

For the Torch of Reason.

Matter or Spook?

BY OTTO WETTSTEIN.

Is there one supreme power, or are the many powers co-equal? Matter acts on matter, but what is the cause? "A god," thinks the heathen; "Matter," thinks our friend (Charles K. Tenney); but we know that we do not know.—[Torch of Reason.

But we do know that "matter acting on matter" is absolutely the sole cause of all the innumerable natural phenomena of nature, and nothing else. We know this simply because we know nothing to the contrary. Our knowledge stops after we have discovered "matter acting on matter"—all else is vague assumption, idle conjecture—superstition.

Don't you see, dear Torch, that conceding that something, not matter, may act upon matter, you put yourself squarely in the category of theists or other spookists, who pretend to solve the problem of existence by positing an unknown agent or unknown agencies as the cause or causes of nature and its infinitely varied phenomena? You repudiate a personal god as you do a "Mother Goose" story, but still insist that an "unknowable supreme cause"—not matter—"may exist or may not exist", you "don't know!"

Kindly permit me to show you the weakness of your position, of Agnosticism, as a stopping-place between Romanism, Calvinism, Talmadgeism and radical, rational, scientific Materialism and, incidentally, of Atheism. There is none. Follow tradition, hereditary tendencies, teachings of your ancestors, "the lessons mother taught", the faith you once held sacred, etc., and to be consistent you should join the first church, cease to reason, resign your work on the Torch, believe in childish simplicity all Talmadgean harangue, put \$1.00 in the contribution box every time you go to meeting, and above all, do not attempt to argue with a philosopher of the stripe of brother Tenney.

Let us see, if such supra-material cause exists, such cause of course must be something—an entity—or it is self-evident it would not exist. But if an entity, what is it if not material? If real it is composed of matter, if not matter, it does not exist.

Brother Tenney's affirmation then that "all phenomena is the product of matter acting upon matter" is strictly correct, because if upon final analysis we discover and demonstrate the existence of the alleged Supreme Power, this power or force in turn must also be classified as one of the material potentialities of nature and then, don't you see, would be nothing more than "matter acting upon matter" after all.

You are still in the evolutionary

period of your intellectual development. You have not quite reached the goal of scientific and rational Materialism beyond which the highest intellect cannot go—because beyond this is intellectual confusion, phantasmagoria, nothing. You have not quite outgrown inherited tendencies and methods which prompt you to concede your ignorance concerning final causes, and that "there may be" unknown powers or agencies behind (never before) the sun, behind Sirius, Arcturus or some other cosmic body more powerful and cogent than all the potencies of matter combined, and which are the primary causes of matter acting upon matter. And these causes you imagine to be out of sight and beyond the reach of science and are such supreme causes by virtue of being out of sight and beyond our knowledge, because if in sight and knowable you could instantly classify them with all other material causes and discover them to be "matter acting upon matter" after all.

You ask: "But what is the cause" of matter acting upon matter? Matter is the cause—it is itself the sole cause of all cosmic phenomena and organic life. It is a fundamental characteristic and attribute of all matter to be active, forever acting upon matter. That matter is dead and needs outside agencies to aid, assist and manipulate it to assume its innumerable aspects, is one of the three giant delusions of the world—the others are the belief in a "supreme being" and in personal immortality.

Tyndall says: "Matter is not that empty capacity which philosophers and theologians have pictured it, but the universal mother who brings forth all things as the fruit of her own womb. Nature is seen to do all things spontaneously without the meddling of the gods." And, he might have added, without the aid of any extraneous power or agency of whatsoever kind.

Matter is force, power, potency, and in the absence of the former the latter do not exist. The German scientist Lange defines the universe to consist of atoms and empty space, and in its last analysis we find this strictly correct. And this, together with Tyndall's matured convictions, explains existence, both organic and inorganic, more rationally than any other theory, because it posits the causes of all phenomena to be concomitant with and in the constituents of all phenomena—ever present, never absent. Matter, of necessity, being eternal—the contrary proposition being an absurdity—proves that phenomena similar to that which surrounds us is an eternal series, and, consequently was never "first caused" to assume cosmic harmony, order and organic life, but has done so forever in the past and will do

so forever in the future. And matter, strictly without the aid of extraneous agencies, causing all phenomena falling directly under our observation here, proves beyond cavil that matter, solitary and alone, is the cause producing similar phenomena everywhere throughout the boundless realms of space.

