CONTENTS:


What is God? Orlando J. Smith. .............................................. 705

St. Catharine of Alexandria. Conclusion. (Illustrated.) Editor. ........ 727

Goethe’s Soul Conception. Editor. ........................................... 745

Perchance. Amos B. Bishop. .................................................... 752

Jacob Boehme. Belle P. Drury. ................................................ 757

Oriental Sages. (Poem.) M. H. Simpson. .................................. 762


In Answer to Mr. Evalt. Edwin A. Rumball. ............................. 764

The Superpersonal God. In Comment on a Communication from Père Hyacinthe. Editor. ........................................... 765

The Syllabus Again. Hyacinthe Loyson. .................................... 766

General Pfister. ................................................................. 767

Book Reviews and Notes. ....................................................... 768

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CONTENTS:

Frontispiece. St. Catharine. Fra Angelico. .......................... 705

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Perchance. Amos B. Bishop. ........................................ 752

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ST. CATHARINE.
By Fra Angelico, 1387-1455.
Frontispiece to The Open Court.
WHAT IS GOD?

BY ORLANDO J. SMITH.*

Men, from the lowest to the highest, have been unable to recognize the universe as something without order, regulation or law. Those, even, who are called atheists do not deny the existence of a supreme power of regulation; they deny certain conceptions of that power. The agnostics do not deny the existence of a supreme regulator; they deny only that it can be known or comprehended.

In different stages of human culture, men have held numerous varying conceptions of God. The dull conceptions of primitive men gave way to better conceptions, and these to still better conceptions, as men improved in knowledge. Our old conception of God, handed down from a remote period, supplies to us a view of the cosmic order which cannot be reconciled with the facts about nature as they are now known to us. It is as the sacred legends of other peoples, which are now outgrown.

While the belief in the God of authority has declined, the conviction that the universe is ruled by law, marvelous in its perfection, has grown precisely in proportion to the growth of modern knowledge. What is this law, this order, this power or principle of adjustment?

We know something of a gardener by his garden, of an artist by his picture, of an orator by his speech, of a poet by his verses, of a commander by his victories or defeats. Shall we say that we, who are constantly in the presence of the regulations of nature, who have no experience, no existence apart from them, can form no impression of the regulator? Shall we say that we, who know that a certain seed planted under certain conditions will produce a certain result, and that another seed planted under the same conditions will produce

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a different result: that the consequences of some actions are good and of others harmful; that some actions are essential to life and that others produce death—shall we say that we, with all this wisdom, know nothing of the law, of the eternal verities?

We shall know God by reasoning from the consequences of the law, as known to us, back to the meaning of the law; by reasoning from the facts to God, rather than from God to the facts. We are the governed; we know something of the governor. We are ruled; we know our ruler through his ways of ruling. We need not go back two thousand or five thousand years to find God. He did not speak once or twice and then grow dumb. We must take nature as it is, life as it is, and find God in these facts.

I believe that the facts of human experience point straight back to a supreme power of errorless adjustment which men have called God. I have dared, in what follows, to put my speculations and conclusions concerning God’s ways and what God is, in the mouth of God, as if God spoke familiarly to us, adapting himself to our present condition and state of knowledge. I adopt this form of expression for the sake of directness and clearness. These conclusions are not the product of my fancy only; they are not groundless or as dreams. They are built upon the facts of life as we know them: upon the scientific knowledge of the present time concerning the system of nature, and upon reasonable deductions from these facts and knowledge.

AS IF GOD SPOKE.

1.

What am I? What are man’s relations to me and my relations to man? What is the nature of the government of the universe? Is it merciful or loving, just or unjust? Do I acquit myself of accountability for evil, or do I assume the responsibility for all that is? These are the questions that I would answer.

Your scientific minds now know that matter and force are indestructible, and they know also that this fact is a half truth, the other half being that matter and force are uncreatable—the whole truth being that matter and force can neither be created nor destroyed. They know also, by rational inference, that what is true of the system of nature, so far as their observation extends, has been and will be true in all times and places.

They comprehend also that what is true of matter and force is true also of all things—that all changes are transformations; that
nothing can, in its essence, be created or destroyed. A building is not created; it consists of brick, stone, lime, wood, glass and metal, of labor and of mind, all of which existed before its construction. As nothing in it is created, so nothing in it can be destroyed. Its substances may be transformed by fire or decay, but the matter, energy and intelligence which entered into it will still exist.

In these simple facts you shall find the key to the government of the universe. As my government is here and now, it has been and will be in all times and places, without change or exception, through eternity and infinite space. No atom is destroyed, no atom is created. Nothing is made out of nothing. Throughout the universe there is ceaseless motion; nothing stands at rest. Transformations are ceaseless; in variety and number they are infinite. The way of transformation is single. A seed is a transformation, not a beginning; decay is a transformation, not an ending. Birth is not a beginning; death is not an ending. In the universe there is no creation and no annihilation.

Think you that I, who have created no atom, who have destroyed no atom, would create or destroy a human mind? Think you that nature would give eternal life to a senseless speck of dust, and deny it to the consummate flower of all life—the mind of a man? Open your eyes to the whole truth, the simple truth, that the soul of the individual man, like matter and force, is not created, and will not be destroyed.

