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THE PSYCHOLOGY OF LEGERDEMAIN.

BY MAX DESSOIR.

(Translated from the German by Mrs. Emily S. Boyer.)

I STILL well remember how I felt when for the first time I was present at an exhibition of the magic art. Soon after the opening of the doors I took my place and waited with beating heart a full hour for the moment when the curtain should rise upon that world of wonder. And when at last the witches' revelry began, as eggs changed into dollars, dollars transformed themselves into pocket-handkerchiefs, bird cages vanished in mid air, and empty chests dispensed an incomprehensible wealth of treasures,—then I seemed to be living in a land of dreams, far, far away from earth.

Nowadays, if one wishes to study the methods of the juggler, it may be done very easily. A number of dealers in magical apparatus will sell to you what you most desire: wooden pins, cups, rings, balls, false cards, double dollars, etc., and accompany each article with "Instructions." Books without number, from the thin sheets distributed at fairs, to elegant illustrated volumes, promise to initiate you into the secrets of the black art. But all of these books* and instructions tell only *in what a trick consists*, not *how it is done*, without ever mentioning that just the most interesting part of the art of the adept has been kept a secret, or at least revealed at a particularly high price. Apparatus and instructions do not reveal the kernel of "modern magic." When you know how it happens that a dollar disappears, you still know nothing; you may nevertheless be deceived by this trick a hundred times: and if you try the same thing exactly according to directions, with that alone you will not obtain the least result.

That which makes prestidigitation an art of deception, is not its technical appliances, but its psychological kernel. The working out in the realm of the senses of certain capacities of the soul is something incomparably more difficult than any finger-skill or machinery. To prove this fact and analyse it theoretically, forms the theme of the following lines. First,

however, I will make the reader acquainted with the company into whose deeds and doings I propose to introduce him.

1.

The history of jugglery forms a significant chapter in the long history of human illusion. From the rise of the Egyptian priesthood down to the beginning of the Middle Ages extends the first epoch, in which the arbitrary accomplishment of apparently impossible results was accompanied with pretensions to superhuman skill; stragglers with such a purposely deceptive aim have maintained themselves up to the present time, as spiritualistic mediums. To a second epoch belong the conjurors of the Middle Ages and later times; these confess that their tricks are performed by natural methods. Finally, the third era dates from the opening of our own century: then for the first time, jugglers appeared on the stage, they were taken into society and acquired a certain culture, they omitted from their programme all conjurors' methods and worked with cards, gold-pieces, pocket-handkerchiefs, and the like. Naturally the conjurors did not on this account disappear from the scene, but they withdrew into the villages, and had no association with their better established professional comrades; just as it is with us at present. Only occasionally did one of these nomads advertise himself. Thus the Signor Castelli, who in the second decade of this century passed through Europe with a travelling troupe, excited attention everywhere by the statement that he would devour a living man. The solution of the puzzle was that the brute would actually begin to bite his victim in the arm, whereupon the latter took his leave in the speediest manner imaginable, and thus the execution of the experiment was rendered impossible.

The better class of performers, mostly French and Italian, called themselves *physiciens* or *escamoteurs*; the term *prestidigitateur* originated with Jules de Rovère. Rovère belonged to the leaders of that old school in which also Olivier, Préjeau, Brazy, Comus, Chalons, Adrien père, Courtois, and Comte attained great prominence—not to speak of Lichtenberg's famous Pinetti.

The most distinguished of these was indisputably

* As a noted example may be mentioned Hoffmann's *Modern Magic*, (London, 1885) a book from which I have borrowed many important statements.

Comte. French from head to toe, he accomplished extraordinary things in tasteful form and a delightful manner. One of his delusions, performed for a small group of spectators, bore the stamp of a deception carried out with the finest humor. He declares in a joking manner that he will transform all the ladies present. Naturally, therefore, surprise and merriment among the gentlemen. Comte quiets them with the assertion that he will arrange everything to their satisfaction, then grasps in the air with his empty hands and brings out of space a handful of beautiful roses. He goes on, "*J'avais promis d'escamoter et de métamorphoser toutes ces dames; pouvais-je choisir une forme plus gracieuse et plus aimable? En vous métamorphosant toutes en roses, n'est-ce pas, mesdames, offrir la copie au modèle? n'est-ce pas aussi vous escamoter pour vous rendre à vous mêmes? dites-moi, messieurs, n'ai-je pas réussi?*" Now he begins the distribution: "*Mademoiselle, voici une rose que vous avais fait rougir de jalousie.*" Before another dainty maiden the flower changes into the ace of hearts, and the gallant magician fittingly adds: "*Vous lez vous, madame, mettre la main sur votre cœur. . . Vous n'avez qu'un cœur, n'est-il pas vrai? . . . Je vous demande pardon de cette question indiscrete, mais elle était nécessaire, car bien que vous n'avez qu'un cœur, vous pourriez les posséder tous.*"

Such word-plays are told by the hundreds of Comte. To be sure, in our day when we have neither *salon* nor *conversazione*, the old-fashioned manners with their delicate perfume are very seldom interesting, and we even look in astonishment upon the juggler who expresses himself in too clever forms of speech. Besides, the joke readily turns the attention from the object itself, the trick, and moreover, sets the audience into a commotion which is often little to be desired.

