THE MARTYRDOM OF ST. SEBASTIAN.
Frontispiece to The Open Court.
THE RELIGION OF BIOLOGY.¹
ITS TRUTH AND ITS SUPERSTITIONS.

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"Nec vero superstitione tollenda religio tollitur."
Cicero, De divinatione, II, 72.

I.

"A logical society of atheists is impossible because the idea of absolute responsibility is a necessary social error."

This declaration uttered some years ago by Felix Le Dantec in his work Athéisme somewhat scandalized a large number of freethinkers who claim to conciliate their rejection of deity with faith in the obligatory character of duty. At the same time it greatly delighted the opponents of independent ethics, whereas in fact it has nothing to do with ethics which relies solely upon reason to indicate the rules of conduct to be followed by individuals and by societies. But the point is to know whether the very foundation of the idea of duty does not disappear with the notions of obligation and responsibility which M. Le Dantec declares to be correlative with faith in God and destined to the same extinction.

First of all we must inquire whether the philosophy of the eminent biologist is really as anti-religious as it appears to be and whether it is not open to the suspicion of destroying one religion for the sole purpose of replacing it by another. In his lecture de-

¹Translated by Lydia G. Robinson from the Revue de l'Université de Bruxelles.
livered at Brussels at the last jubilee of our university and published in its Revue, he informs us himself that biology assumes in his eyes “all the attractiveness, but likewise all the despotism of a religion,” and he adds this comment: “The chief end of religion is to teach man what he is, whence he comes, whither he is going. Biology which has for its object the study of life, ought more than any other science to satisfy our religious curiosity.”

M. Le Dantec moreover is far from being the only one to proclaim this new gospel. There are many writers—less perhaps among scholars properly so called than among popular writers in philosophy, romance and even poetry—who apply to their conception of life the current phraseology of religious feeling. Although today we have completely abandoned the hypothesis of a vital force with which all biological manifestations are related, life is still commonly regarded in abstracto; it is dressed out in a capital letter; it is treated like an entity; qualifying epithets are conferred upon it which imply if not personality at least a sort of autonomy; hymns in verse and prose are sung in its honor; it is endowed with marvelous properties calculated to insure the happiness of humanity, and therefore commanding henceforward our support. The old scholastic adage, philosophia ancilla theologiae, becomes a claim to regard all the sciences, even moral and political science, as handmaids of biology.

With all due allowance, this biological mysticism is no new thing in the history of the human mind. Manifestations of life unquestionably figure among the first phenomena to have attracted the reasoning imagination of man, and at a very early time the attempt was made to abstract vital energy from its various applications in order to see in it an essential mode of divine activity. The book of Genesis confuses the soul with life, which latter it regards as the breath of the Eternal alternately emitted and inhaled. From the earliest times the chief insignia of the Egyptian gods was the key of life in the form of the anastated cross. As early as in the time of the ancient empire the conflict between Horus and Set which constituted the leading myth of the Egyptian religion had become the symbolical glorification of life at its foundation, eternally renewed. Professor Tiele remarks: “To the Egyptian, the indestructible character of life in spite of all the powers of death and

*Revue de l'Université de Bruxelles, December, 1909.
*Renan, Histoire d'Israël, I, III.
*C. P. Tiele, Histoire comparée des anciennes religions de l'Egypte, Paris, 1882, p. 139,
destruction comprises the sole content of his faith, the foundation of all his hopes."

The Persians based their dualism not only on the opposition between light and shade but still more on that between life and death. No sacred book formulates more forcibly than the Avesta the divine command to respect and develop life among animals and useful plants as well as among men. Moreover the general prevalence of phallic cults testifies to the importance which all the peoples of antiquity attached to the transmission of life, even aside from the satisfaction assured to the instinct of procreation.

In all the religions of antiquity the future life was simply a prolonging after death of the present life, wherefore there was no reason why men should not love, adorn and make the most of life on earth. On the other hand, from the Christian point of view earthly life was only a time of trial, and the soul separated by death from its fleshly bonds sought elsewhere the fulness of existence. The Renais-
sance gave value to life once more and restored to man the joy of living. But the antagonism still remained, and even yet remains, as to whether life should be assigned a natural or supernatural origin.

