



NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY



THE

INQUISITION.

PART II.



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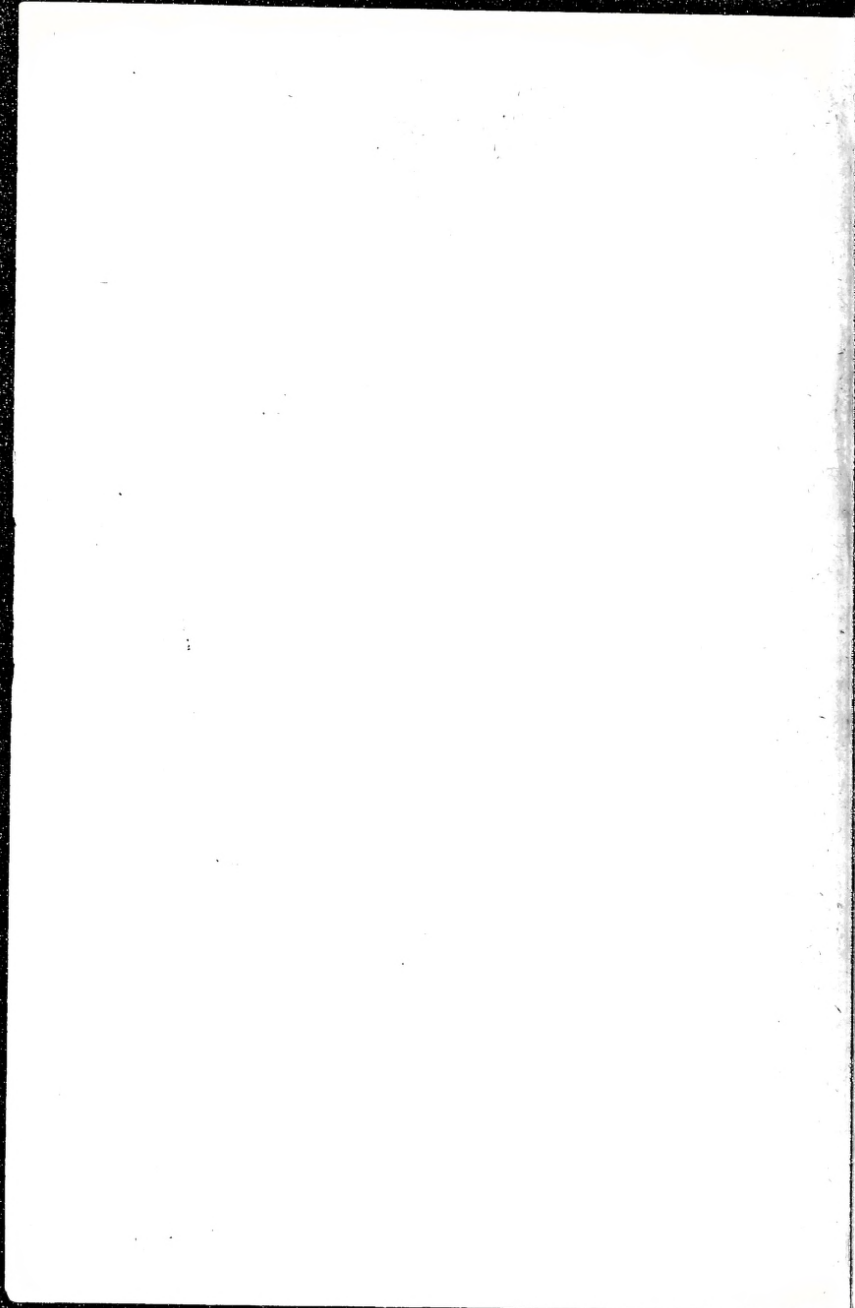
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THE INQUISITION.

PART II.

