, with a long and remorseful face, that the pages were lost. Smith was suspicious. He believed, in the first place, that Harris had shown the manuscript around too freely; and he also had a smarting Yankee notion that somebody was holding back the pages in order to confound the work
of revelation. Would a second translation of these pages tally with the first? Were the Urim and Thummim infallible and invariable? Being from God, they should have been trusted anywhere, any time. But Smith didn’t trust his divine spectacles, any more than he trusted Mrs. Harris, who didn’t say whether she had lost or hidden or indeed knew aught of the manuscript, but who vowed, with a crudity most unseemly in sacred matters, that “Joe Smith may peek for it.”

No doubt Smith, though seemingly in a hole, realized that a prophet could define his course at will and yet be safe. Certainly he would not let the word of God be hindered by such an obstacle. Drafting one Oliver Cowdery, sometime schoolmaster and village Vulcan, the prophet resumed the translation: but obeying the obliging word of Moroni he began at page one hundred and seventeen, leaving the other pages to whatever fate God might decree. The writing now went on at the rate of two or three pages a day and required, in all, seven months’ time. And: “In order to insure privacy to the proceedings, a blanket, which served as a portiere, was stretched across the Whitmer family living room, to shelter the translator and the golden plates from the eyes of any who might call while the work was in progress.” Evidently no Bible is free of vagueness; for in the course of translation there were arguments between Smith and Cowdery as to certain theological niceties and intricacies. Disputing about baptism, they retired into the woods, met John the Baptist, baptized one another, and all was well.

The angel Moroni was as shrewd and business-like in his way as Joseph Smith. When Smith had finished the translation, he had to return the golden plates to Moroni. We may believe that the prophet was perfectly willing to do this, as he had the “dope,” so to speak, and he did not fail to get the Book of Mormon copyrighted in behalf of “Joseph Smith, Jr., author and proprietor.” Whatever profane critics may aver regarding the source of the book, there was no question in Smith’s mind as to the value, if not the sacredness, of the book. He was as careful with it as if it were verily a book of gold. The printer was given only a few sheets at a time, these being carried by Oliver Cowdery, who was himself reinforced by still another man. I have referred to the slovenly English of the Book of Mormon as it came from the hands of Prophet Smith. According to the proofreader, Daniel Hendrix, says Werner, “the penmanship of the manuscript was good, but the grammar and spelling were hopelessly inaccurate, and punctuation and paragraphs were entirely missing.”

It did not escape the mind of Smith that witnesses were desirable. And, as it divinely fitted to his very purpose, near the end of the story on the golden plates an instruction was found that the plates should be submitted to the gaze of three witnesses. Accordingly, after sounding God more precisely in the matter, Smith, Cowdery, David Whitmer and Martin Harris again “took to the woods” to pray that the plates be made visible to them. At first there was difficulty, and Harris suggested that he wasn’t spiritually right for the ordeal: he withdrew to pray apart, and in his absence Smith and
the others were visited by an angel who permitted them to see the golden plates; and, not only that, but he also declared that Smith had proved himself a most worthy and correct translator. Moments later, Harris, purified by prayer, rejoined the group and the angel returned to let him in on the vision. Although, said Harris, the plates "were covered over with a cloth . yet I saw them with the eye of faith." . . .

Three witnesses were not enough. The Mormon pioneers were very imitative of the Hebraic legends of Christianity; and, as the ancient miracles were "proved" by eleven witnesses, so the modern, Mormon miracles were subscribed to as absolutely accurate by eight more men, all but one of whom were members of the Smith and Whitmer families. The family character of the statement of these eight prompted Mark Twain to write: "And when I am far on the road to conviction, and eight men, be they grammatical or otherwise, come forward and tell me that they have seen the plates too; and not only seen those plates but 'hefted' them, I am convinced. I could not feel more satisfied and at rest if the entire Whitmer family had testified." It is interesting that the first three witnesses, although subsequently they were put out or, with bad feelings, took themselves out of the Mormon Church, never repudiated their belief by word or sign. Naturally, they were urged, again and again, to confess a hoax; but on their deathbeds they still held to the view that Joseph Smith and the angel Moroni transacted legitimate, inspired business at Cumorah Hill and thereabout. It may be added, for what it is worth, that very few ordinary, uninspired persons have been able to steadily read the Book of Mormon, which was described by Mark Twain as "chloroform in print." And, says Werner, "according to one writer who was a faithful Mormon for many years, even many devout Mormons have been unable to read it through consecutively. . . . The book is padded with material from the Old Testament and the New Testament and with predictions of ruin and accounts of famine. . . . It is one of the dullest books in world literature. . . ."

GOD THE TEMPTER

No preacher has ever been able to explain, strictly from the viewpoint of the pulpit, why God endowed man with the faculty of reason. Of course I assume, for the sake of argument, that the preachers are correct and that God really created all that in us and before us and around us lies. It is obvious that, if he is the one who made the cosmic works, he is the author of human reason as well as stupidity. The man who uses his mind in a skillful way, who applies himself to problems in a spirit of realism, who reasons things out—this man, good or bad, is simply putting to its proper and inevitable use a tool that was given to him by none other than the hand of God. When a man once contracts the habit of thinking—when a little doubt, a little observation, a little reflection starts the wheels inside his head—not he, but God, is responsible for the
process. And no man can be assured that he will escape thought. Reason lies in wait for every man who is not a born fool. Certain persons can no more help thinking than they can help breathing. Yet, if we are to believe the preachers, God has a merry hell prepared for the man who thinks. Why? Is this a crazy trick that God has played upon the human race? Is this God’s idea of a joke? Did God create man with a reasoning machine? and spread throughout this world of his various and endless temptations for man to use his reason? and then, to cap the climax, fix it so that a man who thus fulfills the divine plan is condemned for his helpless, God-invented and God-impelled sinning to burn in a hell for ever and ever? Must we regard God as the supreme, universal tempter, out-doing Satan in his machinations? I repeat that this is something which the preachers, with all their jabbering, have never explained.

SAVE THE SCHOOLS

There is nothing more outrageous and indefensible than the attempt of the churchmen to force the Bible into the schools. It is a blow at the heart of education. It is a plain violation of the very safe, enlightened, modern principle that guided the skeptical fathers of the American Government in separating Church and State. The purpose of the Church, in this crusade for Bible instruction in the schools, is dishonest and treacherous. It is obvious that the holy schemers are not interested in the real intellectual growth of the children. They are not inspired by any desire to make education better or to raise the mental level of our future citizens. They would degrade education—they would pervert and prostitute the public schools of the land—in order that they, whose business (to speak plainly) is based on the Bible, may increase their power and profits. They have their eyes on the collection boxes; and they lick their chops at the vision of larger congregations. They don’t want the children to grow up mentally free, with the right to think for themselves, and in full maturity to decide whether they want to follow the pious Pied Pipers. Like the cowards they are, they want to steal the children’s minds while the latter are defenseless. We want teachers—free and honest and capable teachers—in our schools; not a lot of preachers in disguise. The child in school has the right to knowledge. He should be encouraged to use fully his mental powers. How base to fill his head with silly myths and put these myths on a level with history and science! To put the Bible in the schools would be to work a monstrous swindle upon every child. Save the schools! Give the children a chance!

IS RELIGION THE NECESSARY BASIS OF MORALITY?

Let us glance for a moment, my friends and fellow-skeptics, in a spirit of scientific curiosity at the claim that religion is the necessary basis of morality; that religion and morality are indeed one, being
merely different aspects of salvation by the grace of God; that there can be no morality without religion. Aside from the phantasmagoria of the Bible, this is the biggest lie the Christians try to put upon us. It is among the most stupid, pretentious and bald, brazen assumptions of the bally-hooers of holiness. This gibberish of sacred and supreme morality is a familiar defense of the Christian when his more technical and transcendental hocus-pocus is hit heavily in the solar plexus. When theology is groggy from the shattering blows of reason: when the miracles are miserably used by laughter and logic: when the Apostles’ Creed is rejected with a hoot and doctrine collapses fatuously like a slit bladder: in short, when religion cannot confute nor convince, nor absolutely terrorize the sinner, by crying up the pregnant, dire, delirious possibilities of another life; then, with a smirk and a shuffle the Christian utters the hoary lie that religion is morality, and morality is religion, and never the twain shall be found separate.

I say this is a lie. I say it is well to speak plainly about this self-righteous, arrogant, insulting, utterly false claim of the churchmen. It is not a respectable idea. It is not even plausible. One cannot pay it the polite observance that one would grant to clever sophistry. Outside of religion, such a claim would instantly be heaped with the scorn it deserves. No other institution, no movement, no philosophy, no form of human belief or activity except that of religion would claim to be the origin and essence and sole assurance of morality. Were such a claim advanced in behalf of any non-religious system of belief or conduct, what sensible man would believe or even give it a courteous nod of recognition? Yet outside of religion there are superior moral forces that have a more valid title to the importance that religion claims for itself out of sheer, unmitigated gall.

This claim of Christian morality is not only a lie. It is a kind of pious theft. The Christian would steal the credit that belongs to all other influences of life. With one sweep of sanctimonious plunder, the churchman would expropriate the ethical values of the ages of human evolution. The whole structure of social law, and the whole body of individual ethics, he would falsely identify as the property of himself and his peculiar God. He would rob the philosopher of his ethical goods. He would rob the artist. He would rob the scientist. He would rob the moralist untrammeled by theological notions. He would rob the builders and law-givers, who recking not of the fantastic demands of another life, have tried to erect institutions and mark safe paths for the purposes of this life. He would rob the teacher and the thinker. The Christian would rob man himself who, in the age-long struggle with natural forces and the adjustment of his social interests, has learned a few things that were not originally written in any book sacred or profane, about the business of life.

There is a material basis of morality which the Christian finds it convenient to ignore. When man learned how to provide himself more easily with food; when he learned how to build for himself a better kind of shelter; when he learned how to labor more intelligently, how to formulate laws for the better protection of his life and goods, how to enter into mutual arrangements for his safety and social well-being;
when man, his wits sharpened by necessity, learned how to manage these simple but fundamentally important material things, he achieved a very practical and potent sort of morality. And religion did not help man to achieve this morality. Man had to solve these very material and very moral problems of existence or perish. Not how he was to die, but how he was to live, was the question. As a matter of good sense, if man had been less superstitious, less religious, less borne upon by dark and terrified speculations about another life, he would have progressed much faster in arranging sensibly the affairs of this life. Man, for example, would have learned more quickly how to use fire had he not worshipped it in fear as a portent of the gods. He would more quickly have mastered the elements had he not seen in them and shrank trembling before them as the awful, mysterious operations of the gods. The builder, I say, is a pioneer of morality. As man builds, so does he grow in civilized and ethical stature. And what has religion built? It has built idols. It has built churches. It has built torture chambers and dungeons and bonfires for heretics. It has diverted man’s energy and imagination from moral to frightfully immoral things.

The truth is that religion, far from being a moral force, has given its sanctifying allegiance to the greatest immoralities in the history of man. There has been no “custom of fell deeds,” no proud wrong of oppression, no baseness of sham that religion has not blessed. The thinkers and humanitarians and liberators have always recognized the church as their great enemy. The moral, the intellectual evolution of the race has been harried and impeded in every age by priestly force and craft. And religion has been defeated, on first one ground and then another, by the growing ethical sense of mankind. The churchman trips himself upon his own quibble. He protests, in a most aggrieved tone, that the abuses and iniquities of religion were the fault, not of religion per se, but of the undeveloped mind and morals of the race. So in a dark age of mankind religion, helpless and blameless, has been guilty of dark practices. What is this but a confession that religion is not the great light, the great moral regulator of society? We can see that there has been much religion with little morality. It is written plainly for all to read that religion, instead of leading man to higher morality, has followed man to the lowest depths of immorality. If religion has simply reflected the age, then it has been no more significant as a moral guide and arbiter than man’s habits of love and war, of eating and drinking. Religion, by the churchman’s own admission, is not the creator and custodian of pure ethics: it but fawns upon, pours ointment upon, and throws its robes around the current practices of sinful man—not so much his individual peccadilloes (though it has ever been prone to wink an eye at the triflings of saints) as his social mores. God has always been strong for the custom of the country. He is a patriot of dullest ray serene, a reactionary, a one-hundred-percenter, the most antique and bewhiskered of the old foggies.

Men have believed strange things—they have performed strange deeds—and, however given to folly and wickedness, religion has said these beliefs and deeds of man were holy. When man believed in slavery, religion backed up this article of the age’s morality with a
mighty prolonged "Amen." The church has defended human bondage in every form. The priest, the soldier and the lord of lands and serfs have worked in complete, pious accord to bind and rob the stupid, praying masses. The Bible has furnished innumerable texts for the tyrants and slaveholders. The medicine men of religion have in every age brewed doses to stupefy the herd into hugging its chains. The church has upheld the institution of slavery in slave countries: and—oh! most moral, most noble, most courageous priestcraft—it has dared to oppose slavery in free countries. We no longer believe in slavery: a man, chiefly propelled by economic forces, has passed on to more subtle and efficient institutions. So today the witch-doctors do not preach of the righteousness and blessings of slavery, although they worship the same Bible that, in other ages when this supremely moral religion was less moral, was quoted liberally by the soothsayers to prove that to be a rebel was wickedly human, to be a cringing slave divine.

The immoral record of religion is immense. History is full of it. We read of religious wars: and what can be more terribly immoral than to drive men into killing one another for the sake of conflicting ideas of God and the views of missions? We read of the staves of the holy relics, of the roasting of right-honest heretics for the glory of God. We read of men stretched on the rack. We read of men thrown into dungeons. We see everywhere man set against man, the human race divided into numbers of bloodthirsty, warring sects: all for Jesus, all for religion, all for this thing that calls itself the only symbol and safeguard of morality. We see men trying to bring knowledge to their fellows—trying to improve the intelligence, and therefore the true morals, of the race: and persecuting these men, striving with all its power to keep men in darkness so that they might more easily remain in subjection to the superstition-mongers, we find that moral-religious band of the churchmen. Crime of crimes—most dark and damnable of all immoralities—we see religion binding the intellect of man: we see religion with whip and gag and bundles of Bible-blessed fagots denying men the right to speak and punishing men for the slightest honest motion of the lips: we see religion forcing scholars to recant their intelligent teachings, burying with hoodlum holiness the books of the thinkers; hounding, with spies and thugs, the educators as if they were criminals. We see that, under the absolute sway of this holy, most moral religion, it was regarded as a crime to think. It was the age—ah, yes, the very religious age—the age in which there could be no ignorance without religion, and no religion without ignorance. The morality of the church bade men wade through slaughter to the altar of the true God.

There were moralists in those days; or you may call them intellectuals; or skeptics, as indeed they were. They spoke for morality against religion. They denounced as highly immoral this enslavement of the human mind. They condemned the hanging of witches. They declared that massacres—religious massacres—were immoral. They insisted that man should respect his thinking faculties and dignify them by sane, free usage. They cried out to men that it was a glory, not a crime, to think. They held that knowledge, not blind belief, was the higher moral force:
that man should cultivate and follow the leading of his intellect rather than follow his mad, fanatical, pious emotions into bloody ditches. Voltaire wrote his magnificent essay on Tolerance as a protest against a most Christian butchery—a veritable, vile commonplace of that most Christian-moral age. The scholars, the philosophers, the real irreligious moralists, under the leadership of the lofty-minded anti-church Diderot, labored heroically, with infinite moral earnestness and self-sacrifice, to assemble knowledge that would triumph over the immorality of religion. These men—these moral-intellectual skeptics—were on one side. The church—religion—was on the other side. Choose between them, my friends, on the ground of simple morality! Will you have the light spread by the torch of the bigot or the light spread by the pen of the heretic? The man of God on the warpath or that old skeptic, Voltaire, in his study?

We have spoken of the past. A great deal of water has passed under the bridge since the days when no sinner was safe and only marauding, murdering saints could lay down the moral law to mankind. This water has been less and less reddened with the blood of heretics. As man has grown in morality—guided by intelligence, by the arts and sciences, by the gradually perceived necessity of making the world a little safer for progress—the ignorant immoralities of religion have lost the power they once fearfully held; and these immoralities, although they have survived in spirit and theory in the holy of holies of the tabernacle, have been abated in practice. Religion, for all its babble of morality, has appeared in history as an immoral force that has been compelled, from age to age, to accommodate itself to the progressive morality of the race: a morality growing up outside of the church and perforce asserting itself generally in opposition to the church and to religion.

What article of morality, social or individual, can we hail as the blessed gift of the church? What has religion given to man in the way of morality? Nothing—not a Presbyterian jot nor a Baptist tithe. We owe to the thinkers and scientists, to the artists and inventors and builders—and to the operation of social forces as non-religious, as undiscriminating between preacher and publican, as the forces of Nature—the moral and material gifts that are ours today. Our age, for its more obvious great advantages, is chiefly indebted to science. I am not thinking simply of the mechanics of our civilization—of better communication, transportation, sanitation, illumination—though surely in this more efficiently ordered world there is the stuff of morality growing out of material things. We are safer, cleaner, more productive—in short, we are, in external habit at least, more civilized—and we cannot thank the church for our situation. We have to thank, not religion, but science—science, which religion assailed furiously as the foe of righteousness, before which religion has reluctantly retreated, and which, emboldened to a last desperate stand, religion is fighting today under the leadership of the braying Bryans of prairie pews. We have no longer the institution of serfdom or of chattel slavery—pleasant little hells on earth that were blessed by the church; we have the wage-system, not as the gift of the Mother of God (or the Father or the Son
or the Holy Ghost), but as the gift of necessity, the mother of invention. We no longer witness the spectacle of witch-hanging, nor see demons in human form, because science has taught us that insanity is pathological rather than theological. It is no longer a crime to think—not a crime in the eyes of the law, nor a crime that bigots, however wild-eyed in godliness, are free to punish. Shall we thank the church? No: we must thank the skeptics.

There are other ways in which we see that morality has been a process of destroying old religious ideas. Consider, for example—in this day of feminism triumphant or at least within sight of its goal—the teaching of religion, of Christianity, regarding woman and sex. When men speak of morality, they are apt to think of sex—as if sex were the only phase of life that held moral implications. And in this very particular and delicate moral sphere, what is the record of religion, that holy mother of morality? Woman was regarded by the church as the slave of man—the slave of his domestic and social economy, the slave of his desires. Under the beneficent, bright, moral light of religion, it was seriously debated whether woman had a soul. Woman was the temptress in the eye of God, as the divine orb was cocked in those days. The very function of sex was regarded as unclean, shameful, a thing to be hidden. Talk of sex, thought of sex, knowledge of sex in any guise and purpose, was taboo by the most smirking, itching, pious Christian morality. This Christian doctrine, this stupid, dirty ethic of religion, obscured for ages any just and proper consideration of the rights of woman and the civilized, intelligent function of sex. The sexual life of man, under this rule of Christian immorality, was not free nor candid nor sensible. Christianity, on this subject of sex, was a "cistern for foul toads to knot and gender in." Today sex has lost its holy, ignorant shame. It has come out of the darkness. It is trying to assume its wholesome, natural, joyous place in the life of man. Women are coming to be free—companions of man in moral freedom and equality, not creatures of man in immoral, religious bonds. We are learning the truths, the laws, of sex that we may live more intelligently: that there may be less disease, less misery, less terror, less of the atmosphere of Christian unctuousness and uncleanness in this vital relationship of man and woman. And with no thanks, by your leave, to religion. Here, as elsewhere, religion has simply been driven from post to post of retreating orthodoxy by the evolution of society, the light of science and the growth of the non-religious moral sense of mankind.

When we hale religion before the bar of morality, we find that it has sinned in so many ways that it were vain to ploddingly enumerate them. We are startled, then repelled, and at last bored by the appalling, endless record of Christian immorality. However, let us turn a casual eye upon another outstanding example of religion on canting mischief bent. It is due to religion that we have had ever with us, and have with us not less blatantly and irritatingly today, that most immoral of tendencies: the pseudo-moral desire to reform the morals, compel the beliefs and dictate the habits of other men. The Christians (and on this score we cannot wholly exculpate one Jesus of Nazareth, who came preaching from the provinces) saddled upon mankind the evils of
proselytizing. They started—introduced to our Western World at least—that evangelical rage which has swept amazingly down the ages; which has grown until it has assumed a multitude of forms and spread like a subtle poison into all man's intellectual activities; which has split our ears, robbed us of sleep, interrupted our meditations, pricked our unoffending skins, singled us out, each and every one in his turn and in his mind, as a fair mark for any meddling fanatic with a dyspeptic, bilious call to preach and convert and save.

We wish to be let alone. We wish to think. We wish to seek out to work out, our own little plan of salvation—or, as one of the brethren blithely puts it, we wish to go to hell in our own way. We wish to retreat into our libraries, into our workshops, into the quiet and freedom and peace of our own personalities—and there seek God or the Devil, or philosophy or fun, the positive joy of exaltation or a merely negative relief from the boredom of God's mad, grievous, stupid world. Alas! it is little of this private, unbothered, freely hell-bent joy that we can snatch away from the smoke and din of this and that ism, ology and sacred, saving plan of thought. The soul-savers are constantly on our trail: if they are not actually tracking us to our selfish, bookish, meditative lairs, still their cries are all about us and it is the God of battles (of spiritual battles no less terrible than that physical warfare that God blesseth through the lips of patriotic ecclesiastics) rather than the God of peace who rules in our world of holy, helpful-handed babble. Preachers, preachers everywhere, and not a moment nor a quiet spot in which to think. Preachers of humbug (instead of statesmen) in politics: preachers of freakishness and salvation and impertinent moral purpose (instead of artists) in art: preachers of fantastic systems and super-religions (instead of real thinkers) in philosophy: preachers of faith, folly and fantasy, of cure-alls and cosmic trifles, of uplifting and go-getting: Fundamentalists preaching the religion of gestation and Modernists preaching the religion of gesture.

