

# TORCH OF REASON.



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## The Actual.

Why should we ever seek to know  
What never can be known!  
Why should we present joys forego,  
In hope of joys to come?

How much by Art man can improve,  
What silent Nature shows!  
How many scenes inspire to love,  
As he more happy grows!

How knowledge, with the soul enlarged,  
Inspires to virtuous deeds;  
Unless the mind has been surcharged  
With error's noxious weeds.

Then let us all improve the time,  
And still more happy grow;  
To learn the ways of truth sublime,  
And all her secrets know.

—[Selected,

## What Can We Reverence?

BY G. H. ATKINSON.

Atheism and Materialism are terms used by vulgar minds to frighten the ignorant. "We fool ourselves with our own fopperies and inventions, like children who are frightened with the same face of their playfellow that they themselves have smeared and smutted." Vulgar men strive to raise themselves by degrading others; and when they are foiled by reason they swear and use bad names. To say a man is an Atheist is to "smear and smut" his reputation, and to cause him to be avoided with fear and disgust, as if he were possessed of the plague, or were a murderer and devourer of human flesh. Every theologian, though differing from other theologians, assumes that he is in the true faith, and that his faith is a revelation proved by miracles; and he conceives, with a strange appearance of presumption, that he is called upon to abuse all the rest of the world, and to strive to convert them to his particular faith, that they may partake of its advantages. But we must judge of the tree by its fruits, and not by its promises. Men have faith enough; but not in the best things. It is not faith that is wanted, but knowledge. Faith will not give knowledge, but knowledge will give faith, and elevate its character. Blind faith is a stumbling block; enlightened faith is a clear path, and a heaven on earth.

How many significations are there to the term Materialism? And yet men who ought to know better, use this word as a term of reproach, without defining what they mean by it. Words have as many meanings as the chameleon has of colors. One understands by the term God, precisely what another understands by Atheism. What we understand by Christianity, another considers utter Infidel-

ity. What one sees as a terrible fatalism, another recognizes as beautiful harmony, eternal and universal law. It is astonishing how much ill feeling is avoided by bringing men to the definition of terms; by bringing men out of their feelings and imaginations down to the matter of fact. We may express a dislike to hypocrisy, to gluttony, to irreligion, to indecency and worldliness; but a good mind will not dislike the men, but only their immoral condition. Much less will he slander any one for his honest intellectual convictions. Christians have hunted down and destroyed their victims in their turn, as Christ was hunted down and destroyed. Under every religious faith, men persecute and are persecuted.

Men try to paint a flattering likeness to themselves, and call it God; and they usually exhibit a monster. It is said that man is a god to the dog; but this is a mistake. Dogs fear and follow men, and bite men; but they do not worship them. We might learn from the lower animals many of the errors which struggling reason falls into. They reprove us for our fears and our hopes, and are free from the follies of philosophers and divines. But we must mend through knowledge, and cultivate men's virtues, rather than reprove them for their failings.

Xenophanes pleasantly said, as Montaigne tells us, "that if beasts frame any gods to themselves, as it is likely they do, they make them certainly such as themselves, and glorify themselves in it, as we do. For why may not a goose say thus: All the parts of the universe I have an interest in. The earth serves me to walk upon; the sun to light me; the stars have their influence upon me; I have such an advantage by the winds, and such by the waters. There is nothing that yon heavenly roof looks upon so favorably as me. I am the darling of nature. Is it not man that keeps, lodges and serves me? It is for me that he both saws and grinds. If he eats me, he does the same by his fellow men; and so do I the worms that kill and devour him." And Montaigne says, "As much might be said by a crane and with greater confidence, upon the account of his liberty of flight, and the possessing of that high and beautiful region."

We judge according to our impressions and the conditions of our minds. A child believes that its parent knows all things and can do all things: and when it awakes from this dream it is only to trans-

fer its notion to an ideal object,—to a universal parent. How natural the growth of the idea and the transfer! Great men have been thought gods all-powerful; and gods have been thought of as great men. "Augustus had more temples than Jupiter; served with as much religion and belief in miracles." We only know phenomena: and phenomena are no representation of the cause of the eternal and inherent force of nature. The dreams and promises of theologians do not exhibit what men know, but what they wish; and their wishes are follies. The sailor wished that the earth was all tobacco and the rivers brandy. The psalm-singer's highest notion of heaven is to be singing praises to God continually. Men "sing to the praise and glory of God," seeing in him a jealous man,—a wretched image of their own miserable selves.

He who does not suppose a personal god, or look for a future, may be most unselfish and deeply religious; so religious that he shrinks from all the forms of worship, because he sees in them all but forms of worship, and forms of fancy, and not the spirit and image of truth. There are thousands upon thousands upon any one question relating to their religion, and yet are most proud in declaring themselves Christian, although it be not certain that they possess any one Christian self-denying virtue.

Were Christ to appear among such persons he would not be recognized; nor would he recognize them as Christian. Saying, "I am a Christian," and crying, "Lord, Lord!" will not open the gate of heaven to any man; and those who jostle in before their neighbors, shall be the last to enter, and the least in heaven;—in the heaven of a truly virtuous and loving heart. I think a man may be so religious as to be quite shocked with all notions of prayer and all familiar intercourse with the "deity" whatsoever. We must pause in wonder before the great mystery of nature,—the hidden truth and the cause, and learn that knowledge is power, and knowledge is wisdom, and wisdom and power are in obedience: for, by yielding to the law, the law is fulfilled, and works are accomplished. Christ lived and died for the good of mankind. Socrates lived and died for the good of mankind; and so ought we all to live and die for the good of mankind: and only by forgetting self shall we elevate and ennoble life. I would not accept

of "heaven if I thought that others were to go to hell."

The idea of God and ruler is essential in rude and barbarous times, just as the idea of loyalty may be essential, though the king be never seen: and the fear of hell may be useful as the fear of the gallows is useful,—in barbarous times like the present. Creeds stagnate, and prevent development and progress. Christian morals are considered perfect; but they will require much weeding and developing before they can be accepted by high and philosophic minds,—by the best and most enlightened minds of the present day. And is there no place for man's faith when he has ceased the worship of idols? It is the idlest folly to suppose that the idea of Necessity would set men loose among their evil passions. But that we require something to reverence and elevate our thoughts towards, is true. Knowledge gives us a more elevated poetry, gives us the chart and laws of mind to guide us, and will exhibit to us higher objects for reverence. Is it nothing to have faith in nature; to have faith in knowledge, and in goodness, which is the fruit of knowledge? Is it nothing to have faith in love? Is it nothing to regard nature in all her forms with profound reverence? to love truth, and worship goodness, and have no place for contempt of any living thing or condition of matter? Trained in the knowledge of the laws of mind, to find it impossible to take offence—what a soothing influence! What a blessing, this one circumstance! what a foundation for virtue and generosity! and for peace of mind! Is it nothing to cast away ambition? to desire excellence rather than to excel? to feel a noble contentment in reflecting that you are a part of nature—a form of the eternal? Is there nothing in that faith which seeks for happiness out of self in the happiness of others, and the glories of nature—content that in death the sense of personality shall pass away, and that you shall be as you were before you were—in a sleep forevermore?—[Laws of Man's Nature and Development.]

The higher the motive that prompts an action, the less the hope of reward. An unconverted fireman who risks his life to save a little child from a burning building, is not moved by selfishness. The rewards expected by Christians are so great that their motives must be low. It is not others, but themselves, that they expect to save from fire.