The names Philippe and Torrini mark a considerable advance in the development of our art. Torrini especially, possessed such an extraordinary knack in the manipulation of cards, and such an incredible boldness in execution, that the public irresistibly yielded to him its unqualified admiration. His piquet trick was simply unparalleled. In other matters too he displayed remarkable daring. Being an Italian nobleman whom adverse circumstances had thrust into the calling of prestidigitation, at one time while he was in Rome, he was invited to give a performance before the Pope. By chance on the preceding day he saw at a watch-maker's a costly watch of which the owner assured him that it was the only counterpart of the famous watch of Cardinal X . . . , and had just arrived from Paris the day before. Torrini bought the time-piece for the respectable sum of twelve hundred francs after he had bound the watch-maker to secrecy and had assured himself that the Cardinal would be present at his performance. At the close of his entertainment

he now ventured the following stroke. He asked for some very expensive object and if possible for one whose like did not exist in the world. The result of this request was that the Cardinal, at the command of the Pope, though with evident reluctance, handed over his watch to the artist. Then Torrini took a mortar and pestle, and to the horror of the spectators, shattered the valuable treasure into a thousand fragments. The Cardinal averred in a trembling voice that there could be no question of a mistake here, as he recognised the remnants, piece for piece; in reality, however, it was the recently purchased counterpart that had been destroyed. The performer took advantage of this moment of excitement, to slip the genuine watch, unobserved, into the pocket of the Pope, and as soon as quiet was restored he challenged the audience to designate to him some person who by no possibility could be a confederate of his. As he desired, all pointed to Pius VII. "Very well," he continued, as he made a few mysterious motions, "I now will that the watch be restored, and be found in the pocket of His Holiness." The Pope, with every appearance of entire disbelief, reached into his pocket and, red with embarrassment, drew out the watch and handed it to the Cardinal as quickly as if he feared he might burn his fingers on the uncanny object. It is easy to imagine what an excitement this bold stroke created in Rome. Torrini never had occasion to regret his expensive but original advertisement.

In the matter of advertising, however, no one was more ingenious than the great prestidigitateur, Anderson, "the celebrated Anderson, the great wizard of the North." Once, in the forties, he sent to all London butter-dealers wooden molds, on which were carved his name, "titles," and the hour of his entertainment, with the request that the recipients should have these stamps printed for a certain period on the butter they sold. In consideration of the fact that eventually every one finds it necessary to eat butter, the idea certainly deserves imitation. Another time he offered a silver vase as a prize for the best joke which should be made during the intermission. Any one had a right to relate a joke, and the public must make the decision by the strength of the applause. But that was not enough: Anderson had all these more or less worthy witticisms stenographically recorded, and sold them in shilling pamphlets. "The great wizard" knew quite well how willing most people are to see themselves in print. Of the approximate extent of his income from this source, we may form some opinion when we learn that each pamphlet contained over a thousand jokes.*

Whether Philadelphia, Döbler, and Bosco were

* Compare *Confidences de Robert-Houdin. Une vie d'artiste. Théâtre et prestidigitation.* 2d ed., Paris, 1861, Vol. II, p. 144.

really so superior as one would suppose from their reputation remains a question. Of Bosco we know almost certainly to the contrary. He spared no means to accomplish his purpose, and in his brutality went so far that it was often necessary to kill doves, not apparently, but really, on the open stage. He used every opportunity to display his craft; in the stage-coach, at the table d'hôte, in the café and salon, in short, everywhere he performed his little feats. Last, but not least, his odd but euphonious name helped to make him quickly popular. To the same circumstances, a decade later, Bellachini owed his fame.

But all we have named, and a countless host of unnamed, were overtopped, head and shoulders, by Robert-Houdin.

