

The Passing of Religious Creeds.

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In the great social march of humanity we frequently encounter what has gone before. Those familiar with that wonderfully interesting work by Dr. Draper, entitled "History of the Intellectual Development of Europe," will remember that it is there shown that man, in his social march, in obedience to the majesty of law, "encounters and endures an inevitable succession of events." In that determined march this fact is conspicuous: Religious creeds come into existence, serve their place for a time, and then crumble and fall under the weight of their own inconsistencies.

The priests of Egypt, who once represented the most advanced knowledge of their time, came to fancy that man had no more to learn and upheld their creed against all newer wisdom. So the world passed them by and left them grovelling in superstition.

The breaking up of the religions of Greece and Rome left the people in a deplorable state. For ages they had recognized a duty of right living to the gods of Olympus. Naturally, when their enlarged experiences taught them that Olympus and its gods had no existence, the duty of right living was also gone. Their philosophers and teachers failed to provide an adequate regulative system of morals, and the result was that they fell into the hands of ignorant fanatics and scheming ecclesiastics and emperors; whereby Europe was plunged into an intellectual darkness for more than a thousand years, the evil effects of which are still seen among us.

No man can read the plain unvarnished story of that religious night without a shudder of horror. The last rays of the sun of Grecian learning disappeared when, in the 414th year of our era, Cyril, bishop of Alexandria, murdered Hypatia, because in her academy she discussed philosophical questions before the wealth and intellect of Alexandria, thereby, not only detracting from the interest in Cyril's theological sermons, but also making it impossible for the thoughtful to accept his dogmatic assertions.

From that day to the present, it has been the aim of the Christian church to compel all thought to conform to her dogma. For a thousand years or more, her most effective weapons were confiscation, imprisonment, torture, death. For the last three centuries she has endeavored to crush and discourage scientific research as dangerous.

We so frequently hear it said today that the Christian church is no longer opposed to the advancement of scientific knowledge in any material sense, that it seems necessary to cite a few instances to show how utterly false is the assertion.

I take it that every time a religious organization encourages a practice that is hurtful, or a belief which is false, it materially interferes with the increase of Scientific knowledge. The faithful of any religion will always consider the instructions of their priests as but little short of the command of a god. They are much more worthy of observance than the statements of a mere man of Science.

Let me first give you an instance which came under my personal notice. About a year ago I called at a home in Portland, some of the members of which were Catholics. While there I happened to turn over the pages of a book in which I came across a piece of thin, white paper, about the size of my hand, upon which were printed a number of miniature crucifixes. Upon enquiring its use, I was informed by a perfectly reliable lady of the household that it had been purchased by one of the other members from a Catholic institution in Portland, and that the crucifixes were to be eaten, one at a time, as cure for stomach trouble! Aside from the effect of such a practice upon an already deranged digestive system, will any sane man say that it was not hurtful?

About seven years ago the Protestant Episcopal bishop of Pennsylvania issued a call to prayer in order to ward off the cholera. One of his clergymen, however refused to respond declaring that to do so in the filthy condition of the streets, then prevailing in Philadelphia, would be blasphemous. It is not reasonable to suppose that all the faithful in the bishop's diocese had even as much common sense as this clergyman.

In 1892, a boy in Wemding, Germany, became hysterical, and a Catholic priest said he was possessed of an evil spirit, and charged a peasant's wife with bewitching him. Thereupon the woman's husband brought a suit against the priest for slander.

The defendant claimed that the boy was possessed of the devil and the decrees of popes and councils were pleaded in support of the defense. It is encouraging to notice that the court condemned the good father to fine and imprisonment. "Hell was dismissed with costs." But how many people in that community implicitly believed that the priest was right and the court wrong?

I think that the position still retained by the Christian church which is most hurtful is that which denies to the operations of nature

an orderly occurrence—that events have occurred, and are occurring, which sensibly deviate from the laws of nature and are wrought by the direct interposition of supernatural beings. It cannot be doubted that the adherence of the church to a spirit-world and to the miraculous has much to do with the popularity of those pernicious absurdities known as Spiritualism and Christian Science.

