

The Great Agnostic.

In the death of Thomas H. Huxley, the third of the famous "Quadrilateral" of evangelists of doubt and unbelief of this generation passed to the judgment and final account. The *London Spectator* says truly of him: "There has not often been an Englishman of more brilliant gifts, of richer energies, of higher courage, and more thoroughly English combativeness. He had in him, too, all the qualities of a leader of men." The *London Academy* says, perhaps with equal truth, that some scientists have surpassed him in genius for discovery, while others may have equalled him as a "popularizer of scientific results, on the platform and with the pen; but no other man of science of the first order—with the exception, perhaps, of Buffon—has won such high rank as a leader of thought and as a master of literary style." He was undoubtedly of a kindly nature and often very helpful to his fellow investigators.

He had also that most dangerous gift of sarcasm that characterized the religious discussions of Voltaire, and that in its brutal form, tending toward abuse, marks the utterances of Haeckel in science; and he often rendered this gift more effective by assuming to sneer at religion in the name and with the authority of science, thereby deluding himself with a supposed victory, and plunging his hearer or reader into absolute skepticism or blank despair—a downright sneer being more potent with the average man than a thousand arguments. Moreover, he had always absolute confidence in himself and in his own conclusions, and the full courage of his convictions. This made him a strong *asserter*, and in great partizan expositions and encounters, with the multitudes who have no time for investigation, brass counts for more than brains, an ounce of confident assertion often going further toward producing conviction than a ton of able reasoning. It made him at the same time a brilliant fighter, his method of attack being—as we have somewhere seen it described by himself—that of some small wild animals, that more than make up for lack of weight and strength by the dash and fierceness of their onset.

But while so many accidents favored his quest for fame, certain essential drawbacks prevented his attaining the highest permanent success in either science or philosophy.

First of all, Professor Huxley did not receive in his early years a liberal education, and the conditions of his later life were such as to preclude his remedying this defect. He had only a showy, superficial, "pick-up" knowledge of theology, philosophy, literature, in fact of the whole broad range of special knowledge opened to the scholar by such a liberal education. It is a remarkable fact that of all the "Quadrilateral" only

Charles Darwin received a university training and he in a most superficial way. This fact makes the assertions of Mr. Huxley on all these great subjects of knowledge absolutely worthless except as backed by the most cogent proofs.

Nor was Professor Huxley an exact scientist, in the sense in which exact scientists use that phrase. He was a mere experimentalist and investigator of facts, never dealing with truth reduced to exact mathematical statement according to the method of the physicist. He was, besides, a specialist, dealing with biology; and it is admitted that mere specialists can hardly be otherwise than narrow. Mr. Huxley made himself still narrower by devoting himself to the exposition and dissemination of the biological theory that he borrowed from Darwin. Darwin was his absolute master; Darwinism his dominant idea. This transformed his scientific thought into biological speculation, and changed his induction from facts into deduction from natural selection and evolution. The well-known story of "bathybius" is a case in point, and his fierce contention that man is a "voluntary automaton" is another. On the assumption of the truth of Darwinism, he and his disciples were equally ready to pronounce Cuvier and Owen obsolete and Quatrefages a "fossil." His course helped his influence and reputation in its day; but Darwinism is now scientifically and philosophically discredited, and its day is over.

It was Professor Huxley who invented the term "agnostic" and popularized it, and made "a sort of creedless creed of agnosticism," and made himself notorious by it; but agnosticism, too, has been philosophically discredited and is acknowledged to be far on in its decline. Kidd's "Social Evolution," is the recognition by the materialistic thinking of the age that civilization and progress are impossible without God and religion, and that Christianity is the only adequate transforming and uplifting force in the world.

Like Darwin and Tyndall and Spencer, Professor Huxley was lacking in real logical acumen, and had no command of that exact logical and scientific method, for which the higher spheres of science and philosophy call. This—in connection with his limitations in exact science and his substantial innocence of any clear comprehension of the nature of the problems of theology and philosophy that he attempted to discuss—was sufficient to make his discussions incoherent and inconsistent and his scientific conclusions unsatisfactory. That teaching alone stands the tests of time and scientific criticism that rests on a solid logical and rational basis; that which is lacking in such basis—however brilliant its literary qualities—will soon be remanded to the upper shelf, and sooner or later removed from that shelf to make room for something of real value. Nor, since the apparent scientific basis has been removed, will the banter and the sneers—so freely and effectively used—long delay their final fate. Voltaire was the prince of persifleurs, the absolute master of the sneer, and a thousand-fold more brilliant literary-wise than Huxley; but who reads Voltaire? When the sober second thought comes, even the partizan scientists will begin to see for how slender reasons they apotheosized this dashing knight errant, and Christians whom he so greatly alarmed will see how causeless and unseemly was their terror.

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