

The Widening Circles of the Century.

BY PROFESSOR S. C. MITCHELL, PH. D.

History has been divided into three epochs. The first may be called the river epoch, in which the earliest civilization sprang up and flourished in the rich valleys of the Nile and the Euphrates. The second may be termed the sea epoch, in which the classical world of Greece and Rome covered the shores of the Mediterranean. The third is the ocean epoch of history, in which man's progress, no longer confined to the narrow ribbon of the Nile valley nor to the limits of the Roman lake, has extended itself from continent to continent across the Atlantic and the Pacific.

THE ILLIMITABLE EXTENSION OF NATURE.

It is a great thing to live in the ocean period of the world's development. We hardly realize how immeasurably extended are the bounds of our horizon. To Homer the world appeared like a warrior's shield. Even in much later times the earth was regarded as the centre of the universe. What an apocalypse was given us of the world without by two men, who were born within less than thirty years of each other, and who wrought at the same time at their high tasks! While Columbus was making known the sphericity of the earth and uncovering new continents, Copernicus reduced this globe's size to a pin-point, as compared with the illimitable extent of the solar system, whose rhythmic motions the earth obeys. Thus the earth and the universe in extent became known in a day. No wonder that Columbus was loaded with chains and that Copernicus dared not disclose his awful discovery. Such intensity of light the human eye could not endure.

THE UNITY OF LAW.

Within the memory of men now living, there has been an advance in knowledge not unworthy to be compared to that splendid day of Columbus and Copernicus. To the ancients, natural law was capricious and operative only in certain well-fenced fields. Aristotle divorced the earth and the moon, but Newton remarried them. If today I could leap beyond the light of the polar star, the same law would be found to obtain there as governs my body in this study. It is, however, not this boundless extension of physical law that constitutes the great achievement of the nineteenth century, but the discovery of the unity that underlies all law. Caprice has skulked from our view; laws have everywhere asserted their dominion; and these various laws have at last formed a confederacy, in which the spirit of unity overmasters all.

"One God, one law, one element."

NATURE IS PLASTIC.

No less remarkable has been the change in our attitude toward nature. When the child first opens its eyes on the world, all things seem fixed. Its home is as it always has been. The society and institutions under which it lives seem unalterable. Language, science, and religion are regarded as in their final forms. Fixity expresses the child's conception of the world, including social forms as well as mountain, sea and star. It is a world into which the child is to fit itself as best it may. In the family, its first lesson is "to mind"; and in nature, its first fact is that "fire burns," and hence is to be avoided. Man for thousands of years contented himself with this child's view of nature as fixed and final.

To us nature is plastic. We can no longer disguise to ourselves the fact that change is only too rapid in the home, in the State, in systems of truth. Society is seen to be a living organism, and not a crystallization. In nature, too, we behold like transitions ever taking place. Indeed, to the geologist the hills are not eternal, but rather the sea, the very thing that to the ordinary eye is the symbol of ceaseless change. "Driven by the wind and tossed." As the government of our country is not the same as it was a generation ago, the law of political well-being demanding constant readjustment to ever-varying conditions that arise, so we know that the frosts of the past night were tearing down the mountains and filling up the valleys, digging deeper the channel of the Mississippi and filling up the Gulf. Nothing is stable. All is kaleidoscopic. Language grows in spite of Webster. At last we are beginning to know what the words of old Heraclitus mean: "All things flow."

If nature is plastic, then man's hand is to mould it into such forms as it can. From a passive man becomes an active being. Nature is no longer a huge machine, into whose cogs he is to fit himself, but clay, to be fashioned by him as a potter. His energy is set free; he reacts on the world. Society, government, art, and nature are changeable, he wills to change them for the better. This world was made for him. As Humboldt put it: "Government, society, science, religion, and nature itself are only the scaffolding to make a man." Man was not made for the Sabbath, but the Sabbath for man. As he sees all things subserve a moral end, the dignity of his own being becomes apparent. He begins to live in the light of that

"One far-off divine event,

To which the whole creation moves."

NATURE INSTINCT WITH THE SPIRIT OF PROGRESS.