Observe the fatal inconsistencies in the assumption that the soul of the individual is created at his birth. Some souls are born strong, brave, wise, honest; some have genius, some beauty, some fair-mindedness, some innocence, some honor. These, under the theory that I am the creator of souls, would have no merit; they would be the beneficiaries of my favor. Other souls are born ignorant, cruel, corrupt, selfish, cowardly, base; some are malicious, some ugly, some foolish, some depraved. These, under the theory that I am the creator of souls, would have no demerit; they would be the victims of my disfavor. The theory that I am the creator of souls would convict me of putting a blessing or a curse upon each soul in the very act of creating it.

If I am the creator of souls, then I have placed in one soul the seed of hypocrisy, in another ingratitude, in another treachery, in another murder. Would these souls be responsible for these qualities with which, if I am their maker, I have endowed them? They would not be responsible; they would be wholly innocent. I, if I have created them, am responsible. I am guilty; I, if I have made
them, am the hypocrite, the ingrate, the traitor, the murderer, that I have created.

The theory that I am the creator of souls would convict me of being the maker and inventor of all liars, debauchees, thieves, impostors, slanderers, tyrants and torturers; it would convict me of being, through my creations, the author of all the ignorance, meanness, vice and cruelty in the world; it would convict me of being the greatest criminal in the world, of being, in fact, the only criminal, since all criminals would be of my creation, under this theory, and really my victims, created vile, without will or choice of their own.

Reasoning built upon a false postulate will carry to the end the errors of its foundation. Your theology, based upon the assumption that I am the creator of souls, presents me necessarily as a God of favor and of wrath. It declares that I loved Jacob and hated Esau: that I have had a favored people; that I am an arbitrary God, having mercy on whom I will have mercy and that whom I will I harden; that I am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me: that I condemn all men for the sin of Adam. Maintaining that I create without justice, it holds that I will save without justice; that salvation can be secured only through the grace of God; that the favor of my salvation can be gained only by those who believe and accept certain revelations concerning me, and will be refused to all who doubt or deny these revelations.

And what is the substance of these revelations? That I waited in silence and loneliness through an eternity before I created anything; that I finally created a globe with the life thereon; that I became so dissatisfied with this work that I destroyed nearly all life with a flood, beginning anew; that again I became incensed with my creatures, and became reconciled with mankind only through the sacrifice of my son, begotten of a woman; that I then invented a new plan of salvation and a new sin—the new way of salvation being the belief in an atonement through the martyrdom of Jesus Christ, the new sin being the doubt or denial of this plan of salvation.

And what is this doubt or denial, which is represented as the worst of sins? It is the doubt or denial that I changed, nineteen hundred years ago, my plan of redemption, my way of salvation; changed my relations to man and man's obligations to me. It is the doubt or denial that I then invented a new sin, a deadly sin—greater than treachery, ingratitude, cruelty, murder—where there had been no sin before.
And what is this belief, represented as so marvelously good that without it man cannot be saved? It is the belief that I am a vacillating God: that I have changed, and consequently may change again, my way of governing the universe: that I have invented a new sin, and consequently may invent other new sins.

Another conclusion, based upon the postulate that I am the creator of souls, is this: that I am the God of good only, and that I am perpetually in conflict with another God, the God of evil; that the world is rent and torn by an unceasing combat between the God of beneficence and the God of malevolence; that I am responsible only for the good that exists, and that Satan is responsible for the evil.

Know, you men, that I have no rival, no antagonist, in the government of the universe; that I am one, single and supreme; that no soul has been or will be the beneficiary of my favor or the victim of my wrath; that I have no partiality, no favors; that I have not been angry, resentful or regretful; that I have made no failures, have repented of no errors; that I have invented no new terms of salvation, no new sin; that no one shall be damned for an honest doubt; that my ways are just and unalterable, requiring no repairs, no changes.

Know that there is only one way of salvation—eternal and changeless; the same in the distant stars as here—"Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap."

II.

Each soul, like the atom, like the universe, is eternal; its antecedents had no beginning, its consequences will have no end. The individual builds his own character; he is sick because he has neglected the laws of health; ignorant because he has failed to improve his opportunities; fretful, despondent, lazy or cowardly because he has cultivated mean-spiritedness; a drunkard, boaster, ingrate, thief, liar, hypocrite or murderer because he has dishonored himself. Each man reaps as he has sown; he is what he has made himself in his previous existence; he is forever working out his own damnation or his own salvation. From the complete responsibility for himself man cannot escape. Suicide cannot kill him; death cannot destroy him.

Man's life is an endless battle in which the good and brave are victorious, and the mean and cowardly are defeated. The character of each being shows what its life has been; its strength and goodness are medals of honor for its victories; its weakness and vileness are the badges of defeat. Your soul is mean; it is the hovel of your
own making. Your soul is noble; it is the palace of your own building.

What, then, of evil? Doubting the necessity for evil, you should first consider a world without evil—a world without ignorance, difficulty, danger, suffering or selfishness—to know whether such a world would be to your liking.

In a world without ignorance no one could gain or impart any intelligence, each one’s cup of knowledge being full. There could be no discussion, no inquiry, no issue between right and wrong, no alternatives; and consequently there could be no enlightenment through experience, no pleasure of discovery, no stimulation of thought; indeed there would be no reasoning, since reasoning is an inquiry into the undetermined, an effort of the mind to overcome ignorance. In a world without ignorance there would be no exercise of the mind, no intellectual achievement. The mind would be dead in all respects in which it is inspiring or fruitful.

