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THROUGH IRRELIGION TO TRUE MORALITY.

BY CORVINUS.

IT IS WITH no little degree of hesitancy that I undertake to analyse the replication with which the able editor of *The Open Court* has honored me, in a recent issue of his valuable hebdomadal, in answer to my attempt to prove the futility of sacrificing one's best forces in the work of bringing about a conciliation between religion and science; between religion as a belief in the arbitrary interference in human affairs of capricious, supernatural forces and science as systematised knowledge—such knowledge as we are enabled to acquire through unbiassed investigation of the problem of existence, of the why and wherefore of life in its different forms; in short the knowledge acquired through experience and observation, which to make we are impelled by an inherent desire to discover the truth. I hesitated to reply because I realise the fact that the readers of this paper are more or less indifferent as to the words a writer may give preference to in expressing his thoughts. As a rule, not words but the ideas one tries to convey to others receive consideration; nevertheless, I am constrained to maintain that, where possible, ambiguity, which with Dr. Carus may be unintentional, should be avoided in the discussion of questions raised for the purpose of furthering the propagation of the advanced thoughts originating in the minds of talented, noble men.

But, in picking up the gauntlet thrown in front of me by Dr. Carus, I am led by a reason outweighing the objection raised above to writing these lines: it is the desire to imitate—as I have been in the habit of doing—the example of Hunyady's great son, to deal justly with everybody, asking in return nothing else but that the same measure should be made use of in commenting upon my actions, or the views I hold in regard to the world-moving questions agitating, in this turbulent age of ours, the mind of the thinking public.

Weighty grounds have aroused in me the suspicion that Dr. Carus merely glanced over the lines of my essay, which Mr. Green was kind enough to publish in pamphlet form, otherwise he could not have failed to detect the fact that I speak with deference not only of his ability as a writer but also of the noble ideals

worshipped by him; and that my attack is mainly directed against the form, or manner, in which he presents his ideas to the public. While it is true that I differ from him on many important points—here I only mention the views he holds about the Gospels and Christ—I openly admit that I support many of the suggestions he has to make as to the purification of the religious conceptions to which the great mass of believing humanity adhere with a tenacity only justified by ignorance and force of habit.

Dr. Carus accuses me of identifying “the negativism of my peculiar freethought with science.” I challenge him to quote one sentence from the lines of my essay which would exclude every doubt as to the correctness of his assertion. If, what he claims were true, I am of the opinion that Dr. Carus lowered himself; that he has stained his honor, as a scientist and thinker of repute, in wasting his time upon the consideration of diverse propositions advanced by one so ignorant as to identify the negativism of his or any freethought—or for that matter freethought itself—with science.

Fortunately—or unfortunately—for him he cannot verify his assertion. In contrasting science with religion I even accepted and quoted his definition of science. But what I said is that “systematised knowledge, and religion—that sanctifies the absurd—are irreconcilable. If religion is being identified with the ethical nature of man, with his aspiration to find the truth by the most reliable and truly scientific methods then no conflict exists between religion and science,” because such a religion *is* science, and what I contend for is that it should be called by its proper name.

I am also accused by Dr. Carus of misrepresenting him. I can assure him that I have with scrupulous care avoided misrepresentations. To misrepresent proves prejudice, and if there is anything that I have always scrupulously guarded against, it was the betrayal of thoughtless prejudice. In order to control that tendency that only too often—as is quite natural—urges men of mature convictions to regard with decided suspicion the opinions, consequently the just claims also, of their opponents, I never fail to recall to my memory, when taking part in the discussion of important matters, that prejudice—implying onesided-

ness and proving mental weakness in a certain measure or certain direction—can be productive of very little good, as it impairs clear vision, hence the establishment of unassailable truth. Having thus learned to move with caution, though with a firm step, in the arena of intellectual combats,—to which I may perchance, once in a great while, gain access,—I have succeeded in strengthening the tie of friendship and mutual respect that binds me to that little circle of my society, where—I regret to say—the belief in preposterous church tenets still prevails.

