

acquiring a good knowledge of the epistolary style and of the running handwriting in which familiar letters are penned.

Other seminary courses will be devoted to research work in the ancient and mediæval history of Central Asia in connection with the discoveries made by modern explorers in Eastern Turkestan, and also based on the Chinese literature regarding the various branches of Chinese culture such as bronzes, stone sculptures, porcelain, pictorial art, and objects of daily life in connection with certain exhibits in the ethnographical department of the American Museum of Natural History and objects borrowed from private collections.

A NEW FIELD FOR PHILOSOPHY.

To the Editor of The Open Court :

The following narrative, while it was in the making, seemed to express a criticism, an account of an experience, a confession of faith, "an insight and a plan of action." Now that it is cold it seems rather a grotesque conglomerate. Nevertheless it may suggest as well as anything I could say, an opportunity, which it seems to me the philosophical world strangely ignores, to do the American people an immense service. I do not see how else the professional world is to come out of its emotional "spree." The workingman naturally follows where the educated lead him. Nothing is to be hoped for from the press so long as advertising rates vary in proportion to circulation—and that condition may be expected to hold. Plenty of business men see plainly that our great new social problems have no real existence but are only a false appearance due to the fact that in recent years that public sentiment for law and order on which everything we have is based, has sadly degenerated. But they would not be listened to.

THE PHILOSOPHY OF ACTION.

A few years ago a friend prevailed upon me to cut business for a bit and make a little excursion with him into the region of philosophy. I learned there, to my surprise, that the traditional firing into the air, for which the inhabitants of that region have acquired some reputation, has had the effect of creating, at last, a small but apparently very promising rain belt. A very direct route, moreover, was open to this promised and promising land, and it came to pass that after my first visit I fell into the way of making little personally conducted excursions of my own into this interesting country. Even the especially arid districts came to have a certain attraction. The remains of the extreme prototype of our statisticians I found there in those deserts; also the limit of stock-jobbing—accounts of a world whose ultimate issue was nothing but water. Airy worlds too, and fiery worlds, had been begun and had ended there before ours of the earth earthy established its present supremacy.

Many an idle hour I spent in the "Bad Lands" of that wilderness, watching the antics and contortions of grave and spectacled gentlemen who endeavored to move things without motion, or construct things out of nothing. And always there was the joy of listening to the skinless and bootstrapless fraternity—those late fit dwellers in that barren land. "Place your hand upon my arm," one of these would say, "Skin? Sure, are you? Well, I'm not. Maybe I have a skin, maybe I haven't. Positive knowledge is impossible. Never thought of that, did you? Tell you how I know—don't know, I should say. It's this way, (here he swung his arms and jumped strenuously, squirmed and twisted). See? Can't jump out of

my skin, therefore I can't say for sure that I *have* a skin. No getting around *that*, is there? How am I *sure* I can't get outside of my skin? Why—why—Great Scot! a child might know that."

And off he would go railing at the perverted "common sense" of the "plain man," giving place to others who, failing to raise themselves by their bootstraps triumphantly declared that there was no certainty that they had any bootstraps.

Wearying of these amusing performances one could always pass the time sitting on the wall at the edge of the finite lot, kicking one's heels together, and observing the efforts of the *Ding-an-sich* and the Unknowable to avoid running into each other.

But these entertainments alone could not have drawn me again and again to that strange land. In that rain belt aforesaid, the barrenness of the soil was already overcome; oases had sprung up, fertile, pleasant places where men could be found who tried to use their eyes for the purpose of seeing; men who feared nothing in heaven nor hell nor in the world between, except only blindness. From these men I learned untechnically, and as a business man may, the outline and the drift of some large new notions about life. And the point that sunk deepest into the element of speculation in my make-up was this: "Life," said one of these men "is dynamic. It is a movement, an activity, a striving of some sort; and the end of life is death; cessation of striving, or call it Nirvāna, perfection, the millennium—any one of the dozen statical synonyms you please—connotes mere nothingness."

"So it would seem," I agreed, somewhat dubiously, for the landscape was behaving strangely and my attention wandered. Fogs lifted here and there and the horizon took up its bed and walked.

