RELIGION AND DEMOCRACY.[1]

BY WILLIAM ALBERT NOYES.

AS our President expressed it, "America is joined with other nations in fighting *to make the world safe for democracy.*" A little more than fifty years ago our greatest statesman said that we were fighting in a not altogether dissimilar conflict in order that "government of the people, by the people, for the people shall not perish from the earth." Much as Lincoln hated slavery he saw in the Civil War issues of vastly greater importance than the question of freedom for the slaves.

Long before the conflict between autocracy and democracy led to this dreadful war humanity began an age-long contest between authority and freedom in matters of religious belief. The two contests have often been inextricably interwoven in the political history of the world. To-day the political and religious conflicts are largely separated, but the fundamental issues at the basis of each are so closely related that a clear philosophy in religious belief must help toward a true philosophy of government. This is, in part, my excuse for writing on a subject about which scientific men are either very reticent, or speak only among a selected group of men who are supposed to share beliefs very like their own.

In any field of knowledge we can understand the present only in the light of the past and at the risk of repeating things which are familiar to every one I wish to sketch briefly the development of religious beliefs in the world.

Primitive man was very much at the mercy of his environment. He was surrounded by hidden, mysterious forces which he could not understand. Under these conditions a belief became current that the objects of nature are peopled with a myriad of unseen spirits who live a life of their own and who often interfere, sometimes benevolently, sometimes malevolently, in human affairs. A natural sequence was the development of religious rites of various kinds designed to propitiate the unseen inhabitants of the invisible world. Among the people of the eastern shores of the Mediterranean, where our own religious beliefs had their origin, these rites had assumed the dreadful form of human sacrifice. Some four or

[1] The following paper was first delivered as an address before the Philosophical Club of the University of Illinois, December 8, 1917.

five thousand years ago a man by the name of Abraham conceived the idea that such sacrifices were not necessary and that an animal might take the place of the human victim. A later, uncritical age read back into the religious beliefs of Abraham the conceptions which came through many centuries of later development, but we have no good reason for thinking that he was so far in advance of his age. Knowledge of religious truth has come exactly as knowledge of other truth—by slow, gradual development guided by leaders who often grasp a single and always a partial truth—as this of Abraham's has proved to be.

Later, the descendants of Abraham made their way to Egypt, at first under favorable circumstances, but by a change of political relations they were brought into bondage. According to the tradition, which doubtless has a basis of truth, one of their children was brought up in a king's household and was instructed in all the secret knowledge of the priestly cult. It seems certain that he learned from the priests the notion of a single supreme Deity far above all others—a belief somewhat related to the belief in Zeus among the Greeks or in Jupiter among the Romans, but more closely allied to the monotheistic faith of later Judaism. This belief in Egypt was kept for the chosen few. There is some reason for thinking that Moses imparted the belief clearly only to the priests. In any case, the belief in many gods was prevalent among the Jews for centuries after this time. During these centuries, there grew up an elaborate ritual which was fostered by the priestly caste. There are some who would have us think that the priests were entirely selfish and hypocritical—that they continued the ritual because they were supported by the people in a position of authority and received for themselves a part of the sacrifices offered. There is some truth in this point of view—some truth, even in a similar view of the priests and pastors of the nineteenth century—but it is only a very partial and sordid truth. It was an uncritical age and each generation of priests accepted the beliefs handed down to them, and these beliefs grew by insensible accretions. They were the intellectual leaders of their time and they had some vague notion, at least, of that which we can see so clearly to-day—that they were keeping alive beliefs which, in spite of all the mixture of error and evil, have proved of vastly greater importance to the world than anything else that has come to us from their nation. Their God was still, practically, only a national god, more or less capricious and jealous of his rights, as were all the rulers of that day, intensely interested in the national life and supremacy of the Jews but quite oblivious of

the rights of other nations—a point of view which has not altogether disappeared from the world. But, with all that, there grew among the Jews, as nowhere else in the world, a belief in a "Power not ourselves that makes for righteousness"—a Power which is just to the poor and needy as well as to the rich and powerful and with which all must ally themselves, if they are not to be destroyed, —a thought almost identical with the scientific doctrine that an individual or a race must be in harmony with its environment if it is to survive.