If the following instance—a similar one to those commented upon by me in the *Freethought Magazine*—which could be multiplied, and which I mention in support of my assertion and as an illustration of Dr. Carus's inclination to ambiguity, deserves to be called a misrepresentation I am willing to plead guilty to the charge of having, on former occasions, also, misrepresented statements made by him: "The religion of science is not and cannot be the Christianity of those who call themselves orthodox Christians, but it is and will remain the Christianity of Christ."¹ Contrast this sentence with the following: "Christianity is falling to pieces, but the *religio-ethical ideas of humanity*² will not be destroyed with it; on the contrary, they must be shaped anew upon the basis of a scientific world-conception."³

Is the religion of science the Christianity of Christ? Is it the true Christianity that Dr. Carus preaches? I deny both; noticing with great satisfaction that he unconsciously supports this denial in admitting that the religio-ethical ideas of *humanity* will not be destroyed though Christianity may fall to pieces, and that these ideas were not the exclusive property of Christianity but only part of the religious belief known by that name.

I have quoted the above phrases only for the purpose of showing that Dr. Carus cannot possibly avoid inconsistency in using so many old words in a new sense, because at times, for the sake of conciseness and clearness, he is led, unconsciously, as it were, to use certain terms in the same sense that they are used by the masses. This I call ambiguity.

The symbols of a creed can be transfigured into exact truth without reverting to terms implying ambiguity. Dr. Carus wishes to show the dogmatic believer a way out of his narrowness. Can he do it by using ambiguous terms? I say, no! Because the dogmatic believer will interpret such terms to suit his fancy, whereby nothing is gained; and with the radical reformer it creates discontent, owing to the slow progress freethought, or, let me say, modern thoughts

necessarily make when their exponents use obscure language.

No doubt exists in my mind that the inclination of some modern reformers to cloak such terms as Christianity, God, religion, soul, in new garments, impedes the intellectual and moral progress of the masses, rather than advances it. This being the case, I can see no earthly reason—prejudice does not come in question at all; I am only impelled by the desire to see humanity throw off its mental shackles and to use without timidity and constraint that greatest of nature's gifts that sets man so high above the animal—to dish up to the people Christianity, that is, a religious belief which recognises in Christ its founder, its perfect teacher, and the divine Saviour of mankind, as modern views of ethics; religion, that has at all times been identified with submission to supernatural forces, with belief in teachings owing their origin to ignorance and caprice, rather than to scientific investigation and observation, as man's noble aspirations and ethical nature; God, who has always been an anthropomorphic conception; and soul, that was considered an individual, self-conscious entity by all—but few such men as Dr. Carus, who agreed in the opinion that the terminology of the masses, as to these terms, is mere rubbish—as the laws of nature, as reason; and as the habits, convictions, and ideas of mankind. To do this is, to say the least, misleading and therefore impractical.

Regarding the mysteries of traditional religions, I would say that I frequently point out myself the beauties of mythological fables to others, but I am not in the habit of practising self-deception in order to gain the favor of the thoughtless masses through arbitrary, high-sounding, seemingly learned interpretations of absurdities rendered sacred, with the good Christian, through tradition; or with a view of reconciling these absurdities—with which my brain also was infected in its early stages of development—with common sense and reason, through allegorical expositions, in order thus to save my reputation as a thinker and—as a pious person.

The beauty of many Christian fables consists in nothing else but their acceptance as beautiful fables upon questionable authority. As an instance, I only mention the grotesque idea that an infinitely wise and perfect God should run through all phases of embryological evolution, be born as an infant, nursed as such, and, when grown up to manhood, commit suicide. No matter how we may interpret this fable, and try to draw elevating thoughts from such interpretations, the fact remains that a truly noble mind, unshackled from degrading superstition, turns with contempt upon the mere assumption that a perfect Being should select such means to reveal its presence and save hu-

¹ *The Open Court*, No. 303, p. 3700.

² Italics are mine.

³ *Milwaukee Freidenker*, No. 816

manity from everlasting perdition. Apprehended as mere allegory, the value of this fable can hardly be said to equal that of others, owing to the fact that it mars the picture conceived by noble minds of the Most High.

