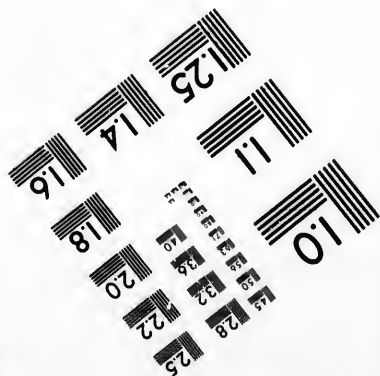
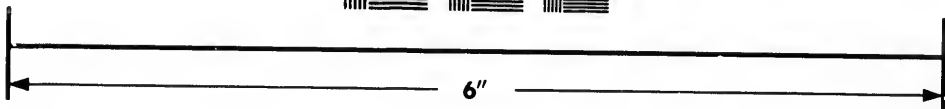
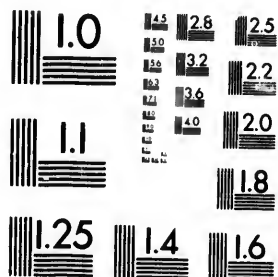


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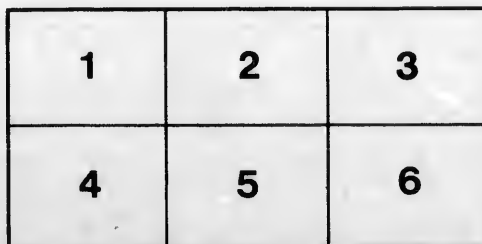
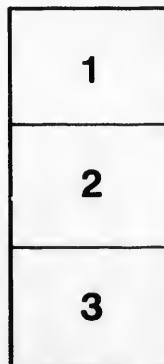
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A CRITICISM  
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MR. LESUEUR'S PAMPHLET,  
"DEFENCE OF MODERN THOUGHT."

BY VINDEK



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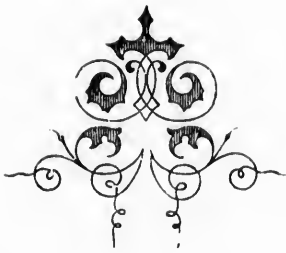
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A CRITICISM  
OF  
MR. LESUEUR'S PAMPHLET,  
ENTITLED  
"DEFENCE OF MODERN THOUGHT."  

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BY VINDEK.





## "DEFENCE OF MODERN THOUGHT," CRITICISED.

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MY attention has been called to a tract recently issued, bearing the title, "A Defence of Modern Thought," and purporting to be a reply to a pamphlet by the Bishop of Ontario, on "Agnosticism." The essayist gives us much that is suggestive and worthy of attention, but mingles with it so many misconceptions and erroneous inferences, that, in the interests of truth, I feel constrained to offer a few words by way of criticism.

The writer, Mr. W. D. LeSueur, repudiates the title Agnostic, and for this we must respect him, from a philosophic point of view. Speculative Agnosticism can be nothing else than mental suicide, and practical Agnosticism, which is the form under which it is most frequently met with, seems to me to be adopted by many, simply to save them from pushing their inquiries to the end, and thereby reaching certain inevitable but disliked conclusions.

It is not my intention to deal at present with Agnosticism, or to enter particularly into the merits of the case, as between the Bishop and his critic. My purpose is rather to show from statements made in his essay, that Mr. LeSueur misconceives the nature of the argument, as between the Christian believer and himself—and therefore misrepresents the attitude of those whose special duty it is to teach the tenets of the Christian religion.

## ORTHODOXY AND EVOLUTION.

The point of departure in the discussion is Evolution. Mr. LeSueur sees Orthodoxy trembling before Evolution and ready to fall. "Of course," he says, "it is possible to rely on a promise given that this result will never happen," upon "certain alleged Divine guarantees of the permanence of the Church." Now, in the first place, we ought to know what Mr. LeSueur understands by Orthodoxy. Does he mean by it the whole mass of theological dogma? If so, the false may tremble—the true will stand. Does he mean the essential beliefs of Christianity? If so, I see no sign, and no need of trembling. And let me say here that by essential Christian beliefs—I do not mean merely the abstract doctrines of God and Immortality, but God as a God of grace and mercy, and the gospel of eternal life through Jesus Christ—a gospel which proclaims to man a Divine-human Saviour—who died for our sins, and who rose again the third day according to the Scriptures. This Orthodoxy is not trembling before Evolution or Agnosticism, or anything else that I know of. Believers are still quite sure that this Gospel "is the power of God unto salvation."