And so in a world without difficulty there would be no incentive to forethought, to energy, to patience, to self-control, to fortitude. The noblest virtues which test and make manhood would cease to exist. The virtue of courage does not exist without the evil of danger, the virtue of sympathy does not exist without the evil of suffering, and so no other virtue could exist without its corresponding evil.

A man without eyes could see no evil, and without his other senses could hear, taste, smell, feel and know no evil. But, so emasculated, he would be a clod, not a man. A world without evil would be as toil without effort, as achievement without opposition, as light without darkness, as a battle with no antagonist. It would be a world without meaning.

Why should you not have happiness without effort? Because you would not have earned it. In this universe each soul gets precisely what it earns, no more and no less.

* * *

“But we suffer often without sin. The friend whom I believed to be honest, proves to be treacherous. The beautiful flame which attracts the unknowing infant, deforms the child. That which we believed to be wholesome is injurious. A prescription carelessly prepared contains poison of which I have no knowledge. An action which was innocent, even noble, is followed by unhappy consequences. One goes down to help the wretched, and acquires a loathsome or fatal disease.”
My law has no exceptions. Would you have it that fire should burn those only who know fire? that poison should kill those only who take it knowingly? Should I put a premium on ignorance by saying, "For that which you do ignorantly you shall not suffer?" Would you interrupt the vast movement of cause and effect—by which alone justice is accomplished—that men may be protected from the consequences of their own ignorance? And all this for what? That ignorance may be transformed into a thing so sacred that I may lay no penalty upon it? What sort of men, women and children would you produce if ignorance were an insurance against evil, the sole guarantee of happiness? Who would be wise, if each bit of knowledge brought a penalty from which ignorance is exempt? If I should thus reward ignorance and penalize knowledge, you men would be infants forever.

My ways are stern ways. Fire burns, poison kills; there is no preventive nor antidote for either in ignorance, in innocence or in good motive. The one protection from the ravages of either is knowledge. Many evils, such as pestilence and famine, which you formerly accepted as manifestations of the wrath of God, are now known by you to be the results of man's ignorance. The "black death" is now unknown; tuberculosis is curable; knowledge is overcoming, one after another, your worst diseases. A simple screen will protect infants from injury by fire. Prudence, foresight and cooperation will relieve the horrors of famine. The panacea for all evils is knowledge, not ignorance.

Is evil, then, in a sense good? Danger is good as a trial of courage; suffering is good as a penalty of indolence; medicine, not good to taste or smell, is good as a corrective. Evil is good as a trial, penalty or corrective. Good comes out of evil, as life comes from decomposition; as the perfume of the rose comes from the stench of the fertilizer; as strength and health come from the knife of the surgeon; as wisdom comes through the penalties of ignorance.

* * *

What you call chance or luck, good fortune or ill fortune, upon which you base the assumption that you may suffer from unearned evil, is manifest in a superficial sense only; in the deeper sense there is no such thing as hazard in the world. This is illustrated in the experience of your insurance corporations, which are built upon the sound assumption that fires, accidents, marine disasters, and even death itself, will always bear a definite ratio to time, numbers and other factors.
Through the working of this law of averages, the individual in his eternal life passes through all forms of experience possible to human beings. He has been born rich and poor, king and peasant, in barbarism and enlightenment; he has been shipwrecked, seared by fire, mangled in battle, tortured by all kinds of disease, unjustly condemned; he has died in infancy, in youth, in middle life, in old age; he has suffered from treachery and malice; he has lived under all forms of government, from the most liberal to the most despotic; he has been blinded, injured by accidents, by lightning and the convulsions of nature; he has been born deaf and dumb and otherwise defective; he has lived in tropical jungles and in lands of ice and snow; he has been a naked savage, and has been the heir of ease and luxury, fawned upon by eager menials; he has known all temptations, enjoyed all pleasures, suffered all pains; he has been master and slave, victor and vanquished, slayer and slain; he has been born into all superstitious, and has had access to all knowledge, wisdom and light; he has benefited and suffered impartially with his fellow men from all possible experiences, favorable and unfavorable.

What you call misfortune in the life of a man is merely an incident of his eternal life, in which adversity, as well as prosperity, has its uses and its compensations. What you call good fortune is not always good, nor is bad fortune always evil. Adverse fortune strengthens a man’s unselfishness and fortitude, while good fortune may weaken his nobler qualities, as riches develop idleness and vanity, and as inherited privilege fosters self-love, arrogance and contempt for one’s kind. The heir to a throne, subject to adulation and flattery, the beneficiary of unearned honors and dignities, is really more unfortunate than he who is born to poverty and toil.

I try you by all difficulties, troubles and dangers, by good and by evil fortune. I try you by discomfort and pain, by drought and flood, by heat and cold, by fullness and hunger, by good and bad harvests, by sickness and health, by blindness and deafness, by poverty and riches, by hardship and luxury, by rank and privilege, by flattery and servility, by truth and falsehood, by unjust accusations, by malice and slander, by the lash of your master, by wrongs to your manhood, by heartbreak and torture. By indignity and insult, by honors unearned, I try you. These experiences are tests of your manhood, trials of your worthiness without which your souls would shrivel for lack of exercise. I would make men of you. The post of hardship and danger is the post of honor.