“Morality,” Dr. Carus claims, “without religion—religion in the highest sense—would have simply been fear of the police, and nothing more.” I do not deny that this may have been the case and is still the case with many, but we have entered a phase of ethical evolution where we are justified in asking the question: “When will men learn to see that the sources of the noblest and most elevated actions of which we are capable have nothing to do with the ideas we may hold about God, about life after death, and about the realm of spirits?” I most emphatically assert that true morality can exist without religion and without police supervision.

The *raison d'être* plays no part in the moral life of those who know the nature of true morality; of a morality that bows to no master and no ruler; of a morality that asks no questions as to the purpose, the why and wherefore of exerting itself, but that draws pleasure simply from the knowledge of its existence and its self-love.

I am an atheist; I believe in no God, no heaven and hell. I do not believe in Christ, though I accept many of the moral teachings that Christ, in common with others, supported. Still, I try to lead a moral life, to practise virtue, in short, to be good. Why? What purpose have I in view in doing this? Thus asks the religious man; the believer in a future life in the immediate presence of God, proving thus his utter incapability of understanding the nature of true morality. I have no purpose in leading a moral life; I simply love to do it. I love kindness, charity, honesty, justice, self-respect. I find satisfaction and happiness in the consciousness of loving and practising these virtues. To commit some low act is repulsive to my nature; my sentiments revolt against vice in every form, and—far from being perfect, as a human being—if, in a weak moment my animal desires—which I, in common with the rest of humanity, have inherited from my more animal-like predecessors—supervene, when I commit an act regarded by the society I live in as an offence against the moral law, I am blamed for it by my conscience, the moral governor living in me, as the offspring of my education and self-training.

Mind you, I deny God! I ridicule the idea that a heavenly voice speaks from within when I shrink back from doing wrong. This statement I make to meet the objection—childish, as it would be—that God, whom I deny, whom I chase away from my presence, with whom I have no desire whatever to

commune, is bent on pitching his tent in my bosom, and on guiding me along the path of virtue. I repel him, I don't want him; still I feel the desire of leading a moral life; without any definite purpose, without any definite aim; without fear of eternal punishment; without hope of a future reward; without speculating on the result of my actions, and without considering the beneficial influence my exemplary life may have upon others; simply because I love to lead a moral life.

Love for morality is with me the sole motive for practising it. The hope thus to gain the respect and admiration of my fellowmen, and to see my associates imitate me gives me pleasure and fills my heart with joy; but this pleasure, this joy is only, as it were, the delicious juice of a rare fruit, of which I become conscious after it touches the palate. And I claim, without fear of successful contradiction, that such morality that does not ponder the reason why it exerts itself and the purpose of its existence, is so far superior to that of our professional Christian preachers of morality, as the intelligence of a Darwin is superior to that of a Bushman.

As an outspoken atheist I am ostracised by so-called respectable society; I am regarded as an outcast, as a depraved creature, by ministers and priests, by hypocrites and sincere believers alike; by them that claim that virtue without a reward loses all its charm, and that devotion to such virtue becomes unreasonable—an amiable but quixotic weakness.

I seize this occasion to tell you, mentally near-sighted banner-bearers of the Galilean dreamer's numerous flock, that I look with pity upon you, as well as upon your thoughtless followers; that it grieves me to notice your utter incapability of comprehending what true morality is; and that I rejoice in the knowledge that you stand beneath me, beneath the pariah of society. You deny the possibility of a virtuous life without a purpose. I claim the possibility of such a one, and, as an example, the nature of the proposition forces me to present myself, though modestly objects.

Human life has a purpose, the same purpose that all life has during the limited period in which it appears in a certain form: to live in conformity with the conditions into which it sprang; but do not ask for the purpose of a virtuous life. Instill love for virtue in the human mind, direct your efforts toward making the practice of virtue a pleasant habit, and, this accomplished, you will forget to propose the question as to the purpose of a moral life, because the problem has found its solution.