Preach! cried Jesus. Go everywhere and shout into the ears of every damned sinner the glad tidings of salvation. Let no man escape. Tell the heathen that Jesus died. Make it hot for the skeptics. Shout the holy word until the heavens crack and the stars fall affrighted into the jarred depths of space. Lift the gigantic megaphone of missionary purpose, and rock the very walls of Time's corridors with the bawlings of holiness, fill the shrinking ages with apostolic noise until history jabbers and staggers like a drunken thing; split with the mournful, bloody-eyed wail of war-dancing piety the eardrums of all the generations born and unborn, of the great Sun. So spake Jesus, or words to this general, excruciating effect. And religion through the ages has tried impertinently and violently to save men—often by the method of massacre.

And from religion this proselytizing fever has spread to all the other interests and pursuits of life. So that the preachers of this, that and the other are as the sands of the seashore, and their combined babel is as irritating and distracting as a sandstorm. And we are not simply preached at—blasted with an unearthly, pious noise. We are subjected to actual interference—and faced with threats of greater interference.
Puritans spy upon our books and pictures. Bigots plot to get control of our schools. The Christians itch to lay their hands upon our very personal habits—as they have already told us what we shall drink. Societies “pro” and “anti” swarm in the social atmosphere like fleas, each with its neat little pestiferous program of how we should live and think, swear or pray. The intolerance of the preacher and the censor and the moral reformer—this shall rank, with the historian of these hectic-holy ages, as one of the greatest immoralities of religion. It is a big noise. It is a bore. It is a pest, Horatio.

CHURCH PROGRESS

Up bobs an earnest Methodist reader, full of grace and good intentions, and tells me that the Church has made progress. It is not the institution that it was in the days when a serious issue with the theologians was whether God liked better the taste of a heretic stewed or fried. We can agree that Reason is safer than when the Church stood, dripping sword aloft, on the neck of mankind. We know that the Church works less havoc and hates less successfully today than when it was in power; and we know, too, that we enjoy this comparative safety simply because the Church is not wholly in power, although it is not powerless. But progress in the Church? That is another question. We may consider one example of this boasted progress. Not long ago the Methodist Church finally reached the point of declaring that it is no longer a sin to dance. Isn’t that remarkable? Don’t you feel dizzy when you read of such swift, amazing, defiant progress? Yes, the Methodist bishops have at last told us that “the poetry of motion” that artistic, joyous expression that is as old as the human race—is not a mark of wickedness. That’s CHURCH PROGRESS, brethren. That shows how the Church keeps pace with human evolution, and even steps daringly and jazzy ahead of it. When one contemplates the wonders of science; when one beholds the record of the artistic creations of man; when one sees how man has developed standards of ethics, governmental institutions, complex social machinery, infinite and subtle relationships of every kind, and immense agencies of education—when one views the spectacle of ordinary human progress, it is only then that one can properly appreciate how very extraordinary is the record of Church Progress.

CHRISTIAN CRIPPLES

Among the many crude, contemptible tales about Robert G. Ingersoll, one made lying use of the figure of Henry Ward Beecher. The story was that Beecher shamed and silenced Ingersoll by the charge that, in attacking the faith of Christians, Ingersoll was on a parity with a man who would knock the crutches from the hands of cripples. Christian cripples! The holy faith—“the faith of our fathers”—nothing better than a crutch! A Christian world, not of sound upright men, but of men hobbling about on crutches! The preacher, shaking his crutch to emphasize a point! Consider the implications of such a viewpoint—
NOT, by the way, the shame of Beecher but of the little liars of the Lord. One must admit, first of all, that if Christians are cripples, who cannot stand without a bolstering faith, then atheists, agnostics, skeptics are better, sounder men—whole men, able to stand alone and to walk unaided. Again, one must admit that men cannot travel as fast on crutches as if they had full, active, swift use of their legs. As the Christian crutch-habit is more general, the more will we find men going slowly and uncertainly along the path of life. Thus we see that religion is a terrible drag on progress; that a crutch-faith means a crippled humanity; that, as man throws away his crutches, he will advance with more boldness and energy to better things. So the Ingersolls—the skeptics of every age—are working in behalf of progress. They are trying, not simply to rob the pious paralytics of their crutches, but to cure them of their lameness so that they will no longer require the support of crutches to go through life. Surely a noble, useful mission!—to make whole and well this poor, Christian-crippled humanity. And, on the other hand, the preachers are trying to keep men in their crippled condition. They exhort men to lean harder on their crutches. They have crutches for sale.

IN THE DUST

Different trades, different words. The preacher says, “Let us pray.” The movie director would say, “Register superstition.” For prayer is the revealing posture of superstition, as it is the age-old symbol of the imposture of creeds, rituals, spells and incantations. How tragic it is when one considers the years mankind has spent on its knees—in the dust: when across one’s mind flashes a picture of history as a long, long line of sad, futile, kneeling figures. Tabled creatures of dust, “worms of the dust,” kissing the dust in fear, dust in their eyes, thick layers of dust on their minds! Seeking “tips” from oracles, bending anxiously over entrail-auguries, groveling before hideous idols, imploiring the intervention of stolid saints of plaster and papier-mâché, submitting to the curses and blessings of priests, and now—the refinement, the metaphysical reductio ad absurdum of modern prayer to an Unknown God! Certainly, Christian prayer, at a glance, seems most absurd of all—prayer to absolute, blank, fatuously imagined nothingness. It has been the fashion to speak of prayer as something that is fine, sublime, demanding reverence even from skeptics—to say that prayer is a sign of the great humanity of man. We have even been told, by “broad-minded” Christians, that a savage, bowing to his grotesque idol, should command our respect. The truth is the opposite. Prayer is a sign of pitiful human weakness, a mark of the superstition that has always, in varying fashions, beset the pathway of mankind, a gesture that robs man of his dignity. And, though the mummeries is kept up, men believe less and less in the power of prayer. As men have forged ahead in real progress, we see prayer becoming more and more formal and meaningless. Man should rise from the dust. He should stand up bravely—stand up as a real, intelligent, dignified, self-respecting man—and face the truths of life. Up! Arise! Be free!
THE WHITE MAN'S SHAME

It is the shame of American white men that they treat the Negro, not as a human being, but as a sort of lower animal. It is not simply a question of this or that phase of brutality or subjection—of lynch lawlessness or the denial of political rights or the refusal of an equal place in industry. These are symptoms—effects—of the heartless, ignorant, uncivilized attitude toward the Negro that prevails, distressingly in these States. The heart of the evil is in the notion that a Negro is not as good as a white man. And, out of all the pother and piffle, only one clear objection emerges: and this is that merely the color of his skin—the fact that he is black and not white—constitutes the Negro's inferiority. Other colors—brown, yellow, all shades—are supposed, idiotically, to be more acceptable. No one knows what are the possibilities of the Negro race—they have never been given a fair field in which to try out such possibilities. Even so, the Negro, with all the cruel handcaps slung about his neck, has individually and racially taken long steps from the condition in which he was held for years by white men. And I say that the intelligent, individual Negro is as good as the intelligent white man—man for man. I say that the industrious, useful Negro is busy to no less good and deserving purpose than the white man. I say that any Negro, with the capabilities and personal worth of a white man, is just as good, just as worthy of respect and friendship, as the white man. And I say further that all Negroes, regardless of anything else, should have the right to compete and associate fairly with white men in every field of life. And what it all means is this: We should treat the Negro as a human being. We should treat him, meet him, as we do white men. We should not, in short, ostracize, insult, abuse, hold back the Negro—and then point to the effects of our inhumanity as the Negro's, not the white man's, shame.

"BAD TO DIE BY"

"Agnosticism," says the Christian, with an air of fearful finality, "may be good enough to live by, but it's bad to die by." What a revelation of simple Christian thought! In the first place, it reveals a monstrous state of cowardice. Imagine one going through life with the fear of death ever cringingly in mind! What an impossible notion it is that one should plan one's life, adjust one's every thought and deed, with relation to one's deathbed. We are told, indeed, that living is a gradual process of dying—but still we manage to live, Christian and agnostic, with some hope and purpose that looks otherwhere than to the grave or beyond. And how stupid, how utterly illogical, it is to remark that a philosophy can be good to live by, but not good enough to die by. Truly, this is a contradiction that only a Christian could achieve. And this is a peculiar Christian fallacy, and a very bad mental attitude, that death is more important than life. Death is unimportant. It would be important if by thinking we could escape it; but, as this end is prepared for every one, why let it dominate our thoughts? When a man dies, the only question we ask is, How did he live? We are interested in the
career of the living man, and not in the unknown fate of the corpse. It is clearly our life that is important, that should engage our wits, that should determine the uses of our philosophy. We must work for life, not death; think for life, not death; judge men and events and ideas by the rules of life, not by the mystic conjectures of death. If the agnostic has more freedom and more fun in life than the Christian—if he is admitted into fields of joy and imagination and thought that are denied the Christian—if, in short, he can live by his ideas of life, he can well die by them. We should ask of our ideas only whether they are truthful and intelligent. A philosophy—a creed, based on the fear of death is absolutely worthless.

VOICES

The story of Voices is ancient and curious. Long ago man told himself that he heard the Voices of the gods in the wind and the lightning and the roar of the sea; we know that what he really heard was the voice of his own fear. Again, man has fancied that he heard the Voice of a particular tribal god; but in truth he simply listened to the Voice of the priest. The Voice of glory has called men; but it proved to be the voice of the captain leading the hosts to slaughter for interests they did not understand. Nations have been urged to hearken to the Voice of destiny; only to discover, in the swift course of time, that they had been deluded by the voice of a crafty statesman trading an age of general ruin for a generation of personal power. Fanatics have harangued men with the Voice of holiness, which in retrospect was revealed as a very human voice which men followed to hate and terror and futility. A Joan of Arc hears Voices—of saints, she imagines; but she hears, in very truth, the voice of her own spirit. A Napoleon hears the Voice of destiny and, in defeat and exile, listens to the thunder of the guns at Waterloo. Woodrow Wilson heard "voices of humanity in the air"; actually all other sounds were drowned by the inner voice of the man's own purpose; but he was soon forced to hear the voices of a tired and cheated humanity. One man cries out that he has been moved by the Voice of conscience; but perhaps he has mistaken the familiar but sly note of self-interest. A prophet—whether a bilious Saint Paul or a brainless Joseph Smith—shouts to the multitude that he has been filled with the Voice of Divine-Truth; but men with normal auricular gifts can hear only sound and fury. Voices have inspired, charmed and deluded men. We have a noisy world of voices today: voices of sham, voices of intolerance, voices of guileless folly. And, in the babel, a few voices of truth and toleration.

THE USES OF DOUBT

When men rail against doubt, they abuse the attitude of mind that has been useful to man in every age. Doubt was useful to man
when he was only in the process of becoming man. The first thought was, let us say, a doubt, which led to a new view of life and the purposes of things not formerly understood. The first man doubted, which is to say he investigated, which is to say he applied himself to changing the prehistoric scene. He began to doubt that the earth was intended simply to walk on, and he put it to the uses of agriculture. He doubted that minerals were made to look at and to play with, and he forged them into tools and weapons. He doubted that rivers and seas were impassable and, doubting to good purpose, he constructed vessels to navigate the sea. He doubted the wisdom of indiscriminate strife, and he drew together, he and his fellows, in rude social forms. He doubted the wisdom of exposure, and sheltered himself; of nakedness, and clothed himself; of hunger, and fed himself; and, as man doubted the perfection of his methods, he studied how better to shelter and clothe and feed himself. New ideas have come from men who doubted the old ideas. New joys, new activities, new adventures have come from men who doubted, and who quickly were certain in the matter, that the old scheme of life was sufficiently interesting. Sing the praises of progress, in short, and you sing perforce the praises of doubt. Doubt is the opposite of credulity; it is the opposite of sloth and stagnation; it is the opposite of the attitude which says: We do not want to think; we do not want to move. Doubt—even religion owes something to doubt. What of Christianity if men had not doubted paganism? And what indeed of the future of the human race if men do not increasingly doubt Christianity?

MARTYRS

It is generally agreed that martyrs—after they have been dead long enough—shall enjoy the admiration of mankind. One who suggests an unflattering view of martyrs is rated inhuman and charged, so to speak, with crucifying Christ anew. But as I let many thoughts slip from my pen that are not sweetly designed to tickle the bony nerve of man-made-in-the-image-of-God, I may as well speak like a monster about martyrs. And what I say is: Martyrdom, by and large, is a very foolish way of giving or taking human life. The act itself has been confused with what prompts it, what is loosely supposed to justify it: so that men tend to look upon martyrdom as grand and eternally right of itself. Yet what, all sentimentality aside, does martyrdom signify? A man dies for an idea. Does that prove the idea to be right? Not at all. There have been martyrs on each side of every fatally disputed question. Orthodoxy and heterodoxy—both have martyrs. Reaction and revolution—both have martyrs. And a number of martyrs have died, not for anything so dignified as a genuine idea, but for quiddities that were entirely foolish. Think of the martyrs who died in quarrels over ridiculous hair-splittings about points of theology! A man dies in a dispute over the difference between Tweedledum and Tweedledee—and posterity crowns him with immortal glory! Consider the problem of a
martyr, if he were thoughtful (in which case he would not be a martyr): He does not know that he is right—and how absurd to die for an error! He does not know that his death will make the right triumph—and how sad to die uselessly! The death of a martyr does not certainly affect the logic of events; probably had he lived, history would have followed the same course. There would have been a Civil War, and a new order in America, had there been no John Brown. I admire Voltaire, who was nobly in the right, but who would lie and dodge and run to escape martyrdom.

**CLODS AND CLOWNS**

The King of Brobdingnag told Gulliver that, judging by the latter's report, the human race was a swarm of vermin. We are informed that God himself grew disgusted with his creatures and drowned them—showing his partiality by saving a merry but quick-tempered old drunkard and his family; and Mark Twain served notice, after years passed in the study of man, that he would use his influence at the Court of Heaven to have the race drowned again—no Noah, no Ark. I do not hate man as did Swift; and I am making no threats, as did Mark. Yet who can, in moods of intense thoughtfulness, fail to see at once the stupid and the comical outlines of humanity? That is to say, man often appears as a clod; and, again, he appears as a clown. He is a clod—this little imitation God—when he submits himself to be dragged into dirty, wanton wars; when he rolls, unresisting, in filth and blood and disease. Man is a clod, inert and without a spark of his supposed godhood, when he permits himself to be used by groups of petty tricksters for cheap, contemptible and cruel purposes. Man the slave is simply a clod. Yet man is a clown, filling one with a monstrous and sad mirth, when he shouts and leaps and grimaces with approval of his clod-like usage. He is a clown when he yells hoarsely with enthusiasm over the war that means his degradation. A clown is he when applauding the bombast and drivel of the politician whose aim is to confuse man's dull wits that he, the charlatan of the hustings, may remain in the saddle with bridle and whip in hand. And see this clownish man when he is thrown into wild ecstasies over the sham of religion, which robs him of the last trace of dignity and sends him grovelling at the feet of impostors; man, alternate clod and clown, calling out to God and claiming kinship with God. Dust to dust, indeed.

**SHAM OF IDEALISM**

Idealism, which is represented as the noblest thing in life, may be really false and petty. I am thinking of the idealist as the opposite of the realist: the kind of idealist, covering evil with glib pretense, whom Ibsen attacked in his progressive dramatic theme of truthfulness, courage, individuality. It is this kind of idealism that
is the stock in trade of sham; that fathers sham, protects sham, and enables sham to live in a world that rewards the comforting lie. It is, obviously, of the essence of sham that it hides its real nature; and, with an eye to self-preservation, calls itself idealism. Take a common phase of life, of profound and universal importance: Sex. The history of man's sex life is a record of terrible blunders, due to a shame and cowardice and, in short, plain ignorance that has passed for the idealism of innocence. The institution of romantic love, as it has flourished for ages, has been simply an ugly mess of prudery and pretense: now we are beginning to see a finer romance in the realistic, wise harmony with the facts of life. Consider how war, that triumph of human folly, has gilded itself with the cheap stuff of idealism: noble, heroic, a great adventure, the defense of all that is holy. Observe how the leaders of men, who practice the craft of State, have always employed the finest language of idealism—to lead the herd into blind alleys, into swamps, and over precipices of disaster. And religion—what an enormous fund of fake idealism has gone into the making and the maintaining of the sham of religion! A Sacred Sham, gentlemen—a Sham which hurls at its foes, the truth-tellers, the word of Blasphemy—a Sham whose so-called Idealists call all others Infidels. One may suspect the man who yodels "Ideals." Look closely, and you may detect the very face of that old hag, Sham.

"ALL'S WELL"

The rivalry in bunk (a friendly one—each kind of bunk helping out other kinds) entertains us with many a close race. Well to the fore, running briskly and proudly, is the kind of optimistic bunk that cries, whatever befalls, "All's well with the world." Or, as that immortal ass, Dr. Pangloss, phrased it, "All is for the best in the best of all possible worlds." It may appear a trifle hard, in any sort of world that we can recognize, to subscribe faithfully to this bunk; but that it is easy we may assume, the proof being in its popular acclaim; it is only necessary to deny what is painful, tragic, futile, silly in life—or to assert that this is so only in the Finite, not in the Infinite, view—or, to go farther and fare no worse, that a complete Higher Plan has arranged that all will be ultimately for the good of mankind. Surely this requires an imagination, not necessarily an artistic one: but the refusal or the inability (perhaps a little of both) to see things is not an uncommon trait. Yet this bunk of "All's Well" is quite simply to be exposed; requiring not even great thought; but only a little honest observation and a capacity for being truthful with oneself. All is NOT well in a world full of ignorance; a world full of sham upholding every kind of outrage; a world in which not only Man but Nature is capricious and cruel. The greatest art, the greatest thought, has an overtone of tragic melancholy; it is only the shallow-minded who are complacently cheerful. Shall we therefore despair? No, indeed. We can see the good and the bad, the wise and the foolish, the pleasant
and the painful, the beautiful and the ugly; choose each day as best we may; encourage the one, if but a little, and oppose the other. Be honest. Be a philosopher. Be a worker.

FREE WILL

A very plain and awkward and even crude style of bunk, which survives to the astonishment of every thinking man, is the bunk of Free Will. This bunk persists, not only in the face of science and philosophy, but in the face of the insistent, unescapable circumstances of life; and, if one did not understand the ingenuity of ignorance, one might well marvel that men ever believed as they did (and as many continue to believe) in this fallacy of animals free to create, apply and follow their wills—fate and nature and all things notwithstanding. Glance about you, and you will see men everywhere controlled, shot hither and thither, thrown up and down by forces that yield not to their individual wills. And go behind this or that man’s act, and you will at once discover something that impelled the man to his action—something that the man did not create, did not choose, could not control. Can any man, by sheer and simple will, choose for himself an entirely different personality: exchange, so to speak, egos with another? Is life, which after all is apparently far short of perfection—this immense and intricate human comedy—a thing simply of man’s contriving, of man’s willful choice, within man’s power to say, THUS IT SHALL BE? And, not at all jokingly, would any man be a fanatic if he were free to choose? Would he be ignorant? Would he be the prey of his own or others’ impulses and desires? Jump not to the belief that when we deny freedom of action, we deny action; and that a man, being wise, will act wisely; and, being strong, will accomplish what is beyond a weak man; and that life may use men nobly as well as ignobly. The idea of free will—essentially a religious doctrine—is bad in that it obscures understanding, leads to senseless condemnation, and prevents us from making the most intelligent use of the forces of life. We shall cry for the moon in vain; but we can walk about the earth and learn its ways.

BELLYACHE

The intelligent man will steer a thoughtful and amiable course between the extreme of crying up life as perfectly good and crying down life as utterly bad. A chronic bellyache is not a sign of wisdom, but only of poor health—mental and physical. And, even so, certain folks enjoy a measure of illness; play brightly with the shades of melancholy; and get a thrill out of the philosophy that life is unmitigated evil. We are not concerned whether the balance of life is on the side of pleasure or pain; we waive the question of destiny and divine purpose; you may take your ultimates else-
where. We observe life in this moment, and we find it an enormously varied and interesting spectacle; we think and feel differently in a hundred situations; we laugh and cry, fail and win, love and hate, thrill and yawn, work our way to this truth and fall into that error. In short, although life eludes definition (and why bother to define it?), confounding each day the optimist and the pessimist, still we live and, living, somehow avoid death. We shall die. Oh! but this moment we are full of life. We shall be painfully ill. Yet now we are gloriously well: we feel the urge to dance and sing, but instead—a good walk, a good dinner, a good pipe, and a good book, rounded by that sleep which is death in little. We shall know again the taste of defeat. This hour we exult in victory as if it were a prize that could not fade. We shall feel again the boredom and the mockery of life. But—oh, irrepressible ego!—now we feel the sublimity of art; we see the broad, beautiful vistas of culture; we gain strength from reflections upon the wonder and daring and power of human knowledge. We are economists; waste no emotion; ignore no important aspect of life. We can shake our fists at this evil; but we can also clap our hands at that rare, delightful spectacle.