After man has discerned these changes taking place in the social and natural world, he no sooner resolves to turn them to the better than he finds an unexpected ally, a spirit of progress working everywhere toward the same

divine ends. The striking of that alliance is the crowning achievement of the intellect hitherto. It has enabled man to deploy all his forces, added strength, and given untold confidence. Each day that man works with this ally makes him more and more aware of the inexhaustible resources which that covenant brought with it. The whole creation groaned and travelled in pain until now. The discovery of an ascending energy in the universe, answering to man's own yearning, has filled the future with hope. To man sitting in his lowly place the Master of the house has come and said: "Friend, go up higher."

GOD INDWELLS AND INFORMS NATURE.

The identity of this strange ally was some time in revealing itself. His power was made good to man long ere his personality was known. To the ancient this world appeared like a clock, which God has wound up and then left to run of its own accord. If he had connection with it thereafter, it was casual. He was a *Dens ex machina*. How radically different is the view which we entertain to-day! This new ally, in whose might we rejoice, is no other than God's agency. The belief in the immanence of God sheds a holy light on nature and life. Instead of deities living remote on some Olympus peak, we realize that "earth is crammed with heaven, and every common bush afire with God."

A higher conception now enters than the unity of law. Law is love. It is an expression of God's loving will toward us. See that child, how it tries to break through that screen at the window, because it obstructs the way. Little does it know, in its impatience, that the fatherly hand placed the screen there to keep it from falling to the pavement below. The once cruel and harsh mien of law is changing into the face of the Father. As the Greek advanced from a chaos to a cosmos, so we have proceeded from law to personality. In nature he saw beauty; we see love. Natural law is simply God's glove. "As light fills and yet transcends the rainbow, so God fills and yet transcends natural law."

UNITY OF LIFE.

It was Agassiz—is it not matter for wonder that the two greatest naturalists, Agassiz and Audubon, which our country has produced were both foreigners?—it was Agassiz, I say, who first showed the structural identity of such animals as the ox, the deer, the whale, the bat, the horse, the mole, and man. The visitor in the South Kensington Museum can see these type forms arranged side by side, bone for bone. That was a kindling truth which that enthusiastic Swiss struck out, and the world has profited by it.

The conception of the unity of all life has not only started us with fresh zeal on innumerable paths of fruitful discovery, but has also deepened and widened man's sympathies. When the curtain rose on the Mediterranean world, each nation was walled off from the others, having its own gods, its own customs, its own language. Stranger and enemy were expressed by the same word. A man's sympathies extended only as far as the bounds of his petty city-state. Then followed the consolidating work of Rome, by which these separate and warring States were melted down into one empire, over which extended one law, one army, and one worship. And hence there grew up naturally in this unified State the Stoic doctrine of the brotherhood of man—a vast step in human progress.

Within our century, however, this circle of sympathy has widened so as to include not only neighbor and fellow-citizen, not only alien-peoples, such as the Chinese and the African, but also the entire lower realm of animal life.

"A sacred kinship I will not forego

Binds me to all that breathes."

As a result, behold the enthusiasm of such a lover of the animals as Mr. Seton-Thompson and mark the widespread interest which his thrilling biographies of the bear and rabbit excite. Indeed, man's sympathies, thus launched, stop not at the bounds of the human, not at the bounds of the animate, but enter boldly the realm of inanimate nature, finding there rich spiritual treasures that surpass the dreams of the hardest seeker after Eldorado. The Alps were discovered only yesterday. Livy, though born at their foot, and writing of Hannibal's heroic passage of them, betrays no hint of appreciation of their majesty and beauty.

These, then, are some of the widening circles of thought in this oceanic century, in which it has been our lot to live—the unity of law, the unity of life, the universality of God's love. Our hearts, surging with delight in these lofty truths, take up instinctively the exclamation of the enraptured Psalmist: "O magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt his name together!"—R. I. I. Herald.

BY REV. DAVID BRATON, D. D.

Chopping the Church Into Bits.

