

The Crane Classics

Adventures in Common Sense

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SYSTEMS

"WHAT is your system?" a man asked me. What he meant, as you would know if you had heard the rest of the conversation, was, what particular cult, sect, philosophy and so forth do you belong to?

The question reveals a prevalent error. It is that some System of truth must be true. Quite the contrary! No System is true. Only single facts, individual laws are true.

The minute you begin to make a System, whether a religious creed or a philosophy, you leave off asking the only question worth while, What is true? and begin to ask only, What fits the structure I am rearing?

That is why every Ism is full of defective timber. There are weak spots in socialism, anarchism, nationalism, Romanism, Protestantism, Judaism, and all other Isms.

The human mind is not large enough to "grasp the scheme of things entire"; and, when it tries, makes unsatisfactory business of it. We can see only one truth at a time; usually only a piece of that.

And if they be real truths that we see, very often they contradict one another and won't fit at all into the same system.

The two truest, and, by the common consent of mankind, the greatest, teachers who ever lived, were Jesus and Socrates. Neither had a System. Both were utterly discursive, occasional, often inconsistent. Hence their deep trueness.

"Life is just one blamed thing after another," is the homely saying. And philosophy to be true must be the same—just one thing after another.