

THE BASIS OF BIGOTRY.

Some articles have been published in the SPECTATOR from the pen of Mr. Frederic Harrison, an English barrister, a disciple of Auguste Comte, and a brilliant writer withal. A word as to the master. He was the author of what is now known as "The Positive Philosophy," in which is taught that the human mind has by a natural law passed through three successive stages in its thoughts upon all subjects, viz., the *theological* stage, in which phenomena are accounted for by the supposition of supernatural beings to produce them; the *metaphysical* stage, in which while living supernatural beings are got rid of, certain abstract ideas, such as those included in the use of the word "Nature," "Harmony," &c., take their place in men's thoughts as the productive causes of everything; and the *positive* stage, in which, shaking off both unseen spiritual agencies and abstractions, the mind grasps the notion of the universe in all its branches and departments, as proceeding according to certain laws or uniform sequences, to be ascertained by observation and induction. M. Comte's God was Humanity—the soul an abstraction—immortality an idea, or memory. Mr. Harrison is his disciple and exponent.

For the publication of those articles we have received much and severe censure, contained in private letters and public criticism. Some have been hasty enough to accredit the Editor with holding similar views—others have not hesitated to say that such reading is highly dangerous to the young people of our families.

The world of human life is certainly to those of us who are only ordinary folk, a most elaborate puzzle. There are hosts of men who are always talking of "original sin," "disorganizations of the mind and spirit," "ignorance," "total depravity," and such like things, who act as if they meant by "original sin" inherent holiness, and by "ignorance" the fulness of knowledge. They have nothing to do with doubting or questioning. In Religion they have an exact science, necessary truths, as in Geometry and Mathematics. The windows of their great souls have never been darkened—their judgment is not warped: their knowledge is not partial, as was highest human knowledge in the days of Paul; but absolute wisdom has chosen to live with them, and in all probability, will die with them. They have said—this thing is false, and of course it is false. How did they reach that sublime position? By being educated as they would have others educated now. In this matter of "The Positive Philosophy," we agree with them, not having a particle of sympathy with the teachings of Comte. But when we are told it is highly dangerous to put such reading into the hands of young people, then we differ *in toto et in loco*.

Young people may be compelled to read and know one side of things, or one set of questions; but no power of earth can stay the sweep of education or of liberal thought. They may be kept for a time from all those great questions of life and death, of time and eternity, which trouble in thoughtful minds. They may make of their opinions a couch to rest upon, but the time will come when thorns will heave through the covering and pierce the skin and start them to their feet in discontent and questioning. A casual word—the sudden rising of a thought—a day's sickness, a new book, will bring new ideas storming in upon the soul. Questions of God and Christ—of Immortality—of Free Will and Fate—of Evil and how it came to be, will toss them to and fro, as the sea will sport with a ship when pressed by the wings of a storm. Some will pay little heed, and whistle their doubts down the wind. They will fall back upon their ignorance, which they miscall knowledge. They will thrust the rising doubt down as an evil thing and a foe, until they have persuaded themselves that doubts are of the devil, and all who hold views opposed to their own to be evil entreated. And that is the basis of bigotry. Others will reach that by a longer and more difficult way. When doubts come they will use them at first as things to play with—they will amuse themselves with strange and brilliant fancies—they will take pleasure in watching the weird, fantastic shapes the fogs of their mind fall into. Then, as the things grow grimmer and darker their courage will fail—for the danger is new—the difficulty has not a familiar appearance, they have come face to face with the awful, gaping, bleeding wounds of the universe. They search for the healing balm, but cannot find it. Cannot find it in the Churches—cannot find it in Herbert Spencer's Sociology—in Matthew Arnold's "Sweetness and Light," or that "eternal power, not ourselves which makes for righteousness," not in the "biggest Biologist," or the "most prodigious protoplastologist" of Huxley, or the positive philosophy of Harrison. And then comes the most awful moment in a man's life—the moment when the soul begins to feel that many of the props it had rested on are old and rotten—to feel a horrible insecurity—as if life had lost its meaning and shrivelled to a span, and the sad mysterious Here pointed to no Hereafter. From that there is an instant recoil to a narrow form of faith—or a narrow form of no-faith. It has produced a bigoted believer, or a bigoted non-believer.

