

## PERCHANCE.

BY AMOS B. BISHOP.

SEDUCED by solitude and a far horizon I am tempted to emulate the courage at least of Montaigne—he who dared to be on occasion irrelevant and casual and short—and rove in the company of some ideas which, however old in essence, are fascinatingly new to me. Isolation can invite great guests to the mind, and it has been one of my surprises in a virgin land to find it preoccupying me with the gods.

The reason for it begins with the perception of the change in scale here between man and nature. Country long familiar with human presence is, as well as the city, man's handiwork. Nature is benedictory, or now and again obtrudes a cataclysm. But on the whole it has the effect of acknowledging a master. In the wilds this is reversed. Storm-distorted trees, creeping shadows; even the marching clouds, are instinct with a drama quite their own. Countless miles of forest utter a voice deep and steady as that of the sea. It is nature's realm. Her presence becomes almost visible. It threatens in the storm winds, it smiles in the afterglow that sets the earliest stars; and in the still white nights. The most sophisticated man, in the retirement of virgin woods and lonely waters, does not escape the realization of a great presence abroad. Primitive, childlike men did more. They feared it, again they loved it. They deified it: and the gods were born.

The future fortunes of the gods are particularly engaging at a moment like the present when religion has the effect of being in one of its periods of abeyance. Each race and every age has seen the gods withdraw as sophistication took the stage, to return when feeling surged up again to command. Religion, however, returns with a difference; just as the sophistication that exiles it assumes never twice the same guise. It is even very long since the gods became a euphemistic phrase. Religion to moderns means a God:

although it is easy, by personifying attributes, to fill a pantheon; and certain creeds of the moment analyze to the secularist into polytheism. However, it is monotheism alone that is acknowledged to-day. To the gayety, the variety, the irresponsibility of the gods succeeds a God; single, grave, responsible, and perfect. With him religion stands or falls.

What can make him fall? What is now religion's chief foe, sophistication's latest avatar?

It is the fashion to instance science: and in the name of truth science has smiled austere at the title. Science does analyze cosmos into mechanism; and permeates thinking with an exactitude that eliminates much of the material on which religious cults thrive. But science rather passes by on the other side than charges into religion. It finds religion not germane to its inquiry. It leaves room behind the mechanical frame for a cause which shall be intelligent, responsible, or anything else. "Atoms, space, and law" do not of necessity tell the whole story. Science inherently declines to speak about more than these. It is for ethics to ask, Is there a God? For ethics approaches cosmos with a differing analysis. Its concern is to discover the nature of the order of the world: if it is moral, if evil and suffering "bear the high mission of the flail and fan," if cause and effect regard quality. Obviously it is a moral order alone that can rationalize a God. If the order of the world discovers itself not to be moral, not to regard quality, a single cause,—intelligent and responsible—does not fill the measure of a God. Several causes dividing responsibility in the old fashion of Olympus can retain divine virtue by their loss of divine power. One or several causes frankly disclaiming divinity, acknowledging imperfection, make conceivable primal agents. In more definite phrase, if the order of the world is not moral, monotheism disappears from possible concepts, polytheism and pluralism are ethically tenable. But Olympus is no more, and pluralism is not religious. Monotheism holds the scene.

Is then the order of the world moral? The test is to bring together descriptions of a moral order and of the actual scheme.

A moral order is one where cause and effect are qualitative. The most highly organized is the most precious. Wealth of consciousness conserves. Suffering brings ultimate benefit. Imperfection and struggle justify themselves. Quality is the selective principle on which creation moves.

Is this a description of the actual scene? A different situation stares from history and from every day. The child injured before

birth or born to be dwarfed, maimed, brutalized through no fault of its own and to its own permanent loss: the power of accident to cut off the most costly and potent life: "the distracted industry of nature" in a reproduction unequal to providing for its own: are facts apparently eternal and facts irreducible to good. They disclose an element of brute injustice in the scheme that no amount of analysis removes. Analysis discovers its source in the ascendancy of the mechanical categories. One physical reaction perforce starts another without regard to the conscious phenomena involved. A great machine grinds on, indifferent to the phenomena of consciousness. Consciousness can elude it, can manage it now and again: but fitfully; not fundamentally. It is physical reaction that is in command, consciousness that protests with less or greater success. The child can be ruined because it lacks the mechanical reaction to resist the mechanical attack. Reactions of the sexual organs create the immense human potential as carelessly as they create the brute. Satisfaction of physical needs is competent to start down the ages a stream of human woe; while an instant's mistake in a drug, in a calculation, can destroy a genius. This amazing incommensurateness between cause and effect displays the difference in the plans on which consciousness and the machine work. Value to the one is not value to the other; and the machine is able to make its standard of value, success in physical reaction, prevail. "It is doubtless more polite to deny God's existence than to accuse him of this." Because of it the place at the beginning of things that science leaves vacant, ethics leaves vacant too. Science declines to posit a cause, ethical perception irrationalizes a God. The scheme of things affirms itself innocent of intention. If it is not moral, neither is it immoral. It is simply unmoral.

