

TORCH OF REASON.



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

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Dishonest Critics.

BY G. L. MACKENZIE.

WHY thank the Lord for bloody graves,
O Christians pharisaic?
Why praise him, pious fools and knaves,
Professional and laic?

In praising God we criticise
As much as in arraigning;
And if, when thanking, we are wise,
We're ditto when complaining.

If God we praise for what is good,
With Reason for our master,
We ought, when in a thoughtful mood,
To blame Him for disaster.

If Reason argues from success
To God with commendation,
It also argues from distress
To God with condemnation.

To praise and blame as facts suggest
Is rightly using Reason;
Ignoring "worst" and praising "best"
Is fear and mental treason.

Our praise to God for sieges raised
Implies this fact egregious:
That God must surely be dispraised
For letting foes besiege us.

The pious person is an ass
Who praises God for glad things,
Unless he thinks it right to pass
His censure for the sad things.

These fruitless God-belaunders fill
The thoughtful man with pity,
As though he saw them try to till
The curbstones of a city.

Bestow your praise and blame on men
Who profit by and need them,
And not on ghosts beyond your ken,
Who neither need nor heed them.
—[London Freethinker.]

Cosmic Evolution.

[Extracts from a summary of the "Weltrathsel" (world enigma) of Prof. Ernest Haeckel, by Joseph McCabe, in Watts' Literary Guide for April.]

THE old myth of creation, with its varied modern restrictions and elaborations, has been swept aside by the triumph of evolution. The unity, or continuity, of the world in point of time has been proved as utterly as its unity in actual existence. In the first place, all talk about the "beginning of the world" and the mystery in which it is said to be involved is pure assumption. The earlier evolutionists, unfortunately, lent themselves to this interpretation. Modern astronomy and physics have shown that the "law of substance" rules in the remotest regions of space as it does on earth. "We are logically driven to the important admission that the persistence of matter and force has been as universal in all time as it is today." In any case, our observations force us to conceive the world as illimitable in time as well as in space. The evolution of worlds is a great drama that is continually going on around us. While suns are dying out in one corner of space, others are just commencing their life; moreover, the extinct

solid stars are apt to collide, and the enormous heat generated is sufficient to reduce them to their simplest elements, and the whole evolution begins over again. There is no ground whatever for assuming a beginning to this cyclic process. The idea that all force is being gradually transformed into heat, which is only partially reconverted, is of no consequence, as the mere collision of two masses generates enough "living force" for a new cosmic process; those who fear that this points to an end of the world are misled by partial experiments. Geology has taken up the thread of the story from astronomy and worked out the development of the earth. Many million years ago—"certainly more than a hundred million"—the globe that had been cast off by the condensing nebula cooled down sufficiently to allow the water to settle on it. Then began the long drama of organic evolution, of whose last act we are the witnesses and the participants. Biological evolution is now as irresistible as astronomical and geological. Darwin, says Dr. Haeckel, "has been the Copernicus of the organic world."

THE UNITY OF THE COSMOS.

In the next chapter Dr. Haeckel sets out to prove the correctness of the fundamental and titular idea of his philosophy—the monism, or unity, of all things. The author is sometimes described as a materialist; but he resents the title. He is neither a spiritualist nor a materialist. The fount and base of all existence is an inscrutable substance of which matter and spirit (in the sense of force; immaterial substance he entirely rejects) are the two chief aspects. The real antithesis of his philosophy is dualism—the theory that holds we cannot explain life, or thought, or the cosmos as a whole, without postulating spiritual and transcendental agencies. The first position taken up by the dualist is at the origin of life. The author points out confusion which is usually associated with the idea of spontaneous generation. Modern scientific experiments—such as those of Pasteur and Tyndall—prove nothing whatever as to the primeval origin of organisms. In fact, modern chemical research into the character of complex combinations of carbon has constructed a natural bridge from the inorganic to the organic world. In the developed organism the apparent "purpose" of the various parts is invoked as proof of the

inherence of an other than material force. Against this we have not only the theory of selection, but we have quite a science of "dysteleology." Rudimentary, imperfect, hurtful organs negative the idea of prevision and preordination. The whole question of teleology, of purpose and of chance, including the problem of a moral purpose in history, is treated at length. There is no proof whatever, from end to end of the universe, from the beautiful markings of a diatom to the vicissitudes of human history, of any prevision or preordination. Science, when its data are soberly interpreted, finds one entity—nature—slowly, blindly, painfully unfolding itself on the theatre of time.

Faith in One's Faith.

BY DR. J. E. ROBERTS.

THIS world has been cursed, not in fact, but in the thoughts of men, until it is distrusted, and life is feared, and death is thought of as a horror; until we do not know whether we are sorrier that we came or gladder that we cannot stay. The crown has been filched from the brow of man. The church has bound into a bundle the sceptres that she has stolen from the hands of the individual and has made cowards and slaves of men. The faith of the individual is such a faith as reveals itself to the individual. No great faith can be forced upon any one. The church is mistaken if it thinks, even though it has the truth, it can compel its belief. A belief is not a matter of choice, it is a matter of necessity. Beliefs are the result of persuasive argument or conclusive evidence, or a harmony with the nature of things. There could be nothing more absurd than for a man to say, "I will believe." It isn't a matter subject to volition. It is a matter solely of evidence and proof. No two men can look upon the same thing and have the same mental condition as the result. I suppose the heavens look different to every beholder; I suppose the everlasting sea tells a different story to every listener, and I suppose no two would hear the birds' morning song with exactly the same response of sympathy or with the same thrill of joy. A celebrated woman once said to Turner, "I confess I cannot see what you see in the landscape." "Ah," the artist replied, "do you not wish you could?" Great nature's plan allows each thinking

rational soul a certain originality, an independence of relation peculiar to itself. The faith of the individual is exactly what is revealed to him by the world without and within. There must be differences—no two see alike—and when the individual finds the authority for his faith in himself he will recognize the authority for the other man's faith in him, and there can be no dispute, no friction, no pious hatred of each other. There can be no such things as bigotry, prejudice, intolerance or persecution. The man that fights for a faith has received that faith at second hand. The man who rests his faith upon his own reason, does not find it necessary to kill, or imprison, or torture anybody else who cannot see things as he sees them. The more authority religion has, the less authority it has.

Jehovah and Brahma.

BY R. G. INGERSOLL.

CAN we believe that Jehovah ever said of any one: "Let his children be fatherless and his wife a widow; let his children be continually vagabonds, and beg; let them seek their bread also out of their desolate places; let the extortioner catch all that he hath and let the stranger spoil his labor; let there be none to extend mercy unto him, neither let there be any to favor his fatherless children?" If he ever said these words, surely he had never heard this line, this strain of music, from the Hindu: "Sweet is the lute to those who have not heard the prattle of their own children."

Jehovah, "from the clouds and darkness of Sinai," said to the Jews: "Thou shalt have no other gods before me. . . Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them nor serve them; for I, the Lord thy God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquities of the fathers upon the children, unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me." Contrast this with the words put by the Hindu in the mouth of Brahma: "I am the same to all mankind. They who honestly serve other gods, involuntarily worship me. I am he who partaketh of all worship, and I am the reward of all worshippers."

Compare these passages. The first, a dungeon, where crawl the things begot of jealous slime; the other, great as the domed firmament inlaid with suns.—[Prose Poems.]