

## Our Contributors.

### SOME CHANGES THAT DID NOT TAKE PLACE LAST YEAR.

BY KNOXIAN.

Standing once more upon one of Father Time's watersheds and looking back, we naturally think of changes that took place during the past year. Some of these changes make us sad. The proper way is to bow submissively and say, as does Whittier:—

All as God wills, who wisely heeds  
To give or to withhold  
And knoweth more of all my needs  
Than all my prayers have told.

Enough that blessings undeserved  
Have marked my erring track:  
That wheresoe'er my feet have swerved,  
His chastening turned me back.

That more and more a Providence  
Of love is understood,  
Making the springs of time and sense  
Sweet with eternal good.

That death seems but a covered way  
Which opens into light,  
Wherein no blinded child can stray  
Beyond the Father's sight.

That care and trial seem at last,  
Through memory's sunset air,  
Like mountain-ranges overpast,  
In purple distance fair.

There is another side to the shield. Whilst we naturally feel sad in thinking over some of the changes that took place during the year, perhaps we should feel sadder on account of some of the changes that didn't take place. Many of us are far too much the same as we were a year ago. We began the year resolving to be better and do better, but we have been and have done pretty much the same old thing. Of course the perfect people are exceptions. They were so good at the beginning of the year that there was no room for improvement. Their whole duty evidently was to look down patronizingly from their high pedestal and thank the Lord that they are not like other men. That duty was faithfully discharged throughout the whole year. The ordinary mortals have not changed half as much as we should have done. If we had kept our New Year resolutions we would have changed a great deal more. Whilst sorry on account of some changes we may have seen or felt we ought to be ashamed that we ourselves did not change much more for the better in 365 days—days loaded with rich mercies and high privileges.

Here is a man who began the year with a resolution more or less solemn that he would attend Church regularly during 1890. He kept his resolution for a few Sabbaths and then relapsed into his former careless habits. He didn't change very much. If he had changed more it would have been a good thing for himself. The changes that didn't take place in him make his friends feel sad.

Here is a man who didn't give a cent for missions in 1889 and he gave precisely the same amount in 1890. There was not much change in him. A radical change in all such men would be a good thing for themselves and a good thing for the Church.

Thousands of men begin every year with a resolution that they will drink no more whiskey. Before the end of the year they drink as hard as ever. A change in their habits would have been a great blessing for themselves and their friends, but the change did not come. More's the pity.

"He is just the same conceited fool he always was." "He is as great a mule as ever." "He grumbles as much as ever." "He is just as cross as ever." "The old man is just as egotistic as ever." "He is as lazy and shiftless as ever." "He is as hard as ever." These and similar expressions we hear almost every day and they all indicate that no change has taken place in the persons referred to. A change in each case would have been a good thing. Whilst sad over some changes we should work and pray for others. Most of us don't change half enough.

We often hear about the changes that take place in localities. Such changes sometimes form the pathetic part of sermons. There might often be a more pathetic part on the changes that didn't take place. There stands the old church that the early settlers built forty years ago with their own hands. Noble old men they were. They built a better house to worship God in than any of them lived in themselves. Their sons have grown rich but they have hardly religion enough to keep the roof water-tight on the church their fathers built or to put a little blacking on the old stove in the corner. There is one change that did not take place—the old church is the same as it was forty years ago. Quite often there is another change that didn't take place in such localities—the minister's salary is just the same as it was when the people were poor and half their present numbers. Brethren, when you preach on changes, work up a good paragraph on some of the changes that didn't occur.

The saddest of all sights in our churches is that of a man who remains for many years unchanged in heart. There he sits year after year hearing the Gospel that was intended to change men, that has changed millions of men, that is changing thousands of men every day, but he remains unchanged. Perhaps it would be more becoming in many Christians to expend some of the sorrow upon such cases that they expend

upon changes that have taken place. A friend taken home and crowned is not such a fitting subject for sorrow as a friend unsaved.