“For as gold is tried by fire, 
So a heart must be tried by pain.”
I try you by torture and by the lash of your master, that you may learn compassion for the wronged and the outraged, that you may learn to hate cruelty and slavery. You have heard that I am the God of love, and this is true: I am also the God of hate. I say unto you hate injustice, hate cruelty and slavery, hate the lash of the master! Until you learn to hate these with all your heart and soul you shall be an unfinished man, something less than a man.

III.

“Must these trials, difficulties and terrors be endured forever? Is there nothing in store for us but a dreary round of experience in which we stand constantly in the presence of trouble and danger? Is there no haven of ease, no harbor of security, in which we may finally cast anchor, life’s troubles being ended, the last enemy conquered, to live in peace forevermore?”

There are two ways to end trouble—one way is to decline it; the other way is to conquer it. By the one way you go downward, by the other upward. Examples of both ways of ending trouble are all about you. Every living thing is an immortal soul, beginningless and deathless, the same as man is. The brute, the bird, the fish, the insect, the tree, the plant, each is an immortal soul. Each is where it is of right. Your scientists know that there is no misplaced atom in the world, and I say unto you that there is no misplaced soul in the world. Each soul is in the place that it has earned. I am as just to the meanest insect as I am to the noblest man.

In all life below you, trouble diminishes in exact proportion as intelligence and character grow feeblers and weaker. The brute does not worry about right and wrong, about education, about religion, about government, about health, about schools of healing, about bereavement, about good or ill fortune, about insult or indignity, about death. It is unconscious of sin, has no apprehension for the future, and is exempt from most of the diseases which afflict mankind. The life below the brute suffers still less from trouble. The plant knows no such thing as anxiety, toil, sorrow or pain. It exists in a haven of ease and security, in a harbor of rest. You can secure that haven of ease, that harbor of rest, but you must descend to gain it. You must cease to strive, cease to resist, cease to assert yourself, cease to work, cease to think, cease to be a man, cease to be an intelligence. This descent will take ages and ages; it cannot be accomplished quickly, but it can be made. It has been made; it is being made. There are human souls among you that are traveling downward at a rate which will lead in time to the lower levels of life.
The descending soul shall have many opportunities to turn back; it shall have numerous warnings, in the growing aversion of its fellows, in its own recognition of its increasing debasement, in all the associations and consequences of a life degenerating, going down to littleness or meanness.

One soul, desiring only ease and comfort, without toil, care or anxiety, may ultimately gain its desire as a bullock, well fed and well housed for the market, or as a pet animal, cared for solicitously by loving hands; another, desiring only ease and comfort with admiration, may gain its desire as a bird of brilliant and showy plumage; another, a vicious groveler with a hateful character, may in time become a venomous and repulsive reptile: a soul purely indolent and idle, without aspiration or enthusiasm, may descend into the form of a harmless insect. The soul may even descend to a beautiful and glorified state of ease and rest, corresponding to some popular conceptions of heaven. It may become a tree, beautiful in form and foliage, a shrub or plant, producing flowers exquisite in form, color and perfume.

Of the way of meeting trouble by conquering it, you have examples also all about you. There are those who do not fear death: they have conquered it. They conquer death by comprehending it, by knowing that death is of small consequence, that it is inevitable, that fear will not remove it or delay it, and that the only evil in death is the foolish fear of it. There are those who conquer pain, either by ascertaining how to avoid or prevent it, or by the courage to bear it, knowing that it will come to an end. There are those who conquer fear, knowing that it is worse than the danger apprehended, and that it presents itself continuously when there is no danger. There are those who conquer sorrow, knowing that time will heal it, and helping by cheerfulness this process of time. There are those who conquer bereavement, knowing that death cannot separate those who love each other. There are those who conquer ignorance by diligently making some daily progress in knowledge or wisdom. Wherefore I think well of man, knowing that each one may be a hero and a conqueror if he so wills; that he need not wait for some great opportunity, for some dazzling height in the eyes of the world; knowing that he can be a conqueror this day and hour, in the silence within his own soul.

My ways are stern and hard; they are also mild and gentle. Each soul shall have its heart’s desire. If it desires perfect ease, freedom from toil, pain and trouble, it shall descend to that place; the way is open; it is an easy way.
The soul that would ascend shall have also its heart's desire. The way is not easy, but its compensations are many and substantial. There is no limit in its ascent; it may grow in wisdom forever without exhausting all wisdom, grow in power without exhausting all power, grow in beauty without exhausting all beauty, grow in goodness without exhausting all goodness. But it must pay in effort, in toil, in thought, in sacrifice, for all that it gains.

You will observe that there is no limit, in the meaner forms of life on your globe, to the possibilities of degradation for the descending soul. There is also no boundary in the eternal life before you to the progress of the determined ascending soul. All heights are accessible, all depths are open to the soul of the individual man.

* * *

The human form, however humble or even degraded, still confers a certain stamp of nobility. You are a man; you have made progress; you might have been a beast, a bird, a fish, a reptile, or even something lower. However poor a man you may be, still you have the opportunities of all manhood before you. There is no good or glory beyond your reach. The universe exists for you. It is your heritage, your arena, your throne. It has no secrets which you cannot grasp, no barriers which you cannot surmount, no forces hostile to you which you cannot conquer.

