



SUNDAY READING

OUR FATHER IN HEAVEN.

The Majestic Presence of the Deity is With Us at All Times.

Reacting against tape-measure theology, reacting against irreverent endeavour to fathom and measure the infinite and the Eternal, there has grown up the spirit of agnosticism, the philosophy that says, God cannot be known. There is a great power beyond ourselves, that is in all nature, and that manifests itself in various forms; that much, it is said, we know, and nothing more. "Nothing is more certain than this," says Herbert Spencer, "that we are ever in the presence of an infinite and eternal energy, from which all things proceed." But if we ask, What is its nature?—agnosticism says we cannot know. Is it a good energy or a bad energy?—John Stuart Mill says you cannot tell. Is it an energy that thinks, that reasons, that loves, that cares for men?—agnosticism says you cannot find out: there is nothing known except a great, infinite, eternal energy, that transcends all knowledge, that exceeds all measuring, that is beyond all apprehension.

But though a great unknown and infinite energy may fill us with awe, it cannot awaken in us reverence. I will not worship power: I will only worship holiness. I will not revere mere muscle: I will only revere the righteousness that directs it. And if all that life has to tell me is, that there is an infinite and eternal energy from which all things proceed, I may tremble in the presence, but I will not bow. For man, in all his feebleness and weakness, yet loving, would be more worthy of my reverence than an infinite and eternal energy that was loveless. The babe in the cradle that looks up with loving eyes into a mother's face would be worthy of more worship than the majestic might that fills the universe, if there is neither conscience nor affection in it.

So, by a natural and an inevitable reaction against the philosophy that says to us we can know nothing about this infinite and eternal energy from which all things proceed, there springs up another philosophy that declares to us, we must have something to worship; we cannot worship an infinite and eternal energy: go to, let us worship man. Over against agnosticism there comes up the spirit of positivism or humanitarianism, which I can best illustrate from Professor Clifford, its ablest exponent:—

"The dim and shadowy outlines of the superhuman deity fade slowly away before us, and as the mist of His presence floats aside we perceive with greater and greater clearness the shape of a still grander and nobler figure—of Him who made all gods and shall unmake them. From the dim dawn of history and from the inmost depth of Soul the face of our Father Man looks out upon us with the fire of eternal youth in His eyes, and says: 'Believe: Jehovah was I am.'"

There they stand, these two pagan conceptions of the infinite. On the one hand, a great infinite and eternal energy, without love, without conscience, without any moral quality; on the other hand, man—idealistic man, defied man, man cast up on the clouds of a great imagination, but still man. You cannot worship floating mist, and therefore—look in the looking-glass and worship yourself. Both these modern philosophies are simply reconstructed forms of paganism. All paganism is one or the other of these two philosophies. It is either "There is no God but Nature" or "There is no God but man"; either there is no God that you can know—that is the paganism of the Orient; or else, there is no God but a defied humanity—that is the paganism of ancient Greece and Rome. It is either, there is no God but an infinite and eternal essence, a Brahma that lives an unconscious life; or else it is the paganism that worships Jupiter, a cruel and sensuous Roman, or Venus, a beautiful but immoral woman.

Now, over against these two philosophies that, under different guises, really say, There is no God, comes the teaching of the Hebrew poets interpreting the ministry of the clouds. God is "our Father which art in heaven." God is not of the earth, earthy. He has not sprung from this globe on which we dwell. He lives above us: comes to us because He comes down to us. He is a transcendent God. We cannot measure Him; cannot understand Him; cannot have a complete and perfect system of theology about Him. "Thick clouds and darkness are round about Him." "He makes darkness millions round about Him, dark waters and thick clouds of the skies." He maketh the clouds his chariot; He walketh upon the wings of the wind. The thunder is the sound of His voice; but he is more than the thunder. The lightning is the flashing of His eye; but he is more than the lightning. The quaking of the earth is the tread of his feet; but he is more than the earthquake. The still, small voice that speaks to you when you say to yourself, "Be still, and know that He is God," is His voice; but he is more than His voice. The heaven of heavens cannot contain Him. He is "our Father," but he is "our Father," which art in heaven," veiled when from our lower life men climb the mountain peaks where He is hidden behind a great cloud, and then hold converse with Him, though they enter as truly into the cloud as Moses ever did, still he that has not had that experience of personal intimate communion cannot tell whether this Moses has gone, nor understand the language of conference that he has with the Almighty.

