

SCIENCE:

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JOHN MICHELS, Editor.

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SATURDAY, JANUARY 14, 1882.

We refer our readers to another column of this issue where a letter written by Professor George S. Morris, A. M., of the University of Michigan, and Lecturer in the Johns Hopkins University, may be found. This letter is a reply to an editorial in the *Popular Science Monthly* for January of this year, which repudiates the assertion that Herbert Spencer is an atheist, or that his writings have an atheistical tendency, the writer claiming for Spencer that the world is under an obligation to him for elevating man's conceptions of the character of the Deity, and that Spencer, so far from being an atheist, has contributed new and powerful arguments for the existence of an "Infinite and Eternal Spirit," and further that Spencer is ever bringing us to the underlying truth and therefore doing the highest religious work.

As a masterpiece of special pleading the article in the *Popular Science Monthly* to which we refer, will be read with interest, and if it were possible to reason or talk an Augean stable into cleanliness, the editor of the *Popular Science Monthly* might have succeeded in the task he had in hand. Professor Morris has torn off the hypocritical mask of divinity assumed by the editor of the *Popular Science Monthly* for Herbert Spencer, and exposed the real nature of his teachings. Had the editor of the *Popular Science Monthly* merely claimed some mitigating circumstances, or some underlying truths in Spencer's teachings which merited recognition, he might have succeeded in deceiving his readers, who he evidently believes are at the mercy of his sophistry, but to claim for Spencer, the position of a great religious teacher was proving too much, and gives a

ludicrous aspect to the whole discussion. As Shakespeare says:

'Tis too much prov'd,—that with devotion's visage
And pious action, we do sugar o'er
The devil himself.

Let us calmly examine what Herbert Spencer really teaches, and to those who desire to follow us, and have no time to wade through Spencer's voluminous works, we advise a perusal of Professor Morris's valuable work, "British Thought and Thinkers," published by S. C. Griggs & Co. of Chicago. We will now make a few quotations from this work, and as the author is a teacher of this subject in two of the leading Universities in the United States, he may be acceptable as an authority sufficient for our purpose.

What is the "Infinite and Eternal Spirit" which Spencer would have us accept as God? Spencer merely terms it "*the unknowable*," a something or a nothing, which "is absolutely beyond our knowledge." Whatever it may be "it does not come within the range of sensitive consciousness." In plain English this "*unknowable*" may be a God, a Devil, or it may be an ether, electricity or anything else. One thing is certain, that it is not spiritual and is devoid of intelligence.

All that relates to mind or matter is purely mechanical in Mr. Spencer's estimation. He contemplates man in common with the whole universe as the subject and scene only of purely mechanical, automatic, irresponsible and unreasoning processes, in fact the whole knowable universe is brought under the one category of mechanism.

Man is simply "sensitive flesh and blood alone," his very individuality denied, for Spencer says that "the reality of a belief in *self* admits of no justification." *Mind* is a mere bundle of phenomena of a mechanical nature, and *consciousness* simply "molecular oscillations and the transmission of motion in the nervous system," and as if to strike from man the last vestige of his humanity, *morality* is annihilated, for *good and evil* are measured by the amount of pleasure or pain which results. Thus the perfect man, like the perfect hog, is the one whose nervous organization is perfectly adapted to surrounding physical conditions, the man and the brute on one level, soulless and devoid of any spiritual nature.

Such is the Spencerian theology. Readers, picture to yourselves such a God, and man as we have described, and then knowing the real nature of his teachings, imagine Herbert Spencer elevated to the rank of a spiritual teacher who "is ever bringing us near to the underlying truth, and therefore doing the highest religious work," and the sickening hypocrisy of this whole business is apparent.

Well did the rugged philosopher Carlyle exclaim, "There is but one thing without honor; smitten with eternal barrenness; inability to do or be: Insincerity, Unbelief. He who believes *nothing*, who believes only the show of things, is not in relation with Nature and Fact at all."

Much more could and perhaps should be said on

this subject, but as we cannot spare eleven columns to editorial remarks, we will conclude by stating that a wrong is inflicted upon Science by those who suppose it is answerable for Mr. Spencer's debased views of God and man. In summing up Spencer's teachings Professor Morris exclaimed to the students of the Johns Hopkins University, "all this is gratuitous, extra-scientific absurdity, contradiction and dogmatism." Professor Morris does not stand alone in this opinion, and he has at least our hearty endorsement.

