

DEMOCRACY VERSUS THEOCRACY.

BY JOSEPH GRIFFITH.

A friend of mine after reading the paper headed "Our Opportunity," in our specimen number, told me that he took exception to the statement that Congregationalism is democracy. He claimed that it is theocracy. My rejoinder was to the effect that Congregationalism is both democracy and theocracy; there is no necessary antagonism between the two assertions.

Every professedly Christian communion of which I have heard makes prominent enough the theocratic idea. Every so-called church affirms distinctly enough its own divine appointment. All Christians—I know of no exception—acknowledge Christ as their Supreme Lord and His word as their supreme law. There is no difference between sect and sect on these points. The difference comes only when the questions are discussed, how Christ's kingly authority is to be expressed and how His statutes are to be interpreted. It is here that we fight. The Roman Catholic tells me that Christ's authority is represented by a vicar in the person of the Bishop of Rome, he decides the meaning and application of Christ's statutes. There are Protestant brethren who tell me that Christ's authority is represented to some extent by assemblies of ecclesiastical office-holders. But no Christian, Roman Catholic or Protestant, would intentionally dispossess Christ of His authority. No Christian would diminish His authority. All are agreed in the confession that He must stand first and foremost. The theocratic idea is found in all branches of the Christian Church.

We, Congregationalists, are not singular in asserting the supreme authority of Christ in His Church. All true Christians are shoulder to shoulder with us. Wherein are we singular, then? In this: we affirm that Christ's ordinances are to be interpreted and applied by the mass of believers. Christ speaks, according to us, to every individual disciple of His, and every disciple must decide what Christ says and how he shall obey Christ's behests. The commandments of Christ are supreme; but the interpretation and application of these commandments is left with those to whom the commandments are addressed. In other communions this is the prerogative and duty of some one man or one class of men.

It is in ecclesiastical polity as it is in the various forms of civil government. We all claim that civil government is of divine appointment. We all confess that all good government is of divine origin. God is the source and sum of all authority in the State as well as in the Church. The Divine will is the supreme law of the State as well as of the Church. But we are not all agreed as to the way in which the Divine will shall be made efficient. One man may prefer an autocracy; another may prefer an aristocracy; we English-speaking people prefer a practical democracy. We think that God speaks through the medium of the general run of men as to our civil duty. The voice of the people is to us the voice of God. But under all forms of civil government there must be an essential theocracy. Unless there is a theocracy—that is, unless there is a recognition in some fashion of Divine authority and Divine law—there can be no real government.

The theocratic idea, I maintain, is essential to all ecclesiastical government. Whatever may be your church polity, you must have a recognition of Christ as head of the church. In that respect Congregationalism is in no sense peculiar; and yet I am sure that it has its advantages. I am convinced that the more democratic your church institutions are, the more powerful the theocratic idea. It comes about in this way. Multiply your officials, your representatives of authority, your sources of secondary authority, and inevitably the primary source of authority, God Himself, is not very vividly and distinctly brought before men's minds. Brush all these things away and nothing is left but God. His voice is the only voice that speaks. The soul fixes its gaze on Him and on Him alone. And thus you have the theocratic idea made the prominent if not the sole one.

I maintain then, that in ecclesiastical government

there is no necessary antagonism between theocratic and democratic principles. I go further—I maintain that in the church, the nearer you come to a perfect democracy the nearer do you come to a perfect theocracy, and the nearer you approach to a perfect theocracy the nearer do you approach to a perfect democracy.

NATURALNESS IN PREACHING.

Religion is, and must be organized into an institution. Preaching and worship occur at regular intervals, at definite times, and in places set apart for the purpose. It would be strange if in the case of both ministers and hearers, the services of religion did not become, in a greater or less degree, perfunctory. Men may preach and even pray, as they wind up their watches in the morning, merely because the customary time has come. The services of religion, simply because they are repeated week after week, may sink into a lifeless routine. An evangelist, who comes for a short time and then goes, who holds his meetings in a building specially erected for his use, at unusual times also, and under circumstances altogether peculiar, is comparatively free from this exposure. But the sight of his work may serve to remind us of it, and stimulate us to guard against so insidious a foe. One part of the lesson is, to aim at and expect results. The end of the sermon is to produce an effect. Something is to be done and accomplished. The auditors are to be made to see a certain truth, to feel in a certain way, to resolve upon a certain line of conduct. One who is not striving for such a result, to be achieved on the spot, might as well beat the air.