Robert-Houdin has related the events of his life in a book, which, by reason of its fascinating, varied contents, and its unpretentiousness of style, forms very agreeable reading. He has, with wonderful frankness, exposed the secrets of the order whose chief master he was, and exhaustively described all his mechanical, technical, and, especially, his electro-technical devices. While most jugglers are jugglers and nothing else, Robert-Houdin must be described as a man of polite education, a graceful writer, and a technical genius. Even when a child, he worked upon the instruments in the workshop of his father, a watch-maker. This early love of everything mechanical grew into a passion of strength, such as book lovers feel for manuscripts, collectors for coins, and players for cards. The boy investigated everything that was complex and was always attempting to repair or construct something. He also had some wholly original ideas. At boarding-school he devised the following means to awaken at the proper time. He bound a cord to the great toe of his right foot, carried it through his half-open window out to the garden gate, and fastened it there, so that at the opening of the gate it would be violently pulled. Thus, in the morning, when the old servant opened the resisting gate, our little Robert found it necessary to jump quickly out of bed, and was thus in every case effectually awakened. From such primitive devices to his famous "enchanted villa" was indeed a great distance, but the former were related to the latter just as any promising beginning to a happy ending. The country seat of the retired magician attracted universal attention in its time; there were electric wires from cellar to garret, mysterious automatons haunted every nook and corner, descending floors and secret panels connected the rooms, bells, traps, and self-acting revolvers kept thieves at a distance—in a word, it was a truly "enchanted house."

It is easy to suppose that such a mind should feel itself irresistibly drawn to the allurements of the black

art. A mountebank, a fair-ground performer of German descent, gave the ten-year-old boy his first notion of jugglery, and a book later informed him concerning some of the more important tricks. How he afterwards continued to instruct himself, and, finally, to the dismay of his family, entered on the career of *escamoteur*, we read in detail in his biography. Enough, that one day, on the Paris bulletin-boards, the following hand-bill glittered:

AUJOURD'HUI JEUDI, 3 JUILLET 1845.

PREMIÈRE REPRÉSENTATION

DES

SOIRÉES FANTASTIQUES

DE

ROBERT-HOUDIN.

AUTOMATES, PRESTIDIGITATION, MAGIE.

The automatons, however, played a very subordinate part. Robert thought very rightly that people did not come to the magician to see apparatus perform; true prestidigitation should not be the work of instrument-makers, but of the performer himself. For the same reason he introduced a very important reform. He abandoned the long, draped table formerly in use and substituted small, bare side-tables. Likewise he threw into the lumber-room the eccentric costumes of other *escamoteurs* and appeared in a simple frock-coat—a Talma of his art. He also gave another form to the *boniment*, or harangue, which accompanied the tricks, always seeking so to compose it as to give each feat the semblance of truth. Above all, Robert-Houdin laid the greatest stress upon carrying the deception to its greatest completeness. Here is an illustration: The artist devised the trick of suspending a person from a pole, apparently without support, (though in reality he was fastened by a corset-like halter,) at a time when all the world was talking about ether. The ether, accordingly, he introduced into his performance by holding to the person's nose a flask of this substance and apparently narcotising him. The flask was really empty, but behind the stage at the same moment a few drops of ether were spilled, so that a strong odor penetrated the room and considerably heightened the illusion. The whole arrangement of his performances abounded in such delicate touches.

During the intermission Robert distributed an elegantly designed miniature newspaper, whose contents changed from evening to evening. The title read: *Cagliostro. Passe-temps de l'entre-acte (ne jamais lire passe-t-en)*. *Ce journal, paraissant le soir, ne peut être lu que par des gens éclairés . . . le rédacteur prévient qu'il n'est pas timbré (le journal)* . . . In one of the numbers, under the head of "Faits divers," occurred the

following dainty bon mot: "*Le Ministre de l'Intérieur ne recevra pas demain, mais le Ministre des Finances recevra tous les jours . . . et jours suivants.*" The whole was enclosed in a ribbon band with the following explanation: "*À M. et Mme. * * *, demeurant ici. Votre abonnement, finissant ce soir, le gérant du journal vous prie de le renouveler demain, si vous ne voulez pas le voir expirer (l'abonnement).*"

But the history of his triumphs would fill a volume. Before emperors and kings, before the workmen at Manchester, before African savages, this wonderful man performed his feats of magic, always with brilliant success. Nor did success forsake him at Berlin. He performed at Kroll's from the last of October, 1853, to the middle of January, 1854, certainly an extraordinary number of entertainments for the conditions of that time. As proof of the attractive power of this magician *par excellence*, two journalistic testimonies are given herewith. An anonymous writer in the *Spenerischen Zeitung* says, concerning the first "soirée fantastique" of Mr. Robert-Houdin, prestidigitateur of the *Palais Royal* of Paris: "Mr. Houdin is king of escamoteurs, emperor of jugglers, the chief of magicians. Had Horace known Mr. Houdin he would surely have given up his stupid *nil admirari* creed. Although the gold disappears in his hands more quickly than in many a state's treasury, still one may be at rest, for after a few moments it comes to light in the pockets of its former possessors, without having suffered diminution. We should never have believed it, had we not seen it. The public will do well to inform themselves personally, else they will think we are relating Munchausen stories and fables; but all this actually took place in the year 1853 at Berlin, and at Kroll's, whereof each and every one may learn for himself for ten silver groschen."

