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RELIGION AND SCIENCE.

BY EDWARD C. HEGELER.

THE aim of The Open Court was criticised in a late number of The Nation in the following way:

"The profession of The Open Court is to make an 'effort to conciliate religion with science.' Is this wise? Is it not an endeavor to reach a foredetermined conclusion? And is not that an anti-scientific, anti-philosophical aim? Does not such a struggle imply a defect of intellectual integrity and tend to undermine the whole moral health? Surely, religion is apt to be compromised by attempts at conciliation. Tell the Czar of all the Russias you will conciliate autocracy with individualism; but do not insult religion by offering to conciliate it with any other impulse or development of human nature whatever. Religion, to be true to itself, should demand the unconditional surrender of free-thinking. Science, true to itself, cannot listen to such a demand for an instant. There may be some possible reconciliation between the religious impulse and the scientific impulse; and no fault can be found with a man for believing himself to be in possession of the solution of the difficulty (except that his reasoning may be inconclusive), or for having faith that such a solution will in time be discovered. But to go about to search out that solution, thereby dragging religion before the tribunal of free thought, and committing philosophy to finding a given proposition true--is this a wise or necessary proceeding? Why should not religion and science seek each a self-development in its own interest, and then if, as they approach completion, they are found to come more and more into accord, will not that be a more satisfactory result than forcibly bending them together now in a way which can only disfigure both? For the present, a religion which believes in itself should not mind what science says, and science is long past caring one fig for the thunder of the theologians."*

Religion is the sphere of those ideas which have been impressed into man to support him in the vicissitudes of life and to comfort him in affliction, but especially in order to regulate his conduct. When we speak

*Our critic in a certain sense revokes his criticism, he says: "However, these objections apply mainly to The Open Court's profession, scarcely at all to its practice. . . . On the whole, The Open Court is marked by sound and enlightened ideas, and the fact that it can by any means find support does honor to Chicago." But if the profession is wrong, how can the practice be correct?

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of ideas as religious, we also mean thereby that they are our innermost conviction.

Wherever religious ideas are taught, we are confronted with the doctrine that there is a great power that punishes or destroys those who are disobedient to the religious commands.

From our religious instruction has resulted this prominent idea: "Strive and struggle for truth everywhere, but above all in the very highest and most important field--Religion. Our critic proposes the maxim that we should remain passive with regard to a conciliation of Religion and Science. But a passive state of abeyance, according to our religious view, is irreligious and immoral.

The question is raised by our critic: "Is not the profession of The Open Court to conciliate religion with science a predetermined conclusion and therewith an unscientific and unphilosophical aim?" We answer, "It is a religious aim, and also it is not an unscientific aim." It appears that among the religious ideas of our critic there is one which in his soul predominates over all the others, viz., that "Religion to be true to itself should demand an unconditional surrender of freethinking."

We were educated in the so-called Christian Rationalism while our critic apparently belongs to some orthodox school. Religion, accordingly, we were taught, must be in accord with science. What are presented to us as conclusions based on science may be in part erroneous, and amongst the religious ideas taught us there may also be erroneous ones. The substance of our religious instruction was that all those ideas taught to us as the Christian religion, which already appeared to the teacher as untenable or might still be found to be erroneous, were unessential.

Those ideas which are in conflict with science we have to drop; yet, at the same time, we must be careful not to drop any more. To drop that part of religion which is not in conflict with science is a mistake almost universally made.

The maxim that errors should be dropped was not always directly pronounced, yet it was impressed upon us by example. Thus, for instance, the Mosaic account of the creation was no longer believed by our teachers, nor were we asked to believe it; we were not instructed to believe that Joshua really made the sun stand still in the valley of Gibeon, nor that Jonah came alive out of the whale; nor were we very seriously asked to believe in a trinity. Irrational faith was never upheld or recommended. But at the same time the conviction was most positively impressed into us that the essence of religion would be found to be true; it will remain. And this proposition is supported by Science.

Mr. Herbert Spencer has pointed out the extreme improbability that there should not be some important truth in ideas which are so old and so widely spread. He says concerning the religious ideas entertained by men since time immemorial:

"We must admit that the convictions entertained by many minds in common are the most likely to have some foundation."

Herein we fully agree with Mr. Spencer, but then Mr. Spencer makes the mistake of concluding that the mysterious or the unknowable is this important truth. He says:

"Religions diametrically opposed in their overt dogmas, are yet perfectly at one in the tacit conviction that the existence of the world with all it contains and all which surrounds it, is a mystery ever pressing for interpretation:"

And this mystery, Mr. Spencer declares, is "not a relative, but an absolute mystery."

From the Mysterious or Unknowable no ethics can be deduced, and Mr. Spencer himself has not attempted it. He makes the happiness of mankind the basis of ethics.

In opposition to Mr. Spencer we maintain, that the important truth which is in common to all religions, is this:

All religions teach that there is some power which enforces a certain line of conduct by man.

The savage worships his fetish not because it appears mysterious to him, but because he believes in its power.

The Religion that was taught us has gradually become the Religion of Nature, for we now recognize this power in Nature.* Nature enforces the further evolution of mankind. Those men who do not take part in this further evolution must perish. The highest civilized man will survive. In this we believe to be "in the possession of the solution of the difficulty," as our critic expresses himself; and this solution is very nearly the same as that which Matthew Arnold embodied in the sentence:

"There is a power, not ourselves, that makes for righteousness."

We would alter Matthew Arnold's sentence in this way: There is a power that enforces a certain line of conduct in the domain of life, and it is this line of conduct enforced by that power, which we call righteousness.

*Mankind is a part of Nature.