

The Progress of Science.

The science of geology, at first sneered at and ridiculed by those who saw that its teachings were unmistakably opposed to the faiths that had been so long cherished as bound up with what was held to be infallible truth, and then opposed by all the violence that the most intolerant bigotry could display, soon came to be recognized as being based upon well-established facts, which no opposition could gainsay and no sophistry overturn. In consequence of this, old opinions had to be cast to the winds, and the theories which had done duty so well in earlier and darker ages have been banished to the oblivion where lie buried so many errors of the past. Men who had a few years before contended, with a degree of dogmatism as positive and vehement as any to which the history of the most benighted ages had borne witness, that the earth could not be more than six or seven thousand years old, now came to recognize the fact that millions of ages ago it had been running its course as now. They also maintained that they had known this all along, and that there was nothing in it contrary to the early views on these matters. So strange a being is man that no inconsistency was seen in this sudden change of front, and this complete desertion of their own camp for that of the enemy. Of course we make no complaint of this fact; we only chronicle it as a mark of progress—an indication of the signs of the times. The antiquity of man and many other kindred subjects have had the same fate as geology, and now evolution itself is seen to be quite in harmony with the teachings of records which had declared in unmistakable language—if language has any meaning—that all organic beings were the result of a special or supernatural creator.

All this proves that science is the king of thought, the moulder of opinion, and the guide of mankind. It does its work modestly, but very effectually. It moves without the sound of trumpets or the clamor of noisy controversy; but it moves all the same, and conquers every opponent. Denunciation is a weapon which it disowns; persecution it leaves to its antagonists, and bigotry it countenances not. Its history is not written in blood, and no tears of widows and orphans follow in its train. It has proved itself to be the benefactor of man, the consoler of those who suffer, the alleviator of pain, the promoter of peace, and it will, if wisely used, do more than all else toward bringing about the brotherhood of man.

The progress that has been made

in recent times has resulted, not only in the remodelling of opinion on the subjects that fall immediately within the province of the researches pursued in external nature, but it has completely revolutionized thought upon numerous subjects lying to some extent quite outside the pale of physical experiment and investigation. Newer and more correct views of the physiology of the brain have led to great and important changes in psychology. The motives from which actions spring, the nature of the human will, the mystery of mentality, the laws of thought, the phenomena of cognition, and, what is of greater importance, the scientific rule of right morals, have all had a flood of light thrown upon them by evolution. Indeed, as Mr. Herbert Spencer has shown, this principle operates everywhere, and covers the entire range of human knowledge. Then, too, the discovery of the doctrine of the conservation of energy and the bringing to light the fact that law operates everywhere, have changed men's views regarding the miraculous, the display of alleged supernatural power, and even the conception of God. Theology is no longer defended on the old lines; and professed Christians themselves have felt compelled to relinquish all their old positions and to sweep away the ancient landmarks of their faith, which was once deemed as stable and fixed as the granite peaks of the Andes.

Philosophy and science, if not one, are twin brothers, and to properly understand the one it is necessary to become a diligent student of the other. Just as the old forms of theology have been exploded, so have the musty systems of metaphysics, on which the ancients so prided themselves, been, we hope, forever dissipated. For this progress we are indebted to science. Therefore, in the words of the poet, we say:

Blessing on science. When the earth grew old,
When faith grew dotting, and the reason cold,
'Twas she discovered that the world was young,
And taught a language to its lisping tongue;
'Twas she disclosed the future to our view,
And made old knowledge pale before the new.
—[Charles Watts, in Freethinker.

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