The theory of evolution has decided the issue of the conflict by affirming the unity of natural forces, but if this theory is being more and more accepted to-day it owes the fact in great part to the wonderful discoveries which have renewed the study of the science of life in the course of the past century. We can comprehend the importance attached to that science, the enthusiasm that it arouses, the prestige of its revelations, even of its conjectures, and we ought not to be greatly surprised if in its pride at having shaken the foundation of the ancient theologies, it tends somewhat to inherit their function while affirming very sincerely—to use the terms of M. Le Dantec—that it has not the slightest intention of "replacing the gods whose altars it overthrows."

II.

To look only at externalities we might assert without too great a paradox that biology possesses the chief characteristics of a religion. Life has its places of worship in the laboratories where scholars officiate whose task it is to penetrate into the mysteries of nature; it has its sacrifices where animals are offered as a holocaust for the health and prosperity of mankind; it has its seminaries in the higher schools where successive generations of students become initiated in the nostrums of science; it has its missionaries who popu-
larize its laws by word and pen; it has its exorcists who armed with
formulas and instruments vie with one another like the priests of
ancient Chaldea in contending that the heart, the liver, the entrails,
all parts of the human body, are given over to the invisible generators
of disease and death; it even has its martyrs, victims of professional
duty or of scientific research who with a devotion often sublime
courageously risk their own lives to prolong the existence of their
fellows or simply to wrest some new revelation from the unknown.
But biology has also—and this is one more respect in which it re-
sembles religion—its exaggerations, its illusions and even its super-
stitions.

First, it is an exaggeration to claim that all sciences are simply
branches of biology. Le Dantec writes: "Since man is before all
a social animal the search for the most favorable conditions of life
can not be separated from the study of laws which govern societies.
I do not see by what principle we can find limits that reasonably
separate social hygiene from individual hygiene." If the learned
professor, who moreover in another passage presents biology to us
as "a chapter of physics," had simply meant that the study of sociol-
yogy implies and presupposes knowledge of the laws which regulate
the individual life every one would agree with him; but we need not
study this thought very deeply to find there the claim that all social
problems can be solved by biology. In reality it is only by analogy
that we can speak of the social "body" and of the social "life,"
when once we have passed the level of madrepore societies.

Would you like to know to what conclusions this comparison
taken literally has led so distinguished a leader of thought as M. Le
Dantec? With regard to the word, or rather the idea, "justice," he
writes: "Biology teaches us that the law of the strongest, or, if you
prefer, the fittest, is the only general law; life itself has a warlike
and triumphant definition and this affects painfully our natural
nobility.... All these absolute notions of whose humble origin we
are now aware are represented in our language by words which
can boast of a wonderful prestige. These words respond so per-
fectly to some hereditary details of our nature that we can not
hear them without experiencing profound emotion. These words
are the greatest obstacle to the acceptance of the conquests of revo-
lutionary science." Now it is more and more recognized that the
universal law of vital concurrence with its inexorable results in the
animal world is completed and corrected in man by other laws whose
existence is revealed to us only through sociology. From this point
of view biology can hold only a subordinate rank on the ladder of
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our knowledge, as has been admitted by all those who have undertaken to arrange the hierarchy of the sciences from August Comte to Herbert Spencer.

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Another exaggeration is the assertion that "more than any other science biology makes possible the discussion of the fundamental affirmations upon which human religions are based." It is very possible that theology, even Catholic theology, in making its appeal to symbolism will one day make an attempt, since it can not act otherwise, to become reconciled with the discoveries of biology as it has done with those of astronomy, and as it is about to do with those of geology and prehistoric anthropology. It will certainly be greatly to the credit of biology to have forced the church to this evolution. But this is no reason to disregard the fact that history, historical criticism, has contributed just as much if not more to dissipate the miraculous aureole in which revealed religion is enveloped.