After a short period of national glory, perhaps somewhat exaggerated in their own records, the Jews lost their independence, and many of them were carried away and scattered in other lands. After a time a few intensely religious men and women, who would not allow themselves to be absorbed among the other nations and who believed that their God could manifest his full power only at Jerusalem, returned to their old home. These fervent souls had sloughed off almost the last remnant of belief in other gods, and there was no longer any trouble from idolatry. So severe was their belief that sculpture was impossible among them. They still retained their ritual, but there appeared among them the prophets who could say with Micah, "What doth the Lord require of thee but to do justly, and to love mercy and to walk humbly with thy God?" Less than two centuries before the Christian era desperate attempts were made by their rulers to stamp out the Jewish faith. But the fierce, fanatical zeal of the Maccabees and others saved their faith and also some semblance of political life, until Jerusalem was destroyed by Titus. The history of the Maccabees is found in the Apocrypha, and it is a great pity that the makers of our canon robbed us of those books.

Nearly nineteen hundred years ago a young man, not yet thirty, gathered together in his mind the conceptions of a Supreme Power always present in the world, which had been growing among the Jews through centuries,—a Power sometimes severe in its justice, but also tender and kind as a Father. He felt himself to be in intimate personal relationship with this Power which pervades the universe. He said, "My Father and I are one"— and he considered it of supreme importance that every one should bring himself into intimate accord with this Power which dwells in the world and which he called God. He seems to have accepted without question the prevalent view of the supernatural origin of the so-called Mosaic law, and he conformed to the ordinary religious ritual of his time, but he saw more clearly than any one before him that such a Power

as he conceived was not interested in external forms. He said, "The Kingdom of God is within you." He pointed out that the fundamental purpose in one's life is of more importance than anything else. "Out of the heart are the issues of life." His practical test of accord with the Supreme Power was not in the performance of any ritual, or in any external forms which were supposed at that time to be essential in serving God, but in our relation to others. "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." He delighted in the paradox, "He that saveth his life shall lose it." He who puts first in his life acquisition will lose the very thing for which he seeks—happiness is not to be found in that way. "He that loseth his life for my sake and the Gospel's shall save it." He identified himself here with the Supreme Power of which he considered himself a part—he who strives with his whole soul to bring himself into accord with that Supreme Power by service to others, as that Power serves others, will attain to the only sort of life that is satisfying and worth while. He is greatest in the Kingdom of God. The greatest men of the world are not those who seek wealth or fame or advancement for themselves but those who have done great things for others.

He did not commend the life of the ascetic or recluse but said, "I am come that they may have life and may have it abundantly."

He was tempted at one time to try to form a temporal kingdom and bring back his people to their ancient glory. He may have seen that such a course was impossible of success, or he may have seen that it could not lead to the triumph of those ideas which were dearer to him than his life. In any case, he rejected that course of action.

It was inevitable that he should soon find himself in bitter opposition to the religious leaders of his nation and that he should denounce in unmeasured terms the false god whom they presented. to the people. Some one has said recently that he killed the Jewish god. But it was a part of his greatness that he accepted the terminology and in a large measure the thought of his time and built on what he found instead of tearing it down and endeavoring to start new.

After three short years of teaching there came the supreme test. Opposition became so bitter that if he continued to speak openly in Jerusalem he must face death at the hands of the Jews. He might, doubtless, have withdrawn to lead an obscure, quiet life among his friends in Galilee, but that would have meant defeat and failure in that which he had set himself to do. He had the insight to see

that if, instead of this, he should go forward to his death this culmination of his life would give a power to his teaching that could be secured in no other way. He believed most ardently in a future life, though the Jews of his time were far from agreed upon that question. This belief must, undoubtedly, have played an important part in his final decision. He carried his purpose through, though he found the way at the end exceedingly bitter and hard and almost his last words were, "My God, my God, why hast thou deserted me?" In the result, however, his death became the supreme illustration for all the world of his doctrine that he that loseth his life shall save it. Through his death his doctrines were given a vitality and life that they could have secured in no other way—and I think no one will question that his life has had a greater power in shaping the history of the world than that of any other man who has lived.