Looking forward, we say 1891 will bring many changes. Some of these will no doubt be sad, but let us hope and pray that many of them will make us glad. Changes of a certain kind are just what we should wish for, work for, pray for. That careless men should become thoughtful, that prayerless men should become prayerful, that godless men should become converted, are changes devoutly to be sought. Among Christians there is ample room and need for change. None of us are as zealous, active and self-denying as we might be. The liberality of the Church is improving but there is much room for further improvement. We need more than a change in giving—we need a revolution.

We need better preaching, better pastoral work, better attendance at the house of God and better hearing. Better preaching would make better hearing, and better hearing would make better preaching. More prayer would help both. Changes forsooth—why change in the right direction is just what we all need. Stagnation is the thing we ought to dread—not beneficial change.

The Church courts could stand some change. Less time spent in quibbling about small, unimportant matters, and more given to the vital interests of the Church would be a most desirable change. An important committee of the council of a great city was reported the other day to have spent much precious time in discussing pea-nut stands. If any of the members were elders perhaps they thought they were in Presbytery.

The New Year will bring changes. Let us hope and pray that it will bring many good ones.

### MODERN SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH AND MODERN DOUBT.

THE VASTNESS OF THE VISIBLE UNIVERSE NO GROUND FOR SCEPTICISM.

BY PROF. GEORGE P. FISHER, D.D., LL.D., OF YALE UNIVERSITY.

(Concluded.)

The care of divine Providence in providing for the sustenance, education and comfort of man by things around him on earth is equally demonstrable. He has not cast His creatures on these shores of time without supplying with tender concern such blessings as correspond to their nature. They do not ask for bread and receive a stone. And in the mission of Jesus Christ to seek and to save the lost race from moral destruction; in all that Christianity brings us for this life and for the life to come.—God has given the most impressive proof we can imagine of His interest in us. These unspeakable gifts come down from the Father of Lights, whose love is without variableness or shadow of turning. They prove that He is mindful of us. In a literal sense he has visited us.

We do not aim, then, to establish the fact that God is concerned for man. This the Psalmist did not doubt, however much he was amazed at the thought of it. No man can doubt it without being an Atheist, without ascribing what he is, what he enjoys, what he hopes, to something besides God. But our aim is to answer the question, why God is mindful of us? What is there in man to render him in any sense worthy of the attention of his Creator?

The question, put in this form, appears to answer itself. Man has been created; and if God had a motive in his creation He has a reason for desiring Him to do justice to his nature. If the creation of so inferior a being is not an act unworthy of God it is not unworthy of God to care for him after he is made.

But the difficulty is directly solved on gaining a true conception of God and of man. First, a true conception of God, as infinite. The discoveries of astronomy have added no attribute to the Divine Being. They have simply rendered the feeling of His greatness more vivid. From the earliest times pious men have believed in the existence of multitudes of intelligent beings who are superior to man—of "the army of Heaven" as well as "the inhabitants of earth." Nowhere is the Divine Power set forth with deeper fervour than in the Psalms. But the moment that you grasp the idea of an infinite Being all his works seem to be nothing in the presence of their Creator. The great and the small are alike atoms in His sight—the one not more than the other, entitled to His notice. Chalmers is one of those who have dwelt on the fact that, as if to forbid the notion that what is minute escapes the eye of God. When the telescope unveiled a universe above us, so vast as to overpower the imagination, the microscope at the same time, was uncovering a universe beneath us, finished in every part and not less full of wonders. The natural attributes of the Creator, moreover, are never to be allowed to veil from sight His moral perfections. "His mercy," like his power, "is great above the Heavens." His condescension is equal to His might. Therefore He is said to crown man with his loving kindness.

The difficulty is solved on obtaining a just view of man and of his dignity as a spiritual being. Only when we exalt matter above mind does the greatness of the Physical Universe excite the fear that we are overlooked by the Creator. In his spiritual nature, by which he is made to resemble God, lies the real worth of man. His body is feeble than that of the animals around him, and returns to dust; but his

soul is great, almost beyond conception. Man has often been called a microcosm—a little world in himself—an epitome of the universe. Everything in the world has some relation to him—a correspondence with some part of his nature. Even in his physical organization the lower orders of beings that have inhabited the earth were prophetic of him, and seem to have been elaborating the elements of grace and nobleness that are combined in his person. But in his mind are comprehended the laws of the universe. In his intellect is the geometry which the reason of God has stamped on his whole creation. Though fettered to the earth he weighs the distant worlds, ascertains the course which they take and measures their speed.