It arises from the previous lack of education. The doubt has come with awful sudden swoop upon an unprepared mind. The teaching was one-sided, so was the growth. The Reason has been neglected; the Judgment has been biassed; the mind has not been trained to

weigh matters and sift evidence, and the first coming of some great problem of life will bring disaster. The separate method in anything is bad. A child educated in a narrow sectarian system, will be narrow and sectarian in his thoughts and modes of living. The politician who reads but the press of his party, and seeks no acquaintance with opinions beyond its limits, may be a firm partizan, but a statesman he never can be. And the theologian, whether as minister or layman, who has confined his study to one school, or pinned his faith to a denomination, may be very earnest, very full of a kind of faith, very tenacious in his clasp upon it; but very wise as a guide, or very efficient as a teacher, he cannot be. Is a student likely to know more of English history, and to be more correct in his estimate of time and events, because he has only read British eulogists, and not what French and German writers have said on the subject? If he shall say "facts of history are facts, and why should there be two versions, or two opinions, of the same thing?" will he be judged much other than a fool, and no true student at all? What would be said of the man of science if he confined his studies to one school? And yet there are men professing to teach the great and sacred science of life; asking the people to learn how to live, but trying to hide from those they would teach, all theories but their own. They seem to have forgotten the injunction, "add to your faith *knowledge*."

What is needed—and needed greatly—is not a narrowing process, not a drawing in of the lines, but a broadening process, more liberality of sentiment, more generosity of view and judgment and sympathy. Rome has always had its Index ex-Purgatorium, and books which seemed to oppose her dogmas were forbidden a free circulation; and Rome has been the fruitful mother of infidelity. Some Protestants are not a whit more wise or tolerant. They brand and condemn all they do not approve. Holding the divine right of infallibility as to knowledge of literature, they put fetters on the popular mind as truly as ever did Rome. "Do not read this; do not read that; give no attention to the men who do not pronounce the Shibboleth correctly; if they only leave out the h, turn away from them, there is danger in the listening, there is danger in the reading." That is the cry; as foolish and false a sentiment as mortal could put into words. The danger lies not in knowledge, but in ignorance; not in breadth of view, but in narrowness of sentiment; not in much reading, but in little and one-sided reading. That people will only be great, having a permanent faith, who have conquered doubts in themselves; have faced the problems of life: have sifted evidences, and reached conclusions through intelligent convictions. It would be well if men and women should lay to heart the injunction of the great Apostle: "Work out *your own* salvation," that is, do not trust to the faith and works of others; do not rest on the knowledge others have acquired; but acquire for yourselves, that to your own faith may be added a knowledge which is your own.

MONTREAL SOCIETY.

What is it? and Where is it? Who is, and especially, who is not, the *crème de la crème*? What does, and what does not constitute it? Where shall we find it, and where may we not look for it?

We are invited to a very grand party, at the aristocratic Mrs. So-and-so's. We meet many fine people in very fine clothes, but as to their pedigree, that is an *autre chose*.

We shall possibly find the butcher, the baker and the candlestick maker, among the not very remote ancestry of some of the guests. Indeed we may perchance find the quondam butcher, baker, or candlestick maker, tinker, tailor, or grim undertaker, under some of the fine broadcloth now present. But we do not object to this. It is the pride and boast of our country that anybody may become somebody, and nobody need despair of becoming almost anybody. What we would object to is that when the nobody becomes somebody, he is apt to look down upon anybody who is nobody; and we all know that nobody likes to be looked down upon by anybody, even if he is somebody, and especially if standard, we do not seem to have any firm money basis. We are divided up into innumerable little cliques and coteries, each of which seems to despise and depreciate the other. Mrs. Smyth will tell you that she does not care to associate with Mrs. De Jones, because she has been told that Mrs. De Jones' father once kept a small hotel and sold liquor *by the glass*! Again, Mrs. De Jones will tell you that the Smyths are very low people, although they put on *by the bundle*! Now these are distinctions without a difference, and would it not be better to ignore them? Let all who are possessed of a certain income, or who live in a certain style, meet together on the same level. Let the young people ing. What does it matter whether the ancestral bearings were a meat-axe, a

Why should we waste our lives listening to wretched twaddle as to how So-and-so's father made his money, or how So-and-so himself was once a boot-cleverness and business ability that has raised them to their present position? But in a commercial community like this, where the millionaire of to-day may become the insolvent of to-morrow; where the strongest houses are tottering, and our base of society, and build it upon some surer foundation? Why not meet upon the great platform of the nineteenth century—education and cultivation—