

Are We To Be Word-tripped? Always?

BY T. B. WAKEMAN.

We can do nothing without tools. Man is best defined as the "tool-using animal." Because tools are indispensable we become their dependents, and they our informers, teachers, ministers, masters and gods. Words are our inevitable mind-tools and organs. By and in them mind travels as does our body by and on its limbs. Turn, wrestle, twist, strive, agonize as best we can, we are the victims of our words. We can never think or be without or beyond them. Are we then eternally doomed to be lingual slaves? Can we never really know or do anything? When we think we have some bottom of Fact or Truth to build on—it is only a word. In the beginning was "The word, and the word was God," and so is it now, and ever so will it be? Where is the Iconoclasm, the Atheism that can deny, kill, crush and obliterate the God-word? Let us pray to our own souls for that! So we mused as we laid down our old, good, faithful Boston Investigator (long may it wave!) of June 23, E. M. 300 (A. D. 1900), after reading the admirable chapter therein of the serial, "The Gospel of Evolution," by Rev. J. P. Bland, B. D. Reader, by all means read that chapter, if you never read anything else (except the Investigator and Torch). For it contains the Scientific basis, the foundation (with references to the authorities, too), of the instruction given on that subject in our L. U. O., and upon which the splendid and glorious satisfaction of the altruistic immortality in the EARTHLY PARADISE is taught in place of the exploded old Egotistic Immortality of the Celestial Mirage, or "Summer Land." But then, if this reverend gentleman has done his Scientific-construction work so well—why not enjoy it in silence, or make the world echo with its applause? The latter we wish to do—but with a word of reserve and caution. Does the Learned Author in the end mean to bring down upon us again that old army of spooks, dressed in new uniforms, but gibbering their old nonsense in new and half mysterious words, which paralyze because we can't clearly make out what they may mean?

This is the old trick of Obscuratism. There was Sir William Hamilton. How splendidly his "Philosophy of the Unconditioned" gives us the mental sunlight in which to work and build on Earth. But how soon was it all beclouded by that "legitimate belief" which gave Theology the stronger sway of unlimited, because unconditioned, authority of "Revelation." "Belief," was his killing word.

Then Dean Mansel told us "that

to believe God to be as we could think him to be, was the highest blasphemy." Which meant: Be a child in the hands of Church and Priests, or as Newman interpreted it: Get into the Romish Church, which takes the same ground—you must believe "because it is impossible," or be damned. A religion resting on mystery is as impregnable as the mystery. Then, there was our own John Fiske, who lauded and lost his splendid "Cosmic Philosophy" in the "Idea of God" and the "Unseen World." Thus he nullified Herbert Spencer, until Spencer finally spoke out clear, as is shown by his reply to Balfour. See Judge Waite's "Spencer and His Critics," (pp. 55-57), and the quotations in this serial of Mr. Bland. Many more reactionists could be named—the query is will our reverend author be one of them? If a thinker leaves even the slightest crack or loop-hole in his wall, it is wonderful to see how quickly some spooky lichen or weed will find a lodging for its rootlets of Egoistic hedonism, and finally bring down the whole structure.

This query rises because he well shows that modern Science, that is, THE FACTS proved that "the soul is but the consciousness produced within us by the action of our nervous tissues; consciousness thus being simply a function of organized matter [protoplasm] and psychosis, but a product of neurosis." One might, could or would suppose that this PROVED FACT would end the question whether "this consciousness can still continue to exist after the death (and destruction) of the organism whose vital activities produced it," and of which it is shown to be the concomitant and resultant?

But no! All of this scientific certainty is merely so much fat which he throws into the fire of doubt. For, our reverend friend goes right on to say: "To that question the scientifically intelligent can no longer give an affirmative answer, and that neither can they give an absolutely and conclusively negative one; this absolute negative being excluded—if, for no other reason, by the possibility that there may, for aught we know, be infinitely

"... More things in heaven and earth Than are dreamed of in our philosophy." Consequently, such rays and gleams of immortality's hope as men may still be able to rationally cherish, Science and sound philosophy neither frown on nor discourage; but the probabilities of man's consciously surviving his body's death are seemingly very slight." He is not certain that the life ceases when the body is gone which produced the life—whose activity it was!

