

The Old and the New.

BY R. G. INGERSOLL.

Our fathers did the best they could. They believed in the supernatural, and they thought that sacrifice and prayer, fasting and weeping, would induce the supernatural to give them sunshine, rain and harvest—long life in this world and eternal joy in another. To them, God was a monarch, quick to take offense, sudden in anger, terrible in punishment, jealous, hateful to his enemies, generous to his favorites. They believed also in the existence of an evil God—almost the equal of the other God in strength and a little superior in cunning. Between these two Gods was the soul of man like a mouse between two paws.

Both of these Gods inspired fear. Our fathers did not quite love God, nor quite hate the devil—but they were afraid of both. They really wished to enjoy themselves with God in the next world and the devil in this. They believed that the course of nature was affected by their conduct; that floods and storms, diseases, earthquakes and tempests were sent as punishments, and that all good phenomena were rewards.

Everything was under the control and direction of supernatural powers. The air—the darkness—were filled with angels and devils; witches and wizards planned and plotted against the pious—against the true believers. Eclipses were produced by the sins of the people, and the unusual was regarded as miraculous. In the good old times Christendom was an insane asylum, and insane priests and prelates were the keepers. There was no science. The people did not investigate—did not think. They trembled and believed. Ignorance and superstition ruled the Christian world.

At last a few began to observe, to make records and to think.

It was found that eclipses came at certain intervals, and that their coming could be foretold. This demonstrated that the actions of men had nothing to do with eclipses. A few began to suspect that earthquakes and storms had natural causes and happened without the slightest reference to mankind.

Some began to doubt the existence of evil spirits, or the interference of good ones in the affairs of the world. Finding out something about astronomy, the great number, the certain and continuous motions of the planets, and the fact that many of them were vastly larger than the earth—ascertaining something about the earth—the slow development of forms—the growth and distribution of plants, the formation of islands and continents, the parts played by fire, water and air through countless centuries—the kinship of all life—fixing the earth's place in the con-

stellation of the sun—by experiment and research discovering a few secrets of chemistry—by the invention of printing and the preservation and dissemination of facts, theories and thoughts they were enabled to break a few chains of superstition—to free themselves a little from the dominion of the supernatural and to set their faces toward the light. Slowly the number of investigators and thinkers increased—slowly the real facts were gathered—the sciences began to appear—the old beliefs grew a little absurd—the supernatural retreated and ceased to interfere in the ordinary affairs of men.

Schools were founded, children were taught, books were printed and the thinkers increased. Day by day confidence lessened in the supernatural, and day by day men were more and more impressed with the idea that man must be his own protector, his own providence. From the mists and darkness of savagery and superstition emerged the dawn of the natural. A sense of freedom took possession of the mind and the soul began to dream of its power. On every side were invention and discovery, and bolder thought. The church began to regard the friends of science as its foes. Theologians resorted to chain and fagot—to mutilation and torture.

The thinkers were denounced as heretics and Atheists—as the minions of satan and the defamers of Christ. All the prejudice, ignorance and malice of superstition were aroused and all united for the destruction of investigation and thought. For centuries this conflict was waged. Every outrage was perpetrated, every crime committed by the believers in the supernatural. But in spite of all, the disciples of the natural increased and the power of the church waned. Now, the intelligence of the world is on the side of the natural. Still the conflict goes on—the supernatural constantly losing and the natural constantly gaining. In a few years the victory of science over superstition will be complete and universal.

So, there have been for many centuries two philosophies of life; one in favor of the destruction of the passions—the lessening of wants—and absolute reliance on some higher power; the other, in favor of the reasonable gratification of the passions—the increase of wants, and their supply by industry, ingenuity and invention, and the reliance of man on his own efforts. Diogenes, Epictetus, Socrates, to some extent, Buddha, and Christ all taught the first philosophy. All despised riches and luxury—all were enemies of art and music—the despisers of good clothes and good food and good homes. They were the philosophers of poverty and rags, of huts and hovels—of igno-

rance and faith. They preached the glories of another world and the miseries of this. They derided the prosperous, the industrious, those who enjoyed life, and reserved heaven for beggars.

