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# The Trend of Scientific Thought Away From Religious Beliefs

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*Respectfully and Affectionately*
*inscribed*
*to the*
*Right Reverend Frederick Burgess, D. D.,*
*Bishop of Long Island*

*Strange that with this beauty all about.*
*The shining path that points the one way out,*
*There shall be unrequited wanderings,*
*Allurement in the sterile fields of Doubt.*

*O shame of shames! The Wise Men saw on high*
*God's guiding Star gleam in the Eastern Sky.*
*And straightway journeyed forth across the world*
*With ne'er a question asked of Where or Why.*

—Quatrains of Christ by George Creel.

# THE TREND OF SCIENTIFIC THOUGHT AWAY FROM RELIGIOUS BELIEFS

# I

IN presenting this theme for discussion it assumes two forms. 1. A doubtful question.

Is the trend of present scientific thought away from religious beliefs? This will appear to be answered affirmatively.

2. Is that scientific thought which undertakes to support religious beliefs consistent with its main contention of holding a Monistic basis for the Universe of Matter and Life?

The conclusion will appear to be that scientific thought on the whole is really agnostic or indecisive as to religious beliefs and therefore has a trend away from them.

This treatment of the question comprehends only the scientific thought of the last twenty-five or thirty years, and is an effort to determine its character and trend at the present time.

We accept religious beliefs as including prevalent ideas of God, the Soul, Personality, Freedom, Immortality, Supernatural agency

and Providence. These beliefs universally held as religious ideas, are fundamental to all rational religions, and under them the special doctrines of Christianity are included. Their philosophy is either Dualism, or Spiritual Monism.

Scientific thought has for its basis the idea of the Universe, the Unity of Matter and Life in force, or energy and will, and its philosophy is Monism, or Monistic Materialism.

Both religious beliefs and scientific thought at the present time, attempt to hold Kant's theory of knowledge, that it begins with sensation, proceeds to understanding and ends with reason. And the reason knows only the ultimate ideas, the soul and the Universe. Kant says the reason knows God as a transcendental idea, but the soul and the universe and God are each an illusion, because we are incapable of apprehending them—they are beyond knowledge. Science says there is no knowledge of God whatever—Religion affirms that there is a knowledge of a personal God. Some scientific thought claims that God may yet be known.

The nineteenth century scientists accepted

the idea of the existence of God as a power and yet declared things about God which are more incredible than to accept the fact and belief that we do know Him by the rational action of our minds. Scientists like these are Spencer, who says "That there is a First Cause is a postulate of the Sane Reason." The omnipresence of this Something is a belief that the most unsparing criticism of all religions leaves unquestionable or makes even clearer. But the ultimate religious truth of the highest certainty is that the Power which the Universe manifests to us, is utterly unscrutable. Such Agnosticism, as it is called, as a working creed denies that religion expresses any eternal fact, for what we do not know and cannot know must forever remain unknown.

Can such an assertion of Agnostic Science be regarded as reasonable or even sane? It requires of us that we know every act of this power, every atom of this universe, every particle of space where this power exists, every moment of His eternity, every faculty of this power in the Infinite Being, to know that He cannot make Himself known to such minds

as ours. It requires the knowledge of every mind of man from the beginning, every experience of every soul, and the consciousness of every human mind, to assert that man never has known and can never know this Being.

In more comprehensive speech, this Agnosticism in a word really claims to know this about God that He can never reveal Himself to an intelligence He has created; and that Agnosticism can be so intimate with God as to say that nothing whatever about God can ever be known!

Yet, Spencer calls God not only Unknowable but All Nothingness. His use of words stands for ideas that are unthinkable and inconceivable—He speaks of Him as Unascertained Something—As a Power without attributes, as a Substratum of Material Existence on which Nothingness rests—As an Unconscious Energy—As a Creative Power that does not think.

We seem from our standpoint to see that an Eternal and Omnipresent Creator rises up in his mind while denying Him.

So much may be said to cover the general trend of scientific thought.

We now may perceive its positive attitude and trend away from religious beliefs by those who now maintain a Monistic Materialism.

Monism was a theory of the Universe advanced by Greek philosophers before Plato. It seeks the essential oneness of all the complexities of existence both material and mental, manifested to sensual impression and consciousness. It seeks one fundamental reality, which some call matter, some energy, and some call substance. Hegel called it Idea. Shopenhauer called it Will and Idea. Spinoza called it Spirit. What philosophers do not generally favor now, Scientists like Spencer, Huxley, and Haeckel aggressively claim to be the true Monism—Substance, of which Mind, Thought, Consciousness are by-products. This is the Monistic Materialism of Tyndal, and modern biologists. Its most convenient term is Materialism, distinguishing it from Idealistic Monism.