With the growth of knowledge the attitude of the world toward the supernatural has slowly changed. For some centuries there has been little definite belief in present-day miracles though there are sporadic tendencies to renaissance as at Lourdes and in Christian Science. The Protestant world has rejected the miracles recorded of Christian saints since the first century but retained a belief in the miracles recorded in the Bible. Most intelligent Protestants are quite ready now to say that the sun and moon did not stand still at the word of Joshua and that the whale did not swallow Jonah, but there are as yet few theologians who question openly the miracles of the New Testament. Many of these, however, maintain an attitude of silence about these miracles, and very few use the miracles as proof of doctrines contained in the Bible. The practical situation is that many still believe in the miracles, or in some of them, because of the truths about human life interwoven with the account. In the centuries following the Christian era a belief in the miracles was, undoubtedly, a very large factor in the spread of the Christian faith. To-day, the accounts of the miracles are much more a hindrance than a help. I do not wish to antagonize too strongly those earnest and honest men and women who hold different views and who believe that the Supreme Power dealt with the world, in times past, differently from the way in which it deals with it to-day. But I think all will agree that we cannot base a belief in Christianity on the miracles recorded in the Bible.

The evidence is very clear that Jesus did not rest his authority on any such foundation. When we remember that he lived at a time when a belief in the supernatural was well-nigh universal and that the records of his life were not written for thirty years or more

after his death, it is remarkable that we have, nevertheless, such a clear picture of his attitude toward this question. He said, "An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign but no sign shall be given it except that of Jonas the prophet." The reference is, of course, to the resurrection. I will not stop to discuss the fact that, in the light of the universal belief of Christians in the resurrection when it was written, the first part of the sentence has far greater significance than the last. Over and again, he told those who were healed that they should tell no one—an indication that his followers had a greater belief in his miraculous power than he himself had.

Not only did he reject the miraculous as the basis of his authority but he gave a positive basis which the world to-day is coming to see clearly must be the basis of all authority—the basis which makes the difference between an autocratic authority imposed from the outside and a genuine democratic authority which grows from within. "If any man will do my will he shall know of my doctrine whether I speak for myself or whether I speak the truth in accord with that Supreme Power which rules the world and of which I am a part."

The generation of Christians which followed the death of Jesus believed implicitly in his physical resurrection. Paul, who saw him only in a trance, or vision, which was not seen by his companions, held the belief just as firmly as any. The early development of Christianity certainly depended in considerable measure on this belief. The early Christians also believed in a speedy return of Jesus in physical form to establish a political kingdom in the world. Some passages in Paul's letters show that this doctrine of the second advent of Christ led some of the early Christians to neglect their daily work and he rebuked them sharply, saying that no man knew the hour when the Lord would come and that they were to live as though they expected him at any minute. A critical reading of the New Testament will make it clear to any one who is not blinded by preconceived notions about the inerrancy of the written word that the apostles were mistaken about the second coming, but the error has been revived over and over again through all the centuries since, and it has often produced the same baleful results as in the time of Paul.

Jesus seems to have accepted the ritual of the Jews so far as he believed that this came from the authority of Moses. He spoke to Jews and could not have secured a following if he had pursued any other course. But he taught his followers that the original teaching had been overlaid with traditions of men, and he made it

perfectly clear that a ritual or custom is to be followed, not because it is commanded but only because it is inherently right and of service to men. Thus he said, "The Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath." The Sabbath is to be observed, not because it was established by the authority of God, nor, in the spirit of the sacrifices, as a means of courting God's favor, but because it is useful in man's development—a usefulness which has increased rather than diminished. The complete change of the course of one's thought at regular intervals, once a week, is especially valuable to intellectual workers—and there is need, too, for time to think of our relationship to that Power "in which we live and move and have our being," and to consider our relations to our fellow men, which are so intimately associated with that relation.

Paul, the only well-educated man among the apostles, was commissioned by the Christians at Antioch to preach the Gospel among the Gentiles. It was through his efforts, chiefly, that Christianity made its way to Greece and Rome and from thence to the whole of Europe. His experience led him to break away almost completely from the old Jewish ritual. But new principles make their way slowly in the world and while Paul could say, "Prove all things, hold fast that which is good," the thought that authority must be imposed from without dies hard. Within a few centuries there grew up a new ritual. The Christian sacraments took the place of the Jewish forms. Baptism took the place of circumcision and was considered essential to salvation. It was supposed that Jesus by his death had appeased the wrath of God exactly as the old Jewish sacrifices had done and a new priestly caste grew up which arrogated to itself the right to mediate between God and man. This new order continued almost without question for more than a thousand years.