But the clouds have another lesson for us: They are above us, but they are about

us. We are apt to conceive of God, because He "is in the heavens," as a God afar off. He is "in heaven"—that is, we think, not upon earth. But we mistake. The heaven itself is but a part of the earth, and in all the Hebraic treatment of it, it is treated as belonging to this globe of ours. "And God made the firmament, and divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament." What, then, is this firmament? The great blue sky far, far above the clouds? No. The clouds, according to the Hebrew conception, are above the firmament; the firmament is the great middle ground between the ocean of the earth and the ocean of the sky. "It is He that sitteth upon the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants are as grasshoppers; that stretcheth out the heavens as a curtain, and spreadeth them out as a tent to dwell in." What are the heaven, then? The blue dome spangled with the stars? No. The heavens, according to the Hebrew conception, are the clouds that God has spread out as a curtain under which He dwells, as one dwells under a pavilion. "Our Father which art in heaven" is not, according to the Hebrew conception, a God that lives in some far-distant globe of fiery glory. He is our God, who dwells in the same atmosphere in which we dwell: our God, who dwells in the clouds which envelop us; our God, whose way is upon the seas, whether the seas beneath our feet or the seas above our heads. A God whose pavilion is in the clouds; a God who dwells hidden from us behind this veil and curtain, and yet a God who so lives upon the earth that in Him we live, and move, and have our being; this is our God. He is our atmosphere. Before his majestic power, as before the atmosphere in the tempest; all human handiwork is naught; yet His gentleness is like the dew on Hermon. Listen to the double message which the clouds perpetually bring, as messengers from Him: "I am the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity; I dwell in the high and holy place; with Him that is of a contrite and humble spirit." Listen to the antiphonal service which every drought and every refreshing rain repeats: the earth crying out, "Drop down, ye heavens from above, and let the skies pour down righteousness;" the heavens answering, "Let the earth open, and let them bring forth salvation, and let righteousness spring up together."

"Thy mercy is in the heavens, Thy faithfulness reacheth unto the clouds." "Thy righteousness is like the great mountains; Thy judgments are a great deep." "The trees of the Lord are full."—Rev. Lyman Abbott, D. D.

THEY CANNOT COMPREHEND.

Difficulty in Teaching Christianity to the Coast Indians.

The Victoria, B. C. "Colonist" representative at Vancouver had an interesting conversation a few days since with R. J. Skinner, Government timber agent, in reference to the Haida Indians and the coast Indians in general. Mr. Skinner said: "Although I have the greatest respect for missionaries among the Indians, no matter what their denomination, and while I have not the least doubt that most of them are very earnest men, I am sorry to say that the reports that they send to the outside world are rather too highly colored. 'I have been a resident among the Indians for twenty-five years, and have talked with hundreds of the natives on the Queen Charlotte Islands and other places on the coast. It was always the rule, while all the tribes acknowledged a Supreme Being, that those who had not met the missionaries knew nothing of a spiritual life, prayer, purgatory, or the atonement for sins; but those who had come in contact with the missionaries solemnly aver that their religion had always been similar to the Christian religion. It is very difficult to really convert the Siwash for these reasons. They cannot tell the truth as we define it. If asked a direct question, they will answer as they think would please you, and not necessarily according to the facts of the case. 'Again it is foreign to the nature of the coast Indian to believe in any such thing as vicarious punishment. The suffering of Christ upon the cross, in atonement for our sins, is simply beyond their comprehension, although, of course, in a superficial way, they will smilingly acquiesce in anything. There is little doubt that the missionaries are doing a grand work in elevating the morals of the red men; but this talk about white people taking an example from Indians in morality is not justified.'"

Messengers of Help for the Week.
Sunday.—Deut. 5: 12: "Keep the Sabbath day to sanctify it, as the Lord thy God hath commanded thee."
Monday.—Psalm, 34: 8: "O taste and see that the Lord is good."
Tuesday.—9th verse: "There is no want to them that fear him."
Wednesday.—10th v.: "They that seek the Lord shall not want any good thing."
Thursday.—14th v.: "Depart from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it."
Friday.—19th v.: "Many are the afflictions of the righteous; but the Lord delivereth him out of them all."
Saturday.—22nd v.: "The Lord redeemeth the soul of his servants; and none of them that trust in him shall be desolate."

The Pope is perfectly well, but does not like to read the speculations as to his death at no very distant date, and what will then happen. His Holiness took special care to inform a literary visitor the other day that he had every prospect of living to be a hundred, a belief supported and warranted by the fact that his family have been very long-lived people, both on his mother's and his father's side. He is extremely regular in all his habits; each day, with him, is the counterpart of the past one. He made an exception, recently, in favor of having two teeth extracted.

