

Dr. Abbot's Definition of Religion.

BY B. F. UNDERWOOD.

The editor of the Free Church Record sends me a copy of Dr. Abbot's essay on "Sectarianism," or Inclusiveness and Exclusiveness in Religion," with a request that I review the work.

I recognize the earnest spirit, the ability and lofty thought of the essay, and concur in its practical conclusions and main purpose, but I am not prepared to accept unqualifiedly the author's definition of religion or all his theoretical conceptions based thereon.

Instead of saying that religion, as it is known historically and scientifically, is "actually living upward" or is "man's effort to perfect himself," I am disposed to regard religion as an expression of man's relation to the Cosmos, or to the Cause or Basis of all phenomena.

Religion begins with man's feeling of dependence upon the power which causes and sustains human life. Feeling precedes thought, and it is primary in religion. It is merely animal. Later come emotions which result from reflection, from recognition of the unseen cause or causes of phenomena, with the corresponding impressions. As seen today, religion is fundamentally a predisposition to worship, to reverence the unseen cause of phenomena; and secondarily, a body or system of doctrine in regard to the unseen and unknown. According to the doctrine of evolution, religion, both as a predisposition and as a belief, is experiential—is a product of observation and reflection, and also of heredity. If man was evolved from the animal, there was a time when man was without religion, or when his religion was indistinguishable from the feelings and thoughts of the ape-like creature from which he ascended.

Whether religion is universal among men today depends, as Lubbock observes, upon the definition given to religion.

Fear and desire to escape the pains and perils of life were most prominent in the early religious life of man. Later the moral nature and with it the social ideals and the higher moral and spiritual aspiration appeared. These were merely "potential" in primitive man. When religion is defined by Matthew Arnold as "morality touched by emotion," or by Martineau as the "culminating meridian of morals," or by Abbot as the "effort of man to perfect himself," the higher aspects of religion only are considered. Neither in thought nor in conduct are religion and morality necessarily connected. In ancient Rome the thief prayed for success in his contemplated crime and the adulteress implored Venus

for the favour of her paramour. Says Mommsen, "a wager might be made that the more lax a woman was, the more piously she worshipped Isis." A Roman youth entreated Hercules to hasten the death of a rich uncle that he might inherit his fortune. Today multitudes continue in wrongdoing, believing that by the Christian atonement, by the death of Christ, they will escape the natural consequences of their crimes and vices. A bankrupt salvation scheme is the very essence of the Christian theology. Says Dr. Schaff (in the Princeton Review of September, 1879), "The negroes are very religious by nature, and infidelity is scarcely known among them, but their moral sense of honesty and chastity is weak." Dr. Willis, Spinoza's biographer, referring to the association of religion with crime and immorality (as well as the highest moral excellences), says: "The piety—the religion—displayed is a perfectly truthful manifestation of the emotional element in the nature of man, which seeks and finds satisfaction in acts implying intercourse with Deity, but neither seeks nor finds satisfaction in acts of honesty and virtuous life in the world. We have here an explanation of how it happens that our penitentiaries are filled with the worst sort of criminals, whose lives, prior to the detection of their crimes, were characterized by eminent piety and a strict regard for religious observance."

Often religious belief is strong, and religious feeling, the devotional disposition, is dominant in persons whose moral nature is but little developed or perverted.

Says Lange: "Unusual piety is in the popular eyes either genuine saintship or a wicked cloak for all that is vile. For the psychological subtlety of the mixture of genuine religious emotion with coarse selfishness and vicious habits, the ordinary mind has no appreciation." That which is universal in religion is not, it seems to me, thinking, feeling and living upward, so much as the recognition of power above man and beyond his control, to which he sustains a relation of dependence. Religion is but one of the many elements which unite to complete the complex nature of man; and the extent to which it infuses or is intimately associated with moral thought, feeling and conduct, is determined by the moral development and education of individuals and nations. If man is an evolved product of the modifications of lower forms of life, both morality and religion have existed in every stage of progress; and both must have been developed from conditions which are regarded as unmoral and unreligious.