THE leading heretical sects were known respectively as the Catharists, Waldenses, and Petrobrusians, or Albigensis. In spite of the remorseless persecution of these by the Papal hierarchy, they continued to increase and to attract to themselves new factions and sects, all the sects having, at least, the opinion in common, "that the public and established religion was a motley system of errors and superstition, and that the dominion which the Popes had usurped over Christians and the authority they exercised in religious matters were unlawful and tyrannical." These sectaries, of course, quoted against the Papacy the ever-convenient Scriptures, which can be cited in favour of every possible virtue or pravity, from putting a new seat in the Great White Throne to putting a new furnace in the Bottomless Pit.

The Waldensian heretics, as also the Protestant heretics of a later century, had, at least, one powerful advantage over the Secular heretics of to-day. Many princes, nobles, and magistrates foresaw, in the triumph of the olden heresies, a triumph for themselves in the overthrow of the civil dominance of the sacred order, the restoration to the civil power of wide tracts of Church territory, and an immunity from paying the grievous taxes and imposts necessary to support the stupendous magnificence and extravagant luxury of the monasteries, abbeys, and cathedrals. The mighty ones of the earth do not look forward to any benefits of this nature from the triumph of Secularism, and, consequently, on our side, we have no Raymond and no Frederic, no Louis of Hesse, no Regent Murray, no Lords of the Congregation. Intellectually and morally, Europe is now as ripe for Agnostic Secularism as ever she was for the Arian, Albigensian, or

Lutheran heresy. But the moral courage of Europe dare not follow where the dominating classes might suffer material loss. The possessions that Secularism might confiscate from the Church would not be diverted to the prince, the noble, or the plutocrat; and so these take no part in helping on the Secular evangel. If we of this forlorn hope had any prize to offer to the classes who through all history ever have, and who through all history ever shall have, the ball of the earth at their foot, Secularism would be exalted and Christianity in the dust before this generation has passed away. The question between God and no God is a mere drop in the bucket to the more concrete considerations that determine the motives and actions of mankind. In the latter end of last century the French nation had God and no God time about, without any serious mental and moral inconvenience.

If every angel in heaven were to pull a feather out of his wing, sharpen it into a pen, and commence to write for this journal in support of Anti-Theism, the effect would be almost *nil*. But were I an astute and able prime minister of England, who, by a master-stroke of diplomacy, could throw such a sop to certain interests as would ensure the passage through the legislature of a measure essentially Atheistic, I would, by one blow, have hurled god out of heaven. Properly speaking, even now we have no god at all. We have only a goddess, and her name is GRUNDY. She sits with Jehovah and his son upon her lap; but let her once cast them thence, and they are gods no more. Reason and logic have nothing to do with the matter. Make the want of a god *respectable*; and, whatever logic may say, the having of a god will be low and vulgar. Make it profitable and conventional to preach Agnostic Secularism, and the reverse to preach "Christ and him crucified," and ninety-nine out of a hundred of the men who are at present, at Oxford and Cambridge, training for holy orders will leave "Christ and him crucified" to take care of itself. Only the other day I remonstrated with a learned man and independent thinker whom I met returning from church. "And this from *you*," said I, "after the admissions you made to me about this Christism?" "Aye, this from

me," he retorted; "make your d——d ism *respectable*, and I will take to it in preference to Christism."

But here we stand, hoping against hope. We cry in the wilderness, scorched by the sun of contumely, smothered in the sands of neglect. A little band of fanatics for Truth, we devote to principle the pens that should bring us fame. Our propaganda is not of this world; for it is not framed to attract the cupidity of the classes who could render us adequate support. Far otherwise was it, as we have pointed out, with the rebels against Rome; and so they were enabled to write a large and sanguinous page in the world's history—with leaders intrinsically feebler than ours—and, at length, to divide the spoils of empire with her of the Seven Hills. The pontiffs were not slow to recognise that, in point of numbers, as well as in point of social rank, their heretical enemies were most formidable, and the most exceptional means were resorted to for their suppression. As early as the year 1198 Pope Innocent III. had commenced the persecution of the Waldenses and Albigensis. He had confiscated their goods, giving one-third to their accusers, disinherited their children, and denied them the rites of burial. Early in the next century he despatched legates extraordinary into Southern France to stamp out heresy at whatever cost and hazard. The followers of Dominic and Francis were now zealously seconded in their inquisitorial work by the Cisterians, Rainer and Pierre de Castlenau.

