Anarchism 7173

THE RIGHT TO DISBELIEVE

BY

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210 EAST 13th STREET, NEW YORK

1910

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THE RIGHT TO DISBELIEVE

WHEN an individual gives expression to a protest against theologic tradition, he does so with the understanding that he lays himself open more or less to social ostracism. Public opinion, which is not given to fine distinctions, and which is prone to mass its conceptions, sees in the heretic, the infidel, the agnostic and the atheist a conglomeration of individuals to be denounced and mistrusted, just as it sees in the socialist, the anarchist and the terrorist a group of individuals whose functions are supposed to overlap, and who are supposed to be inimical to society.

When we see an entire city terror-stricken over the accidental presence of a leper, who is very much less dangerous to a community than a consumptive, we can realize the blind power of tradition, prejudice and ignorance.

We are all inclined to over-estimate the enlightenment of the present age. True, we have an enlightened minority, but the compact majority is, relatively speaking, just as stupid and just as gullible as it ever was. We must not forget that in structure and inherited tendencies each of us is hundreds of thousands years old, but that the civilized part of us is recent.

The two dominant powers in the civilized world are Church and State. With the latter I shall not particularly concern myself. I am, however, sufficiently familiar with anarchistic literature to realize that the great idealist of to-day is the anarchist. If the outlook for the anarchistic propaganda under present-day conditions and for generations to come were not so hopeless of practical realization, one might pin one's faith on the ideals of anarchy. But the perfect man and the millennium of the community is not in sight. The dreamer, planting the seed of universal liberty, will harvest a crop of thorns for his pains.

The other great power dominating the affairs of the human race is the Church. While the State pretends to be the guardian of the rights of the people, including the granting of freedom of action and speech with-

in certain sometimes unpleasant limits, the Church has always attempted to crush even the freedom of Thought. If it is right to detest oppression, bigotry, violence and wholesale murder, we are certainly justified in hating the Church for its consistent, pitiless history of persecution. What has always struck me as most detestable in the history of the Church is its utter absence of pity, just common pity, for its victims. Even death would not satisfy these followers of Christ, unless it were accompanied by torture.

But we are to-day living in a great period of revolt. The most formidable institution of history, the Church, is crumbling. It is falling under the attacks of doubt, reason and knowledge. We must not despair because in the death of Ferrer it still shows its power to destroy. Rather, we must see in this phenomenon the final rally of a dying beast, crushing its unsuspecting victim.

I am going to try to demonstrate how vital it is to disbelieve in that which is not true, and have, therefore, given my essay the title "The Right to Disbelieve."

The most remarkable phenomenon in the psychology of the human race is the tenacity with which it clings to its faith in the supernatural. Originating, we are told, in mystification at the phenomena of nature, dominated by fear and prompted by attempts at conciliation, religion was born in the breast of man. Man found in the elements powers beyond his control: "Denn die Elemente hassen das Gebild der Menschenhand." In order to propitiate these destructive forces of nature, he sought refuge in worship and in the bringing of sacrifices. In his helplessness against unseen and uncontrollable agencies, he was obliged to marshall influences outside the physical world. Hence the endowment of physical objects with spiritual attributes. Stones, trees, fire, water, the air, the animal world were supposed to be the habitation of spirits, who could be reached and influenced by worship, cajolery and sacrifice. The visions of dreams and trance were endowed with reality, and death, the eternal sleep, gave permanent escape to a supposed spirit, hovering over the scene of its earthly abode. These spirits of the dead were credited with an influence over the

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destiny of the living. Hence we see a belief in the supernatural, a belief in immortality, and the practice of worship as the earliest religious manifestation of the human race. When imagination rose into sublimer visions, the heavens also were peopled with worlds and beings controlling our destiny. This interpretation of the relation of man to the universe has persisted with racial and temporal modifications to the present day. It is used as a stock argument for the necessity of a creed, for if all men had religion, religion must be a natural postulate of the spiritual life.

