

Underwood's Belief.

The following is from a lecture by B. F. Underwood, one of a course given under the auspices of the Montreal Liberal Club:

The reverend gentleman in criticising my lectures in this city, says: "Agnosticism declares that we do not know and cannot know. Agnostics who doubt everything can have no creed, no convictions. Why does Mr. Underwood assume to teach when he admits that he does not know anything; when he has no belief, but only doubts and tells what he does not believe."

In reply to this criticism I have to say that an Agnostic is one who does not profess to know what is the ultimate nature of being. We can study phenomena, physical and mental, for they belong to the calculable order; what may lie beyond or under phenomena as the ultimate basis of all activity, we do not know.

One may call the ultimate "matter," another may call it "mind." But these words are only symbols—one representing the external order as revealed in consciousness, the other representing the subjective order as experienced in feeling and thought.

These two classes of phenomena may have a common unitary basis, indeed I believe they have; but what this ultimate of being is the Agnostic does not profess to know. This position he holds in common with the world's greatest thinkers of past and of modern times.

It does not follow that because one is unwilling to profess knowledge in regard to that which is inaccessible, in regard to what nobody knows anything about, that one is without knowledge in regard to what is accessible, or is without beliefs respecting the unknown but ascertainable, or even in regard to what is not ascertainable or verifiable, but is conceivable, and may or may not be true.

Knowledge means certitude; beliefs differ in the degrees of probability which they carry with them from great uncertainty to a point next to demonstration.

One may know but little and believe a great deal. This is true of many of the majority of preachers, whose ignorance of this world I have generally found about in proportion to their assumption of knowledge respecting God and another world.

Agnostics may, and do know as much as those who profess knowledge which they do not profess.

For the benefit of my theological critic, and those whose mental and religious condition he represents, I will state in part my belief, not dogmatically, but as conclusions to which I have been led by years of observation and reflection:

I believe the enlightened human reason, and not any one book, is

man's highest standard and best guide.

I believe that the well-being of man, and not the glory of God, should be the object of our efforts.

I believe that intellectual, moral and physical culture, not piety, is the prime condition of man's well-being.

I believe that the means of this condition consists in observation, experience and reflection, and not in a pretended book revelation or in special inspiration.

I believe that the untrammelled exercise of human reason is not only an inalienable right, but a duty.

I hold that beliefs are neither moral nor immoral in themselves, but that right beliefs in time show their good influence on character and conduct, and wrong beliefs result injuriously; that, therefore, we have every influence to seek truth and avoid error without condemning those who have not the truth.

I believe doubt is the beginning of wisdom; that without doubt a man never investigates; without investigation he never learns anything, and will live and die in ignorance; that doubt leads to inquiry, inquiry to knowledge, wisdom, confidence, and happiness.

I believe that we have a right to expect unity in things only that can be demonstrated; that in things admitting of doubt there should be free diversity, and in all things charity.

I believe in that faith which is conviction based upon evidence.

I believe that morality is the science of human relations.

I believe that the principle of self-sacrifice admired in Jesus should be glorified in humanity, wherever men have died for country or race, or made sacrifices for the good of others.

I believe that the world is worthy our best effort; that "one world at a time" is all we can attend to; that, if there be a continuance of life beyond the grave, the best way to fit ourselves for such a life is to attend to the interests of this life.

I believe that the performance of the duties of life is better than any theological preparation for death.

I believe that reliance on ourselves and the inviolableness of law is better than reliance on prayer.

I believe that evil is non-adjustment, and can be continually lessened.

I believe that at birth none are sinners, but that effects of experiences of ancestors are inherited by all, and exist at birth in the form of constitutional tendencies or aptitudes.

I believe that the good tendencies can be strengthened and augmented, and the bad ones diminished by education.

I believe that the moral sense called conscience has been acquired by the race, and that its decisions

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