Scientific Atheism accounts for the Universe as only a material substance in manifold forms, self existent and without intelligent control.

Life or vital force is a product of chemical and physical forces which reappear as forces at its dissolution. Haeckel claims these theorems have been amply demonstrated.

1. The Universe is eternal, infinite, illimitable.

2. Its substance, with its two attributes matter and energy, fills infinite space and is in eternal motion.

2. This motion runs on through infinite time, as an unbroken development, with a periodic change from life to death, from Evolution to Devolution.

4. The innumerable bodies which are scattered about the space filling Ether all obey the same law of substance: while the rotating masses slowly move towards their destruction and dissolution in one part of space, others are springing into new life and development in other quarters of the Universe."

Under the name of Law of Substance, Haeckel embraces two supreme laws of different origin and age: the older is the Chemical law of the Conservation of Matter, the younger is the physical law of the Conservation of Energy. These two laws relate to two

different aspects of one and the same object, the Cosmos.

"There are," he admits, "still a few men of science who contest this and think it possible to reconcile the old theistic theory of human nature with the pantheistic truth of the law of substance. All these efforts," he declares, "rest on confusion of sophistry when they are honest."

In theism God is opposed to Nature as an extra mundane being. In Pantheism God as an intra mundane being is everywhere identical with Nature itself, and is operative within the world as force or energy, as compatible with the sumpreme law of substance."*

Thus he approves the saying of Shopenhauer, that Pantheism is only a polite form of Atheism—God and the World are one is merely a polite way of giving the Lord God his congé.

The ethical trend of this monistic materiaiism thus appears.

"Just as the infinite Universe is one great whole, in the light of our Monistic teaching,

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*Riddle of the Universe.

so the spiritual and moral life of man is a part of this Cosmos, and our naturalistic ordering of it must also be Monistic.

Haeckel's negations are on an amazing scale. Monistic philosophy definitely rules out three great central truths—of God—Freedom and Immortality. Only a world of machinery is left; for to deny personality to God is to reduce to nothingness the personality of man. Every being, every thought, every emotion, every theory, or philosophic argument, foul lusts and pure affections are all meaningless and resolved into chemical terms.

All morality is destroyed.

Haeckel represents the baldest Monism. He has made the doctrine of Darwin, Spencer and Huxley concerning Evolution to support his own theory of the Law of Substance, as a substitute for the spiritual idea of God, and thus affirms the religion of Monists to be Pantheism which has excluded God from the Universe.

"There are not two different separate worlds, the one physical and material, and the other moral and immaterial," says Haeckel.

He admits that the great majority of phil-

osophers and theologians still hold the contrary opinion. They affirm with Kant that the moral world is quite independent of the physical and is subject to very different laws. Hence a man's conscience as the basis of his moral life must also be quite independent of our scientific knowledge of the world and must be based rather on his religious faith.

"The great majority of philosophers," Haeckel further says, "are content to grasp with the right hand the pure knowledge that is built on experience, but they will not part with the mystic faith based on revelation to which they cling with the left. The best type of this contrary dualism is in the conflict of the pure and practical reason in the critical philosophy of Immanuel Kant."*

There is the same conflict, between consistent idealists and theists—and logical realists and pantheists, as between dualism and pure monism.

Haeckel declares the religion of Monism to be superior to that of Theism—for it is connected with the scientific establishment of

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*Riddle of the Universe.

cosmic laws. "The astonishment with which we gaze upon the starry heavens and the microscopic life in a drop of water, the awe with which we trace the marvellous working of energy in the motion of matter; the reverence with which we grasp the universal domain of the law of substance throughout the Universe, all these are parts of one emotional life falling under the head of natural religion.

In the sincere cult of the true, the good, and the beautiful, which is the heart of our new Monistic religion, we find ample compensation for the anthropistic ideals of God, Freedom and immortality which we have lost."*

Haeckel confesses that design exists in the organic life, while he denies it in the inorganic world. "We do undeniably perceive," he says, "a purpose in the structure and in the life of an organism. The plant and the animal seem to be controlled by a definite design in the combination of their several parts, just as clearly as we see in the machines which man invents and constructs." Riddle of the Universe, page 93.

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*Riddle of the Universe, page 344.

He says the atom is not without a rudimentary form of sensation and of will, so he denies soul to man, and discovers soul in the atom.