Rainer and de Castlenau proved, by their inquisitorial unscrupulousness and merciless cruelty, to be successful missionaries of the holy see. Their secret and remorseless mode of procedure had rendered them and their accomplices bitterly unpopular on the scene of their operations, and they, in performance of their task, had to carry their lives in their hands, owing to retaliatory outbursts of popular fury. But the Pope and his cardinals cared for none of these things. The heretics had had decidedly the worst of it, and that was enough. A council was consequently held at Toulouse in 1229, which placed the Inquisition upon a still broader basis by appointing in every city a council of Inquisitors, consisting of one priest and three laymen. In 1233 Pope

Gregory IX. superseded the measures passed at the Council of Toulouse by delegating to the followers of St. Dominic the duty of discovering heretics and running them to earth. Shortly afterwards the Bishop of Tournay set loose upon France Pierre Cellan and Guillaume Arnaud, perhaps the most devilishly-successful of all the Inquisitors; and the most diabolical institution that ever cursed the world set its dungeon and rack right grimly to their work.

"Not Christianity did this!" cries the Christian apologist; "it was the inherent cruelty and depravity of human nature!" Poor human nature! Would to heaven that it could get a proper chance that it could be permitted to mind its own proper business and have nothing in the way of Ormuzes and Ahrimans, gods and devils. Essentially, man does not dislike his brother man so bitterly that he could torture him. But he resorts to this sort of thing when flamens and hierophants drive him mad with deities and fiends. Once impress upon man (who is always a fool—his wickedness arises from that) that there is a *post-mortem* existence about which he must concern himself in this *pre-mortem* existence, and you administer to him a draught of a sort of moral bang, or brandy dashed with gunpowder, which renders him delirious; and his delirium too frequently finds vent in the pastime of cutting his neighbour's throat. The world's trillion fools always dance to the tune played by the world's dozen knaves, and the knaves know well that the mad carmagnole is danced best to the notes of the religious psalter. It has been claimed for many of the leaders in the Inquisition, as, indeed, for many of the prime movers in all religious persecutions, that they were men of unimpeachable morals, large human sympathies, and kindly amiability of disposition. Delude such men into the faith that thereby they are serving the highest and immortal interests of themselves and their race, and there is no river of blood through which they will not wade, no rack-lever which they will not pull, no red-hot pincers with which they will not tear off the writhing flesh of their own wife or child. "Indeed," says Buckle, "that the Inquisitors were remarkable for an undeviating and incorruptible integrity may

be proved in a variety of ways, and from different and independent sources of evidence. Llorente, the great historian of the Inquisition, and its bitter enemy, had access to its private papers; and yet, with the fullest means of information, he does not even insinuate a charge against the moral character of the inquisitors; but, while execrating the cruelty of their conduct, he cannot deny the purity of their intentions. Thirty years earlier Townsend, a clergyman of the Church of England, published his valuable work on Spain; and though, as a Protestant and an Englishman, he had every reason to be prejudiced against the infamous system which he describes, he also can bring no charge against those who upheld it; but, having occasion to mention its establishment at Barcelona, one of its most important branches, he makes the remarkable admission that all its members are men of worth, and that most of them are of distinguished humanity. These facts, startling as they are, form a very small part of that vast mass of evidence which history contains, and which decisively proves the utter inability of moral feelings to diminish religious persecution. It is to the diffusion of knowledge, and to that alone, that we owe the comparative cessation of what is unquestionably the greatest evil men have ever inflicted on their own species."