In order to formulate this relationship of man to the universe into a general code, there arose a guild of specialists called prophets, seers and priests, who studied the unknown and, according to their light, acted as interpreters, mediators and celebrants. In order to sustain their authority, it was necessary for them to assert a more or less intimate knowledge of divine and sub-divine intentions, and a power to influence natural and supernatural events. Hence the priesthood, whose authority went unchallenged for a very long period, dominated not only the spiritual life, but during the thousand years of European darknees, when faith and ignorance had their strongest grip, the secular affairs of the earth. As the purposes and results of their ministrations could not always be demonstrated by physical evidence, dogma and infallibility became imperative corollaries. It is therefore quite natural that the Church has always stood by its assertiveness and that the specter of doubt was exorcised by persuasion, if possible; by coercion, when necessary. An early Church Father has given expression to this necessity of blind faith in the famous epigrammatic utterance: "Credo quia impossibile," an aphorism so exquisite as to tickle the imagination of the most obtuse.

We have endeavored to explain in the fewest possible words that religion originated in a groping for light; that it emanated from ignorance, not wisdom; that its foundation rests on superstition, its structure on faith. We can all see this so clearly in the religious systems of others! But when it comes to our own particular creed, doubt or negation is branded

as blasphemy. The great religions of Egypt, India, Persia, Greece and Rome seem a bewildering maze of wasted energy, of incomprehensible ceremonial, of cruel sacrifice, of inhibited development. We cast a skeptic eye on the fervor of the Brahmin, and the Gods of Olympus make comic opera. And yet all religions spring from the same source; every new creed is a protest against the old. Their development is a progression from the more to the less absurd. All progress in religious development has been the relinquishment of something which a growing intelligence was obliged to repudiate as untenable.

Contrary to experience in all other realms of knowledge, religious advance has been a problem in subtraction, not addition. Or, in other words, when theology takes a step in advance, in deference to an increased intelligence, it does so by dropping some of its ballast. It sounds like a modern cry when we read that the Roman priests denounced the early Christians as atheists. The rite of baptism, sprinkling with holy water, bathing in rivers for the cure of leprosy, are all tributes to the water gods; and the burning of incense is an old Egyptian rite. Stripped of its complexity and sifted to its fundamentals, Christian creed emanates from the same motives and is permeated by the same emotions as dominated the most primitive men. We need not go into detail, in order to prove that it is so infested with fetishism, idolatry and anthropomorphism that the twentieth century Christian locks hands with the prehistoric worshipper.

In this connection it is interesting to note that Huxley has pointed out a startling parallelism between the fetishism of the nineteenth-century Polynesian and the old Israelitish theology.

In considering some of the fundamental characteristics of the religious mode of thinking, the mind naturally reverts to the chapter of miracles. The miracle is the most beloved child of faith; the assertion that Christianity must stand or fall with its miracles runs through the entire history of the Church. The Christian Church has no hesitation in rejecting pagan thaumaturgy or miracle-working. It considers the repudiation of faith in extra-Christian miracles as laudable, but if the miracles outside the

Christian realm are spurious, the assumption that Christian miracles must be true is a reductio ad absurdum.

I am now going to give an historically indisputable example of the manner in which miracles are recorded. We have in the life of St. Francis Xavier a valuable object-lesson of the origin of miracle belief and a demonstration how miracles fatten on time. Andrew D. White, in his study of St. Francis Xavier, the "Apostle of the Indies," tells us that St. Francis has left a minute record of his life as a missionary in his own writing, and in the writings of his missionary associates. In none of these manuscripts is there any allusion to Franciscan miracles. On the contrary, St. Francis and his contemporaries explicitly deplore his human limitations. José de Acosta, the Jesuit spokesman of his time, the highest contemporary authority on the subject, plainly states that St. Xavier worked no miracles. St. Francis, it will be remembered, lived in the first half of the sixteenth century. Shortly after his death the first stories of miracles wrought by him began to appear. In 1622, seventy years after his death, he was canonized at Rome, and credited with three resurrections of the dead. In 1682, one hundred and thirty years after his death, he is credited with fourteen resurrections. If these legends could originate in the centuries of Shakespeare, when the art of printing had long outgrown its infancy, how fertile must have been the soil of thaumaturgic myth in the early centuries, when manuscripts circulated only among the initiated, who could juggle with traditions as their fancy dictated, and who considered every contribution to the wonders of Christian performance a pious act.

