

Healthy Attention in Religions.

BY T. B. WAKEMAN.

"To like and not to like the same things—such is the final ground and test of friendship." So said the old Roman, Sallust; and he might have said, further, that such is the source and ground of all Religions. The only difference is one of extent and degree; for the union of belief and sentiment which unites into "Religion" is our common final view of the world, and of the lot and fate of man in it. These views make or concern the very highest thoughts and motives we can ever have, and because they are the highest, the Religion of a People always with them covers controls and dominates everything else. The main motive of a people, and their very life and soul, is their religion. Destroy suddenly their faith and confidence in that, and the essence, mainspring, motive and REASON for living is gone. It is singular, but a most noteworthy fact, that a tribe of people never or seldom survives their religion. A transmutation of religions is almost as difficult as a transmutation of species. The reason of all this is that religion determines ATTENTION. Their attention indicates the highest and most important life and death affairs, and makes an environment resulting from, and adjusted and suitable to, their world.

We have learned two important things about attention: (1) That it is the "searchlight of the mind or 'soul'" which realizes, materializes and creates what it rests upon; and (2) that in and by so doing it excludes from sight and causes the eye and senses, from non-use, to become forgetful and incapable of apprehending the world and ideas beyond or outside of the usual range of our main religious attention. The past religions of the world, from Fetichism up, have been the successive stages by which Man has climbed from round to round, to ever new concepts of the world on his ladder of evolution. That "Nature never makes a jump," is a maxim as true in human history as in that of plants and animals. We can only climb our ladder; we can never jump it, nor take it down so as to change it for another's while we are on it. Social Science thus enables us to see and appreciate the horrible but ignorant cruelty of the missionaries who try to replace one religion by another. In crossing the stream of life, how can we swap or change the horses by which only we are enabled to travel at all?

Revolutions of this fundamental kind can only be made by new but gradual changes of our searchlight, attention, to new objects and in new directions, so as to evolve, step by step, a new world which shall replace by outgrowing the old.

This is the secret of real education and of progress. The brain acquires its new convolutions and powers by climbing up and feeding upon the shores of the new world. Note, we say THE new world. We mean the new World and Universe, and the new Man opened up to us (A. D. 1600) by the new or Copernican Astronomy, of which the Religion of Science and Humanity is the logical and inevitable outcome and result. That discovery made it plain that all of the old Religions were sheer illusions, because they had no true Cosmogony, no real World or "Soul" of Man, to go upon. They had misdirected the attention of Man to the work of giving "local habitations and names" to their "airy nothings," until the real world, for all higher and religious purposes, remained unexplored and almost lost to view. Man was made to forget his only solid basis, this earth. His attention was devoted to the ecstasy of flitting through a "Heaven" of Nothingness upon the wings of "Spirit"—and both, and his all, were but "the shaping fantasies of his seething brains."

But now, presto, change! The Heavens and Hells, the Nightmare, "the fierce vexations of a Dream" vanish! The Sun of Science rises! Copernicus and Bruno have put us on the Earth again. Shakespeare and Gæthe become the masters of our work and play. They send our attention healthfully, generally and generously over all, "to find sermons in stones [geology] and good in everything" in its correlate relations to everything else—and so on forever, with the ever-blossoming Beautiful and the True! In this way ATTENTION, healthy and universal, yet imaginative, creative and selective for the Human, makes our existence "grow to something of great constancy," gradually unfolding itself upon "The Theatre of Time." And what is the air, spirit, life, soul, sap and blood of this new concord and cooperative friendship of the Each and the All? Why, it is the new Correlation, the Union within the Universe—The Religion of LIBERTY [which frees us from all superstitions and limitations, so that we can desire and see the good and right]; of SCIENCE [so that we can make the Universe our Farm, and learn the True in order to do the Good]; of HUMANITY [which leaves "nothing human foreign to us," but extends our earthly days into the countless Ages of the "Earthy Paradise"]. We live to forefeel, and work and die to make the reality, which we thus anticipate and enjoy.

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