

Fashionable Sin

A Modern Discussion of an Unpopular Subject

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OVER the marquee of the motion-picture theatre blazed the name of the current success, "Charming Sin." On a daily newspaper's delivery wagons ran a screaming notice : "The Diary of Peggy Halpin Jones, the Mistress of a Hundred Hearts, starts on Tuesday." A sedate magazine on the news-stand listed as its leading article, "Has Biology Destroyed Our Concept of Sin?" The best-seller of the month, running furiously through edition after edition, was a morbid defence of sex-perversion. A group of business men about to close a big deal met the frightened "But is it quite honest?" with an affronted "What the hell has that got to do with big business?"

Constructive as our age is, magnificent as are its achievements in skyscraper, farm machinery, factory efficiency, air control, time to come will remember it as the age that tried might and main to destroy the idea of sin.

Sin a la Mode

When a robber baron of medieval days went out, war club in hand, to wage war on the defenceless young son of his recently-dead rival, he sacked the towns, pillaged the farms, raped peasant women and strung up peasant men, and returned to his castle knowing himself to be a blackguard and a villain whose hands were red and whose soul was black with sin, and who, because he was the enemy of God and man, would eventually burn in hell for his sins.

But your modern robber baron steals and cheats on a magnificent scale, bribes judges and tricks justice in the process, is ruthless towards weak competitors, turns his inner office into a seraglio, and then hires some psychologist to tell him that he is a superman following his atavistic instincts, and a philosopher to assure him that since there is no God he may make his own commandments and conveniently break them when he chooses.

When a woman of other days betrayed her husband, she admitted herself to be an adulteress. An impure woman might shrink from the brutal names hurled at her, but she admitted their sad truth. Now, a Carl Van Vechten heroine thinks no more of a week-end of adultery than she does of a week-end of golf; and, far from betraying her husband, she is probably acting with his consent and co-operation. As for the impure woman, she is rapidly being abolished in favour of the girl who lives up to the impulses of her artistic and emotional nature.

Men have always sinned, just as men have always known the horrors of cancer and the plague. It has been left for our age to develop religions that deny both the fact of sin and the fact of cancer, and to expand philosophies which find no more harm in sinning than they do in sneezing.

Sin in Silk

Added to this, sin has been tricked out in the silks and jewels of the musical revue (exquisite in colour and filthy in thought; lovely in line and beastly in lines) and in the scintillating cleverness of smart farce and cynical novel.

Women are paid well nowadays for betraying their purity, paid in the yard-high letters on billboards and in the rapid succession of wealthy marriages made no longer in heaven, but in Paris, Reno, and across the Mexican border. If honesty is the best policy, many a millionaire who gives sage advice, with his tongue in his cheek, to boys' clubs has not been able to see it.

University students sit in rapt attention under professors who teach them the need of a new morality (which will begin with a repeal of the Ten Commandments), the biological necessity of what was once called sin, and the obsolescence of Christian morals.

"Puny Man"

It is a little difficult, perhaps, to talk about sin to a group of neo-pagans who know almost nothing about God. If there is no God to command, there are naturally no Commandments. If there is no one to reward or punish, it is silly to talk of eternal sanctions. George Eliot, in a simpler age, felt that sin was punished right here in this life, but experience does not always keep step with the theory. Even the natural law which man finds in his heart, forbidding him to sin and commanding him to do good, is argued out of existence by our modern pagans. For, not content with denying God, they are denying the plainest facts about man himself - for example, the instinct that, even in the savage, clearly recognizes some things as unmistakably wrong and forbidden.

Still, we may begin our study of modern attitudes towards sin with the sceptic who likes to meet us, as he thinks, on our own grounds. He turns against the Christian his belief in an omnipotent God. His argument is clever and specious, and runs this way:

"My friend," he begins, "your concept of sin is - forgive me for saying it - disproved by your own beliefs. There's your omnipotent God and here's His tiny, puny creature, man. Why, what possible harm can so small a being as man do? God is important; man is trivial. God is great; man is insignificant. My puny actions in no way affect the course of the ages. God is utterly beyond my reach and the reach of my most terrible crimes.