These observations lead us to a vital issue. As the holiest traditions of the Christian Church cluster about the personality of Jesus, the Christian world will be slow to accept the corrosive results of historic research into his life and time. Our information concerning the personality of Jesus is, according to all reliable sources, based entirely on tradition. The first writings we have describing his life are by Paul, who never saw him. The four gospels were written about forty, fifty, sixty, and one hundred years after his death. Even though our information came at first-hand, which it does

not, we should be justified in entertaining the most serious doubts of the reliability of witnesses. We all know that the Gospels were elaborated centuries after the beginning of the Christian era by anonymous writers, who added their flights of fancy to the earliest records. History teaches us that during the period of the first Roman Emperors there was a general expectancy of the arrival of the Messiah. Polytheism was bankrupt. It no longer fitted the intellectual and moral needs of men. Into this Graeco-Roman world of discredited polytheism there came a new preachment of succor to the poor, justice to the oppressed, liberty to the slave, hope to the despondent, regeneration to the wicked, resurrection to the dying. And the people rose to what was subsequently used as a bait.

We are told that during this period there were several men of the name of Jesus, who laid claim to a Messianic vocation, and the conclusion is inevitable that the scriptural Jesus is a composite figure. The very name of Jesus, which, to the uninitiated seems something distinctive, is an Hellenization of the Hebrew Joshua. We can thus see in his apotheosis an ecstatic expression, both subjective and objective, of that religious fervor which is so characteristic of the frenzy of races to find the sublimest expression for their form of worship and their hope in redemption. If historic criticism can go so far, however, as to assert the gravest reason for doubting whether the Sermon on the Mount was ever preached, and whether the so-called Lord's Prayer was ever prayed by Jesus of Nazareth,[1] a thorough revision of Christian tradition is long overdue. But however much our conception of the personality of Jesus is open to revision, his ethics is the voice of the human soul, has an almost universal application, and is in many instances the culmination of the doctrine of righteousness.

The sins of the Church are not the sins of a pure Christianity, for if Jesus had never lived, the doctrines of which he is the incarnation did find, and would have found, utterance in the universal voice. One might justly ponder over the sorrow of the spirit of Jesus could it realize what the priesthood has done to him; how it has desecrated his memory in crime; how it has perverted

[1] Huxley: Agnosticism: A Rejoinder.

his simplicity in the trappings of ceremonial, of pomp and of violence. We can see his bewilderment at the adulteration of his purity and gentleness with brazen power. We can see him lost in the sumptuous cathedrals erected in his honor. We can see him shudder at the toll of human suffering exacted as the price of his glorification. And if he were reincarnated, stripped of the legendary attributes with which the Church has invested him, we can imagine him an object of scorn and ridicule by those same priests who have transformed him into a divinity.

As a very respectable and intelligent body of Christians, the Unitarian sect, does not subscribe to the faith in the divinity of Jesus, it may be contended that the apotheosis of the Redeemer is not an essential tenet of the Christian creed. There then remains a restricted creed, the skeleton of which is the monotheistic conception, with Jesus as the great teacher.

Let us inquire into the development of Monotheism. Huxley contends that the evolution of theology is a study in anthropology. In following the origin, growth, decline and fall of those speculations respecting the existence, the powers and the dispositions of beings analogous to men, but more or less devoid of corporeal qualities, which may be broadly included under the head of theology, he cites the ghost belief as an integral part of the old Israelitish faith. The name of Elohim was applied to a ghost or disembodied soul, conceived as the image of a body in which it once dwelt. The difference which was supposed to exist between the different Elohim was one of degree, not of kind. Elohim was, in logical terminology, the genus of which the ghosts, Chemosh, Dagon, Baal and Yahveh, were species. The ancient Israelite conceived Yahveh not only in the image of a man, but in that of a changeable, irritable and occasionally violent man. Yahveh-Elohim was represented as a being of the same substantially human nature as the rest, only immeasurably more powerful for good or evil. Hence the Yahveh conception is the direct outcome of fetishism, ancestor-worship, hero-worship and demonology of primitive thought. In the Mosaic tradition this man-god was elaborated into the omniscient, omnipotent God of Jew, Christian and Mohammedan. This conception of the divinity could never have originated in a modern brain,

and still it is demanded of our generation that we twist our interpretation of the great cosmic mystery into, that we concentrate our reverence on, a God, the conception of whom entirely antedates our scientific trend of thought.

