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**IF.**

[Revised for the Torch of Reason.]

If man would but his finer nature know!  
How much of sorrow, misery and woe,  
Would from his life be sifted out, and  
then  
Much nobler still might be his fellow  
men!

If man would but his better nature learn!  
How much of passion, much of sins that  
burn  
The life-blood from his heart so full of  
fear,  
Might, by this learning, all be then  
made clear!

If man would but his finer nature feel!  
How many painful wounds his hands  
might heal  
That now make miserable his brothers,  
when  
They should be helpful, earnest, toiling  
men!

If man would grandly feel and learn and  
know  
His better nature, he could onward go  
From one great deed to others just as  
grand,  
Until he made of this a fair, a perfect  
land.

**The Night of the Middle Ages.**

BY FELIX OSWALD, M. D.

"Your prayers for light shall be answered, if you consent to open your eyes."—[G. E. Lessing.]

Since the dawn of modern rationalism, the path of social reform has been obstructed by a Sphinx that still propounds her riddle to every philosopher, to every moralist, to every speculative historian. That Sphinx is the Christian religion; and the riddle, which has to be solved before we can clear the road of progress, is the enigma of the Middle Ages.

Whence that dreadful night that followed suddenly and unnaturally upon the bright sunrise of pagan civilization? that long eclipse of reason, science, freedom, and happiness, that trance-like lethargy of the very nations which before and after gave the most decided proofs of their capacity for mental progress? What turned their health into a thousand years' disease? Was it the influence of a supernatural religion? Then, how did the followers of other supernatural creeds happen to escape that doom?

For we should not forget that the morning-hour of our prosperous Age of Reason is but a moment compared with the long centuries of health and prosperity which the Greeks, the Spanish Moors, and the Eastern Saracens contrived to combine with a firm belief in the reality of supernatural agencies.

It would have been well for the nations of Europe, if their priests had contented themselves with the inculcation of such beliefs. The misery of the Middle Ages was due not to the supernatural, but to the

anti-natural, tendency of the Christian religion. According to the gospel of the Galilean Buddhists, earth, with all its joys and desires, with all its visible and invisible habitants, is wholly evil; the renunciation of temporal blessings is the first condition of eternal welfare, and death the only gate of true life. The Christians did not deny the existence of the pagan deities: they merely changed them into devils. The pagan Pantheon became a pandemonium. Rivers, woods, and mountains swarmed, not with harmless nymphs and dryads, but with tempting demons, emissaries of the brimstone-pit who devoted their superhuman powers to the seduction and affliction of Adam's progeny. The gods and saints of Greece, Rome, and Palestine, descended from heaven to share the earthly joys of mortals, to bless and hallow the scenes of their earthly struggles and triumphs. The saints of Buddhism and Christianity visited earth to mar its joys, to depreciate its blessings, to wean its children from their natural instincts and sympathies. Has the worship of sorrow ever failed to darken the light of nature? Has it added one millet-seed to the sum of earthly happiness? Did the Apostle of Galilee ever speak one word in favor of industry, rational education, the love and study of nature, physical and intellectual culture? Not one. Has his mission promoted our progress in the paths of science and freedom? Not one step. His doctrine in all its tendencies is wholly unearthly, and therefore wholly unavailable for secular purposes.

The pagan gods were the deified powers of Nature, the patrons of mariners, shepherds, and husbandmen. The Christian gods, were the deified enemies of Nature. Even the Christian Deus Maximus frowned on earthly pleasures, and could be propitiated only by the mortification of almost every natural instinct: the bounteous All-father had become an All-tormentor, a celestial grand-inquisitor, who demanded an implicit submission of human reason to inhuman dogmas; and doomed the vast plurality of creatures to the tortures of an everlasting auto-da-fe.

