

THE NEW ORDER OF SAINTHOOD

JERRY FAIRFIELD OSBORN

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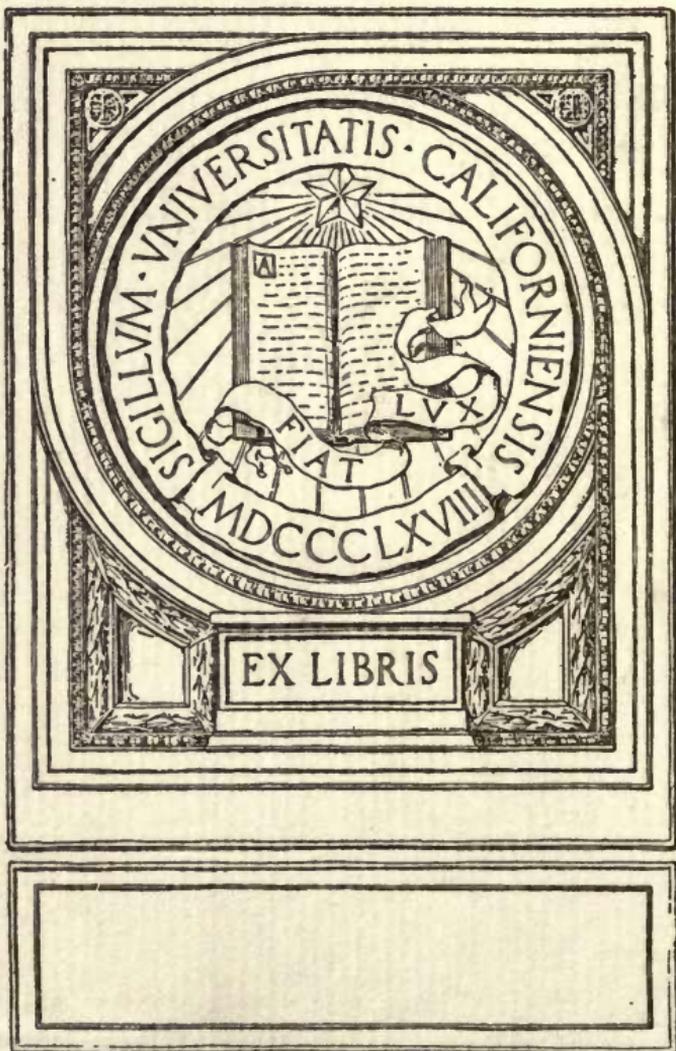


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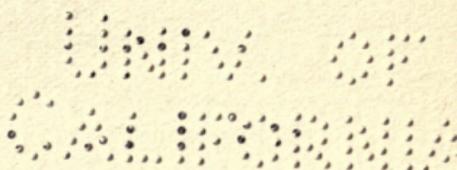






THE NEW
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IN a very beautiful address¹ before the students of the University of Edinburgh Sir William Osler opens with the words: "To man there has been published a triple gospel — of his soul, of his goods, of his body."

What is and what shall be the attitude of the Church toward the gospel of the body, toward the men who have given us this gospel? The question turns our thoughts at once to the leading and greatest exponent of this gospel, and backward to the early centuries of the Church before there had arisen any divorce between the study of nature and the matters of the spirit.

¹ Osler, Sir Wm. "Man's Redemption of Man." 12mo. (Paul B. Hoeber, New York.)

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Among all the great scientific men whom the nineteenth century produced Pasteur ranks supreme as a benefactor of mankind. He played the original and creative part in the movement for the prevention and relief of human suffering which Sir William Osler has aptly termed "Man's Redemption of Man." It is far under the truth to say that he has saved more lives than Napoleon destroyed. In Nature he found the causes of a very large part of human suffering; in Nature he also found the means of controlling or averting suffering. His attitude toward his fellow men was one of noble compassion. His first trial of the hydrophobia serum with a young sufferer brought to him, his agony of mind lest the remedy itself might be the means of causing death, his joy as the child was restored in perfect health to its

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parents, is one of the most beautiful episodes in human history. As recited by Radot:

“Pasteur was going through a succession of hopes, fears, anguish, and an ardent yearning to snatch little Meister from death; he could no longer work. At nights feverish visions came to him of this child, whom he had seen playing in the garden, suffocating in the mad struggles of hydrophobia, like the dying child he had seen at the Hôpital Trousseau in 1880. Vainly his experimental genius assured him that the virus of that most terrible of diseases was about to be vanquished, that humanity was about to be delivered from this dread horror — his human tenderness was stronger than all, his accustomed ready sympathy for the sufferings and anxieties of others was for the nonce centred in ‘the dear lad.’ . . .”

