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THE SCIENTIFIC TREATMENT OF CRIMINALS.

The Tribune is alarmed at the logical consequences of the mechanical theory of life, seeing in them not only the downfall of theological dogmas, but the subversion of our entire criminal jurisprudence.

For example: "A prisoner, brought before a court of justice for assault, might admit that he struck the blow, but allege that the act was simply [the mechanical effect of] a piece of 'unconscious cerebration.'"

The Tribune apparently sees in this a fatal objection to the automatic theory. Perhaps it may be rather a fatal objection to the present constitution of the court—a proof that the current theory of criminal jurisprudence is altogether wrong.

Suppose the plea of the hypothetical prisoner to be admitted: nay, further, let the prisoner assert that the assault was due to conscious cerebration—in other words, that he knew precisely what he was doing and why he did it.

Suppose, we say, that such a plea is accepted as cogent. Would the foundation of justice be undermined, and the stability of the social order destroyed? The Tribune would undoubtedly reply with an emphatic affirmative.

Our present manner—we cannot call it method—of dealing with offenders against the commonwealth is an irregular inheritance of vengeance, intimidation, sentimentality, superstition, brutality, and party politics.

passport to eternal bliss. From first to last, he is held responsible for the conditions of his birth and education, the structure of his body, and the constitution of his mind. He is born a thief and a liar, and is alone held to blame for it.

From this point of view, the plea of our imaginary criminal would be respectfully heard. Then the judge might say: "The court is sorry that your organism is so viciously constructed, since it therefore becomes necessary for the community, in self-defense, to take it in charge."

The prisoner replies in the negative, and the judge continues: "That is to be regretted, since it makes it the harder for you to square your account with society. You will proceed to the public works, to perform such labor there as you may be found competent to do, under such restrictions as may be needful in your case."

But, it may be objected, all crimes are not of this simple character; the robber, the incendiary, or the murderer deserves punishment, while a lifetime of hard labor may be inadequate to make good the damage he has done.

Shall we therefore throw away all the possibilities of profit which his organism involves? Because a locomotive jumps the track and wrecks a train or kills a passenger, do we add to the loss by smashing the engine?

The murderer is simply a bit of mechanism, not sufficiently well adjusted to be self-regulating. Left to itself, it works mischief; but, under proper supervision, it can do much that needs to be done.

As for the deterring effect of the treatment of criminals upon those approaching criminality, we should certainly trust to the resistless, passionless logic of the scheme we have suggested, quite as much as to the uncertain and illogical disposition we now make of them.

For the reformation of criminals, there is demonstrably nothing more effectual than habits of industry, sobriety, and respect for the rights of others, which are not, but should be, the great lessons of the prison school.

HUXLEY'S THEORY OF MAN.

There is nothing so easy as to forget. Just now half the world is discussing as a new theme the logical tendency of Professor Huxley's latest utterance, or speculating as to the grounds of his declining to accept the conclusion that man is nothing but a machine.

The inseparable connection of matter and life is a fact of every day experience. Whatever the spiritualists may claim, Science has no knowledge of bodiless living beings.

matter was demonstrated by Professor Huxley in the celebrated "Lay Sermon" on the physical basis of life (first delivered in Edinburgh one Sunday in November, 1868) by a line of argument substantially as follows:

The four elements never absent from living matter are carbon, hydrogen, oxygen, and nitrogen. Carbon and oxygen unite in certain proportions and under certain conditions to give rise to carbonic acid; hydrogen and oxygen produce water, and ammonia is the product of nitrogen and hydrogen.

We think fit to call different kinds of matter carbon, oxygen, hydrogen, and nitrogen, and to speak of the various powers and activities of these substances as the properties of the matter of which they are composed.

When an electric spark is passed through a mixture of hydrogen and oxygen in certain quantities, the elements disappear, and a quantity of water, equal in weight to the sum of their weights, is found in their place.

Is the case changed in any way when carbonic acid, water, and ammonia disappear, and in their place an equivalent weight of the matter of life makes its appearance?

What justification is there for the assumption of the existence in the living matter of something which has no representative or correlation in the not living matter which gave rise to it?

Further, if the phenomena exhibited by water are its properties, so are those presented by protoplasm, living or dead, its properties. If the properties of water may be said to result from the matter and disposition of its component molecules, there is no intelligible ground for refusing to say that the properties of protoplasm result from the nature and disposition of its molecules.

But having shown in another connection that protoplasm is the common basis of life, Professor Huxley sees no logical halting place between the admission that the properties of protoplasm are the result of the nature of the matter of which it is composed, and the concession that the highest manifestations of life are equally the expression of molecular changes.

Does this land him in materialism? He avers not, and takes pains to say that he reprobates the fundamental doctrines of materialism as he does the most baseless of theological dogmas, believing, with Hume, that they, like the fundamental doctrines of spiritualism and most other "isms," lie outside the limits of philosophical inquiry.

In all this no account is taken of what by many is deemed the essential factor of humanity—the soul.

While Professor Huxley evidently frames his definition of man so as to leave room for the introduction of this hypothetical element, if any one feels so disposed, it is clear that he regards its existence and influence somewhat as questions of "lunar politics"—questions which neither he nor any one else has any means of determining.