In the fourteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth centuries Wycliffe in England, Huss in Bohemia, Luther in Germany, and Calvin in Geneva revolted against the ecclesiasticism of their time, and, just as Jesus went back to Moses and the prophets to find the truth and stripped away the false beliefs which had become current in the teaching of the priests, these new prophets went back to the Bible to find those great fundamental truths which had been covered over with errors grown strong through the accretions of thirteen centuries. Some of these accretions were derived from the Greek and Roman mythology and mysticism, though some truth came from these sources, too. But the world of that time could not yet grasp the idea that truth in religious matters is discovered by exactly the same sort of process that is used in discovering any other kind of

truth. So Wycliffe and Huss and Luther and Calvin felt the necessity of a supernatural authority to take the place of the authority of the Church. They put the Bible in this place, and the world of to-day is only slowly freeing itself from this great error. They were curiously blind to the fact that the books were written by fallible men, that the canon was established and many books were rejected and others included by a fallible Council of the Church against which they were revolting and that the books contain many errors which are evident to any critical reader.

Throughout the centuries a large part of the emphasis of Christian teaching has been laid upon the doctrine of a future life, the conduct of the present life being important chiefly in its relation to immortality. Calvin, in this connection, developed a more logical and consistent theology than any of the others. One of his doctrines was that the omnipotence and omniscience of God implies that certain persons have been chosen from all eternity to be saved and certain others to be damned. If this is accepted, there seems to be no escape from the conclusion that the individual is powerless to alter the eternal decree.

This doctrine has to-day a strange renaissance. Modern science has shown that there is a most intimate connection between the phenomena of life and the laws of matter and energy which dominate inanimate nature. Physical and chemical changes within living bodies are, so far as we can discover, exactly like the physical and chemical changes that we study in the laboratory, and there is no evidence generally accepted by scientific men that consciousness can exist without some physical organism. The study of physical phenomena has led to the conclusion that if we have enough knowledge completely to describe any isolated physical system at the present moment we can predict what its condition will be at any future time. In other words, we believe in an absolute uniformity of sequence in the phenomena of nature. Applying these principles, the mechanistic philosophy of the present day claims that every human being is, in all of his thoughts and relations, merely the resultant of physical forces which have been in operation for countless ages and which will continue to act long after he is dead. The thought of any personality or purpose within the human soul which can alter this inexorable sequence of physical phenomena is repugnant to such a philosophy. This is a fatalism worse than that of the Turk, a Calvinism without even a divine purpose behind it.

On the physical side the mechanists have made out a strong

case, but, to me, they have disregarded two very essential factors in our knowledge of the question.

The beginning of new life has never been observed in the world in spite of the most strenuous efforts to discover it. A negative of this sort can never be proved, but so long as it stands it must be considered as a serious flaw in the mechanistic philosophy.

The other factor is more positive. We are often conscious of weighing in our minds the reasons for some course of action, and in the end we choose deliberately, perhaps something which ministers to our immediate personal gratification, perhaps something which will find its fruition years hence in some good which will accrue to ourselves or to some one else. So far as our own consciousness goes, it seems to us that we might have chosen differently and we instinctively treat all our fellow men on this basis. It is well for us to remember that all of our knowledge of the external world comes through consciousness and that the testimony of our consciousness on this point is as valid as upon any other.

If our consciousness deceives us, we are the helpless victims of an inexorable sequence of physical forces.

Toward the close of the eighteenth century there came in France a revolt against an intolerable political system under which the most fundamental human rights had been denied to the masses of the people. The revolt was, in part, a sequence of our own American Revolution. In some of its phases it was a revolt against the corrupt ecclesiasticism of France, as well as against the government. Reason was enthroned as the God of the world, a ten-day period was substituted for the week and the metric system of weights and measures took the place of the chaos of systems and no-system previously in vogue on the Continent. The revolt against the religious systems of the time spread far beyond the confines of France, and atheism became rampant among the scholars of the world. In 1800 scarcely a single church member was to be found among the students of Yale college, and ardent admirers of Tom Paine were to be found everywhere.

