

**London Secular Tract Society's Tract.—No. 2.**

The Bishop of Ripon, speaking at a meeting at Exeter Hall, of the Society for the Promotion of Christianity, amongst the Jews, remarked that the growth of scepticism and infidelity was the special danger which now confronted them in the church, and few were fully aware of the extent to which the country was infected with the poison of infidelity, especially among scientific men. Out of a hundred men of known scientific attainments who had recently been asked what was their particular bias as to religion, only one acknowledged himself to be a believer in Christianity.

In August, 1868, Dr. Hooker, in his inaugural address as President of the British Association for the Advancement of Science, said—"One of our deepest thinkers, Mr. Herbert Spencer, has said, if Religion and Science are to be reconciled, the basis of the reconciliation must be this deepest, widest, and most certain of facts, that the power which the universe manifests to us is utterly inscrutable."

The power which the universe manifests, or, perhaps, we may say God, is utterly inscrutable. What folly then, what impudence, what irreverence of any man or men who dare to say they have a revelation from God, or that any book contains a revelation from God. The inscrutable cannot be known; therefore, if any man says, I know what God is and what is his will, he is a deceiver or deceived; for all we can know is that which comes under the cognizance of our senses.

If men would but exercise their common sense, they would see at once that if there was a God that wished us to believe certain things of himself, Almighty power and Infinite wisdom could easily cause all men to know what he wished them to believe. How sublime the faith of the Cosmist; how much wiser, how much better is it to devote our time to the investigation of Nature. To see in nature the self-subsistent, the self-active, the eternal. To cease complaining of our lot here, but to devote all the powers of mind and body to make the best of it. He, the Cosmist, has no mutable Deity to fear or beseech, but looks on Nature as one vast whole, and believes it to be his duty to ascertain as far as he can what is, and in that knowledge alone hopes to know why it is. He feels there is less difficulty in believing that this world always was, than in believing that it was made out of nothing. That it is more rational and consistent to believe that Nature exists of its own inherent power, than that it was made by some being above Nature. If there ever was a time when nothing existed than the God over all, was God over nothing? It seems much more respectful, more humble, more consistent to believe that this vast universe always was, and always will be, than to have the childish, foolish faith of the sects who believe there is a God watching over the affairs of men; that to please him they must pray to him as though he were changeable: that they must praise him as though he could feel pride or pleasure at hearing himself highly spoken of. They say God is everywhere present; that God is love; that God is good. Yet innocent miners are killed by explosions, innocent sailors are drowned by storms on the ocean, innocent men, women, and children destroyed by earthquakes, innocent men and women robbed and murdered by cruel men too lazy to work for themselves, and yet thousands, yea, millions, have died of hunger. And to crown the absurdity of their faith, they say there is a Devil—a being very powerful—that tempts people to be wicked, and thus draws them to hell. That the Devil is a kind of spiritual person that is everywhere. Oh! the folly of their faith, how absurd, how contradictory. If a rational man were told it for the first time, he would think the man mad

that told it him. This world on which we live is ninety-three millions of miles from the sun, a distance so vast that could we travel at the rate of sixty miles an hour, it would take sixty-four thousand five hundred and eighty-three days of 24 hours to travel the distance. It is ascertained that there are other worlds at far greater distances from the sun than we are—one as much as one thousand eight hundred millions of miles from the sun. How absurd then the folly of believing in the existence of a Devil. How cruel, how unjust to believe in the existence of a hell. What folly to spend time in studying books that tell of worlds no one can know anything of; of powers unknown; of existences unseen and unfelt; of what cannot be known. If mankind could be directed from the study of the unknown and the unknowable, to investigate what is, and study our relations to each other, then the reign of charity, love, peace, plenty, knowledge, health, and wealth would soon supersede the present imperfect state.

As to death, the parsons say that unbelievers in their superstition fear death; are more uneasy in the hour of death than the Christian is. This talk is untrue; is absurd; is foolish. How can it be? If there is anyone especially who ought to fear to die, it is he who believes that there is a hell. See the description of the torments of hell (Luke xvi. 23), tormented in the flame. See also Matthew xiii. 42, where it is described as a furnace of fire where there is wailing and gnashing of teeth. See Matthew vii. 13, 14—wide is the gate and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate and narrow is the way which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it. See also xx. 16, xxii. 13, 14, xxv. 30. Read also Romans ix. And then say, ye believers, if it is not you that should fear and tremble in the hour of death. Who can be so conceited, so proud as to think that he is one of the few that are saved? Why should he not rather fear that he will be one of the many that are damned? But the man that is a man in thought, in independence, in kindness, in equity, in justice, spurns such craven teaching; despises such unjust and cruel descriptions; and feels assured that as there is no crime a bad man could commit that would deserve eternal punishment, so such a thing as everlasting punishment cannot be. Moreover, it is wicked to think such a thing. It is malevolent and irreverent to attribute such horrible unjust cruelty to God, or to endeavour to torture man with such horrid fears. Eliza Cook has more wisely, justly, and generally spoke of death as follows:—

'Tis a long, 'tis a last, 'tis a beautiful rest,  
 When all sorrow has past from the brow and the breast,  
 And the lone spirit truly and wisely may crave  
 The sleep that is dreamless, the sleep of the grave.

When mankind become sensible enough to forsake the study of these falsely called sacred books, to turn from theology, a myth in which few agree, and no one can know, to that which can be known, to what can be tested, then shall the race of improvement commence on earth, and hatred, strife, war, ignorance, poverty, and prostitution shall cease, and all the great requisites for a happier life be enjoyed by all.

Volney, in his *Survey of the Revolutions of Empires*, a book well worth reading, says—"What, having forgotten our own infancy shall we pretend to know the infancy of the world? Who can attest what he has never seen? Who can certify the truth of what no one comprehends?"

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