The dreaded Rellstab published a hymn in the "Voss," a few portions of which may be of interest. "Now at last I may again converse! now at last I am permitted to make my appearance in public places, since I have now seen him, the man of public admiration, the cornerstone of the day's interest, the magnetic pole of the air-currents, the—no more! Of whom can I speak but of the great magician Robert Houdin,* who not only charms, but enchants, even the reporters and critics, formerly as impossible as the quadrature of a circle." Rellstab then describes a few of the artist's tricks, as follows: "He wraps up a lovely turtle-dove in a sheet of silken paper; we see it struggling there, he breathes upon it, and—a breath of air is all there is within the silken paper! Gone is our little dove through space. 'Oh, we have often seen the like before.' I believe you; but how? You never

saw it like this before. . . . I will relate to you a fable that is a true history. The magician graciously requested a handkerchief and ring from a beautiful hand, wrapped the ring in the handkerchief, and tied it carefully into a little package. An egg, a lemon, and an orange were placed before us, and the choice given in which of the three the handkerchief and ring should be found. The Right cried, 'In the orange'; the Left, 'In the egg'; the Centre, 'In the lemon.' Oh, why is not Mr. Houdin made a minister? How he could unify the most divergent parties! He would have settled (even if he had not answered) the Oriental question at a cup of after-dinner coffee! 'Nothing is easier,' he replied, 'than the harmonising of these three wishes. I shall put the egg in the lemon, and the lemon in the orange, so shall all three be in one, and the handkerchief in all three.' And the thing was actually and truly done."

Since Robert-Houdin the art of sleight-of-hand has had no new reformer. It travels still, for the most part, in the same paths as forty years ago, and seeks to gain a new impetus by a pretended usage of spiritualism and mind-reading. There are no longer magicians who command the entire field with equal skill. The two best living representatives, M. Hermann of Berlin, now of New York, and Cazeneuve of Marseilles, are very good only in certain fields. The former excels in hand tricks with cards and dollars, and the latter in card tricks. And of the thousand others it may be said that they perform well, but not that they perform excellently. The black art is going to ruin, like many another art and isolated craft. It waits anxiously for its Messiah.

Beyond mere technical knowledge, which any one with proper patience may acquire, what is there then needful in order that a person may become a good sleight-of-hand artist?

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

EXPERIENCE.

EXPERIENCE is the effect of events upon sentient beings. The condition of experience is memory. Grant that in a world of changes sentient beings are possessed of memory and the result will be exactly what is commonly understood by "experience."

That experience is the sole source of human knowledge has been doubted by three classes of men only: (1) by mystics, (2) by believers in supernaturalism, and (3) by Kant and strict Kantians.

Mystics believe that there exists some kind of inspiration which bestows knowledge at a glance and in full completeness as it can otherwise be acquired only imperfectly and piecemeal by many years of experience. This extraordinary source of knowledge is called "intuition," because mystics describe their ecstasies as

* The real name of the artist was Robert; the family name of his wife, Houdin, he first added in the forties by legal permission.

visions. We state simply a tautology when we say that knowledge derived in a mystical way by intuition is "visionary" in the literal sense of the word; but the intuitionist's "visionary" is now so discredited that the very word has become a synonym for the fantastic, the unreal, the fabulous, the chimerical, the impossible.

Believers in supernaturalism declare that some truths were not acquired in the natural way but by the special intercession of an extramundane God. They regard "revelation" as a better and more reliable source of knowledge than experience.

Two kinds of truth can be distinguished which, according to the statement of supernaturalists, were acquired by special revelation: first, such moral truths as love of enemies and self-sacrifice for ideals higher than self, and secondly, mysterious statements concerning extramundane affairs. The former have been proved to be of natural growth; for they have been developed without any supernatural intercession among people who are denoted by Israelitic, Christian, and Mohammedan supernaturalists as gentiles, pagans, and *giaours* respectively.

The maturest and most careful investigations of ethical science show that all vices lead to destruction, so that the noblest and most elevated virtues are exactly that which, according to natural laws, possesses the power of preservation. Moral truths, accordingly, are not unattainable, and if it were true that Jews, Christians, and Moslems did not and could not naturally develop their moral ideas, which in a less complete form were naturally developed among other nations, this would prove only the mental or moral inferiority of their races.