Then the article closes by defining the Universe "as the natural product of the orderly workings of Nature's immanent creative Force

... from the Nebula to the

now. Or, theologically phrased, Evolution is that system of thought which regards all things as proceeding from an immanent and omnipresent Deity, who eternally creates and de-creates by the ceaseless and orderly movings of his indwelling presence." So say the priests.

Our author very considerably adds: "But, my dear sir, this must be rather tiring to you;" and so the chapter fitly ends with a refreshing lunch to his hearer. Yes, this conclusion was "tiring," and as we can't share the lunch, we pray for information. Is not this phrase, "an absolutely and conclusively negative answer," a mere word-trip, having no meaning whatever as applied to a fact or law actually found to exist in the objective world? Is it possible, for instance, for both the old and the new Astronomy to be true? When we find that the earth goes around the sun annually, can we not say "absolutely and conclusively" that the sun does not at the same time go around the earth? When we find that twice two are four, must we "sleep on the doubt" before the Savage who thinks it may be three or five? When we find that the bottom law of Science is "that equivalence and correlation of the changes in the world are qualitative and quantitative," shall we not say "absolutely and conclusively" to the Spookist, your soul, and all souls, are "but a process of neurosis"—a result of change in protoplasm, and not an entity, or spook, or spirit of any kind whatsoever? Must we hesitate in saying that a thing may be a thing, and yet no-thing at the same time?

Then about the "workings of Nature's immanent and creative Force." Is not our author here word-tripped out of Science into Mythology? Nature (capital N) is simply the begetting or passing of one correlate into another in the process of world changes. It is a fact—a link in the infinite process of correlation—or a Goddess or a SHE working like Venus or Diana?

Then, too, is not "Creative Force" a word-trip? How can Nature have any entity Force, creative or other? One change is found, as the fundamental law of all Science, to be the equivalent and correlative of a preceding and a subsequent one. Must we not say "absolutely and conclusively" that no other Creative Force is possible? Is not the scientific meaning of Force simply a name for the changes of the modes of motion in the world?

Then, is not "an immanent and omnipresent Deity" another word-trip into mythology? Is not a Deity as "absolutely and conclusively" impossible as that "conscious immortality" after death? If the world is found to be a limitless process of equivalent correlation of changes, what room is there for a

Deity in, or beyond, or after it? And if he can have no room for existence in the infinite correlation of the world, how can he "create or de-create" it? When Hydrogen and Oxygen combine and form water, does the water proceed from the "indwelling presence" of "an immanent and Omnipresent Deity," or from the Hydrogen and Oxygen gases which actually go to make the water, and which may be exactly reproduced again from it? May we not say "absolutely and conclusively" that the gases make the water, and that no Deity creates it? And so of every other fact or process in the limitless universe. Do not the simple facts of change take the place of Deity, Nature, Force and of all the Entities and Spooks?

Can a person be "Scientifically intelligent" who persists in talking or writing, for unscientific people, as though Science had not thoroughly explained the childish ignorance and consequent innocence out of which these illusions of a "Creative Deity" and of a "Conscious Immortality" arose? and leaving a doubt that Science has not "absolutely and conclusively negated" the possibility of their existence?

Then again, is not our author certain where he should be hypothetical—about "the transmission from the Nebula to the now?" Was not Herbert Spencer too sudden about that Nebular Hypothesis in treating it as a fact? May not Lockyer, Proctor, Ball and other astronomers be nearer right with their Meteoric, Aggregative, Collective, or other Hypothesis? After a few thousands or millions of years, may not our successors in the "Earthly Paradise" find that our Solar System is still young and vigorous, still picking up comets, etc., as it goes along, and that the horrid stories of its burning or freezing out were childish dreams of the Theology which gave us the creative God, and the post mortem personality and conscious immortality?

Do you say we inquire "too curiously" to inquire so? No! We of the Liberal University are under the highest and strongest obligations to teach "the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth." We must do all we can to keep from being humbugged, bamboozled or word-tripped, or from allowing others to become so. This exposition of Mr. Bland is extraordinarily good and useful. Let it be read by every one; then answer the queries above suggested, as the Scientific method logically and truthfully requires, and you may add still more to its usefulness.

To know when to speak and when to remain silent is a fine knowledge. Words have led to murders, but silence has prevented them. In a quarrel, the silent tongue is the wise man's possession.