

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

A WOUNDED SOLDIER TALKS OF GOD

SIR,—I received today the September number of your REVIEW, and, as every month, I perused it with the utmost pleasure. I was particularly interested by the title of one of the articles, "A Modern Conception of God," but although I read it thrice very attentively, I must confess that had I been a believer I should have much more confused ideas now than before. So that, being a Frenchman, lying in a bed since many months, and being feverish at the very idea of the war in which I have no place, I thought that I could as well chat with you half an hour on that very quiet and soothing subject, God.

I am not very conversant with modern philosophy, so that if I did not understand the above mentioned article, I do not ascribe the fault to the author. But these last years I have been reading regularly half a dozen of American monthlies and weeklies, and of course I have seen in them the subject of God spoken of very often. But I fail to remember when the writer thereof did not take for granted that there was a God, and build upon those premises a lot of consequences, and finally I have been brought to think that in America it was a very wicked and almost forbidden thing to question the very existence of God.

Now for a Frenchman that is a rather amusing idea, because all the thinking people I know of here have questioned that existence (we were such a rotten people, you know) and the majority have arrived at the conclusion that there was no God. Although I have been brought up very religiously, as soon as I was able to think a little by myself all my religious garments fell at once. And I am yet to meet the man who could show me clearly why there should be a God. Has any American an answer for it?

When I put that question to any believer, I almost exclusively get the answer that the Rev. P. S. Moxom seems to give also (creation is the process through which God expresses and fulfils His own being). That is, there is a God because things have been created, and hence there must be a creator. There may be other reasons, but as nobody ever took the pains to give them to me, I'll stop only at that one.

Let us try to see what there is at the bottom of this idea, creation. We know of two infinities, time and space, and in them are contained everything we know—God Himself, if He exists. Then I see only two manners of seeing the universe: In the infinity of time, matter (is that the word for French *matière*?) is infinite and eternal, and transforms itself, following laws of which we know a small number; or, at a certain day, an eternal and immaterial something that we name God created, out of nothing, that matter and set it a whirling.

Is there a third hypothesis? I never heard of it. Then let us look upon those two.

The first is simple and, to my mind, logical. The matter whose substance is to us unknown transforms itself around us, gradually, by processes of which we get sometimes a glimpse. We don't know why it does so, where it goes, if ever it has any end, but we know that all our knowledge, being finite, is not even a drop in the seas of the unknown. We try to learn the most of it and make the best of it—that's all. That is no explanation of our beginning and finalities, but we know that we cannot obtain that explanation.

The second hypothesis is much more complicated. For an infinity of time, an immaterial being has been living. We call him God. We suppose that He has almost all the qualities we share a little part of: science, power, etc. Then suddenly that Being creates the world. Why? I never had any answer for that "why." The most common one, that it was to give a field of experimentation to the human race and observe what would become of it, seems to me a ferocious joke. "A joke," because being God, He knew beforehand everything that would happen, and did not need the experience to prove it; and "ferocious," because that concept of human vanity, that man is the centre and motive of the universe on that pinhead we name earth, would make of Him a conceited coxcomb if things did not every day trample Him pitilessly. But let that "why" be for an instant unanswered. Do you think that this explanation of our origin, God, is better than the other? I see only that we merely change a material unintelligibility, matter, into an immaterial one, God. But that does not explain to my mind that unintelligibility.

Has any American an answer for all those questions? Every time I propounded them I was literally crammed with proofs out of the Bible, or sometimes out of the Koran and the Veddas! Well, I never wanted to know which was the best of Gods; but why is there a God? Surely in a Christian land like America, some minds did consider that question and resolve it satisfactorily for themselves. How they did it is what I should like to know.

It must be pretty well understood that any question of morals is to be set apart. I have since a long time observed that theists and atheists do behave very much alike in life, and that it would be very hard to discriminate them by their behavior. They conform, consciously or unconsciously, to the moral rules of the time and country they live in, and for the most part don't bother where those rules come from.