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“Cured from his wounds, delighted with all he saw, gayly running about as if he had been in his own Alsatian farm, little Meister, whose blue eyes now showed neither fear nor shyness, merrily received the last inoculation; in the evening, after claiming a kiss from ‘Dear Monsieur Pasteur,’ as he called him, he went to bed and slept peacefully.”¹

The life of Pasteur is typical of that of many students of Nature, of less genius, perhaps, but of equal devotion and self-sacrifice. It is interesting to imagine what tributes might have been rendered to Pasteur if he had lived in the period of the early saints of the Church, and had won the love of his generation and the reverence of suc-

¹ Vallery-Radot, René. “The Life of Pasteur.” Translation of Mrs. R. L. Devonshire. (London, Archibald Constable & Co., Ltd., 1906, pp. 416, 417.)

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ceeding generations by his mighty works. It is interesting to surmise what would have been the attitude of the early Church toward such a benefactor of mankind. Our belief to-day is that Pasteur should stand as a symbol of the profound and intimate relation which must develop between the study of Nature and the religious life of man, between our present and future knowledge of Nature and the development of our religious conceptions and beliefs.

We are now in a process of readjustment between the issues of two lines of thought, which are almost as old as human history; between laws derived from Nature which were discovered in the middle of the nineteenth century as to the origin of man, and traditional laws which when traced to their very beginnings we find to have been purely

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of human conception. Let us imagine our descendants three or four hundred years hence looking back on the spiritual and intellectual history of man; with larger perspective they will separate these two grand thought movements.

First, the Oriental movement, marked by Oriental lack of curiosity about natural law, a great moral and spiritual movement developing three thousand years before Christ along the Nile, the Tigris, and Euphrates, out of five thousand years of hard human experience, and expressed in Judea in the faith that Nature is the continuous handiwork of God, in a supreme standard of righteousness, the moral duty being finally summed in the simple phrase, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." This was the spiritual redemption of man, which left

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the laws of his physical welfare unknown and uncared for.

The second movement begins six centuries before Christ in the inquiring mind of the West, which is always characterized by intense curiosity about Nature. This movement is the search for natural law. Its rapid progress among the Greeks terminates with the fall of Greece. It is expressed in Cato's reply to Scipio: "My wisdom consists in the fact that I follow Nature, the best of guides, as I would a God and am loyal to her commands." After nineteen centuries it revives with Copernicus and Galileo and culminates in Darwin. Man is again perceived as a part of Nature: in the study of Nature man finds intellectual delight; in the laws of Nature man finds his physical well-being; man through Nature becomes the redeemer of physical man.

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The Augustinian theology was imbued with a deeply theistic view of Nature, a view which the modern Church professes but does not profoundly believe nor live by. As shown by Aubrey Moore, Augustine was entirely sound in counselling the entire separation of these two great lines of thought, the natural and the spiritual:

“It very often happens,” says Augustine, “that there is some question as to the earth or the sky, or the other elements of this world . . . respecting which one who is not a Christian has knowledge derived from most certain reasoning or observation” [that is, a natural philosopher], “and it is very disgraceful and mischievous and of all things to be carefully avoided, that a Christian, speaking of such matters as being according to the Christian Scriptures, should be heard by an unbeliever

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talking such nonsense that the unbeliever, perceiving him to be as wide from the mark as east from west, can hardly restrain himself from laughing.”

Augustine held what may be regarded as a pristine faith in Nature as a manifestation of the divine.

This pristine theistic view is founded on passages in Genesis, especially Genesis 2 : 15 and Genesis 3 : 19. These passages show that Nature, typified by the Garden, gives man his sustenance, and yet, as it has to be won by the sweat of the brow, man's energy or art must work with Nature. These passages, as Bishop Boyd-Carpenter observes in his inspiring studies of Dante, are also the foundation of the famous lines in the “Divine Comedy” in which the poet expresses the relation between the theistic view of Nature and scientific or philosophical inquiry.

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“. . . He thus made reply:

‘Philosophy, to an attentive ear,
Clearly points out, not in one part alone,
How imitative Nature takes her course
From the celestial Mind, and from its art:
And where her laws¹ the Stagirite unfolds,
Not many leaves scann’d o’er, observing well
Thou shalt discover, that your art on her
Obsequious follows, as the learner treads
In his instructor’s step; so that your art
Deserves the name of second in descent
From God. These two, if thou recall to mind
Creation’s holy book,² from the beginning
Were the right source of life and excellence
To human kind. . . .’”

The preceding is Cary’s version.³
Another version of this passage is that
of Longfellow.⁴

¹ Aristotle (“Physics,” ii, 2). “Art mimics nature.”

² Gen. 2 : 15; 3 : 19.

³ “The Vision of Dante Alighieri.” Translated by the Rev. H. F. Cary for Everyman’s Library. Canto XI, Hell, p. 47. “Dante’s Divine Comedy,” with an Introduction and Notes by Edmund G. Gardner, M.A. (London, J. M. Dent & Sons, Ltd. New York, E. P. Dutton & Co.)