A preacher who is thus in earnest, and practical in the true sense of the term, will be very much aided in casting aside all cant, and all conventionalities of speech of whatever nature, and will be more likely to give to the truth a fresh and living expression. When a great religious ferment exists in any age—for example, the sixteenth and the first half of the seventeenth century—religious thoughts and emotions create for themselves a language of their own. This language is handed down and becomes a traditional vehicle, which is kept in use after it ceases to suit the consciousness of a later generation. Religious truth becomes incrustated in words and phrases which hide it, instead of revealing it. In that case, religious teaching fails to come home to the bosoms and business of men, and, consequently they stay away from church; or, if this does not happen, "the hungry sheep look up and are not fed." It is an immense gain when a minister can break through these fetters, and speak in the natural language of the living generation. The old truth is made new when it is uttered in the words of to-day. I have in mind an eminent preacher, widely diverse from Mr. Moody in education and in habits of mind, the Rev. Phillips Brooks. Yet one prime source of the interest with which the sermons of Mr. Brooks are heard, lies in the freshness and naturalness of the expression in which he inculcates the truth of the New Testament. Who that is thirsty does not prefer a mountain stream to a rain cistern? It might be profitable for many a minister to examine his own prayers and sermons for a single Sabbath, and see what amount of phraseology there is in them, which though it might have been telling in Solomon's temple, or Calvin's Institutes, or in the mouth of one of Cromwell's chaplains, falls dead on the ear of living men to-day. Artificial elegance, let me add, weakens the influence of truth, not less than cant. No kind of food cloy so soon as confectionery. Although it is not well for preachers generally to stuff their sermons with anecdotes, no one should disdain to introduce an illustration, however homely in its incidents, which really elucidates or recommends his doctrine.—*Rev. Geo. P. Fisher in an address before a Congregational Association.*

LEAVES FROM A NEW SHORTER CATECHISM.

What is God? The effectual cause of the phenomena of the universe; an entity whose existence it is scientifically unpleasant to assume, but logically impossible to deny.

NOTE.—Whereas, God was once very much of a man, now Man is very much of a God.

What is Man? The supreme product of the development forces acting on organic forms.

NOTE.—Originally Man was simply a cell, now he is a complex one.

Of what is Man made? Of protoplasm.

NOTE.—Formerly organisms were supposed to be made of dust, now we know dust to be made of organisms.

At death, to what does Man return? To gas.

NOTE.—Spiritualism would make this a verb in the infinitive; science shows that this supremest product of cosmic forces drops at once into its first elements.

What is the Chief End of Man? To attain "sweetness and light."

NOTE.—This only applies to the upper classes.

What is true Morality? Complete adaptation to one's environment.

NOTE.—This rule makes up by its universality for the limitations of the previous one. It reaches from man to the polype.

What is Faith? Faith is an emotion clinging to the high things which reason has not yet demonstrated.

NOTE.—There are two kinds: (a) Religious faith, the belief in an ennobling supernaturalism; (b) Scientific faith, the belief in an alluring hypothesis.—*C. L. Dana in January Scribner.*

Sunday Afternoon.

The February number of "Sunday Afternoon" contains, as this magazine always does, a large quantity of fiction. This fiction is of a very lively order in style and language, but its teaching and tendency are exceptionally good. Much of it seems to be written by men and women who are Christians of some experience. Besides the stories, the present number contains several articles which will inevitably be skipped by confirmed fiction-readers, but will furnish acceptable food for mind of a somewhat more thoughtful class. The subject of one of these articles is "A Conventional Conscience," and the writer of it is of the opinion that *vox populi* is not exactly what it has been called. The article on "Ministers and Hobbies" is evidently the work of a man of large and long experience in life, whose mind has retained all its keenness and vigour. The writer of the paper on "What is Conscience?" seems to be somewhat of a metaphysician and is pretty successful in his attempts at definition; but he afterwards wanders off in search of a perfect standard of morality, and falls foul of the Bible which he does not know half as well as he knows metaphysics. He cannot find any "perfect standard of morality" in the Old Testament. Instead of that he finds in it "a compromise with actual immorality." In the New Testament, however, he finds "a much higher standard," though he does not seem to be quite prepared to call even that perfect. It is expressed in what he appears to regard as two original commands given by the Saviour, viz.: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and thy neighbour as thyself," and "Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them." We hope there are many Sabbath school children who could point out to him that the former of these commands contains the latter, and that it is to be found in the Old Testament, from which the Saviour was quoting when he used the words. They could also tell him that it is a perfect standard of morality. This writer himself makes a reluctant admission to this effect when he says that it "would seem to contain, in a pregnant way, a standard of absolute morality, if only finite and fallible man could always infallibly apply it. But it is so pregnant, it involves such countless applications, and raises such countless queries as to whether it is applicable at all, and if so, how it is to be applied, that mankind on their present plane of character and intelligence, can hardly be expected to apply it infallibly." The "application" of the two great principles in question, namely, supreme love to God, and love to our fellow-man commensurate with the love of self, is to be found in the Moral Law given to us in the Old Testament, and more familiarly known as "the ten commandments." This