“A why for the moral life, in the sense of an ulterior motive other than that life itself, there cannot be. The attempt to erect one at once destroys the conception of morality, whose essence

lies in the objects of will. The only sense in which, if I am right, a 'why' for moral life can be assigned, is that of an explanation, not the indication of an ulterior motive."¹

I leave out of consideration the assertion that: "the freethinker who recognises no authority to which he bows save his own pleasure or displeasure his God is Self." Because the freethinker who loves virtue for its own sake may be placed in the position where he can choose between happiness and duty, and his choice may fall upon the latter. He may believe in the attainment of as great an amount of happiness as possible, but not to the exclusion of duty.

Is this pure negativism of barren freethought? I deny it. Nor can I agree with Dr. Carus when he says, "that freethought has been barren because of its negativism and because it has failed to come out with positive issues."

Modern freethought has neither neglected to come out with positive issues nor is it barren. In trying to demolish the Church—not the moral teachings of religion—that hotbed of a plant upon the stem of which the buds of morality thrive only as parasitic excrescences, because the juice they receive for their nourishment is drawn from a soil richly fertilised by superstition; in trying to undermine the pernicious influence exerted by the highest dignitaries down to the lowest upon the public *in their unscrupulous endeavor to prevent the dissemination of knowledge and the spread of truth*; in warring against the dogmatology of traditional religions and the systematic inculcation of absurd doctrines in the susceptible mind of the growing generation; with that aim in view to erect instead institutions of learning where the discoveries of science and the thoughts of master minds are truthfully represented to a laity desirous of knowing the truth; where children as well as adults can ennoble their nature and draw elevating thoughts from lectures delivered for the purpose of pointing out the crude notions the believer in dogmatic Christianity holds about the principle of good and evil, about duties and rights, and about knowledge and belief; the essence of which is to illustrate the moral superiority of those who worship noble *ideals* and who hold reason, the guide showing the way to light, in high esteem, in comparison to the morality of those that pray to an impotent deity and that heed not the voice of reason; in which the childish tales and myths of religious creeds are expounded as such, and where man's mind and emotional nature receives that training which enables him to comprehend and appreciate the value and grandeur of modern ethics.

The freethought of to-day is battling against the systematic perversion of the human mind when the same receives its most lasting impression; it comes

out with positive issues in advocating the abandonment of our present mode of religious education, with a view of substituting instead an education purely moral—aiming thus at raising a moral instead of a religious generation. This it tries to accomplish by discarding religion, by throwing overboard, as dangerous ballast, the superstitious notions of believing humanity now taught in connexion with a peculiar kind of morality, and by trying to mould noble souls, not by teaching children gratitude and love for a Being nobody knows how to describe, but by admonishing them to love and be grateful to their parents, to obey and respect them; to honor and always to treat politely their brothers, sisters, and companions; to be kind, polite, industrious, candid, truthful, temperate, and clean; always to behave well, to maintain their personal dignity and self-respect; to detest ignorance and idleness; to exercise justice and charity; never to slander any one's reputation, and never to endanger the life of a human being; in short, to love virtue for its own sake and to detest vice for the same reason.

Thus prepared for his future existence man, as he grows in intelligence, will not yearn toward such a moral support as is furnished him at present by a preposterous religious belief, but will satisfy his emotions, and find strength to withstand all temptations in life, in noble self-reliance—besides being thus enabled to grasp the ennobling thoughts of exceptional great minds and to purify his sentiments by possessing himself of such thoughts.

I have very briefly shown, as I think, that modern freethought does not consist in negativism merely, but that it comes out with positive issues; and even Dr. Carus himself, though he denies this, involuntarily admits it in advancing his assertion in the form of a condition: "*If*,"¹ says he, "to be a freethinker means to be purely negative, etc."

I regret to say that Dr. Carus is not fair in his argumentation, at least with me; or else he did not succeed in correctly interpreting my thoughts, though I tried to present them in as clear and concise a form as I was capable of. He accuses me of identifying the negativism of freethought with science. When and where has this been done by me? He charges me with misrepresentations, forgetting to support the charge by proofs. He also imputes to me the concealed statement, "that all religions, and especially Christianity, are errors and unmitigated nonsense."

What I said is that all positive religions contain errors and tenets exerting a demoralising influence upon the public, and that Christianity, as a religious system, is nonsense, because it is based upon assumptions which not only border the realm of the absurd, but are right within it. I, myself, made reference

¹ B. Bosanquet.

