

The Offensive Stranger: Take yet one more instance. With the best intentions the missionary has been laboring in China for eighty years.

The Dervish: The evil result is—

The Offensive Stranger: That nearly a hundred thousand Chinamen have acquired our Civilization.

The Dervish: And the good result is—

The Offensive Stranger: That by the compassion of God four hundred millions have escaped it.

1923

Dr. Loeb's Incredible Discovery

Experts in biology will be apt to receive with some skepticism the announcement of Dr. Jacques Loeb of the University of California as to the creation of life by chemical agencies. . . . Doctor Loeb is a very bright and ingenious experimenter, but *a consensus of opinion among biologists* would show that he is voted rather as a man of lively imagination than an inerrant investigator of natural phenomena.—*New York Times*, March 2d.

I wish I could be as young as that again. Although I seem so old, now, I was once as young as that. I remember, as if it were but thirty or forty years ago, how a paralyzing Consensus of Opinion accumulated from Experts a-setting around, about brother experts who had patiently and laboriously cold-chiseled their way into one or another of nature's safe-deposit vaults and were reporting that they had found something valuable was a plenty for me. It settled it.

But it isn't so now—no. Because, in the drift of the years I by and by found out that a Consensus examines a new thing with its feelings rather oftener than with its mind. You know, yourself, that that is so. Do those people examine with feelings that are friendly to evidence? You know they don't. It is the other way about. They do the examining by the light of their prejudices—now isn't that true?

With curious results, yes. So curious that you wonder the Consensuses do not go out of the business. Do you know of a case where a Consensus won a game? You can go back as far as you want to and you will find history furnishing you this (until now) unwritten maxim

for your guidance and profit: Whatever new thing a Consensus coppers (colloquial for "bets against"), bet your money on that very card and do not be afraid.

There was that primitive steam engine—ages back, in Greek times: a Consensus made fun of it. There was the Marquis of Worcester's steam engine, 250 years ago: a Consensus made fun of it. There was Fulton's steamboat of a century ago: a French Consensus, including the Great Napoleon, made fun of it. There was Priestly, with his oxygen: a Consensus scoffed at him, mobbed him, burned him out, banished him. While a Consensus was proving, by statistics and things, that a steamship could not cross the Atlantic, a steamship did it. A Consensus consisting of all the medical experts in Great Britain made fun of Jenner and inoculation. A Consensus consisting of all the medical experts in France made fun of the stethoscope. A Consensus of all the medical experts in Germany made fun of that young doctor (his name? forgotten by all but doctors, now, revered now by doctors alone) who discovered and abolished the cause of that awful disease, puerperal fever; made fun of him, reviled him, hunted him, persecuted him, broke his heart, killed him. Electric telegraph, Atlantic cable, telephone, all "toys," and of no practical value—verdict of the Consensuses. Geology, palaeontology, evolution—all brushed into space by a Consensus of theological experts, comprising all the preachers in Christendom, assisted by the Duke of Argyle and (at first) the other scientists. And do look at Pasteur and his majestic honor roll of prodigious benefactions! Damned—each and every one of them in its turn—by frenzied and ferocious Consensuses of medical and chemical Experts comprising, for years, every member of the tribe in Europe; damned without even a casual *look* at what he was doing—and he pathetically imploring them to come and take at least one little look before making the damnation eternal. They shortened his life by their malignities and persecutions; and thus robbed the world of the further and priceless services of a man who—along certain lines and within certain limits—had done more for the human race than any other one man in all its long history: a man whom it had taken the Expert brotherhood ten thousand years to produce, and whose mate and match the brotherhood may possibly not be able to bring forth and assassinate in another ten thousand. The preacher has an old and tough reputation for bull-headed and unreasoning hostility to new light; why, he is not "in it" with the doctor! Nor, perhaps, with some of the other breeds of Experts that sit around and get up the Consensuses and squelch the new

things as fast as they come from the hands of the plodders, the searchers, the inspired dreamers, the Pasteurs that come bearing pearls to scatter in the Consensus sty.

This is warm work! It puts my temperature up to 106 and raises my pulse to the limit. It always works just so when the red rag of a Consensus jumps my fence and starts across my pasture. I have been a Consensus more than once myself, and I know the business—and its vicissitudes. I am a compositor-expert, of old and seasoned experience; nineteen years ago I delivered the final-and-for-good verdict that the linotype would never be able to earn its own living nor anyone else's; it takes fourteen acres of ground, now, to accommodate its factories in England. Thirty-five years ago I was an expert precious-metal quartz-miner. There was an outcrop in my neighborhood that assayed \$600 a ton—gold. But every fleck of gold in it was shut up tight and fast in an intractable and impersuadable base-metal shell. Acting as a Consensus, I delivered the finality verdict that no human ingenuity would ever be able to set free two dollars' worth of gold out of a ton of that rock. The fact is, I did not foresee the cyanide process. Indeed, I have been a Consensus ever so many times since I reached maturity and approached the age of discretion, but I call to mind no instance in which I won out.

These sorrows have made me suspicious of Consensuses. Do you know, I tremble and the goose flesh rises on my skin every time I encounter one, now. I sheer warily off and get behind something, saying to myself, "It looks innocent and all right, but no matter, ten to one there's a cyanide process under that thing somewhere."

Now as concerns this "creation of life by chemical agencies." Reader, take my advice: don't you copper it. I don't say bet on it; no, I only say, don't you copper it. As you see, there is a Consensus out against it. If you find that you can't control your passions; if you feel that you have *got* to copper something and can't help it, copper the Consensus. It is the safest way—all history confirms it. If you are young, you will, of course, have to put up, on one side or the other, for you will not be able to restrain yourself; but as for me, I am old, and I am going to wait for a new deal.

P.S.—In the same number of the *Times* Doctor Funk says: "Man may be as badly fooled by believing too little as by believing too much; the hard-headed skeptic Thomas was the only disciple who was cheated." Is that the right and rational way to look at it? I will not be sure, for

my memory is faulty, but it has always been my impression that Thomas was the only one who made an examination and proved a fact, while the others were accepting, or discounting, the fact on trust—like any other Consensus. If that is so, Doubting Thomas removed a doubt which must otherwise have confused and troubled the world until now. Including Doctor Funk. It seems to me that we owe that hard-headed—or sound-headed—witness something more than a slur. Why does Doctor Funk *examine* into spiritism, and then throw stones at Thomas. Why doesn't he take it on trust? Has inconsistency become a jewel in Lafayette Place?

OLD-MAN-AFRAID-OF-THE-CONSENSUS.

Extract from Adam's Diary.—Then there was a Consensus about it. It was the very first one. It sat six days and nights. It was then delivered of the verdict that a world could not be made out of nothing; that such small things as sun and moon and stars might, maybe, but it would take years and years, if there was considerable many of them. Then the Consensus got up and looked out of the window, and there was the whole outfit spinning and sparkling in space! You never saw such a disappointed lot.

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1923

Down the Rhône

In old times a summer sail down the Rhône was a favorite trip with travelers. But that day is long gone by. The conveniences for the sail disappeared many years ago—driven out of existence by the railway.

In August, 1891, I made this long-neglected voyage with a boatman and a courier. The following account of it is part diary and part comment. The main idea of the voyage was, not to see sights, but to rest up from sight-seeing. There was little or nothing on the Rhône to examine or study or write didactically about; consequently, to glide down the stream in an open boat, moved by the current only, would afford