If gods, supreme agencies, etc., or Spencer's "unknowable", were needed way off behind Sirius or the farthest stars, and existed there of necessity to produce phenomena, such factors would be needed and exist here to produce phenomena known to us. But we know that such agencies positively do not exist here. All known phenomena is known to be caused by "matter acting upon matter", and beyond this our knowledge ends. And by parity of reasoning we also know that because such agencies do not exist here, they are not needed and do not exist anywhere.

These agencies were conjectured in the dark ages of ignorance because they were supposed to be a logical necessity and a need to explain existence and life; but now, when science explains nearly all upon a purely physical basis, the need of such agencies vanishes, and, as Bro. Pentecost once said, "a useless god is no god at all". The need of such agencies now not being apparent, consigns them all to oblivion.

To insist, then, dear Torch, that we "don't know" is irrational and debasing—"a concession to orthodox prejudice", as editor Armstrong says, because it tacitly admits that theism and all other mysticisms which add extraneous causes to the material forces of nature, are as rational as the solid ground and self-evident facts of the grand and invulnerable science of Materialism.

An assertion irrational and not proven falls to the ground for want of proof. Of course we do not absolutely know that a devil does not exist behind the moon or in the molten caverns of the earth. Yet because the idea is ridiculous and not supported by evidence we freely insist that we know that a devil does not exist. If then after due investigation we find the god idea equally absurd, and not sustained by reason and facts, why not admit frankly that we know such a being does not exist. The world now is ready for the whole truth, let us be fearless men and women and express our honest thought.

If you want to know the causes "why matter acts on matter", study physics, chemistry, read Haeckel, Humbolt, D'Holbach, Buchner, Tyndall and Huxley and you will learn that matter purely by virtue of its own potentialities causes and evolves the crudest forms of life to the proudest man and most beautiful woman, as well as the infinite

aggregation of worlds, suns and systems constituting the universe.

All suggestions in the line of "supreme causes", "supreme beings", gods, etc., are lamentably inadequate to explain the innumerable and diversified phenomena of nature, because a solitary cause or mind could not possibly explain or account for infinite phenomena; but infinite causes which co-exist in and with infinite phenomena, in the constituents of the matter constituting all phenomena, this alone is a rational explanation of all prevailing cosmic phenomena and life.

And so the finite segregate matter is the cause of all minor phenomena, while the vast infinite aggregate may be properly called the "supreme power", though the sum total of all existence is and must forever remain simply matter.

The absurdity of the theistic hypothesis or of any other notion suggesting "supreme power", "infinite personal potency", "almighty energy", etc., etc., will be apparent when we subject these several concepts to but a casual examination. Not one of these god-creators can point to a solitary fact in nature which in the least corresponds to these infantile concepts. The god in trousers-and-mantle fable has long since been repudiated by all thoughtful minds, but these impersonal deities of all spooks are the most absurd.

Where for instance in nature do we find personal attributes and functions in the absence of personal or animal structure? The two are cause and effect, organism and attribute, machine and function—one dependent upon the other. In the absence then of animal structure, what remains to make a god out of—air, ether, electricity, gravity, magnetism, space, or what? Believers in these grotesque phantoms or impersonal gods cannot answer, and any definition is and must be a burlesque on common sense.

You say "matter acts on matter but what is the cause?" Let me repeat the plain and only answer: MATTER! matter is the sole cause the all-sufficient, the sole omnipresent cause—the eternal and infinite cause. Nothing else could possibly act upon it simply because nothing else exists. Matter is the great all in all—whatever is not matter—solid, fluid, airiform or whatsoever kind is nothing. This we know. This is all we know. Therefore when any man, school or church affirms that something else acts upon matter, but does not produce the evidence when called upon, it is every rationalist's duty to deny the affirmation on the ground that a bald assertion without evidence falls to the ground when contradicted by the self-evident facts we do know.