¹ Italics are mine.

to the ethical teachings of Christianity, "as *part* of the religious system known by that name." This ought to be sufficient proof that I draw a distinction between Christianity, as a system of religion, and its ethics. The former I reject as absurd,—though I agree with Dr. Carus that unbiassed study of the history of religions should be supported, because it reveals, at least to thinkers, "the development of that most important side of man's nature, which determines the character of his life,—and of the latter I adopt what meets with my approval. Thus I accept the truth, no matter where I may find it, while I reject that which, in my opinion, is false.

Regarding the claim that freethought has been barren, I simply propose the question: "How many centuries elapsed before Christianity could gain a firm footing on continental Europe?" Considering the fact that it took more than a thousand years to convert the whole of Europe to a religion essentially materialistic, and therefore easily comprehended even by uncultured minds, it is not at all surprising that ideal freethought is making very slow progress. There is no reason for discontent. Only a few years ago freethought was a weak sapling, to-day it is a mighty tree, spreading its green branches, despite the formidable influences brought to bear to kill them in the bud, in every direction—slow of growth, but of healthy constitution.

Dr. Carus agrees with Professor Haeckel that ethics is always the expression of a world conception. It would lead me too far to dwell at length upon the reasons why I reject this assumption. Until some better theory will be advanced regarding the formation of solar systems, I adopt that of Kant and Laplace; I believe in the theory of evolution worked out by Darwin and supported by nearly all students of natural sciences; I have implicit faith in the potency of science and the potentiality of the germ of life; I am firmly convinced of the immutability of the laws of nature, and the constant change that energy—inherent in matter—subjects matter to; I deny God, but take it for granted that intellectual and moral evolution is unceasingly shaping the conditions, requirements, and mode of conscious life. But I cannot say that my conception of morality has anything to do with all this; that it is in any way dependent upon or affected by my world-view. This I hinted at in speaking of a system of pure ethics, which is objected to by Dr. Carus upon the ground that "a system of pure ethics" is unscientific; and he adds: "Ethics is always the expression of a world-conception."

I spoke of a system of pure ethics in the same sense that I would speak of religion, as a religious belief and not as a scientific system. Theology is a science. In a broad sense, it is the science of religion, but itself it is not religion. Ethics is a science, the

science of morals, but itself it is not morality. Just as religion, as a sort of sentiment, revealing itself in every individual in more or less grotesque form, existed and exists independent of a *correct* method of science, or of a *correct* knowledge of the forces keeping the world in motion, so it is with those sentiments that constitute the ethical life of the individual. They also are the expressions of emotions, modified by the degree of intelligence of the individual, and by its knowledge and capability of rightly interpreting the moral injunctions in force.

In order to present to humanity, in a comprehensible manner, the ideals of religious teachers, their conception of good and evil, of vice and virtue, theology constructed a system of belief as authority for the moral conduct of their pupils and themselves. And although this system of belief was not based upon a correct knowledge of things, upon facts scientifically established as such, it acted as a powerful agent in moulding the moral character of humanity. Ethics, likewise, may formulate and bring into comprehensible form the precepts by which we ought to be governed in our moral conduct, without paying attention to the—*scientific*—world-conception¹ of the individual, and the question as to the correctness of scientific theories regarding the fulcrum on which the world turns; and may thus, as a system of pure ethics, be substituted in place of the religious belief that now shapes the moral life of the vast majority. In its application it is art, the art of awakening—dormant—emotions and of purifying them, i. e., of turning them into a direction conformable with the noblest conception of morality.

We should infer from what Dr. Carus has to say "that a system of pure ethics is unscientific, because ethics is always the expression of a world-conception," that the ethics of the American Indian is scientific—because it is shaped by his world-conception—and should therefore be accepted in preference to my "unscientific" system of pure ethics.

Dr. Carus tells us that "he not only believes but knows that there is a power in this world which we have to recognise as the norm of truth and the standard of right conduct, and in this sense he upholds the idea of God as being a supreme authority for moral conduct." There is certainly a norm of truth, but this originated with human intelligence, is subject to modifications by human intelligence, and is affected by the laws of nature only in so far as we have to live in obedience to these laws in order to preserve the race. The language of Dr. Carus betrays unconscious or concealed dualism, or half-hearted monism.