A feeling of weakness, of dependence upon the power manifested in the world, and later the emotions

produced by thoughts, though dim and confused, of this power with its creative and sustaining and its destructive forces, seem to me as fundamental and as universal as anything we can discover in the religions of the world. Dr. Abbot says: "In precise phrase Universal Spiritual Religion is the genus of which Special Historical Religions are simply the various 'species'." This being so we can hardly more expect these different religious species to come together in common work or for a common purpose than we can hope, that the different species of the zoological world will ever co-operate in a common moral aim. Yet we may indulge the hope that in the remote future the more advanced systems and the more enlightened sects of the religious world—and this is probably what Dr. Abbot means—will unite in an effort to combine the highest morality with the most rational interpretation of natural phenomena, including the life and thought of man, though the patience of [a] god is needed to base practical effort on the expectation of such a realization. Meanwhile, the Free Church of Tacoma, and all other free religious societies, have sufficient reason for their existence and for the "strenuous effort" to support their work; in the urgent need of educative and directive influence during the present transition from the theological to the scientific, ethical and rational stage of thought.—[Free Church Record.]

For the Torch of Reason.

Church Unity.

BY F. S. MATTESON.

The Legal Adviser of May, 1900, printed in Chicago, Ill., contains an article on "Lines of Church Unity," which appears to me to be a good subject to quote and comment on.

"The Rev. Algernon Crapsey, rector of St. Andrew's (Prot. Epis.) church, Rochester, N. Y., is the author of a pamphlet on church unity, in an appendix to which he formulates the lines along which he believes such union might, and should, proceed. These lines are quoted, with approbation, in the 'Ascension Record,' the editor of which is the Rev. Percy Grant, secretary and companion of Bishop Potter in a recent oriental tour. They are as follows:

"First. Subordination of the official organization of the church, from the highest to the lowest of its members, to the church itself, as practiced in the primitive church, as decreed by the Western Church in the Council of Constance, and as affirmed by the principles of the Protestant Reformation."

Here is direct legislation: Church government by and of the people. The priestly, autocratic regime of

modern Christianity appears to be wearing out and to need mending, and the second proposition points to the patch to put on.

"Second. The pastoral, rather than the priestly, conception of the ministry."

That is, more of a feeding caretaker and less of a shearing "boss." It would appear that the "sheep" are beginning to think. And then the Rev. Algernon Crapsey, rector, etc., gets off this surprising proposition as his "thirdly."

"Third. The statement of Christian doctrine so that it will be in accord with the facts of the visible universe, as these are discovered and formulated by the process of inductive thought."

Here is an admission that Christian doctrine does not accord with the facts of the visible universe. Consequently, either their Bible is not "inspired," or else they, or their God, has made a blunder which it has become necessary to rectify. But if Christians accept the views of Freethinkers, the latter will not object. But the "fourthly" of the Rev. Algernon Crapsey is a stunner.

"Fourth. The statement of Christian doctrine so that it will not conflict with the great primal instincts of the human heart, the instincts for justice, mercy and truth. No man will be compelled to believe such a doctrine as that of everlasting punishment as taught by St. Augustine, or the doctrine of predestination as taught by John Calvin."

This is Secularism, pure and simple, as far as it goes. But please note the admission that "Christian doctrine" does "conflict with the great primal instincts of the human heart (mind), the instinct for justice, mercy and truth." And the "doctrine" of the "fall of man" is a fraud. The "doctrine" of "total depravity" is a deception and a snare; and all this "redemption" preachee-preachee is only a "damned barren ideality." Surely these preachers should be "a class of men widely renowned for breadth of cheek and strength of gall. Truly, the natural "great primal instincts of the human heart (mind) are for justice, mercy and truth, and always were and are so wherever the pernicious and demoralizing "Christian doctrine" has not perverted them. Christianity has much to answer for. But the Rev. Algernon Crapsey's "fifthly" is a paralyzer.

"Fifth. Absolute intellectual freedom within the church (wait a moment, please, till I catch my breath), so that every opinion shall have a hearing (rest) and be taken for what it is worth; (hear, hear!) to have the force of its author's personal character, learning and wisdom; (bravo, bravo!) and to establish itself by its own truthfulness or not at all." (Great applause.)