

"I Do Not Know."

EDITOR TORCH OF REASON:

Replying to your observations (they are hardly criticisms) upon my article entitled "I do not know," published in your issue of October 27th, I would say it would seem we do not radically differ in our views, or more than is common to all mankind, looking through different eyes. I think it very fortunate that nature has so constituted the human race that at the beginning of the argument of any important question, comparatively new, we look upon the subject from different standpoints, until the light of real truth finally dawns from the combination of the different views, after that is discarded which will not bear the full test of reason.

I think likely you misunderstand my true meaning when I say "that matter acting on matter, and all contained in one limitless expanse, know as the universe, is the supreme power." I think you will agree with me that nature is but matter and its manifestations, and that all manifestations come from matter acting on matter. If you do so agree, then we have reached a common standpoint upon which to discuss this subject.

You say in substance, "you do not know there is a supreme power because there are some powers of nature manifested in various ways, and that some of the powers are antagonistic to each other, and the result can not be called a supreme power any more than all the combined political powers of the world could be called a supreme power when at war with each other."

It is certainly true there are many powers continually counteracting and destroying the work of others, but this does not demonstrate that conflicting powers are not a part of the whole universe, and owing their existence to the fact that they are a part of it, and that these seemingly antagonistic powers would be in perfect harmony were the conditions proper, and that these proper conditions can be brought about by other powers, or perhaps the same belonging to and in the universe, but all being a part of and making up the whole.

The locomotive engine, perhaps the most satisfactory machine, under all conditions and circumstances, made by man, may serve as an example of my meaning. Where is its supreme power? Is it the steam or the steam chest, the boiler or the furnace, or the drive wheels, or the piston, or the throttle, or the water to be expanded, or the coal to furnish the heat? Under different conditions and circumstances every material entering into its structure, and every material used in its operation, might be made antagonistic to the purposes for which it was constructed. As

it stands upon the track, ready to do the bidding of its master, can it be said that any part of it is supreme? I think you will agree with me that each and every part in its structure, each and every thing in its operation, and all constituting a whole and complete locomotive engine, is supreme.

And so it is with the man at the throttle. He is full of checks and balances, all necessary for the promotion of his life. He could not live and be a man but for his various organs. Which is supreme? Is it his heart, or his digestive organs, his lungs, his liver, or his nervous system, or his brain? One could not be without the other, and all performing different functions, and all combined, supreme.

I am glad you suggested political combinations to illustrate your views, as our form of government aptly illustrates my position. Theoretically, at least, the government of the United States is based on the whole people. William McKinley is not the supreme power; neither is his cabinet, nor the house of representatives, nor the senate. They are but the servants of the whole people forming our government, just as the various organs of the human body are but the servants of the whole. There is continual antagonism among us over the spoils and powers of office. It is only a few years since we were engaged in a bitter and prolonged war with each other. Yet there has never been a moment since our existence as a government that the whole people have not been the supreme power.

Why matter acting on matter causes certain effects I, of course, do not know. That it possesses inert powers I do know from the facts of the case, and which can point to no other conclusion. It is these inert powers which are supreme. They could not, however, be in the universe, nor of it, but for the whole, and therefore are subordinate to the whole, just as any part of the human body, exercising separate and distinct inert powers of its own, is subordinate to the whole.

I fully agree with you that "the result can not be the cause," but I do maintain that both the cause and effect combined are supreme. Why matter possesses certain inert powers I certainly do not know. I do not know why the sun produces certain effects, but I do know it produces such effects. I do not know why water at a certain temperature becomes a solid, and at another becomes an invisible gas, but I do know such to be the fact. I do not know why the bacteria produces certain chemical changes in matter, and in many instances gives it its color, and gives it its flavor or odor, but I do know that it does so. I do not know why we have what is known as the "food