The greatest things in your world are not its rivers, lakes and mountains; not its forests, plains and palaces. None of these can see, feel or love; none can think, aspire or dare. Man, who can conquer the forests and plains, who can build palaces, who can read the stars and suns, who can taste of both pain and joy, is the noblest object in your world. The raggedest child in London is greater than St. Paul's; the poorest peasant in France is nobler than the tallest peak of the Alps.

The individual man need not grovel or abase himself. He is older than Rome, older than the Pyramids, older than the Koran and the Bible, older than any book ever written or printed, and he shall survive them all. He builds his own destiny; he makes his own fate. He is the eternal master of himself, a king of a royal line older than any throne or dynasty. The noble man has a noble kingdom; it extends as far and wide as his thought and love can reach. The base man has a mean kingdom; but, if he so wills, he can broaden it, better it. He can lose it only through his own abdication, for in all the universe he has no real enemy but himself.

None can harm you but yourself. Your friend may rob you;
he robs only himself. Your master may beat you; he degrades himself. A tyrant may torture you; he injures his own soul, not you. You have nothing to fear but your own ignorance: nothing can help you but your own wisdom. I do not mean the wisdom of your schools; I mean the wisdom of life—the wisdom that conquers fear, knowing that the soul has nothing to fear but itself; the wisdom that conquers malice, treachery, dishonesty, knowing these as roads that lead down to hell. Know that no god or saviour shall fight your battles for you. Know that no church can save you: that Christ, Jehovah, Allah, Buddha or Brahma cannot save you; know that one only can save you, and that that one is yourself. Your fortress is within yourself; you have no outlying possessions to be protected, no detachments to be guarded. No external treason, stratagem or valor can injure you. Your battle is forever within yourself, your higher self against your lower self.

The individual man is his own saviour and creator, and makes his own heaven and hell. Heaven and hell are real. They are always with you, and shall follow you through all experiences. Now, and every day of your lives, you must choose between them. You can accept either, scorn either.

Hell is visible to you in the consequences of your indolence, your dishonesty, your degeneracy. Heaven is visible in the fruits of your industry, your self-respect, your increasing knowledge—in bodies sound, strong and clean; in muscles that can stand a strain; in organs that resist disease; in eyes that drink beauty; in ears attuned to music; in minds that reason and understand, appreciative of noble thoughts and deeds, eager for wisdom, hospitable to truth, scornful of lies; in moral natures set to the golden rule, kindly, cheerful, generous, loving and just; in courage true, in honor bright.

IV.

You would have an explanation of heredity, of the theory that the character of each soul is predetermined in the character of its parentage.

To vicious parents a vicious child is born. If this birth were the beginning of the child’s life, if it were created in the act of being born, then it would be true that the character of the child would be predetermined by its parentage, as the character of its parents would have been predetermined by their parentage, and so on back through all of their antecedents. And it would also follow that no soul would be justly responsible for what it is at birth, that this responsibility would rest wholly with the power or forces which created it.
But the child is not created. It is a soul which has pre-existed through eternity. Coming to this earth, it is attracted by its own kind. Vicious itself, it necessarily becomes the offspring of vice. And so also the ignorant soul is born to dull lineage, the wise soul to wise ancestry, the good soul to good antecedents.

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You would know also whether all life is as you see life on this earth: whether, upon your departure from your present body, you will enter into another body on this earth or elsewhere, or whether there is any truth in the theory that a soul can exist consciously apart from its body.

You shall find the answer to these questions in analogies drawn from the life about you. Nothing exists in the universe of which some example, prototype or illustration may not be seen in your life here. One law rules all that is: the consequences of the law are all of kin, near or remote.

In your experiences here you are familiar with many changes from one state to an opposite state. Day turns into night, waking into sleep, summer into winter, life into death. And these changes are followed again by opposite changes—night into day, sleep into waking, winter into summer, death into life.

Other alternations, from one state to its opposite, are observed in your experience here—from toil to rest, from pain to ease, from war to peace, from the world of reality to the world of your imagination. You may observe also the alternation from one form of physical body to an opposite form in the lives of your two hundred thousand species of insects, exemplified in the transformation of the caterpillar into the butterfly. The groveling and repulsive worm descends to its grave in the cocoon, from which it ascends a winged and brilliant butterfly. Here you may observe the alternation from creeping to flying, from ugliness to beauty. Here you have an example also of the pre-existence and after-existence of a soul. The worm has an after-existence in the butterfly; the butterfly had a pre-existence in the worm. Under your observation, one soul occupies two bodies.

As you pass from night to day here, so you shall pass from your life here to an opposite life beyond the grave. Here you see darkly; there you shall see clearly. Here lies may pass as truth, the counterfeit as genuine, hypocrisy as holiness, folly as wisdom, the noble may be obscured and the vulgar exalted; there deceptions have no existence, there you can deceive no one, and no one can deceive you.
The opposite life beyond the grave is an unmasking of souls: it is a place of happiness, peace and rest for the good, the honest, the sincere: it is a hell for impostors and hypocrites, for the malicious, the selfish, the ungrateful, the treacherous, the dishonest. There each one's character is a book open for whomsoever would read: there no meanness or vilence, no unselfishness or nobility, can be concealed. Here you see physical deformity; there you see moral deformity. Here a mean soul may be concealed in a beautiful body; there the meanness of the soul shall be revealed. Here a beautiful soul may be imprisoned in a body deformed by accident, toil or sacrifice; there the glory of the soul shall be also revealed. Here one may hide the sins of the mind—its secret envy, treachery, malice, bestiality; there these secrets are exposed. There all mysteries are unraveled: the letters that are burned, the clues that are hidden, the evidence that has been withheld or falsified, shall come into the light; the innocent shall be vindicated, and the guilty shall be known. It is the land of truth, in which no deception, mystification or lie can exist.

