

### "Elements of Prejudice in Religious Discussion."

In the December number of the STUDENT I find an article from the pen of G. E. H., having the above caption, of which, with your permission, I will give a short notice.

With many of the propositions as set forth in the article I heartily agree. That either religion or science is all error, is too absurd a proposition to be seriously asserted by any sane person. Science, in its true sense, is only that which is known; therefore it must be true as far as it is science. Religion, although concerned chiefly with things beyond our knowledge—that is, which will not admit of logical proof—has many principles so interwoven with our own conscious being, that to deny it wholly is to do violence to our own better nature and throw off all the obligations of virtue and the restraints of moral law.

That all the phenomena of nature cannot be explained by any law of science, is a fact long since proved; that there is a force, or intelligence, back of all visible or knowable forces, is most freely admitted by those who are best acquainted with the laws which govern nature's phenomena. It being then admitted that there is a mystery beyond human comprehension—that the caused must have had a cause—may we not inquire what creative force is most in accordance with reason and the effects produced?

It is asserted by G. E. H. that, whatever the nature of the first cause, whether existent in matter itself, or in some external agency, it cannot be infinite, since it "is a cause or creator only in relation to the thing caused or created;" that there is a mutual relation between them, and because a relation, a mutual limitation; hence the first cause is not a first cause, but must have been caused by something else if caused at all.

If this creative force is in matter, it is undoubtedly limited by the thing created—that is, by matter itself—since the same causes continuing to act would produce the same effects until the creative force was exhausted; hence the created would be equal, both in duration and extent, to the creator, and without the creature the creator is non-existent—that is, the effect produced the cause; which is absurd, showing that our hypothesis was incorrect.

If on the contrary, as the monotheist claims, the creative power is vested in some external agency, the relation between the creator and the created is not so plain, this external cause being an intelligent being and not a blind force—one whose existence depends in no wise upon the works of his hands; who, had the universe never been created, would still have been a creator in power.

The writer of the article under notice does well to say that this relation between the creator and the created must have been caused by something if caused at all. It leaves him an opening at which to escape, but it is little calculated to inspire confidence in the minds of his readers to show so little faith in his theories himself. He dodges the only real issue, if the monotheistic idea is correct. God was not caused, but is self-existent, the cause of all things. "All things were made by him, and without him was not anything made that was made."

But such a contradiction of terms as the gentleman has used implies to my mind that he was already floating without rudder

or compass on that boundless ocean of mystery of which he speaks.

Again he says, "is it not enough that we are conscious of a power beyond our ken?" and "is not existence which is inconceivable more worthy of reverence than a being that can be represented in thought with form and attributes?" How any one can reverence an existence of which he cannot conceive is beyond my ken. I can hardly be conscious of such an existence, and I greatly fear that frail bark of the writer is fast sinking beneath the waves of this ocean of mystery.

To attempt to restrict religion to the acknowledgment of a higher power, shows entire ignorance of the subject. Such an abstraction is no more religion than the theory of evolution is science. It is a judgment without the evidence, an attempt to describe what has never been seen or felt. Religion is not a form that may be practiced, or a science that may be learned, but a power that must be felt. As we can not know what death is till we die, neither can we realize what it is to live by faith until we are born of the spirit; and I doubt whether the change is more complete in one case than in the other. What would such a religion be as this reformer tries to picture to our imagination? for imagination alone can grasp it—a religion without love, or power, or wisdom, or any of the attributes which orthodoxy ascribes to God, which "merely predicates the existence of a power back of all phenomena the unknowable mystery." If God, or first cause, is an unknowable mystery, then all religion is vain, or rather there is no such thing as religion, but all contemplation of a higher power is idle speculation.

"The great error of religion," declares the writer of the article, "is the unceasing attempt to drag down the Infinite within the narrow scope of human conception." "The attempt to represent the Infinite First Cause as possessed of attributes which human beings can comprehend, however pure and holy, is the chief means of self-degradation." How the contemplation of anything pure and holy can be the means of self-degradation is another point beyond my comprehension. It is an assertion at variance with positive facts and experience. You might as well assert that the example of a just and virtuous man is calculated to lead men into vice and crime as that the contemplation of a pure and holy God conduces to human debasement.

The writer's ignorance or carelessness is again shown in his statement "that all the conceptions of the Infinite are mere caricatures, more or less crude, according to the development of the subject." That the orthodox of God is perfect has never been affirmed. Human conception cannot take in the fullness of the attributes of God. Our standard of comparison is too small, but it does not follow that God does not possess those attributes because they exceed the domain of human thought, for "we are not to constitute the capacity of thought into the measure of existence, or recognize the domain of our knowledge as necessarily co-extensive with the horizon of our faith?"

