

TORCH OF REASON.

VOL. 2.

SILVERTON, OREGON, THURSDAY, DECEMBER 1, 1898.

NO. 47.

MY FREEDOM.

O JOY! at last my mind is free!
In ruins lie its prison bars!
My bark hath gained the open sea
And sails beneath the eternal stars.

I languish in the clutch no more
Of Superstition's palsied hand;
Behind me fades the narrow shore;
Beyond, the sea of Truth expands.

Henceforth no narrow, heartless creed
The freedom of my thought shall chain,
The truth aloft my steps shall lead
Trough Reason's limitless domain.

Reproachful voices now are hushed,
The conflict's angry murmurs cease;
With dawning hope the sky is flushed,
And o'er me waft the airs of peace.
—Secular Songs.

Then and Now.

BY R. G. INGERSOLL.

SINCE the murder of Hypatia in the fifth century, when the polished blade of Greek philosophy was broken by the club of ignorant Catholicism, until today, superstition has detested every effort of reason.

It is almost impossible to conceive the completeness of the victory that the church achieved over philosophy. For ages science was utterly ignored; thought was a poor slave; an ignorant priest was master of the world; faith put out the eyes of the soul; reason was a trembling coward; the imagination was set on fire of hell; every human feeling was sought to be suppressed; love was considered infinitely sinful, pleasure was the road to eternal fire, and God was supposed to be happy only when His children were miserable. The world was governed by an Almighty's whim; prayers could change the order of things, halt the grand procession of nature—could produce rain, avert pestilence, famine and death in all its forms. There was no idea of the certain; all depended upon divine pleasure—or displeasure, rather; heaven was full of inconsistent malevolence, and earth of ignorance. Everything was done to appease the divine wrath. Every public calamity was caused by the sins of the people; generally by a failure to pay tithes. To the poor multitude, the earth was a kind of enchanted forest, full of demons ready to devour, and theological serpents lurking with infinite power to fascinate and torture the unhappy and impotent soul. Life to them was a dim and mysterious labyrinth, in which they wandered weary and lost, guided by priests as bewildered as themselves, without knowing that at every step the Ariadne of reason offered them the long lost clue.

The very heavens were full of death; the lightning was regarded as the glittering vengeance of God, and the earth was thick with snares for the unwary feet of man. The soul was supposed to be crowded with the wild beasts of desire; the heart to be totally corrupt, prompting only to crime. Virtues were regarded as deadly sins in disguise. There was a continual warfare being waged between the Deity and the devil for the possession of every soul; the latter generally being considered victorious. The flood, the tornado, the volcano, were all evidences of the displeasure of heaven and the sinfulness of man. The blight that withered, the frost that blackened, the earthquake that devoured, were the messengers of the Creator.

The world was governed by Fear.

Against all the evils of nature, there was known only the defense of prayer, of fasting, of credulity and devotion. Man in his helplessness endeavored to soften the heart of God. The faces of the multitude were blanched with fear and wet with tears. The world was the prey of hypocrites, kings and priests.

My heart bleeds when I contemplate the suffering endured by the millions now dead; of those who lived when the world appeared to be insane; when the heavens were filled with an infinite Horror, who snatched babes with dimpled hands and rosy cheeks from the white breasts of mothers and dashed them into an abyss of eternal flame.

Slowly, like the coming of the dawn, came the grand truth that the universe is governed by law; that disease fastens itself upon the good and upon the bad; that the tornado can not be stopped by counting beads; that the rushing lava pauses not for bended knees, the lightning for clasped and uplifted hands, nor the cruel waves of the sea for prayer; that paying tithes causes, rather than prevents, famine; that pleasure is not sin; that happiness is the only good; that demons and gods exist only in the imagination; that faith is a lullaby sung to put the soul to sleep; that devotion is a bribe that fear offers to supposed power; that offering rewards in another world for obedience in this, is simply buying souls on credit; that knowledge consists in ascertaining the laws of nature, and that wisdom is the science of happiness.—Prose Poems and Selections.

Spirit of Zoroaster and of His Religion.

BY JAMES FREEMAN CLARKE.

It is not likely that Zoroaster ever saw Pythagoras or even Abraham. But though absolutely nothing is known of the events of his life, there is not the least doubt of his existence nor of his character. He has left the impress of his commanding genius on great regions, various races and long periods of time. His religion, like that of the Buddha, is essentially a moral religion. Each of them was a revolt from the Pantheism of India, in the interest of morality, human freedom and the progress of the race. They differ in this, that each takes hold of one side of morality, and lets go the opposite. Zoroaster bases his law on the eternal distinction between right and wrong; Sakya-muni, on the natural laws and their consequences, either good or evil. Zoroaster's law is, therefore, the law of justice; Sakya-muni's, the law of mercy. The one makes the supreme good to consist in truth, duty, right; the other, in love, benevolence and kindness. Zoroaster teaches providence; the monk of India teaches prudence. Zoroaster aims at holiness, the Buddha at merit. Zoroaster teaches and emphasizes creation; the Buddha knows nothing of creation, but only nature or law. All these oppositions run back to a single root. Both are moral reformers. Zoroaster cognizes all morality as having its root within, in the eternal distinction between right and wrong motive, but Sakya-muni finds it outside of the soul, in the results of good and evil action, therefore in the nature of things. The method of salvation, therefore, according to Zoroaster, is that of an eternal battle for good against evil; but according to the Buddha, it is that of self-culture and virtuous activity.

Both of these systems, as being essentially moral systems in the interest of humanity, proceed from persons. For it is a curious fact, that, while the essentially spiritualistic religions are ignorant of their founders, all the moral creeds of the world proceed from a moral source, i. e., a human will.

Zoroaster was one of those who was oppressed with the sight of evil. But it was not outward evil which most tormented him, but spiritual evil—evil having its origin in a depraved heart and a will turned away from goodness. His

meditations led him to the conviction that all the woe of the world had its root in sin, and that the origin of sin was to be found in the demonic world. He might have used the language of the Apostle Paul and said: "We wrestle not with flesh and blood"—that is, our struggle is not with man, but with principles of evil, rulers of darkness, spirits of wickedness in the supernatural world. Deeply convinced that a great struggle was going on between the powers of light and darkness, he called on all good men to take part in the war, and battle for the good God against the dark and foul tempter.

Great physical calamities added to the intensity of this conviction. It appears that about the period of Zoroaster, some geological convulsions had changed the climate of northern Asia, and very suddenly produced severe cold where before there had been an almost tropical temperature.

Amid these terrible convulsions of the air and ground, these antagonisms of outward good and evil, Zoroaster developed his belief in the dualism of all things. To his mind, as to that of the Hebrew poet, God had placed all things against each other, two and two. No Pantheistic optimism, like that of India, could satisfy his thought. He could not say: "Whatever is, is right"; some things seemed fatally wrong. The world was a scene of war, not of peace and rest. In the far distance he saw the triumph of good; but that triumph could only come by fighting the good fight now. But his weapons were not carnal. "Pure thoughts" going out into "true words" and resulting in "right actions"; this was the whole duty of man.—[Ten Great Religions.

The idea of Greek religion which distinguishes it from all others is the human character of its gods. The gods of Greece are men and women, men and women on a larger scale, but still intensely human. The gods of India, as they appear in the sacred books, are vast abstractions; and as they appear in sculpture, hideous and grotesque idols. The gods of Egypt seem to pass away into mere symbols and intellectual generalizations. But the gods of Greece are persons, warm with life, radiant with beauty, having their human adventures, wars, loves. The symbolical meaning of each god disappears in his personal character.—[Sel.