

The Open Court

A MONTHLY MAGAZINE

Devoted to the Science of Religion, the Religion of Science, and the
Extension of the Religious Parliament Idea

Editor: DR. PAUL CARUS.
Assistant Editor: T. J. McCORMACK.

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VOL. XV. (NO. 5)

MAY, 1901.

NO. 540

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THE HOLY SAINT JOSAPHAT OF INDIA.

OR THE CHRISTIAN CANONISATION OF BUDDHA.

From a photograph of the image in the church of San Giosafat in Palermo.

Frontispiece to The Open Court.

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SCIENTIFIC FAITH.

BY THE HON. CHARLES CARROLL BONNEY.

TOLERANCE, not bigotry, is the fruit of Scientific Faith. Religious Science naturally culminates in a scientific expression of faith. The word faith as here used is intended to signify a settled conviction of the truth of certain ideas. The duration of this conviction is not material. It may be of long standing or of recent formation, but it is essential that it be controlling.

One of the first steps toward a rational arrangement of scientific ideas is a clear perception of the distinction between absolute and perfect truth and the view which may be obtained of it from a study of its manifestations in the subject involved. The mind should be taught to recognise the fact that the perfect truth exists independently of its ideas and remains the same whether those ideas be correct or erroneous. The mind is thus put in an attitude of diligent search to discover and embrace the truth, and is forewarned that errors will only harm themselves and not the truth.

The mind is so constituted that the pursuit and utilisation of knowledge is as natural to it as the acquisition and consumption of food. The spirit of inquiry into the existence and relations of all the objects which the mind finds in the world it inhabits is also as natural as the hunger and thirst for material sustenance.

The first great discovery which the mind makes in its search for accurate knowledge is the distinction between apparent and real truth. It soon begins to learn that "appearances are often deceiving," and that there are many things which "are not what they seem."

The mind is thus led to inquire into the verity of appearances before accepting them, and so begins the upbuilding of a scientific

system. The doubts it feels and the tests it applies are thus not in opposition to the truth but from a desire to ascertain the facts and be governed by them.

The mind soon makes another great and important discovery. It learns from experience and otherwise that its ideas of any object depend upon the correctness of its knowledge of that object, and thus if its knowledge be defective or erroneous its ideas will be unreliable and misleading. Thus a loyalty to the truth compels the mind to be constantly on the alert to discover and correct the errors into which it may fall.

By such discovery and correction and the pursuit of the new ideas to which the process leads, the progress of the world is wrought.

Thus in the language of the poet :

“ We build the ladder by which we rise,
From the lowly earth to the vaulted skies,
And mount to its summit round by round.”

While this process is going on in the mind, liberty of opinion and freedom of conscience become more and more sacred to the soul as the means by which it may seek and secure the richest blessings provided for it by the Creator.

In early life the mind is inclined to leap at once to conclusions, but as years advance it becomes more cautious and delays its judgment for investigation and reflexion.

The common stages to a conclusion are hearing, toleration investigation, and when these have been passed a mental reservation that the conclusion will be changed if the discovery of new facts should at any time require.

The reflecting mind realises more and more how very small is the domain of its absolute knowledge.

It discovers on examination that nearly all the ideas it holds owe something to information derived from others, in whose competency and fidelity it has confidence. The safeguard of this process is the Golden Rule. The mind accords to others merely the respect and credence which it asks for itself. Thus justice and sound judgment exercise a controlling influence in the upbuilding of the character.

It is a startling fact that the mind is so constituted that it can believe anything however absurd, or disbelieve anything however true. Of the truth of this statement any one may satisfy himself by observation and experiment, as well as by reference to the world's history from the earliest times. Unguided belief is like a

horse without a bridle, very likely to run away. It is therefore a matter of necessity that in the formation of beliefs, the mind be guided by common sense and sound judgment.

The basis of belief in any case is the entire body of ideas which the mind holds in relation to the subject involved. It accepts with credence what harmonises with those ideas and seems worthy of belief, and rejects whatever is inconsistent therewith.

As soon as the mind realises that its own ideas on any point depend upon the correctness of its knowledge relating to that point, and must be changed in case any error be discovered in the information on which it is rested, it ceases to be arrogant and dogmatic and holds itself ready to hear with kindness and patience an expression of a different view.

In the earlier stages of development the mind is likely to give an undue weight to creed formulas and doctrinal statements; but as wisdom comes with experience and reflexion the mind discovers that the meaning which it finds in credal forms is necessarily more or less affected by its own ideas and environment, and that this must necessarily be the case with every other adherent. Thus the mind perceives that there is a domain of personal liberty for every soul and that the most it can expect from others is a cordial sympathy and general agreement.

Thus he who holds a scientific faith on any subject, keeps himself in readiness to correct any error into which he may have fallen; and as willing to hear from others their ideas and convictions as he is ready to communicate his own so far as they are willing to receive them. This is the way to promote peace on earth and good will among men. Thus a Scientific Faith wears ever the white bloom of charity and tolerance without one thorn to mar its heavenly beauty.

The real significance of formal creeds is largely misunderstood. Almost any Declaration of Faith, for example the Apostles Creed, represents whole volumes of ideas in innumerable combinations, and as it is said that no two leaves in a forest are precisely alike, so it may be affirmed that among thousands of communicants no two can be found to whom the words of the creed have exactly the same meaning. For as was said to the Parliament of Religions, "each must see God with the eyes of his own soul," and the views of each believer will necessarily take on to some extent the hue of his own environment.

He looks through that environment as through a colored glass upon every object to which he directs his vision.

The most that can be expected from those who profess a common creed is a general agreement on the principal points involved. Always there must remain to every soul a little world in which it communes directly with the Creator, feeling that He at least understands its faith, its aspirations and its prayers.

Half the sectarian prejudices that have embittered the world have arisen from misinterpretations of Declarations of Faith by hostile critics. But he who has no love for a creed cannot discover its innermost meaning. Only the patient devotee can do that.

The command to "Judge Not" applies with peculiar force to the things of Religion. The apostles of every faith may freely declare the good tidings they have to offer that they have no commission to become assailants of other forms of faith.

The orderly process to a Scientific Faith is not difficult to understand and follow. The supreme condition of progress is loyalty to the truth; a love of the truth and a determination to obey it.

It is also steadfastly to be borne in mind that "spiritual things must be spiritually discerned."

Each faculty of the soul should diligently seek the things which it is created to enjoy and make useful. The musical faculty should seek the "harmony of sweet sounds;" the mathematical faculty, the mysterious charm of numbers; the religious faculty, the transcendent ideas that bind the soul to the Creator. The soul that thus lives and strives will develop in harmonious proportions, and will find itself sustained and soothed by the innumerable consolations of a Scientific Faith.