BISHOP CROWTHER'S CAREER.

The Story of a Life Which Abounded in Strange Experiences.

Captain Mockler-Ferryman, in his recent volume, "Up the Niger," gives a pleasing account of his visit to "the small, clean settlement of the Church Missionary Society, where the Bishop of the Niger, Samuel Adjai Crowther, and his son, the archdeacon, had their headquarters, and were striving hard to civilize the miserable heathens." The worthy bishop's life was full of striking and romantic experiences, some of which are thus recounted by Captain Mockler-Ferryman:

Adjai was a native of the kingdom of Yoruba. At the age of thirteen he was captured and carried away into slavery to the town of Isehun, where he was separated from his mother and became the property of the chief. Shortly afterward he was bartered for a horse and marched off with a gang to a neighbouring slave-market.

Here to his intense delight and astonishment, he encountered, his mother, and had the satisfaction of living in daily intercourse with her for three months. Then they parted, as both thought, for ever. The boy was sold and carried away toward the coast, and, after a varied experience of masters, found himself at work in a store at Lagos.

Thence he was by-and-by shipped, with one hundred and eighty fellow-slaves for America; but shortly after the vessel left the coast two English cruisers captured it and carried off the human cargo, to be freed at Sierra Leone.

Here Adjai was received into the mission school and taught the trade of a carpenter. He showed himself a diligent student, and was baptized in 1825 under the name of Samuel Crowther.

At the age of eighteen he visited England, where he remained almost a year. Then he returned to Sierra Leone, and became first a student and afterward a teacher in the Fourah Bay College.

In 1841 he went to England again, and after a period of study was ordained by the Bishop of London, and returned to the west coast as missionary. A few years later he accidentally met his mother in the market place, after a separation of twenty-five years. In his journal he describes the meeting.

"When she saw me she trembled. She could not believe her eyes. We grasped one another, looking at each other with silence and astonishment, big tears rolling down her emaciated cheeks. She trembled as she held me by the hand, and called me by the familiar names by which I well remember I used to be called by my grandmother, who has since died in slavery."

"We could not say much, but sat still, and cast now and then an affectionate look at each other—a look which violence and oppression had long checked, an affection which had been nearly extinguished by the long space of twenty-five years."

In 1843 Mr. Crowther, after a much devoted missionary service, was consecrated first bishop of the Niger in Canterbury Cathedral. The University of Oxford about the same time conferred upon him the Degree of Doctor of Divinity. He died at Lagos in December, 1891.

STRANGE BIBLE FACTS

Learned by the Prince of Granada While in Solitary Confinement.

The learned Prince of Granada, heir to the Spanish throne, imprisoned by order of the Crown for fear he should aspire to the throne, was kept in solitary confinement in the old prison at the Palace of Skults, Madrid. After thirty-three years in this living tomb, death came to his release, and the following remarkable researches, taken from the Bible, and marked with an old nail on the rough walls of his cell, told how the brain sought employment through the weary years. In the Bible the word Lord is found 1,853 times, the word Jehovah 6,855 times, and the word Reverend but once, and that is in the 9th verse of the 11th Psalm. The 8th verse of the 67th Psalm is the middle verse of the Bible. The 9th verse of the 8th chapter of Esther is the longest verse; 35th verse, 11th chapter of St. John, is the shortest. In the 17th Psalm, four verses are alike—the 8th, 10th, 21st and 31st. Each verse of the 136th Psalm ends alike. No names or words with more than six syllables are found in the Bible. The 37th chapter of Isaiah and 19th chapter of 2nd Kings are alike. The word girl occurs but once in the Bible, and that in the 3rd verse and 3rd chapter of Joel. There are found in books of the Bible 3,586,484 letters, 773,694 words, 31,373 verses, 1,189 chapters, 66 books. The 26th chapter of the Acts of the Apostles is the finest chapter to read. The most beautiful chapter in the Bible is the 23rd Psalm. The four most inspiring promises are John, 14th chapter and 2nd verse, John 6th chapter and 37th verse, St. Matthew 11th chapter and 28th verse, and 37th Psalm, 4th verse. The 1st verse of the 60th chapter of Isaiah is the one for the new convert. All who flatter themselves with vain boasts of their perfectness should learn the 6th chapter of Matthew. All humanity should learn the 6th chapter of St. Luke from the 20th verse to its ending.