Put chiefly in the moral nature of man do we behold his greatness. He is able to bring God and the realities of the unseen world into the circle of his consciousness. He is able to set his affections on things above; to commune with his Creator; to understand the ends of His moral government, and to co-operate with Him, in the freedom of filial obedience. For the sake of righteousness, a purely spiritual good, he is able to sacrifice everything earthly, and to lay down his life with joy, knowing that death is the transition to a more glorious life—the door into a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

Is it said that man is sensible of his ignorance; that his powers are finite, that bounds are set to his knowledge; that an atmosphere of mystery surrounds all things? Is it said that man feels himself at an infinite remove from God? In this very consciousness of inferiority and dependence we find a striking proof of his greatness. How strange that he should know his own inferiority! What being is this who rises so high that he can look down upon himself? What marvellous power is that of seeing his own littleness! Is it not plain that he could not possess this wonderful self-knowledge unless he were somehow cognizant of what is infinite and perfect, unless he were on his way upward? When man looks abroad on the universe and cries: "How can God be mindful of me?" is it not plain that his mind has taken the great thought of the universe, and the great thought of God, into itself? And what a mind that is, which can thus soar away from itself; which can strive to fathom immensity, and deplore its partial success! What a mind that is which mourns that its attainments fall so short of its desires! The weakness of man is one of the grandest proofs of his greatness, because it is a conscious weakness—a weakness from which, in thought and aspiration, he has already escaped. Only on a system of materialism—on what has been aptly called the dirt-philosophy—can the material universe be ranked in dignity and glory above the mind of man. We do not determine the worth of matter even, by mere bulk; for the diamond may have a greater value than the mountain from which it is taken. An infant that is too weak to stand upon its feet is incomparably nobler than the highest animal that walks on the earth. What if that infant were a Kepler or a Shakespeare! The mind of the philosopher, engaged in extending the law by which the apple falls, over all the worlds, is an object with which the force of gravitation and all the globes of matter which it binds together, are not worthy to be compared. The course of a just man, who lives to enlighten his fellow beings and scatter the clouds of ignorance and sin, is infinitely more deserving of admiration than the course of the sun in the sky, which rejoices as a hero to run a race. What is the brightness of the visible heavens in comparison with the glory that shone from the face of the first of the Christian martyrs!

If it be granted that man is immortal, or even that he may be immortal, the notion that he is an insignificant being vanishes. If the place of his abode seems contracted he is now at the outset of his existence. This globe is his habitation only for a short time, while he continues in the flesh. He is here in a school whence he will emerge into scenes of inconceivable magnitude and rise to a stage of being of which he has now but a vague conception. When man is stirred with the thought of his immortality he never doubts the dignity of his nature. When the greatness of his destiny breaks upon him, when he once feels that he is to live forever, he doubts not that God is near him.

We are not to think, then, that God is not mindful of us, or that His eye is ever withdrawn from us. Our distress, whatever may be its source, is known unto Him. Our sins are known unto Him. Let none imagine that the universe is so vast, and they are so obscure that their sins pass unnoticed. This world is so small, my days on earth are so few, it matters not how I live; the man who reasons thus is a traitor to his soul. If his days are few it is of great consequence that he should spend them well. Let him not think that he can hide away from God. Let him rather confess to his Maker: "O Lord! Thou has searched me and knowest me;" "Thou understandest my thought afar off; Thou compassed my path, and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways; for there is not a word in my tongue, but lo, O Lord, Thou knowest it altogether! Thou hast beset me behind and before, and laid thine hand upon me!" "Whither shall I go from Thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from Thy presence?" "If I say surely the darkness shall cover me, even the night shall be light about me. Yea, the darkness hideth not from Thee, but the night shineth as the day. The darkness and the light are both alike to Thee!" Vain is the attempt of a man to cover up his wrong-doing or excuse an irreligious life, on the plea of his low rank in the scale of existence. He has reason and will, the elements of a moral nature; and no angel has more. His conscience shows him that he is amenable to law and judgment. He will be called to answer for