THE BUNK OF BELIEF.

There are certain questions—"posers," so to speak—that are put to me continuously. One of the most popular, and delivered with the gravest manner, is: "If you destroy a belief in God and the Bible, what belief will you give men as a substitute?" The point seems to be that men must believe in something outside the realities of life; and what it means, really, is that men cannot get along without a kind of superstition, without a belief that is irrelevant to thought or a knowledge of life or the actual business of living. Man must worship something. He must have a trick of holy words to fool himself withal. That I deny. I can answer that, when men cease to believe in God, they will believe in themselves—believe in life as we can plainly see it—believe in real, life-interesting, useful ideas. They will believe what their reason persuades or urges them to believe, not merely what they can see, but what they can understand and reduce to a workable human value. They will believe in the joys of art, in the nobility of honest thought, in the possibilities of human effort. They will believe that it is better to accept life, and make use of it, and fill it with significance rather than to prostrate themselves foolishly before the unknown, and try to give a name and attributes to the unknown. They will believe in sound, not in vapory and fictitious, things. They will believe in living up to the truth and the personal life that is within them and can be translated into terms of reality. What shall men believe? Why, I protest it is not my desire to have them BELIEVE anything. I want them to think. I want them to develop and enjoy their minds without the impediment of false belief, without the obscurantism of vague worships and wool-gatherings. I do not worry about the belief of the cultured, thinking man.
GOD’S WAYS

Some one defined a scientist as one who finds out God’s ways—spying on God, I believe, was the poetic term. Unfortunately, scientists have never been on really close terms with God. They have never been able to get within earshot of the Divine Throne and hear God speak in his own ripe, resonant voice. They have had to work, and work hard, for their knowledge. A scientist will put in years on the trail of a queer little fact that cannot be seen with the naked eye. Scientists are very modest and they have a sense of values exactly opposite to that of the preachers: the scientist regards a little fact as more important than a big, high-sounding theory. On the other hand, the scientist is very exacting. He puts knowledge to the test—to continuous, careful tests. He is not so eager to pretend to know something that he is willing at once to believe anything. He is different in every way from the preacher. The preacher struts and blows and with red face vows that he knows God’s ways. He has had it all straight from God himself. If you believe in the claims of the preacher, you may well believe that science is a dreary, grotesque waste of labor. Why do scientists continue to devote their lives to the search for truth—to “spying out God’s ways”—when there is a preacher in Podunk (or the Rev. Straton in New York) who has found a magical shortcut to omniscience and is panting to tell it all? Why does a scientist work himself baldheaded trying to discover ONE LITTLE FACT when Billy Sunday, in the twinkling of a lurid eye, can yell at him the GREAT, BIG TRUTH? Scientists and preachers are different—that’s all.

AMERICA’S DANGER

I can imagine nothing quite so foolish as this talk of the Pope plotting to rule America; of the danger of domination by the Catholic church. One wonders if anybody is really frightened by this bogey-man—if there is any one who is oppressed by a genuine belief in the possibility or the faint, far-fetched probability that these States may become papal provinces. This has been for years a stock bugaboo of American politics, so that, despite talk of religious equality under the law—of religious toleration—a Catholic President is one of the things that could not happen in this country. Yet, with this situation well known to every voter, bunk-peddlers still yawn about the Pope’s conspiracy to capture the White House. This is a Protestant country, ruled ecclesiastically and morally by Protestant churches, based upon Puritan and Protestant thought. And it is the Protestant, not the Catholic, influence that constitutes the real danger in America. It is Protestant bigots who really interfere with politics. It is the Protestants who are back of our Sunday laws. It is the Protestants who are trying to force the Bible into our public schools. It is Protestantism that produces our characteristic sin-killers, the Joan Roach Stratons and the Billy Sundays. It is the Protestant theory of life, here or hereafter, that the most powerful, menacing movement—beside which Catholicism is small indeed—is seeking to
impose upon this country. Please do not misunderstand me. I hold no brief for the Catholics—for any religion. As a religion, it is simply one more fashionable superstition; as a social force, it is bad measured by its influence; but Catholicism is not the big religious-social force that we have to fear in America. This is a Protestant country. It is the Protestant fanatics who are our immediate, important foes.

"WHEN MEN GET RELIGION IN EARNEST"

"It is simply terrible," remarked the unofficial village historian, "when men get religion in deadly-dull earnest; when they try to anticipate on this earth the kind of life that is proper only to the dead who have no sensation, imagination or desire. It is the fashion, among superficial thinkers, to say that the trouble with Christians is that they do not practice what they preach. This depends, of course, upon what they preach. However, if a man is a preacher of downright, undiluted, unenlightened religion—if he is a Christian and Bible-believer from Genesis to Revelation—the worst thing he can do is to practice what he preaches. His preaching may indeed be an annoyance, and the less one hears of it the better; but if he insists upon going to the lengths of practice, then he becomes a public nuisance. The best Christians I know (the best men and women, that is, in spite of their religion) are those who satisfy themselves with an easy belief and are not so unreasonable as to attempt living complete Christian lives. Lack of practice makes them human. The old Puritans not only demanded that everybody go to church, but they tried to make the whole of life resemble the atmosphere of a church; as a result, an occasional Indian raid and massacre was welcomed as a relief from the joyless monotony of the pure-and-simple Christian way of living; and, too, as a humorous historian put it, 'the Puritans knocked what fun there was out of the Indian,' and he went on to ask, 'Did anybody ever see an Indian smile after the landing of the Pilgrims?' American life and literature have been singularly dull and gloomy and uninspired as the slightest view of our history will reveal; and that has been due to the Puritan influence or, so to say, to the idea that Christians should practice what they preach. You do not remember the sort of horribly literal and sincere theology that was the rule in America in the days of Ingersoll. Somewhere you will read a description by Ingersoll of the old-fashioned Sunday; and only Dante exceeds that picture in unpleasantness. We have evolved into better ways, as men have ceased trying to practice religion and, so to speak, have turned that obligation back to the preachers; being willing even that the latter should enjoy some latitude—and lassitude. Years ago, I recall, some preacher wrote a book in which he essayed to apply to daily life (Monday no less than Sunday) the rule of 'What would Jesus do?' The effect was very, very bad and was short of a social catastrophe only to the extent that Christians did not try to follow such an impossible rule; and, in short, were able to persuade themselves (each man, you understand, as it pleased his purposes) that Jesus would do rather generally as they wished and did. Even so, a very few Christians trying to emulate the rather problematical and difficult
conduct of Jesus were sufficient to disturb the fairly peaceful if sinful life of a community; social, business and personal relations were threatened plainly enough to indicate what would happen if any great number should get the itch to lead a Christian life and try to guide modern relationships by the admonitions of the old soothsayers who had a hair-raising talk with God every few days. I remember one man who followed Jesus to the point of bankruptcy; another who destroyed the friendships of a lifetime; another who deserted his family and went forth, barefooted, to preach along the highways and by ways; another, with a different but no less earnest slant, began to associate persistently with the publicans and prefer wine to water. The crisis, fortunately, was brief and matters returned to normal and folks once more were Christians in name only; and, therefore, not bad neighbors and citizens.

"The worst experience, however, befell Bales City when Rev. V—came to lead the Methodist flock. Here was an extremely bad, direct, personal influence that, if I may use the phrase, played the devil with the village for a period of two years. V—was a young man who came here straight from a theological seminary—chockful of the Scriptures, saving grace, and a sense of the awful, abysmal sinfulness of his fellow men. I knew exactly the kind of man he was the moment I set my eyes upon him. He reminded me at once of the saying of some wit, 'Be good and you'll be bilious.' V—had a dark, stern, dyspeptic countenance on which a frown perpetually appeared as the hallmark of righteousness. He looked indeed to be a man who had never walked with any one more convivial than God. I said to myself, 'Here is a man who has surprisingly stepped right out of the middle of the Middle Ages. From his look, one might safely guess that he has just been engaged in frying a heretic; and undoubtedly he believes in witches. He is not simply a polite preacher; but a regular, rampant sin-killer and a wrestler with blest baptismal texts: the sort of man who would not hesitate to burn a city to rescue it from sin.'

"Such a man he was indeed. He began with a sermon on the necessity of living the Christian life, every day in the week and especially on Sunday. The precise, fearful, holy-holy observance of Sunday was his favorite theme, which he preached early and late. Sunday was the Lord's Day—simply that and nothing more—and the only activity of man that was lawful on that day was to engage in prayer. Cotton Mather did not have profounder ideas on this subject than did Rev. V—. And it was not merely a generality, but was replete with ripe and specific instances. One of the most impassioned sermons ever delivered by Rev. V—was prompted by what would have seemed, to the ordinary ungodly man, a very trifle. In a walk (with God of course) one Sunday afternoon, the preacher chanced to observe a young couple, eminent in the Epworth League, taking refreshments in the ice cream parlor. Rev. V—was a practical Christian and he had the courage of the fanatic who lives only to see God; he discarded the sermon he had prepared for that evening and preached extemporaneously on the subject of 'Soda-Water Christians.' His point of view was very simple. The duty of the Christian was to see that his thoughts should dwell singly and powerfully on God—particularly on Sunday; and he proved conclusively,
by a very plain kind of logic, that for a certain interval the thoughts of this young couple had strayed from the contemplation of the Almighty. He showed that the enjoyment of an ice cream soda could not be reconciled by any means of sophistry with reflections upon the Most High. Here, too, was a case of brazen amusement, publicly flaunted as it were, on a Sunday afternoon; and money stolen from God and given (as it happened) to an irreverent business man who never looked inside a church—and who, indeed, smoked cigars every day of his life. 'How is it possible,' demanded Rev. V——, 'that these young people can walk almost directly from an ice cream parlor to God's house? And—with an air of terrible solemnity—'imagine their feelings if they should be transported suddenly from such a place into the presence of God! What kind of excuse could they offer to God?'

"A trifle? Surely; but does not God number the very hairs of a man's head? and will he not therefore note the most trifling lapse from righteousness? Anyway, such matters were not trivial in Rev. V——'s view. He could not bear to see or to hear of any sort of amusement on Sunday; and few indeed were the pleasures that he regarded as good on any day. Dancing was utterly wicked and, in that day, un-Methodistic. Flirtation was a sin only different in degree, not in kind, from a tenderloin manner of life. One touch of profanity made a whole world of sin. Smoking and traveling in any way on Sunday, would certainly imperil one's immortal soul. A number of good men, among them my partner in the printing business, fell hopelessly under the sway of this Savonarola. They were almost afraid to turn around lest they should violate thoughtlessly a commandment of God. They tried to live meticulously as Christians; and the most prominent effect of their conversion was their intolerance toward every one who would not ape the archaic Puritanism of Rev. V——. I recall a day in the office, when my partner, Rev. V——, and a man who was zealously endeavoring to run the hardware business as Jesus would run it, were discussing the reforms they wanted to promote in the modern regenerate Sunday. They quickly reached the conclusion that everything, trains and all, should stop dead still on Sunday—at the stroke of midnight on Saturday; only excepting the ships at sea, which could not very well be tied up over Sunday. On land, however, all should be quiet so that God might hear the prayers of his creatures. I lit a cigar, and instantly all three turned upon me. They told me what a wicked man I was—how very sinful, wholly depraved indeed, was the habit of smoking. Would Jesus smoke? Rev. V—— asked, as if to overwhelm me. My partner, slightly more recon- dite, argued that no man could be spiritual with the smell of tobacco on him. The man who was in the hardware business under the name of Brown, Jesus and Company grew confidential, telling me that once he had been addicted to the vile habit but God had personally urged him to quit. He was horrified—such blasphemy!—when I replied that if God, himself, should ask me to quite tobacco, I shouldn't hesitate; but that I didn't want God to send word by anybody.

"The whole influence of Rev. V—— upon Bales City was, from first to last, immoral. I use the word carefully, in an intelligent rather than a Puritanical sense. He influenced many good folks to lead stupid,
unhappy lives, and to waste many a bright pleasant Sunday in righteous living. He frightened others who, not being able to restrain their impulses toward happiness, imagined that they were hell-bent in their simple diversions. He was responsible for a state of intolerance in the community that is ugly to recall. Every man, and every woman, who was under the baneful spell of Rev. V——'s fanaticism, denounced his or her neighbor; spied upon the personal habits of the free and sensible people; revelled (yes, this was their highest kind of pleasure) in bilious Christian gossip about the sins of the community—and no idle, indifferent act of a sinner could escape their vigilance. And the sinners were not simply those who did not belong to the church; the church itself was full of them, in the light of Rev. V——'s deadly-earnest Christian theory of life; and that unity in which Christian brethren are sometimes exhorted to dwell was badly shattered, every good brother or sister looking with suspicious, accusatory eye upon every other.

"Rev. V—— left at the end of two hectic years, and the town gradually recovered from the blight of his pastorate, retrieving to a decent, worldly manner of life. The digestion of good Christians was no longer impaired by the blasphemous whistle of the Sunday afternoon train and ice cream sodas, innocently taken, were not sinful in their consequences. The best of all was that Rev. V—— escaped from himself and several years later, in a neighboring city, began to play tennis; preached a sermon, on a summer Sunday, clothed rather festively in white; and endorsed the running of important trains on Sunday, still holding, however, that strictly local traffic was inexcusable. . . ."

LITERATURE AND THE MASSES

[Below is printed a verbatim report of an address delivered before the Washington University Association, St. Louis, Mo., February 10, 1925.]

The fact that I have been asked to talk about literature and the masses is doubly significant. It is a sign of the false notion, which has not yet disappeared, that the masterpiece and the multitude are phenomena of different worlds. It is also a sign that the two worlds, unreasonably divided, are coming to be regarded as one. If it were not for this misconception, the subject would not be a possible one, or not a very large one. I might ask: Why not literature and the classes? Why not literature and the human race? Or, to more correctly limit the subject, why not literature and the readers of books? Kipling offers us a worthy text:

"The Colonel's lady and Judy O'Grady
Are sisters under their skins—"

The maid picks up the discarded novel of the mistress; she thrills identically to the splendid manhood of the hero; she sees herself with the same romantic vision in the person of the beautiful heroine; she flutters in an equal tempo of sentiment over the love passages; and she weeps no less over the tender, sad scenes. Perhaps the Colonel's lady feels a closer touch of kinship with the psychology and poses of Sir Charles, while Judy recognizes more clearly the portrait of Jenkins the
butler. And perhaps when profanity and pugilism are to the fore, Judy lets herself go with greater gusto. She is, we may assume, not so easily shocked as her mistress. Yet these, in their way, are trifles. The larger fact to consider is that a human being, equipped with a good nervous system, will thrill to the fundamental stuff of books (which is the fundamental stuff of life) regardless of his more or less accidental place in the social order.

This is especially true of what is called a masterpiece. The great books are the ones that have the universal, elemental appeal. Anybody can thrill to Shakespeare. Whether high-born or low-born men and women, this fact about his characters is far less important than the fact that they are men and women. Their passions are the passions of the whole of dizzy-headed and clay-footed humanity. When they sigh, carouse, laugh or fight, they appeal to instincts with which we are all so generously endowed that it is only hard or unusual circumstance that can kill our capacity for these emotions. We know indeed that Romeo and Juliet flies straight to the hearts of all young lovers—oh, yes, and old lovers, too. Hamlet is a figure of irresistible reality to all of the perplexed, melancholy and hesitating tribe. They say that nobody loves a fat man, but everybody loves Falstaff and laughs with the merry old sinner. Othello's jealous rage will prick the ready skin of every dreadful-doubting husband. Shakespeare on the boards is an unfailing attraction, and the gallery is filled no less than the pit. Among the best sellers of the Little Blue Books are the plays of Shakespeare.

Shakespeare is a popular writer—not perhaps as the latest novel by Harold Bell Wright is popular, but decidedly more popular than the esoteric author of Jurgen. And Shakespeare would be far more popular if his reputation were not so sadly battered in the schools. I think that the greatest misfortune of Shakespeare was that he became a school classic. High school students who are forced as a grim duty to read The Merchant of Venice and Julius Caesar and As You Like It are in a poor way to be impressed by the genius and the grand, glowing humanity of Shakespeare. One marvels, to be sure, how one can escape the passion of the plays, the vigor and truthfulness of these characters who live at the heart of thought and action. It is a tribute, so to speak, to the power of the schools to reverse the natural process of literary appreciation.

It is often a disadvantage to have a great reputation. It frightens people and "freezes the genial current of the soul." People think that because Shakespeare is the great, the supreme, the immortal, Shakespeare he must be terribly profound and dull and unreadable. He is profound, but wherefore not simple too? It may well be that the best way to approach Shakespeare is to forget that he is the great master. Don't read Shakespeare—rather read Hamlet, who was tossed about on a sea of troubles. Don't read the gravely sculptured Bard of Avon—but read the deathlessly human Juliet, who loved in the full tide and ecstasy of youth. If you think of Shakespeare as too grandly great, dwelling remote on Parnassus, and never coming down to Pineville, think of Falstaff as "hail, fellow, well met." And quickly enough
you'll find that Shakespeare was the most human of men, which is the secret of his appeal to all men, both the masses and the classes.

While speaking of Shakespeare, let me say that I believe the finest approach to the bard is by way of Frank Harris' *The Man Shakespeare*. Harris makes Shakespeare vividly, tremendously real—a man, indeed, even as you and I. He will tell you that Shakespeare himself is the greatest character in his plays—and, whatever may be said for his theory (and this may be said: that critics of Harris have not been able successfully to assail it), it cannot be denied that he brings Shakespeare closer to us. He shows us the very gestures and heart-impulses of a man whom we can love and understand. And to love is to understand, while to understand is to love.

If you agree with me that Shakespeare is a popular writer, in that he has the very widest appeal, then you will readily appreciate the example of Dickens. He was the most popular writer of all time. All England hung breathless upon the fate of Oliver Twist—enjoyed the humors and mishaps of the day with Mr. Pickwick and Sam Weller—followed the fortunes of the cheerfully improvident and ever hopeful Micawber—pulled out its handkerchief or pulled up its apron when it read of Little Nell. City and countryside—comfortable gentlemen in their clubs and weary laborers in their cottages—escaped from boredom or fatigue by the magic aid of the novelist. It is true that Dickens had a special, homely-flavored appeal for humbler folk. It was of them he wrote largely. There are drawing rooms in Dickens, and fine gentlemen, who, if we believe the novelist, are not as fine as they think they are: but there are more kitchens and Peggotys and poor boys who don't get enough to eat and lowly people who do not go to Bath. Dickens never forgot the poverty that had marked his own early life. His sympathy was with the poor and his ideal was middle-class comfort and contentment. Middle-class England lifted him to the heights of popularity and prosperity. And all England, high and low, read him.

Dickens is not read so widely nowadays. He, too, has suffered somewhat from the stiff idealization of the classroom and classic reputation running cold. We admire Dickens as a master—admire him, as the phrase goes, at a distance: we enshrine him in elegant sets: but few of us read him. It is not only that the warm reality of Dickens has been chilled by the icy hand of ferrule-pointing and footnoting authority. In this age of universal stepping on the gas Dickens is too leisurely a story-teller. People who are used to gulping snappy drama from the morning paper with their rolls and coffee—who are familiar with the hair-trigger climaxes of the "movies"—who love to hurdle a row of stars and dive into the middle of events ten years after—who delight in such quintessentially quick-fire titles as *Three Weeks, One Day and His Hour*; these people are not disposed to jog along with the slow pen of Dickens through a six-hundred-page lifetime. They cannot, like the novelist, learn to love his characters so well that it is painful to let them finish their dearly intimate roles. Yet if Dickens today has not so many readers as when *All the Year Round* was read all the country round, the classification of his readers is still as various and broadly representative as humanity itself. Dickens is read in
fine leather and fair cloth and coarse cloth—and in the Little Blue Books. That little classic which never grows old—*A Christmas Carol*—must surely be included in any list of literature for the masses. And here, to be fair, we must let the masses include the classes. For if there is any one, whether situate in mass or class, who cannot enjoy that tale of holiday spirits, you will find that he is a passionate lover of statistics.

The life of Dickens, too, while interesting to all lovers of Dickens or lovers of biography, is perhaps specially beloved of those who are poor in purse but rich in romantic spirit. It is the story of how a poor boy grew to be successful and famous. The masses are fond of the oft-told tale. Maybe this is why so many poor boys, who are born in log cabins or sold newspapers or dusted the frost off the pumpkin after they had put the fodder in the shock, are sent to live in the White House and be first in the hearts of their countrymen. And it is a great, thrilling story—this story of struggle and success—when it is not cheapened in the telling nor in the object of the telling. We may differ, of course, in the kind of success we admire. But we are one in our admiration for the lofty spirits who have realized themselves in art; who, beginning in poverty, have attained to such wealth that they could give to the whole world out of their intellectual or imaginative store.

