

TORCH OF REASON.

"TRUTH BEARS THE TORCH IN THE SEARCH FOR TRUTH."—*Lucretius*.

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Superstitious Man,

TO ALL earth's blessings deaf and blind,
Lost to himself and to his kind,
With mad presumption, lo! man tries
To pierce the ether of the skies.

His fancy winged to worlds unknown,
He scorns the treasures of his own;
By fears of hell and hopes of heaven,
His noble mind to madness driven.

Oh, first of all the tribes of earth,
Wake to the knowledge of thy worth;
Then mark the ills of human life,
And heal its woes, and quench its strife.

Victim and tyrant thou, O man;
Thy world, thyself, thy fellows scan,
Nor forward cast an anxious eye,
Who knows to live, shall know to die.
—*Liberal Hymns.*

The Impartial World Our Base of Life and Hope.

BY PROFESSOR LESTER F. WARD.

HAVING tried to paint the world-picture true to life (in our last issue,) let us next inquire what the lesson is that we should learn from its careful study. The first and most elementary principle of that lesson is that the very FORTUITY from which this entire state of things results is laden with the highest hopes for mankind; that no other condition could furnish any such ground for hope: that the opposite or optimistic view, were it the true one, would really lead to despair. The optimist may be compared to a young man without employment or means of subsistence who lives in the perpetual and illusive hope that some rich relative or acquaintance may bequeath him a fortune. Contrasted with this, the meliorist may be likened to a young man who, recognizing the truth that unearned fortunes are not given to idle adventurers, goes resolutely to work and strives by honest industry to build up a fortune for himself. And this is the true lesson for human society. There is no room for social Micawbers. Whatever "turns up" must be turned up. The passive attitude is suicidal. This folding of the arms and resignation to fate is certain to meet its fate. The cosmic Juggernaut will roll over and crush those who throw themselves before it. The logic of Science is action, and only by busy brains and busy hands can the recognized evils of the world be lessened or removed.

The second principle in this great lesson is that it is only because all nature is a domain of rigid law, of absolute impartiality, and devoid of all moral quality and all intelligence, that man can hope to carve out of it his fortune or

shape his destiny. If it had sympathies and preferences and prejudices; if it had intelligence and will, it would be utterly unmanageable and would ever remain the master and despot of man, as it practically has been during most of his early history, and it could never become his servant and all-powerful aid and ally as it is fast getting to be and is certain ere long fully to become. Thus the hardest facts of existence are seen to embody the germs of the brightest hopes. Those dark realities which have been taken as arguments for pessimism are themselves, when correctly understood, the foundations of the only sound philosophy of social progress.

The only proper attitude on all these questions is to view the universe objectively. Dismissing forever all idea of what it ought to be, we must simply seek to determine what it is. We must also divest ourselves wholly of the notion that we can determine this by pure reflection. There is no fixed way in which things must be which enables us to reason out the way they are. While, of course, the way they are is really the only way they could have been, still the antecedent causes which have brought them into existence, besides being unknown to man, are so infinitely complex that they are for the most part wholly beyond his grasp. For example, any one can conceive of a solar system in which no single relation is the same as exists in ours. Any one can conceive of beings inhabiting a planet all of which shall be entirely different from any of those that inhabit this earth. The plan of structure of organic forms depends entirely upon the initiative which first launched each type upon its career. This initiative is wholly fortuitous. The vertebrate type of animals, for example, must be looked upon as due to some primordial accident, as it were, i. e., some coincidence of causes, external and internal, at the appropriate time and place, that happened to determine that type of structure which proved better adapted to sustain the highest organization thus far attained in the animal kingdom. If this particular type had not chanced to be tried, some other would have stood highest, but it is as likely to have been a still better one as to have been a poorer one for the purpose. If the planet Mars is really the home of living beings, the chances of the vertebrate type of structure occurring there are only as one to

infinity. Yet some superior type may be developed there. And if there be on that planet or anywhere else in the solar system or in the universe a master being related to other beings in any such way as man is related to the other living creatures on this earth, the chances are again infinity to one against his possessing the form or any of the leading physical attributes of human beings.

All this may at first sight look like wild utopian speculation. But its utility does not lie in any knowledge it yields as to the inhabitants of other planets. It lies in teaching the great lesson that no knowledge of anything can be gained by speculation, and that our only knowledge consists in the actual investigation of facts that lie within our reach. We must study the tangible, visible, demonstrable world and find out what it contains. There is no telling what we shall find. No preconceived notions of what we ought to find, much less of what we ought not to find, must influence the quest for truth. This is not, however, to discourage the use of hypotheses. They are the searchlights of science. But their use requires due caution, and a hypothesis must not be confounded with a thesis.

Now, while it is true that all those aggregations of cosmic elements that give multiplicity and variety to the content of the universe are in the sense explained wholly fortuitous and might as well have all been different from what they are, it is a legitimate question to inquire whether there remains anything which is not thus fortuitous, and which must in the nature of things be what it is. And we find that there are such things. There are essentials as well as accidents, but they belong to a different category. If we examine the matter closely, we will see that all the cases considered come under the head of form—worlds, plants, animals, men. But there is another great class of cases which fall under the head of forces or principles, and these when carefully examined are found not to be variables but constants—the constants of nature. By this I do not mean that they always exist at all times and places, although this is probably true of the universal gravitant and radiant forces, of which, indeed, all the other forms of energy are doubtless special conditions. I refer in general to what is known as the principle or law of evolution, and in particular to the three

latest phases of that law which are called respectively, Life, Feeling and Thought. For while the forms through which these modes of energy are manifested may vary to any required extent, I cannot conceive that the attributes themselves could, under any circumstances, be other than they are. For example, while the fancied inhabitants of Mars might all differ in every other particular from those of this earth, it is impossible to conceive them as not endowed with life at least, although we can suppose them devoid of feeling in the same sense that we conceive plants to be. But if we imagine them to have advanced even to the lowest animal stage, we are obliged to endow them with feeling, consciousness, will. And when we speak of a remote planet being "inhabited," although we can abstract from those inhabitants every physical character that belongs to man and conceive them as dragons, or satyrs, or monsters of any form, we cannot imagine them devoid of reason and intelligence in addition to the attributes of life and sensibility.—[*Sociology and Cosmology, in Outlines of Sociology.*]

A Future Life.

BY HORACE SEAVER.

THE great majority of mankind think that a belief in future existence is absolutely necessary to present happiness. We believe the doctrine to be a mistake. Time a thousand years hence is no more to us now than time a thousand years past. As no event could have harmed us when we existed not, so no event can possibly harm us when we are no more. By anticipating and calculating too much on future felicity and dreading, or at least fearing, future misery, man often loses sight of present enjoyments and neglects present duties. When men shall discover that nothing can be known beyond this life, and that there is no rational ground for any such belief, they will begin to think more of improving the condition of the human species. Their whole thoughts will then be turned upon what man has done, and what he can still do, for the benefit of man. As they will be delivered from all fear of invisible voluntary agents that may do them harm, so they will no longer look up to such agents for help, but they will study more their own powers and the powers and properties of Nature. They will discover how much time and labor are spent entirely uselessly, and worse than uselessly—perniciously; that so far from improving the condition of man, such labors only tend to destroy his own peace and render him an enemy to his fellow-man.—[*Occasional Thoughts.*]