I am accused of many misconceptions by Dr. Carus.

¹ I use the term in a restricted sense, considering its application to one's conception of morality as inadmissible.

If these *many* misconceptions were pointed out to me I might be able to prove that, after all, there is, at least, a kernel of truth in asserting the ambiguous character of his religio-philosophical expositions. This he omitted to do, citing only the following in support of his imputation: "If God is being defined simply as abstract thought, an idea, as something existing only in imagination and not in reality, it is meaningless to say science is a revelation of God;" commenting upon this as follows:

"God is an abstract thought, but God himself is a reality. There is no abstract thought but it is invented to describe a reality. Man cannot make the laws of nature, he must describe them; he cannot establish facts, he must investigate, and can only determine the truth; nor can he set up a code of morals, but he must adapt himself to the eternal moral law which is the condition of human society and the factor that shapes the human of man."

To me it seems that several propositions are here advanced which, standing in no proper relation, do not admit of the same deductions. Our knowledge; our description of the laws of nature; of facts the truth of which we establish, is not based upon mere assumptions, but upon actual observation of these laws, of these facts; upon observations that our senses enable us to make; while the claim of the reality of God—as an individual, extramundane power, or as a superpersonal force, or as norm for our moral conduct—is only based upon assumption. The laws of nature we can observe, facts we can notice; our ideas concerning them are representations of a reality seen and felt by us. Not so with God, whether described as a personal or superpersonal being, as is admitted by Dr. Carus himself in advancing no proof for the knowledge he claims to have of the existence of God, as a power which we have to recognise as the norm of truth and the standard of right conduct, but in placing before the reader the supposed proof merely in the form of a peculiar condition: "*If*¹ the term 'God' did not describe an actual reality it would be meaningless to speak of science as a revelation of God."

In opposition to Dr. Carus, who says that man cannot set up a code of morals, but must adapt himself to the eternal moral law, I say there is no moral law—the distinction between moral laws and moral injunctions is only a theoretical one—but what is established by man; and I prove this by the fact that no moral law can be conceived as existent without the presence of one conceiving it. The laws of nature, as forces knowing nothing of compassion and morality, are a reality; the moral law of nature—the condition of human society is no moral law of nature, but a law conditioned by human society—consciously or unconsciously shaping the moral convictions of humanity, is a child of the human brain and as such not self-

existent. Destroy the brain that conceives it, wipe humanity out of existence and its phantom character will reveal itself.

The laws of nature, facts that we can observe, are real, and our ideas concerning them representations of reality; while our ideas of God, at least that of the monist, are only representations of objects of imagination. Thus I arrive at the conclusion that there are ideas which have an objective reality: our ideas about the laws of nature, etc.; and ideas which have no objective reality, ideas developed upon purely imagined grounds: our ideas of God—no matter whether conceived as a superpersonal being, or simply as the moral law of nature.

"Certainly," Dr. Carus says, "the moral law of nature . . . cannot be seen with the eye, or heard with the ear, or tasted with the tongue, or touched with the hands. It is one of those higher realities which can only be perceived by the mind. The senses are insufficient to encompass it, but any normal mind can grasp it."

It is only with a smile of sincere compassion that I pass this cherished phrase of all true *believers*, repeated in such a serious vein by Dr. Carus—by one of the most enthusiastic protagonists of monism, by one who admits the absurdity of a force hovering loose over matter—and dreaded so much by timid minds, whom the fear of being charged with superficiality and base materialism prevents from contradicting it. Well, I have no desire to rob my opponents, whose profundity of thought, I notice, wades in stagnant water, of their innocent pleasure to accuse me of superficiality and base materialism, as I find satisfaction in the knowledge that humanity owes a greater debt to men regarded as superficial by many and as profound by few, than to men regarded as profound by many and as superficial by few; and in the consciousness that the materialism I represent is purer idealism than is dreamed of by those who parade with the grandeur of the idealism they claim to have discovered in the teachings of Christ.