There is a great deal of poverty and struggle in biography, and especially in the lives of men of letters. It is true that writers, like readers, are not to be sharply defined by class. Byron was not the less a poet because he was a lord, nor Keats because he was a commoner. Yet one may call a long roll of artists who have known bitter poverty—who have belonged to the masses and often received less than the wage of a day laborer. Seldom is the world inclined to reward the man who devotes himself to ideas and ideals. It is well that the thinker and the poet know how to be content with their thoughts and dreams. The world lavishes fortunes upon its destroyers. It opens its arms to the charlatans. It is wont to flatter and heap gifts upon the mediocre. But the great—the wise—the inspired—are passed by in the rush that the thrifty may fawn upon the little man of a brief hour. So it happens that there is a kind of literature for the masses in the world's biographies. As the struggling artist knows only too well the lot of the common man, so the latter can appreciate the human feelings of the dweller in an attic. There is here, you observe, a bond of sympathy—a human rather than an artistic bond, that may, however, lead to artistic sympathy and understanding. Poverty speaks to poverty. The man who has roughed it for himself, who has been at earnest grips with circumstance, discovers force in the spectacle of the hard knocks of the obscure, impeccable artist. He reads, with an interest that the man of ease cannot quite attain, a tale of early struggle and he rejoices, much as if he himself were vindicated, when this struggle ends in triumph. *Tis a true tale, he vows, moved by its realism.

There is no class distinction here. The intelligent worker is not going to dismiss an artist because he didn't know the sensation of
being broke. It is not a question of raising a flag for a school of artistic poverty. It is simply that one man who has been hit on the head by unkind fate is more keenly aware of the predicament of another who has been likewise biffed—and the fact that one is a mechanic and the other an artist is quite irrelevant. They are two men who have, each in his way and day, whistled not so blithely and wondered whence the next meal would emanate. Common experience makes strange but sympathetic bedfellows. What matters it to the radical workingman, with a taste for literature and life more abundant, that Doctor Johnson was an old Tory? He knew the struggle for existence, not academically but actually and acutely. He toiled fiercely like a Trojan; he took all blows standing; he did not give up. And he delivered a round blow at the patrons who, in need, tried to patronize hard-won success. The life story of the Grub Street Goliath will get under the skin of any worker who reads it. And this means little, save that the worker has this point of contact with many of the makers of books: and that, even aside from this circumstance, the fact that he belongs to the anonymous, sweating herd does not prevent his enjoyment of a chat or a matching of wits between Doctor Johnson and the heedless Goldsmith. Mass or class, Doctor Johnson or Reverend Sterne or the undoctored and un Reverend Dick Steele, this enjoyment of literature is a matter of personal and not social degree. I suggest that the worker, from one point of view, can easily appreciate Doctor Johnson. On the other hand, some of the most appreciative papers about the godly-girt ed Doctor have been written by a man who is so little worried by the well-known wolf that he can indulge a taste for book-collecting.

Whether it be realism or romance, what book that holds the talisman of human interest can fail to evoke a spirit in the hearts of the masses? Concerning realism, I should say—if there is a sharper tendency to be pointed—that the masses, more readily and wholly than the classes, can taste its strong flavor and assimilate its robust fare. They have the stuff of realism in their own lives: and by this I do not mean to imply that realism as a kind of art is a description of the grim, sordid, common phases of life only. The realist is known by his method, not by his subject: he may write of prince or peasant, so he write with fidelity to the truth of his material. But it seems clear enough that the man of the masses lives, on the whole, more realistically than the man of the classes. He sees life as it is—close and immediate and exigent—without any sophisticated or artificial concealments. He is not withdrawn from the hurly-burly of this world but is necessarily and constantly in the midst of it. He fights this world for the means of life. He pays his way fully and dearly, and he knows the hue and weight of each separate coin. He knows how the world is run. He turns the wheels. The mighty throb and din of industry, the rattle-and-bang of traffic, the crash of accident and disaster, the endless streams of humanity—each in separate, unguessed drama going about the collectively epic business of life—these are the huge, uncompromising realities of the daily spectacle of life as it is seen and lived by the man in the shop and in the street.
The worker sees tragedy stalk forth, in all its naked and essential drama, in the next block. He sees the many comedies of a life that has not the means to hide its ridiculous, incongruous aspects. He sees men and women, without the pretty disguises and draperies of fashion and culture, acting out their roles with none but human, all too human gestures. He is privy to other things than appear in the well-ordered, polite play. He knows the life back-stage and beyond the stage door. He does not live in a private, protected little world. When things happen, sad or amusing, he is well-situated to hear and see. He knows that the woman in the basement flat didn’t roll in until five o’clock in the morning—that her man expressed his sentiments regarding such late hours, not wisely but too well, leaving marks other than wounded feelings—and that the landlady will have an ad in the evening paper, while another couple will go on to other domestic battlegrounds. He hangs around the corner barber shop for an hour after supper, and he knows that Bill the barber is on the booze and may come to himself in a week hunting a job two miles or two hundred miles from the scene of his crime. He is witness to Bill’s drunken attempt to settle with the boss, when the shop is full of impatient customers. Bill staggers and stutters and doth protest o’er-solemnly and wheedlingly in a manner inimitable: and the boss swears with a conscientious fullness and finality that would not be permitted on the stage, not even of the most daring Little Theater. And the boss—himself a follower of the modern outlaw, John Barleycorn—vows with a mighty and picturesque oath that this Bill falsely procures the essence of corn in the name of the boss: and then, by the piping of Pan, says he, “when I want something I can’t get it.”

And this observer of life’s little ironies sees the artful-dodging youth (who sleeps in the garage and despatches his scrupulous toilet in the barber shop bright and early each morning) breeze out in as Bill breezes out. The youth has fifteen minutes in which to catch a train for Los Angeles. He spends his winters in Los Angeles and his summers in Chicago. Without letting go of his suitcase (contents unknown) he “borrows” carfare from a casual acquaintance in the barber chair and a package of cigarettes from the barber, overwhels one and all with effusive farewells, cries cheerily, “See you in May,” and—unshaven, unshriven and undischarged of a nickel debt to the porter—he is off for the odoriferous orange groves. A good, gay, generous youth, they say: if he has a quarter in the morning he treats himself to a roll and a cup of coffee and tips the waitress fifteen cents.

Propped informally against the restaurant counter, absorbing the mysterious principle of a stew, this spectator of drama in a plain, scarce-concealing wrapper sees the waitress stare long and thoughtfully at a letter that has come to her sweetheart, the cook. Shortly he hears a low, intense commotion in the kitchen, hissed words, and a louder noise of irons and kettles. He can tell you that people are more real in a kitchen than in a conservatory. He knows, this man of the masses, a great deal about the loving and hating and struggling and plotting of his fellow beings, male and female, old and young, merry and grave. He can recognize a real emotion: the emotions are freely and boldly
displayed within his circle. The accent of passion is familiar to him. Crude, raw, fate-packed moments are scattered profusely along the pathway of his daily life. He thrills with a sense of intimate reminiscence when events crowd thick and fast on the printed page; when there is a tense atmosphere and the imminence of the inevitable conflict; when feelings are worn to a thin edge by the impact and strain of a life that is not softly upholstered.

Is there the black, knotted forehead and the fierce glance of hate? This flat-dweller, frequenter of hash-houses, barber-shop habitue and street-corner observer knows the look of hate. Is there the ardent, bold regard of love that is not ashamed? Love is swift and candid and real out where the gang begins. The maid, though no Bolshevik, believes in direct action in matters of love; while the mistress, with the privileges and punctilios of leisure, inclines toward parliamentary procedure. Is there a breath of hot desire or a sigh of disappointment and regret? These signs are by no means cryptic to the man who dwells in the midst of urgent, unpretending life. Is there a cry of pain and defeat? a sound of terror and agony wrung from one to whom life has revealed its last stark purpose? Truly these things are in the book of this reader of streets and tenements. No emotion, no conflict, no touch of fate, no element of tragedy or comedy can be strange to him. The touch of art that reveals life makes him kin to all the world that feels.

It may be a tale of mean streets, or a tale of grand boulevards, or a tale of hedgerows and quiet lanes—a tale of the seething center of civilization or of the seven seas—but if there be the movement of men and not of marionettes, this man who has been educated in the curriculum of common life will react in the manner of his kind. And he will dramatize it in his own mind, even beyond the telling of the artist. Remote it may be in place and time, its characters tricked out in ancient or exotic costumes; but the emotions, the real stuff and purpose of the tale, are familiar enough and can be related vividly to his own life. His own life indeed—the verisimilitude of his unmistakable experience—figures simply and veraciously in many a tale. There was a time when art—a thing of bombastic and bedizened romance—hung courtier-like about the castle and the throne and sang chiefly of fair, fragile ladies and bold knights goldenly equipped. Then it wandered forth and discovered things more wonderful, tales powerful, and passing strange, in places not so fair. It discovered the peasant, the artisan and the squire—deserted villages, "simple annals of the poor," humbler courts and commons. Art learned that truth and depth of emotion, and broad sweep of life, are more important than a decorative surface. Lords and ladies had to share their scented pages with men and women who, if they were not so comely, were more genuine and more rugged and were fresh-odoried from sun and wind and rain and were of the earth earthy.

The great artists have loved the trials and adventures and contrasts of common life. They have looked, not for the obviously grand, but for the unsuspectedly dramatic. Whether a Hugo drawing a vast social background or a Baudelaire fashioning poems in
prose, the artist finds the tragic and the beautiful in the life of the masses. Thus the common man finds his life plentifully and even picturesquely (for the realist, with the enthusiasm of art, may love even the apparently unlovely) contained in the books. And he can, for certain, appreciate his own.

Romance—all the world loves romance, even as all the world loves a lover; or a fighter, when he fights (as the heroes of romance do) for good things and true. The worker is thrilled by the realism that pictures his own life: and he gets no less a thrill, though of a different kind, from the tale of romance or adventure that carries him far beyond and above the limits of his own actual sphere. This is a great life, but it's narrow and niggardly enough, when you think of it, even to the richest and freest of us. There is a large empty space in every life that can be filled only with the ideal and the unattainable—with the material, if not of other real lives, of imaginary lives that are quite as hearty for the purpose. The Thousand and One Nights have a thousand and one appeals that cannot be measured by economic criteria. Stevenson did not write Treasure Island for any class. He wrote it least of all for actual seekers of lost and buried treasure—a search that, we sorrowfully learn, has been put upon a business basis, syndicated andsqueeze of its romance. Stevenson, whose legs could not carry him fast and far enough to get all the adventure he craved, wrote for all the world that loves to sail in imaginary ships to imaginary isles in the hunt for imaginary and dream-glittering treasure. The bold, colorful romances of Sir Walter Scott are not alone for those who move modernly amid gay, gorgeous scenes, whose own surroundings can vie in grandeur with those of Sir Walter's semi-historical characters. Every man's pulse leaps at the tread of the stern-visored knight in the great, gloomy hall—gloomy with the ghostly dust and shadows of the years at the combat on the Field of the Cloth of Gold, with pomp and heraldry and beauty looking on: at the charge of mighty, mailed hosts—at the intrigues of dark-favored nobles, treacherous and brave, nobler in name than deed—at the tale of gallantry and valor, the panoramic stir and splendor of an age into which the novelist has breathed a life that shames the dry historian.

There is nothing in the field of romantic art that can be alien—wholly alien—to the emotional life of the common man. Here is not his own life, 'tis true—but he is interested in other kinds of life than that which teems around the corner. Suppose this romance is unreal; suppose it draws upon the richness of a kind of life that is beyond the worker's ken; suppose here is artificiality, and a circuitous approach to life, and great deeds too glibly told, and too pale, too fine emotions—not so is life lived in Cottage Lane, but Cottage Lane is curious and imaginative and knows a thrill when it feels one. We may not respond personally to the delights of romance—perhaps we lean to realism and prefer a real Piers Plowman with lifted hoe to a sham Sir Launcelot with lifted lance—but we can understand how the folks who live on the third floor back or in the little house at the edge of town or out in the Sleepy Hol-
low neighborhood can desire to enlarge and more brightly weave the fabric of their lives with the many-colored stuff of dreams. It is not strange that romance in books should appeal to those who have poor opportunities for living it. Yet, not to lose sight of the whole in the study of a part, we remind ourselves that literary romance appeals to every one, rich and poor: for it always seems grander than the romance in one's life and no one, though he go to the ends of the earth, ever gets quite enough of romance.

In speaking of the taste of the masses for romance, I do not have in mind the shop-girl type of infatuation for the heroes of Robert W. Chambers nor the picture of the maid dropping her broom or the cook her skillet to devour greedily and enjoy vicariously with mouth agape the story of a hollow, fimsel duchess. Of course there is envy and curiosity among the masses, and the pseudo-society novel circulates far beyond the pale of the aristocratic Four Hundred: though I should observe that the frolics and the awful mysteries of ultra-polite society titillate the fancy of the middle-class dame of indeterminate degree more than that of the simple, proletarian housewife: and I should remark, too, that there are leisure-class ladies who are not very different from the foolishly romantic maid of the familiar picture—ladies who, impelled by a similar motive of idle and stupid curiosity, are eager to peruse the most absurd, apocryphal tales about life among the undiscovered masses.

There is a cheap, false romance and a romance that rings true: even as there is the generic detective story on the one hand and Poe's Murders in the Rue Morgue bulking in sharp belief on the other hand. But do not imagine that a preference for the dross of sentimentalism rather than the pure gold of romance is a mark of the peculiar, sociological taste of the masses. It is a mark of commonplace taste—of no taste indeed, but a voracious and indiscriminating appetite—and may be found all too easily in any stratum of social life. Taste is individual—a far better measure of worth, too, than the figure of one's income—and it is not strange that there are intelligent workers who seek the romance of authentic gesture that comes bearing real gifts of imagination. The fact points simply to the democratic habit of culture. Culture belongs to—recognizes—neither class nor mass. It knows, broadly speaking, but one rank, one distinction, one kind of favoritism—that of taste and intelligence. Its favor—its joyous companionship—is to be won only by mental effort and the charm of true personality. One is indeed favorably introduced by one's desire for this companionship.

It is easy to understand, you may say, how the masses can be impressed by the tale of common life—by the recognition of familiar scenes and emotions; or how they can enjoy the bright illumination of romance, longing for the thrill of the unfamiliar and unrealizable. Yet the masses have other interests than that in the simple characters of a Dickens or the grand characters of a Scott. They like subtlety, artificiality, the flare of wit and the flow of grace, no less than the leisureed dilettante. The studied and stunning paradox has no terrors for them. Oscar Wilde is a great favorite with the masses who read the Little
Blue Books. Wilde certainly did not dwell lovingly on the life of the masses, nor did he write for them; neither did he labor sweetly to bring romance into people's lives. He wished to be an arbiter, and an artist, of elegance—thought of himself as a lord of life and art—enjoyed a rare, perverse wit. He touched a chord of real sympathy with the masses—with all mankind—in his Ballad of Reading Gaol: that of course was a cry from the chastened Wilde, the Wilde who had suffered, who had lived roughly and bitterly: and the Ballad, by the same good token, has its popularity. One of the first Little Blue Books, it is still one of the best and best-selling titles. But Wilde in the main held himself remote from the ordinary human appeal, scorning to bring tears or loud, jolly laughter or the kind of sentiment that Sterne made fashionable. The amiable but self-centered Oscar was delicate, subtle, artificial, perverse. His style often reminds one of the Persian-rug style that he spoke of as the ideal, gorgeous pattern of a novel that he dreamed of writing. Wilde did not even try to be sincere, but delighted in turning paradoxically upon his own paradoxes. He played with ideas and with life. He was a man of gestures, and a writer whose style is a consummate, inimitable gesture.

One might naturally assume that Wilde is not a writer who would find favor among the men who carry dinner buckets or who eat their luncheon in the shadow of the plow. But in this atmosphere of learning and truth, I must speak truly. Those who pride themselves upon an excellent, exclusive enthusiasm for Wilde must surrender the fond illusion. The mechanics, the factory hands and the laborers in the fields read the esoteric Oscar. If I may permit the testimony of the salesman to reinforce the judgment of the critic, Wilde is a certain, unimpeachable “seller.” And not his plays alone, but his epigrams of wit and wickedness, his prose poems and the essays in which he strolls with a graceful, disdainful air through the field of esthetic theory—all these are embraced in the sound and catholic appreciation of the masses. People who spend nickels for Little Blue Books do not get enough of the epigrammatic Wilde—and so they buy La Rochefoucauld. Wilde cannot fully satisfy their longing for prose poems—and so they turn to Baudelaire and the poetic prose of Francis Thompson and the charming pages of Lamb and Hazlitt and Stevenson. They want more paradox and more essays that sparkle with new and daring thought—and so they will have Bernard Shaw and Samuel Butler. They love romance so well and soundly that they read Andrew Lang's Aucassin and Nicolete and William Morris' Thirteenth Century Prose Tales.

I can imagine some one thinking that an interest in Wilde fails peculiarly to indicate a certain literary taste. Wilde was notorious, such a one will reflect, and his notoriety explains much of his fame. He sinned, and his sin was the kind that sets men pruriently agog. May not an interest in Wilde be merely an interest in Wilde the sinner rather than Wilde the artist? This is a natural question, therefore I anticipate it; but it is, I believe, an unfair and unreasonable presumption that the ordinary man who reads Wilde must be drawn by another motive than the love of literature. You and I read Wilde because we enjoy his kind of art. It is true that we are humanly interested in the man and
his life, but after all it is the artist that is most significant in our thoughts. Any one who reads Wilde will quickly forget his sins in the pleasure of his sentences. And if we read Wilde for his wit's sake, why assume that others read him for his wickedness's sake? Not to deny the attractiveness of scandal, past or present, I cannot believe that this viewpoint will hold as a sweeping judgment on the interest in Oscar Wilde: I cannot believe it, because I have had evidence strikingly to the contrary.

Some time ago there was a discussion of Wilde—and of Wilde the artist, mind you—that ran through many issues of the Haldeman-Julius Weekly. You may know that the leading feature of the Weekly is the editor's page—pages, really, for this department will not confine itself to a single page. This is a kind of open forum in which my readers and I discuss all things under the sun—and even beyond the sun, where no man knoweth. This unique editorial forum was almost wholly devoted to Oscar Wilde and his art for a period of many weeks. The unprofessional but enthusiastic critics among the masses—many of them very good critics, I assure you—analyzed Wilde's thought and style from every point of view. There was vigorous debate as to the soundness of his theory of art. There was the question of his sincerity: were his contradictions, his apparent insincerities, the sign of mere flippancy and shallowness, or of the perversity of one who would sacrifice truth to paradox: or was this rather the mark of the mobile mind of Wilde, turning about to see ideas from every angle, realizing the contradictory aspects of life and of truth itself, delighting intellectually to state an idea and then to give equally spirited attention to its reverse? Was Wilde a thinker whose epigrams, far from being mere flashes of a wit that was careless of truth, were really profound observations on life? Would Wilde rank in English literature with Sheridan as a writer of comedies? and was it not interesting to note that both Sheridan and Wilde carefully studied and saved their epigrams to put them in their plays? Was Wilde as great a wit as Whistler? and to what extent did he owe his method to Whistler? Was Wilde or Lord Alfred Douglas the finer poet? Was it likely that the new Wilde, after the prison ordeal that inspired the haunting Ballad and De Profundis—had he lived and strongly realized his ideals—would have produced in a new manner a masterpiece that would have overshadowed the work of his earlier and gayer period? Was it not, after all, quite beside the point to call Wilde artificial when he wrote in the style natural to him? when he used his talent in its admirably proper place? and when his style, for all its bizarre contents, represents almost the ideal in the simple use of words? These are questions, you will observe, that reflect a literary interest. Thus did the critical masses, forgetting the scandalous and o'er published Wilde, try to reach the heart of the artistic Wilde. On a subject purely of literary criticism, the forum of the Weekly was crowded with the opinions of the butcher, the baker and the candlestick maker, farmers and shopmen and oil field workers.

I can recall only a single controversy in the Weekly that rivalled in length and intensity of interest the discussion about the art of Wilde: this lively critical battle was fought about the subject—of poetry: in the
beginning it was, like Swift's *Battle of the Books*, a tilt between the lovers of the old and the lyricists of the new—the recurrently inspiring dispute between the solid genius of the past and the fluent, hopeful genius of the present: but the discussion grew until it embraced all that could possibly relate to the activities of the Muse—and at length it went beyond the philosophy of criticism into philosophy itself and developed into a fine, free-handed struggle between the realists and the idealists.

Realism and idealism—yes, the masses are thus philosophically divided even as the classes: and the phrases of these schools of thought flow as easily from the pen of the laborer as from the pen of the savant. They, too—these men who work long hours with their hands—are perplexed, even as the man who has leisure to be bored, by the riddle of the cosmos: and, after the fashion of men the world over, they attempt to build a reasoned structure—a logical house of highly important cards—that is more comfortably comprehensible than life which defies the deftness of logic. And the manner of thought is not apparently the product of any occupational color or inspiration. The farmer, surrounded by the beauty and mystery of the great out-of-doors, may be the hard-headed realist: and the laborer who tends a machine in an ugly, noisy factory that would drive an esthete to tears may be the idealist, crying out for the verity of the good and beautiful that is not but shall be. A most idealistic letter, breathing the very spirit of hope and high dreams, came to me from a worker in the oil fields—in a Texas oil field. If you have ever had a glimpse of an oil town in Oklahoma or Texas, you will say that this worker must have a very Baudelairean eye for seeing beauty in strange places. An oil town ought to make a cynic out of a Methodist preacher—especially an oil town without oil. Of course, if we wish to be light about serious things, we may say that the idealism of this oil field worker is explained by his connection with an industry that deals all too frequently with the ideal and the unattainable—that often demands a great deal of faith from those engaged in it. I have received epistles of intransigent realism—as opposed to the gospel of "sweetness and light" as the biting brief La Rochefoucauld—from coal miners and modern poets: which leads me to believe that realism and idealism are habits of mind that grow as freely in one kind of soil as in another: that, like literary taste, they are very personal. The worker may share with the man in the study the thrill of refined and reasonable illusion: and it is not astonishing, when seen in the light of the well-known personal equation, that the masses have an eager inclination toward philosophy.