In fact M. le Dantec thinks that biology alone can definitely replace religion in teaching man "what he is, whence he comes, whither he is going," and it is for this reason more than all else, he declares, that it deserves to inspire a religious interest. This assertion would have some foundation if life could be regarded as the end and crown of evolution with which no one would agree. But this would be to fail to recognize: (1) that life is only one detached leaf from the tree of nature; or, if you wish, the sap which circulates in one of its countless branches. M. le Dantec moreover himself defines it as "a form of universal activity," like motion, heat, light, electricity and reason itself; (2) that it is simply one step in the course of evolution, since in our globe it is later than the inorganic development of matter and precedes the appearance of intelligence; (3) that above the biological conception of the individual (though in making the claim I subject myself to the reproach of heresy in the eyes of certain scholars) there exists the juridical conception of the person with his rights and his duties.

I entirely agree with Haeckel that life exists in germ in the inorganic world and that consciousness is its expansion in man. I will not complain that this proposition exceeds the limits of observation, although the source of life is always a mystery and hitherto our experience is not sufficient to enable us to grasp its appearance above the cell. Unless we suppose with certain adventurous spirits that organized life preceded inorganic bodies and that the latter represent the remains of the former—or again with other scholars
that the first cells must have been transmitted to us from some distant star in the form of cosmic dust, we ought indeed, if we do not wish to break the continuity of evolution, to admit as highly probable that life existed potentially in unorganized matter and even in the primitive nebula. But in order to call it forth there must be an evolution the place and time of which could explain the how but not the why. Let us add that from the day when life appeared, being has developed in some way along a new plan, and that the same was true when reason came to be added to life.

The actual tendency in biology—and Le Dantec has contributed not a little by his works—is to explain vital manifestations as the result of an unstable equilibrium, of a reciprocal exchange, of an incessant reaction between the organism and its environment. There is authority for the statement that life represents simply a higher degree of complexity among the physico-chemical reactions of unorganized matter. However, even the partisans of this last proposition must recognize that in the living cellule the reaction tends to perpetuate itself as is not the case in the inorganic molecule; that it gives rise to a persisting individuality (we have even heard of the immortality of cellules); that it transfers its seat from the outside to the inside of organisms; that it furnishes these organisms with their conditions of existence and of reproduction, for this purpose integrating the usable elements of the surrounding environment; much more that by the hierarchical arrangement of the cellules complex beings are formed which admit of structural differentiations and coordinated functions absolutely foreign to their cellular constituents and consequently subject to new laws that are not contradictory but complementary. Exactly the same thing takes place in the intellectual and social domain. Thus is amply justified the formation in the first place of biology and later of psychology and sociology, as distinct and special sciences. In the midst of humanity man acquires the power not only to react to his social environment as well as to his physical environment, but also to create motives of action in himself in increasing measure. The idea in its turn becomes force, as has been so well demonstrated by Alfred Fouillée.

In wishing to reduce everything to the application of a single criterion, perhaps biology, we would fail to recognize certain necessary steps, we would even lose all feeling of proportion and would

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finally come to the point, like M. le Dantec, of writing this psychological enormity which they wish us to accept as a judgment of history: "Between my individual constitution and that of my ancestors in the time of Caesar the difference is inappreciable; there is as much disproportion between my scientific consciousness and theirs as there is in the distance between man and the ornithorhynchus."

A little less exaggeration in science—not to say a little more modesty—would be more becoming.

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No less is it an illusion to think that the religion of life can replace the notion of duty. Without doubt it is the province of science based upon observation—or to be precise of sociology, comprising ethics, law, economy and politics—to find the formula of the necessary relations between men. But it is not enough to formulate rules; they must be enforced. Now what becomes of considerations of general interest when they run counter to conventionalities and individual passions if we have logically suppressed the ideas of justice and of duty denounced by M. le Dantec as contrary to the clearest teachings of biology?

Leaving aside an old remnant of ancestral prejudices which in time will disappear, there no longer exists any other restraint than the fear of repression or, which amounts to the same thing, the right of the strongest, and the strongest in an inevitable conflict of all against all will not always be the social organism. Even Guyau in his work La morale sans sanction ni obligation closes by recognizing that "a sort of sanction" is absolutely indispensable and he thinks he finds it in the desire to realize "the most intensive and the most extensive life possible in physical and moral relations."