This is a rather long letter, Mr. Editor, but my excuse, as I told you, is that I lie crippled in my bed. I must also beg your very best indulgence for the poor English in which it is written; I should like better to write in French, but our language is not now for that sort of serene philosophy.

M. QUESNEY.

CLINIQUE LA PRIMEVÈRE, LEYSIN, SWITZERLAND.

[We venture to remind our friend of a saying by a great modern philosopher which may help him in his perplexity. It is as follows: "There are in man many regions more fertile and more profound than his reason or his intelligence."
—EDITOR.]

WHO STARTED SABBATH OBSERVANCE?

SIR,—Your reviewer of Dr. McConnell's *History of the American Episcopal Church* cites a passage from the book in which the author expresses

the opinion, or rather the conviction, that the proper observance of the Lord's Day is a heritage from the Presbyterians more than from the Puritans. It may be that the scrupulous regard for the Sabbath is to some extent due to Presbyterian influence; but it was certainly not the only agency. P. A. Bruce, in his *Institutional History of Virginia in the Seventeenth Century*, makes it clear by abundant citations that the people of the Old Dominion were as illiberal, if one chooses to put the case that way, as were those of New England; and they were nearly all Anglicans. Although I have not, at this moment, the work before me, I recall the author's remark that there was the largest possible liberty of action on week-days and the smallest imaginable on Sundays. Drunkenness and profanity attracted very little attention on six days of the week, but if a man had imbibed too freely of an intoxicant or so far forgot himself as to utter an oath on the seventh he was severely punished, if apprehended. A man must take no precautions against the ravages of a storm, if it occurred on Sunday, must not kill a noxious beast even on his own premises, or even be seen with a gun on that day. Whether we call this state of mind bigotry or conscientiousness, Mr. Bruce furnishes abundant data showing that it was by no means a characteristic of the people of New England solely. As I am not a student of Colonial history I do not know to what extent the records here drawn from have been examined before Mr. Bruce set himself to the task. Albeit, what he tells us will go far toward demonstrating that the strict observance of the Sabbath is a British rather than a Presbyterian or Puritan custom. This fact "leaps into the eye" of everybody who spends one Sunday in either England or Scotland at the present day, except in so far as it has been modified by the exigencies of the war. During the present century frequent complaint has been made, not only by church people, but also by liberals, against the increasing disregard for the Sabbath in Great Britain by foreigners and persons of foreign ancestry. There is no reason to believe that the veneration of the British people for the Sabbath is due to a reflex influence of the New country upon the Old as it has perdured in the latter country ever since the time of Cromwell if not longer. Perhaps some day an expert in what the Germans call "Folk-psychology" will tell us why the Protestants and the Roman Catholics in the British Isles differ so widely in this respect from those persons professing the same faith in continental Europe. It may be remarked in this connection that the automobile has made more serious inroads on what many people regard as the proper observance of the Lord's Day than any other agency since colonial times.

CHARLES W. SOPER.

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PROHIBITION IN COLORADO

SIR,—As a reader of THE NORTH AMERICAN REVIEW, I have been interested in the article on prohibition in Kansas, by Mr. Albert J. Nock, and also the article in the October number on "Prohibition's Legislative Efforts," by L. Ames Brown—but interested in the sense that I feel these articles do injustice to the principles of prohibition, and to the results, where it has been put in practice.

As to the results of practical prohibition, I wish to call attention to the

way it developed locally in this portion of Colorado, before it became a State matter.

In 1869 and the first part of 1870 the Greeley Colony was organized, with Horace Greeley as treasurer, and as a leader in the organization and final location of the colony.

Prohibition was an important principle in its first organization, and was carried to the extent that, after the site for the colony was selected, and each member of the colony given his lot in the town site, which was the social and business center for the development of the colony, there was put in each deed a clause calling for the forfeiture of the title to the lot if liquor were sold on the premises.