They love poetry, too: as we have seen, they even love criticism of poetry, which is likely to be a far cry from the actualities of life. Scratch a plowman, and you'll find a poet. He may not be a Burns, but he has the soul to appreciate a Burns. And, though he lingers over a Scottish daisy, he doesn't stop with Burns. He has a taste for bolder stuff. He reads the old Greek poets and dramatists. Aeschylus and Euripides stand with a quite natural, modern air in the Little Blue Book row by the side of Ibsen and Moliere. Homer is not unknown to Main Street, and the tale of Troy is hardly less real to the plain reading man of today than it was to the Athenian crowd, listening to a passionate re-
cital of it on a street corner. On the rural routes are men of the heroic stuff of which readers of Dante are made: and my letters indicate that they read him primarily as a poet, rather than as a sensational guide through Gehenna. They are interested in Villon—a rarity on the bookshelf in comparison with Longfellow: and they read not only the verses of this unbelievable, brazen rogue of a poet, but they also enjoy the human glimpse of the fellow in Stevenson's A Lodging for the Night. Speaking of books about poets, let me say that Francis Thompson's essay on Shelley is very popular among those who patronize the five-cent bookshelf. A modern favorite (our bookman of the masses having a taste for good things old and new) is A Shropshire Lad. This Housman is a true poet, our bookman will exclaim, and he has a slant on life that is very fine and subtle and well flavored with common things and not the less sensible for its adornment of verse. He reads, and even in these arid days of the commonwealth he agrees with a smack of reminiscence, that

"Malt does more than Milton can
To justify God's ways to man."

Among the Little Blue Books there is a good, long catholic list of poetry, ranging from the Sonnets of Shakespeare to Poems of Evolution: and these titles move rapidly from our shelves out into the common reading world. Poets introduced the Little Blue Books to the masses. The Ballad of Reading Gaol and the Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam led the procession of five-cent classics that has now run far into the millions. The poets, I found, were good leaders—and so they have proved constantly to be. The selection of a poetic title has never failed to justify itself. The love of poetry in the heart of the common man is as simple and true as the fact that many poets have been common men and have sung of common life. "A man's a man for a' that." Who should enjoy the flower-strewed and field-smelling songs of Burns if not the kind of men who sat about the tavern table with the blithe, bibulous Bobbie, o'er-merry in his cups, and drank out of the same bottle? talked of the day in the fields? and exchanged tales of similar escapades and diversions?

"Tam lo'ed him like a very brither,
They had been drunk for weeks thegither."

So the common man loves Burns, having drunk of the beauty of the selfsame common things that inspired the Highland Muse.

Yet if the common man is, Sterne-like, a very sentimental fellow—a lover of the "singing line" and of high-hearted romance and one who thrills withal to the bold, fateful gestures of realistic drama—he does not dwell forever in this gentle, soul-inviting mood of poetry and romance or in the stern emotional grip of the tale that comes straight from the heart of life. In other words, art is not all of life: it adorns, stimulates, lifts and lights, and nobly completes life. We turn to the poet in the quiet hour: to the romancer in the dull hour; and to the realist when we would see life greatly and fearlessly in terms of universal, passion-deep art. Beyond these lie other fields: and the subject of literature and the masses must lead us to those fields.
And perhaps, if we glance at the field of science, we are not straying a long way from the garden of poetry. Was it not Herbert Spencer—industrious, sober-scientific, unpoetical fellow that he was—who fell into a relatively rhapsodical vein in remarking upon the poetry of science? There is a thrill in the story of life on this planet—the evolution of life, its manifold wonders, the great forces that operate immensely, both majestically and minutely, to carry on this intricate scheme of things. Few scientists are poets too, and not all scientific writing belongs to the literary art. The Huxleys are few and precious—the men who can investigate profoundly and accurately and report brilliantly. Yet the reader, even on the most laborious page, cannot escape the feeling of awe and wonder, the thrill of this vast spectacle of life spread orderly before him: and this knowledge of life, however precise and meticulous, trails some few clouds of poetical glory. The evolution of man is indeed the greatest drama of all.

We are not accustomed to regard science as popular nor history as a diversion of the general—though H. G. Wells combined science and history in a manner to achieve a success that caused staid bookmen to rub their eyes and stare at this new world. A world that reads science and history as avidly as fiction? What a world is this, my friends! Even so, we may remark to good purpose that Wells was not read widely enough. There are some hundreds of thousands hidden in the fearful gloom of the Ku Klux Klan who didn't read Wells. There are fire-breathing, hate-stirring chauvinists who passed by the tale of races, and empires buried deep in the heart of vanished time. There are little putty-and-plaster Don Quixotes, fighting the knowledge of evolution, who scorned to profit by so much as a glance at the records of prehistoric life. Wells succeeded beyond belief, but not so incredibly well as to eliminate all future labors by himself and other educators.

The knowledge of science, and the scientific attitude of mind, must reach beyond the laboratory and the obscure, academic bookshelf. It must reach the mind of the common man if it is to have a really profound influence upon life and contribute, according to its possibilities, to social and individual progress. Science, in a word, must become more popular than superstition; only by this tactic of winning the masses can science drive superstition into the far background, to dwell fittingly among the shadows of the past. What greater irony can there be than the fact that science, while it is always changing the mechanics of life, has little or no effect upon the thinking of the people? People live in a flying-machine age and carry about with them a set of stagecoach ideas. The cliff-dwellers in a modern city see as darkly in thought as the cliff-dwellers of a primitive epoch. While the scientist is equally probing the secrets of this life, there are large groups among the masses who are hating and persecuting one another because of their differences regarding the secrets of a mythical other life. It is heartening to picture to ourselves the scientist in his laboratory, patiently and finely extending the domain of knowledge: but then we turn and witness the disheartening, degrading spectacle of men banded together for the purpose of forcing scientific knowledge out of the schools. The recent and still clamorous crusade against Darwinism—the attacks upon
science by the ignorant Back-to-Adam school—are possible only because science has not found its way into the intellectual life of the masses. The winning of knowledge is only half the battle: the spreading of knowledge is the other half which, if neglected, endangers the triumph of the first half.

Not a tenth, not a hundredth part of the knowledge in the possession of a minority of the human race is applied to the daily living and thinking of the majority of the race. What does it signify that certain men know how life may be improved and how it may be lived more intelligently and nobly? These men form a little enlightened band. Their knowledge confers a personal joy upon them: but they must despair, too, when they meditate upon its unrealized and disregarded possibilities: and they are in a fair way to become cynics, with a Swift-like scorn for the blind, blundering human race. They are helpless so long as their knowledge is remote and academic, confined to their little group. A man with the omniscience ascribed to a god would be helpless while confronted with an inert and unenlightened multitude.

Scientists may well be alarmed by a condition that enables any evangelical ranter to throw the crowd into a medieval frenzy and stir up a mass movement in opposition to the activities of science. We may assure ourselves that such a movement is fatuous and cannot prevail in the long run: but we know that it can viciously interfere with the work of scientists and leave a trail of destruction and folly in its wake. It is a mockery that dims the luster of science, so that on occasion it seems a lonely and futile thing: for if science cannot clarify and elevate and more sanely direct the thinking of mankind, its material structure will prove a Frankenstein to destroy its creators. We know that the scientist, like any other worker, desires to be free and unassailable in his work. Yet he cannot be absolutely free—and certainly he cannot be wholly effective—so long as great numbers of his fellows are enslaved by superstition. Intolerance, revived in this proud century and instinct with hate and fight, will throw stones at him and scatter hooligans in his path. The scientist, though he flee to the solitude of his test tubes, is not safe from the unscientific mob. And the scientist who has a feeling of human purpose, to whom science is a means of greater life and not merely an end in itself, must desire to see his work reach a splendid fruition in the common daily life of mankind.

As I am convinced of the need to drown the fanatics and the blind leaders of the multitude in a flood of scientific knowledge; as I believe earnestly in the importance, not only of the spread of scientific knowledge, but, as an important corollary, in the cultivation of a scientific habit of mind; so I am proud and hopeful of the work of the Little Blue Books in carrying to the masses the story of mankind, both in the telling of science and history. It is my wish to offer to the masses the widest possible culture—the inspiration of art, the wisdom and guidance of the great thinkers and the solid knowledge upon which any significant life must base itself. And I believe it is in this easy, popular fashion that science must be introduced and in the end thoroughly assimilated into the life of the masses. Fortunately one phase of the work is solved: the writing of scientific Little Blue Books is in brilliantly ca-
pable hands—in the hands of scientific thinkers, men with scientific research at their fingers' ends, who have the human purpose that inspires this kind of writing for the masses: and men who, without being the less precise and essentially full, can make the story interesting. It remains only that these little books shall be read; and I am glad to report that they are being read.

The success of these scientific titles leads me to the encouraging belief that the job of bringing science to the masses is not so difficult as may have been imagined in some quarters. It merely wants doing—that is all. The masses—the common men in all walks of life—show that they are eager, and often pathetically eager, for the light of science. They wish to connect themselves intelligently with the past of mankind, to benefit by the long upward struggle of the race. They wish to belong really to the race, and not be simply citizens of a community stranded in a little moment of unhistoric time. So they read science, these workers who turn so quickly into bookworms. And they read history. The worker, if you reach him, has a sharp, lively reason for being interested in these fields. Strange fields they may indeed be to him in any large and adequate sense. All too often we find that the common man has been denied the opportunity for thorough schooling. Frequently he has a very meager kind of education—hardly more than just enough to be literate, to know reading and writing and a little more: but enough, too, I happily discover, to fill him with a desire for more knowledge. And how industriously these men of the masses do read and how enthusiastically they write to me, singing the praises of these useful books that have unfolded wonders and glories to them—unimagined vistas of thought and aspiration and fulfillment. The vigor of their studies and their vivid, enthusiastic reactions would astonish and perhaps shame many a high school or college student who has a laggard attitude toward the books and courses that surround him.

The worker who has left school at an early age to assume his burden in the world of industry grabs a little book on science or history as a famished man grabs a plate of food. He has an impatient, hungry mind. He knows that there are many things undreamed in his philosophy. He is aware that just beyond him lies the vast, teeming world of science—a greater knowledge of this life that is all a Chinese puzzle to him. How did life come upon this earth? How did man evolve into his present shape and habit? In what manner does this far-flung, astonishing scheme of nature operate? What is known about other worlds? about the planets that wheel in the great, distant sky? What are the laws of life, of human development, that a man may know and follow them?

And there is the appeal of history to the little schooled but mentally eager man at the work-bench. He knows certain names out of history; he has heard indeed, and knows a thing or two about Caesar and Napoleon and Cromwell and the Greeks and the Romans and the voyage of Columbus and the building of the American nation. Yet these are little more than names, and this man will confess that it is his misfortune rather than his fault that he knows but vaguely indeed the history of his own country. So he will read of this vague, thrilling,
significant, richly human past. He is told that history repeats itself and he wants to see it in the act. He approaches history in exactly the right spirit—as a great story. The truth of history, he quickly finds, is far stranger than any fiction.

He educates himself and enjoys it. Knowledge is not a bore to him. There is no special lesson that he is commanded to master and repeat: but he reads as the mood falls, when desire impels, when he can let his mind wander agreeably backward through the centuries. He is satisfying a need that has been too long neglected. Not his the fault of the neglect, we may agree—but a hint, a simple opportunity, is enough for this man who wisely would be wise. Perhaps he hasn’t enjoyed a sufficient leisure, busy man that he is—but now he can get the story of the Roman empire in a little book than can be read in an hour. It may well be that he has not been able to get the larger and more expensive volumes, not to speak of the difficulty of getting through their pages—but here for a handful of nickels he can get his pockets full of history. And perhaps this man has often wished that he could have something worthwhile to read while riding to and from work or during the lunch hour: now here are little books that he can read as he runs or rides or rests. He observes that education is offered to him on the very easiest and pleasantest terms. He can fill the gaps—supply his lack of education—open the doors of culture, of history and science, as he had never dreamed of being able to do. A spare coin—a spare hour—and he is the richer by an age.

Opportunity! It is a fair word: a word that comes "trippingly to the tongue," but a condition that does not trip so lightly into the life of every man. Whether one believes with a certain poet that Opportunity rings the doorbell once—long and loud—and then, an indifferent door remaining shut, departs in a pique: or with another poet that Opportunity has the patience of the Devil and returns daily to the challenge of human lethargy: still if one adds a little knowledge of life to a quoting acquaintance with the poets, one must admit that Opportunity, whether once or often, is not a certain visitor at every humble door. Often it fails to arrive, and often its coming is delayed. It is opportunity—simply that—which the worker has lacked in the literary way. When the masses were illiterate, and reading was the privilege of a few scholars in universities, a daring theorist might have asserted that, if the masses were taught to read, they would reveal a taste for reading. And so it was that, until the past few years, certain men in the book world held that the masses were not interested in the better sort of reading—that they demanded only the sensational, shallow books. Such a view took no account of the fact that, while there were books and books, there were no books consistently and plentifully published with an eye to the needs of the man who spends nickels instead of dollars. The worker is not a book-collector, regardless of price. He cannot search for the classics and rare treasures of literature. He has a limited leisure for reading and cannot—or will not, as you please—circumnavigate the seavast tomes. Again, his cultural desires cover a wide field—many fields—and he prefers to read a dozen little books on as many subjects rather than to read a single big book about one particular subject.
But when the worker is approached with an understanding of his literary needs: when good books are offered to him in a simple, practical and acceptable form: and, further, when the classics are thrust upon his attention as constantly and urgently as has always—and too distinctively—been the case with the poorer sort of literature: when these conditions are realized, and this kind of opportunity is freely provided, then we discover that a great reading public, swarming unsuspected at our doors and all around us, has been gained for the cause of culture. We have tapped a new enthusiasm, and one that will not soon run dry. Then we—or those of us who have misjudged this matter in the past—hasten to revise our preconceptions on the subject of literature and the masses. We may recall, with an awkward smile, that we overlooked the obvious procedure of going to the masses to learn their literary tastes.

The millions eagerly reading Shakespeare—reading Dickens and Balzac and Flaubert and Tolstoy—reading the poets, from Homer to Housman—reading the modern Shawian drama and the ancient Greek drama—reading Oscar Wilde and Mark Twain, each in the mood—absorbing history and burying their heads in little books on science as if they were “snappy stories”: when we observe this spectacle, we reflect that the question of literature and the masses is simply a question of keeping the five-cent bookshelf full and overflowing to satisfy the needs of millions of eager, intelligent readers. We perceive, too, that all other distinctions fail and a booklover is known only by the literary company that he keeps.

BIBLE BORES

They always quote the Bible, whatever the occasion. It seems they are familiar with no other book. The world is flooded with books, books full of beauty and wisdom: among them many good books, that man can really understand and that can be applied to life: clever, sensible, suggestive, entertaining books. Yet the Bible bore ignores this vast collection of literature, devoting himself to purblind contemplation of what he calls the Book of Books: and he lugs this mighty and mouldy tome into every group, into every talk. The talk is of social and political life in the modern world: and the Bible bore is prompt with the assurance, heavily backed by chapter and verse, that in this book of his bibliolatry the laws and customs were revealed long ago that should govern the world of today. We talk of ethics, changing from age to age: and we cannot escape the bore, who insists that the last word on the relations of man to man was written in this book—and he will refer us to Somebody ix:14. Our talk runs upon scientific subjects, and hard at our heels runs the bore who tells us, in a breathless awed manner, that the laws of life, which are primarily the edicts of God, are contained in this universal repository of platitudes and unrealities: and the key to the mystery of life is in the hands of him who patiently peruses this book, especially Blank v:17 and Ditto xi:21. We discuss the new aspects of psychology, and firmly the bore informs us that the riddle of human nature was
solved by the ancient soothsayers—Old Soi vi:06. We mention art—and the Bible bore pursues us still, exclaiming that Humpty Dumpty iv:12 will tell us the greatest story ever written—something Jesus did. Even our humor is not free from the Bible bore, who draws upon the Book of Books for his jokes, his puns and his slightest allusions. We can't suppress the Bible bore. And we can't kill him.

ON BEING "DIFFERENT"

Fashion corrupts taste. Conformity is death to originality, to individuality, to the emergence of the real man; self-developed, self-controlled and self-knowing. We observe everywhere a life of imitation, in mental and social and physical habit. The precious quality of difference—that which should be a thing of joy if not of pride—is feared, shamefully avoided, ridiculed as queer and often denounced as unpatriotic, anti-social, perverse by the crowd of marionettes. It is a fact that the average man or woman feels no impeachment quite so keenly as that of being "different." He shrinks from the very appearance of a free, differentiated life. The aspiration that possesses him is that of being, as nearly as possible, similar to his fellows in every feature of thought and conduct. I do not refer merely to the snobbish tendency of circles in which what is known as fashion rules. The desire for uniformity is equally felt and exemplified in the economically lower ranks of society. High or low, the man who wants to realize his own life, who exhibits a kind of taste that is at odds with the dull, monotonous predilections of his neighbors, is labelled as an eccentric. This slavery to habitual, identical, unimaginative ways of life is more pronounced (brightened indeed by the minimum of intelligent variation) in the small town and the country where the free, simple life is assumed to maintain itself pure and unalloyed. One finds the liberal air in the city. The truth is that the individuality is not crushed out of a man in the city, but in the "wide, open spaces" that so often figure in flowing eulogies. It is only in the city, as a rule, that man dares to be an individual. There one can find every kind of life. One can find free, congenial circles. The habit that would be marked instantly as eccentric in the small, virgin-American community passes unheeded and unmolested in the city. Simplicity, in the sense of living one's life, is a city privilege.

FAR AWAY, LONG AGO

The grip of religion upon the world's imagination is due in great measure to the remoteness of its origins. Far away, long ago, it is potent with the spell of antiquity and the other side of the world. This spell is lifted only by bold minds; minds determined upon truth; minds that calmly investigate the first century in the spirit of the twentieth century. The majority hearken to these ancient tales of Bethlehem and Mecca and the misty past of India, accepting them without suspicion or scrutiny. It is so written; so it was. Any one will tell you that miracles do not happen today; but he will add, upon inquiry, that when
Jesus lived the miraculous was a matter of ordinary occurrence. The most incredible things, if they be things of old and hallowed report, are embraced with an eager, sentimental credulity. It is still true, always true, that “distance lends enchantment to the view”—whether it be a hill seen across a valley or a belief viewed through the soft, subtle haze of centuries. A Jesus living today would not be able to compete with the legendary Jesus. Were Jesus to return and profess to work the miracles, and were he to advance the claims, and were he to behave himself in the manner that we are told he did—were this Jesus to materialize out of the distant fairyland into a near and commonplace view, those who now count themselves his followers would be among the first to reject him. They would see Mr. Jesus, standing forth in the full light of day, as a vagrant whose visions were proper to a padded cell. The miracles would be hooted, by the pious and the skeptical alike. The story that Jesus had fed a multitude with a few loaves and fishes would be mocked as a very poor, clumsy lie. The men of Jesus’ own day, not deluded by a distant view, did so doubt and mock the man. They thought of him as we think of “nuts” who prophesy the end of the world. It is strange that men will use sense with regard to present events, and waive all sense in looking at past events. Old lies are the strength of religion.

“IN GOD WE TRUST”

Everybody says it. Nobody does it. It matters not whether one believes in a God or denies him wholly. The atheist does not look out for his own interests, or trust in what he can see, more carefully than the devout man. I observe two signs in a cafe, one hanging above the other, that illustrate the sham of the motto that one sees on the American dollar. One sign reads: “In God We Trust.” The other sign—a second thought, as it were—warns: “Watch Your Hat and Overcoat.” Trust in God—oh, yes!—but look with a vigilant, irreligious eye to the safety of the smallest article of property. The man who enters the cafe, whether a shouting Methodist or a snickering agnostic, may glance casually, unheedingly, at the trust-in-God sign. It’s old stuff, and not of any practical importance. Yet every one is quick to see the warning and, not in a spiritual but in a very materialistic mood, mentally note his responsibility. So through all of life, an untrustful, personally self-interested and alert materialism is the rule; it is the rule, at any rate, among intelligent and successful men and women. The man who trusts in God is always shoved to one side by the man who is trusting in his own ambitions and abilities. The effect of trusting in God is to make oneself untrustworthy. Carried to its greatest lengths, this trust in God is regarded, even in the ranks of God’s worshippers, as pure shiftlessness and worthlessness. A man trusts himself perhaps, his talents, his opportunities, his judgment of the present moment—and possibly his associates. Yet a man will indeed often hesitate to trust his fellows whom he knows, in whom he has many reasons to repose confidence. Why, then, does any one suppose the man will trust a God, who is absolutely
unknown? No man of average, sound mind neglects, in a spirit of trust in God, to observe the simple, everyday rules of life. A man is more likely to ask somebody to trust him than he is to trust himself in God or anybody else.