I cannot follow historically the blood-stained footsteps of the most hideous Sammaël, or Death-angel, that ever, keeping time to the cry of human suffering, marched over sweltering hills of human carnage. Half-blinded by the blood-mists that rise up from the chasm of the centuries that lie between Then and Now, I dimly descry the outlines of the slaughter of the *million men* who perished in the Albigensian war alone. Over the huge holocaust of rotten rags, shreds and strings of putrid flesh, whitening bones, and rusting swords, I gaze into the mythic heaven and fabled hell, and ask what in the one was to be hoped for, what in the other was to be feared, to warrant this colossal sacrifice on the altar of Ruin and Death. Huge heap of pestilence, death-glaring eyes, and wriggling worms, whatever heaven what was immortal of you may have reached, you have left a hell behind you. All around you for miles the fire-

burnt and blood-slaked earth is echoing with the cry of the widow and the fatherless. There the wolf is tearing the sleeve and flesh from the arm that should have earned bread for the orphan that is perishing. There the raven is rending away from the grinning teeth the lips of the youth that, in the moonlight streaming through the myrtle, should, to the maid of his choice, have whispered of love. Freethought is buried under a mountain of corpses ; incipient Protestantism* is drowned in blood. The Albigensians have perished under the "Holy Office" of the Inquisition, and the South of France is a hideous Gehenna. A million men have perished on the battle-field and scaffold, and millions of the unarmed are left to mourn for them and die of hunger. Southern France was a Paradise ; but, from that baleful hill near Jerusalem, the shadow of the Cross was flung athwart the welkin, and there was nothing but the apples of Gomorrah growing among the cinders of Tophet. The Prince of Peace, who came not to bring peace, but a sword, had brought the sword and fleshed it to the hilt. The air was hot with burning cities and pestilent with the stench of corpses. The unripened harvest was trampled in the dust, torn out of root by the feet of men in the death-grapple, and, ever and anon, wet with a rain redder than the heavens ever gave forth. In the abomination of desolation the starving mother with her dying child sought the field where the olive had grown, and where, from the vine tendrils, the bunches of the grapes had hung, that, with the juice, she might moisten the lips of her dying babe. She found vine and olive uprooted and withered and scorched and blasted, while among their tangles lay rotting the horse and his rider ; and mother and child sank down beside them to share with them the commonwealth of death. And all this for thee, and in thy name, O terrible Galilean ! Thy Church now proclaimed the land "purified," for the heretic was dumb. In that vale of Hinom, and in the creaking of Torquemada's racks, I trace thee,

* Sismondi says : "In the exposition made by the Bishop of Tournay of the errors of the Albigensis we find nearly all the principles upon which Luther and Calvin founded the Reformation of the sixteenth century."

son of Mary; and yet the fashion of my age and nation expects me to bless thy name and to recognise in thy baleful cross the tree "whose leaves were for the healing of the nations"!

Even now we have arrived at a time when it is almost impossible to believe that the species to which we belong was ever so mad as to put into force an ordinance* by which it was made the duty of all true Catholics to inform the Inquisition whether they knew of any one present or absent, living or dead, who entertained, or had entertained, any doctrinal opinions of which the Church did not approve; whether they knew of any one who had a leaning towards the heresies of Luther, who possessed a copy of any heretical book of the Koran, or even of the Bible, in a tongue understood by the people, or who had protected or in any way favoured heretics. And the office of "Familiar"—that is, spy or informer—was so honourable and lucrative that it was frequently competed for by persons of rank and influence.

God help the person, innocent or guilty, against whom the "Familiar," for personal spite or any other reason, cared to prefer a charge of heresy! From the moment the accused entered the Inquisitorial court he was cut off from the world as effectively as is a toad who lives in the centre of a granite rock. His place was in a deep vault of the *Holy House*, utterly alone and in rayless darkness. His dungeon had two doors to its only outlet. The inner door was bound with iron, and had an iron grating through which the food was pushed as if to a wild beast. No friend was allowed to visit the entombed one: he had no books and no light by which to read books, even if he had had them. If the sound of hymn or soliloquy or moan arose from the depths of his living grave, the officer in watch over it had a terrible way of maintaining the grave's normal silence. And yet that weird and eerie death-in-life was in itself happiness to the unutterable suspense of what his sentence might be in the court above—a sentence most likely to be succeeded by excruciating torture.

