



For the Torch of Reason.

## Nature.

BY GRACE E. GRUBER.

WHEN dusky shakes are gathering,  
And the sky is streaked with  
gray,  
Then the pink and purple tinges  
Proclaim the fading day.

Then the winds come slowly whispering  
To a little streamlet near,  
It is then we stop and listen—  
Ah! what is that sound we hear?

It is just a sad, sad moaning  
Of the wind in plaintive sigh;  
For, like life, with day declining,  
It would rather live than die.

Then its moan grew faint and fainter,  
And 'twas then a gentle breeze  
Fondly kissed a tiny ripple—  
Then 'twas calm and seemed at ease.

And thus nature has ordained it,  
Yet the blind can never see  
Nature's sun go brightly dancing  
O'er the ripples of the sea.

Nature binds the birds and flowers  
In companionship, and they  
Know no grief nor care like ours,  
For here nature holds full sway.

Yet we mortals feel distracted,  
And we sometimes close our eyes—  
And not always in the evening,  
But where brighter lights arise.

When the evening shades are falling,  
Nature's hand will here adorn  
Just the same bright, truthful gleaming  
At the coming of the morn.

Ah! 'tis then I love to ponder,  
For in natural laws I see  
Many things could be made clearer  
Which we now call mystery.

## From the Old to the New.

BY B. F. UNDERWOOD.

THE present is remarkable as a period of transition from old to new ideas and methods. In religious thought the change is very marked. During the last twenty years the decay of faith has been the subject of a vast amount of comment and discussion from every point of view. Herculean efforts have been made to turn the tide, but these efforts have apparently served only to strengthen and extend doubt and disbelief.

The rapidity with which doctrines, once firmly fixed in the popular mind, have, during the last two decades especially, lost their hold upon the masses is, on so large a scale, without precedent either in the ancient or modern world. The spread of skepticism in regard to the Pagan faith when Christianity was making its early conquests and preparing to assume imperial control, affords no parallel to the present rapid diffusion of skepticism as to the essential theological dogmas of Christianity.

The facility with which ideas can now be widely and quickly spread, puts into the possession of millions

at once, arguments and utterances which, if published a few years ago, supposing even that they had not been suppressed by the authorities, would have reached but a comparatively few. Now, not simply business and news dispatches, but the opinions of eminent thinkers, sermons by famous preachers, speeches, lectures and essays by men who are attracting attention, chapters from, or the leading thought of, the latest important books are telegraphed from one community, from one country, to another. In proportion to the intelligence of the people or their capacity to understand or assimilate the thought which is "in the air", do they profit by this rapid transmission of ideas and this diffusion of literature throughout the civilized world.

It is only a question of time that the agitation of thought induced by modern agencies and the habit of making facts the data of belief, and proofs the test of their validity, will cause the mass of people to become discriminating, as the few are now, and make reason prevail over authority and science triumph over superstition.

During the transition from the old to the new thought, there is sure to be a great deal that is inconsistent and anomalous. The desire to accept the new and yet retain the old, results in some very grotesque combinations of thought. Human nature does not take on an entirely new mood at once. It does not break with the past suddenly and forever, but gradually. An extensive stroke of mental and moral evolution will have to be undergone even by the most enlightened minds before they can assume the Phrygian cap of perfect moral and intellectual freedom. If this is true of the most advanced class of thinkers, how difficult it must be for the average mind, with its more limited knowledge and with its inherited predispositions, to discard old beliefs and adopt new ones. Reverence for ancestral faith and practices, and attachment to religious associations, old observances, together with the difficulty of finding anything to take the place of the dogmatism of the promises, of the prayers and the hymns which have afforded to millions consolation through life and in the solemn hour of death, blur his perception of the absurdities of theology and make him slow to accept anything thought to be in conflict with long cherished beliefs. He will naturally try to retain as much of the

old faith and to adopt as little of the new truth as the demands of his intellect, influenced by his feeling, will permit; and such inconsistencies and stultifications as are seen, for instance, in the views of those who are trying to satisfy themselves with "progressive orthodoxy", are the result.

The hideousness of the doctrine of eternal torment, with no chance for repentance and reform after death, is seen and a progressive step is taken by admitting first that there may be, and then that there is, according to the scripture, "probation after death". Joseph Cook is not up to this point, but he says the soul remains in the body a short time after breathing has ceased, and between that time and actual death there is a chance for repentance and salvation! So while there is no probation after death, there is probation after breath!

St. George Mivart recently contributed to a leading English magazine an article entitled, "Happiness in Hell," in which he advanced the idea (consistently with his faith as a good Catholic, he believes) that many if not most of the people who go to hell will be in a state of happiness, and that men may be there damned and not know it! The Catholic Review, while not wholly approving Mr. Mivart's views, thinks his article will have a good effect upon those who have been repelled from the church by its alleged teachings in regard to the fate of the majority of mankind.

The absurdity of the doctrine that all who, having heard of Christ, die without belief in his saviorship, will be forever damned, is conceded unwittingly and unwillingly by those who say that the actual condition of salvation is belief in the "essential Christ", the "Christ principles", which need not include belief in the "historic Christ". It was in this way that the Independent, a few years ago, assured the world that Montefiore and Victor Hugo, though unbelievers in Christian dogmas, were among the redeemed. With many the fallibility of the Bible was first conceded by admitting, as Dean Stanley did, that science contradicts Genesis and that the Mosiac cosmogony, so-called, is mere legend and superstition.

In this period of transition there are occupants of Christian pulpits, men educated for the ministry, who have outgrown all the essential theological elements of Christianity,

men who are without belief in "the fall of man," or "salvation through Christ," without faith even in the more general doctrines held as indubitable in Pagan nations, such as the immortality of the soul. On the other hand, among the advocates of Freethought are ex-preachers of orthodox sects, men who have broken loose from the churches, but who in many cases are saturated with bigotry and prejudice, and with whom declamation takes the place of argument, and ignorant assertion the place of proof; who have neither the intellectual freedom and flexibility necessary to enable them to rise above the narrowing influences of their old faith, nor the education and knowledge to comprehend the best modern thought.

The terms Freethought, Liberalism, Materialism, Infidelity, Secularism, etc., are indefinite labels which denote opposition to theological beliefs, together with a mass of indiscriminating or undigested thought on philosophical, social and moral questions. During transitional periods, like the present, there is much incidental to progress which is offensive to the thinker and to the man of practical views; but it is inevitable and will drive no wise reformer from his purpose.

We should never lose sight of the fact that in the old systems of philosophy and faith there are important truths. He who while rejecting the errors of these systems, can hold fast the truths they teach and add to them the best thought of the day, is the man who will find the least difficulty in adjusting himself to the changes of this transitional period.

The belief in a demonic world is inculcated throughout the Gospels and the rest of the books of the New Testament; it pervades the whole patristic literature; it colors the theory and the practice of every Christian church down to modern times.

More especially is this conception fundamental for the authors of the Gospels. Without the belief that the present world, and particularly that part of it which is constituted by human society, has been given over, since the Fall, to the influence of wicked and malignant spiritual beings, governed and directed by a supreme devil—the moral antithesis and enemy of the supreme god—their theory of salvation by the Messiah falls to pieces. —[T. H. Huxley.