

HONEST SKEPTICISM AND ITS REMEDY.

Although we do not endorse the teachings of Prof. Huxley on the nature and destiny of man, we must acknowledge that he is one of the great thinkers of our day, though we see that like many other thinkers not submitted fully to the direction of the Word of God, he has stumbled into many foolish and illogical errors as viewed from the standpoint of divine enlightenment.

A recent article from his pen shows clearly that sectarianism, with its false teachings, claiming to be the teachings of God's Word, is responsible, to a large degree, for Mr. Huxley's infidelity, as doubtless the same cause is responsible for very much of the prevalent and growing agnosticism.

Nothing but the *truth* will reach and satisfy the candid, discriminating minds of honest men of really strong minds. The nominal church in rejecting the simplicity of Christ's gospel and manufacturing various schemes and theories instead, has indeed invented what will rule the ignorant and superstitious; but in so doing she has lost the only thing which could reach or influence intelligent men. As a consequence, now, that superstition is giving way and intelligence is becoming more general, skepticism is rife on every hand and is fast blooming into open infidelity --an infidelity, too, not only against sectarianism (which would, indeed, be a blessing), but infidelity toward God's Word, too; for it is generally, though very erroneously supposed that the "Creeds of Christendom" represent the teachings of the Bible. Prof. Huxley's article referred to, however, we are glad to see, indicates that his eyes are opening to discern between the teachings of sects and the teachings of God's Word. He writes as follows:

PROF. HUXLEY ON BIBLE READING.

"Greatly to the surprise of many of my friends, I have always advocated the reading of the Bible, and the diffusion of the study of that most remarkable collection of books among the people. Its teachings are so infinitely superior to those of the sects, who are just as busy now as the Pharisees were eighteen hundred years ago, in smothering them under "the precepts of men;" it is so certain to my mind, that the Bible contains within itself the refutation of nine-tenths of the mixture of sophistical metaphysics and old-world superstitions which have been piled round it by the so-called Christians of later times; it is so clear that the only immediate and ready antidote of the poison which has been mixed with Christianity, to the intoxication and delusion of mankind, lies in copious draughts from the undefiled spring, that I exercise the right and duty of free judgment on the part of every man, mainly for the purpose of inducing other laymen to follow my example. If the New Testament is translated into Zulu by Protestant missionaries, it must be assumed that a Zulu convert is competent to draw from its contents all the truths which it is necessary for him to believe. I trust that I may, without immodesty, claim to be put on the same footing as the Zulu."

Good, clear logic that! If the Bible *is the standard* of truth, if it is God's Revelation of himself, his will and his plan, why not grant to each the fullest liberty to read and believe it for himself? Why not merely point out to such the external and internal evidences of its truth, and leave them free from bondage to creeds to grow in the knowledge and understanding of it? Why should Christians separate into sects and adopt other "standards" for each sect? Why teach the precepts of Calvin and Knox and Luther and Wesley, and others, when we have better, purer doctrines than theirs in the words of Christ and his inspired apostles and prophets? Why teach the traditions of men just emerging from the dark ages with the eyes of their understandings semi-blinded with the smoke of Papacy's errors? Why not destroy all creeds and confessions and merely confess the fountain source of all truth to be God and his Word, and go daily to that fountain?

It is encouraging to see Prof. Huxley at the Fountain, even though yet incredulously sipping, and to hear his

testimony that the waters thereof are much sweeter and purer than those of the various befouled streams flowing through the jungles of the dark ages.

We note a still more interesting and remarkable yet similar case here in Allegheny, recently: A gentleman of culture and a thinker recently called upon the editor and producing a clipping from one of the daily papers of about a year ago, inquired as to its authorship. It proved to be an article written by the editor of this journal to his fellow-citizens explaining briefly our views of the divine plan, intended to be a contradiction of certain misunderstandings and public misstatements of our views. The caller then continued the conversation somewhat as follows:--

"That I clipped over a year ago and have kept it ever since. I consider the views there presented the most reasonable and in fact I may say, the only reasonable views on religion that I ever met with. I was brought up a United Presbyterian, a Calvinist of the strictest sort. I was earnest, honest and zealous. I united with that sect when I was about eighteen years of age. But, though always moral and rather sedate, I never could feel sure that I was one of the elect, and I had great distress of mind continually which I was rather ashamed to confess, even to my spiritual advisors, though I was forced to do so finally to, if possible, get relief. I was through the civil war, and before every battle I was harassed with the thought that it might be my last and that dying might prove that I was not one of God's elect.

"I finally came to the conclusion that all such ideas were false--contrary to common sense, and contrary to the character which God must have to be God. Knowing well the passages upon which the doctrines of my church were rested, I finally concluded that the Bible was not God's revelation and rejected it and all religious beliefs built upon it. I became thus a free-thinker--an infidel, a disciple of Thomas Paine; with him believing in a supreme Creator, but denying that his character and plan are represented in the doctrines of the various associations calling themselves his church. I have been in this condition, satisfied with infidelity, for over ten years, but I have been skeptical for twenty or more.

"But from your article, here, clipped from the *Press*, I get some new thoughts on the Election of the Church, what it is elected to, and the object of this election. I want, if you please, to have you appoint some evening, when I can call upon you and learn more of the details of this which you term God's Plan of the Ages. I did not willingly renounce the Bible; I never was one of the blatant blasphemous sort of infidels; I am too conscientious, however, to quietly profess what I do not believe, though there are many church members who believe no more than I do. If now, as you intimate, you can show me that all the various sects draw their conflicting and unreasonable doctrines, not from the Bible, but from the Church of Rome, and that the Church of Rome drew them from the vagaries of the Grecian Philosophy at a time when she was intent upon building up her system and gaining political power; and if then you can show me that the Bible contains the grand philosophy which this little article from the *Press* outlines, I shall be a convert most willingly. But I want clear, reasonable evidence and not mere hypothesis."

