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EDITORIAL

IN QUEST OF LIGHT.

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A SERIES of letters, written by Goldwin Smith to the *New York Sun* in the course of the last six or seven years, have been collected by their author and are now published under the above title by the Macmillan Company in a neat 169-paged book. The subject seems to be if not theologic, religious, or religious-controversial. Probably most people who read the book will acquire that impression at the start, and finish the book with the impression confirmed. It is a mistake. There have been other books before that exposed dogmatic religion, planting themselves on science. Of these works it may be said that, by adopting a scientific dogmatism, they also read themselves out of the court of practical life. They became as abstract and therefore as unsatisfactory as the religious dogmatism, the abstractness and non-practical quality of which render it increasingly unsatisfactory to the masses—consciously so to the thinking and cultured elements, unconsciously so, but equally powerful, to increasing numbers. *In Quest of Light* is not of the number of such treatises. It is the first work of its sort, that we know of, the key-note of which is the pointed declaration of “the vital importance, even on SOCIAL GROUNDS, of the question between extreme materialism and faith in spiritual life,” which means idealism. *In Quest of Light* is the first attempt, from that quarter, at saving Materialism from running under ground, and at saving Idealism from evaporating into air; it is the first attempt, from that quarter, to strike the right path by placing the two in their proper relation—Materialism as the groundwork, Idealism as the superstructure. Fain would we say that the attempt is an “intelligent” one, meaning thereby one conducted “with full knowledge.” It is not that. It is the struggle of a mighty intellect to grasp a great Truth, the rough outlines of which it perceives; it is the struggle of a bold spirit to rid itself of impeding trammels; but it is the struggle of

an intellect, which, however mighty and however bold, is still lamed by the navel-string of the habits of thought of its own bourgeois class. Due to this Goldwin Smith, on the one hand, fails to perceive wherein the danger lies of ultra materialism; on the other hand, seeing that he is thoroughly alive to the impending, if not the already consummated, doom of churchianity, his poise is that of a man standing alarmed at the crater of a volcano in eruption, seeing the destructive forces at work, but unable to perceive their simultaneously constructive operations. Consequently, he is unable to take a hand in the work of construction, and limits himself to the asking of questions. The questions, nevertheless, are sublime.

Goldwin Smith plants himself flatfootedly upon science. In the true spirit of the scientist he is ready to bow to the fiat of science, however unpalatable the fiat. What does not accord with science must go. To use his own words, taken as to-day's Quotation at the head of this column—"through frank abandonment of that which can not be sustained lies our only road to truth"—and he frankly throws overboard all that science orders thrown overboard. He is a materialist in that sense, and boldly affirms it. But in the process of his materialism certain facts do not escape him. He acts neither blindly, nor puffed up with "the pride of superficial learning" that distinguishes the pseudo Darwinians and most of the parrots after Herbert Spencer. Differently from these he would not wash out the bath with the baby. {sic} His truly scientific spirit{,} which implies aggressiveness, coupled with modesty, rebels at what may be called the Knipperdolings of science. His views on the subject are summed up in the sentence: "Ultra-physicism is evidently beginning to affect morality, particularly in relation to the duty of strong nations and races towards the weak." Goldwin Smith by that sentence proves that he has come square up against the great Social Question. Science, having overthrown the foundation of Biblical morality, threatens, in his mind, to scorch morality itself. If the author had firmer faith in that very materialism which he recognizes as indispensable to truth, he would be assailed with no such misgivings. There is no danger to morality. But morality can not be saved by itself. Idealism will grow more luxuriant than ever. What now sears its leaves and threatens to crush its roots with the gospel of the "Big Stick" is a purely transitory manifestation. It is a manifestation that springs from the circumstance that physicism, or materialism, or science, whatever the

name by which we may call the thing, has not yet attained supreme control. The “Big Stick” is but a manifestation of the sense of self-defense. With a bogus science still holding sway in economics and sociology, the lives of all are in perpetual danger. The “Big Stick” sprouts up naturally under such conditions. It is not physicisism but partial physicisism, with its accompaniment of baseless morality, that breeds the “Big Stick.” Complete physicisism, or recognition of scientific facts on the domain of economics and politics, will furnish such a foundation as never was before for idealism, or be it religion. That completeness of physicisism is approaching. The economics of the Social Revolution are asserting themselves. Socialism, now past the stage of speculation, renders idealism assured, religion beyond the point of doubt.

It is not by moaning over the disastrousness of a community without morals that the disaster will be avoided. It is by helping to furnish the material foundation for morality that the disaster will be averted and its opposite instituted. The quandaries that beset Goldwin Smith are but the result of his bourgeois habits of thought, which, while his intellect has been emancipated from ecclesiastical dogma, still hold it imprisoned in the dogma of capitalism. At any rate, *In Quest of Light* is the first work that proceeds from the camp of capitalist thought which the Socialist can read with profit and which will contribute to his spiritual exaltation. The work bears testimony to the Socialist principle that the highest morality awaits the most solid material foundation, and that Socialism, bringing, as it does, the solid material foundation for morality, is, indeed, the great historic Movement that it claims to be—at once economic, political and religious.

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