For this is the scientific age. During the last four or five centuries human inquiry has swung into new channels. The art of printing, the Reformation, the science of astronomy and new ventures in navigation were the trumpet blasts announcing the modern era. The art of printing dispelled the pall of darkness which for fifteen centuries brooded over Europe. During all this time, and extending over the period of the Reformation, the birth pangs of Christianity filled the earth with its wails. It was a protracted labor. The first-born happened to suffer from that abnormity which, in the language of pathology, is characterized as bicephalus—or a two-headed monstrosity, the one head representing the Greek, the other the Roman type. The second brother, launched into the world some centuries later, a lusty chap, who was born protesting violently against his elder brother, seemed a healthy babe, but subsequently developed so many excrescences or tumors that it has become difficult to determine where the patient ends and the tumors begin. These two battered children of Mosaic ancestry, whose father, Jesus, would have difficulty in recognizing them and who, to put it mildly, have been guilty of considerable rudeness toward one another, have been beset by enemies other than themselves. Draper points out the fact that during the first fifteen hundred years of the Christian era there were no Christian astronomers. In the eyes of the Church, with its primitive conception of genesis, astronomy was the most hostile of all the sciences. If a Christian, therefore, wished to enjoy the luxury of dying in his bed, he found it safer to relegate astronomic research to the Arabians. But early in the sixteenth century Copernicus wrote a treatise based on mathematic calculation, which he called the "Revolutions of the Heavenly Bodies." He did not dare to have it printed for thirty-six years. On his deathbed he enjoyed the sad solace of having a printed copy of the book presented to him by friends.

One century later, Galileo looked through a tube provided with a system of lenses and gave ocular demonstrations of the Copernican doctrine. During this same

period the three great mariners, Columbus, Da Gama and Magellan, demonstrated the scriptural fallacy of the flatness of the earth. Then came discovery after discovery, martyrdom after martyrdom. The sorrowing face of genius peers through the centuries. One should never tire of the story of Galileo. Even though the stamping of the foot and the "eppur si muove" are legendary, they are too good to be forgotten. The historic recantation, "I, Galileo, being in my seventieth year, being a prisoner and on my knees, and before your Eminences, having before my eyes the Holy Gospel, which I touch with my hands, abjure, curse and detest the error and the heresy of the movement of the earth," was delivered under threat of torture, and was followed by theologic refutations of the Copernican system which Galileo was not permitted to answer.

I am going to quote the work of Chiaramonti, written under the auspices of the Church, as a characteristic specimen of the ecclesiastical repartee of that day. "Animals," Chiaramonti says, "which move, have limbs and muscles; the earth has no limbs and muscles; therefore, it does not move. It is angels who make Saturn, Jupiter, the sun, etc., turn around. If the earth revolved, it must also have an angel in the center to set it in motion; but only devils live there; it would, therefore, be a devil who would impart motion to the earth." In the face of such and other defense was the cosmic theory of Bible and Church finally annihilated, the earth dethroned from its centricity. Rampart after rampart has been deserted and the Church has ceased to be the dominant militant power. It has been reduced to a form of masterly inactivity, reaching, when it is hard-pressed, a faltering hand to science triumphant, willing to waive the literal interpretation and receding into the quicksands of symbolism.

Scientific truth, however, is a grim mistress, offering no compromise, and when the heavy philosopher with his jargon, or the pseudo-scientist steps in as mediator, attempting to bridge the chasm with an acrobatic display of dialectic finesse, we can witness the curious performance, according to our disposition, either with amusement or disgust. It has become quite the fashion in recent times to let the Church down easy; to find a common meeting-ground; to hold out the hand of fellow-

ship; to clasp the bloody hand of the butcher or the oily hand of the time-server. To those who would tolerate the embrace of a snake I do not begrudge the bed-fellowship of priestcraft.

