

GENERAL LITERATURE.

LIGHT.

It is said that Sir Isaac Newton, impressed as he was with the presence of the Deity in all his wonderful works of creation, could never mention the name of God without the greatest awe. He could see the name of the Almighty inscribed on every leaf and over the earth. Science should be joined to religion. To illustrate these views, we will take the nature of light. Light! what is light? It is not a question that can be answered.

What is light, and whence comes light?—In the first chapter of Genesis, it is put down as the first work of Divine power. Remember that God said, "let there be light, and there was light." Milton, in his line commencing, "Hail holy light," &c., beautifully expresses his ideas in reference to this portion of God's work—the creation of light. It is the most incomprehensible and most mysterious study of the age. What has been discovered as regards its nature? Why, that light consists of extremely small particles of matter; the filling up of space with these small particles of matter. According to this belief, light is matter; but a more recent doctrine is, that light is not matter, but the existence of ether kept in motion by the sun or fire; and when this ether is still there is darkness. In the presence of fire, light appears, because this substance is kept in a waving motion, and when put in motion it becomes light. The sun does not undulate, but the substance in the space; and this theory is now generally admitted as an established fact. Sir John Herschel says it is a beautiful theory and ought to be established. Lord Brougham says it is not established, and moreover it is not likely to be.

There are then these two explanations of the causes of light; but does either give us a

Neither theory makes it known. Either may serve as a convenient basis for the science of optics; but I am not about to meddle with the science of optics—and refer only the subject by way of explaining the causes of light; for how utterly impossible is it to refute either doctrine. Let us consider the nature of light, and theory advanced as to its cause, and let me remark at the outset, that according to the philosophy of nature it must consist either of matter or spirit. We have no language for any other substance than these two. Suppose we conceive it to be matter or spirit.—Let us urge that it is matter sent forth in extremely small particles. In the first place, then, each kind of matter that we know of has its gravity. All substances on earth are held there by gravity; for instance, if a stone be thrown up from the earth, it returns, &c. The sun, more than other matter, possesses this gravity, and the planet Herschel, although eighteen hundred millions of miles from the sun, yet it is held by the sun with its mighty gravity, as it were at arm's length, as if it were a mere toy.

This sun emits small particles of matter or light. Yes, light is matter—matter that does not gravitate; hence what becomes of our definition of matter? Then again matter is said to be tangible, yet light is matter and not tangible. Light takes no room; we see it; yet where is it? Cut it off and we are in darkness. It has been rushing by us continually as a river of matter flowing on, yet there is nothing there; nothing accumulates. We see as if there were an ocean of matter, yet is never felt. Other matters have mechanical force when put in motion, but where is the force of light? By the mechanical laws of nature, light should sweep the earth as a tornado, yet it does not disturb a leaf or a sea-

ther. It penetrates where no mechanical power can reach, into the very heart of a diamond, yet it has not force to press the finest nerve.

If light be matter, as Sir Isaac Newton asserts, then it is matter with the property of spirit. An incomprehensible miracle of the Creator. Let us now take up the other theory—that light is not matter, that no matter proceeds from the sun, but that light is spirit or ether. Let us suppose this to be true. If it be so, the mystery is by no means diminished. What is ether! Science does not answer. Physical science takes it for granted that it is matter, but what right has science to say that it is matter? Is it matter or spirit? You cannot define the properties of it. Have I not a right to call it spirit? No man can refute me, and say that it is not a spirit. I do not, however, wish to commit myself, but if it cannot be identified as matter, it must be spirit; and how wonderful it is in this view, for what are the properties of spirit? It cannot be weighed or handled. It is nothing to any of the bodily senses. We can see light; indeed we can see nothing but light. Nothing but spirit; this is a fact for materialists. What a man sees, he believes. He says, "I believe what I can see. Show me something and I shall believe it exists." Therefore were I to make the assertion that we can see nothing but light, nothing but spirit, nobody can contradict me; and not only can we see that spirit, light, but we can analyze it; decompose it; we can prove of what it consists.

