

APRIL 21, 1894.

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Mr. McPherson's State Papers.

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UNBELIEF.

Not the least amusing feature of modern atheism, if it were not also the most pitiful, is the boast, open or implied, of its professor that their unbelief is really a sign of their intellectual eminence. The absurdity of such a claim in view of the slight services rendered to humanity and only emancipated from belief, as contrasted with those rendered by men whose pivotal reliance was a Supreme Being, never seems to even ruffle the plumage of their sublime self-consciousness. Viewed with practical, humorous eyes, this self-gratification of the free thinker suggests the comparison of a deformed person—a museum freak or circus attraction—exalting himself above his perfectly developed human fellows, for the mere fact of his deformity.

Not in all cases, but in many, the decadence of a man's belief in God is but the sequence to the decadence of his belief in humanity and in himself. And loss of faith in these last two comes rarely save to those who have sinned grievously against them. Surely in such cases, death were more merciful wages of sin, than the moral darkness which waves itself aloft as purest light. And cynicism, indifference, liberalism, light scents are they are of the army of unbelief, are they not also danger signals hung out by the very hand of God himself, over the morasses of unbelief, of modern paganism, into which the feet of his faithful ones might otherwise unwarily stray? In cynicism, the spirit of our day, that spirit that gives and scoffs, and reduces all things to a common level, even men themselves, professed sneers, know there is little attractiveness. The cynic in literature is an exorcism, a deformity. Loveable, honest Thackeray himself becomes repellant in his scoffing moods. And the great ones—Shakespeare and Milton, Dante and Goethe—what a splendid spirit of belief in God and humanity glows throughout their pages! Even Byron, most cynical of earth's great singers, is great for us, not of his cynicism, but despite of it.

Marvellous indeed is it that man, with that infinite, ever-varying wonder of creation about him, with this still, immovable, fixed law of a conscience within, can doubt the existence of a supreme source, a supreme law! A grave-eyed Napoleon, not caring to waste further breath with the philosophers who had proved, beyond peradventure, that all belief in the supernatural is but a shibboleth, points to the starry firmament above, with the query, "Gentlemen, who made all these?" Answerless query! But even could we accept the conclusion that all this endless miracle of clouds and stars, of seas and wind-tossed flowers, and a nature ever renewing itself, was but a harmonious combination produced by the clashing and welding together of millions of atoms moving for millions of years through space, by what reasoning can we explain this inner voice, this law higher than reason, this incommunicable judgment within ourselves, that we call conscience? Splendid, incontrovertible fact, clearest word of the Creator to His creature, human reason cannot explain it, or cynicism explain it away. True, indeed, when its warnings have been repeatedly disregarded, its mandates set ruthlessly aside, this inner voice sometimes ceases, and silence, to be any longer a proof of the existence of a God. But was to him for whom it has ceased, rudeness; as he is, drifting hither and thitherwards on a shoreless sea?

But conscience, voice as it is of God's justice, is also the voice of His love. What a divine happiness of approval it sheds on the self-sacrificing deed, the exercise of courage and truth in a hostile or unfriendly world! Lord Brougham, speaking to Sir Robert Peel at the time of the latter's espousal of the cause of popular reform, said: "Your public career will be checked, but you can always turn from an storm without the sunshine of an approving conscience within." Best, best sunshine! well for the man, be he statesman or peasant, for whom it has ceased not to shine.

"So fallen, so lost! The light withdrawn Which once he wore."

"All else is gone; from those great eyes The soul has fled: When faith is lost, when honor dies, The man is dead."

But more manifest even in the nations than in men are the evil effects of unbelief. A strong faith in a higher law, a Supreme Being, has ever characterized those races that have strongly impressed themselves on human history. Even heathendom itself, with its worship of cloud-compelling Zeus and the multimiform gods of the Olympian heaven, was a saving force morally and nationally. 'Twas when Rome forgot her heathenism, when she relaxed into animism of unbelief, that she knew the hour of her greatest degradation. It was at people who had lapsed from their belief, not in one true God, but in many false ones that St. Paul hurled that terrible denunciation contained in the first chapter of his Epistle to the Romans, "They liked not to be God in their knowledge."

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wretchedly false one. "All epochs," observes Goethe, "in which faith has prevailed, have been brilliant, heart-elevating, and fruitful both to contemporaries and to posterity. All epochs, on the contrary, in which unbelief, under whatever form, has maintained a sad supremacy, even if they glitter for a moment with false splendor, vanish from the memory because they have been barren."