Very well, but if it pleases me to lead a life less complete and less extensive what will morally compel me to sacrifice a direct and immediate advantage to a greater one perhaps but less personal and farther removed? We do not conceive "a sort" of obligation or of sanction, and I consider irrefutable in so far as it applies to the basis of ethics this sentence of Edouard Scherer: "Morality needs the absolute; duty is nothing if it is not sublime, and life is a frivolous thing if it does not imply eternal relations."

The rapid progress of our civilization has multiplied enormously our forms of activity and the sources of our enjoyment. This intensification and exhilaration of life coincides on the one hand with the relaxation of the social bonds which not long since restrained the individual; on the other hand with the reaction of free minds against
the excesses of an extreme regulation tending to replace the detailed
tyranny of custom or of faith by that of law, and the yoke of
churches by that of government. Whence comes the vogue of phi-
losophies and literatures which in their several rituals preach the
right of each to “live his life” as the-motto of modern times. (A
century ago one would say, “to follow his nature”).

No fault can be found with this formula if by it we under-
stand “the harmonious development of our faculties” (to employ
the terms of the old Belgian master, Guillaume Tiberghien, so out
of fashion to-day although he was one of the fathers of free thought
in Belgium), including the sentiment of altruism and the obliga-
tion of duty. But who does not see that the pretext of obeying every
inclination, good and bad, especially the bad, may become too often
the justification of all our selfishness and all our failings, in fact
an encouragement to place supernannted tabus from which it is
creditiable to free ourselves in the same rank with the higher obli-
gations which assign to life a useful function in the evolution of
humanity and of the universe? This is the place to repeat Juvenal’s
dictum, “For the sake of life to forfeit every inducement to live,”

... propter vitam vivendi perdere causas.

III.

If we wish to ascertain at what point an exaggerated conception
of the rôle and importance of life has given rise to what, continuing
the use of religious terms, I have called superstitions, it is not
necessary to confine ourselves to the speculative and necessarily ab-
breivated account of an academic lecture even when delivered by
so conscientious and representative a scholar as M. le Daniec; it is
more desirable to examine the social applications by which they are
currently interpreted. I do not intend here to draw up a syllabus,
but I would like to set forth some characteristic examples.

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In the first place there is the axiom that the only function of
living beings is to propagate life. Not very long ago I heard one
of the most brilliant physiologists of Brussels seriously maintain in
a popular lecture that about the age of from sixty to sixty-five years
(it is well to add that our learned lecturer had not yet reached this
limit) man became in the order of nature a useless and parasitic
creature because he then lost the faculty of reproduction. Does not
this view fail to recognize that man has not only an organ of repro-
duction, but also a brain? The observation formulated by Leo
Errera in his Mélanges posthumes is of far-reaching significance
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when he says that among the higher organisms individual life tends to outweigh reproduction. It seems to me that this difference characterizes to some extent a new order of things. Statistics are no less eloquent when they establish the fact, like a law of destiny, that the generative power is decreasing—whether or not the fact is to be deplored—on account of cerebral power and it is this cerebral power which in its turn is seeking for means to prolong life.

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We have also the assertion that the conservation of life must be assured for life itself. When traveling in the northeastern part of India some thirty-five years ago, I heard related as a recent incident the story of an ascetic belonging to the Jaina sect who for fear of injuring or destroying some living thing carefully swept the place where he was about to sit down, and when he went to drink put a cloth over his mouth after the fashion of many of his coreligionists. Some well-intentioned missionaries tried one day to show him, by the aid of a microscope how the air, the water and the surface of any object whatever swarmed with invisible animals which no one could help destroying all day long. The unhappy man condemned himself to absolute motionlessness and died of inanition. Here at least was a life worshiper who was logical to the end.