⁴ Longfellow’s Translation, Inf., Vol. XI, pp. 97-108.

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“‘Philosophy,’ he said, ‘to him who needs it,
Noteth, not only in one place alone,
After what manner Nature takes her course
From Intellect Divine and from its art;
And if thy Physics carefully thou notest,
After not many pages shalt thou find,
That this your art as far as possible
Follows, as the disciple doth the master,
So that your art is, as it were, God’s grandchild,
From these two, if thou bringest to thy mind
Genesis at the beginning, it behooves
Mankind to gain their life, and to advance.’”

As Bishop Boyd-Carpenter remarks, Virgil’s answer to Dante is to this effect: We learn from philosophy that the operations of Nature proceed directly from God, and those of art indirectly, because art consists in the imitation of Nature. (“Inferno,” xi, pp. 97–105, Longfellow’s translation.) Again the Bible teaches us that it is by these two principles, Nature and art, that the system of man’s life should be ordered. (“Inferno,” xi, pp. 106–108.)

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If we are guided by the spirit of Augustine and of Dante we cannot fail to see that the Church has passed through a very critical period of scepticism as regards Nature. This is perhaps an original view of scepticism, but there is no way of evading its application; if Nature represents the wisdom and goodness of God, to be blind to its interpretation is a form of scepticism — devout and well-intentioned though it may be. Especially the Roman Church has been led away from its pristine faith in Nature as a manifestation of the divine, while the Protestant Church, in consequence of this loss of faith during the nineteenth century, has suffered a loss of influence in the world which it will require a long period to regain. If the laws of Nature are manifestations of the divine power and wisdom, as we proclaim in

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our services, the attitude of the Church toward these laws should not be hesitant, defensive, or apologetic, but active, receptive, and aggressive.

Considered in this way the great scientific inquiry of the latter half of the nineteenth century, so far from being regarded as destructive, is a constructive, purifying, and regenerating movement; it takes us back to the lost faith of our fathers, a faith which spiritualized the Old Testament, a faith which finds in Nature a manifestation of the divine order of things. If Newton opened to us the new heavens, Darwin showed us the new earth, Pasteur showed the way to the physical redemption of man. If we were to rewrite the Litany in the twentieth century, for the passage, "From plague, pestilence, and famine, good Lord, deliver us," we should read, "From

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ignorance of Thy Laws and disobedience of Thy Commands, good Lord, deliver us.”

From the standpoint of this older teaching of Augustine and Dante the life-work of Louis Pasteur was more than humanitarian, it was more than scientific, it was religious. He regarded natural processes which in their superficial view appear relentless, cruel, wholly inexplicable, as part of a possibly beneficent order of things; he again revealed through his profound insight, through his unparalleled toil, discouragement, and even scorn on the part of his contemporaries, deeper laws, which are beneficent, protective, and restorative in action. He was the evangelist of Osler's "third gospel":

“And the third gospel, the gospel of his body, which brings man into relation with Nature—a true *evangelion*,

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the glad tidings of a conquest beside which all others sink into insignificance — is the final conquest of Nature, out of which has come man's redemption of man. . . .”

“If in the memorable phrase of the Greek philosopher, Prodicus, ‘That which benefits human life is God,’ we may see in this new gospel a link betwixt us and the crowning race of those who eye to eye shall look on knowledge, and in whose hand Nature shall be an open book, an approach to the glorious day of which Shelley sings so gloriously:

‘Happiness

And Science dawn though late upon the earth;
Peace cheers the mind, health renovates the
frame;
Disease and pleasure cease to mingle here,
Reason and passion cease to combat there,
Whilst mind unfettered o’er the earth extends
Its all-subduing energies, and wields
The sceptre of a vast dominion there.’”

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Should we not institute a new order of sainthood for men like Pasteur? Could we find one more eminent for consecration, piety, and service in life and character than this devout investigator? Entrance to this order would be granted to those who through the study of Nature have extended the bounds of human knowledge, have bestowed incomparable blessings on the human race, have relieved human suffering, have saved or prolonged human life. Would not a statue of Louis Pasteur in the Cathedral of St. John the Divine proclaim the faith of the modern Church that the two great historic movements of Love and of Knowledge, of the spiritual and intellectual and the physical well-being of man, are harmonious parts of a single and eternal truth? On the base of such a statue might be inscribed the words written

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by Pasteur in the most perplexing period of his life:

“GOD GRANT THAT BY MY PERSEVERING LABORS I MAY BRING A LITTLE STONE TO THE FRAIL AND ILL-ASSURED EDIFICE OF OUR KNOWLEDGE OF THOSE DEEP MYSTERIES OF LIFE AND DEATH WHERE ALL OUR INTELLECTS HAVE SO LAMENTABLY FAILED.”

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