The town of Greeley, Colorado, began with the first of the colonists that landed on the town site, some fifty-two miles north of Denver, on what was then the Denver Pacific Railroad, May 1, 1870. Greeley now has a population of ten thousand or more, and there has never in all this time been a saloon allowed in the town. Now what I wish to call attention to is the fact that, while in this section Greeley has been the pioneer in the exclusion of saloons, in this part of the State the benefits have been so evident that, within the later years, not only have small towns grown up—as Windsor and Eaton—in which no saloons have been allowed, but others of the larger towns, as Longmont, Loveland, Fort Collins and later Boulder, have cut out the saloons.

These mentioned are the important towns in this section of the State, and this condition developed with no special push of the prohibition propaganda, but evidently from the leading citizens and business interests, who recognized that saloons were a detriment to the true prosperity of the community. And this development has come in the towns of Loveland, Fort Collins, and Boulder in comparatively recent years during the development of the sugar-beet industry. This industry has been the cause of a very large increase of population, many of whom are Germans, and accustomed to beer-drinking. The development of the temperance policy, put in practice here, though brought about first in the line of local option instead of State-wide prohibition, is conclusive evidence, to me, that where prohibition is fairly tested by time, its wisdom and benefits, with wise application, will be proved beyond contradiction.

JOHN E. LAW.

WINDSOR, COLORADO.

“SELF-SACRIFICING GERMANY”

SIR,—Would it not be advisable to cast out the beam in our own eye before we insist on removing the mote from the eye of Germany? It goes without saying that, so long as we are not concerned either with the causes or objects of the European war, only intent on prolonging this money-making massacre, we are guilty of a colossal crime against humanity. Being thus sordidly occupied, we obstreperously threaten Germany whenever she makes a move calculated to interfere with the transit of our munitions to the Allies and to shorten the white man's Armageddon. Aye, we dictate in season and out of season to self-sacrificing Germany, who in the hope to avert it altogether, put off mobilizing her army a little too long. We even reprobate Germany when, having failed to avert it altogether, she

tried to make this dire struggle as swift and bloodless as possible. Would Belgium permit the passage of her troops through her realm—accepting damages for any injury done? Of course not! Belgium being hand in glove with her powerful neighbors preferred to fight to a finish: thus proving to all who are not sordidly blind or have a political axe to grind that she was anything but neutral in spirit.

If one judged America and Europe today by their vituperative spokesmen, their scribes and pharisees, one would be tempted to believe that the pessimistic assertions of Mr. Chamberlain regarding the nineteenth century applied with still greater truth to the opening decades of the twentieth century. This is how the learned author of *The Foundations of the Nineteenth Century* puts it: "In the nineteenth century we have heard so much fine talk about the freedom of speech, the freedom of science, etc.; in reality, however, we have been worse enslaved than in the eighteenth century; for, in addition to the tyrants who have really never been disarmed, new and worse ones have arisen. The former tyranny could, with all its bitter injustice, strengthen the character; the new, which is a tyranny proceeding from and aiming at money, degrades to the lowest depths of bondage."

MARY IVES TODD.

BROOKLYN, N. Y.