Many a time I have heard objections raised to cremation of the dead on the pretext that it created an obstacle to the transmutation of life as carried on in the laboratory of nature; in other words that it deprived tombstone epitaphs and the plants of the cemetery from their share of life. This touching posthumous solicitude recalls to some extent the legend of Buddha offering his body as food for a famished tigress so that she could nourish her young.

Our physicians do not hesitate to sacrifice animal life in the interest of science. But it is an absolute rule that they must prolong human life no matter what circumstances might seem to justify an opposite action. I am not speaking of an "Instance of Conscience," recently produced at the Comédie Française by Paul Bourget in which a physician by prolonging the life of a dying man for a few hours gave him sufficient time to commit an unjust and detestable act. But there is the case of a wretch in the last stages of hydrophobia whom the Pasteur treatment is powerless to cure or even to relieve. How many physicians are there who would consent to administer to the patient at his earnest supplication in a lucid interval a drug which would let him pass without suffering,

* Un cas de conscience, a play in two acts by Paul Bourget and Serge Basset.
from an artificial to an eternal sleep? They were more merciful in
the days when they would have smothered him between two mat-
tresses!

I recall the case of one of my colleagues in the senate, when he
was stricken with an ailment which condemned him to an early
end. An operation might prolong his days for a few weeks, but as
he also suffered from cardiac complications he could not take chloro-
form without risk of dying on the spot. His surgeons decided to
operate without putting him to sleep. Some hours afterwards he
died after having submitted to a terrible and useless torture under
the surgeon's knife. Every follower of Æsculapius ought to remem-
ber that a physician's mission does not consist only in delaying
death but also in assuaging pain. Of course in such a case his
problem would be a delicate one, but he owes it to his patient to
tell him the truth and if the patient demands an easy death the
responsibility of the operator should cease.

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Equally a superstition in the same line is the absolute condem-
nation of suicide on the pretext that no one has the disposal of hu-
man life, even of his own. It is true that suicide is too often an act
of cowardice, a desertion before the enemy, as Plato calls it. Gen-
erally too it is an act of stupidity in view of the chances which the
future always contains. But each one of us is no less the master
of his life than of his personality, and I can find no word of blame
for the man who, if stricken for instance by an incurable cancer,
would kill himself rather than be resigned to a slow decomposition,
which would make him an object of disgust to himself and to those
who took care of him.

I would say as much for the man who after committing a dis-
honorable act in a moment of weakness would ask at the hand of
death the means to escape the condemnation of a court, the stigma
of which under our present customs would fall upon his innocent
family.

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Another superstition is the reproach of immorality which is
laid upon all who promulgate or practice neo-Malthusianism.

On the part of the Catholic church this accusation is based on
the principle that it is a sin to prevent the birth of souls fit for sal-
vation. It is considered of equal importance in military nations
where the diminution of the birth rate would have a like effect on
the supply of victims for the cannon. However, considering the
general conditions of our society, is it not absurd because of a
ful in matters as he under-stands the theoretical love of life to encourage the indigent classes to give birth without limit to children condemned by fate to chronic destitution or congenital weakness? I say without hesitation that reasoning beings have a duty higher than that of the multiplication of the species. This duty is to abstain from giving birth to children except as they are able not only to feed them but even to equip them for the struggle for existence.

When the archbishop of Malines issues a pastoral accusing of impiety those who refused to take literally the commandment of the Bible, "Increase and multiply," he is perfectly within his rights, although the church likewise contributes to limit the population by favoring the institution of convents. But what can we think of a physician, the professor of a clinic in a large Catholic university in the north of France, who when impeaching the medical axiom, however reasonable and suitable it may be, is addressed to tubercular women, "Girls, do not marry; women, do not have children"—does not hesitate to write in a report addressed to the medical section of the scientific society of Brussels and to reprint in a pamphlet at the end of the archbishop's letter:

"How many tubercular women we know who in spite of their disease have had one or several children. Probably some of these children were born dead, but others have survived to perpetuate a family and some have been of useful service to their country.... And then," he goes on to say, "although the world can not understand it, is it not better for them and for their families that they