In the instinct of freedom, in the love of knowledge, and the sense of beauty, the Christian moralists, like the pagan philosophers, recognized the power of a mysterious inspiration, but with this difference, that the pagans ascribed that inspiration to the favor of a beneficent god, the Christians to the wiles of a tempting

fiend. More than fifty generations of our Christian ancestors were taught to neglect the health laws of nature as unworthy the attention of a candidate for the higher blessings of the world to come. Every opposition to the tyranny of the secular or spiritual authorities was punished as a revolt against the authority of a creed which inculcated the duty of submission to injustice. The holy alliance of church and state disdained to recognize the natural rights of men whose natural instincts were supposed to be wholly evil. In every progress of natural science, the guardians of an anti-natural creed scented a danger to the prerogatives of the holy brotherhood. Every philosopher, every mathematician, every naturalist, had to keep the secret of his discoveries, if he wished to keep his head. The night of the middle ages was not the natural blindness of unenlightened barbarians, but an unnatural darkness, maintained by an elaborate system of spiritual despotism, and in spite of the fierce struggles of many light-loving nations.—[The Secret of the East.]

**Education a Cure for Bigotry.**

Ignorance is not only the mother of superstition, she is also the parent of fear. He who has no definite knowledge of what he professes to believe, is not only afraid openly to avow his sentiments, and firmly to maintain them, but he is also afraid to have them very closely examined. The consequence is, that if he possesses any power over those that are about him, he finds it far easier to propagate and defend his opinions by the awe of his authority, than by the clearness of his explanations and the force of his arguments. Hence, an ignorant people are afraid of frank inquiry and close investigation, not so much, perhaps, because they fear the skepticism of others, as because they dread the exposure of their own ignorance.

It is here, then, that bigotry begins to fetter the powers of the human mind, and to chain it in a thralldom far more distressing than the imprisonment of the body. Among an ignorant people, the child is not permitted, with freedom, to express its sentiments. To dare to doubt what has been said to be true by its friends and its relations, is to subject itself, if not to their censure, at least to their gloomy frowns and their dark suspicions. The result is, not the inculcation of correct sentiments, but the growth of an ignorant bigotry; and then, when the

mind, unshackled from these early religious restraints, begins to examine for itself, there are ten thousand obstacles in the path of truth; there is still this long-cherished fear of offending those whom they have been taught to reverence and love; there is connected with this, perhaps, a deep sense of shame, because they know so little of things with which they ought to have been familiar; there is a feeling of discouragement at the contemplation of those who are apparently firm in their conviction, and enjoying the pleasures of unwavering faith; then there is the cutting, withering conviction that they are unsettled in their opinions, and yet cannot express a doubt, without sacrificing character. It takes a firm and decided mind, particularly if one possesses warm and ardent affections, to bear up with perseverance, under the pressure of circumstances like these. And we have often thought that many an individual thus educated, or rather thus permitted to grow up in ignorance, has, in the madness of disappointed enthusiasm, rejected the truth, through fear of subjection to the bigotry of error.

Education prevents such catastrophes. It scatters light upon what is dark, instead of enveloping it in tenfold darkness. It encourages inquiry because it loves the truth. The parent who is instructed wishes the child to ask, that it may receive its instruction. Reasonable doubts are heard with attention, and answered with candor, and the village where such a state of society exists, is a village from which bigotry flies, and in which truth makes her dwelling.—[Horace Seaver.]

Religion and morality have never kept abreast. The most strikingly religious epochs have been those most darkly stained with brutality and fraud. Evolution and dissolution of peoples, as of all things, is ceaseless; but the evolving peoples are the least religious and the dissolving peoples the most religious. Civilization and morals, in evolving peoples, run together; and our modern and moral civilization is mainly due to Pagan letters and Arab science. The forces of religion are not those of progress, and progressive forces are not religious. Biological science surely teaches that morality is a necessity of sentient life. It is a primary and inherent property of nerve-matter. Morality is an endowment of all animals, while religion is an acquired propensity arising among early men, flourishing in the less cultured and paling in the more cultured civilizations. Morality is primary and fundamental, religions are parasitic and transitory.—[Jordan.]