

THE PHILOSOPHY OF SECULARISM.

Real life—that is, an original relation to man and to the universe, worship of one's own ideal, consecration by one's own love—has for ages been postponed by despairing hearts to another world, and thither where their hearts were their treasures followed. But that waking grows dim. The future is all unsure. Lost opportunities are lost for ever. He who throws away his life upon dogmas or dreams is as one who throws life away in dissipation. Let every heart arise and claim its full measure of existence!

The weakest will is strong enough to select its right elements and organize its fair life, if it be only free—free to concentrate itself each instant upon the nearest need of life—the essential condition of every farther step. It is the single, simple will, intent each moment on its truest and best, which finds those moments ever weaving the general life into beauty, and virtue into joy.—Moncure D. Conway.

ATHEISTS.

Prof. Tyndal, in alluding to Atheists, says:—

"It may comfort some to know that there are among us many whom the gladiators of the pulpit would call Atheists and Materialists, whose lives, nevertheless, as tested by any accessible standard of morality, would contrast more than favorably with the lives of those who seek to stamp them with this offensive brand. When I say offensive, I refer simply to the intention of those who use such terms, and not because Atheism and Materialism, when compared with many of the notions ventilated in the columns of religious newspapers, have any particular offensiveness to me. If I wished to find men who are scrupulous in their adherence to engagements, whose words are their bond, and to whom moral shiftiness of any kind is subjectively unknown; if I wanted a loving father, a faithful husband, an honorable neighbor, and a just citizen, I would seek him in the band of Atheists to which I refer. I have known some of the most pronounced among them, not only in life, but in death; seen them approaching, with open eyes, the inexorable goal, with no dread of a hangman's whip, with no hope of a heavenly crown, and still as mindful of their duties, and as faithful in the discharge of them, as if their eternal future depended upon their latest deeds."

AN ANGLICAN CLERGYMAN ON THE OLD TESTAMENT.

The Reverend A. R. Fitchett, in a sermon preached in All Saints Church Dunedin, on Sunday the 26th August, replied to a lecture of Judge Higinbotham's on "Science and Religion," and made the following observations (reported in the Dunedin Star), on the averment that—"The Churches were committed to anthropomorphic conceptions of God inconsistent with the teachings of Modern Science":—

ANTHROPOMORPHISM.

The Churches were charged with maintaining anthropomorphic views of the Deity, and so with presenting to the people as the object of worship a different God to the God revealed in nature and known through science. Anthropomorphism is the attributing of a human form to God—human parts and passions—the conceiving of the Deity as like ourselves. The lecturer himself explained why such conceptions were natural in the early stages of the race's mental development, and admitted that they were inevitable. Before the advent of modern science this planet appeared to be the principal body in the universe—sun, moon, and stars were mere appendages for its convenience; man was conceived as the chief object of the Divine care, the sole intelligent creature of the Divine government. God reigned over the kingdoms of men as an Oriental monarch over the satraps who governed his provinces—King of Kings, irresponsible, arbitrary in his action, varying in his plans, capable of being deflected from His purpose by human entreaty. God in short, was mainly conceived as a magnified man, and in the childhood of the race it was natural so to conceive him.

THE OLD TESTAMENT.

Anthropomorphic conceptions undoubtedly pervade the Hebrew Scriptures. The Old Testament is the record of religious development in a particular people. At the beginning of Jewish history Jehovah is a tribe God—the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He is a God amongst other and rival gods—greater than they, but it was long before the Jewish mind was cleared of the notion that the gods of other tribes and other regions had a real existence. As the tutelary deity of the clan, Jehovah was enshrined or tabernacled in a dwelling. At Salem was his tabernacle, and his dwelling in Zion. In the holy place of the Temple the lid of the Ark was Jehovah's throne; the cherubic figures on either side were the attendants on his state; the table of the shewbread was spread before him every week, in keeping with the idea of his residence there. The phenomena of the natural world the Jew referred to the direct action of Deity. The thunder was Jehovah's voice, the lightning His arrows. He looks upon the earth and it trembles; He touches the hills and they smoke—that was the Hebrew explanation of the earthquake and the volcano. It is tolerably certain