"Suppose," he argues on, "as I walk my garden paths some morning, a worm wriggles up from the damp sod and spits at me. Does it harm me? Of course not. There's no proportion between myself and the worm. Beside me the worm is simply too insignificant for consideration.

"So, by your own concept of the greatness of God, sin becomes a trifle. It is nothing but a tiny man spitting at your great God. It is a lapdog snapping at a tolerant lion. It is a child shaking its feeble fist in the direction of a giant."

But is He Puny?

The argument begins and ends with the assumption that man, like the worm, is really unimportant. But is he? Let's suppose that the man walking in his garden goes back and wrathfully grinds the obnoxious worm into the mud. That is the end of the worm. Its mangled body makes richer the loam in which the grass is rooted, but the worm's whole existence ended under the grinding heel of the man.

Man, however, is a very different sort of being. When the heel of death grinds his body to dust, his soul goes on with the immortality that shall last as long as God is God. Nothing that is immortal can be regarded as unimportant or trivial.

More than that. When the worm spits (if worms spit) or the dog snaps, each does the thing that blind instinct forces it to do. Neither dog nor worm is master of its fate. An unpleasant hostile odour, and the dog must of necessity bark. An impulse received from outside, and the worm must without hesitation react. Man knows himself to be different, very different from that.

God gave him a power which every man recognizes as his, the power of free choice. He has liberty. He may do this or that, choose to act wisely or to play the fool, to strike his friend and kiss his enemy, to do the world signal service or to play havoc among men and women. He has a free will that makes possible the most astonishing alternative: He, in spite of his perishable body and limited brain, may stand in the presence of the Almighty Who created him and hold high debate: "Shall I serve You, God, or shall I defy You? Shall I work with You or shall I join Your enemies in relentless warfare?" And God Himself will not force him to a decision.

Far from being trivial and unimportant, man is so important that God asks him for free service and will accept no other. And in the face of God's request man may reply: "Yes, I shall be proud to serve You; that would be an honour," or he may lift his fist, shake it in the face of his Creator, and carry war to the very gates of heaven.

Free Service

This is not the end of his importance. When God created the earth, He turned over to man, His dearly-beloved son, a large share in its management. Man might, if he proved faithful, manage it well; he had it in his power utterly to mismanage it. By good deeds he carried on the affairs of the earth splendidly; by sin he upset the moral universe. And when sin entered in, the sin which just now was termed slight and trivial, the earth was rocked to its depths.

For men have murdered and the red of blood has written wretched chapters in human history. Men have stolen, and wars broke out, armies gathered, nations fell upon each other, cities smoked in black ruins. Men have lusted and along their paths lay broken bodies, disease-marked children, ruined homes, rotted lives.

God forced the worm and the dog to do His work blindly and like slaves. God put it in man's power to serve and save His world or defile and spoil it. By sin man chooses to send God's earth, as far as he possibly can, crashing to destruction. Sin is unimportant? It is the most terrible power loosed on the world.

Man is unimportant? With God's graciously given help, man is able to scale heaven, to become the companion of angels and the brother of saints. Yet, with all this within easy reach, he is still capable of turning his back on God and happiness and running down the path of sin. With his mind infinite in its longings, limitless in its capacities, he still may choose the degrading thought, the low desire, the trifling pettiness that makes up most evil. Though he might of free choice find himself among the disciples of Christ the Saviour working for the salvation of humanity, he may deliberately league himself with evil and throw the weight of his powers against God and against mankind.

Man is unimportant? His powers and capacities are so unlimited for good or evil that they frighten the person who looks at them in the light of their consequences.

So Common

The very frequency of sin, however, its commonness in the world, is used as an argument by this same group. Surely, they urge, nothing that is as recurrent as sin can be very terrible. Frequency destroys horror. Commonness makes things seem less bad. And the commonness of sin robs it of its terror.

There are some things that commonness does not affect in that way. It does not take the terror from death or cancer or leprosy. On the contrary, it makes them seem more terrible. And sin is in that same class.