First, the accused one was called upon to confess his

* Such an ordinance was passed in Spain in 1732.

guilt. If he did so, he was held to have pronounced his own sentence, and he was punished accordingly. If he did not confess, he was subjected to torture to try whether, as he writhed in mortal agony, when his tongue jabbered madness and his brain reeled in delirium, he should make admissions he would not make in his sanity. His accuser was not before him, and he did not know even his name. He could employ no counsel, he could call no witnesses. There were only the two lay inquisitors and the monk sitting beside the crucifix, skull, and candle, ominous of death in the most fearful form in which it can come to man.

Mutilated out of human shape, haggard and swollen from the torture-room, the condemned heretic is led out to the *auto-da-fé*. His eyes, bleared and wild from the dungeon, blink impotently in the glare of the torch that is to light the fagots at the stake where he will shortly shrivel up in the fire, because he entertained, or was supposed to entertain, some doctrinal opinion a hair-breadth wrong about that irrepressible and terrible Jesus.

It is Sunday, the favourite day for the *auto-da-fé*. The morning is only breaking; only one half of the sun's red disc is, as yet, above the horizon. The radiance of the east is lying in faint and partial rays across the penumbral landscape. The pines nod on the hills, and the morning light shakes and shimmers on the white crests of the sea. The sparrows chirm, and the peasant stalks from his hut in the field, from the thatch roof of which a wreath of blue smoke is curling up into the air. From afar there comes the muffled sound of the crowing of cocks and the barking of dogs; and the breeze is redolent of dewy fields and opening rose-buds. Man's world is beautiful and suggestive of a holy and elevated life. But the day dawns, and we find that man's beautiful world has been cursed with the nightmare of a Christ, and that man, in his devout delirium, turns his "Earthly Paradise" into hell, and, in god-madness, imbrues his hands in the blood of his brother.

The entire disc of the sun is now above the horizon. There is hurry and bustle and pouring crowds, and the great bell of the cathedral peals out its most deep and solemn dong to summon the faithful to the *auto-da-fé*.

Men of high rank and men of no rank are jostling along in the street to witness the execution of the heretics—a duty they owe to the Church, to the State, and to God. Fair ladies, too, the dower nearest to heaven that earth possesses, are there in their gilded carriages and on their ambling palfreys. Against the morning air they wear their mantles of taffeta welted with cloth of gold. Their hair streams down on their coronals of gems, and sweet-breathed and young, ardent in affection and plastic to the touch of love, they yet assemble to see human beings burned alive. Even they are debased and debauched by the spell-word of this Jesus, and the purest and tenderest impulses of their life have been immolated before the baleful symbol of "THUS SAITH THE LORD."

On march barefooted the condemned, with the exception of those whose feet have been crushed to jelly in the torture-engines, and they are drawn on tumbrils. Every victim is robed in the awful *san-benito*, a coarse yellow tunic, painted all over with flames and devils, but with the sign of Calvary's dreadful cross on the breast and back. The Dominicans marched in front with the banner of the Inquisition, and again the emblem of Calvary's accursed cross (this time a huge wooden one) was borne by monks immediately in front of those whose remaining few steps upon earth were upon the edge of their fiery grave. Behind them were the effigies of suspected persons who had fled, and black coffins containing the bones of those who had been convicted of heresy subsequently to their death and burial. The effigies and the coffins were painted all over with flames and fiends. At the stake the victim was asked, "In what faith will you die?" If he replied, "The Catholic," he was, in mercy, strangled before he was burned. If he did not reply, "The Catholic," the loving kindness of strangulation was denied him, and, in the presence of priests, roughs, artisans, nobles, ladies, and even kings, the heretic stood till the fire had burned away, and with its feet in a heap of hot ashes, a blackened and undistinguishable human cinder stood, lashed up to the stake by an iron chain. The chain was unloosed, the erect cinder fell down among the other cinders and ashes, and the crowd dispersed. Another heretic had been

despatched to endless torment, another service had been done for Jesus ; at least, through all the sword and flame of the terrible centuries, Jesus never indicated that the service was one he did not appreciate ; the voice of eternal Benevolence was dumb, the hand of everlasting Omnipotence was unlifted.