What shall we do, then, finding equal difficulties under either doctrine. The truth is, man is not competent to demonstrate whether light is matter or whether it is spirit. There is but one thing we can see, and that is the Divine agency of an Almighty and wise God; then the mind is naturally driven to this conclusion, that this is a Divine agency.

Consider some of the purposes of light, as it is made to answer some of those purposes. Consider the condition of the blind, or rather what would be the condition of the blind, provided they had no one that could see to guide and teach them. . . . Then how wonderful is this single agency of light, how complete and magnificent the result!—We see, and thank God for the boon.

The gift of light—it is every thing—it is our day—it is our starry firmament—it is our fire-side cheerfulness—when going out or coming in, it is our source of joy; it gives the wisdom of books—the wisdom of science—it lifts the mind out of the deep dungeon of ignorance to study the sublime and lovely works of God. . . . I must still take time to trace the connection between this matter and spirit. Now it seems to me that there is something wanting in rising from the sphere of matter into the sphere of spirit. Those who have followed me thus far concerning the nature of light, from the doctrine which makes it matter to that which makes it spirit, will have seen the difference. With regard to matter, it wants substance—it is a blank. With regard to spirit, it wants something like an analysis and conceivableness; but we need not decide upon the merits of the two rival systems. We may safely say that our conception of light must hold the middle way between matter and spirit—that it belongs partly to both, yet to neither—a bridge resting on either shore.

It is as much akin to spirits as it is to matter. Yet it is a substance that I can see, of whose reality I have here. It is something that I can admit or exclude from my room,

yet the reality has as many properties of spirit as it has of matter.

It seems to me as an emblem of the invisible world—a ladder let down from Heaven by a Supreme Ruling Power, which none but atheists will attempt to deny, and none other will for a moment call in question the truth of what I now advance. The marks of design, the tokens of love and care, the leaves and buds of Spring, declare from every point of immensity the omnipresence of God.

THE BENEVOLENCE OF THE PRIMITIVE CHRISTIANS.

BY THE REV. ROBERT JAMIESON.

AMONG the various features in the character of the primitive Christians, there is none that so eminently claims our admiration as their mutual love. All the details transmitted to us of their social intercourse, and of their public conduct, bespeaks the lively operation of this Christian spirit. And when we read of the delightful harmony and concord that reigned in their assemblies, their ready disposition to render to every one his due,—the high condescending to those of low degree,—the poor giving the tribute of their respect to those whom Providence had placed in a more exalted station,—and all vying with amiable rivalry, to promote each other's happiness and welfare, we perceive the strong grounds of the proverbial observation of the heathen, "Behold how these Christians love one another!" Not only when they were small in numbers, and meeting together almost daily, were well known to each other, did this admirable affection prevail among them, but how widely soever they might be separated, the ardour of their love suffered no diminution; and forgetting every other distinction in that of being the followers and friends of the Saviour, they sympathised in each other's joys and sorrows. Whatever blessing one of their number had received, was a subject of lively gratitude to all; and whatever calamity had befallen a single member spread a gloom over the whole community. Bound to each other by ties infinitely holier and dearer than any that belong to the world, they looked upon themselves as members of the same common family. Every time that they met, either in their own houses or in their public assemblies, they interchanged the kiss, as a badge of fellowship, and token of the warmest affection. Though totally unconnected by ties of consanguinity, they addressed each other, according to their respective age and sex, by the name of father, mother, brother, sister. Though naturally separated by distinction of rank and diversity of colour, nothing could cool the ardour or prevent the reciprocities of their mutual love. The knowledge of the simple fact, that any one was a follower of Jesus, changed him at once from a stranger into a friend; creating a union between them not to be described by the cold, selfish friendship of the world; and to them belongs the peculiar distinction of realising a state of society which many philosophers have been delighted to picture to their fancy and wished for in vain,—the idea of a community united by no other bond than the golden chain of universal love.

One very remarkable way in which this love manifested itself, was in the care they took of their poorer brethren. Among them, as in every association of men, the needy and destitute were found. The duty of providing for these was not left to the gratuities of private individuals, whose situation gave

* A Christian husband did not give the name of mother to his wife, however far advanced in life she might be. She then received the appellation of sister. —Turner's *Chronicles of the Primitive Christians* accounted for.