Theology has taught false doctrines and has become a discredited teacher. If ever there will come a solution of the Great Mystery, it will come not through theology, but through the sciences. The priest, with leaden feet, will continue to follow in the wake of research. We shall turn to the mathematician, the astronomer, the geologist, the experts in paleontology, physics, chemistry, botany, biology, anatomy and physiology, seeking knowledge of heaven and earth, life and death. Just what modification the priestly function will ultimately undergo it is difficult to say. It is probable that the ranks of the clergy will be considerably thinned. It is more than probable that the seeker after truth will not be hounded and ostracised by the discredited priest. It is more than probable that when reason sits on the throne of tradition, the human race will breathe a sigh of relief at its emancipation from the slavery of fettered thought and at the extinction of a tribe of men who have been false teachers.

In this connection there are two questions, the solution of which offers a fascinating problem.

First: How is it possible that, in the face of the fatal blows delivered at the historicity of the scriptures, orthodoxy, semi-orthodoxy or even liberalism in theology can still persist?

Second: What will be the fate of the human family when the prop of theology is withdrawn?

Now, as to the first question. How is it possible for the Church to have survived the attacks of its antagonists, and how is it that men of the most subtle intellect remain loyal to theologic tradition? The answer is complex. Masses move slowly. The institution of tradition may be likened to a pyramid, with its power of resistance greatest at the base. All great movements begin at the top and have the tremendous inertia of mass to overcome. Although the structure is crumbling, the process of demolition is so slow as to dishearten the sanguine and to lull the reactionary into a sense of false security. Evolutionary movements must be measured not by years or generations. The fact that an institution of fossilized

antiquity, even with a record of several centuries of decay, has not yet reached the stage of dissolution cannot be accepted as evidence of stability. It is most interesting to study the imperviousness of intellectual men to the logic of evidence. It is not only fools who are advocates of quackery of all description—religious, political, scientific and social. When a man of the type of a Gladstone enters the arena in defense of orthodoxy, we must place ourselves in the attitude of the physician who searches for a diagnosis to explain a symptom. Let me explain what I mean, by an illustration: Located at the point of entrance of the optic nerve into the retina is the so-called blind spot. Every normal eye has the blind spot. If we translate this fact into a metaphor, we can find also in the brain one or more blind spots. When an impression reaches this spot, there is no reaction, no response. In stupid people the absence of these reactions is aggravatingly conspicuous. In the intellectual class their number diminishes. But there are very few brains that are so sensitized as to receive all impressions faithfully. In fact, we often observe that the stronger the light, the deeper the blur. The reasons contributing to this result are manifold. First, there is our system of education. We go to school because the economic value of brains is greater than that of muscle—if we exclude the prize-fighter and the baseball player. The majority of our population must be content with the elementary school. Less than five per cent. ever attain a secondary education, and less than two per cent. ever go to the higher seats of learning. This leaves ninety-five per cent. of relatively illiterate people in a country which boasts of the intelligence of its citizens. What is taught in our public schools is totally inadequate for what might be called an education. These millions of children are dumped upon the community with a smattering of a few things and a total ignorance of most things. It would lead me too far from my subject to explain how these precious seven years of school-life are frittered away by a bad system and by incompetent teachers. Suffice it to say that where there is no solid foundation, there can be no solid structure. These children develop into commonplace adults—intellectually speaking—and are rarely endowed with the faculty of independent thinking. Herein lies undoubtedly the secret of the power

of the press in America. From this source emanates that subtle poison which our optimists call Public Opinion. "Public opinion, that great compound of folly, weakness, prejudice, wrong feeling, right feeling, obstinacy and newspaper paragraphs."