Again, with regard to the promises of God, the essayist's reference indicates a misconception as to the use intelligent Christians make of them. To an Evolutionist of the essayist's type, who does not believe in revealed religion, the Christian reasoner would never dream of quoting one of God's promises in proof of the ultimate triumph of Christianity. This would be a sheer "casting of pearls," and highly unscientific. These promises are given for the joy and comfort, and strengthening of those who believe God has spoken to them in His Word.

We say rather to such an Evolutionist *your* theory is yet but an unproved hypothesis. There has nothing been established in it that can disturb our beliefs. Moreover, by your own process there is an inferential argument in our favour, for you admit, as one who has studied the Science of

religions, that Christianity is the best and purest, and therefore, in the spirit of your law of "the survival of the fittest," it will be permanent and become universal. We say further that we have examined carefully and scientifically into this matter, and we are convinced that Christianity is of Divine origin, and must therefore endure and triumph, and that you have as yet no arguments or reasons entitling you to set aside these claims which have been acknowledged by thousands of the profoundest and acutest minds in every age. So we stand assured not merely by certain alleged Divine guarantees, but because we know that Christianity rests on such a foundation that it cannot be shaken.

In discussing Evolution it is necessary that scientists both Christian and un-Christian, should perceive and acknowledge the state of the case. Without entering into minutiae I believe the following points will be generally admitted :—

1. That there are many facts in nature which point to Evolution as their legitimate explanation—but there are others which persistently refuse to be explained according to that theory. To anticipate the result and suppose the doctrine established is unscientific.
2. Evolution is not able to account for the origin and order of things, without the aid of some creative act or acts.
3. The origin of life, and the origin of reason, lie as unyieldingly as ever as stumbling-blocks in the way of Evolution pure and simple. The four gaps that Evolution must fill up, before it can claim to be established, yawn wide as ever, viz.: "the gap between dead matter and living matter; the gap between animal and vegetable life; the gap between one species and another; the gap between animal life and human reason and conscience. Darwin himself says "in what manner the mental powers were first developed in the lowest organisms is as

hopeless an enquiry as how life first originated." What is the origin of life? What is the origin of the higher powers in man—consciousness, reason, moral sense? Why is it that like produces like?

For these and other questions Darwinian Evolution has no answer—and until they are answered it is unscientific to press us with inferences from a theory that is not proved, and, moreover, that does not seem possible of proof.

4. So far as Evolution has been established there is nothing to prevent a Christian from being an Evolutionist—no fact has been brought to light that is contrary to Christian beliefs. The Evolutionist is transgressing the primary rule of scientific investigation, who, with so many momentous questions unanswered, and facts unresolved, leaps to an absolute conclusion, and assumes that his theory either has accounted or can account for the origin and order of the universe. It will be time enough for orthodoxy to show signs of trembling when science has shown even the probability of this atheistic evolution, or has discovered any facts that run counter to the religious beliefs cherished by intelligent Christians.

#### POSITION OF THE CHRISTIAN SCIENTIST.

The essayist misconceives the position taken by modern Christian thought. "There are," he says, "good reasons for believing that a general re-adjustment of thought is now in progress, and that it is destined to go on until old forms of belief, inconsistent with a rational interpretation of the world, have been completely overthrown."

As I read these words I find there is nothing in them, as I interpret them, I do not devoutly wish. None desire more than thoughtful Christians to see all forms of error and falsehood taken out of the way. We echo the laureate's

words, "ring out the false, ring in the true." But as we read on we are made to see pretty clearly that the writer means by "old forms of belief" the essential truths of revealed religion. To him the miraculous and supernatural are irrational. Now we have yet to see any rational interpretation of the world without miracle, and as to "old forms of belief," what is false and superstitious we trust will be removed, but what has been, and still is, the essential faith of Christianity will abide, and among those things that abide will be not only a living personal God, but a Divine Saviour with the supernatural manifestation of Divine love made in His life, death and resurrection.

The essayist also appears to be ignorant of what Christian teachers hold as to the relation between science and religion. He refers to Faraday who, he states, "did not attempt to reconcile science and religion as some do," but "between them placed a wall so high that once on either side he could see nothing that lay on the other." Now the inference the essayist would have us draw from this is, that Christian believers must act on this principle if they would hold their faith. If he means that the Christian welcomes facts from the spiritual and moral sphere as readily as he does those from the material, we are not ashamed to admit it, and therein the Christian believer is truly scientific.