Nothing, surely, is as common as death. Sixty thousand people, we are told, die each day. But the fact that 60,000 people are dying is small consolation to the young husband who stands at the death-bed of his bride. The long line marching into eternity does not reassure the criminal as the executioner lays his hands on the death switch.

When a mountain erupts and buries a city's population under molten lava, when an ocean liner sinks with all lives lost, when a hurricane suddenly turns happy homes into grim and silent tombs, or fire sweeps through a hospital, death, just because it is frequent and common, seems far more terrible.

If one cancer is terrible, a hospital filled with cancer patients is a place of horror. One solitary leper by the roadside is an object of abhorrence; a leper colony is our earthly symbol of hell.

And so it is with sin. Sin, by the sad perversity of mankind, is frequent, repeated, almost common, but that fact makes it just the more terrible. When gangs invade a city, and murder, rape, and arson run the streets, even the careless citizen has a taste of the ugliness of sin. When vice infests certain districts, honest men shun those dark lanes because of the very commonness of sin. The slums are places of horror, not because of poverty; poverty was present in Bethlehem's stable and was a beautiful thing. They are terrible because vice is common there, crimes are frequent, sin is unashamed.

The drunkard in the gutter, the prostitute sodden with vice, the thief stained with repeated crime speak graphically of what commonness and frequency of sin can do to a human body and soul. And if we could see the debased souls and degraded minds of secret sinners, we would find them like those of drunkard and prostitute.

To pass over lightly the horror of sin and its sad consequences simply because sin is common is like telling a sailor in a shipwreck that he need not worry because 2000 others will drown with him, or consoling a man just pronounced leprous with the fact that he will find a crowded leper colony in Molokai, or reassuring a damned soul with the thought that he will meet plenty of company in hell.

Sweet Sin

Few of these moderns, however, care to argue from the Christian viewpoint. They know they cannot do so, and maintain their position. So they deliberately fly in the face of Christian morality and set the whole moral world topsy-turvy. Sin is a joy; sin is the road to happiness; sin is a proud thing; there is no such thing as sin, for sin and virtue, vice and goodness are different words for the same experience.

Sin is joy? Keats, when he sang sweet sin, never dreamed how far that theory would be carried in our modern pagan age. He had not seen the elaborate intricacies of art and music that would encrust modern vice. He had not been permitted to sit in a modern theatre, through whose stage door passed

the "most beautiful girls in the world," and, as a cynical Broadway critic added, "the world's filthiest stories and jokes." In his time vice was still supposed to be in exile; it had not forsaken the hovel for the high-class hotel, the low tavern for the cabaret, the company of outcasts for the society of the fashionable.

Oscar Wilde was the man who popularized to a dying Victorian world the idea that sin was a joy. To him a thing was delightful because it was forbidden. "Think," he once wrote, "how much pleasanter is the life of a woman; how many more things are forbidden her." So, under his brilliant leadership, though his followers are slow to acknowledge their master, the worship of sin as the joy-giver is recommended. Sin was pleasure; sin was happiness; sin was joy. Christianity had blighted with its sense of sin the freedom and happiness of pagan lives. Christ, the pale Galilean, as Swinburne put it, had blighted the world, which grew grey with His breath.

Sin as a Cult

So the strange pagan trick is repeated, and man's most debasing sins are turned into objects of worship. Once more pagan lust becomes the glowing Venus; drunkenness is Bacchus crowned with vine leaves; Mercury is the god of theft and lies. Live for love; find experience where you can; worship success however gained; join the gay party, the fast life; you are young only once; purity is for prudes; only the weak are contemptible. Such are the cries echoing through the modern world and luring the youth of today as they were lured, in other pagan days, into temple groves loud with laughter and dark with sin.