The courageous ones in your ordinary life here—the men who carry cheerfully the burdens and sorrows of others: the women who fight patiently through long years for shelter, warmth and food for their fatherless children: the lonely and forlorn souls who walk in the straight road of duty and honor: all the honest, brave, helpful and true-hearted—shall be recognized in the after-life as real heroes, and as the more heroic because there was little rest in their long, prosaic battle; because they sought no plaudits, and hoped for no day when they would receive the homage of mankind.

In the after-life they who have acted nobly here, seeking no approbation or glory, shall be glorified; and they who have played a coward's part shall be scorned. In your life beyond the grave, every honest soul shall have recognition, and every pretender shall be found out. In that life you shall know that the only real noble is the noble soul, that the only real king is the kingly soul.

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"Do we exist in the life beyond the grave as disembodied souls?" I shall answer this question also through analogies observable in the life here.

Observe a nut, say the walnut. As it hangs on the tree, you see its outer hull or husk. Is this its physical body? It is an essential physical body at one stage of the life of the walnut. The walnut falls to the ground, and this hull decays. Is the walnut now dead, its body being dead? No; the walnut has an inner body, its shell.
finer and stronger than its outer husk. Cover the walnut now with earth, give it moisture and heat, and its shell will crack open and decay. Is the walnut, having suffered from the decay of two bodies, finally dead? No; the soul of the walnut shall not stay in its grave; it shall experience a resurrection; it shall cover itself with a new body which shall reach out its leaves gladly for the blessing of the sun. The soul of the walnut shall enter upon a new life which is the opposite of its life in its hull and shell. It was the nut; it is now the tree. The matter in the nut—its outer hull, its inner shell, its meat or kernel—has gone through the process of decomposition which you call death, but the soul of the nut knows no death; it lives in the tree.

The physical body of a man is as the outer husk of the walnut. The death of man’s body does not kill man’s soul, which is enclosed in an inner body of infinitely finer substance than its outer husk. Your scientists have discovered your subconscious mind; they shall later discover your subconscious body. You cannot with your present sight see this inner body with which the soul is clothed after the death of its outer body, and neither can you see a current of electricity; but this inner body is finer than the outer husk, even as electricity is finer than muscular energy.

The sensation of the soul emerging from its outer body is the sensation of emancipation, not of emasculation. The soul was the slave of its old body, compelled to feed it, clothe it, shelter it, keep it in repair; to suffer for its injuries, to be hampered by its limitations, to see only through its eyes, to hear only through its ears. The soul, in its finer and more perfect body, is set free. Conditions are now reversed; the body is now the slave of the mind, the mind is no longer the slave of the body.

Your seers, in glimpses of the life beyond the grave, have seen much of truth—that the soul moves through its own will, not through the expenditure of muscular energy; that the will to be elsewhere, far distant, to pass through any physical obstacle, is accomplished instantaneously. Many of you men have had dreams in your childhood in which you could propel yourselves by the exercise of your will only—dreams of floating above the earth slowly or rapidly, without effort; of turning to the right, to the left, or about, solely in response to desire; and of a sense of lightness and buoyancy, different from any thing known to you in your waking hours. A dream is based wholly on reality. Each fantastic shred goes back to something known, experienced or thought of before. These dreams of childhood go back to the experience of the child in its life before its
birth—the life from which the child came when it entered the flesh, the life to which it will return after the death of its body.

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The soul being free, in the life beyond the grave, from the dominion of the body, is done with the pleasures and pains of the body. The soul which finds its greatest enjoyment in physical pleasures here, shall suffer there from the absence of these pleasures; and the soul which has suffered here through a weak or defective body shall be relieved there of this burden. There all physical afflictions shall end. Sight shall follow blindness, the deaf shall hear, the lame shall walk, and ease shall come after pain.

The better souls, those whose pleasures are of the mind or heart—the kindly, generous and courageous souls; the souls with good will, open hearts and open minds—are at peace and rest in the other life. They have returned home, as it were, after a pilgrimage in alien lands. On the other hand, the lower souls—the gross, dull or vicious—do not find the other world a land to their liking. Stripped of the mask of the flesh, they can deceive no one, not even themselves. Deprived of all means of sensual gratification, they long to return to the more congenial and pleasant life in the flesh, to get back into physical bodies which will cover their mental or moral nakedness. And, since each soul gets its desire, they do return without long delay to the land of their choice. The stay of the lowest is briefest, the stay of the good is longest, in the land of truth. Those who have conquered the trials, difficulties and evils of the flesh may return no more. The life in the flesh is a school from which you shall not pass finally and forever until you shall have learned its lessons.

v.

In what sense do I regulate, govern or adjust the universe? Are my powers limited or unlimited? Am I a personality, an intelligence, a law or a principle?