The greatest blessings to humanity come from the increase of natural knowledge, and the persistent effort of the Church to cling to its ignorant and exploded theories is the blackest spot on the face of our modern civilization.

Let me say here that no right minded person can have a word to say against the purely moral precepts which have survived in the Christian creed. But they are no peculiarity to Christianity. Justice and Mercy are at a higher level to day in Mohammedism than they were in Christianity prior to the 17th century. These virtues are not the result of religion. If there is any relation between them, religion is the result of these virtues. When primitive man began to think of ghosts behind the phenomena of nature, if he had any idea of justice and mercy, his gratitude would naturally go out to the ghosts from whom he imagined he received these benefits; while he will hate and fear the ghost which he imagined produced the evils. The love of right and the hatred of wrong are no more the result of religion, than are the mother-ape's tender love for her infant, or the robin's devoted care of his mate.

But to the absence of religious creeds, what is to be the object of the observance of rules of right conduct? Indeed why should there be any rules of right conduct? The conditions of the Roman world after the Civil Wars, are repeating themselves today. When the current mythology failed to impel men to duty because their gods were found to have no reality, men felt that there was no object in uprightness. Today, the Christian heaven and hell, with their eternal bliss and everlasting torment, are found to be as visionary as Olympus and its deities. Jehova, the Great Ghost of the ancient Jews, which is now the chief god in the Christian pantheon, when tested by our modern ideas of justice and mercy, presents a character so utterly devoid of these qualities that we turn from it with loathing and disgust.

Without hope of reward or fear of eternal damnation, with the belief in ghosts dying out, why should we be good? The answer to this momentous question should be found in the systems of our public education. It is as much a question for Science as the question, "Why should we be clean?" Prof.

Huxley has said: "No educational system can have a claim to permanence, unless it recognizes the truth that education has two great ends to which everything else must be subordinated. The one of these is the increase of knowledge; the other is to develop the love of right and the hatred of wrong." (SC. & ED. p130).

A moment ago I mentioned some of the evil effects of Christianity on our present civilization. I did not particularly refer to its bearing upon the moral training in our system of education. There are many who claim that the only moral precepts man is bound to observe are those which are included in their religious creed; that by rejecting their creed you overthrow the only reason that can exist for the observance of the precepts. But aside from any creed that has ever been invented, man has found that, in the words of Robertson, "it is better to be true than to be false, better to be pure than to be sensual, better to be brave than to be a coward."

And so, in the passing of the religious creeds of our time, it is to school and university education that we must look for the moral instruction of the majority of the growing generation. I believe that before many years our public school system will more adequately meet this growing demand. They have already begun to turn their attention to these matters, but owing to the interference of bigoted and intolerant priest-craft, the moral instruction in our public schools is far from satisfactory. Much good work in bringing about an improvement in this direction can be done by the Secular Unions throughout the country, and in the meantime let us give our hearty encouragement and support to that institution which is so bravely striving for the enlightenment and betterment of suffering humanity along these and other lines—The Liberal University of Oregon.

A Live Society.

The Ohio Liberal Society begins its labors of education and enlightenment along the lines of Freethought, economic, scientific and humanitarian studies this year, with more encouragement financially and otherwise, than it has met with for years.

The Society is growing rapidly numerically, and its influence is being felt all over the country.

The lecture committee is negotiating with the celebrated English Freethought lecturer, Mr. Charles Watts, for an extended course of lectures. Mr. Watts is known as the Ingersoll of England. The Society has had in the past, and hopes to have in the future, the best talent along these lines the world has produced.

As an evidence of progress, the Society has removed from its old headquarters, G. A. R. Hall, 35 N. 6th St., to better quarters and better location; College Hall, 416 Walnut St., where they will be pleased to see old friends.

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