that this crude anthropomorphism was refined into poetry as mental development proceeded. The old phraseology was retained, but was accepted as figurative. Thus in Psalm 104 we have: "Who layeth the beams of his chambers in the waters," *i.e.*, in the watery firmament overhead; "who maketh the clouds His chariot, and walketh upon the wings of the wind." Probably the intelligent Hebrew no more believed that God built chambers in the sky than he believed that the wind had wings. Both expressions were understood as poetry. In the more elevated utterances of the prophets anthropomorphism is condemned and repudiated: "Canst thou by searching find out God?" "To whom will ye liken God? or what likeness will ye compare unto Him?" "God is not man that he should lie, nor the son of man that he should repent." Even before the advent of Christ Hebrew thought had made long advances towards a purer and more spiritual conception of God than that formed by the primitive tribe.

ANTHROPOMORPHISM ENDS WITH JESUS CHRIST.

The consummation of this progress came in the teaching of Jesus Christ. "God is a spirit." That is the final word about the nature of God. Beyond it we have not got; cannot hope to get. God is a spirit; God dwelleth not in temples made with hands; is not localised either in "this mountain" or in the shrine of the "holy place" at Jerusalem. These utterances supersede for ever the anthropomorphism of the Old Testament. That the ancient Jew conceived of God as possessing corporeal parts and human passions as being domiciled in a building, as subject to change—"repenting him" and being "grieved at the heart,"—as entreating to be "let alone" that he may carry out his original purpose unhindered by human importunity—that these were men's thoughts of God thirty centuries ago is nothing to us. Ours is not the theology of the Old Testament, but of the New.

THE LATER REVELATION.

Since the truth was enunciated that God is a spirit we have learned much. Not, indeed, respecting the ultimate nature of God—on that subject the final word has been spoken—but respecting the methods of God's action. This is the contribution to theology which has been made by modern science. We have learned that the Creator Spirit, still at work, works in methods absolutely fixed and unvarying. The changeless "laws of nature" are merely the modes in which we observe the creative and sustaining power of God to work. All modern science is a commentary on the New Testament text which affirms that God is the "Father of Lights," with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning. Unquestionably the most deeply-rooted conviction in the educated lay mind of to-day is that of the reign of law, the uniformity of Nature, the unbroken continuity which links effect with cause in all natural phenomena. Does the teaching given in the churches conflict with that conviction? We have seen that Jesus Christ finally dismissed the older anthropomorphism by enunciating the truth that "God is a spirit." Have we, notwithstanding, gone back to ideas proper only to the childhood of the race? Is the God of the churches a different God to the God of the University class room. That is the question remaining now to be answered.

RELIGION V. FREETHOUGHT.

The principal business of the day with great nations is to destroy one another. Millions of men have been killed in the name of religion.—Every nation is groaning under the burthen of debt incurred in carrying on wars against other Christian nations. The world is covered with forts to keep Christians from killing Christians, and every sea is covered with iron monsters made to blow Christian brains into froth. Verily, it is sweet to see brethren dwell together in unity. There must be some other way to civilize and humanize man. We have tried creed and dogma and superstition, and they have failed miserably. Let us try liberty. We need Freethought, men of moral courage. We need have no fear of being ridiculed. On every hand the people are advancing. The men of science—exploring the heavens and the earth and the gloomy caverns, peopled with the demons of the past—are the angels of to-day. Science digs a clod from the earth and makes it into some great giant that turns with tireless arms the countless wheels of toil.—Col. R. G. Ingersoll.

DECADENCE OF THE SUPERNATURAL.

"The universal idea of the interposition of a personal agency in the most common concerns of every-day life, and the most ordinary natural processes inherited by the European, has become gradually discarded. As science, by successive efforts, explains the sequence and changes in natural phenomena, so mysterious to ignorance, the idea of personal agency becomes gradually eliminated, and driven further beyond the region of direct observation and experience. And, as it escapes ordinary attention, the idea of a supernaturalism gradually fades from the recollection, and ceases materially to influence conduct."—Westminster Review.

The lover of truth, since he observes it in matters of no consequence, will observe it still more in matters of consequence; for inasmuch as he who is cautious of falsehood for its own sake, will surely be cautious of it as being disgraceful; and such a man is praiseworthy.—ARISTOTLE.