We are almost fortunate that the brilliant prophet of the modern cult of sin was sad Oscar Wilde. His life speaks, more loudly than any argument, of the frightful futility of the theories he preached. Brilliant Oscar Wilde, seated among his adoring friends and arguing with startling epigram that sin is joy, that depravity and perversion are natural, that immoral black is moral white, that the happy man wears his vice like the sun-flower on his coat! Sad Oscar Wilde, hounded from society for practising what he preached, and writing from prison his "De Profundis," the tortured cry of an agonizing soul! Poor Oscar Wilde, lying on his death-bed, deserted like the Prodigal by those who had fed on his cleverness, watched by his Catholic friend, physically rotting away from the effects of "sweet sin," clinging to his friend's hand and begging for the favour (granted him by the merciful God he had cynically flouted) of the Catholic sacraments. Wretched Oscar Wilde, high priest and evangelist of the cult of vice, dying, not as men die, but exploding, so that even the nurses and the doctor fled the room, and every article in the sick chamber had to be committed to the flames!

Sin a joy? Stand at the death-bed of Oscar Wilde, if you are brave enough, and let him tell you, not with the glib and glittering wit of health, but with the gasping, broken truths of death.

If sin is joy, then inevitably the conclusion follows that the sinners are the joyously happy. You will search long for the happy sinner.

Death-beds

Some day someone is going to write a book called "Death Comes to Famous Sinners." It will be, even if the author never mentions the sins, a penetrating study of sin as the road to happiness. For, after all, we know the worth of things most clearly when we see them in the low light that burns in our death chamber. Then we see them from two viewpoints, from that of the effect they have had upon the whole of our lives, and that of the effect that will follow us after we have died.

There will be some startling scenes in that book. Nero will be there, pleading with a contemptuous slave for the death thrust, not so much because he feared the living mob of outraged Romans surging up to annihilate him, but because he saw the dim, shadowy faces of Christian men smiling at him through the torturing flames, and of Christian girls rushing to the jaws of lions in preference to his perfumed gardens. The ghosts of his sins were crying out for blood.

Voltaire will find his place in the book, Voltaire gibbering pitifully and asking for the priest and the absolution of the Church which he spent his life in calling "the infamous thing."

Elizabeth of England will be there, her soul in a red mist of Catholic blood and her treasury overflowing with confiscated Catholic wealth, as she staggers from bed, paints and dresses, and simpers in a mad effort to trick inexorable death as she had tricked her pliant courtiers.

Louis XV, after a long career of dainty vice, a life in which he had been taught sin by men bent on keeping the king of France enslaved to lust, so that they might keep France enslaved to themselves, will rise before the reader's eyes to stagger from his bed and beg on trembling knees for the Blessed Sacrament he had not received for decades.

Madame Du Barry, screaming at the foot of the guillotine, will preach an eloquent sermon on the unhappiness to which her life of sin has brought her.

The book will find place for Cleopatra holding the welcome asp against her breast as well as for the latest Broadway butterfly found with an empty poison bottle in her lifeless hand. It will give the story of Judas, prototype of all sinners, swinging to and fro in the storm of Good Friday. And it will not omit the supposedly successful business man found dead with a smoking revolver beside him.

One-Sided Fools

No one is fool enough to deny that sin brings with it momentary thrills, frequent financial coups, a titillation of the senses, sometimes years of comfort and luxury. By shutting one's eyes to all save these advantages, one can find swift and temporarily enveloping joy. The drunkard, if one comes to that, gets exaltation out of his drink and fancies himself a king among men, if he cares to forget the headaches and heartaches that inevitably must follow.

The drug addict lives for a few hours in a world of astonishing delight, only to wake in a drab world of misery with the unendurable hunger of habit gnawing at his nerves. The roué finds fierce delight in his casual loves, but he is obliged to shut his eyes to the beastliness of his conduct, the sad ruins of womanhood he leaves along his way, his betrayal of the high powers of manhood and of the beauty that nature gave those who were meant to be the mothers of our race. The swindling financier may smile as his yacht steams out to sea, but not if he dares to remember the widows whose fortunes he tricked into his pocket and the modest homes of middle-aged workmen that crashed forever when he pulled the wobbly props from under his quite legal but wholly immoral enterprise.

