

TORCH OF REASON.



VOL. 2.

SILVERTON, OREGON, THURSDAY, APRIL 21, 1898.

NO. 22.

Reason.

Rise, Reason, shine on all our race,
Shed confidence around;
For where thou guid'st our wandering
steps
Is sure, is solid ground.

Rise, sun that lights the mental world,
And drive night visions hence;
Dispel the clouds of error's gloom
With beams of common sense.

Shine; from the shores of Columbia
shine;

Extend from sea to sea,
Till all the nations of the earth
Illuminated be.

The day will come, the happy day
Is spreading o'er the sky,
When truth shall chase vain dreams
away,

And midnight phantoms fly.
—[Selected.]

What Is the Brain?

BY HENRY GEORGE ATKINSON, F. G. S.

Mind is the consequence or product of the material man, its existence depending on the action of the brain. The proof that mind holds the same relation to the body, that all other phenomena do to material conditions (light, for instance, or instinct in animals), and that it is not some sort of brilliant existence lodged in the body to be clogged and trammelled by earthly conditions, is to be found by all who will exert their senses and understanding, released from nursery processions. It may be found in the whole circumstances of man's existence, his origin and growth: the faculties following the development of the body in man, and in other animals; the direction of the faculties being influenced by surrounding circumstances; the desires, the will, the hopes, the fears, the habits, and the opinions being effects traceable to causes—to natural causes—and becoming the facts of History and Statistics. We observe the influence of climate,—of sunshine and damp,—of wine and opium, and poisons, of health and disease—the circumstances of idiocy and madness;—the differences between individuals and their likeness to the lower animals, and the different condition of the same individual at different times. But it is unnecessary to insist more to you on the evidence which is now generally admitted, of the relation between the body and the mind. It is not so generally admitted, however, that mind is the consequence and phenomenon only of the brain. It is not a thing having a seat or home in the brain: but it is the manifestation or expression of the brain in action; as heat and light of fire, and fragrance of the flower. The brain, as even some phrenologists have asserted, "the instrument of the mind". When a

glass of wine turns a wise man into a fool, is it not clear that the result is the consequence of a change in the material conditions? The thoughts and will are changed. Another glass and even consciousness is laid at rest—no longer exists;—and hence, such existence is clearly but a temporary and dependent condition;—as much so as light or heat, fragrance, beauty, or any electric or magnetic phenomena. The same reasoning which induces the conclusion that the brain is an instrument of the mind, must force a consistent man to conclude that the steam engine is not the machine producing, but the instrument of that which is produced by its action; or that of the galvanic apparatus is the instrument of a galvanic will or power. Men turn nature topsyturvy,—take effects for causes, to suit their fancies;—in defiance of reason, and of all clear and true analogy. Shall we suppose that the music plays itself, and "uses the instrument to show forth its powers"?—not the powers of the instrument, but its own powers? Shall we suppose a spirit not in the growth of the body, but got there we know not how,—all manifest imperfections being only imperfections of the instrument? that all spirit or mind is, in reality, pure and equal? and, by the same reasoning (or conclusion without reasoning), are we to imagine the "great spirit of the universe" all perfection? and that all evil, pain, blight, death, &c., are the defects of the instrument, Nature. It does not appear to me that such assumptions would support those notions about free will, and some other matters, notions absurd in our eyes, which they are adduced to uphold. When men desert nature, and neglect fact and reason for the imagination, they are sure to entangle themselves in their own web.

If we have extinguished Hell we have not lived in vain. True, we get no credit for it; but that does not matter. True, we are denounced for making the world happier; but we do not mind. If the clergy did not hate us, we should be of no use in the world. And many of their poor dupes are no doubt very unhappy now that hell tortures them no more! But probably they have already found a substitute for the old torture with which they afflict their souls. Probably, now that hell no longer tortures them, they torture themselves about us Freethinkers, and are villainously distressed to think that there is no hell for even such people as we are. —[Ex.]

General Aspects of the Special-Creation Hypothesis.

BY HERBERT SPENCER.

Early ideas are not usually true ideas. Undeveloped intellect, be it that of the individual or that of the race, forms conclusions which require to be revised and revised, before they reach a tolerable correspondence with realities. Were it otherwise there would be no discovery, no increase of intelligence. What we call the progress of knowledge is the bringing of thoughts into harmony with things; and it implies that the first thoughts are either wholly out of harmony with things, or in very incomplete harmony with them.

If illustrations be needed, the history of every science furnishes them. The primitive notions of mankind as to the structure of the heavens, were wrong; and the notions which replaced them were successively less wrong. The original belief respecting the form of the earth was wrong; and this wrong belief survived through the first civilizations. The earliest ideas that have come down to us concerning the natures of the elements were wrong; and only in quite recent times has the composition of matter in its various forms been better understood. The interpretations of mechanical facts, of meteorological facts, of physiological facts, were at first wrong. In all these cases men set out with beliefs which, if not absolutely false, contained but small amounts of truth disguised by immense amounts of error.

Hence the hypothesis that living beings resulted from special creations, being a primitive hypothesis, is probably an untrue hypothesis. If the interpretations of nature given by aboriginal men were wrong in other directions, they were most likely erroneous in this direction. It would be strange if, while these aboriginal men failed to reach the truth in so many cases where it is comparatively conspicuous, they yet reached the truth in a case where it is comparatively hidden.

Besides the improbability given to the belief in special creation, by its association with mistaken early beliefs in general; a further improbability is given to it by its association with a special class of mistaken beliefs. It belongs to a family of beliefs which have one after another been destroyed by advancing knowledge; and is, indeed, almost the only member of the family that

survives among educated people.

We all know that the savage thinks of each striking phenomenon, or group of phenomena, as caused by some special personal agent; that out of this fetishistic conception there grows up a polytheistic conception, in which these minor personalities are variously generalized into deities presiding over different divisions of nature; and that these are eventually further generalized. This progressive consolidation of causal agencies, may be traced in the creeds of all races; and is far from complete in the creeds of the most advanced races. The unlettered rustics who till our fields do not let the consciousness of a supreme power wholly absorb the aboriginal conceptions of good and evil spirits, and charms or secret potencies dwelling in particular objects. The earliest mode of thinking changes only as fast as the constant relations among phenomena are established. Scarcely less familiar is the truth that while accumulating knowledge makes these conceptions of personal causal agents gradually more vague, as it merges them into general causes, it also destroys the habit of thinking of them as working after the methods of personal agents. We do not now, like Kepler, assume guiding spirits to keep the planets in their orbits. It is no longer the universal belief that the sea was once for all mechanically parted from the dry land; or that the mountains were placed where we see them by a sudden creative act. All but a narrow class have ceased to suppose sunshine and storm to be sent in some arbitrary succession. The majority of educated people have given up thinking of epidemics as punishments inflicted by an angry deity. Nor do even the common people regard a madman as one possessed by a demon. That is to say, we everywhere see fading away the anthropomorphic conception of the Unknown Cause. In one case after another is abandoned that interpretation which ascribes phenomena to a will analagous to the human will, working by methods analagous to human methods.

If, then, of this once numerous family of beliefs, the immense majority have become extinct, we may not unreasonably expect that the few remaining members of the family will become extinct. One of these is the belief we are here considering—the belief that each species of organism was specially cre-

(CONTINUED ON SIXTH PAGE.)