Even if they glitter for a moment with false splendor they vanish from the memory because they have been barren. Uttering these true words, was the great German looking down with prophetic eyes at that nation whose paganism flaunting itself in our own day in art, in literature, in education, might well deceive mankind into accepting for a lasting glory that which is but a passing glow? True, while France has been erasing the name of God from her school books, her material prosperity has in no whit diminished. While a large majority of her painters and sculptors have been carefully eliminating all spiritual motives or suggestion from their works, they have attained a technical perfection never yet paralleled. While her writers have been holding up religion as an emotion to be analyzed, or a myth to be dissected, their writings form a large percentage of modern literature's most finished productions.

Yet it requires no extraordinary keenness of intellect to see how far the elements of lasting greatness are welling from this show of Godless well-being. The recent Parisian riots, with their revelation of a social degradation, a moral turpitude almost incomprehensible of belief, were but the logical outcome of the disbelief that has eaten its way into the very heart of young French manhood. Even the leaders of French free thought can themselves see its ruinous tendency. M. Renan, most emancipated of thinkers, could attribute the dreadful collapse and calamity of '70-71 to nothing else than the "press filled with mean buffooneries, the puerile vanity, the vulgar cynicism, which sneers at all faith and virtue, the total lack of the charity which makes nations strong." The faults of the Third Republic are the faults of the Second Empire intensified. Well for it if no deeper mortification, no sadder Sedan, no more terrible Commune await it in the near future.

There is no real greatness, then, personal or national, without belief in God. Remove the sense of individual reliance, individual responsibility to a Supreme Being, and you have deprived man of the one high motive of his existence. But our belief must be a practical one, filled with that love which is the antithesis of pagan selfishness, else it were better to make no profession of belief at all. "That belief in God, believe and shudder," says St. James. We believe in God: let us show it by our charity towards our neighbor, by our devotion to truth, by our pity for weakness, by a kindness which may be the reflection of our Heavenly Father's kindness. So that when we come to stand before Him, ours will be the ecstasies of adoring love, not the shudders of lost, though believing spirits.—Eleanor R. Cox, in the *Seminarian*.

"Escaped" Nuns.

It is noticeable that there is comparatively little talk in this country of recent years of "rescued" and "fugitive" nuns; for which there are two principal reasons. First, there are no nuns in this country who wish to be rescued, and secondly, there are no nuns who wish to be rescued.

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A MIRACULOUS ESCAPE.

One of the most remarkable escapes from instant death that has been reported by the police of this city occurred shortly after twelve o'clock yesterday, (Tuesday) when young Frank Smith fell from the fifth floor of No. 66 Pine street to the ground floor and escaped unhurt.

Young Smith is employed as a printer by Davis & Chryslie, printers at No. 66 Pine street, and is a bright looking boy of about seventeen years old. Shortly after twelve o'clock, after he had lunch, he and Jeremiah Meyer began a race around the big room. The printing establishment occupies all of the top floor. In one corner is a hatchway that is not much in use at present.

There is no hatch door covering the opening, but in order to prevent accident a floor footboard is placed around the opening, standing upright. They became excited in the chase, and as young Smith approached the hatchway he slipped and fell to the floor. Before he could save himself his body was thrown against the protecting board of the hatchway, which broke, and he fell headlong into the open shaftway.

Over and over he turned in his descent, and when he struck the ground floor he lay there without motion. An ambulance surgeon applied restoratives, and the lad was removed to the telegraph office in the building. In ten minutes he opened his eyes.

The surgeon was surprised to find no bones broken and the only bruises on young Smith were two small discolorations on his face and a slight bruise on one of his feet.

In the meantime Smith's companions in the shop came tumbling down the stairway expecting to see their comrade lying dead on the sidewalk. Their joy knew no bounds when they found that he was well and apparently unhurt. The lad was sent to his home, No. 1,017 Atlantic avenue, Brooklyn, in a carriage.

I called at young Smith's home last night, and found that he was perfectly well, and was suffering from no bad effects from his lofty tumble. He said he did not remember anything after striking the board around the hatchway, until he found himself sitting in the telegraph office with a crowd around him.

He added that he expected to go to work in a few days.

Young Smith's father told me that the only solution in his mind for the miraculous escape from death was an intervention of God.

He said that Frank wore the scapular and also "St. Joseph's cord," which insures the wearer the protection of Saint Joseph. The boy had just put the cord on. Frank's mother was of the opinion that his life was saved by the wearing of these symbols of faith.—New York Herald.

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The above account appeared in the *New York Herald* of Wednesday, the feast of Saint Joseph. A few words of explanation will make it clear to all Catholics that this miracle must be ascribed to Saint Joseph. The Smith family, mentioned in the *Herald*, are members of Saint Joseph's Union, a society established by the late Father Drumgoole for the support of homeless and destitute children.

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