1 We call to mind the judicial proceedings of which Dr. M., the alderman of an important community of Hainaut, was a victim—on the pretext of a violation of the Woest law, whose purpose is to check outrages against good morals committed by the distribution of written material or by discourses in public places—in reality for the crime of publishing and distributing neo-Malthusian doctrines among the laboring classes. The tribunal of Charleroi condemned him without reprieve to three months in prison, a fine of two hundred francs and five years of interdiction for having exhibited in a lecture delivered before the members of the "League for Human Regeneration" certain pictures "contrary to good morals" and, the comment was added, "outraging public decency." Upon the pleading of Eugene Hanssens, professor of civil law at the University of Brussels (published under the title Le Neo-Malthusianisme en Belgique, Brussels, Lamert, 1910) the court of appeals reversed the decision and of the three accusations intended it retained only the one which stated that he had furnished explanations "of nature offensive to modesty." But as the result of a line of reasoning which the circumstances of the arrest failed to justify, it confirmed the sentence given by the former judge. With reference to this suit a clerical journal, in superb disregard of our constitutional guarantees demanded measures which will make it possible to attack directly the propaganda of neo-Malthusianism in Belgium on the grounds that it is anti-religious and anti-social. How justified are these members of the Belgian legislature who, while unanimously proscribing pornography in all its forms, were certainly justified in defying the unreasonable act which the honorable M. Woeste succeeded in making a law in 1905.
are born? Probably they have missed some years of life on this earth where illusions and suffering abound, but they have been assured of a happy life in eternity."

There is no doubt but we belong to the world "who can not understand," for we see here a fanaticism worthy of the Jaina ascetic, although he injured but himself.

The ability to refrain from giving birth is a privilege of humanity which man and woman have a right to exercise for motives to be judged by their consciences alone. Like all rights it is subject to abuse, but to point out the limits to be observed is the duty of ethics and sociology. We would agree with Mgr. Mercier when, deploring the extension of Malthusianism among the leisure classes, he attributes it among other causes to an exaggeration of luxury and to the degeneration of family life. In France Guyau wrote vigorously in 1887: "Malthusianism is the pauperism of the middle classes. Just as too great poverty can sometimes kill a whole social class, Malthusianism is sure to result in the destruction of the bourgeoisie." Among the economic causes has been mentioned, and not without reason, the law of succession which requires the equal division of property among children. But the same alarm has been raised in England where parents possess absolute freedom to dispose of their property by will. Under the title "The Extinction of the Upper Classes" the English review, The Nineteenth Century, published in July, 1909, an instructive and suggestive article which shows that England, for a long time proud of her large aristocratic and middle-class families, would not have been able to keep up the normal figure of her population for the last three-quarters of a century had it not been for the productiveness of the lower classes. Among the upper classes which were formerly so prolific—the nobility, the landed proprietors, the professional classes, the more prosperous citizens and even skilled mechanics—the birth rate has gradually lowered more than half since 1830. In some social classes it has fallen from 7.1 to 3.13 per household. "These classes," the article adds, "have therefore retrograded far below the level in which the birth rate ceases to equal the death rate. Under these conditions it is clear that their extinction is only a matter of a few generations." After having shown the damage inflicted by this selective in the wrong direction on the intellectual capital of the English nation, it concludes with the recommendation that early marriages and large families should be encouraged among those elements which are the best endowed physically and morally, and should be discour-

*A pamphlet, Pour l'honnêteté conjugale, Louvain, 1910.
aged among the rest. Nevertheless it neglects to supply the practical means for carrying out this double end.

The essential difference between our own point of view and that of the church is that the latter regards voluntary restriction of the birth-rate as a crime in itself, an outrage to the sanctity of marriage considered before all as "a means of furnishing the church with an organ of transmission of its vitality" (Mgr. Mercier). The fact is that it is one of those questions in which the morality of the act depends upon circumstances and upon the motives, to be condemned in certain cases, excusable in others, sometimes even commendable as we have seen above in the case of a couple physiologically defective. Even when it occurs in relations outside of wedlock the church to be logical ought to regard the tendency to neo-Malthusianism as an aggravating circumstance of immorality. In my opinion, on the other hand, the disregard of consequences increases the sin. To say the least it is an act of culpable lack of foresight to bring into the world when avoidable unfortunate beings who whether legally recognized or not would remain in a state of juridical and especially social inferiority because of the irregularity of their birth for which they are in no wise responsible, and Mgr. Keesen is not altogether wrong in proposing to the senate to introduce in certain cases legal penalties against the natural father. However it be we can see that in all these complex questions the problem lies far outside the sphere of biology.