Dr. Carus denies the existence of an individual God, but cosmic order reveals to him, as he says, the presence of a superindividual God, hence the presence of a prototype of mind, or an authority of conduct. This, I think, justifies the inference that with him cosmic order implies design—aye! must imply design in order to secure the foundation on which his claim rests—the design to shape humanity, that itself is powerless in a certain measure, in accordance with the self-imposed, irrefragable order established for this purpose—for the purpose of serving humanity as a prototype of mind, as an authority of conduct. True, there is order in nature, but this does not necessarily imply design, as order can be observed where more

¹ Italics are mine.

than one thing exists, though the assumption of design is excluded beyond any reasonable doubt. This being the case, cosmic order existing without design, I deny that our moral convictions show its handiwork; I deny that the natural order of the world justifies the assumption of a moral prototype, as is claimed by Dr. Carus. Morality has evolved from sociability, from the community of human beings, as is proved by the changes it underwent and which it is subject to even now. The conceptions of right and wrong, good and evil, not being moulded after a given prototype or standard of morality found in nature, have nothing absolute about them, which otherwise would be the case; they change with time, place, and climate, and at different stages of civilisation.

Can there be any doubt as to the unreasonableness of maintaining that nature furnishes us with a moral prototype, when we consider the fact that a pitiless struggle for supremacy is going on all the time in the realm of organic life; that numberless promising germs, as well as highly developed beings, are daily destined to destruction, and that the preservation of higher intelligence and morality depends upon a constant defence against all kinds of danger?

Dr. Carus bewails the fact that the work of the Open Court Publishing Company is being criticised and suspected. If he were able to read between the lines he would perceive that nearly all attacks directed against him consist mainly in a criticism, not so much of the ideas advanced by him, but of the form in which these ideas receive expression. To illustrate this concisely: To speak of the laws of nature, of cosmos, as God, is no tergiversation,—at least, it is admissible,—but it becomes such when reference is made to this God in terms leading the reader to believe, or at least admitting the conclusion, that the personal God of the believer is spoken of; or, in other words, when this God: nature, cosmic order, is being endowed with the same or similar attributes possessed by the supreme ruler of the theist. To call the habits, emotions, convictions of man, his soul, may be permissible, but it becomes tergiversation when reference is had to *this* soul in a manner conveying the idea that the writer maintains the indestructibility of his, mine, or any one's self-consciousness.

Like a red thread in a sheet of white canvas this unconscious ambiguity is noticeable in all expositions of Dr. Carus when he discusses religious subjects. Let him eliminate this red thread, this ambiguity, and, I dare say, that hundreds, who now look with a certain degree of discontent, aye suspicion, upon his work, will join hands with him and support him.

Without the least hesitation I claim, incredible as it may seem to Dr. Carus, that I thoroughly understand him, that the ideals he has formed, and that he

worships, the noble thoughts and sentiments that he entertains, the aim he has in view, and the hopes that he cherishes, sought their abode in a kindred soul long before I knew him through his writings. I always wished for able writers who would give public expression to these ideas and sentiments, who would cloak in suitable words the ideals worshipped by me, for a public aspiring after the truly noble and elevating, and sublime—and desirous of grappling with the profound questions proposed by life. The publications of the Open Court Publishing Company seemed, for a time at least, to carry to realisation this ardent wish of mine, but I suffered disappointment, owing to the irresistible inclination of its editor to force hostile thoughts into a union which, owing to the different nature of the elements to be united, can never be accomplished.

Modern ethics is based upon knowledge and reason; the ethics of old mainly upon faith and instinct. The good, the true, that originated with faith and instinct, reason will retain and systematise with the aid of knowledge; the absurd it will not try to embody in the sensible, but it will simply reject it.

Above I made the statement that I thoroughly understand Dr. Carus; so much the more do I regret to say that he has failed properly to interpret my ideas, which he proves by the fact that he imputes thoughts to me that I never uttered. It is true that I am not indifferent as to the survival of my ideals, and to those sentiments which I may be permitted to call my better self. On the contrary, I hope that those surviving me will cherish the traits most valued in me by the virtuous. While I live it gives me pleasure to think that the aspirations of this generation will, through transmission, benefit and help to elevate upon a higher plane of intelligence and morality future humanity. But of this pleasure I am only conscious while I live, with death this pleasure ceases; any possible reward for leading a virtuous life I can only anticipate while enjoying self-consciousness; to expect a reward after having ceased to live as a conscious being is preposterous—in the eyes of those denying the existence of an ego-soul.