We assured the gentleman that we should be most pleased to discuss the subject as requested, except that we wanted to begin with the examination of the Bible, and then come to an examination of how the various errors and misapplications of Scripture came to be received so commonly as Truth. But we requested that first of all he should read very candidly the first volume of DAWN--"*The Plan of the Ages*"--after which we would have the proposed meeting for questions and a general discussion. This plan was followed; we had several private meetings as well as the public Sunday services, with the result that in three weeks this friend saw clearly, and confessed heartily, the great Redeemer and the glorious plan. In another week it was time for him to leave the city, but before he went he procured and sent out many copies of DAWN for his U.P. friends as well as for those whom he regarded as the more honest among his Infidel friends. And to us he said,--

"I feel like the prodigal returned to Father's house; some nights I can scarcely sleep for thinking of the wonderful plan, so suddenly seen from out of such darkness. I never knew such joy and heavenly peace but

once before, and that was when as a soldier during the Civil War, I was lying near death's door in a hospital in Philadelphia. I want to tell you of that experience and ask you, how you would account for it. It was before I became an Infidel, while I was yet a believer in the horrible U.P. doctrines which you so aptly term a nightmare. I was fearful of death, fearful of the future, and though I had always been a moral man, I had no assurance that I was one of the elect, but on the contrary believed as I had been taught that my morality had nothing whatever to do with my election. I was in a terrible state of mind, but knew that to confer with others would be useless as none could alter God's decrees. My mental torture was aggravating my physical ailments, and I was becoming daily weaker, spending my weary hours in prayer and thought which seemed to find no response, until one morning I awoke after a most refreshing sleep entirely changed. My fears were gone, my hopes were bright, my communion with the Lord was close; the grass looked differently from ever grass seemed before, the birds had cheerful notes to my ear-- in fact the whole world had changed in that night.

"This joy continued for some time, but gradually faded. I, at that time considered it a manifestation from God that I was accepted with him, but after I became an infidel, I tried to account for it [R1200 : page 7] upon some scientific basis; but now, since this joy has returned to my heart, I am wondering, whether I should not count that hospital experience as a sort of conversion. I want your opinion of it, anyhow."

We told him that to consider his first experience as his *conversion* would be a great mistake, one nevertheless very common among our Methodist friends. We pointed out that conversion is a change of mind, a change of will--from sin toward righteousness, from self and the world to God's control, and pointed out that his will at that time, and for years previous, had been to serve the Lord, and was not in opposition to righteousness, and that the only hindrance to full harmony with God and full joy and peace before, had arisen from his being misinformed regarding the plan of salvation. Had he known the truth then, the *truth* would have made him free then, as it makes him free now--free from the doubts and fears which terrorized and prevented the joy and peace which belong to and must always accompany the knowledge of the truth, the knowledge of the facts of God's good plan. And, we continued, we account for your remarkable experience of a change of feelings in that night as we account for many of the remarkable instances of sudden joy and peace found at Methodist mourners'-benches--we believe that the Lord took pity upon you in your heart-broken condition, and seeing that your distress, if not relieved, would kill you, and that your mind was so prejudiced by the traditions of men that the truths of his revelation could not reach you to give the proper relief, he graciously lifted the load in a miraculous manner.

But, Brother, what led to the loss of that first joy and peace? If you had been faithful, it would have continued--though not as an unaccountable joy without any foundation in reason. Had you confessed the Lord and sought his will and plan in his Word and consecrated yourself to the service of spreading it as you found it, you would surely have gotten a firm foundation for a brighter and enduring hope.

"Ah! I see now," said he, "I was content to have the joy and peace, and neglected [R1200 : page 8] to build under it the firm foundation of God's Word. I was so glad to be rid of those doubts and fears regarding my election, that I let reason go and did not seek to learn of the truth concerning the great divine election, nor did I ever tell of my joy and peace. I put my joy under a bushel instead of reasoning and searching out the truth. I was then unworthy of the favor and lost it."

We pointed out, however, to the brother's comfort, that while not blameless in the matter, he was not so blameworthy as though the clear light had shone brightly around him. We showed how he had merely followed in the footprints of the entire nominal church, including the ministers and elders and deacons, as sheep follow one another. Yet we pointed out that as his heart was *honest*, God never forsook him, but now, after allowing him to learn to reason and to follow *unguided* reason into the wilderness of infidelity, and after allowing him to taste and to fill himself with the husks of unbelief which only the swinish can really relish, had led him back home, and was now setting before him a royal feast of truth which his whetted appetite enabled him to relish far more than if he had never been led by his honesty of mind to doubt and deny the

sectarian fallacies.

How many infidels are such honestly-- driven from God and his Word by the errors of sectarianism, none can tell but God. The case of Brother Caldwell just related, the words of Prof. Huxley above quoted and the writer's own case and others known to us, lead us to believe that some of the most honest are outside Babylon's walls. The truth gives the foundation for faith, which consecrated and exercised reason demands; and when creeds and confessions of men, which sadly (though unintentionally) pervert and misapply God's Word, have been shaken to pieces and consumed in the dreadful "*fire*" of infidelity, revolution and anarchism shortly to come upon Christendom, it will stand. And finally, in the times of restitution of all things, men shall learn to distinguish between God's church built upon the rock of truth, and the sects of human organization built upon human traditions.

=====