The second class of supernatural truths, i. e., mystical statements concerning extramundane affairs, are partly vague and partly absurd, so that they can neither be explained nor understood: they have simply to be believed. And this is the opinion of the supernaturalists themselves. St. Augustine says: *Credo quia absurdum*.

Kant is neither a mystic nor a supernaturalist; yet he objects to the proposition that experience is the sole source of knowledge, and Kant's objection is characteristic of his entire philosophy—indeed, it forms its starting point.

Let us briefly review the antecedents of Kant's ideas.

Locke followed but the old tradition of philosophical thought as handed down from Aristotle, as insisted upon by Bacon, as held by Spinoza, that experience is the sole source of knowledge. "Our observation," Locke said, "employed either about external sensible objects, or about the internal operations of our mind, perceived and reflected on by ourselves, is that which

supplies our understanding with *all* the materials of thinking." (Italics are ours.) "Essay on Human Understanding," II, ch. i.

Locke discards the theory of innate ideas proposed by Descartes and compares the mind to a *tabula rasa*, a white sheet of paper, and all ideas are written upon it through sense-experience. His theory is contained in the sentence: *Nihil est in intellectu quod non antea fuerit in sensu*.

The weakness of Locke's system is apparent. If sense-impressions are comparable to the writing on a sheet of paper, whence is the mind that receives these sense-impressions. It may be granted that nothing is *in* the intellect but that which has been before in the senses. This explains how the intellect can acquire knowledge by impressions, but it does not explain the intellect itself. Leibnitz accordingly extended the sentence in this form: *Nihil est in intellectu quod non antea fuerit in sensu, NISI INTELLECTUS IPSE*. (Nothing is in the intellect which was not before in the senses—except the intellect itself.)

This weakness in Locke's system became apparent in his followers, especially in Hume. Hume granted that all ideas might be resolved into impressions except one, viz., that of necessary connection. We meet with "constant conjunctions" in experience, but not with necessity, and thus the basis of all science, the law of cause and effect, remains a mere assumption. This consideration made of Hume a sceptic.

Kant was aroused from his dogmatic slumber, as he states himself, by Hume's scepticism. But Kant saw what Hume had overlooked: that there are many more conjunctions to which we attribute necessity; foremost among which are mathematical theorems, the certainty of which was never doubted even by Hume.

Mathematical truths are not products of sense-impressions. Mathematical reasoning is purely formal. The sense-element is carefully eliminated from them. And yet we have ideas of purely formal reasoning, and these ideas are not only perfectly clear, but have also been regarded since times immemorial as the model of all reliability. We do not hesitate to attribute to them universality and necessity.

Thus Kant concludes that there is another source of knowledge, which cannot be resolved into and which does not rise out of the experience of sense-impressions. This other source is the pure understanding or pure reason.* Kant's "Critique of Pure Reason" was the result of this suggestion received from Hume.

We have now to call attention to the ambiguity in which the term "experience" is used. Locke's usage of the word reflection is not clear. He might have

* Kant fails to make a clear distinction between reason and understanding.

accepted our definition of experience, viz.: as the effect of events upon sentient beings; but the school to which he belonged regarded the sensational element of impressions, caused by these events, as sufficient to explain the rise of ideas. Hence the name Sensationalism. Hume and Kant followed Locke and the so-called school of sensationalism in the usage of the term "experience." Kant defines experience or empirical cognition as "a cognition which determines an object by means of perception," meaning thereby the sensory element of sensations, contrasting it to the formal cognition of mathematics, arithmetic, logic, and other sciences of pure reason.

Kant unfortunately introduced two terms which have proved very inadequate to express his views. He called cognition by sensuous impressions *a posteriori*, and cognition by pure reason *a priori*.

The term *a priori* gave much offence and produced a great confusion, for Kant's philosophy was considered by many of his adherents and adversaries as a revival of the old and antiquated "innate ideas" of Descartes. That this is not so is evident from the first sentence of Kant's "Critique of Pure Reason." Kant agrees with Locke that all knowledge "begins with experience"; he only denies that all knowledge "rises from experience."

If by experience is to be understood the sense-element of experience only, it is quite natural that purely formal knowledge cannot be resolved into, or explained as arising from, experience. Experience, however, as we use the term, is not restricted to the sense-element alone, but comprises the whole effect of events upon sentient beings. The sense-impressions of experience possess certain shapes; they stand in relations among themselves; they are not merely sensory, but contain also a formal element. And this formal element of experience is not less, but rather more important than the sense-element.