Take the simplest equation—one plus one equals two. Do you assume that that statement is true in itself, that it always was and always must be true, that it is an unchangeable truth? or do you assume that it is true only because I have made it true, and that I could make it false if I chose to do so? If you assume that my power is unlimited, and that I could change the law so that the product of one plus one would be three, or eleven, or ninety, would you assume that I could also change the multiplication table at will, so that three
times seven would be sixty, or that four times seven would be fifteen, or that five times seven would be nothing?

Consider other questions. Do you believe that it would be possible for me to turn right into wrong, or wrong into right? Could I make a virtue of treachery, cruelty, malice or lying? Could I make a vice of sincerity, charity or truthfulness? Could I change the facts and the history of the past? Could I obliterate the fact that there had ever been an America? and, having done this, would it become true consequently that America never did exist? Could I abdicate my own omnipotence? Could I reduce myself and the universe to nothingness?

Apply your own mind to these questions. Forget or ignore for the time all that you have been taught concerning me and my ways. Put aside the theory that any subject is too sacred to be reasoned about. Do not wait to get the opinion of some one wiser than yourself. Use your own reason: you are dull indeed if these questions are beyond your powers. Using your own reason, you shall have the satisfaction of solving, or of making some progress in solving, this mystery which is no mystery—the mystery of my ways and of what I am.

Trusting your own reason, without misgiving and without fear, you shall necessarily reach the conclusion that it would be beyond the power of any force that you can conceive of to change the facts of the past, to obliterate the fact that there had ever been an America, and to make true an opposite fact, that America had never existed.

That which you conceive to be true, after examining it with carefulness and sincerity, turning upon it all the light that you have, you must accept as the truth. You would be a man; do not, then, belittle or distrust yourself. That which you accept as truth may be an error, but the intellectual courage which impels you to accept it as truth in the first place, will also impel you to reject it when its error becomes apparent to you.

The truth that no power, human or divine, can change the facts of the past is self-evident; you shall have no occasion to reject or revise it. Indeed this truth is literally the foundation of all truth—that truth is unalterable and deathless; that the existence of the continent of America being a truth, God himself cannot change or obliterate it.

Building on this fundamental truth, you will perceive that the equation, one plus one equals two, being true, will forever remain true; and that, as it will be true in the future, time without end, so it has been true in the past, time without beginning. And you
will perceive also that all other truth concerning mathematics, concerning right and wrong, concerning the whole system of nature, concerning the government of the universe, is also changeless, beginningless, endless, eternal. If these truths could have been altered in the past, then they may be altered in the future. If they were made in the past, then they may be unmade in the future. If time was when they did not exist, then time may come when they will cease to exist.

My ways are large ways. They were beginningless; they shall be endless; they were not set to work in some dim, far-off time, as an engine starts the wheels of a factory. Cease to confuse your reasoning about a beginning or creation. There never was a time when the universe was not the seat of truth and law, precisely as it is now, and as it will be forever.

* * *

In your practical, everyday affairs you do not connect me intimately with your conduct or misconduct. You do not say that it was through God's interference that you made an error in addition or subtraction; through me that you ate something that disagreed with you, that you forgot an appointment or that you cheated in trade; nor do you say that it is through me that you are courteous and cheerful, that you do your day's work honestly or that you pay your debts. He who would succeed in athletics does not take a course in prayer, or seek advice from his minister; he takes exercise and a course in training. And so one who would be a farmer or a mechanic seeks instruction and training in the vocation of his choice; and those who would engage in intellectual pursuits seek knowledge and experience to aid them in their undertakings. You do not assume that I will plow your fields, meet your note in bank, patch your roof, mend your broken machinery or give you an education. You assume that you must do these things for yourselves.

Your farmers know that an ear of corn can be grown only under definite and exact conditions—that a certain seed must be planted in a certain quality of soil in a certain climate at a certain time; that the soil must have a certain preparation, and that the plant, after it develops from the seed, must have certain cultivation. He would be foolish who would assume that a seed of corn would produce an ear if planted in an ice field, or in a sand-bank, or in the climate of Labrador, or that an ear of corn could be produced from a seed of cotton. In all of your practical affairs you know but one law, the
law of cause and effect—the law that consequences are true to their antecedents—in which you have discovered no variation.

In these practical affairs you are in perfect harmony with me, and I am in harmony with you—for I am the law of cause and effect. From this law you expect no miracles and no favors. You do not look upon this law as a great personality to be propitiated by homage, worship or praise, or to be moved by supplication. You know that the greatest man in the world, or the wisest or the best—the commander, the philosopher, the hero, the martyr, the saviour—can grow a stalk of corn from no seed other than a seed of corn; that the way of growing corn is the same for all, be they high or low, good or bad.

So far you know me well. Would you know me completely? Know then that, as I am in the growth of corn and in its fruitage, I am in all other growth and fruitage, even in the growth and fruitage of a man; that, as an ear of corn can be produced only by pursuing right ways and by avoiding wrong ways, so also can the fruitage of manhood be produced only by pursuing right ways and by avoiding wrong ways; that, as the harvest of corn can be gained through the acceptance of no ceremony, creed or system of worship, so the salvation of souls can be gained through the acceptance of no ceremony, creed or system of worship.

Know that I have but one process, and that it is generative—that each cause is a seed which begets its certain effect; that every human action is a cause which begets its certain fruitage, even as a seed of corn begets its certain fruitage; that your evil actions beget evil fruit, and that your good actions beget good fruit. Know that all my judgments, all salvation or condemnation, is included in this simple process. Know that I have only one commandment: As a man soweth, so shall he also reap.