INDEX

TO THE

TWO HUNDRED AND FOURTH VOLUME

OF THE

NORTH AMERICAN REVIEW

- ALEXANDER, HARTLEY B. The Morality of Force, 705.
 America and World Peace, 673.
 America Gone Too Far in Democracy, Has? 90.
 Are Americans Poor Farmers? 822.
 Americans, Are We "The?" 340.
 Art: "Who Wants Art Nowadays?" 235.
- AUERBACH, JOSEPH S. To Wolfe and Montcalm, 743; Gold of Toulouse, 744.
- Blacklist, The British, 825.
 Book of the Month, The, 139, 292, 457, 616, 751, 931.
 Books Reviewed, 143, 298, 461, 624, 758, 938.
- BOYD, W. R. Has America Gone Too Far in Democracy? 90.
 British Blacklist, The, 825.
 British Embargo, The: Sea Rights and Sea Power, 515.
- BROOKS, SYDNEY. The Irish Insurrection, 57; The Effects of Roumania's Decision, 531; The British Blacklist, 825.
 Browning Reminiscences, Some, 602.
- BROWN, L. AMES. Prohibition's Legislative Efforts, 589; The Election and Prohibition, 850.
- BROWN, PHILIP MARSHALL. Ignominious Neutrality, 185; Democracy and Diplomacy, 691.
- BURROUGHS, JOHN. Manifold Nature, 245.
- BUTLER, SAMUEL, 270.
- CARTER, MAJOR GENERAL WILLIAM H., U. S. A. Public Opinion and Defense, 203.
- CHAPMAN, DR. PAUL M. "Pure Asepsis," 717.
 Character: The Paramount Issue, 641.
 China, The Closing Door in, 25.
 Christianity and the Sword, 195.
- CLARK, CHARLES UPSON. What Are Colleges For? 413.
 Closing Door in China, The, 25.
 Codlin and Short in Poland, 819.
 Colleges: What Are Colleges For? 413.
 Conjecture of Intensive Fiction, A, 869.
 Conserving Our Spiritual Resources, 881.
 Contemporary Echoes, 306, 470, 766.
 Contemporary Fiction, A New Use For, 745.
 Conventions, The National, 1.
- CORWIN, EDWARD S. Sea Rights and Sea Power: The British Embargo, 515.
 Creative Mystery, The, 595.
 Culture, 610.
- Danish Islands, The Story of the, 381.
 Death-Doors and Asphodel, 909.
 Death, I Have a Rendezvous With, 594.
 Defense, Public Opinion and, 203.
 Democracy and Diplomacy, 691.
 Democracy, Has America Gone Too Far in? 90.
- DEUTSCH, BABETTE. Ephemera, 112.
 Drama and Music, 920.
- DUNN, SAMUEL O. The Railways, Train Employees and the Public, 98; The Threatened Strike on the Railways, 575.

- Editorials:—The National Conventions, 1; The New Independence, 13; The Race Not Going Mad, 16; Our Ships and Some Others, 20; Trade and the War, 23; The Closing Door in China, 25; Political Pledges, 161; Unpreparedness Demonstrated, 171; A Treaty in Chancery, 174; The President and "The Pork Barrel," 178; The Passing of the Turk, 180; The Political Situation, 321; The "Traitors" of Two Centuries, 333; A Tale of Two Empires, 337; Are We "The" Americans? 340; For President: Charles Evans Hughes, 481; Character, The Paramount Issue, 641; A Letter to the Times, 657; Election Eve, 669; The Verdict of the People, 801; Guessing Again, 811; Electoral Vote and Electoral College, 813; Codlin and Short in Poland, 819; Are Americans Poor Farmers? 822.
- Effects of Roumania's Decision, The, 531.
- Election and Prohibition, The, 850.
Election Eve, 669.
Electoral Vote and Electoral College, 813.
- ELLIS, HAVELOCK. The Genius of England, 211.
England, The Genius of, 211.
Ephemeris, 112.
- European War:—Trade and the War, 23; Germany's Financial Position, 39; The Forces Behind the Russian Offensive, 49; The Peace Problem, 75; Sea Rights and Sea Power: The British Embargo, 515; The Effects of Roumania's Decision, 531; The Irish Nationalist as Pro-Ally, 544; I Have a Rendezvous With Death, 594; America and World Peace, 673; The Passengers of a Retarded Submersible, 741; The British Blacklist, 825.
- Federal Farm Loan Act, Some Objections to, 837.
- FICKE, ARTHUR DAVISON. Modern Tendencies in Poetry, 438.
- Fiction, A Conjecture of Intensive, 869.
- Fiction, A Use for Contemporary, 745.
- Forces Behind the Russian Offensive, The, 49.
- Forthcoming Election, The—A Prediction, 757.
- Fröding, Gustav: Swedish Lyric Poet, 897.
- Future Mechanism of Warfare, The, 373.
- Genius of England, The, 211.
- German Citizenship, Paragraph Twenty-Five of the New, 857.
- Germany's Financial Position, 39.
- GILMAN, LAWRENCE. Drama and Music, 920.
- GILMAN, LAWRENCE. A Pilgrimage to Quietude, 135; The Book of the Month, 139, 292, 457, 616, 751, 931.
- God, A Modern Conception of, 400.
- Gold of Toulouse, 744.
- GREENE, WILLIAM CHASE. Culture, 610.
- GRIFFIS, WILLIAM ELLIOT. The Statesmanship of Yuan Shi-Kai, 70; Okuma and the New Era in Japan, 681.
- Guessing Again, 811.
- HAMMOND, JOHN HAYS, JR. The Future Mechanism of Warfare, 373.
- HARVEY, GEORGE. The National Conventions, 1; Political Pledges, 161; The Political Situation, 321; In Memoriam: James Whitcomb Riley, 421; For President: Charles Evans Hughes, 481; Thomas Riley Marshall, 620; Character—The Paramount Issue, 641; A Letter to the Times, 657; The Forthcoming Election—A Prediction, 757; The Verdict of the People, 801; Guessing Again, 811.
- HERRICK, MYRON T. Some Objections to the Federal Farm Loan Act, 837.
- HILL, DAVID JAYNE. President Wilson's Administration of Foreign Affairs, I, 344; II, 550.
- HOWELLS, WILLIAM DEAN. The Passengers of a Retarded Submersible, 741; A Conjecture of Intensive Fiction, 869.
- Hughes, Charles Evans: For President, 481.
- Ignominious Neutrality, 185.
- Irish Insurrection, The, 57.
- Irish Nationalist as Pro-Ally, The, 544.
- Japan, Okuma and the New Era in, 681.
- JENNINGS, H. J. Germany's Financial Position, 39.
- JOHNSON, BURGESS. A Memory of Mexico, 226.
- JOHNSON, WILLIS FLETCHER. The Story of the Danish Islands, 381; America and World Peace, 673.
- JOHNSTON, CHARLES. The Forces Behind the Russian Offensive, 49.
- Kansas, Prohibition in, 254.
- LESLIE, SHANE. The Irish Nationalist as Pro-Ally, 544.