Since the hammer of Heresy has broken the teeth of the Church, the fact that these teeth, when intact, ever bit so fearfully almost passes the bounds of credence. The conception is so diabolical, and the details so heart-rending, that the mere printed page of history would hardly succeed in convincing us that practices so inhuman ever prevailed among the human. But we have more than history's printed page to tell the ghastly tale. True, the Inquisitorial pandemonia of Spain are roofless and in ruins ; but, at Nuremberg, in Bavaria, we can still see a torture-establishment intact, and the inspection of it may corroborate history and make the world shudder for centuries to come. In recording his recent visit to Nuremberg a Christian writer* remarks :—"We found ourselves in a rather roomy chamber, it might be about twelve feet square. This was the Chamber of Question. Along the side of the apartment ran a low platform. There sat of old the Inquisitors, three in number—the first a divine, the second a casuist, and the third a civilian. The only occupant of that platform was the crucifix, or image of the Saviour on the cross, which still remained. The six candles that usually burned before the 'holy Fathers' were, of course, extinguished ; but our lantern supplied their place, and showed us the grim furnishings of the apartment. In the middle was the horizontal rack, or bed of torture, on which the victim was stretched till bone started from bone, and his dislocated frame became the seat of agony, which was suspended only when it had reached a pitch that threatened death. Leaning against the wall of the chamber was the upright rack, which is simpler, but as an instrument of torture not less effectual, than the horizontal one. There was the iron chain which wound over a pulley, and hauled up the victim to the vaulted roof ; and there were the

* Rev. Dr. A. Wylie.

two great stone weights which, tied to his feet and the iron cord let go, brought him down with a jerk that dislocated his limbs, while the spiky rollers which he grazed in his descent cut into and excoriated his back, leaving his body a bloody, dislocated mass.

“Here, too, was the cradle of which we have made mention above, amply garnished within with cruel knobs, on which the sufferer, tied hand and foot, was thrown at every movement of the machine, to be bruised all over, and brought forth discoloured, swollen, bleeding, but still living.

“All round, ready to hand, were hung the minor instruments of torture. There were screws and thumbkins for the fingers, spiked collars for the neck, iron boots for the legs, gags for the mouth, cloths to cover the face and permit the slow percolation of water, drop by drop, down the throat of the person undergoing this form of torture. There were rollers set round with spikes, for bruising the arms and back; there were iron scourges, pincers and tongs for tearing out the tongue, slitting the nose and ears, and otherwise disfiguring and mangling the body till it was horrible and horrifying to look upon it.

* * * *

There were instruments for compressing the fingers till the bones should be squeezed to splinters. There were instruments for probing below the finger nails till an exquisite pain, like a burning fire, would run along the nerves. There were instruments for tearing out the tongue, for scooping out the eyes, for grubbing up the ears. There were bunches of iron cords, with a spiked circle at the end of every whip, for tearing the flesh from the back till bone and sinew were laid bare. There were iron cases for the legs, which were tightened upon the limb placed in them by means of a screw, till flesh and bone were reduced to a jelly. There were cradles set full of sharp spikes, in which victims were laid and rolled from side to side, the wretched occupant being pierced at each movement of the machine with innumerable sharp points. There were iron ladles with long handles, for holding molten lead or boiling pitch, to be poured down the throat of the victim, and convert his body

into a burning cauldron. There were frames with holes to admit the hands and feet, so contrived that the person put into them had his body bent into unnatural and painful positions, and agony became greater and greater by moments, and yet the man did not die. There were chestfuls of small but most ingeniously-constructed instruments for pinching, probing, or tearing the more sensitive parts of the body, and continuing the pain up to the very verge where reason or life gives way. On the floor and walls of the apartments were other and larger instruments for the same fearful end—lacerating, mangling, and agonising living men; but these we shall meet in other dungeons we are yet to visit.