It is possible to believe strongly in the theory of evolution and accept every scientific fact that has ever been demonstrated, and yet receive no shock to a belief in a Divine Providence, while the accumulation of scientific facts in our opinion all tend to confirm such belief, and to demonstrate scientifically that an intelligent Creator has designed and pre-arranged the order of both matter and mind.

In conclusion, we desire to say decisively, that science is not answerable for the vagaries of Mr. Herbert Spencer, his editorial supporters, and others of the same class; his atheistical dogmas are neither founded on scientific investigations or in harmony with scientific discoveries. The mere fact that a scientific journal is made use of for proselyting such views even to the extent of attacking editorially, a President of a university who declined to use a recent work of Spencer's as a class-book, should not be considered evidence that scientific men, as a body, have any regard for the extreme views of Herbert Spencer. On the contrary, those engaged in real scientific work, do not care to interfere with their neighbor's religious opinions, much less do they desire to force atheistical views upon them.

Lastly, we say emphatically, that there is no real conflict between Science and Religion at this present day. Some persons appear to consider that they have a mission to stir up discord and contention between scientific men and their best friends, and the worst feelings are engendered by continued attacks against men holding any religious views who form nine-tenths of the population in all civilized countries.

What better evidence can be given for the correctness of the position we take than the fact, that a large number of our most esteemed scientific workers are men in holy orders. We could fill a page by the mere enumeration of their names. Dallinger, the biologist, who has carried off the highest scientific honors, is a Protestant Clergyman. In astronomy we have a Catholic priest who successfully investigates the mysteries of the heavenly bodies, for Secchi's name will always be classed among eminent astronomers. If there was any real conflict between science and religion, would these men have continued their investigations? Of course not. The conflict at this day is wholly imaginary, invented and kept alive for sensational purpose. If these men would cease their irritating interference, science would be welcomed in every home and be considered one of the most convincing evidences of a divine Providence, instead of being hated and dreaded, as not in harmony with any religious belief.

We do not deny that there are many who cling to religious dogmas which have been exploded by facts revealed by science. For such we have compassion, but we hold in far higher contempt the bigoted blustering fanatic who has no religious belief whatever.

Hume admitted that he dared not select his own confidential servant from such as held his own principles. We believe we are correct in saying that Professor Huxley, who holds views somewhat akin to Spencer, is careful in selecting a school for his children where the Bible is taught. These facts appear to show conclusively that these advanced thinkers considered that there was a possibility that they might be wrong, and that some discretion was necessary in teaching their atheistical views, at least in their own families.

We apprehend that similar prudence should be practiced by all who are directly or indirectly answerable for now *popularizing* views and principles which, if successfully propagated, will be destructive even to a simple belief in God, and aim to undermine society itself by denying the intrinsic value of morality.

Finally, we ask that science shall no longer bear the odium of atheism; that it be freed from this pernicious parasite, and that atheism being published in journals devoted to that subject, shall be supported only by its own devotees.

We trust the above remarks may not be interpreted as an attack on the "*Popular Science Monthly*" as a journal, or personally on the editors. The latter are gentlemen, honored and respected wherever science is known, and have been pioneers in the good work of introducing scientific knowledge into the homes of the people; their journal has always been conducted in a manner to defy criticism, and is an honor to the house which publishes it. The recent editorial was a bold demand for criticism on the policy of the journal teaching doctrines, which appear to lie outside of its province as a scientific journal. To this we have responded.

The root of the question at issue lies in the interpretations of the works of Herbert Spencer. We consider Professor Morris a safe guide in this matter, and a perusal of his letter will show that Spencer's writings have a dual character, they *partly* confirm the position taken by the "*Popular Science Monthly*," so far as showing Spencer believes in a "*something*," but are fatal to all the deductions drawn by the editors of that journal, and strictly in accord with the position we have reluctantly taken in this controversy.

NEW YORK ACADEMY OF SCIENCES.

Dec. 12, 1881.

SECTION OF GEOLOGY.

The President, Dr. J. S. NEWBERRY, in the Chair.

Forty one persons present.

Mr. N. L. BRITTON presented

"ADDITIONAL NOTES ON THE GEOLOGY OF STATEN ISLAND." *

Two wells have recently been sunk to a considerable depth on Staten Island, in the vicinity of Stapleton. One of these is on the property of Mr. J. J. Cisco, near the summit of the Serpentine hills; the section as given by the Superintendent of the Pierce Well-boring Co., who sank it, is as follows:

Glacial drift,	50 feet.
Soapstone,	150 feet.

* These notes are supplementary to the paper on this subject read by R. Britton on April 4, 1881. (Ann. N. Y. Ac. Sci., II, 161.)