Then there are our high schools and colleges and universities for the select few who should logically be our intellectual leaders. There have now been four or five centuries of scientific research, culminating in the stupendous achievements of the nineteenth century. Have these victories of science revolutionized our schools? Not a bit of it. In none of our institutions of general learning do the natural sciences rank first in importance. The medieval system is still in full sway. Aside from the practical importance of an intimate acquaintance with the sciences, they are of the utmost value in the abstract, because they train us to apply our reason, to understand the relation between cause and effect, to take nothing for granted, to comprehend the mechanism of the universe and our relation to nature. The study of nature "is not the narrow preoccupation with material things that some would have it; but, rather the search for the laws underlying the unity of man's being, of which his experiences, mental, moral and social, are all phases." Its fundamental principle is development, growth, change, based on evidence.

Now, the entire theologic structure is based on opposite principles: on the principles of fixity, unalterability, finality. All its evidence rests on tradition. None of its wonders could be demonstrated to-day to a sane audience. You must believe even in the impossible. That is *faith,* of which so many speak with pride. If you don't know a thing, but believe in it, and are willing to light the fires of torture in defense of your dogma, that is faith.

These points will explain why people of brains—brains trained in a wrong direction—or people without brains—trained in no direction—believe in the Church.

But there are many other influences just as powerful in the aggregate. For instance, there is the factor of mental indolence; the argument that we have been raised that way and don't want to shock our grandmother. Then there is the herding instinct, the snugness of feeling that you are in a set, in the majority, with all the

social and business advantages connected therewith. Then there is the intellectual coward, who might be considered queer if he thought different than his neighbor. Then there is the weakling, who wants to be on the safe side, whom the Church rules with promise of reward, or menaces with a threat of punishment. For you must remember that the Church exercises a power which is stronger the farther you get away from it. It pretends to influence your destiny after death, and the shameless traffic in the reading of masses shows its power to wring a tribute even from the dead. It issues you a promissory note, with instructions to collect in the other world. Then there is—worst of all—the religious hypocrite, who strives to deceive not only his brother, but his God. To me it seems that the most serious charge to be brought against the Christian world is in the contradiction between its profession and practice. I know of no other religious sects—Jewish, Mohammedan or pagan—who are so untrue to their so-called religious principles. The violence, the cheating, the lying, the oppression among Christians, after Christianity has been on probation for almost two thousand years, shows the Christian religion as a practical guide to be a dismal failure. The argument that Christianity has been a check against injustice and crime is so brazen that we can let it pass with silent contempt. Even a superficial survey of ecclesiastic history will convince an open mind that the Church, the exponent and the standard-bearer of Christianity, has been the most ruthless instigator of crime in the annals of the human race.

Oh, well, it might be argued, this is ancient history. Yes, it is to some extent ancient history—the history of the Church in its dominance. With the weakening of the power of the Church begins the history of tolerance, of pity and of justice. It was the secular arm which paralyzed the Church, and it is the modern spirit, the emancipated brain, the brain governed by reason and not by the faith of our fathers, that guides the secular arm. The Church is constantly whining over a possibly Godless race. What will become of our emotional life, it says, if we cease to thrill over heaven or tremble over hell? What shall become of our souls without the solace of prayer? Well, the world will have to get along without prayer. Darwin, Huxley, Tyndall and Spencer did

not pray. The people who are sufficiently intelligent to grasp the trend of nineteenth-century thought do not pray. Do *they* fill our penitentiaries? Why does the benighted mortal pray to an omniscient and omnipotent God? Does he expect to sway the power and the will above the universe? To my mind, prayer is the essence of blasphemy, for if God is just, why should I attempt to influence his will? If I pray to him in adversity, I mistrust his wisdom. If I thank him for my prosperity, I expect from him a tip in the form of more prosperity. If I think I know better than God what is good for me, I deny his omniscience. The most modern apology for the justification of prayer is that we must not take it literally. It is merely symbolic, for the purpose of the uplifting of the soul, for the purpose of an inner comfort. I might as well argue that a drink of whiskey makes a poor man feel rich. One of the pet arguments of the Church is its long-distance jurisdiction over the human soul. "Do you mean to deny," the believer will ask, with a mixture of scorn and pity, "the existence of the human soul? Would you be willing to descend to the level of the soulless beast? Are we created merely to die? When we are dead, are we really dead?" You can readliy see the egotism of the human race in all these questions. How do we know that the beast has no soul? Does the Roman Catholic bother about the soul of the Hindoo? Does he consider it an asset? Yes, when the Hindoo becomes a Catholic. In the eyes of the Pope it would even not do the Hindoo much good to become a Protestant. In the eyes of the Church a man might better be a horse or a dog if he does not carry the label of some particular creed.