**CASH AND CREDIT**

God's promises are a melodious theme for the exercise of the Christian larynx. They are not, however, so far as one can actually perceive, more substantial than the words of the hymn. The chief promise of God, I believe, is that of eternal life. Where is the Christian who holds this promise to be soundly and utterly and gloriously true? Oh, you will find many Christians who will assure you of their perfect belief in this promise. Such a one might easily assure himself and others that he believes, if he should settle down in the Sahara Desert, God would cause manna to fall from heaven so that his child would not go hungry. He knows, however, that it is out of the range of probability that he will have to call upon God in this manner. He is not going to get himself stranded in the Sahara. And so the Christian, with a pretty good, strong hold on this life, can talk glibly and piously about eternal life. The other side of Jordan is a fine image to him chiefly because he is on this side. It is beautiful, he will tell you, to think of being "nearer the great white throne"; but his principal, real satisfaction is that he is sitting in the old easy chair at home. Ask the Christian: Will he exchange one year of this life for a hundred years of the other life which he pretends is radiantly, rejoicefully real to him? He wouldn't—but as he couldn't, anyway, he'll tell you that he would. Secretly, he knows better. He wouldn't trade twenty-four hours of this sordid, prosaic existence for twenty-four years of the grand, soulful eternity—simply on the strength of God's promise. He would rather keep company with the sinners on earth than with the angels in heaven—the sinners are real, while the angels are too infinitely imaginary. His belief in the promises of God is merely a vague hope of getting something extra: meanwhile he will hold, even as the veriest sinner, to what he has. The Christian, no less than impious Omar, says to himself: "Take the Cash and let the Credit go."

**GOD FORGETS**

It would not be so astonishing if he forgot the sinners. One might put aside the question of benevolence—dismiss the consideration that God should be responsible for all his creatures—and admit, out of deference to the Christian viewpoint, that God rightfully ignores those who ignore him. We may for the nonce regard this as a trifle. The distressing and perplexing fact is that God's memory suffers frequent lapses with regard to the well-being of his own people. Apostolically, I know, the following is mumbled as being true: "I have been young and now I am old; yet never have I seen the righteous forsaken nor his seed begging bread." It is possible to believe this only by scrupulously avoiding a thought, or a glance about one, to test its truth. What state-
ment could achieve a higher degree of falsehood? It is such an audacious lie, flung squarely in the face of the obvious, that one almost admires it. The righteous are forsaken, in large numbers, every day. The seed of the righteous begs bread—and the righteous man himself is often reduced to beggary. One may go into many a poverty-stricken home, and see righteousness contenting itself perforce with rags and a crust. We know that religion is quite popular among the very poor—the most intense zeal and devotion are to be discovered among the most palpably and pitiably forsaken of God. The widow’s mite is a common and useful integer in the sum of the churchly exchequer. Christianity began as a slave religion, and slaves have always adhered to it most devoutly, rattling their chains in tuneful praise of God. It is really true that Christians suffer; that Christians want; that Christians are put to sore distress and disadvantage; even that Christians die. It may be that God does not “spiritually” forsake the righteous, whatever joy that may confer upon the materially God-forsaken; and he may not compel them to beg the “Bread of Life,” however that may satisfy a hungry man. Yet God’s memory, and his word, are not as good as they should be.

BIG TALK

Mere bigness impresses people. And in America, a big country with big industries and activities of every kind, the tyranny of size has destroyed our sense of values. Cities want big populations, regardless of how well they may adjust civic life to these numbers. Every census is the occasion of ridiculous squabbles, cities raising the howl that statisticians have played them false. Big buildings are admired, whether they are beautiful or not. Big figures in all things are worshipped even by the man who never shares in a transaction that cannot be reckoned in two figures. During the World War, the people were thrilled by the enormous figures of men, money and munitions that were involved in this huge conflict. The man who does anything on a big scale, including him who practices crime prodigiously, is the cynosure of the gaping populace. Those who oppose birth control are persuaded that there is virtue in the quantity, aside from the quality, of human life. The Church sets itself to compete with other institutions in bigness. The cry is for bigger churches, bigger congregations, and always a bigger noise. Religious societies work for a bigger circulation of the Bible, and they wave big figures before the public eye, thereby proving as much for their book as Harold Bell Wright can prove for his books. All over the land people are devoted to the fetish of bigness, and they are neglecting many important things of life. The idea of bigness rules and real values are ignored. True greatness, not heralded by extraordinary size, is passed by with scarcely a glance. The theory that is the biggest and boldest—the most sensational—is the one that catches the public mind. The monumental audacity of religion is well calculated to attract the people who are under this spell of bigness rather than true grandeur. The big talkers, the worshippers of sheer bigness, prefer a boulder of ugliness and falsehood to a gem of beauty and truth.
JESUS FAILS

A minister of Christ’s gospel, replying to Rupert Hughes’s statement that man is as safe in a jungle as in a Christian city, cries triumphantly, jubilantly: “Name one.” Ironically, it is urged as a defense of Christianity that Christians are exceedingly rare—that, one might say, they belong in museums among other curious specimens of extinct or uncommon life. It is apparently a matter of pride with this gospel-shouter that, two thousand years after Jesus rolled the divine message off his tongue—after all these centuries of Christian excitement and endeavor—it is impossible to find a single Christian city in a country of a hundred and ten million population. It is a kind of boast of Christians, when hard pressed on the matter of the practice and practicability of the alleged Christian life, that there are few if any real Christians. It would seem that, after such a prolonged and complete trial, one must admit that Jesus has failed. And remember that Christians have ruled the world. They have had every opportunity to establish their so-called way of life. They have enjoyed immense power, wealth and influence. The Western World has called itself Christian, and has been repeatedly—constantly, indeed—and thoroughly informed of the points of Christian belief and behavior. Thousands of preachers, throughout the theological if not purely Christian ages, have thundered forth the message. One cannot conceive how a philosophy, a religion, a scheme of life could have been better situated, not simply to convert, but actually to reform the world. Yet Christianity has not been able, strictly speaking, to show us a Christian world save in name and nugatory numbers only. The failure of Jesus is manifest even to divines. The reason, I believe, is simple. The human race, for all its piety and protestations, has been absolutely unable or unwilling (short of a miraculous revolution in human nature) to follow in practical life the teachings of a crazy man.

THE HOLY BEGGARS

What is the motive that underlies all religion? that defines religion? that is, more often than not, clearly revealed on the simple, speaking surface of religion? It is beggary. Worship is prayer, and prayer is a pious, particular beggary. The first man who talked to a god, asked that god for something—to ward off evil happenings or to shower blessings according to the Christian hymn. The most distinct and common religious belief is that man, by appealing to a god, can secure divine aid and gifts and guidance. Thus religion is for the weak. It is for the man who never feels quite capable of doing anything for himself, of facing life with only human strength and purpose and intelligence to rely upon. The weak man asks God to prosper him; to confound and scatter him enemies; to protect him from his own evil temptations; to show him wisdom that is not of life (i. e., useless to life), and that is not in the books of mere men; to make him not as other men and to save, out of a universe of personalities and forces and objects, the man’s own soul. He cries out to his God to save him from disease, from accident,
from grief and pain—and pleads with him to interfere with the laws of Nature in his behalf. He asks God to give him his daily bread—and then, quite inconsistently, gets busy to earn it. He sins and asks relief for his troubled spirit in the cry, “God forgive me!” Guide and comfort me, God, and give me all things—and if there is anything I have overlooked, and you think I would enjoy it, give me that too; such is the attitude, not merely of Christians, but of worshippers under all skies who extend impotent, eager, self-seeking hands to a heaven they ignorantly imagine. Shut your eyes, O Christians, flop on your knees, hold out your hands, and see what God will give you! Are we not told that God is the Great Father, the Great Provider, the Great Giver, the Great Helper? And a busy man is he in this eleemosynary role.

GOD LAUGHS

We are told—and by the preachers with lips of solemn authority—that God is a fellow of infinite jest. He laughs. This, I swear, is apparently true and life appears to be a joke that is beyond the contrivance of a human sense of folly and irony. Really I cannot imagine an absolutely sober, straight-faced God. I always see him (in my rare, dyspeptic visions) with a smile all over his face. This must be so if God observes the fantastic capers of men. I say, however, that God does not laugh at the skeptics and scoffers as the preachers, cut by ridicule, do tell us. The preachers must do their own laughing at the skeptics—and if they are not men of humor, so much the worse for them. It is my honest belief that God is choked and red-faced with laughter at the antics of preachers and all men who cry, “Holy, holy,” and “Lord, Lord.” Surely God has a tremendous laugh every time a preacher tells what God is and what God plans and what God demands and how God conducts the affairs of his supposititious kingdom—that is, God laughs if he is not too busy or bored to listen. God must laugh when he sees hysteria disporting itself in a tabernacle. God laughs when he sees men kneel and mumble to the empty air. God enjoys a grim laugh when he sees how men persecute and revile one another in behalf of ludicrous and jejune creeds. God cackles whenever a Christian argues with childish rigmarole. I daresay he laughs not at the skeptic. The skeptic does not know all things in heaven and earth—and thus, being a wise and discreet fellow, careful of his words, he is preserved from the divine ridicule. It is the skeptic who laughs, even with God perchance, at the absurdities of the clergy and their credulous victims. He smiles and strikes at the folly and cruelty of superstition. He urges most admirably the virtues of reason and toleration. Anyway, the skeptic would not mind the laughter of God. He laughs easily at himself.

THE GREAT STORY

Of course the impossible happens every day—but I do not see how it is possible for Christians to have a sound conception of art. I am not ready to accept one as a good critic who praises, let us say, a tale told by an idiot as the greatest story in the world. And this is what
Christians say about the story of Jesus. It is the story of a God who, being all-powerful, could only provide for the salvation of a sinful world (his own creation, sin and all) by getting himself a son for the express purpose of making a sacrifice of him for the benefit of a world of sinners. Although this God had arranged a pretty good scheme of reproduction—old-fashioned but eminently workable—he was not satisfied to use it but plotted a miracle; a conception out of a clear sky, as it were. He had a ghost, albeit holy, do the delicate work. He had this son born in a manger, raised at a carpenter's bench, and then sent him into the world for a several years' itinerary of prophecy and healing. This Jesus talked in such a fashion as to alienate sensible men. He was quite justly regarded as a madman. He was a boaster; he was inaccurate; he talked strangely so that men were confused (and still are) by his words. He tried to save the world by giving it a crossword puzzle. Shortly he was stoned, spit upon and crucified between two thieves, whereupon the earth rose in a mighty nausea of Nature. The dead Jesus came to life, talked still foolishly, and ascended miraculously to heaven. Thus men could be saved through belief in this story, and men began immediately to disagree about the meaning of the story. This story—this bloody, crazy, frightfully bungled tale—is hymned by Christians as the greatest story ever told. They grow ecstatic over the blood of Jesus. They swallow the story whole. They see in it divine wisdom, great philosophy, great humanity, great art. And so I repeat that I cannot see how Christians can appreciate art. They do, I know. They simply forget to be critics when they read the Jesus story—the most foolish story ever told.

CRAZY JESUS

Jesus, if he really lived, was crazy—"crazy as a bedbug," to use an odd phrase, though why the poor bedbug should be slandered beyond his due I cannot imagine. He babbled—this sweet and crack-brained Jesus—and raved and talked foolishly, abnormally, grotesquely, madly indeed in the very spirit and lingo of one lashed out of mind by dark, relentless obsessions. He acted crazily—not strangely and unreasonably, not simply like a fool, but like a madman. If words and deeds reflect the quality of the mind that directs them, Jesus was beyond a doubt "blasted with ecstasy." It is astonishing, when one views the record soberly and not superstitiously, that men for ages have worshipped as a god a mythical figure of folly and fanaticism who was (in the light of the professedly "sacred" narratives) no better than a lunatic.

God or madman? It is not a question put by skeptics alone, nor alone by scientists who have dwelt thoughtfully on the psychology of this Jesus. Preachers have recognized this alternative, and it has been stated plainly from the pulpit that Jesus must have been divine or crazy: and this, with the mingled naiveté and arrogance characteristic of theologians, has been held, pulpit-wise, as the best argument to prove that Jesus was a god, and therefore privileged to act crazily without being crazy. It is held to be so foolish, so far outside the pale of polite or possible opinion, to regard Jesus as a lunatic, as none other
than a wild man talking wildly, that the opposite view of his divinity is thought to be enforced. The syllogism would be: 1. The conduct of Jesus shows that he must have been a god or a lunatic. 2. He could not have been a lunatic. 3. Therefore he was a god. Such logic is very theologic.

The story of Jesus is a wild legend of insanity that modern investigators, unimpressed by the weight of mere credulity, have declared to be evidently unhistoric. It is denied, and a vast deal of evidence goes carefully to disprove, that such a man as Jesus ever lived. When I assume that Jesus was other than a botched and inartistic myth, I do so only that I may, taking the Christian story at its face value, show this unreal Jesus to have been, if real, really a madman, probably a degenerate, never by any sign a sane man. I do not believe that this crazy Jesus ever lived; but if he lived, he belonged quite obviously in an asylum. Apparently he came from a long line of lunatics. "Nearly all the prophets of the Jews, from Samuel on," says Havelock Ellis, "are patients for the alienists and candidates for the asylum. Had there been a lunatic asylum in the suburbs of Jerusalem, Jesus Christ would infallibly have been shut up in it at the outset of his public career." Jesus was crazy in the beginning of his mad "ministry," spoke insanely the moment he began to harangue the rabble, and his malady grew and flourished like the green bay tree. Today we have men of Christlike behavior, imitators of the insane Jesus, and we hasten to confine them in a convenient madhouse when we do not regard them with smiling and indifferent indulgence as "nuts." It is easy to answer the question of what would happen to Jesus if he were to reappear among men, with no improvement in his habits or mental faculties: he would be left to enjoy his visions with the rest of the safely immured Jesus tribe of paranoiacs.

It is writ holy-clear in the Bible, this insanity of the peripatetic and shiftless Carpenter, and one need only follow (must follow, indeed, lacking other testimony) the "inspired and infallible record of the Book of Books" which Christians assert cannot be even infinitesimally false. The craziness of Jesus, I say, is not simply a theory or discovery of modern heretics and truth seekers. This verdict was contemporary with Jesus. Sane men of his day who saw and heard Jesus, who were familiar with his countenance and conversation and conduct, regarded him as a mad fellow (John x:20). And this was not an opinion held only by skeptic Jews, who were not "spiritually minded" enough to confuse insanity with divinity, but a view shared by the friends of Jesus: these latter had to admit that Jesus was not right in the head, and they thought of his condition seriously enough that once they (Jesus' own friends, mind you), were on the verge of taking him into custody (Mark iii:21). The men close to Jesus, who felt toward him most charitably and sympathetically, did not fail to observe and to be worried by his crazy symptoms.

"Crazy Jesus," far from being a startling-strange or merely iconoclastic phrase and estimate, is a naming of the man that is carefully and cogently upheld by modern psychologists. The scientific verdict is overwhelming, and it would be even stronger were it not so unpopu-
lar to look at this mythical Jesus in an honest human light that many scientists have not been willing to avow publicly what they privately hold to be true. The really strange thing is that any one, whether scientific or simply sensible, ever believed Jesus to have been sane. However, despite the inhibitions and the obscurantism that have surrounded the discussion of the "pale Galilean," expert testimony is plentiful on the subject of the mentality of Jesus as shown by his own words and deeds recorded in the Bible.

The crucifixion saved Jesus from a fate that is generally dreaded as worse than death, says Dr. Jules Soury, of the University of France, in his "Studies on Jesus and the Gospels." He diagnoses the "divine" Jesus as "a Jew fanatic, a narrow and obstinate visionary, a half-baked thaumaturge, subject to fits of passion which caused him to be looked upon as crazy by his own people. He was a sufferer from a grave cerebral disorder, deep-seated and incurable. Among us at the present time that affection may be seen daily making kings, millionaires, popes, prophets, saints and even deities of poor fellows who have lost their balance; it has produced more than one Messiah. Jesus, at the time of his death, was in a somewhat advanced stage of this disorder, and only the gibbet saved him from actual madness." The fanaticism of Jesus was closely allied to his insanity—a strong mark of the crazy tempest that raged in his brain. His delusions of power and glory were those of a madman, a megalomaniac. We have Jesuses today, crying out their wild and sick hallucinations.

Jesus has been accorded the vague poetic title of seer, even by men who have refused to concede his alleged divinity, but the evidence points to a slightly different view. Jesus was simply a man who "saw things." His imagination was not poetic or prophetic, but crazy and chaotic. The mental disease from which Jesus suffered, according to the analysis by Dr. Soury, exhibits "extraordinary activity of the imagination, often leading to hallucinations, and later on with absurdly exaggerated, frequently delirious ideas of power and greatness, and marked irritability and fits of passion. . . . The progress of the disorder is irregular; remissions occur during which the reasoning faculties seem to be recovered. But whether the duration extends only to a few months or to several years, the increasing weakness of the patient, the intellectual and muscular decay, the cachetic state into which he falls, brings life to a close. There is often delirium more or less intense up to the last. . . . This is how Jesus would have ended had he been spared the violent death on the cross."

Jesus has been described as gentle, but in reality he was subject to passionate spells that disturbed and indeed frightened even his friends. The lashing episode in the temple, which is so foolishly admired, reflects the unbalanced and dangerous state of mind of Jesus; and it was certainly the act of an insane and fury-possessed man to curse a fig tree which did not violate the law of nature and bear fruit out of season. The delusions of Jesus, Dr. Soury tells us, were characteristic of a crazed brain rather than of the divine omniscience of a Messiah who had been "called" to "save" the world. And what irony to reflect that the chief and central and consummately crazy "delirious
idea of power and greatness” that burned in the befuddled and blasted brain of Jesus—the idea that he was the Son of God—should have been enshrined for centuries as an article of absolute, ecstatic belief throughout Christendom. After all, Jesus was ludicrously avenged: dying, he started his ridiculous dream of glory on the way to realization: himself crazy, he set a world crazy. Insanity alive became divinity dead.

The insane tendency of religion is well known and beyond dispute—a long roll of saints, hermits, martyrs, fanatics, faith healers and holy rollers bear witness to the wildness of this ecstasy “which is to madness close allied.” Religion is a baleful fire with which men play at peril of their sanity: it has been often remarked that serious and sustained reflection on religion leads almost surely to a state of mind that, if it be not always insane to the pitch of Jesus, is never quite sane. The unrealities of religious theory, the vague and vain but abnormally acute character of religious feeling, carry the seeds of hysteria and hallucination. I daresay the reason many Christians are not crazy is that they think little about religion—at least they do not ponder its vagaries intensely nor constantly. Religion is safe only in a homeopathic dosage. Allopathic piety is positively and persistently fatal. Jesus drank to excess out of the religious bottle. He was afflicted with a “religious madness.”

Although regarding Jesus as a myth, John E. Remsburg, author of “The Christ,” deigns to consider the man Jesus as portrayed in the picturesque lunacy of Holy Writ. He says: “The alleged conduct of Jesus on many occasions, notably his harsh treatment of his mother, his abuse of the Pharisees, his purging the temple and cursing the fig tree, is not the conduct of a rational being, but rather that of a madman. If these stories be historical they would indicate that he was not wholly responsible for his words and acts. . . . Jesus probably united with certain strong and moral characteristics a form of insanity which manifested itself in a sort of religious madness.”

“Crazy Jesus,” described by E. Rasmussen as moody, irritable and arrogant (in the milder phases of his insanity), was also an epileptic in the belief of this authority. He had, says Rasmussen, marked delusions of persecution (a form of mania that has been more or less common in every age and that we can observe easily today) and a wild notion that his own sufferings would somehow atone for all the evil in the world. The delusions of Jesus were raised into the dogmas of Christianity. Pale, persecuted Jesus is the Christian picture with which we are all familiar—out of this delusion, a dogma. An important point of Christian theology is that Jesus, by dying instead of living a little longer to become more violently and terribly insane, saved mankind—the grotesque aberration of a “candidate for the asylum” glorified as a God-given truth by the Christian world.

Jesus not only belonged to a succession of insane Hebrew prophets, but probably also sprang from a family that was tainted with insanity. The question of Jesus’ heredity is doubtful, but Rasmussen points out that Mary was related to Elizabeth, the mother of John, who was suspected by acquaintances to be abnormal and impaired mentally.
Putting it mildly, Rasmussen says that "Jesus was probably regarded by a large number of his contemporaries as insane." The son of an aged carpenter and a young girl, only thirteen of Jesus' relatives are known (biblically speaking), but seven of these were addicted to some kind of morbid mysticism. So we see that heredity—human and unnaturally predisposed—may explain much in the character of Jesus. Jesus himself had periods of marked depression and anxiety; he exhibited his megalomania in his ideas of world dominion and in the absurd belief that the ancient prophecies all referred to him, an obscure village carpenter. He was, according to Binet-Sangle, a paranoiac, of low and erratic intellectual ability, obsessed by confused notions of anarchism, Oedipism and sexual mutilation. "His delusion was chronic, systemic and polymorphic, and suggests if not characterizes mental degeneracy."