Prizes for Goodness.

From France comes the pleasant statement that most of the persons who receive the "prizes for goodness" awarded by the French Academy are women.

There were eighty-four prize winners last year, of whom seventy-two were women. Every year the speaker at the Academy comments on this inequality, and adds, with a sigh of resignation—

"Ah, messieurs, the women excel us in goodness."

These prizes are usually awarded to women over fifty years of age, and are given in recognition of some deed of self-sacrifice or heroism.

There are remarkable cases of servants devoting themselves to masters who have been overtaken by reverses. In many instances the servants have supported their former employers. There are sons and daughters who have adopted large families of younger brothers and sisters and educated them for useful careers. There are children who have sacrificed every pleasure of life, every ambition, to care for aged or infirm parents. There are records of lives

given to paying the debts of fathers, brothers, husbands. Rarely, it is said, do the prizes make life any easier for those to whom they are given, for in the majority of cases they devote the money to the persons in whom they are interested.

Canadian Church Union.

At a recent meeting in St. Matthews' clergy house, Hamilton, Ont., attended by a number of prominent churchmen of that city, Toronto and other towns, the Canadian Church Union was brought into existence, and is probably destined to make itself deeply felt in the Anglican church.

The most important clause in the constitution is the one in which the object of the organization is set forth. This object is: "To unite communicants of the Anglican Church in Canada for the restoration of the full use of the Book of Common Prayer."

The object of the union as described in the clause quoted above, seems very simple and innocuous. But it means much. It seems that organized effort will be made to restore to the church service all the ritual which was practised at the time of Cranmer, before the introduction of the Puritan element into the church. It means that the vestments, lights and other ornaments, and all the ornate ceremonial authorized by the prayer book of Edward VI. shall be restored, for the leaders of the movement point out that the prayer-book now in use, so far from prohibiting these things, expressly indorses and re-authorizes them. It means that the clergy-men of the church shall strictly observe their religious duties as set forth in the prayer book, one of which duties (and one which is seldom observed) is that they shall hold a public service daily in the church or chapel. It means, in short, that the whole of the proper book, and not portions of it, shall be taken as a guide to faith and religious duty.

Church of the Madeline, Paris.

The mosaic covering a space of 120 square yards, at which M. Lemerle and Gilbert Martin have been working for over three years in theapse of the Madeline, is now visible to the congregation. M. Lemerle designed the work, which represents the triumph of the French church, and contains 21 figures, which are executed in tinted stones. There are 2,000,000 small square stones employed in the work, the basis of which is Portland cement seven centimetres deep under a bed of marble, which becomes nearly as hard in drying. The ground is in five tones of gold and yellow. The separate squares forming these tones are placed close to each other. Seen close they would be spotted; seen at a distance they seem of one hue, but of a quieter tone than it they had been of a uniform shade. The figures represent Christ issuing gloriously from the tomb, with the Marys and Saints Veronica, Martha and Marcella round him, and the bishops and holy men Isidore, Maximin, Martial, Julian, Frophemus, and others who implanted Christianity in Gaul.

Miss Lena Aronson of Hot Springs, Ark., a highly educated and prominent teacher and a young and beautiful girl as well, has entered a Hebrew convent in Cincinnati, and is preparing herself to become a rabbi. She will remain in the convent seven years and consecrate her life to teaching and expounding the Hebrew faith.

Mgr. Lasagna, Bishop of Tripoli, has been deputed by the Pope to proceed to South America, virtually, it is said, as an apostolic delegate directly appointed by the Pope.



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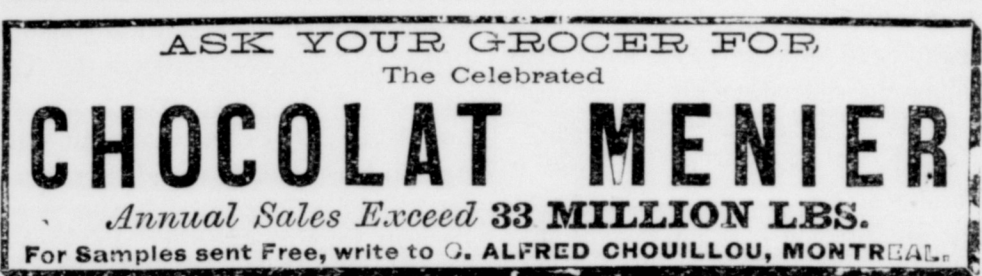
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