During the nineteenth century the rapidly growing knowledge of the universe in which we live and the control of the forces of nature which came with this knowledge gave men a completely changed relation to their environment. A knowledge of the geological history of the earth dispelled forever the notion of a six-day creation. The discovery of the permanence and indestructibility of energy and matter has given us the notion of an inexorable order and sequence in the phenomena of the physical universe outside of

ourselves, to which we must conform if we are not to be destroyed. A knowledge of bacteriology, of vaccination, and of antitoxins has made it possible to control epidemics which a century ago were considered by many as mysterious visitations of Providence. A study of early records has made it very certain that the cosmogony of the Hebrew Bible grew from myths and legends handed down through many centuries, and a knowledge of the processes of evolution has made it quite certain that there are genetic relationships between different kinds of living beings and that man himself is no exception.

Those who think that there must be some absolute authority in matters of religion often take great pleasure in pointing out that our scientific knowledge is fragmentary and imperfect and that theories once universally accepted have been discarded or greatly modified. Such persons fail completely in understanding the basis on which our scientific knowledge rests. Any scientific truth which is to receive continued acceptance must rest, not on the authority of some leader of science, but on a clearly understood relation between the truth and the phenomena of nature on which it depends. No opinion is so venerable or so buttressed by authority that it must not be subjected over and over again to the test of agreement with the facts which we find in the world about us. A man who is imbued with the genuine scientific spirit is not troubled by differences of opinion among his colleagues. A completed, perfect truth has little charm for him. His interest is in that growing, changing truth which approximates more and more closely to that ultimate reality which he knows is in the universe about him but to a complete knowledge of which he can never attain. And he knows that the truth of the present — always a relative and partial truth — has grown through the interaction of many different minds and must continue to grow in the same way. It does not follow from this that there is no authority in science—there is a great and very effective authority, but it is not the authority of the individual. It is the authority which comes from a consensus of opinion among scientific men. That authority may be shaken at any time by one who can bring forward new truth which compels belief. But we know perfectly well that the truth of the present has been inherited in large measure from the work of many generations of seekers after the truth and the man who attempts to controvert old and well-established opinions without first acquainting himself fully with the basis on which those opinions rest will be heard with scant courtesy. But the genuine, earnest seeker for truth, who knows

the truth of the present, and builds upon it, will always find a hearing.

These principles of democratic freedom, which rule in the scientific world, have made way very slowly in the domain of religious truth, and a failure to recognize them in the political field has plunged the world into the most destructive war it has ever seen. We no longer burn men at the stake in an attempt to suppress errors in religious belief, but many of the ecclesiastical forces of the world still claim a mystical, supernatural authority in support of their systems. In spite of this philosophy, which seems to me so mistaken, religious truth has grown in the world exactly as other truth has grown, and a democratic freedom of belief and of discussion is making rapid headway. And the advance grows chiefly within our churches and religious organizations. Just as it would be hopeless to try to reform errors of scientific thought from without, so the man who holds himself aloof from the organized religious truth of the world and who is unwilling, first of all, to gain a sympathetic understanding of the truth which has come down to us through many generations of earnest, honest men and women, cannot hope to have much effect upon the development of religious belief. And religious belief is so vital in its relation to the progress of the world that the thoughtful men of our day have no right to shirk their duty to have a part in its growth.

In the political field, one of the strongest governments in the world still clings to the belief that its right to rule rests on a supernatural authority imposed from above. We might be content to allow this belief to stand the test of experience, confident that the truth will ultimately be found, had not this powerful nation coupled with its belief in the divine right of its ruler a belief in Darwin's doctrine of the survival of the fittest, which it has perverted to a belief in the right of the fittest to destroy—sublimely unconscious of the egotism which would claim that any system of government contains all that is best in political organization. Ignorant, too, of the fact that truth in the political world is best found by the free growth of many different systems side by side and the interaction of these upon each other. The last century has brought the whole world into the most intimate relationships, and if the human race is not to destroy itself we must live together in the future as a great family of nations. There are two ideals for such a life. One would make the strongest and best government in the world dominate all of the rest, contributing benevolently, perhaps, to the development of the other nations and races but shaping them after its