The view that Jesus was a paranoiac—the pale, paranoiac Galilean—is also held by William Hirsch, an alienist who was engaged in the trial of Harry Thaw, and author of "Religion and Civilization." And, says Hirsch, the mental state to which we apply the term of paranoia was not recognized as a disease in the first century. He informs us that: "If persons suffered from delusions of grandeur and were at the same time intellectually gifted, they were accepted as prophets of God. If, on the other hand, they were the victims of delusion of persecution, they were supposed to be possessed of the devil. . . . All that we know of Jesus corresponds so exactly to the clinical aspect of paranoia, that it is hardly conceivable how anybody at all acquainted with mental disorders can entertain the slightest doubt as to the correctness of the diagnosis. . . . Christ belongs to those cases of paranoia in which the patients are quiet and self-engrossed during their youth. Often, as in this case, they show unusual mental ability, and are frequently regarded as prodigies. . . . Slowly, at first imperceptibly to his friends, the delusions developed in the brain of this gentle youth."

The occasion of Jesus’ baptism, Hirsch points out, signalized an acute stage of his disorder; thus "the delusion that he was actually the son of God, sent by him to become the savior of mankind, was converted into hallucinations of sight and hearing"—such as the dove and the great voice out of heaven. During the forty days in the wilderness his delusions, which had been isolated and disconnected, "expanded and combined and formed themselves into a great systematized structure. . . . Such a course of the disease, a transition from the latent to the active state of paranoia, is altogether characteristic of this psychosis."

The insane ego of Jesus is emphasized by Hirsch, who refers to the fact that "all of his speeches, doctrines and sermons culminated in the one word I. I am the King of Heaven, I am the Son of Man, I am the Son of God, I and God are one, I am the Light of the World. I, I and always I. . . . This is the typical chatter of a paranoiac. Any one having the least experience in mental diseases must recognize paranoia in utterances such as these. They seemed so utterly senseless even to the Jews of that time, that some of them said of him: He hath a devil, and is mad; why hear ye him?" (John x:20).

It is a belief held by certain scientists that a form of sexual perversity or deficiency was at the bottom of Jesus’ madness. Thus
Schrempf, in "Menschenloos," Stuttgart, 1900, ascribes the mental disturbances of Jesus to some great and secret sin, and intimates that there is good reason for the reticence of the Gospels about his adolescence and early manhood. This theory, Schrempf thinks, explains the hysterical excitement at the time of his baptism, when he dashed madly off into the desert to live with angels, beasts and demons. It has been suggested that Jesus' unnatural coldness toward his mother masked an illicit and incestuous passion. "Jesus' love for his mother," says Dr. G. Stanley Hall, "is never ardently filial, as if not only extra-canonical but even canonical writers had a deep instinctive dread of any intimation of an Oedipus complex which, especially in view of the disparity in the ages of his parents, he might be suspected of." It is clearly evident, says De Loosten, that Jesus was conceived to the point of madness, respecting neither age nor wisdom. The story of his presumptuous precocity, so admired by Christians and urged as a proof of his divinity, was in reality symptomatic of an abnormal, insane concept. Obviously no sane country boy of twelve would go to the city and thrust himself into the councils of the learned. The boy Jesus was already a crazy Jesus. Again, Jesus' utter lack of affection or even respect for his parents (unless, indeed, as Dr. Hall suggests, the Gospel narrators shied at writing truthfully of the possible perverted relations between Jesus and his mother Mary)—Jesus' contempt for family ties—Jesus' indifference to women, are by no means normal and indicate something morbid in his sexual life. His peculiar talk of glorified eunuchs is significant. De Loosten thinks that something must have been wrong with Jesus' sex organs, and discusses at length whether he was born a eunuch or went mad and castrated himself—a crazy deed that has been committed by several of the famous followers of Jesus.

The mist of morbid reverence did not hide the true picture of the crazy Jesus from the mind of Nietzsche. He saw nothing of the genius or the hero in Jesus, only a sick, sexless preacher with an exaggerated sense of sin, always brooding darkly about death and doomsday, and afraid to face reality like a man. He and his followers, as Nietzsche saw them, were a set of idle, ignorant, cowardly, contemptible scoundrels and the implication is that many of them were morbid or neurotic.

What would happen to Jesus today is stated without equivocation by William Hirsch. "What would you think today," he asks, of an ordinary workman who rode on an ass into the capital of a country, surrounded by a noisy rabble, proclaiming himself a king? Unquestionably he would be locked up at once." The truth about Jesus is plain enough to any one who is willing to recognize facts. Again to quote Hirsch: "To any one not forcibly opposed to admitting the truth, there can no longer be a doubt that Jesus was a paranoiac. He presents as typical a case of this disease as can be imagined. All the symptoms are fully represented, and the development as well as the course of this case corresponds in every respect to the well-known description which modern psychiatry, based on many years of clinical experience, has given of this peculiar psychical affection." David Friedrich Strauss, in "The Life of Jesus," 1835, and later Werner, in "Die Psychische Gesundheit Jesu," 1908, have suggested that Jesus'
malady should not be dignified by the term insanity—he was simply a Schwärmer, a fanatic. Divorcing reason and renouncing the world of reality, he gave himself up to foolish day-dreams, which revolved crazily about the idea that he was somehow to live again and return to earth.

Other scientists are less ready to apply the short and ugly word “crazy” to Jesus: but none of them is able to consider him as sane, still less as a savior. Holtzmann and Bousset think of Jesus as an extremely nervous, eccentric, ecstatic individual, certainly unbalanced but not necessarily insane. There is nothing of the gentle, wise, pure, divine Jesus, but crashing overtones of the crazy Jesus in the picture by Bousset, who says that “fearful and hyper-potent forces raged in his inner nature. The devil and his demons strove with the angels of God, despair and death alternated with transcendent confidence of victory. Light strove with the night, fog-mists rolled, and yet in their midst shone the bright rays of the rising sun.”

The most kindly view, the most restrained and uncolored statement of the facts, shows that Jesus was not, and is not, a man to be followed by any save those as crazy as himself. Thus Dr. G. Stanley Hall, without emphasis, reviews the mad career of Jesus, saying that "in view of the fact that Jesus' friends thought him beside himself; the Pharisees that he was possessed; considering the voice and the vision of the dove at the baptism; the transfiguration, which might suggest collective hallucination; his indifference to his parents, to women, and to family ties; his conjuring of storm, and cursing the fig tree; his ideal of emasculation for the Kingdom's sake; his seeing Satan fall from heaven; his contact with the angels; his outburst of temper in the temple; his idea of his own greatness and of coming on the clouds of heaven at the end of the world, etc., it was inevitable that as the age of freer psychological treatment of his life and character dawned, he should be thought insane by some."

Those who profess to be followers of Jesus can, pragmatically speaking, demonstrate to their own deep dismay that Jesus was crazy. They can really follow Jesus (do they not sing "Where He Leads Me I Will Follow"?) and they will find that his leading will guide them shortly and swiftly in the direction of the nearest lunatic asylum. Crazy Jesus is the only Jesus of record. And if Jesus was the son of God, then God is probably crazy too.

THE BEAUTY OF SHAM

A friend who is too thoughtful to embrace thoroughly the sham of religion, still clings to it and plays with it and defends it with a gentle air by saying, "I enjoy the beauty of it." And I say with Keats that beauty is truth and truth is beauty—and I cannot for the life of me persuade myself that what is false—ridiculously and pretentiously false—is beautiful. If religion is not true, then away with it: it can have no other quality to recommend it. We do not need it for the satisfaction of our sense of beauty. The world is full of beautiful things, and they are all without the doors of the decadent temples. The loveliness of
Nature can be enjoyed without a particle of religious sham—and indeed those who shut themselves up in stuffy churches are turning from the contemplation of real to false beauty. A poem is beautiful, and is beyond comparison finer than any sermon. Art is beautiful, and any picture is better than the stained-glass Jesus. Thought is beautiful and stirs grander emotions, fills and stimulates and satisfies the senses, more than all the mummery of all the religions that pander to the least worthy impulses of mankind. What is beautiful in religion? Not its creeds—skeletons of superstition, living corpses in a modern scientific world. Not its ceremonies, which can appeal only to the believer and must bore the skeptic as utterly meaningless. Not its sermons, which are stupid. Not its music, which is sickly and sticky—and which suggests to me a God who suffers from infinite indigestion. The atmosphere of religion is full of pretense, pomposity and piety that must repel the sensitive mind that is also healthily rational. It is an atmosphere in which thought is absolutely dead, in which emotion is an idle, tricky gesture of sham and futility. It is a bad dream—religion. One of the reasons why I dislike religion is that it offends my sense of beauty. Sham to me is not beauty—but sham.

WHEN CHRISTIANS DIE

They should treat death as an occasion for supreme and hearty rejoicing. They should load their tables for a merry feast. They should have music of the happiest kind, and dancing girls, and a pageant describing the delights of Paradise. He who is dead is miraculously, wholly free from mortal ills and limitations. He is with God and the saints, in the full and fair enjoyment of that bliss divine and endless which is the theme of Christian song and sermon and prayer—which, in the Christian lingo, is the sweet, crowning glory and joy of man. Yet Christians, we observe, fear death even as other men. They seek quite conscientiously and whole-heartedly to evade it. They feel that it is unpleasant to say the least—anything but a ticket for the grand picnic beyond the clouds that they represent it to be. They pay preachers to tell them about the wonders and beauties of heaven—any pay doctors to keep them out of heaven. When one whom they love dies, the Christians are sore-stricken with grief, no less than the so-called infidels—the “translation” of the loved one, and his triumphant entry into Paradise, is apparently regarded by the faithful as a calamity. They are inconsolable and full of sincere lamentations—for he who is dead shall live again and shall lean on the Everlasting Arms for ever and ever. The dead now walks (or floats), a perfect and happy soul, along the gay, glittering streets of the Celestial City—so let us weep, brethren, let us prostrate ourselves in pious anguish. Is not the skeptic reasonably entitled to inquire: Do Christians really believe in the Paradise of which they sing so lustily when in good health? Is immortality so real to them, that they do hug the poor evanescent joys of mortality? Or are the Christians simply selfish? Can they not rejoice in the happiness of the dead? or must they think only of their living sorrow? and perhaps envy the victorious dead?
SOULS

Your soul is immortal, said Henry James, if you have one. He added that people generally are quite soulless. He might have said, without violating the holy spirit of truth, that the person who is most worried about his soul is the most unlikely to be gifted with a soul. The term is meaningless, however, unless one uses it in an airy poetic sense. To speak of the soul as something real, a member and faculty by itself, apart from the mind and body is to deal in sheer nonsense. What is this soul? We cannot define it. We cannot weigh, measure, feel, or see it. We try to explain it, and we do but confuse ourselves the more. We cannot put it to any rational test. The functions which men ascribe to the soul are rather functions of the brain, the senses. The great deeds of men have not been in response to the promptings of a soul but of thought, imagination, desire. We see man in active, intellectual and emotional roles—and we do not understand his activities or attitudes any better when we fall upon the word “spiritual.” I would say that Shakespeare had a greater soul than Jesus: and by that I mean simply that he had greater imagination, the poetic fire, intense and vivid feeling. If I say that Voltaire had a great soul, I mean that he had a wonderful mind, sensibilities that were most acute, wit and energy that will ever appear remarkable. When the realist speaks of the soul of man, he thinks of man’s sense of beauty, man’s power of emotion, man’s capacity for creative art, man’s lofty thought and daring and achievement of the apparently impossible. To one who describes prayer or belief as a function of the soul, I can only reply that this seems to me plainly a function of the mind that has not learned how to reason well, that is under the influence of fear or illogical, childish hope. The soul is a major delusion. It is man’s ego trying to disguise itself.

“PROVE ALL THINGS”

Let us adopt Huxley’s motto: Prove all things, hold fast that which is good. Realistic thinking is the only way to escape the phantoms of faith, worship, credulity, blind acceptance of dogmas and unfounded belief in chimeras, in the unknown and unknowable. “Man follows only phantoms,” said Laplace on his deathbed. If men were as Huxley and aimed, above all, to prove everything, then phantoms of the mind would disappear. . . . Man has a soul? Prove it! There is a God? Prove his existence! Man is immortal? Prove it! Jesus was the son of God? Prove it! So exclaims the realist. It is a stubborn position—as firm as Gibraltar. It discourages and enrages the religionists, needless to say, and they scream “Atheist!” Very well, if realism in thought means atheism then we accept the epithet, for as such is it intended. The realistic thinker demands that they demonstrate their soul-idea, their God-notion—demonstrate it as the scientist does when he says light can be made to pierce solid objects. They cannot demonstrate their phantoms? Then let them be decent enough to allow us to be skeptics without having to endure their insults and abuse.
"Prove all things"—let nothing be accepted on faith, on any priest's say-so, on any preacher's roaring blah. Realistic thinking means the end of superstition and the beginning of wisdom. We are sure of nothing; we test all things, all theories, and all beliefs. This is our challenge to all theologians. Our position is reasonable, fair, enlightened, intelligent; it is the beginning of a civilized existence.

SERVANTS OF GOD
GOD'S LIARS

A popular form of lying, about which for all its commonness little is said, is the habit of bearing false testimony in the service of God. Aside from the primary lie of God—the lie of supernaturalism—the lie that preachers are always telling when they pretend to describe and interpret God; aside from this first great lie, I say, one hears other lies that are repeated for God's sake. It is, of course, well known how Christians lie about "infidels." A Christian simply cannot tell the truth—he will not admit the truth—about anyone who is opposed to his religion. A most familiar lie is that of deathbed utterances ascribed to atheists or agnostics. Thus one sees wholly false accounts of the deaths of Voltaire, Paine and Ingersoll—and this in spite of the fact that the circumstances of their deaths are not secret and uncertain matters of history, not matters for speculation, but are simply and accurately known. Countless lies, stupid and malicious, were told about Ingersoll. A Christian, cornered in debate, will often conjure a lie out of the depths of his pure soul and thus dodge out of the hole. Lies are told about strange and miraculous happenings that are invented to show the power of God, about which God himself is so little interested that he never actually uses it. The Bible is full of lies and contradictions, which the Christians defend with more lies and sophistry and transparently dishonest "interpretations." Always Christians lie about the shameful past of the Church. Here is a preacher who speaks of "the historic fact that the church always has encouraged true progress and scientific research." This is a historic lie. The opposite is exactly and fully the truth of the matter. Christians lie, knowing they lie, and it is all right—because they are lying for God. God, not the Devil, is the father of lies. God's liars are a loose-jawed host.

GOD'S CHEATERS

The greatest of all cheats is religion, and its preachers are the professional, smooth-tongued cheaters. They cheat men out of the knowledge that should belong to them, that is for them to accept if they cultivate open and inquiring minds. But as even a little sound knowledge is dangerous to religion, the cheaters labor with zeal to close men's minds and to keep them closed against any light of truth. The preachers of religion cheat men out of the proper, full enjoyment of life. It is not simply that they give the false name of sin to innocent and joyous diversions; it is not only that the Church monopolizes hours that its victims, if free, could far more preciously use; but these
cheaters labor with zeal to close men’s minds and to keep them closed against any light of truth. The preachers of religion cheat men out of the proper, full enjoyment of life. It is not simply that they give the false name of sin to innocent and joyous diversions; it is not only that the Church monopolizes hours that its victims, if free, could far more preciously use; but these cheaters poison, deaden, imprison the minds and hearts of their victims, thus cheating them out of a vast, lovely, hopeful world of culture. The mental narrowness, the cramped outlook, the twisted viewpoint, the whole petty evaluation and scheme of life of the Christian—all may be referred to the practice of intellectual fraud by God’s cheaters. Man is cheated by religion out of his historical heritage—the heritage of progress—the heritage of art, thought, science. We could have a much better world if it were not for religion. I do not say a perfect world—but it is a fact that a body of wisdom and knowledge and culture has been handed down by the thinkers of past ages: these men labor to shed light upon the roads of life, and the Church, that citadel of darkness, stood against them: now, today, the Church is a bitter obstacle to the use of that knowledge by the human race. A minority live the civilized life. The majority live the Christian life. God’s cheaters defraud man with every breath and gesture. They keep man chained fast to old, dead things. They keep man out of the broad highway of life, and crowded herd-like in the narrow, blind alley of religion.

GOD’S BULLIES

The term “muscular Christianity” does not refer to a recent type of Christian. God’s bullies have always brandished their fists, their clubs, their guns—and their instruments of ingenious torture—to uphold by force and threats the glory of God. Nowhere can one find the intimidation, the braggadocio, the playing upon fear, the appeal to the ungenerous passions of men so constantly and viciously employed as in the pulpits of this world. Preachers cry out, with a sadistic fervor of vengefulness, against every desire and activity of life that is not submissive to their dogmas or amenable to their control. These fat, lazy bullies of God—energetic only in their explosions of pious punitiveness—are ever ready to bluster and curse and strike at any liberal idea or enterprise that is not, as they see it, stamped with the image of God. The type of preacher is not by any means rare or unfamiliar who grasps at the role of a bully over a community: who is watching for a new and sensible thought to raise its head, so that he may belabor it with his clubbed Bible: who keeps out a wary and sharp eye and, detecting a portion of the community in the act of enjoying itself, emits howls of fury that would startle the hardy denizens of the jungle: who denounces the community as sinful and irreasurable, and who endeavors to drive men, like sheep, into the penfold of God with the weapon of wild rhetoric. The Church, with God’s bullies flexing their Christian muscles in the foreground, arrogates to itself the position of a dictator in the social life of men. When God’s bullies shout, it is assumed that
all men should pause trembling, turn about, and meekly submit to the loud-mouthed edict of the holy ones. God is a jealous, violent and vengeful ruler, if the Bible is to be credited. And perhaps God's bullies most accurately reflect the divine will and purpose.

GOD'S BUFFOONS

I believe that if the human race were suddenly to be gifted with authentic, intelligent sense of humor it would abandon religion within twenty-four hours. No religion could withstand the shock of a universal candid appreciation of its absolute idiocy. The race, observing its queer antics of worship with a realistic, humorous-clear gaze, could not possibly continue the farce and hang on to its self-respect. Those who did not die of shame would slip furtively out of the temples and assume the pose and demeanor of sensible men. Consider for a moment how ridiculous men appear, talking about a God that is simply an example of feeble and grotesque imagination; singing of a Heaven, in the sky where they will fly when they die, and wailing about a Hell in which sinners (especially free thinkers) will burn forever; solemnly repeating and discussing foolish creeds that have absolutely no relation to life, insane and impossible miracles, and crude fables—tales of talking snakes and God-inspired bears and vehicular whales—written in a book supposedly dictated by God to a number of very inaccurate scribes. Observe God's buffoons in their baptismal role—ducking the victims of their solemn joke under water to "save" them. See God's buffoons in a jumping, jerking, jabbering "revival"—that supreme effort of Christian buffoonery. Listen to the Rev.—this mental curiosity, this buffoon of God—as he expounds meaningless texts in a discourse sprinkled with hoary platitudes: as he talks of the nature of God, he who is ignorant even of the nature of man. And think of the enormous, ludicrous folly of Christian missionaries, serving their vain and arrogant God by trying to knock over the gods of the "heathens." God is a joke. Religion is a vast buffoonery. The serious reflection is that men are seriously taken in by the joke. They regard God's buffoons as inspired and holy prophets.

GOD'S WEEPERS

When other servants of God fail to "bring in the sheaves," God's weepers try their skill at wringing the hearts and the eyes of the multitude. The tears that have been shed for God! The lachrymose brooks, rivers and seas of Christian sentiment that have been commanded by God's weepers to fall upon and fertilize the stony ground of unbelief. A tearful man of God will bring out the formula of the "old, old story"—that Jesus died to save mankind. Sobbingly he will relate how God had his son killed so that the men and women of this very congregation might be snatched from the jaws of eternal death. Poor Jesus, with his crown of thorns and his heavy cross! Weeping, they are begged to come, and weeping, they come, to kneel at the feet of Jesus. Up stands another of God's weepers and, in a voice that suggests a sadly
moistened handkerchief, refers to that “dear old mother” and the old family Bible: all who love their mothers, come and surrender to the power of Jesus, who had very little affection for his mother. And when the bent form of mother, tottering ghostly up the aisle, is not sufficient to bring tears of repentance, God’s weeper produces the well-worn, lovely theme, “A little child shall lead them.” The little child, of course, has led some one to the altar. Find a little child, oh sinners, and follow it. Again, when all other appeals are coldly received, the weepers for God work a grim, threatening note into their tearfulness, and refurbish the sad, worn tale of the sinner who died—generally the “infidel” who died—crying out for God’s mercy, lamenting his evil skeptic ways, warning others to avoid his pitiful, awful fate. Then there is the story of the blessed man who died with a smile on his lips and with beatific comment on the wings of the angels hovering around his bedside. We are hard-hearted. We smile at God’s weepers.

**GOD’S CHEER LEADERS**

“And now, brethren,” says God’s cheer leader, “let us sing, ‘Stand Up, Stand Up, for Jesus.’” Or: “All who have given their hearts to God, stand up” and—“Thine be the power and the glory.” Again: “Arise and tell the world what God, or Jesus, has done for you.” The cheer leader knows that God needs enthusiasm in his business. He knows that he can make the unjudicious gaze if he claims for his God the greatest performances, promises in behalf of his God the most glorious results of salvation, exalts the splendor and prowess and wisdom of his God above all other gods. This is the booster spirit in religion. God’s cheer leader, so to say, chants the slogan of a “bigger, better and busier” God. Preachers—good servants, with an eye to the profit and prestige of their master—strengthen the loyalty and enhance the ardor of the faithful with loud and boastful eloquence about the glory of God. “Praise God!” sings the cheer leader in a hearty voice. This God is continually overwhelmed with praise. “Thank God!” Thank him for everything but cyclones and plagues and a host of other disasters and misfortunes. His cheer leaders cry up the power—the supreme power—of God. He can do anything; if he doesn’t, that’s a sign of his wisdom; and if his inactivity seems foolish and unaccountable and even heartless to reflective men—why, that’s a wonderful sign of this God’s sheer, tremendous inscrutability. The cheer leader is so determined to boost his God that he claims for him and his Church the sole authorship and guardianship of the morals and wisdom of the human race. Rising to the pinnacle of exaggeration, to super-salesmanship in the spirit field, God’s cheer leader declares that God is good and good is God. God is everywhere—and he dwells most enthusiastically in the hearts of God’s cheer leaders.