- Letters to the Editor, 153, 316, 474, 636, 789, 950.
 Letter to The Times, A, 657.
 Litany, A, 896.
- Mad Philosopher, The, 894.
 Manifold Nature, 245.
- MARSHALL, HENRY RUTGERS. War and Progress, 391.
- MARSHALL, THOMAS RILEY, 620.
- MATTERN, J. Paragraph Twenty-Five of the New German Citizenship, 857.
- MCAFEE, HELEN. Tchekov and the Spirit of the East, 282.
- MCCOMB, CANON SAMUEL. Christianity and the Sword, 195.
- Memory of Mexico, A, 226.
 Mexico:—A Memory of Mexico, 226; President Wilson's Administration of Foreign Affairs, 344, 350.
- Modern Conception of God, A, 400.
 Modern Tendencies in Poetry, 438.
- MOORE, JOHN BASSETT. The Peace Problem, 75.
- Morality of Force, The, 705.
- MOXOM, THE REV. PHILIP S. A Modern Conception of God, 400.
- Mystery of Woodrow Wilson, The, 362.
- National Conventions, The, 1.
 Nature, Manifold, 245.
 Neutrality, Ignominious, 185.
 New Independence, The, 13.
 New York, In, 455.
- NOCK, ALBERT JAY. Prohibition in Kansas, 254; Prohibition and Civilization, 407.
- Note on Rossetti, A, 128.
- Off Newburyport Bar, 267.
- Okuma and the New Era in Japan, 681.
- Paragraph Twenty-Five of the New German Citizenship, 857.
- PASCOLI, GIOVANNI, 113.
- Passengers of a Retarded Submersible, The, 741.
- Passing of the Turk, The, 180.
 Peace Problem, The, 75.
- PELO, FLORENCE B. Some Unpublished Letters of Mary Shelley, 727.
- PERCY, WILLIAM ALEXANDER. In New York, 455.
- Peterborough Idea, The, 448.
- PHELPS, RUTH SHEPARD. Giovanni Pascoli, 113; A Use for Contemporary Fiction, 745.
- Pilgrimage to Quietude, A, 135.
 Poetry, Modern Tendencies in, 438.
 Poetry:—Ephemeris, 112; Off Newburyport Bar, 267; In New York, 455; The Tree, 456; I Have a Rendezvous With Death, 594; The Passengers of a Retarded Submersible, 741; To Wolfe and Montcalm, 743; Gold of Toulouse, 744; The Mad Philosopher, 894; A Litany, 896.
- Political Pledges, 161.
 Political Situation, The, 321.
 President and "The Pork Barrel," The, 178.
 Progress, War and, 391.
- Prohibition:—Prohibition in Kansas, 254; Prohibition and Civilization, 407; Prohibition's Legislative Efforts, 589; The Election and Prohibition, 850.
- Public Opinion and Defense, 203.
 "Pure Asepsis," 717.
- Race Not Going Mad, The, 16.
- Railways, The Threatened Strike on the, 575.
 Railways, Train Employees, and the Public, The, 98.
- RANDALL, WILFRID L. The Creative Mystery, 595.
- RICE, CALE YOUNG. The Mad Philosopher, 894; A Litany, 896.
- RILEY, JAMES WHITCOMB: In Memoriam, 421.
- ROBINSON, EDWIN ARLINGTON. The Peterborough Idea, 448.
- Rossetti, A Note On, 128.
- Roumania's Decision, The Effects of, 531.
- Russian Offensive, The Forces Behind the, 49.
- Sea Rights and Sea Power: The British Embargo, 515.
- SEEGER, ALAN. I Have a Rendezvous With Death, 594.
- Shelley, Mary, Some Unpublished Letters of, 727.
- SHERWOOD MARGARET. Conserving Our Spiritual Resources, 881.
 Ships, Our, and Some Others, 20.
- SLAUGHTER, GERTRUDE E. T. Death-Doors and Asphodel, 909.
- Some Objections to the Federal Farm Loan Act, 837.
- SPOFFORD, HARRIET PRESCOTT. Off Newburyport Bar, 267.
- Statesmanship of Yuan Shi-Kai, The, 70.
- STILLMAN, CLARA GRUENING. Samuel Butler, 270.
- STORK, CHARLES WHARTON. Gustav Fröding: Swedish Lyric Poet, 897.
 Story of the Danish Islands, The, 381.
- SYMONS, ARTHUR. A Note on Rossetti, 128; Some Browning Reminiscences, 602.