If I really have a favored church or creed, if I am impressed by rites and ceremonies, by prayer or worship, these facts would be demonstrable through your statistics. Your insurance corporations have ascertained with much accuracy the relative risks in their policies. Have they determined that there is any real difference in the risk upon a Mohammedan mosque or a Christian church? that there is any difference in the risk upon the home of a Christian, a free-thinker or an atheist? that there is any difference in the life risk or accident risk of one who is assiduous in rites and ceremonies, or in prayer and worship, against one who neglects these completely?

The teaching that my favor is extended to any creed, church or faith, that it can be gained through any rite or ceremony, through
prayers or worship, is confirmed nowhere by your statistics. This
教学 has no foundation in truth. The home of a believer is
subject to fires, the lightning, earthquakes, storms, decay, precisely
the same as the home of an unbeliever. The home of a good man is
subject to injurious and destructive natural agencies to precisely the
same degree as the home of vice. The morally good are subject to
disease, to injury by accident, to death in battle, upon precisely the
same terms as the morally bad. Moral goodness is a protection
against moral disease, not against physical ills; physical goodness
is a protection against physical evils, not against moral disease.

I have only one law for believers and unbelievers: for those
who worship me, for those who misrepresent me, for those who deny
me; for the good and the vicious, for the saint and the sinner; for
the noble and the mean—the law that you shall reap as you sow.
The house with a sound roof shall be better protected from the rain
than the house with an unsound roof, though the first shelters the
guilty, and the second shelters the innocent. If a sinner builds a
house of iron and dedicates it to the vilest purposes, it shall be better
protected from fire than a house built of wood, though the house of
wood be dedicated to religion or charity. The dishonest farmer who
plants wisely and cultivates well shall have better crops than the
honest farmer who plants unwisely and cultivates negligently. The
sinner who takes good care of his physical body, gives it proper
exercise, rest and food, shall have a better body than the saint who
neglects his body. The act done rightly, whether the doer be good
or bad, wise or foolish, shall beget a reward; the act done wrongly,
whether the doer be good or bad, wise or foolish, shall beget a
penalty.

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You recognize that the antecedent three multiplied by three be-
gets the consequence nine, and can produce no other result, and that,
in all other examples of multiplication, the consequence must be
true to its antecedent. You know consequently that the multipli-
cation table is true in itself, and that it requires no divine supervision
back of it to keep it true. And so in all of your other experiences,
from the simplest to the most complex, you should know that con-
sequences are true to their antecedents, that effects are true to their
causes, without divine supervision. Know, then, that the law that
consequences are true to their antecedents is the fundamental fact
of the universe; that it is the regulator and governor of the universe;
that it is the one law to which man, air, water, earth, stars, suns, all
things, are ceaselessly subject; that there is nothing back of it; that it requires no regulation or supervision, being perfect in itself; that there is no deity apart from or superior to this supreme law of compensation.

Know that there is only one law of your being, that there is only one law of nature. Your wisest men have discovered no fact that is not subject to the supreme law that consequences are true to their antecedents. You have no truth, no science, that is not grounded in this law. Cease to search for the key to the mystery of nature in riddles, subtleties and complexities. You shall find this key in the plain and simple fact, known to all men in exact proportion to their knowledge—for there is no knowledge disconnected from this one truth—that consequences are true to their antecedents.

Know that the consequences of your every act and thought are registered instantly in your character. This day, this hour, this moment, is your time of judgment. He who deceives, betrays, kills—he who entertains malice, treachery or other vilness, secretly in his heart—takes the penalty instantly in the debasement of his character. And so, also, for every good thought or act, be it open or secret, he shall receive an instant reward in the improvement of his character.

Every night as you lie down to sleep you are a little better or a little worse, a little richer or a little poorer, than you were in the morning. You have nothing substantial, nothing that is truly your own, but your character. You shall lose your money and your property; your home shall be your home no longer; the scenes which know you now shall know you no more; your flesh shall be food for worms; the earth upon which you tread shall be cinders and cosmic dust. Your character alone shall stay with you, surviving: all wreckage, decay and death; your character is you; it shall be you forever. Your character is the perfect register of your progress or of your degradation, of your victory or of your defeat; it shall be your glory or your shame, your blessing or your curse, your heaven or your hell.

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I am omnipotent and omnipresent in the sense only that the supreme law of compensation is omnipotent and omnipresent. I have no power of abdication; I have no power to change the cosmic order. I am not a man; I am not a higher or glorified man. I have no human motives, feelings or passions; I have no pity, mercy, love or hate; I bear no malice, receive no insults, give no favors. I give
you one thing only, and that is compensation. I am the law, single, supreme, changeless and eternal.

I have made no revelation to one man that is not open to all men; I have revealed nothing in one time that is not revealed in all time. My revelation is an open book; it is in every seed, every growth, every ripening, every decomposition—in every cause, in every effect. Recognize the one law of all life—that consequences are true to their antecedents—and, you shall comprehend the simplicity of the system of nature, its unity, its beauty, its majesty. You shall no longer fear gods or devils; you shall be happier and better men and women through your acceptance of the truth that the law of perfect compensation rules the world; you shall comprehend the rightness of the cosmic order, and the means of its adjustment; you shall solve the mystery which you call God!