"The true man of science," Mr. LeSueur rightly observes, "wants to know and believe as much as possible." The Christian thinker is, we aver, according to this description, "the true man of science," for he opens his mind to receive facts from all sides, and from all sciences, and having investigated and tried them, rejects the false and holds fast the true. Now our regret is, that men who turn their attention to the material world very frequently shut themselves out from large regions of truth, and become, as in the present case, narrow, one-sided and unscientific. To the Christian thinker there is no wall between science and religion. There is no conflict between science and religion, and there is no

and beliefs of the religion of Jesus Christ. It seems to me that this essayist has yet to catch the full meaning of that injunction which lies at the basis of the Christian's liberty of investigation, "Prove all things; hold fast that which is good."

#### MIRACLES AND REVEALED RELIGION THE REAL ISSUE.

Mr. LeSueur will, I am sure, not say I have misinterpreted him if I hold that the bent and design of his argument is against miracles and revealed religion. The essayist states, and truly, that the issue between the Bishop and himself is not with regard to the abstract doctrines of God and Immortality, but on the question of Christianity as a supernatural religion—a revealed religion—a "miraculous system." That this is the issue we readily admit.

It is well, however, to have it clearly understood that Evolution, as limited by known facts, does not deprive us of a single argument for the existence of God, and that the question of the supernaturalness of the Christian religion is not to be settled by a few well-worn, oft-repeated, and unworthy sneerings at the miracles of the Old Testament.

I would remind the essayist that as it is necessary, in order to establish Darwinian development, to give a sufficient explanation of the origin of life, and the origin of reason, so in order to do away with the supernaturalness of the Christian religion, he must be able to explain, on purely natural grounds, the existence of Christianity; the experiences of Christians; and the life and character of Jesus Christ. So far, all who have attempted this have landed themselves in hopeless confusion and contradiction.

Moreover, before he sweeps away the miraculous, he must show sufficient reason for discrediting the fact of Christ's resurrection. This fact has been subjected to the fiercest historical criticism; the evidence for it has been

gone over carefully by thousands of the acutest and most judicial minds—yet it survives, a clearly-attested fact of history. Christianity is ready to answer with its life for the truth of that fact. Its life is not so bound up with every objection that the unbelieving caviller may urge.

In the above I have indicated where the real issue lies, and until these central vital questions are fairly met, it is out of place for those who do not believe in Revelation to ask us to skirmish all over the ground of Old Testament history or answer whatever objections they may be pleased to raise. Once admit the fact of Christ's resurrection, and the claims of Christ as a Divine Saviour of men, and we will be prepared to review the whole course of Bible history. This surely will be admitted to be the fair and scientific mode of procedure.

The essayist pleads for "the universality of nature's laws, and the abiding uniformity of her processes."

Who does not believe in what is covered by these phrases? Only let no one import more into the phrase "nature's laws" than is in the truth it is intended to convey. We who believe in miracles have as great an interest as he has in maintaining the uniformity of nature's processes. If nature was not uniform how could the miracle be discerned? The law of gravitation is uniform. We may not suppose it suspended for a moment. I throw a stone into the air, gravitation is drawing that stone to the ground all the time. Still it ascends. I have introduced a force into nature superior to gravitation. So are we all at every movement introducing forces into nature superior but not contrary to or suspending the laws of nature. May not God, a higher force, do on a higher scale what we do ourselves on a lower. When our Saviour ascended visibly from the earth, gravitation was not suspended, but a new force superior to it was introduced. Those who plead or *insinuate* an argument against the miraculous and supernatural, on the ground

of the uniformity of nature's laws, should remember (1) the only meaning law can have in such a connection; and (2) that the word nature covers a region vastly greater than that which comes within the narrow limit of their observations; and (3) that in nature there are *free* forces, as well as *fixed* forces. Man in the exercise of his will is a free force. Gravitation is a fixed force. The will of God as a free force may be exercised at any time upon nature, producing that which we call miracle.

It will thus be easily seen that the question of miracle is not to be settled or even prejudiced by an appeal to the laws and operations of nature, but by an appeal to testimony. Miracles, therefore, whether ancient or modern are subjects for careful investigation and not for the sneers of an affected superior knowledge. Since they are not contrary to nature they are possible. To those who believe in God, they seem not only probable but necessary. To us who believe in Christ they are a blessed reality.