The sinner is the most one-sided and blear-eyed person in the world. He can find joy in sin only by refusing to face life wholly and honestly. He must shut his eyes to consequences, focus all his attention on the sin that occupies him, blot out all else, or, even on the crest of his sinful delight, he is miserable. The drunkard must forget the consequences to his body, to his family, to his position in life, if he is to find even passing joy in his debauch.

The lustful must refuse to regard his treachery to innocence, his waste of God-given powers, his betrayal of unborn children, that cosmic crime against the future of the race and the goodness of womankind. The dishonest financier must remember only what he will buy in luxury and ease with his stolen money; he must clap his hands over his ears, so that he cannot hear the sobs of the poor and the cries of those his treachery has made wretched.

In other words, the sinner can only be part of a man. He must substitute for the whole of life only his sinful part of it. He must close his life to everything but his vice and what he hopes to wring from it, or he is doomed to misery.

Ghosts

When Macbeth saw at every feast the ghost of the murdered Banquo, he was merely the poet's symbol of sinners who, try as they will, cannot shut out from their consciousness the consequences of their sins. Sooner or later their sins rise to haunt them. Mankind has always known that for a fact, and pagan literature, quite as much as Christian, is filled with the story of supposedly dead sins living on to rise and taunt the sinner. The Furies of the old Greek mythology were only the sins of a man following madly after and tearing him with savage tooth and nail.

Of course, sin brings its nervous thrill and its moment of fascinating pleasure. No one denies that. But, as it does so, it destroys the possibility of peace, sows the seeds of inescapable remorse, sets strange ghosts walking the dark corridors of the mind, and lies in wait for the day when it will flash, before the sinner, consequences of his sin which he refused to consider when he found in it his moments or his years of joy.

There is no group of people in the world so much to be pitied as the devotees of sin. You find them everywhere today, rushing from pleasure to pleasure, making of joy a life's labour, slaving for a few moments' gaiety, not because they enjoy these cloying sensations and these joys that stale before they are tasted, but because their rush, rush, rush is the only possible escape from boredom, remorse, consequence, memory. Name one famous beauty who went in for a career of sin and did not come to the end of her life disillusioned, world-weary, burnt-out, showing the tragedy of an empty heart and a withered soul.

The Only Sin

We have to remember that when our modern pagan talks of the joys of sin, he means only one sort of sin, sins of the flesh. He knows, without any need of argument, that murder and dishonesty and lies and slander are horrible in themselves and horrible in their consequences. But when he argues in favour of sin, when he tells you, as Maeterlinck does, that if we could look into the eyes of a child and the eyes of a prostitute, we would find their souls equally stainless, we may be fairly sure of his motives. The motive of Maeterlinck was concretely Georgette Leblanc, with whom he chose to live unmarried. The motive of most of our moderns who write glorifying the joys of sin is simply the desire to live by their philosophies.

But God and nature have seen to it that this sin should not await its punishment in eternity. The easily-read story of divorce and infidelity, the unhappiness that reeks in our modern pagan literature, quite as much as the sad little idiot children in our foundling homes and the death-beds like Oscar Wilde's, are answer enough for those who call this sin a joy.

But, says Anatole France, sin is a proud thing. In the revolt of the angels we have heroism at its height, the proud defiance of a creature towards his tyrannical Creator, a brave war of independence

in which the subjects rose against their despot to free the world from the arbitrary dominance of God. This is the type of all sin, for sin is simply man's proud gesture of defiance against tyranny. The sinner is the greatest of heroes.

Altogether aside from the fact that sin is usually degrading and contemptible - as it is whether we consider murder or the telling of a dirty story, theft, or the gossip of a scandalous tongue, a vile thought or the robbing of a child of its faith in God - there is nothing about it to be proud of.

The angels in Anatole France's revolt, let us say, had received everything they possessed from the God on Whom they waged war. He was not merely their King and Creator; He was, in a way, their Father, the Author of their being and the source of their benefits. The intellect with which they planned the campaign He had modelled on His omniscience. The will that bound them fast in their rebellion was free because He had made it free. The arms they bore in the war on heaven were fashioned from materials He had lent them. They could not move one fraction of an inch in their wild charge against His throne unless His hand sustained them and His power co-operated with their movements.