At a certain stage of the evolution of mind, a sentient being learns to think in such abstracts of purely formal ideas as numbers. Numbers are abstracts of pure form. They are derived from experience, i. e. not from the sensory features of experience, not from experience as Kant uses the term, but from the formal element of experience. By counting, we construct a system of numbers which soon becomes a most essential part of the mind as a schedule of reference.

When stating that my table has four legs, I do not derive the idea "four" by a direct abstraction from the entire sense-impression called table, but by referring to that system of numbers which exists in the mind as a part of the mind; which existed *a priori* to the present experience, i. e. long before I saw this table.

The same is true of other pure forms. As numbers have naturally risen by creating an abstract sphere, so

all the other formal sciences are domains of wholesale abstraction. Mathematics starts with purely formal space-relations and constructs of them systems which in the same way as numbers serve as models and references. Logic starts with purely formal thought-relations and constructs such frameworks of thought as the categories, which serve as mental shelves or pigeon holes for an orderly and systematic arrangement of ideas.

According to Kant, sense-experience by itself is blind, and formal cognition by itself is empty; and indeed perfect knowledge would not be possible if experience consisted either of its sense-elements alone or of the formal alone. A perfect knowledge of realities becomes possible only by a coöperation of both. The formal and the sensory are the web and woof of knowledge.

Kant saw that the formal and the material (viz., the sense-element of experience) are inseparable in the subjective realm of thought, but he did not see that they are also inseparable in the objective realm of real existence. He regarded the formal element of real things as added to the material by the mind, as if formless things could exist. No wonder that things became unknowable to Kant.

Kant is a very great philosopher; he is a giant among thinkers. Nevertheless, it is true that his great fame was not so much due to his greatness, but to his mistakes. He proposed a problem to mankind which has kept philosophical minds busy ever since. His ability consisted in seeing the problem, not in solving it. His own solution, or rather lack of solution, (for he never inquired into the origin of what he termed the *a priori*), cast a glamor of mysticism over his philosophy which had not been intended by him but proved a source of great fascination to all those minds who take delight in the chiaroscuro of a systematic or apparently systematic ignorance. And this class of thinkers—the philosophasters of mankind—are still in the majority. Their applause, like that of the galleries in the theatre, counts most.

After this exposition of the objections made to the doctrine that experience is the sole source of human knowledge, we need hardly add that modern science and philosophy are to be based upon experience.

No other source has as yet been proved reliable. That which Kant calls the *a priori* is a systematic construction of the formal elements of experience. The visionary knowledge of intuition has been entirely abandoned, and the theory of a supernatural revelation is an erroneous interpretation of the religious experiences of past ages. God reveals himself to mankind in exactly these data of experience; and religion will not be free from pagan elements until this truth is recognised.

CURRENT TOPICS.

WILL my genial friend Robin Goodfellow of the *Newcastle Chronicle* allow me to say a few words to him in a private and confidential way? In the *Weekly Chronicle* of March 4th he complains that a bill was presented in the House of Representatives last February, dividing the Dominion of Canada into states, "with suitable and exact boundaries, and with Representatives in Congress," and many other things, all in anticipation of the admission of said province of Canada into the American Union. Adopting our own idiom, he inquires if this is not a little "too previous"; and he thinks that before proceeding to apportion Canada, the House of Representatives ought to have required at least "some evidence that there is a disposition on the part of the people of Canada to join their fate with that of the United States." Here the House of Representatives is made responsible for the eccentricity of a single member, and this I rise to complain of as unfair. "I wonder," says Robin, "what our American cousins would say if a member of the House of Commons were to introduce a bill providing for the government of Maine, Massachusetts, and other parts of New England, when the inhabitants of these sections shall express a desire to become part of the Dominion." Well, we should advise him to wrap himself up in his ears, and rest. We should give sympathy, instead of censure, to the House of Commons, and we should wonder how such an inverted statesman ever got out of the lunatic asylum and into Parliament. Will our English cousins charitably look upon our feeble-minded statesmen in the same way?