cycle." Beginning with the mineral ingredients in the soil, the food material starts in its circulation from the soil to the plant, from the plant to the animal, from the animal to the bacterium, and from the bacterium through a series of other bacteria back again to the soil in the same condition as when it started. I know it is the sunlight which produces the energy for its movement around this never ending circle, and that, as Professor Conn says, "that it is this repeated circulation that has made the continuation of life possible for the millions of years of this life's history. It is this continuous circulation that makes life possible still, and it is only this fact that the food is capable of ever circulating from animal to plant, and plant to animal, that makes it possible for the living world to continue its existence." Why our food supply contains such an inert power I do not know, but I do know that such is the fact, and so it is with all inert powers of nature. We can not know why, but we must accept the fact. All these supreme powers are perhaps supreme in themselves in the immediate sphere in which they may be at work. They may be antagonistic to other local powers, supreme in the particular field in which they are at work, but we must not overlook the fact that they are all but a part of the whole, and that no part can equal the whole, and that they owe their existence and being to the fact that they are a part of the whole, and that the whole must be supreme. I would, therefore, respectfully reiterate what I said in my former article, that "matter acting on matter, and all contained in one limitless expanse, known as the universe, is the supreme power."

CHARLES K. TENNEY.

Madison, Wis., Nov. 8, 1898.

[The above article, from the pen of Brother Tenney, pleases us very much. We are as near the same opinion as two humans can very well be. We admit that the universe, taken as a whole, is the only supreme power of which we have knowledge. Of course, looking at it in one way, this is no supreme power at all, but all powers combined. We don't know of any one supreme power, yet with Brother Tenney we can say that matter acting on matter, and all contained in one limitless (as far as we know) expanse known as the universe, is the only supreme power (if, after remembering that there can be no subordinate power to the whole universe, it may be called such) of which we have knowledge. Will that do, Brother T.?—ED.]

That Texas girl who ate the heads off 212 parlor matches must have not only wanted to die, but to inoculate herself against suffering in the next world.—[Ex.

The Supreme Power.

EDITOR TORCH OF REASON:

Anent the discussion of the "supreme power," one peculiarity of the Agnostic has struck me very forcibly. It is the ever recurring question: "What causes matter to act?"

Mr. Johnson, in the issue of November 17, admits that the "action of matter upon matter" satisfactorily accounts for all natural phenomena; but later he denies this by asking "what causes" matter to act, which is the equivalent of questioning the action of matter at all, because if some power exterior to matter is the actor, then matter becomes merely a medium and not an actor.

This idea is made more positive when he directly assumes that matter is a "dead weight" and does not of itself act. Let him prove that something exterior to matter causes matter to act, before he asks what that something may be.

The Agnostic is a little more reasonable than the orthodox, in that he wants proof as to what the operating power is, but he seems to accept the orthodox assumption that it is something exterior to matter. There is perhaps no answer to the question as it is usually put, but there are intelligent and satisfactory answers to all or most questions of natural phenomena, and there is no reason for assuming that these answers do not go to the bottom of things and that there "might be" a mysterious something somewhere that science has failed to discover.

The question is an appeal to the imagination and not to reason. Along with the Christian's god, let this "what is it" present something that reason can get hold of, when it will receive proper and courteous attention. But it is not reasonable to suppose, when we see "matter acting upon matter," that it is not matter, but something else acting. I do not mean to say that science has reached her limit, but that scientific conclusions are based upon a preponderance of evidence, and imagination or wonder have no business interposing questions without the backing of a single fact to these reasonable conclusions. If such a question as Mr. Johnson's were allowable, I could easily go him one better, by asking what causes the cause that causes matter to act, and so on, ad infinitum. But this is not the true method of a reasonable discussion. The orthodox are more logical. They tell you at once that the great cause of all things, their god, is a causeless cause, and so stop useless (but embarrassing) questions. My question may embarrass Mr. Johnson, assuming him to be a representative of Deism, but his can not embarrass Mr. Tenney, as a representative of science, because science can have no prejudice against an