own ideals until the whole world is organized in accordance with a single pattern. The other ideal is that each nation shall be permitted to develop in its own fashion so long as it does not interfere with others and so long as it guarantees to its own citizens the fundamental rights of liberty and the pursuit of happiness. The first ideal seems to carry with it great hope for the advancement of backward peoples, but we may be sure that it would be followed, sooner or later, by a period of stagnation and death, just as the autocratic rule of the Christian Church contributed largely to the intellectual barrenness of the Middle Ages. Progress by the democratic method may seem slow at times, but in that method alone lies the hope of the future.

As the world has changed and is changing from autocracy to democracy in political government, a profound change has come in our concepts of God and of revelation—a change which is, consciously or unconsciously, accepted by our best religious leaders, but which has seldom been clearly expressed.

The writers of the Old and New Testaments knew only autocratic governments. To them God was outside of his world ruling over it benevolently and interfering with its affairs for the promotion of righteousness. This concept has been replaced by the thought of an inflexible, unchanging orderliness which it seems impossible to conceive without an Intelligence behind it, but which is never changed by something outside of the universe.

Science may accept the thought of a God who is imminent in the universe and coextensive with it, but cannot well accept a God who is outside of his world. In considering the personality of such a being we meet the same difficulties which have been discussed in connection with the mechanistic theory and for these difficulties the answer seems to be similar.

The change in our view of revelation is no less important. The old idea was that of an authoritative revelation imparted to a few individuals. The growing belief is in a slow discovery of the order which exists in the moral and spiritual as well as in the physical universe—discoveries first made by individuals in a manner which suggests the older idea of revelation, but which rest for their authority, not on the fact of revelation, but on their agreement with the reason and experience of the world.

Some persons who have given up for themselves the thought that there is an absolute authority in religion consider that it is not safe to preach the doctrine that our knowledge of religious truth rests on the same basis as our knowledge of scientific truth, to chil-

dren and to the masses of the people. Without the *ipse dixit* of a supernatural authority, the people are not to be trusted and are liable to go off into all sorts of vagaries of belief and of conduct. This is, perhaps, the last and most insidious refuge of a dying autocracy. It is worth while here to recall one of Lincoln's remarks, "You can fool some of the people all of the time, and you can fool all of the people some of the time, but you cannot fool all of the people all of the time." We cannot, if we would, conceal the truth which is growing in the world and we may take as our motto the words of our greatest Leader, "The truth shall make you free."

ANATOLE FRANCE—A POSTSCRIPT.[1]

BY LEWIS PIAGET SHANKS.

"WE do not remain one moment the same, and yet we never become different from what we are,"[2] said Anatole France at thirty. But what is the stable element in this restless soul? Is it the poet or the naturalistic novelist, the dilettante or the patient historian, the mystic or the rabid anticlerical, the amiable skeptic or the bitter polemic, the cynical satirist or the reformer, the scoffer at men or the humanitarian and builder of a new Utopia? What is constant in this kaleidoscope of phases or moods?

Halt your kaleidoscope at any figure, and take it apart. Some of the colors are covered up by others, but underneath lie all the elements of every pattern. Take Anatole France in any of his phases, and one finds, balanced or conflicting or dominated one by the other, his two basic elements: an imagination essentially romantic and a Voltairian keenness of analysis. And under all their changes of pattern plays the same motive force, the same instrument, the *sensibilité nerveuse* which he early noted in Racine: in other words the artist's temperament, vibrant and sensuous, richly responsive but a shade too delicately poised—a nature which after its first contact with life, is bound to turn away from its ugliness to that softer reflection of reality given by literature and art.

"There are times when everything surprises me, times when the simplest things give me the thrill of a mystery,"[3] he writes at

[1] In the following we give the last chapter of the book on Anatole France which we announced in our September number, and which will soon be ready for publication. The author, Professor Shanks, is now teaching in the University of Wisconsin.

[2] *Génie latin*, p. 309.

[3] *Livre de mon ami*, p. 4.