* * *

In a Chicago paper of this morning I find an editorial article, entitled "Clearing Up a Muddle," and the clearing up is done by stirring up the sediment from the bottom and making the muddle a little thicker than it was. A correspondent in Indiana asked the paper if it was true that the fifty cents merely admitted the visitor to the grounds of the World's Fair, and if it was true that an additional fee was to be charged for admission to each building. In answer, the editor with some irritation says: "It would be idle to search for the origin of this grotesque rumor. Of course, it has no foundation. All the exhibition buildings and all the exhibits under the control of the World's Fair directors are to be seen for the one fee of fifty cents." He then proceeds to lay a very broad and firm foundation for the rumor, in this way: "The Irish, German, Turkish, and Moorish villages, etc., being concessions to individuals and corporations, paid for by private capital, and managed by their owners, are no parts of the World's Fair proper, and these of course take fees from persons who visit them." This explanation may be sufficient, but it says enough to justify the "rumor" that came to the man in Indiana. It shows that there are to be several exhibitions on the grounds, some of them under the control of the Directors, and others not. Besides, there may be more exceptions in the "etc." than in the main statement. It reminds me of the showman who came to Marbletown with a panorama, which he advertised as the "transit of Venius, showing that beautiful planet revolving round the sun in the company of Mercury, Mars, etc." It will be noticed that all the other heavenly bodies were in the "etc."

* * *

One evening a famous temperance lecturer was arrested for being drunk and disorderly. Reproached next morning for the variance between his professions and his practice, he excused himself by saying that although he was religiously opposed to the use of intoxicating liquors, he was not bigoted on that subject. This fable will apply to the Republican convention which met in Chicago yesterday and nominated a candidate for the office of mayor. The Democrats nominated their candidate several days ago, and ever since they did so, they have been subjected to a great deal of patriotic censure, which, by the way, appears to be deserved

Their candidate has been assailed as the patron and protector of the law-breaking element, the centre of a corrupt "ring," the genius of the "gang," who, if elected, is to make the city hall a sanctuary for the criminal classes. The Republicans having played that inspiring tune for about three weeks with fifty variations, found out all of a sudden that the "law-breaking element" was very large in Chicago, and that it would be just as well to conciliate it for election purposes. So, in order to show that while denouncing law-breaking in the abstract they are not bigoted, they adopted the following resolution:

"That while all ordinances should be enforced, with the view to the suppression of vice, the executive department should construe the laws in the spirit of tolerance, with due regard to the cosmopolitan character of the population of Chicago, so that the customs and habits of the various peoples be not interfered with, nor their personal liberty and individual rights impaired."

Surely nothing can be more liberal than that; and if the "various peoples" who occupy Chicago think there is not enough "tolerance" in it, let them offer such amendments as they desire, and the platform will be made more elastic still. The mayor and the police will respect "the customs and habits of the various peoples," when they happen to run against the statutes of the city. In that case, the laws and ordinances will be "interfered with," but not the customs and the habits. If any man in the city has an unlawful habit it is to be charged up to his nationality, and the frailty itself placed under the protection of a plenary indulgence, granted by the mayor. The resolution is a promise that if the candidate shall be elected, he will "construe the laws in a spirit of tolerance," the meaning of which is that they will not be impartially enforced, and some of them not enforced at all.

* * *

Reading a newspaper a few days ago, I found therein a very attractive advertisement to the effect that any person able to prove that Simpson's extract of cocoa is injurious to health, would receive ten packages of the extract free. This temptation reminded me that in my legal practice I had known men to commit suicide for the benefit of their wives and children, the purpose being to cheat the life-insurance companies. This excellent and pious plan usually failed, and all that the bereaved families got out of it was a lawsuit, the companies refusing to pay, for the reason that suicide broke the policy. A cheap and easy way to "shuffle off this mortal coil," without arousing the suspicion of the insurance companies, is to prove the deleterious nature of that extract, get ten packages of it gratis, and use a portion of it every morning as a slow poison, under the pretence that it is a breakfast beverage. Ten packages would probably be enough to finish anybody, leaving a clear gain to the family of the insurance money, less funeral expenses; and even these may be saved by careful economy, for I find in the Chicago papers the following liberal offer: "Funeral expenses of all persons using Chippewa Spring water exclusively will be paid gratuitously by the Chippewa Spring Water Company, 21 Quincy street." Considering how very expensive it is to die since the passage of the McKinley bill, this generous proposal is worthy the attention of all economical householders. I have ordered a barrel of "Chippewa" for my own use.

