

*Theological anthropomorphism
is the parent of materialism*



Let us only love and worship humanity, and all will be well.

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In last month's *Nineteenth Century*,¹ the great English thinker and philosopher, Mr. Herbert Spencer, has contributed a remarkable article, "Religion: a Retrospect and a Prospect."² This contribution, which saps the very foundation of Christianity, breaks down the elaborate structure and sweeps away the *débris* of the ruin, is sure to be received by the intellectual portions of the so-called Christian Society admiringly, by the others — in guilty silence. As for its unintellectual and bigoted sections — since the statements given therein do not admit of even an attempt at successful refutation — by such the iconoclastic article will be complained of and deplored. But even the criticism of the latter will be tempered with caution and respect. We subjoin a paragraph from the article to show its general tenor:

The cruelty of a Fijian god who, represented as devouring the souls of the dead, may be supposed to inflict torture during the process, is small compared with the cruelty of a god who condemns men to tortures which are eternal; and the ascription of this cruelty, [172] though habitual in ecclesiastical formulas, occasionally occurring in sermons, and still sometimes pictorially illustrated, is becoming so intolerable to the better-natured, that while some theologians distinctly deny it, others quietly drop it out of their teachings. Clearly, this change cannot cease until the beliefs in hell and damnation disappear. Disappearance of them will be aided by an increasing repugnance to injustice.

¹ [British literary magazine founded in 1877 by James Knowles. It is regarded by historians as one of the most important and distinguished monthlies of serious thought in the last quarter of the nineteenth century.]

² [A lecture before the Broadway Tabernacle class, New York, 29th March 1884]

The visiting on Adam's descendants through hundreds of generations dreadful penalties

- For a small transgression which they did not commit;
- The damning of all men who do not avail themselves of an alleged mode of obtaining forgiveness, which most men have never heard of;¹
- And the effecting a reconciliation by sacrificing a son who was perfectly innocent, to satisfy the assumed necessity for a propitiatory victim;

— are modes of action which, ascribed to a human ruler, would call forth expressions of abhorrence; and the ascription of them to the Ultimate Cause of things, even now felt to be full of difficulties, must become impossible. So, too, must die out the belief that a Power present in innumerable worlds throughout infinite space, and who during millions of years of the Earth's earlier existence needed no honouring by its inhabitants, should be seized with a craving for praise; and having created mankind, should be angry with them if they do not perpetually tell him how great he is. As fast as men escape from that glamour of early impressions which prevents them from thinking, they will refuse to imply a trait of character which is the reverse of worshipful.²

These and other difficulties, some of which are often discussed but never disposed of, must force men hereafter to drop the higher anthropomorphic characters given to the First Cause, as they have long since dropped the lower. The conception which has been enlarging from the beginning must go on enlarging, until, by disappearance of its limits, it becomes a consciousness which transcends the forms of distinct thought, though it forever remains a consciousness.³

It would be interesting to watch the indignation and the outcry of some of our readers had the same thoughts been found embodied in *The Theosophist* under the name of an *Eastern* thinker. Yet, what have we ever allowed to appear in our magazine half so iconoclastic — “blasphemous” some may say — as this wholesale denunciation of the religion of the civilized portions of Humanity? And this leads us naturally and sadly to think at once, of PUBLIC OPINION — that dreaming and docile “she ass” when whipped by the hand of a favourite, that pitiless and remorseless “hyena” when suddenly awakened and lashed into [173] fury by the opposition of those who may, for some mysterious reason or another, be unpopular with her, because no doubt, they have no inclination to pander to the dotage of old “Mrs. Grundy.”⁴

¹ [Consult “The Origin of Good and Evil,” and “The Original Sin is a Jewish invention.” in our Black versus White Magic Series. — ED. PHIL.]

² [p. 7]

³ [p. 8]

⁴ [A figurative name for an extremely conventional or priggish person, a personification of the tyranny of conventional propriety. A tendency to be overly fearful of what the respectable might think is also referred to as Grundyism. Although she began life as a minor character in Thomas Morton's play *Speed the Plough* (1798), Mrs. Grundy was eventually so well established in the public imagination that Samuel Butler, in his novel *Erewhon*, could refer to her in the form of an anagram (as the goddess Ydgrun). As a figure of speech she can be found throughout European literature.]

It never rains but it pours. Elsewhere, and from another, though perhaps less elevated, platform, another celebrated opponent of the Christian scheme, Mr. F. Harrison, the Positivist, in an address to his fellow-thinkers at Newton Hall, recently sent a thunderbolt over the heads of the “Supernaturalists,” as he calls the Christians. He spoke of Christianity as eaten away to the core by superstition, as effete and worn out and destroyed root and branch by modern science, whilst the religion of Humanity was marching forward to replace it. As remarked by a paper:

His ideal is lofty. His confidence as to what may be done for the welfare of men is inspiring. He puts the supernatural aside as untrue and unnecessary. It is not necessary to resort to other agencies, he assures us, than the resources of man’s own nature. Let us only love and worship humanity, and all will be well.

Theosophy, too, advocates the development and the resources of MAN’S own nature as the grandest ideal we can strive for. There is another point in the extract from Mr. Herbert Spencer’s paper, which must not be passed by in silence. With regard to the First Cause, he says, it is

. . . consciousness which *transcends the forms* of distinct thought, though it forever remains a consciousness.

We may not adopt this language in its entirety, but it is perfectly plain to those who can read the signs of the times that a strong current has set in, in the Western world of thought, towards the much reviled Occult philosophy, which is, at present, largely incorporated only in the religions of the East — chiefly in the Advaita and Buddhist religious systems. Further results remain to be seen.



- “The Origin of Good and Evil”
- “The Original Sin is a Jewish invention”

— in our Black versus White Magic Series. — ED. PHIL.