What we do know of the soul is that it is a function of consciousness, and nobody has ever demonstrated consciousness apart from the body. If we wish to study the soul, it must be studied right here on earth. It is not a question of religion or of metaphysical speculation, but of experience and the laboratory. If the task is laborious and slow, we must wait. Both the anatomy and the physiology of the brain are a dark continent in science, but the solution lies *there,* and not in speculation or in theology, any more than the solution of genesis lies in theology. The earth and not heaven is the abode of the soul. If the mill-owner will cease to grind the

life out of the child, he will be instrumental in developing that child's soul. It was the pious, snivelling New Englander who originally contributed so generously to the exploitation of the child in American factories. A starved body and a starved soul usually go together. Those good Christians who do not seem in the least intimidated by Christ's parable of the camel, the eye of the needle and the rich man's exclusion from heaven, are already finding in the oppressed a constantly growing skepticism concerning the value of poverty as a passport to heaven. And that is why we wish to point out the tremendous economic importance of the right to disbelieve. All knowledge begins with doubt. When the economic victims of Church and State see through the sham, their day of deliverance will dawn. When the people realize that God is not a universal Papa; that the priest is totally ignorant of the mystery of the universe; that the Bible is a patchwork of truth and error, of history and legend; that education is the strongest weapon of civilization; that righteousness is something entirely apart from theology; that justice and character are the great moral forces; that heaven and hell are of this earth and of man's making; that the Christian Church is a travesty on the traditional Christ, and that the real Christ is merely the mouthpiece of our own better selves, then the right to disbelieve, which we claim as our prerogative, will be the foundation of a new civilization.

The average American citizen would consider himself slandered if he were told that his so-called patriotism were a brother-fetish to his religion. In celebrating the birth of two great Presidents, who were so shamelessly maligned in their lifetime, with flamboyant speeches and dinners and the waving of flags; in mutilating himself annually to commemorate the birth of the Republic; in joyfully answering the call to arms when his rulers and the newspapers goad him to the field of battle—his comb swells with the pride of loyalty. All the physical, brutish attributes of the patriot are his. With outstretched hands he clutches the spoils from mine, field and forest, and dines with overflowing mouth on the day set aside for the thanking of God for his prosperity. And, meanwhile, the cancer of corruption is eating into his entrails. All that is vile, oppressive and unpatriotic is veiled by the name of business and politics. The grave mockery of

the courts passes for justice. The liberated negro, for whom the patriot shed his blood, scandalizes the country when he sits at the white man's table. The fraudulent ballot-box is the shambles to which the voter is led for sacrifice. Our Presidents are bribed into office.

We have lately heard of a great moral wave sweeping over the country. That reform does not come from a spiritual awakening, but from a purely physical revolt against an intolerable stench. When the foulest odors are removed, the American public will again settle down to its nice, quiet, and profitable crookedness. If a people are hypocritical in what they claim to be the most sacred thing in life—their religion—how can we expect them to be upright in secular affairs, when they see a greater profit in dishonesty? The well-fed American, with a merry twinkle in his eye, is tickled by the practice of graft, because it denotes a certain successful shrewdness. He calls a crooked clause in a legislative measure a joker, because of his association of rascality with humor. He plucks from the lap of his country the fruit of prosperity, which rots in his tainted hand. And he little dreams that his sham democracy, his sham religion, his sham morality, his sham reforms are sweeping him onward toward some great catastrophe, in which his children or his children's children will pay the bitter penalty.

NOTE.—I am indebted to Mussey's "The New Paganism" for some quotations in this essay.

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