Both Dr. Carus and I have recognised the fact that there is dross in religion, and that the great mass of humanity has always identified the term with belief in fables, doctrines, and dogmas which we have learned to regard as absurd and preposterous. For this reason, and in order to avoid misunderstandings, I reject the word "religion"; he retains it, being thus forced to ambiguity, despite the declaration he makes that to him religion is—merely—the prime factor which is to develop man's moral nature.

Because I discard religion, because I wish to place in its stead a system of pure ethics, a code of morals

that rejects religion and retains only the good and noble that humanity gave birth to,—which by no means was always the product of religion, as morality and religion developed very frequently in different directions,—that teaches justice, love, truth, without the dross religion contains, he calls me a bigot infidel; and because he tries to bring in harmony systematised knowledge, modern views of ethics with the religious conceptions of indolent, superstitious humanity, I accused him of suffering from the reconciliation-mania, which claim I am constrained to uphold in every particular, despite the fact that I admire and support many of the noble thoughts he has given expression to in his aim to perfect humanity.

FABLES FROM THE NEW ÆSOP.

BY HUDOR GENONE.

The Great Physician and the Dumb Broom.

A YOUNG woman who had been brought up by an indulgent mother, having little to do and plenty of such dainties as that country provided, fell ill, more from lassitude and surfeit than any real disorder. She declined to take to her bed, but went about the house languid and wretched, and wearying her anxious mother with her complaints.

The mother tried to induce her to take a potion of herbs which she prepared with her own hands, but the daughter was wilful and declined the draught, saying that she was not ill enough for so nauseous a remedy.

Then the mother in great distress sent for a young mediciner. He came directly, and being handsome and quite talkative, the girl brightened up and conversed gayly with him and was so sprightly that he was convinced she had no malady, and told the elder woman at the door on his departure, (at the time he took his fee,) that she need be under no apprehension on her daughter's account.

For a time after this young man left, the girl seemed a different being, but the day following her old ailment returned, and she moped and sighed and languished again. When this had been kept up for several days, the mother, now seriously troubled, sent to a city near-by for another doctor, who was in much repute.

He came in state, looking very learned and wise, and after putting many questions both to the young woman and her mother as to symptoms, mode of life, and the like, he declared that the patient was really in a perilous position, but needed no physic.

“What she really needs,” he said, “is a complete course of calisthenics. You must purchase dumb-bells forthwith and exercise daily with these according to the rules laid down in my work, *The Science of Athletics.*”

The learned physician thereupon produced a copy of the volume. The price of this, together with his fee, (double that of the young doctor's), was so great that the poor mother, not very well provided as to wealth, had no money left to purchase the dumb-bells.

While in this quandary, (the daughter all the while continuing indisposed,) a neighbor who knew of her trouble told her that the great Æsculapius was passing through that town. Him she appealed to, and when he came, after some inquiries, careful investigation, and knowledge of the remedies which had been prescribed, he had this to say:

“The young doctor was wrong in saying that your daughter had no malady, for she has a very serious malady; and the elder doctor was wrong in prescribing the remedy. I perceive,” he continued, “that this house is far from cleanly—”

Here the mother, interrupting, tried to apologise, explaining that she herself had no time left from her other duties.

“But this young woman, your daughter?”

“Ah, sir, she is much too ill,” replied the poor mother; “but pray, what might the malady be that you say is so serious?”

“Her malady,” replied Æsculapius, “is indifference and unwillingness. I, too, have a prescription, which is not a dumb bell, but a dumb broom. Let her give over her laziness and regain her health by sweeping the house; so, seeking diligently, she shall find it.”

With that Æsculapius arose and took his leave, not heeding the pouting lips of his patient, and declining any fee for his services.

NOTES.

Dr. Carus's reply to Corvinus's rejoinder will appear in the next number of *The Open Court*.

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