* * *

A very aristocratic dinner was given on the 16th of March by the very aristocratic Hamilton Club of Brooklyn, to Mr. Tracy of New York, who filled the office of Secretary of the Navy in the late administration, and who has just retired from that important place. "By a happy coincidence," as the paper joyfully said, "the new Secretary of the Navy, Hilary A. Herbert, was enabled to be present," paying a compliment gracefully non-partisan, and in harmony with the spirit of the banquet. Of course, there was a liberal exchange of civilities, in the line of mutual admiration between the two Secretaries, but that sort of thing, unless it is "too much done," smooths the rough edges of social intercourse,

and adds to the charm of life. Wealth, luxury, rank, elegance, and eloquence graced the banquet, and every guest was in the full dress uniform of gentility, yet the speeches forced once more into prominence the humiliating question: "Is the United States a gentleman?" Shall we never learn, while respecting ourselves, to respect the feelings of others? Where is that gentle courtesy and sign of high breeding which often flashes from the instinct of a common laborer, and which many men of rank and money seem utterly unable to show? Can we never meet around the banquet board without boasting, like prize-fighters in their drink, that we are able to whip somebody or anybody? It was entirely proper for Mr. Tracy to boast that he had built a navy, but the comparisons he made might have come out of the "forecastle," they showed such lack of magnanimity and good taste. Selecting Germany for objective illustration, and caring nothing for the feelings of the Germans at the table, Mr. Tracy said:

"I am aware that this is the first public announcement of our superiority to Germany, but the statement is made not unadvisedly, but after careful comparison of the two navies, ship by ship. From such comparison it appears that with the ships which constitute the fighting force of the two governments the United States can throw in any one direction at a single discharge 31,000 pounds of metal against 25,000 pounds by Germany. In speed and efficiency our cruisers far surpass those of the German navy."

Then follows some hundred-ton bombast to the effect that "ship by ship there is nothing in the world superior to the ships of recent American design and construction." "I know this is good poetry," said an author to an editor, "for I wrote it myself." "I know," says Mr. Tracy, "that there is 'nothing in the world' superior to our ships, for I built them." The explanation of all this glorification of ourselves comes from that "Rule Britannia" spirit of defiance, which we have inherited from England, and which we have expanded to the continental size of the American republic. But there is a proper place for it. Without offending anybody a party of Englishmen roystering at a tavern may proclaim in song, for the patriotic encouragement of one another, that their nation "rules the waves"; but we may be sure of this, that Sir Joseph Porter, K. C. B., when he was at the head of the Queen's navee, or afterwards, would never at a banquet, in a speech made for publication, direct the attention of the nations to the naval weakness of a friendly power. M. M. TRUMBULL.

CORRESPONDENCE.

THE LYNCHING AT PARIS, TEXAS.

To the Editor of The Open Court:

I must protest against the article of Dr. Oswald, defending the burning and torture of the negro criminal at Paris, Texas. I do not believe that this crime against Texas was due to any political interest, but was simply due to a false standard of ethics, which is common in the less civilized parts of the South and the Far West. If the law is not able to take care of such people, as the negro who was burned, then the country is uncivilized. But I suppose that the law is perfectly able to do right for the people in that part of Texas. I believe that such acts are due in this, as in most other such cases, to a desire to gratify a disposition to sanguinary cruelty, which exists in some people of the baser sort. Such people take pleasure in committing a murder, if they think they can do so without punishment. This is the real motive behind lynchings. The crime, or supposed crime, of the prisoner is the excuse, but it is evident that a desire to do justice is not the principal motive in such acts. Governor Hogg did well to denounce the crime of Paris, and the prosecuting attorney would have the support of the civilized people of the United States in seeing that its perpetrators are punished. As to the town, the sooner its name is changed the better, if it is to remain on the map.

Yours very truly,

E. D. COPE.

NOTES.

German, gymnastics, singing, sewing, drawing, and modelling in clay have been branded as "fads," the latter being honored by the special name of mud-pie making.

It is most ridiculous to regard the training of the voice and hand, the drill of the body as a useless specialty that can be dispensed with. Still more ridiculous is the statement that the city of Chicago has no means to pay for these disciplines. If we have no means for these important branches of education, let us rather abolish our whole public school system, for in that case our public schools will soon be degraded into pauper schools.

Chicago is over a third German, perhaps more, and it is highly advisable that the children of German parents should receive some good instruction in the language of their parents. This is necessary lest parents and children be estranged, which would destroy in their homes the wholesome moral influence of the former upon the latter; and it will be beneficial, for the German spirit will in this way be preserved, and many good qualities of the German nationality will thus be introduced into American life.

The teaching of German should, as a matter of course, be conducted with discretion. German should not be obligatory to such an extent as to force it upon those to whom it would be a burden, although there are instances among children of Anglo-American and Irish descent who gladly avail themselves of the opportunity to learn German. Nor should German be taught with a view of supplanting the English. Aspirations of this kind will not have and do not find any sympathy in leading German circles. There is no danger that the German language will crowd out or suppress the English.

The mere idea of regarding such important branches of education as fads is folly. How much wiser it would be to reduce or drop the monotonous spelling lessons. Spelling might easily be taught in a more ingenious and more systematic way than is done at present. Spelling, as taught at present, is not a fad, but a nuisance.

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