This philosophy is losing authority and now most people are anxious to be happy here in this life. Most people want food and roof and raiment—books and pictures and luxury and leisure. They believe in developing the brain—in making servants and slaves of the forces of nature.

Now, the intelligent of the world have cast aside the teachings, the philosophy of the ascetics. They no longer believe in the virtue of fasting and self-torture. They believe that happiness is the only good and that the time to be happy is now, here, in this world. They no longer believe in the rewards and punishments of the supernatural. They believe in consequences, and that the consequences of bad actions are evil and the consequences of good actions are good.

They believe that man, by investigation, by reason, should find out the conditions of happiness and then live and act in accordance with such conditions. They do not believe that earthquakes or tempests or volcanoes or eclipses are caused by the conduct of men. They no longer believe in the supernatural. They do not regard themselves as the servants, serfs, slaves or favorites of a celestial king. They feel that many evils can be avoided by intelligence, and for that reason they believe in the development of the brain. The school house is their church and the university their cathedral. The teacher, the interpreter of nature, is their preacher, and all the truths that have been demonstrated constitute their creed.

They believe in the gospel of intelligence and they wish to save the world from ignorance, superstition and misery.

The new religion satisfies the heart and brain.

The old religion is cruel, selfish and absurd. The old religion was in perfect harmony with a flat world, with a little heaven above it and a large hell beneath. The old religion had a powerful savage, an immense barbarian for a God and another savage for a devil. Man at his best was a poor slave whose happiness and misery dwelt in the smiles and frowns of these supernatural monsters.

The new religion has destroyed these phantoms. The universe is no longer governed by a tyrant and man at last is free.

The supernatural has almost gone, but the natural remains—the Gods have faded, but man is here.—[The Truth Seeker Annual.

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Brains of Children.

How much happier the lives of the thousands of children entering school would be if only women—mothers and teachers—better understood the nature and limitations of their brain cells. Such knowledge is to be had, as very important experiments and deductions have been recently made by scientific investigators; but it always takes an unreasonable length of time for such knowledge to become general.

After 25,000 tests by the educators in America, it has been absolutely demonstrated, for instance, that the length of time a child of six years of age can concentrate its mind does not exceed seven minutes; and that all efforts to confine its attention upon one subject beyond this limit are worse than useless. This power of concentration increases slowly; at the age of eight a child's attention may be easily held ten minutes. At the age of twelve his mind should not be riveted upon one subject longer than seventeen minutes. It is, therefore, a great mistake to keep a child of this age—say at the piano more than fifteen minutes; after a change of occupation, another quarter of an hour's practice will be of incalculably more benefit than the attempt to continue work after brain and nerves have become fatigued.

Indeed, most of the inattention and restlessness of children may be explained on the physical basis. A boy's brain, for example, undergoes a certain shrinkage at the age of fourteen or fifteen. It actually weighs less than at the age of twelve and thirteen. This fact explains the carelessness, laziness and general unreasonableness of boys of this age. Statistics show that a large proportion of boys leave school at about this time. It is altogether probable that if parents and teachers realized that the proverbial lawlessness of boys of fourteen merely evidenced a temporary condition of brain cells, more of them would be patiently guided through the period, to take up their studies a year or two later with renewed interest.

The same tests have conclusively proved that the brain of a child is always most active between 8:30 and 10:30 in the morning. All lessons, therefore, requiring the exercise of their reasoning power—such as arithmetic and grammar—should be at this hour. It has been further deduced that the average child, unhampered by grades and systems, may have easily mastered his arithmetic by the time he is twelve years old.

Scientists have also discovered that if the brain centers governing the motor nerves remain undeveloped until the age of sixteen, there is no chance whatever of any later development; which fact is a pow-