As ethics discovers this, religion of to-day finds its chief foe to be of its own household. Ethics arises from its position of servitude, and assumes to be the critic of its patron: with a measure of success that casts religion back on purely emotional supports, thus bringing into view a further agent for analyzing cosmos.

Science and ethics are concerned wholly with the same material, the world yielded by observation and subject to ratiocinative proof. Neither of them transcends demonstration. Both are limited to the theatre of reason. With emotion it is a different story. Emotion's subject matter is needs and their fulfilment. Prove to emotion that humanity needs a God, and it will lay every mental resource under tribute to the utmost, to provide that God. And nothing is more easy than to prove such a need. The possession of a God assures

to the hard-pressed human soul an infinite background of help, of knowledge, of tenderness, that makes it strong to go forward and to endure. Before a God the spirit of man sinks humbly down into the blessedness of self-surrender; and gains a trust transcending accident. As a methodological device for securing happiness religion has no peer.

But through this very need for a God emotion realizes that the world does not rationalize a God. It therefore makes bold to supply beyond the grave a world which shall correct the scheme of this. Heaven posits compensation for the ignoring of quality on earth. It erects appreciation over against the power of physical reaction. In so doing it bestows divinity on a first cause, who after all, has done things well. Viewed at this its summit, religion has traveled a long way from its origin. A mere cry to the void at length attains a fulness of content which presents from the emotional point of departure a logical completeness fairly magnificent. This completeness amounts, indeed, to a reproach. For while the believer finds it too magnificent not to be true, the observer accustomed to disillusionment in the character of truth finds it too magnificent to be true. There is a great gulf fixed. Emotion's analysis of cosmos does not move on the plane used by science and ethics. Its supplementary world transcends their demonstration and eludes their proof. In the absence of an oracle to deny that both planes are real an intellectual cleavage on the subject is likely to persist. The seeker after symmetry in the universe will find religion by assuming the supplementary world; and the observer intent on exact thinking lose religion by eschewing that assumption.

Something of the same sort happens in relation to the quality of ultimate truth. There is apparently no evidence, for truth refuses to be run down. Facts of to-day are probably hypotheses of to-morrow. Surds stare from analyses on every hand. Always not quite is truth's irrefragable motto.

In such case philosophic opinion decides itself largely by temperament. Some observers see the finer sides of consciousness in such high relief that the truth back of a world merely illumined by them seems perforce very good. Others are attracted to the ascendancy of the mechanical categories, the unmoral working of the machine; and they gain the obsession that the root of things is a blankly gazing sphinx before which man and all his works fall to pieces like the angel in Thompson's magnificent picture.

There is a very practical bearing to the dissonance of view, and the lack of support of either position by evidence. If any hypoth-

esis as to the quality of ultimate truth is as tenable as any other: if, were the mists to dissolve before its face, truth is as likely to appear ugly or indifferent, as good; it is only the child who craves truth in its nakedness. Adjurations in high places to seek ultimate truth, to accept truth and truth only, might as well say, What children are here. For maturity should know enough to lay its emphasis on stabilities that prove themselves good. Love, for instance. Not the physical affair that serves to people the world. But love that cherishes another spirit beyond its own; love that comforts and companions in a world potentially hard and lonely. Further, there is honor; which gives the high pleasure of straightening the soul erect to a losing duty: and sacrifice, through which lies the way of freedom. These things, lovely and sure beyond dispute, deserve the attention of the average man more than the search for a truth which is possibly like the Prophet of Khorassan, too repellent to raise its veil. Strong daring makes the desirable equipment for explorers in philosophic seas. By which token, most minds are better at home.