So they were more than rebels; they were, at least in desire, parricides. They were sons who, having received their very existence from their father, secured with his resources the deadly weapons they meant to use in taking life. They were soldiers who have been given freedom, high rank, arms, and then turned them all against their country.

Proud? If this were a proud thing, the ungrateful son who drives a dagger into his father's heart is a model for youth, and Benedict Arnold, traitor to his country, is the first of Americans.

Traitor

Proud? A certain man found a very dear and considerate Friend. Of all mankind, this Friend had chosen him to share His secrets and the brave plans of His life. Together they walked and talked and looked forward to the splendid things they would do for the good of mankind. To the man his Friend entrusted His purse, together with His secret dreams. He let him know His secret hiding-place, a garden where He went for prayer. But bit by bit the man grew weary of his Friend. His moral talk annoyed him. His plans were not up to his ambitious expectations. The Friend was more concerned with the poor and some stupid, invisible kingdom, than with the immediate problems of making money and getting rid of the Romans. There was too much morality and too little money about the whole business. In the end the man turned on his Friend, drove a nice piece of business, and sold Him for a fair price.

If the rebelling angels were proud and splendid beings, then Judas was the noblest of the Apostles and a patron saint that humanity should imitate. He, too, took up arms against his Master; he turned on his trusting Friend; he made subtle but deadly war on his Benefactor. Such is every sinner that ever uses his God-given intellect and will, his divinely-shaped hands and lips, to betray the cause of God.

Branded

The only thing that keeps sin from seeming terrifying beyond all else is the fact that it cannot at first be recognized in the sinner. Man knows that today he can sin and tonight shake the hand of his friend without his friend's suspecting the change in his soul. If the filthy thought in the mind found its concomitant in a filthiness in the face; if, when one scarred one's soul with slander, one scarred

one's cheek with a jagged cut; if the leprosy of sin infecting the soul spread to the body in white, dry scales, men would regard sin with very different eyes.

Fortunately, the adulteress is not obliged always to wear the scarlet letter. The thief is not branded on the hand with his crime. The lustful need not go through life hiding under carefully combed locks the word "Impure" written in red letters across the forehead.

But in the end sin does mark even bodies. There are the obvious cases out of the gutter, from which decent men and women shrink in involuntary horror. There are the modernly common cases of those who once were beautiful, but whose burnt-out, weary eyes have looked too long and too lovingly on sin, and whose faces are frozen into unreal smiles that are ugly masks of uglier souls. There are the hard, bitter mouths of the gossips; the pleasure-hungry, too-bright, animal eyes of the lecherous; the sleek bodies, fresh from the hands of the experts of Fifth Avenue and Bond Street, which you will search in vain for any worth of soul - men and women who seem less kindly than cats, less unselfish than dogs, beautiful but hard, warm of flesh and cold of sympathy, perfect bodies that shelter dead, repulsive souls, lovely figures sheathing twisted, warped, selfish, conceited little spirits. And the modern world of theatre, fashionable hotel, ocean resort, and smart shop is filled with them, equally well-groomed, equally inhuman. God made them; but sin unmade them hopelessly.

In Disguise

Generally it is possible to disguise sin from the eyes of mankind. Hypocrisy is simply mankind's oblique compliment to virtue. If one cannot be good, one can at least wear the garments of goodness. One will not make the effort to be virtuous, but one will make the effort to seem to be virtuous. So the liar lies to cover his lies. The adulterer hides his treachery under the shadow of carefully-planned secrecy. The clever crook spends unstinted brain power to cover his dishonesty and build up a reputation for scrupulous integrity. Sinners go through life praying the only prayer they know, that mankind will never find them out, that while they live like devils they may pass for saints.