To the charge of a lack of candor brought against religion I would say, do not be harsh in judgment; it is not always an evidence of hypocrisy that a man does not wish to argue with you; besides, the creed of the church is not the fundamental principle of religion; but there are certain principles which have ever been presented boldly—that God possesses

the attributes of love, power, wisdom, justice, mercy and goodness, in the most perfect fullness; that he created all things, and superintends, directs and cares for his creatures, and therefore we are in duty bound to love and serve him; that he rewards virtue and punishes vice; that he gives his spirit to guide and help those who ask and trust him. These propositions have been before the world for eighteen hundred years and more without successful contradiction.

In the light of these facts why should religion dread science? The domain of science reaches only that which can be established by positive proof, and religion asserts only that which never can be proved or disproved by any course of human reasoning, but must be received by faith and proved by the Spirit of God.

I fully concur in the opinion that the great question is what is and not what ought to be truth, but I fear religionists are not the only class of persons who dodge this question in order to save preconceived notions and escape disagreeable conclusions. Let the question be answered fairly and truly, whatever be the result to creed or theory. But do not in your zeal tear down the beautiful temple of religion until you find it unsafe. Dig deep and examine the foundations, and if they be not based upon the rock then let it be pulled down, that we be not overwhelmed in its ruins when the winds and floods beat upon it. Do not ask us to exchange our hope based upon the word of God for the opinions of men—opinions which lack all authority and depend upon certain conditions which may and may not exist, which are not susceptible of proof, and give no reward to faith. Besides the uncertainty of these theories, there is no positive proof of a conflict between them and the orthodox conception.

Many men eminent in science have found no such conflict, and I venture the assertion that none ever will find it except those who are looking more for a justification of a course of irreligion than for truth.

The idea of accounting for the joys of Christians by psychological law seems to me the most absurd proposition in the article, as if any law, however general, compassed all the varieties of temperament and all the circumstances under which these joys have been experienced. What other cause or principle has ever produced the same result in thousands of minds? Yet religion is the same in all persons and under all conditions, the difference in the feelings of its possessors being only the difference in their faith and perfection in the christian graces. Again what other cause has wrought so complete a change in men; a change, not only in their minds but in their acts and lives making the drunken man sober; the dishonest man honest; the profane man a reverencer of God; and even the scoffer, the infidel and the atheist, have been made humble disciples by its power. Those who have set all the strength of their wills against it and have been reached by the spirit of God and convinced of their error, showing that religion is not dependent entirely upon the will. The faith of man is not entirely within his own control. God can so impress things upon his mind that he can not but believe them, but it remains for him to decide whether he will act on his belief or not.

But why is this desire among a certain

class of men to overthrow the Bible and religion? If the Bible is a fable, Jesus Christ a myth, and the holy spirit the creation of an over-active imagination, why waste so much time in fighting against a shadow?

Why attempt to shake the faith of those who are happy in the possession of it, since they have nothing better to offer, and should religion be false its adherents are in no worse condition than the most perfect theories of men would leave them did they possess the soul of truth. In this search we should remember that truth is eternal, and look beyond this earthly existence. Such a religion as these men set up cuts off all hope of a better life and makes death an eternal sleep. But it may be answered that christians will not let this subject rest but keep it continually before the world; true, but can you blame them? Would you not even despise the man who, believing you were in danger of eternal death, should keep silent and leave you to escape or fall without a warning? Would you not say, and that truly, that he was wanting in common humanity? True religion has no place in the heart of him who is willing to save himself alone.

The supposition "that the Bible is the only interpretation of the imperfectly developed finite mind could give of the Infinite and yet may be a false interpretation" is I think untenable. It must be either the direct revelation of God and therefore true or the result of human speculation in an age when few facilities for proving the truth were enjoyed, and consequently lacks all authority.

There is no middle ground; it is God's truth, or man's delusion.

"It is truly sad and absurd to array the faculties of the mind against each other, the consciousness of the superhuman against actual knowledge of Nature's laws." It is equally sad and foolish in the face of positive knowledge of sin and degradation and the universal desire for a purer and better state of existence to deny the existence of a Savior by whose merits we may be reconciled to God.

The fact of sin is patent whether we call it original, or by whatever name. It does not require an original sin in our first parents to condemn us since we have violated the laws of God ourselves and that we have I think none will deny even if God required at our hands obedience to no other laws than those of nature and our own being. It then, we are ever to be pure we must be purified; and if God be pure we must be, to enjoy his presence. The great questions then to be considered are these: Is God an intelligent being or a blind force? Are there any eternal principles of truth, justice and virtue, or are they merely human attributes which have no existence beyond the human mind?

These questions answered, the strife ceases; for if they have a separate existence, that existence is God. May they be answered speedily and may truth prevail?  
A. A. C.

—In this number of the STUDENT will be found the report of our ex-business manager, Mr. H. H. Wilson, which speaks in more glowing terms of his ability as business manager than we are able to do. When Mr. Wilson took charge of the finances of the STUDENT they were in a very poor condition. We were running behind each issue, but as soon as he took charge, the paper not only became self-supporting, but he has paid a part of the back indebtedness.