

## THE PHILOSOPHY OF BELIEF.\*

**T**HIRTY years ago this summer the Duke of Argyll published the first volume of the series of which the present work is the third and last. In *The Reign of Law* the author combated the idea, then seriously entertained by scientists, that physical law was supreme in the universe of nature. Eighteen years after he produced *The Unity of Nature*, in which he discussed the problem, then pressing, as to the competence of the human faculties to understand what Mr. Spencer had most emphatically declared to be "The Unknowable." He now proceeds to an examination of "the relation of natural law to religion in general and Christian theology in particular."

His process of reasoning may be thus outlined: Intuitive theology is fundamental in the structure of language. The materialistic and atheistic philosopher have of necessity used teleological words and phrases, which they have first emptied of their accepted meaning. "Purpose" and "plan" may be cited as instances in point. Indeed, so indelibly is design stamped on language, that to fitly state the atheistic or agnostic position a new vocabulary must be coined.

From intuitive theology as it is found in language we are taken over into an examination of Hebrew theology, whose distinguishing characteristic was its firm grasp on Law. The author rightly insists that the Hebrew sought objective truth, and was little moved by sentiment or speculation. That to which Hebrew theologic thought owes its virility and permanence is its sense of actual ignorance and consciousness of inherent limitations, limitations that were fully realized and often painfully expressed, but which never paralyzed or confused the great certainties which can be and are actually reached. More than is usually supposed, Judaism was an universal religion, in that it expected salvation for the world through a chosen people. Out of the root idea of the Old Testament—"man created in the image of God"—grew the grandeur of the Hebrew conception of their racial destiny.

According to Christian theology, this salvation came in the way predicted by the Hebrew prophets. There was One who bore the infirmities of others, and by whose stripes they were healed. And with His coming came a departure, also

foreshadowed by the prophets, whereby the sacrifice of the altar became the sacrifice of the broken and the contrite heart: when through faith man found Regeneration—a term seldom used in the New Testament and unknown in the Old, but which expresses the spiritual process exalted by both. There came, likewise, a new conception of the fundamentals of ethics and a rational doctrine of prayer, both closely allied to the conception of the one, and the tendency to the other, which is found in the natural man. Strangely enough, this theology, either in the Old Testament or the New, always maintained towards the philosophies of contemporaneous ages an attitude of reserve; and has demanded and received the attention of philosophers in its own era. And the final pronouncement of both science and philosophy will be upon its accord with the great laws governing the spiritual man.

Such is the argument of this strongly conservative and dogmatic treatise. There will naturally be exceptions taken to some of the positions. To the scientist and philosopher of the present day there is too constant a reliance on the supernatural; too unquestioning a faith in the theology he seeks to defend. Like its predecessors, it is so much concerned with combating the transient theories of the time that its value must needs be ephemeral; but it has rendered a service to conservative thinkers, especially in the exposition of the teleological structure of language.

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\* The Philosophy of Belief; or, Law in Christian Theology. By the Duke of Argyll. Imported by Charles Scribner's Sons. \$5.00.