#### THE PROPOSED SUBSTITUTE FOR CHRISTIANITY.

Let us now look for a little at the substitute Mr. LeSueur proposes for Christianity.

"The best thing in the old theological system," he says, "is the inspiration it affords or has afforded towards right living; and this is the best fruit we can expect from the new beliefs."

Would it not have been fitting for him to have asked what it was in "the old theological system" that afforded this inspiration to right living. If he had done so he, would have found that it was those very truths which right living Christians hold so dear to-day—the very beliefs that Mr. LeSueur would have them relinquish in order that he might try if his "new beliefs" would not produce the same fruit. Do men gather grapes of thorns or figs of thistles?



With regard to Agnosticism he makes a necessary admission: "The agnostic *as such* (italics his own) has, I freely grant, no particular inspiration towards any line of conduct." It is safe to affirm that Naturalism or Positivism, the creed for which Mr. LeSueur really pleads has, to say the least, immeasurably less inspiration towards right living than that Christian faith which believes in God, and His grace to sinful man through a Divine human Redeemer. Mr. LeSueur, it is evident, would like to have an opportunity, as our friends across the line would say, to "try on" his creed. He thinks, although he does not seem very confident, that the general result might be for good. He would like to see the experiment. Let "the theological beliefs be smitten as with a blast." Let "the discourses of the clergy and the services of the church come to a stop." Then give us right of way and see how we would reconstruct society.

In carrying out this experiment Mr. LeSueur would like plenty of time. "If it takes a thousand years to bring some trees to maturity, how long may we expect it to take to mould into perfect harmony all the complex elements of human existence?" This is a curious question in simple proportion. It reminds one of the school boy's catch question: If a pound of sugar costs six pence, what will a cord of wood come to? Evolution loves long periods. Mr. LeSueur, in answer to his question, might ask for some millions of years. We answer, that by the process proposed in the essay the complex elements of society can never be harmonized. There is nothing in it that really touches the great cause of the disturbance—Sin.

There are two things, however, to which I desire to call attention in connection with this proposed substitute for the Gospel, the Church, and the preacher.

The first is that the experimenter, although professing to take only what "unaided nature" would give him, really assumes the results of Christianity as a basis on which to begin his operations. He is inclined to take, if I may so

express it, a good deal of the stock in trade, and all the laid-up profits of the "old beliefs," so far as morality, social order, and elevation of thought and sentiment are concerned. For instance, he coolly tells us that "in the ties and affections that grow out of family life we see the force that has worked, and yet is working, the elevation of our race."

What made the family life in which Mr. LeSueur was brought up, and with which he is acquainted? What has refined, elevated, and sanctified the home? Christianity! The atmosphere of Christianity has so permeated all departments of life that it will be a difficult matter to give the new creed the trial it is demanding.

I would observe in the second place that there is no motive or plea, or influence for good in this creed of naturalism which is not at the service of Christianity, whilst in the Gospel we have additional motives and influences towards right living of the greatest moment. In other words we say to Mr. LeSueur and those who think with him, we have *all* of good that you have to begin with, and very much besides that you have not.

Mr. LeSueur's preachers are to be "grave men who have studied the natural order of things until it has become luminous to their minds with lessons of highest import to mankind." These lessons they are to teach to their followers with all earnestness. But, I ask, are not these men only half armed and half taught when compared with men equally grave and earnest, and profound, who have not only studied "the natural order of things until it has become luminous to their minds with lessons of highest import," but who have also studied the word of God, and the ways of God until their minds have become luminous with the light of Truth, and who, in the spirit of love to man, begotten of Divine love, are seeking to instruct, inspire, and save mankind?

One would almost think, reading such pamphlets as the one under review, that science was a monopoly belonging to

a few who make it an excuse for Agnosticism and unbelief. Let anyone, however, visit our seats of learning in Toronto or Montreal, and he will find, that the most earnest and enthusiastic students of science and philosophy are those who are preparing themselves for the grave and increasingly responsible duties of the Christian ministry.

The essayist's misconception as to the scope of the Christian pulpit is inexcusable.

"To think that hereafter it will have to be said of the Christian clergy that a large part of their labors was devoted to making the natural sanctions of morality of none effect." Mr. LeSueur must be singularly unfortunate in the church he attends—or is he drawing upon his imagination or some vicious source of information for his facts? The "natural sanctions of morality" are enforced in the Christian pulpit of to-day with a clearness and an unction that the scientific unbeliever is not likely to equal, much less surpass, and the force of these sanctions are immeasurably increased by the teachings and inspirations and hopes of the Christian faith.