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We must also treat as superstitious the effort to keep alive abnormal children or those afflicted with the rickets. Logic says yes, but sentiment says no, and it is sentiment which must be followed. We can not make an abstraction of the instincts of altruism and pity which are a constructive part, and perhaps the best part, of our nature. Can anything be more touching or more to be respected than the frequent sight of a woman of the common people reserving the best of her care and affection for an ailing or crippled child? Ought we forbid at least the legality of marriage to individuals afflicted with transmissible defects? This is a more delicate problem, for unless they were condemned to seclusion they could not be prevented from bearing children out of wedlock which would be no improvement. We may console ourselves by saying that the communication of hereditary disease has not prevented the progress of civilization, and that if the advance of science tends to hinder the elimination of contaminated elements it also is trying to perfect the means of
remedying them. Indeed, certain ones of the United States, especially Indiana, California and Connecticut, have settled the matter by submitting not only certain criminals but even epileptics and deranged persons to a surgical operation which the Sistine chapel has long since abandoned and at which the Orient itself is beginning to blush officially. Nevertheless we have here a legal monstrosity which justly shocks humane feelings no less than the juridical sense of our times; it is not the superstition of life which is the cause of this but the superstition of heredity.

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How shall we regard capital punishment? It is clear that necessity alone can justify its application and this justification has been so greatly abused in the past that we ought to be glad to cancel the law definitely from our statutes. Nevertheless almost all the Germanic people oppose its abolition. In France it has been reestablished in the case of exceptionally serious crimes. Belgium has practically suppressed it and does not seem to suffer by the loss. I see no reason why attempts in this direction should not continue and I hope that in all countries the scale will finally tip towards the side indicated by the increasingly gentle character of our customs. But is it indeed necessary to refer to the statements of the romantic school on the sacred character of human life, when we are obliged to take into account only the requirements of society modified by humane considerations?

If life, particularly human life, is sacred, why maintain armies? To be sure we are all looking forward to an international organization which by substituting justice for force will put an end to the disastrous emulation of armaments and to the periodic horrors of international war. But in the meantime no nation has begun to disarm and I am persuaded that it would be folly to undertake it one at a time. Suppose that certain states of a liberal tendency would become convinced that they should set an example, they would only put themselves in the power of the militarist and absolutist powers which would take good care not to imitate them. Hence we can not see what the cause of peace and civilization would gain by this means. The life cult would here run against the cult of patriotism which demands first of all to safeguard the independence of one's country. The latter religion has its foundation in our ancestral traditions, and its object being a tangible reality is more justifiable at the bar of reason than that of the abstraction of life; although the idea of country itself is relative and temporary.
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If one really wishes to find among the generalizations of our intelligence a conception capable of becoming the object of religious sentiment, he would better replace the life cult by that of the family which represents the most ancient and permanent social cellule; or rather that of humanity since it comprises all human beings, present, past, and future. Perhaps by directing the education of new generations in this direction the feeling of obligation presupposing devotion to an ideal might fulfill the hope of August Comte and be reinstated in the human heart to the great profit of human society. Nevertheless even if one concedes with the extremists of sociological science that the content of the human mind is produced entirely by social influences, he can not admit that this mind, such as it is, has not succeeded in establishing the existence of any force more powerful and more extensive than that of society. As Herbert Spencer writes: "Nothing resembling humanity can erase even temporarily the idea of a power of which the human race is the feeble and fugitive product, a power which in its constantly changing manifestation existed long before humanity and will continue to manifest itself in other forms when that will be no more." This power, the support and wof of the universe, to employ the terms of the great-evolutionist philosopher, is "the infinite and eternal energy whence all things proceed."