**GOD’S NUISANCES**

A serene, dignified God—an intelligent God who realizes the loftiness of his position—would not bother himself about the little beliefs and pursuits of men. And a God who was genuinely inter-
ested in the salvation of the human race would show men the way of truth without a lot of doubt and fuss and lost motion. A worthwhile God would let mankind alone, or he would guide it pleasantly and efficiently—reveal himself simply, without confusion, without the need of irritating insistence. But God has followed neither a generous nor a sensible nor a polite course—and so we have God’s nuisances, who go up and down and about the world calling men to repentance: bedeviling the multitude with pleas and warnings: stopping a man, with the information (which does not inform) that he is a “lost soul” and must be “saved.” When a man resents this invasion of his personality, this idiotic and unmannerly-zealous concern about his soul, the God’s nuisance is offended. He protests that he was only trying to “save a soul.” He is so thoroughly the fanatic that he cannot imagine the possibility nor the right of a soul wishing to be left in peace. He is so dense that he cannot appreciate the ass he appears when he tells a man of mature mind, proceeding quietly and not uncertainly on his way in life, that he is “lost.” He will not admit, this nuisance of God, that a man has a right to be “lost,” if that is his personal pleasure, without having the fact—if it be a fact and not a febrile fancy—solemnly shouted at him by a pack of pestiferous proselytes. God’s nuisances boast that they are “fishers of men”—and they are continually shoving their bait (a nasty, wriggling mess) in men’s faces. They pant to “convert” men, whether they will or no. They are officiously eager and pushing to “convict” men of “sin.” God’s nuisances are everywhere. They cry out at us. They interrupt, bore, aggravate us—until we vow that God himself is a gargantuan nuisance.

GOD’S LOAFERS

So far as we know, accepting the testimony of Holy Writ, God worked only six days—one week of toil, and then a long rest. After that, God served in an advisory capacity. Emulating the divine practice, we see God’s loafers, who have a “call” to slide through life with the minimum of muscular and mental effort. They observe, in the Church, a sinecure. They can eat, sleep, pray—and let God do the work. They can, if they are moderately ingenious, prepare their sermons in their sleep. A handful of sermons, a few little tricks of prayer, and they are settled comfortably for a life of ease. They can inflict the sermons, in turn, upon successive flocks and repeat the well-known formulas of supplication. They cultivate a manner—and that serves them in lieu of more substantial activity. They are free to engage chiefly in the task of nursing their egos. They are God’s loafers, and therefore leaders in the community. They do not have to win respect—they are respected automatically. They do not have to work soundly for admiration—they bask in the light of God’s reputation. God’s loafers are especially required to hold a “spiritual” example before men. A busy man, pegging away in an industrious seclusion, could not thus represent a “spiritual” light-house. So the divinely called loafer, as a matter of agreeable duty, must enjoy a public and notorious indolence in behalf of God. He
is always about. One meets him in the street, all hours of the day—he is as familiar a sight as the street corner debaters, the barber shop raconteurs and the pool room hangers-on. About the hardest work of God’s loafer is visiting the members of his flock—especially, the sisters. He is the only man in the community who draws a salary for visiting, sitting in the best chair, talking about the weather and the latest gossip. It is pleasant to loaf for God and to know that, scripturally, this loafing is very godlike.

**GOD’S FIXERS**

When God wrote the Book of Books, a careless and obscure literary style was the vogue. Consequently God’s word could not be left safely to the common-sensical, independent reading of men, but required a special class of men to “interpret” it. These are God’s fixers. They remedy the defects of God’s diction, repair the contradictions, and divert attention from the blunders. They say—when they are confronted with a passage in which God’s pen evidently slipped—that God meant something else. God’s fixers have what, vulgarly, one may call a “snap”—they are not hampered in their work by any imposed regard for fact or sense. They say it—and it’s so—that is, it’s the word of God, regardless of the actual words. The words mean nothing—it’s the meaning that’s important. For example, the Song of Solomon, read with a plain understanding, is an ecstatic, voluptuous cry of passion. It is a song of sex. This is where God’s fixers scintillate; they explain that, although Solomon displays a virile enthusiasm over the love and loveliness of women and is eloquent on the subject of kisses and the physical attraction of females, what he really means is praise of the Church. The Book describes God as jealous, angry, very human in disposition and practice. And God’s fixers tell us that this was a device of rhetoric to impress the conception of God upon the simple-minded, anthropomorphic people of that day. God said that Adam would die on the day that he ate the apple. Adam lived a long while and ate “an apple a day.” But God’s fixers insist he died “spiritually.” When one points out that God is alternately represented as a God of hate and a God of love, the fixers smile knowingly and reply that we cannot understand God. Crazy sayings of Jesus are “figurative.” The insanity of Revelation is “symbolic.” God’s fixers are never at a loss. They have a complete set of tools, consisting entirely of a smooth tongue.

**GOD’S APOLOGISTS**

It is a ticklish point with Christians that this God-created, God-conducted world is full of sin. It seems difficult to reconcile the notions of a supremely powerful and a wholly benevolent God, in a world wherein the Devil triumphs in such a frequent and conspicuous manner. If God rules and is righteous, why therefore evil? God’s apologists clear their throats and expatiate. God ordained ages of sin to punish mankind for Adam’s peccadillo: so that Adam, not God, is responsible for the sinful condition of the world. The victories of the Devil are only apparent. God will be on top at the showdown—will
suddenly leap into the lead in the home stretch. This is a pretty big and mysterious scheme of life, and finite man cannot see the cards hidden in God's infinite hand. And consider the goodness and the foresight of God. He knows, say a thousand years ahead, that a catastrophe will occur in human affairs. Does he try to prevent it? No—he realizes that sinful, stubborn man will smash things. God is far more clever. He contrives that something shall be saved out of the wreck. He lets man hurt himself—and then lets him recover. Again, what if sin is abroad in the world? Good also exists. And virtue will eventually conquer vice. The Christian spirit, the purity of soul with which God endows the faithful, may be depended upon in the long run to remedy the situation. Indeed, one of the divine purposes of evil is that it shall test the faith and strength of Christians. Fighting and resisting evil is good "spiritual exercise." A Christian, in a perfectly pure world, would have too easy a life. And good, say God's apologists, may often come through evil. It doesn't often—but, the good consists, chiefly, in trying to beat the evil. The Devil tempted Jesus. Why shouldn't he tempt men? "God," say his apologists, "moves in a mysterious way his wonders to perform."

GOD'S JAZZERS

This is the age of jazz. And God, the eternal, must have his soul-saving enterprise adjusted to the fashions of a day. All dull piety, and no "spiritual" song and dance, will not succeed in the midst of countless vivid attractions. The role assigned to God's jazzers is to lure the sinner with an unctuous ukulele and entertain the jaded nerves of the devout with a biblical ballet. Vaudeville, recently branded as a trap of the Devil, has been admitted into the holy of holies of the Church. A little comedy, a dash of syncopation, a modicum of light fantastic toe-work—and the collection is larger. We must, says God's Jazzers, compete with the Devil as cleverly as the Evil One himself—fight him, so to speak, with fire. It is permissible even to introduce mockery of certain aspects of unfashionable, lowly religion. One church has, for its leading feature of jazz, an imitation of a Negro preacher. Other churches, not content with imitations, import Billy Sunday. Lovers of baseball and acrobatics, along with the merely curious, fill the temple. Preachers who cannot get Billy as a drawing card, do not hesitate to adopt his jazzy style. The sermons, matter and manner, are made to yield the last giggle and gyration of jazz. The text is only a pretext. The topic that sets the crowd agog is the scandal that happens at the moment to be in the public eye. A sensational murder, preferably with a morbid overtone—an amorous debacle—a particularly appealing drama of banditry: God's jazzers grasp with alacrity these heaven-sent opportunities to fill the balconies with "spiritual" jazz hounds. The recent cyclone in the Middle West was also a godsend. Do not the people want to know why God sends cyclones? God's jazzers will tell them. The lurid lure of sin is, of course, the best attraction of God's jazzers: big, notorious, contemporary sins and scandals. The sins, especially, of sinners—not of preachers and elders in the Church. God's jazzers even pray in ragtime.
GOD'S BEGGARS

God has kept pace with the economic development of human society. In days of old, God wanted commodities in kind, and he demanded "burnt offerings," exhibiting a remarkable taste for roast kid. Food, declared the hungry priests, always delighted the nostrils of the Lord. The way to God's heart was through his stomach. Nowadays God, falling in with momentary custom of the race, wants coin of the realm. He is, as the Chinaman observed, always hard-up. Wherefore God's beggars gird up their loins and go forth to practice a pious mendicancy. They ask one to "dedicate" one's dollars to God. "Dedicate" is a word of sweeter extraction than "give." They use something more than diplomacy, do God's beggars. This kind of begging is strangely privileged and bold. There is a threat—if an implied, still a well understood one—back of it. It is quite likely, you know, that God's beggars will persuade God's victims to apply the thumbscrew of a loss of trade, or an equivalent loss of prestige, to the "butcher, the baker and the candlestick maker" who refuse to contribute properly to the Sham of Shams—whether they believe in it or not. It is a fact to bear in mind, in all discussions of religion, that men who do not believe in the Church, who do not attend church, who secretly are out of sympathy with the Church—fear the Church. This is a church-ruled land, whether the pews are filled or empty. Many a skeptic, in a position of public dependence, dare not avow his opinions—or say "No" to God's beggars when they approach him with holy palms of an habitual itch. No institution has a greater number of "causes" to support, or a greater variety of ways to reach into the pockets of a community, than has the Church. So God's beggars are always busy. And we observe that their manner is somewhat brisker when they are engaged in making up arrears on the preacher's salary. Then are God's beggars truly inspired.

THE PURPOSE OF LIFE

One can hardly get farther from realistic thinking than to say that life has a purpose—which each man defines according to his pleasure. Certainly, there is such a jumble of contradictory ideas regarding this supposititious purpose of life, that we cannot agree what it is: it is unknown, and if we don't know WHAT it is, we cannot say that we know it IS. Those who talk in this purposeful strain of metaphysics assume that life has a single, mighty, infallible purpose—which makes the notion all the harder for the thinker to believe. It is too vague. And it postulates too much simplicity in a very complex universe. Why not reason (and be more reasonable) that life has many purposes? There is no evidence, however, for one or a dozen purposes, employing the word in this large, life-inclusive sense. All we know is that men cherish what they are pleased to call purposes. Actually, we know only what our own purpose or aim or desire in life happens to be—and not always that as clearly as we wish to see it. It is quite ordinary for men to be confused about what they want in life: and, as one develops and as different ages bring altered capacity and desire, one's purpose changes.
We know how men differ in the objects for which they strive. This man wants money—that is life’s purpose to his view: simply the accumulation of dollars. That man is eager for fame, to win laurels, to hear the applause of the multitude: life means that, above all, to him. Another man desires knowledge, which is more valuable to him than wealth or fame: another is filled with zeal to reform the world: another wishes, not merely to acquire knowledge for his own satisfaction, but to disseminate culture among his fellow men. These purposes, too, are based upon a comparatively short view of life. None of us can project his vision along the dizzying vista of future ages, and demonstrate to himself that his purpose, or any purpose, will work itself out as LIFE’S purpose. In short, we do not know—four little words that are tremendous in their scope.

THIS NOISY WORLD

Schopenhauer, shaken out of his philosophic calm by the clattering of carts over the cobbles, wrote with bitter feeling against the makers of noise. He declared that only fools could be happy in the midst of a blaring racket—that thought was incompatible with a violent assault upon the ear-drums. Schopenhauer would have run from a carnival and cried out at a circus parade. Coney Island would have driven him mad. A day on Broadway, and he would have died, terribly indifferent to the will or the idea. Halfway through a political meeting, he would have been carried out on a stretcher. Imagine him not at a Billy Sunday shakedown. The world grows noisier. The principal feature of modern life is noise. One can best define it by calling it The Noise Age. We may be able to look at it more philosophically than the old philosopher. We must endure the noise of industry, the noise of traffic, the noise of the hectic, hurrying crowd—unless we can situate closer to green fields and village commons. There is, however, a great deal of noise in the world that may well try our patience. Billboards scream at one. The politicians are tireless in their continual hullabaloo. Military leaders cry out that we should prepare for war. Nations are in a jabber and jangle about their “rights” and “honor.” Preachers are laborious and long-winded in crying out curses upon this sinful world, and vocally belaboring men to come to repentance. A charlatan is on every corner, shouting his nostrums and his wares. Boosters go about blowing their own horns, playing the bagpipes for a community, or beating the big bass drum for an industry. Sensation, which means a loud noise, is all the vogue. People who have foolishness to utter, no longer rent a hall. They use the radio—and the air is filled with furious and fantastic sounds. It’s a noisy world. And bunk thrives on noise, demands noise, is conveyed by noise. No wonder people find it hard to think quietly and sensibly.

THE FOLLOWERS

Followers, followers everywhere, and where is the man who thinks? The millions, for the nonce without a leader, search the horizon for another to lead them. They are powerless to move until the leader steps forward and, with a mighty shout, commands: “Come on boys!” It
does not matter in what direction, for what purpose, with what reward of glory or happiness or knowledge at the end of the march. It is simply that one man leads, and a million men are impelled by long habit to follow. Rarely do we see the independent man, who goes the way of his own choosing—who acts from clearly reasoned motives—who is not to be led by strings of platitude, by a showy manner masking shallowness, or by a tongue that is more brassy than silver. Search for the man who heeds only the music of his individual drummer of thought, and you will be tired and discouraged long ere your search be finished. The worst of it is that these millions of followers are in the hands of worthless leaders. They are led astray into every imaginable path of folly: and no matter what the suffering that attends their sheep-like attitude, they never learn the wisdom of taking their own intelligent course, but are always ready to fall into the double-quick behind the neatly shod heels of another leader. Bunk is, on the whole, inseparable from leadership. The encomiums that are heaped vaguely upon “leaders of men” are very foolish, holding up for our praise a type of man that is seldom worthy of admiration. The leader, whatever his private convictions may be, finds that it is easier to bring the followers trooping after him if he puts on a big, blustering show. He cannot attract the mob with the truth, or with thoughtful words, or with a decent, dignified appeal: they quickly desert the would-be leader who urges them to be intelligent and think well whither they would go. Bluster in the leader, blindness in the followers: such is the rule.

THE CHEERFUL CYNIC

There is pleasure in thought—and the cynic, being a good deal of a thinker, extracts a considerable amount of the essence of fun from the daily show. He is not, you will observe, bothered by that plague of too intensely desiring thought: the passion to arrive at the absolute truth. The cynic sees that as impossible. Nobody worries so little about the Great Unknowable, and about what will eventuate a million years from now. Thought is enough, and it usually takes the form of a close observation of men and things, with deductions that are appropriate to reality. The cynic is happy in that he carries a very light baggage of beliefs. The impediments of credulity and conviction, that burden and confuse and weigh heavily on the minds of his fellows, do not bring weariness to the cynic. He is essentially a light-minded and a light-hearted fellow. He enjoys pouring his peppery shots of sense into the beliefs of others. The greatest of all intellectual sports—that of debunking—brings to him, who is so adept at it, a full measure of gleeful recreation. The cynic has really an easy job—easy, that is, if one is constituted to perform in the role. It is so much more agreeable, and so much more practically resultful, to hunt error with a sharp, smiling eye than it is to search for truth. There is so much folly and error in the world that needs only a fairly good, smooth-working mind to detect it, and a talent for the keen, bright phrase to expose it: and truth is something that men seek and do not find, but only the semblance of it, or a temporary, expedient substitute for it. Men die, as Olive Schreiner depicts
it, with only a solitary feather of truth clutched in a hand: while the
cynic can go out early in the morning and have a bagful of errors
by noon. The cynic lives to a good old age. He is not fooled by life,
but works it for all he can get out of it. He turns down an empty
wineglass, and throws away the skin of a completely assimilated
orange.

COMMON SENSE

What is commonly called “common sense” is very poor sense, having
the slightest possible connection with real thought. The trouble with
it is that it is too common. It is what everybody holds to be true. It is
majority rule in the realm of the intellect—although one cannot speak
justly of intellect and “common sense” in a breath, for the two are
worlds and eons apart. Mr. Common Sense—hundreds of him, as
nearly alike in mind as peas in a pod, a stupendous and tiresome repeti-
tion—may be observed filling the rows of any crowded house with a
“popular” appeal. It is Mr. Common Sense and his tribe who, through
the weight of their wonderful influence, make it certain that you will
see the old, bum, stale acts whenever you drop into a playhouse. “Com-
mon sense,” and nothing else, rolls up the majorities that lift politicians
to the high places. No war could be successfully waged without “com-
mon sense.” It is “common sense”—a great and inexhaustible quantity
of it—that enables Mr. Easy Money to complacently contemplate the
world from that familiar eminence which is represented by the shoulders
of Mr. Hard Work. There has never been a fake that did not owe its
prosperity to “common sense.” Mr. Common Sense never, by any
chance, thinks for himself. It does not occur to him that thought should
be analyzed and that words should convey thought. He argues, but never
reasons. And “common sense” is not simple: not clear: not realistic.
The weirdest kind of foolish notions pass readily under the name of
“common sense.” Fix the eye of Mr. Common Sense upon a bright
bit of bunk, and he will steadily refuse to look at the truth—will indeed
be unconscious of its existence. It is Mr. Common Sense who, collec-
tively, runs after false leaders: is the prey of fakers, new and old:
forms the mob—climbs upon the bandwagon—marches in the parade:
it is he who buys patent medicines, goes to fortune tellers, and believes
what he reads in the papers.

A NOTE ON TASTE

Macaulay remarks of some character—a writer of fair talent—
that he was only a man of sense and taste. This seems to me a
tribute. And it is not simply the sense that is important, but the
taste as well. It is hard to define taste. It is something more than
intelligence: a very good thinker, an erudite man, a man of sharp
intelligence in the ways of life, may be lacking in taste. We may
call taste an eye for beauty, an ear for harmony, a sense of propor-
tion, a feeling (to fall upon a poor phrase) of the fitness of things—
not conventionally but naturally. The man of very good taste has,
too, an appreciation of subtle effects. He can see, feel and hear what
others miss. He enjoys, in art, the finest things. He observes the
nice shadings of personality. His conduct (regardless of artificial
etiquette) shows tact and consideration and, with it, that spirit of freedom which never obtrudes. There is taste in thought. One man can detect a fallacy of thought, almost as he would note a disharmony in music: he thinks, as it were, beautifully straight: his mind is an instrument which he plays with simple and exquisite skill. One cannot always explain good taste—can never fully explain it—but one can recognize it: often it reveals itself quite simply, in a phrase, a gesture, a lighting of the eye. And men are separated by taste often as sharply as by a physical difference. There are men whose every preference is petty and coarse: others who love fine and noble things, and who shrink almost in physical distaste from the tawdry and meretricious. I say that good taste is unexplainable, and yet it is not wholly so: we know that a man who is put in the way of hearing classical music will grow to appreciate it, and will lose his taste for murdered melodies. One who is surrounded by good books, and has even the common curiosity to read them, will learn to enjoy good literature. Yes, fortunately, good taste can be cultivated. Any one with the requisite mentality can enrich his life and see finely through the eyes of good taste.

**GOD AND THE WATCH**

Religion, says the Christian, is a fundamental instinct: and to prove it, he supposes a savage to find a watch—even a dollar Ingersoll, let us say—lying in the heart of the forest: the savage, we are told, would at once conclude that the watch had a maker: and so man, viewing the universal mechanism, knows in his heart there is a God. This is taking a bold leap into the mind of the savage. Would he be impressed, as would a civilized man, by the use of the watch, by its perfect working, by its beauty? Reason tells us “No.” A watch would excite no greater feeling in the savage than a pretty stone or a new and curiously formed tree. He would not know that the watch was a fine, orderly, carefully made instrument for keeping time: he wouldn’t realize the splendid workmanship that went into the making of the watch: and his first thought would be, not who made it or whether any one made it, but what he could do with it. He might think that it was a kind of strange weapon. He might bite it, trying to discover if it was valuable as food. He might cut a hole in his ear, and hang the watch in it as a bauble to impress the females of the tribe. He might throw it into the fire, to see what would happen to it. He might only glance at the watch and then, chancing to see a stone or a stick that was shaped to catch his fancy, drop the watch and completely forget it and proudly walk away with the worthless object in his hand. If the savage had a thought about the origin of the watch, he would probably conclude that it simply happened to be there. (To be sure, he might think that one of the gods had dropped it out of his vest pocket, when he tripped over a star—but that would hardly be an argument for Christianity.) Again, the savage would put no greater value upon the finest Swiss watch than upon a dollar Ingersoll. The up-shot might be that this particular savage would go away and leave the watch to be found by another savage, who would perhaps crack nuts with it.