#### AN INADEQUATE ANALYSIS.

The essayist's conclusion is expressed with considerable pretentiousness. It has an air of symmetry and completeness about it that is impressive, yet is far from being so complete as it looks. It affects to be a statement of the whole situation, but it is not so. In fact, it is in this particular that the essayist is defective all through. He fails to grasp the truth of the situation. He does not see clearly the "status questionis." "There are," he says, "two great practical problems with which men of intellect may grapple to-day. One is how to *put back* the thoughts of men so that all that was credible to their forefathers may be credible to them. The other is how to *put forward* men's thoughts

so that they may harmonize with the new knowledge the world has acquired—so that a new intellectual and moral equilibrium may be established. At the first of these tasks the priesthoods are laboring with many helpers from the ranks of the laity.” The second cause has “few avowed helpers.” It is the cause advocated in the essay. I submit that neither the position Mr. LeSueur assigns to the priesthoods, nor the position Mr. LeSueur assumes for himself and a few others, fills up the whole bill. There is a third position which I believe to be the true one—the position occupied by the mass of intelligent, thoughtful reading Christians of the present day—men who have no sympathy with those who would put back men’s thoughts and no desire to have the present generation believe *all* that was deemed credible by their forefathers, and who, on the other hand have just as little sympathy with the position taken by the essayist and his friends. These are they who have examined and tested what was held credible by their forefathers, and have found the essential facts and beliefs of the Christian religion come forth as gold tried by the fire. Beliefs that they hold not as traditional, but because convinced of their intrinsic truth. With equal readiness, and equal carefulness they also examine what is presented to them by modern research and hold what appears to be established as true. These, with wider comprehension and profounder insight, and more judicial spirit than either of Mr. LeSueur’s classes, in conserving the truth, find that they must be loyal to the great verities of the Christian faith, and at the same time welcome any thought of God embodied in the facts and laws of nature. It is this class, and not the one-sided scientist, or the one-sided theologian, who, in the essayist’s phraseology “have cast aside all limited and partial views, and who are opening their minds to the full teaching of the universe.”

#### ONE-SIDED MENTAL DISCIPLINE.

That the essayist does not take an ample but a partial and one-sided view of the subject in hand is but too

apparent—that he is determined to do so is also apparent from the following: “Our minds, I believe, are just as amenable to discipline as our bodies, and there is no radical impossibility—I go further and say no serious difficulty—in keeping our thoughts down to their proper work.”

I desire to call attention to this passage, for I believe it contains the explanation of the writer's strange misconception of the views held by thoughtful Christians. He has been disciplining his mind so as to keep his thoughts *down* to their proper work—that is, according to his own showing, holding his mind back from “ontological speculations.”

The body is amenable to discipline. The mind is amenable to discipline. But discipline in this sense may be for evil or for good, the training may be in the right direction or in the wrong. The body can be disciplined, kept erect, and strengthened in muscle and nerve. The mind can be disciplined, strengthened, toned, and to a certain extent directed. You can also discipline the body so that it may be stooped and bent, and the eyes that have been made to look upon the blue heavens, the sun and the stars, may be compelled to fix their attention upon the dull earth. The mind, too, may receive a similar perverse training, so that its attention shall be mainly occupied with the facts of this material world, and the great thoughts that the heavens are telling—great thoughts of God and the soul and eternity largely shut out. “There is no radical impossibility; there may be ‘no serious difficulty’” in doing this, but it is a perversion of the mind, and a crippling of its powers. In this direction I fear the essayist has been for some time at work disciplining his mind. That he has succeeded all too well in the vitiating process is evident from the following reasoning:—

“Whether it is a tortoise or an elephant that finally upholds the world, it is for the individual believer to say; for nobody can put him in the wrong by going down to see.”

Has not the discipline gone a little too far?

I have only in the interests of truth thrown out a few criticisms upon this "Defence of Modern Thought." I would add one word as to this phrase, "modern thought." There is a great deal of assumption in it. An ambitious clique of writers adopt certain words:—"Free-thinker," "Advanced Thought" "Progressive Thought," "Modern Thought." The public are, in a measure, beguiled by the high-sounding specious terms. The glamour is being dispelled. It is becoming more and more apparent, even to the uninitiated, that the words cover but a small part of modern thought, and often cover real mental barrenness and poverty of ideas. The truest thinkers of the time, and the freest thinkers of the time belong not to these cliques.