IV.

We are justified in drawing the conclusion not only that the apotheosis of life does not furnish elements essential to religion, but also that if taken too seriously it may lead to some of the exclusivisms produced by the positive religions.

Moreover the same observation applies to other substitutes by which the attempt has been made to replace the God of the ancient religions in terms of a moral agent—the goddess Reason, the supreme being Humanity, Duty itself conceived as a self-existent categorical imperative.

And yet must we confine ourselves to this purely negative solution? We may perhaps find means to escape the dilemma M. le Dantec presents in the statement which serves as an introduction to the present study. But to do this we must look farther than life. We must do more than take into consideration biology alone or any other branch of our systematized knowledge; we must include all scientific systems among which biology fills only a subordinate rôle; we must mount the ladder of phenomena from series to series until we find ourselves facing their ultimate source, namely that by which
everything comes into existence, the principle of all changes which take place in nature, the primordial and universal factor which in the absence of a better term we call “force” or “energy.”

It can not be gainsaid that this last notion if regarded in its relation to the workings of the universe is sufficiently imposing to give rise to sentiments of dependence, of alarm, of amazement, which are the component parts of religious sentiment; for this we have to do with a reality, still relative if you wish, but the greatest and most enduring of all realities. Moreover it is no more than the Unknowable, a limitless ocean for which, following the expression of Littré, “we have neither bark nor sail, but the clear sight of which is as beneficial as it is formidable.” Nevertheless in order that this energy may inspire in us something more than a formidable and fruitless contemplation we must consider its purposes, that is to say the orientation given it by the study of evolution—a gradual tendency to put more equilibrium into nature, in other words, more order in the physical world and more uprightness in the moral world.

Man will find again, his destiny and his duty by attaining in the proportion of his increasing liberty a realization of the task by which the supreme Power labors to perfect the universe according to laws accessible to our intelligence.

Faith in an infinite progress, it is true, lies outside the sphere of observable phenomena but it completes it, and if an act of faith is necessary here it is as essential a faith as that which causes us to admit the universality of the reign of law or the unity of the forces of nature—two axioms of the highest probability which cannot be more accurately verified by direct observation. If the idea of infinite progress is included with that of posthumous reward among “the prejudices of another age” the life of individuals and even of societies would be like the work of a squirrel in a cage, and the last word of wisdom would be found in the philosophy of Ecclesiastes, “Eat, drink, and be merry, for to-morrow we die.”

It has been maintained that in order to be moral it is necessary to be religious, an abstraction made by any adherence to a definite religion. I would readily say that in order to believe in duty it is necessary to believe in the certainty of final progress, in the coming of overmen, in the future of the universe—which moreover is another form of religion. We need the constant hope that even if humanity should disappear none of our useful efforts will be lost—humble foraminifera that we are, working isolated and unknown though doubtless with innumerable fellow-workers in the depths of
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The celestial ocean to build up the courts of some city vaguely foreseen by our reason in the mists of the future. However, the only scientific basis offered by a belief in an infinite progress consists in a deduction inspired by the apparent direction of the mysterious and universal agent which we call energy. It is of this alone that in the present state of our knowledge we can say or repeat:

"In the beginning was Energy and besides Energy there was nothing except the Unknowable.

"All things were made by it and without it was not anything made that was made.

"In it was motion, life, reason which is the light of men.

"It was in the world, and the world was made by it, but the world knew it not.

"Man has come, in whom it has received consciousness of itself, and he has born witness of the power which labors constantly to establish order in the universe."

Now if we wish to substitute the term Life for that of Energy there is no great objection provided that the interpretation remains the same. If some would prefer to preserve the metaphysical term Logos, or one of its more or less forced translations, I am not enough of a grammarian to seek a verbal quarrel with them. The important thing in this question as in many others is the idea and not the word. Grant me only the possibility of assuming life to possess a transcendent end, one superior to the pleasure of feeling oneself alive, and I will show the point of attack from which Archimedes sought to lift the world, that is, in the present case, to explain morally as well as rationally the organization of the universe and the destiny of man.