- Tale of Two Empires, A, 337.
 Tchekov and the Spirit of the East, 282.
 Threatened Strike on the Railways, The, 575.
 Times, A Letter to the, 657.
 Trade and the War, 23.
 "Traitors" of Two Centuries, The, 333.
 Treaty in Chancery, A, 174.
 Tree, The, 456.
 Turk, The Passing of the, 180.
 Unpreparedness Demonstrated, 171.
 Unpublished Letters of Mary Shelley, Some, 727.
 Use for Contemporary Fiction, A, 745.
 USHER, ROLAND V. Washington and Entangling Alliances, 29.
 VAN RENSSELAER, MRS. SCHUYLER. Who Wants Art Nowadays? 235.
 Verdict of the People, The, 801.
 VILLARD, OSWALD GARRISON. The Mystery of Woodrow Wilson, 362.
 War and Progress, 391.
 Washington and Entangling Alliances, 29.
 Welles, Winifred, The Tree, 456.
 What Are Colleges For? 413.
 Wilson:—President Wilson's Administration of Foreign Affairs, I, 345; II, 550; The President and "The Pork Barrel," 178; The Mystery of Woodrow Wilson, 362.
 Wolfe and Montcalm, To, 743.
 Woodsmen, Two, 426.
 World Peace, America and, 673.
 WYATT, EDITH. Two Woodsmen, 426.
 Yuan Shi-Kai, The Statesmanship of, 70.