In this very attitude of mind is another proof that even the unbeliever knows that sin does matter. The pagan sinner is eager to hide his sin. Watch him in ordinary life. He writes a vile book, but protests that his own life is stainless. She plays in a vile revue, but hastens to cover her latest moral prevarication with a swift divorce and an easy but socially acceptable marriage. He and she preach a philosophy of free love, but practise, for the world to see, a life of almost Christian decorum.

Only the hopelessly depraved admit their depravity, and even they disguise their vice under the brave trappings of virtue. Is the modern young emancipated lady going a wild and furious pace? Ah, she hastens to assure us, she is simply being honest with herself and waging war on hypocrisy. She never says, "I'm impure"; she says, "I have the courage to live my own life." Impurity is vice; but courage is a virtue. She admits the virtue and disdains to refer to the vice.

The gangster would slay you for suggesting that he is a murderer or a thug. He is simply a brave man defying the law and making just war on unjust society. He likes to think of himself as the descendant of the fearless buccaneers. He may, he assures us, be a bit careless about human lives, but he sticks to his pals. He may not have a high regard for other people's property, but he is kind to his mother. He may take his enemies for a "ride," but he takes the orphans on a yearly outing.

Not one, not even the known criminal, wants to acknowledge sin, and there is no mental terror comparable to the fear that one's secret sins will some day find one out.

Talking Down the Mountains

Call a man a liar, and you have used fighting words. Accuse a woman of slandering her friends, and you have equivalently accused her of stabbing them in the back. Sins of the flesh still make a man feel so close to the sty and the kennel that he commits them in the darkness and by stealth. Even the clean light of day must not be allowed to look upon them. Lust and light Shakespeare said wisely, are deadly enemies. No young man but would die rather than let his mother see the foul pictures and obscene drama that he allows to play within the secrecy of his mind. No crooked banker but fights with all his power to preserve his reputation for honest dealing.

In other words, all the talk of modern philosophy and literature has not really affected the deep human consciousness of sin and its malice. It is a hurling of anathemas at the mountains, a drying-up of the sea with long-winded discussions. Whatever the clever may say, the sane know sin for what it is; and even when they embrace it, they dread it and hate it.

Biological Necessity

There is just one more argument raised by the modern pagans against the fact of sin. "We are not free," they argue. "We are animals, and, like the rest of the animal world, red in tooth and claw. The murderer, like the lion, must slay. The thief, like the jackal, is by nature dishonest. The lustful are so by the same uncontrollable instincts that incite the chimpanzee."

However clever and convincing that may sound in the laboratory or classroom, it is poor theory to offer to a man weighed down with the consciousness of guilt. The murderer, as he tries vainly to wash the blood from his hands, or the destroyer of innocence, alone with his remorse, would find that poor consolation. On the contrary, the terrible lash that sin cracks over the sinner is the knowledge that he need not have fallen. There may be moments of insanity or blind passion, when reason abdicates and animal instincts usurp. The insane act by animals' instincts with no more guilt than animals. But the sinner knows clearly that before the sin he weighed and measured it. He could at any moment have said no, and the decision would have stood against any external pounding. He knows that the one impelling motive was his desire for the object of his sin, and he chose it deliberately, either blinding himself to the consequences, or accepting the consequences as unimportant compared with the satisfaction he would find in his sin.

And though the same murderer may sit blandly in court, while his lawyer throws up the smoke-screen of inherited impulses, of temporary insanity and moral blind spots, in the silence of his cell he faces his crime and knows that he deliberately fathered it. No soft consolation that a ridiculous science may offer to the murderer will ever for a moment make him face his soul and say an honest, "Not guilty". Nor will it make the roué, who carefully hunted down his unwilling victim be able to wash his soul with a consoling, "I was urged on by a blind, uncontrollable, biological impulse." Against this absurd scientific sob-stuff the voice of conscience speaks out an unanswerable "Guilty." Science may try to explain away sin; the sinner knows quite well why and how it entered his life.

So, despite the modern world's feverish attempt to argue away the facts of sin, and, by calling vice by other names, making it smell as sweet as virtue, the grim facts remain. Men sin. Sin is terrible in itself and in its consequences. Every man knows that. And the sinner knows it clearest of all.