“Here there is a vaulted chamber, entirely dug out of the living rock, except the roof, which is formed of hewn stone. It contains an iron image of the Virgin, and on the opposite wall, suspended by an iron hook, is a lamp, which, when lighted, shows the goodly proportions of ‘Our Lady.’ On the instant of touching a spring the image flings open its arms, which resemble the doors of a cupboard, and which are seen to be stuck full on the inside with poignards, each about a foot in length. Some of these knives are so placed as to enter the eyes of those whom the image enfolded in its embrace, others are set so as to penetrate the ears and brain, others to pierce the breast, and others again to gore the abdomen.

“The person who had passed through the terrible ordeal of the Question Chamber, but had made no recantation, would be led along the tortuous passage by which we had come and ushered into this vault, where the first object that would greet his eye, the pale light of the lamp falling on it, would be the iron Virgin. He would be bidden to stand right in front of the image. The spring would be touched by the executioner, the Virgin would fling open her arms, and the wretched victim would straightway be forced within them. Another spring was then touched, the Virgin closed upon her victim; a strong wooden beam, fastened at one end of the wall by a moveable joint, the other against the doors of the iron image, was worked by a screw, and as the beam was pushed out the spiky arms of the Virgin slowly but irresistibly closed upon the man, cruelly goring him.

“When the dreadful business was ended it needed not that the executioner should put himself to the trouble of making the Virgin unclasp the mangled carcase of her victim ; provision had been made for its quick and secret disposal. At the touching of a third spring the floor of the image would slide aside, and the body of the victim drop down the mouth of a perpendicular shaft in the rock. We look down this pit, and can see at a great depth the shimmer of the water. A canal had been made to flow underneath the vault where stood the iron Virgin, and when she had done her work upon those who were delivered over to her tender mercies she let them fall, with quick descent and sudden plunge, into the canal underneath, where they were floated to the Pegnitz, and from the Pegnitz to the Rhine, and by the Rhine to the ocean, there to sleep beside the dust of Huss and Jerome.”

A name which has been associated more than any other for the last fifteen centuries with the world's pain and misery is still the name that commands the greatest reverence to-day, such is the infatuation and madness of mankind. The spaniel whines and licks the foot that kicks him ; but man makes his own fiend and calls him a deity—kicks himself with his own foot and blesses the operation. Some day man may awake to find that Paradise is at his own fireside, and among the objects of his daily life. But, as yet, he prays and cries in the troubled dream of a hectic nightmare. The hero of this nightmare is this terrible Jesus Christ, who, with his blood-reddened cross and his crown of thorns, makes the dream horrent with teleological terrors, and who, with his grave-clothes and wounded side haunts the dreamer through all the phantom-lands of Misery. The curse of man is that he cares less for what concerns him than for what does not concern him at all. This world is all he can know—yea, much more than he can ever know—and yet he cannot be persuaded to stand up manfully in it and do his part ; he must needs, in his folly, lean over the rim of it to invent Elysiums and heavens in which he may drink the wine of gladness, and to torment himself with Niflheims and hells, in which he may drain to the dregs the chalice of inexpressible pain. When will he learn

that his business is with his living neighbour, and not with the dead Jesus Christ? When will the truth of the Gospel dawn upon him, that his own children are cherubim, that the mother of these children is more to him than the Mary of theology, and that her homely cradle-song to her babe is holier than all the music from the harps of angels?

Biological Evolution is slow. What æons may lie between the anthropoid ape and man as he is? What æons may yet lie between man as he is, diseased and insane, and man as he will be, healthy and sane? Surely the time will yet come when man burning man to death in the name of Jesus, will be a more curious palæontological fact than the Neanderthal skull is now. The Future may, in spite of history, yet deny the fact as incredible that there was ever such an institution as the 'Holy Office' of the Inquisition, and that, in diseased mentation, man pursued a phantom and exercised his highest ingenuity to, for God's sake, augment human suffering in every mean between the two extremes of tearing off a fellow creature's flesh with red-hot pincers to tickling him to death with a feather?

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