Haeckel's Confessions of a Man of Science are not less antagonistic to religious belief. His Riddle of the Universe is a pernicious and harmful book. Yet it is one of the most popular books in Science. The volume I have quoted from and studied is worn and smeared like a school book of many terms use. It was taken from a public library. There are six penny editions of this work sent broadcast over England and the British Colonies. As a biologist, he has affected the thinking of medical men and professors of colleges, and lawyers, who in a general statement have lost their interest in religious worship, if they have not become infidels and atheists.

The series of articles on Man by Prof. Lowell, published in the Century and now in a book, is a revelation of the negations of Science in relation to Religion. The theory of Evolution starts with the nebulous star dust—and age long aggregations into suns

and planets: it develops into chemical unions of gases, which form the conditions of life, and proceeds to atomic unions of inorganic elements into the life of protoplasm—and thence into the life of higher orders. The intelligence of animal life and the soul of man— which is self impelled and self generated life, with intelligence and design, has thus been traced in the forming of planets with no allusion to creative and designing mind and power. So the world goes through eons to be resolved again into elementary atoms of etheric matter. How little we think of the asphyxiating miasma of such scientific speculation—stated attractively by Haeckel and his followers, and by an increasing number of scientists, as proved facts of the potentiality of matter, and of the will which is but an impersonal force in its continuance and varied manifestation.

The saying of Aristotle is foolishness to such men, that "if a man should live underground and there converse with works of art and mechanicism and should afterwards be brought up into open day, and see the several glories of the heaven and earth, he would im-

mediately pronounce them the works of such a being as we define God to be."

The scientist has become wiser than Sir John Herschell, who declares "the signature of mind is written on every atom, on every pulse of life, on every movement of force. The presence of mind solves the whole problem of the material Universe."

The limits of this essay do not permit many of the modern writers on Science to be brought into one hearing, to confirm this view of their tendencies if not their aims, to destroy the foundations of religious experience. But such as have been brought before us bring the discussion to an affimative answer to the first question. The trend of scientific thinking seems to be away from religious beliefs.

## II

THE second inquiry—Is that scientific thought which undertakes to support religious beliefs consistent with its main contention of holding a monistic basis for the Universe of Matter and Life?

In the books which recently have been published, Life and Matter, Science and Immortality, we have in the Author, Sir Oliver Lodge, a type of scientists who generally advocate a Monistic view of the Universe, in which they include what is Idealistic and Spiritual.

This scientist is perhaps the most eminent at the present day. He shows the presumption of Professor Haeckel in such statements as I have described so far as they affect our religious beliefs, without being antagonistic to his Monistic theory. But he represents his claims to be hypothetical rather than scientific and accurate, when he declares the Law of Substance to be a reasonable and sufficient substitute for an intelligent Mind and the basis of the world of matter and life.

With only a brief experience of one human life, one thus assumes to pass judgment on the origins and eternal duration of matter in all its forms and of life in all its potentialities. One becomes unscientific by making assertions as proved facts, when experience and a rational interpretation of the Universe are to the contrary.

Sir Oliver Lodge shows that the philosophic basis of Science is Monistic, but no general conclusion is inevitable from the Monistic base which can exclude a supreme or guiding mind to the Whole. His positions are that we are to believe in an irrefragable Law, which means that we accept an orderly and systematic Universe with no arbitrary cataclysms and with an essential continuity, and that disturbances of the natural order are only apparent because most of the Cosmos is hidden from our senses.

The second position is, briefly described, that we may believe in spiritual guidance which gives us a purposeful and directed Universe carrying on its evolutionary processes from an inevitable past into an anticipated future, with a definite aim and control by

what is akin to energy and to life and mind, which is immanent in the Universe.

In order to hold both these positions we must realize that the whole is a law saturated Cosmos, which consists not of matter and motion alone, nor yet of spirit and will alone, but of both and all, and so we must enlarge our conception of what the whole contains.

Both the scientific mind and the religious mind are inclined to be too narrow and exclusive as seen in the acceptance by one of miracle and the denial of it by the other, or by people who cannot accept providential leading or an all controlling intelligence. But to others prayer is a part of an orderly Cosmos and may be an efficient portion of the guiding and controlling will, just as the desire of a people will bring about a civic improvement under any kind of government.

Guidance and control must be regarded as continuous rather than exceptional, in a scientific investigation of whether there are modes of existence higher than our ordinary selves. The business of Science is to ascertain these if they exist. The atmosphere of religion should be recognized as permeating every-

thing. Strange or abnormal things are not to be regarded specially holy. A surviving human faculty, or an inevitable endowment of a sufficiently lofty character may reasonably account for them. But the scientific proof is not essential to religion. So they may be searched for without prejudice. It is not likely we possess the only intelligence in the Universe: or that such faculties and powers as we possess are denied to all else.