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Brothers A. and B. were accustomed to speak very freely to each other, and the vital questions of church life received vigorous treatment at their hand. They were resting just after their weekly spin, and Brother A. looked rather glum for a man who had enjoyed ten good miles of the glad, open air life of a perfect summer day. "No, I am not as happy as I ought to be on this

glorious morning, but the fact is things are not all right with my church. There is a want of reality and spiritual power, in spite of our numbers, wealth and superficial success, that causes me grave misgiving." A. was evidently deep in earnest and B. let him talk on. "I have a large church, my people are generous and the Sunday morning congregation is all a pastor's heart could wish. But there is a formality, an inertia, a want of enthusiasm, a coldness to certain kinds of appeal that makes me tremble when I look below the surface."

Brother B. expressed his surprise at this revelation, for A's was one of the leading churches of the body, and an outsider would have pronounced it a paradise for a pastor. But, thought B., each foot knows where its own shoe pinches. B. sympathetically indicated a wish for particulars, and A. continued.

"To begin with, I don't get more than a baker's dozen to my evening service; my prayer-meeting is attended by one little set as to age and sentiment; the Y. P. S. C. E. have their own weekly meeting, and even they reach but a section of the young people; the Women's Missionary Society is divided into two separate water-tight compartments and does its grand work all by itself; the Sunday-school, though effective, is also a separate institution, and so on through all the church life—the King's Daughters, the Boys' Brigade and the Young Men's Club are all taking on separate organizations and expressions of life, and we are chopping the church up into little bits.

"But, Brother A.," exclaimed B., in astonishment, "you would not abolish our Y. P. S. C. E. and Woman's Missionary Societies, two of the most distinctive and successful institutions of our century?"

"I don't want to abolish anything; I simply want to point out a tendency of our time in all our societies which, if it goes much farther, will split the church of Jesus Christ into a dozen little churchlings.

Take the Women's Missionary Societies first. A. bly conducted, devoted, enthusiastic and resourceful, yet by virtue of these very qualities they have drawn to their separate organizations the missionary interest of the churches. I have known many instances in which the members, in their excessive zeal to swell the treasury of the woman's board, have got their husbands to give their annual missionary subscriptions through the woman's society instead of the church. Indeed, this separation of the benevolences into the separate heads of the church, Y. P. S. C. E., Sunday-school and Woman's Board is a thoroughly schismatic and unscriptural method. It is bad enough that we should have to work and pray separately, but it is simply suicidal to have separate treasuries and separate acknowledgements of that work and its gifts; for this is an acknowledgment, in our administrative life, that these societies are of co-ordinate authority and influence with the church. Our women's societies are a great power deserving of the most careful administrative consideration, but in religion as in government one principle prevails—the power of the purse; where money is collected and voted there is supreme authority. The women's societies, therefore, should pay their moneys into the treasuries of the local churches, and thus act towards all external organizations as a part of the church of which they are vital members."

At this point Brother B. became strongly excited, for he is a strong supporter and warm admirer of the women and their work. "The women are surely not to be blamed for doing their duty if the men neglect theirs. Let the men rather imitate their example and not hinder their zeal."

"That's it," retorted A. "You see, Brother B., you are separating the church into men and women, into classes and ages. This is the ecclesiastical vice of the day. In Christ there is neither male nor female, young or old, learned or illiterate. The glory and power of the church is in its comprehensiveness in discarding the accidents of age, temperament, social position and sex. It is the only institution that includes and satisfies all life. Yet this splendid distinction we are lightly sacrificing to the false ideas of our time. Verily, we are separating what God hath joined together, the men are losing the tenderness of the women, and the women the breadth and deep grasp of the men; while the old are losing the simplicity and fervor of the young, and the young the maturity and vigor of the old."

"O, stop right there, Brother A., you must not say a word about the young people's society. They have done a wonderful thing at least."

"That's my next point," quickly replied A. "Have you not noticed when a company of ministers are talking confidentially, the shaking of the head when our Young People's Society work is discussed? Well, the reason is that we ministers are finding out that the Society is becoming a church within a church. I do not think its leaders are false to the pledge of loyalty to the church; I simply point out the trend of the movement."

"Now, Brother B., don't be frightened," exclaimed A., seeing the glum look on B.'s face; "it will all come right if we have courage to look the facts in the face and humility enough to acknowledge our mistakes. I am not talking of the inherent weakness of the society just now, merely of its methods. It is ominous to me that