"I doubt," my friend continued, "whether you can have fully understood. Does it quite sink into your mind that this amounts to saying that our ideals are not conceivably attainable? For the conception of an attained ideal, of perfection realised, is a statical conception, and a statical conception is, again, a conception of inaction, Nirvāna, death, nothingness—or tries to be." "Yes," I replied, "I caught that vaguely. Just let me think. What you say sounds true enough, but—well, things are kaleidoscoping so my mind is confused. But now—now all seems to come to order again, and— See here my friend, am I dreaming or—what? Things have settled back just as they were before, all but my standpoint, and—man alive! the horizon is *gone*."

"Yes," said my friend calmly. "Never mind, you will not miss it."

"But look here," I broke out presently, when I had gathered my wits together, "there is no room in this world of yours for ideals, and you may say what you like, but I *have* some ideals."

"Who said there is no room left for ideals?"

"Why, you did—in effect—in your incantation"

"I did not."

"You—pardon me—you—"

"I said that our ideals of life are not envisagements of nothingness; i. e., of the *end* or *goal* of striving. And I might have added that in the due course of ages men will probably find this truth in kindergarten curricula.

"We *have* ideals—we know this as well as we know anything—and these ideals are ideals of that affair of striving which we call life. They cannot therefore envisage anything but the worthy *direction* of that striving. What we have upon our hands then is the inevitable and omnipresent *It is* of our actual situation, and also the ideal sense, the sense of the *Ought to be*. The problem of life is practical

and not theoretical. There is no thought of goals nor peace nor perfection. The problem is to move the *It is* in the direction mysteriously given by our sense of the *Ought to be*. *How* and *when* such movement can, in point of fact, be effected, no man can positively say. Likewise no man can refuse to follow the only guide he has, namely, his honest private judgment as to this *how* and *when*, and escape failure in life. Worthy life is a question of *doing*—not of doing whatever we *like*, but of doing what we honestly judge is productive, on the whole, here and now, of movement in the direction which our ideals mysteriously but indubitably envisage. The *It is* and its *Ought to be* are for our form of consciousness undetachable and unmergable. And I would have you note carefully that this is so whether or not *you* or *I* approve the plan. We know this if we know anything, i. e., we know it with all the certitude of any finite knowing. And the contention that our finite knowing is not *unfinite* or absolute knowing is a monumental platitude. The eternal truth and the practical inconsequence of the agnostic contention is worth observing. If, on the contrary, the agnostic contends that he meant to deny the possibility of *finite* knowledge, he deserves no answer. He can mean a platitude or he can mean nonsense—and there is no third way. Yet again, observe that if you speak of *justice*, or of *right*, and have in mind something other than legal sanction, you can only mean the *Ought to be*; you but voice your sense of the worthy direction of effort. Justice, right, the *ought to be*, the ideal, are synonymous symbols, and symbols, I repeat, of a sense of direction and not of a state attainable. Ponder these things."

So I did, and returned to the world of business.

Strange things I found there; not new things, but a confusion of old ones. Most excellent men were sitting at home or in their offices on the days of primary elections, bemoaning the laws passed by men who had taken up the governmental reins which the "most excellent men" had cast away. "The law is unjust," they declared. "What we want is justice, fairness, right. Give us these and *then* we will go to the primary polls. Meanwhile it is too unpleasant to mix in ward politics. Besides we are very busy, and then there is the question of the Filipino's capacity for self-government that we have to determine, and the great social problems that have fallen to us in these days of our intellectual insolvency. Under such circumstances it is really too inconsiderate to ask us to go to the polls and make the law more *just* if we think it unjust as it stands."

Uncritical minds, hearing these bemoanings, and all unaware of the declared bankruptcy of the intellect, had taken up the refrain and were working tooth and nail unwittingly for social suicide. "Fairness, fairness," was the cry. "I look forward to the time," one labor leader was saying, "when peace and justice and right shall *be secured* for those who toil." In the tumult of these cries it had come to pass that the law was ignored and the non-unionist's life was imperiled and,—here was the very center and essence of the trouble—the voice of vigorous general public sentiment was *not* raised in protest. The strong sound sense for law and order upon which we have so plumed ourselves and upon which we have so relied, had, in the emergency, turned up missing.

Back I hurried to the oasis. "For God's sake," I cried to the philosophers of the dynamical view of life, "come over to the every-day world and start some neighborhood settlements among our submerging, over-worked, down-treading educated!

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