We control matter and forces on this planet in an intelligent way for ourselves. Guidance, personality and love must belong to the whole, if to us a part of the whole. So Sir Oliver Lodge asks for the scientific world, "Should we possess these things and God not possess them?"

But others of this class of scientists, like Lord Kelvin, the late President of the British Association of Science positively affirm creative and directive power, as an article of belief—and say that design is unmeaning without a designing mind. Lord Kelvin says "The Atheistic idea is so nonsensical I do not see how I can put it into words."

Another scientific critic says, "Naked

Atheism belongs to the wards of a lunatic asylum. The healthy person refuses to believe in a three legged stool without a carpenter. So this great Universe that has behind it no definite and contriving mind is unthinkable. One might as well say that Milton's Paradise Lost had its letters blown together by a whirlwind, as that the creation so built on mathematical laws and saturated with intelligence should be the creation of a mindless force."*

Yet the advocates of a Monistic unification will not admit, Sir Oliver Lodge tells us, a multifariousness of existence, nor will they speak of mind and matter, body and spirit, God and the World, as in any sense separate entities. They claim that the Whole has come into being without direct intelligence and apart from the spiritual guidance, and that it is managed so well, no Deity exists, and it is absurd to postulate the existence of a comprehensive mind

This is a wonderful achievement, he says, to be able to state comprehensively and fully,

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*Dr. Fickett.

not only what is, but what is not, but it is not wise for the people to pin their faith nor build their hopes, on the utterances of any one however eminent who makes this superhuman claim.

One experiment on radium rays, revolutionized at a stroke mechanics, optics and astronomy. It revealed the bonds that unite them and a general design on the map of Universal Science. So another scientist, Henry Pomcare, shows that as streams flow from a common source from a point in St. Gottherd pass, into four different valleys, there are facts common to several sciences, diverging in all directions. Such men as Lodge claim the probability that in a hundred years or more science should find the common source of life and the world, in some vaster conception of the Universe than now we have—as a kind of incarnation of mind.

Ideas of Evolution have increased the impression both of the actuality and of the rational character of the World. Says Dr. Waggett, "Nature is more intolerant of independent spiritualism but at the same time more inviting to a spiritualism which is content to live on terms with fact."

It appears that Sir Oliver Lodge and those who in the main agree with him, have departed from the Monistic basis of science. They are as near to Dualism, as most of us when we think practically in our religious teaching. In making this conclusion or answer to the second question proposed at the beginning of this discussion, to illustrate this inconsistency, we quote Sir Oliver Lodge, "Mind when it ceases to act through the brain, as the means whereby it is made manifest on the material plane does not require us to grant that mind is limited to its material manifestation; nor can we maintain that without matter the things we call mind, intelligence, consciousness, have no existence. Mind may be incorporate or incarnate in matter, but it may also transcend it; it is through the region of ideas and the intervention of mind that we have become aware of the existence of matter." Lodge.

On the whole, we may answer the second question of this paper then, that the scientists who are coming forward in the twentieth century, are returning to the idealistic Monism, which may save their theory. But we must

also conclude that Science with all its splendid service to man, increasing more and more to enlarge the dignity of his being has cast a veil of unbelief over the world, that hides God from the conscience of the thoughtful but misinformed people, of whom it may be said, in the words of the Master of Life—Having eyes they see not, and having ears they hear not, neither do they understand the Majesty of God.

Science is their idol. It serves man's convenience, reveals material forces and gives him control of them in minute measure: it enriches his life, with natural wealth and with knowledge: it shows the paths to health and mental vigor, and enlarges his intellectual vision. It claims the Kingdoms of this world and the principalities thereof and offers them to one who will give supreme homage to the wisdom of man. It glorifies his earthly being and destroys his soul.

There can be no reconstruction of religious beliefs on the basis of scientific materialism. It entirely excludes them.

Neither can the consistent thinking of idealistic Monism, with its agnostic surmises of the

possible existence of mind and a Supreme Being, give any confidence to religious faith.

This faith with all the beliefs to which it gives ground and support is an immediate conception of God.

He that cometh to God must believe that He is and that He is the rewarder of those that diligently seek Him.

Religion is based on the facts of the spiritual consciousness of man which have been multiplying and becoming clearer ever since his intelligent history began.



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