

[R1792 : page 81]

THEOLOGIANS BECOMING RATIONALISTS.

DR. Lyman Abbott's paper in a recent issue says: –

"One of the most significant signs of the times is the change of attitude among scientists toward religious questions. Those who keep pace with scientific thought, and are familiar with the atmosphere and spirit of scientific investigation in the universities abroad, have been struck by the radical change which has taken place in the last twenty years. What now strikes one in the attitude and spirit of a great many scientific men is a spirit of reverence toward the religious side of life."

While we agree that it is a fact, that the leading scientists and the leading theologians have come into closer sympathy of thought within the last twenty years, we account for this in a totally different manner. We hold that it is the theologians, and not the scientists, that have changed their base and made warfare between the two no longer reasonable.

If these theories of Professors Darwin and Huxley have been changed within the last twenty years, we know nothing of the changes. But who is not aware that all the [R1792 : page 82] theologically great (Isa. 29:14) have surrendered to the Darwinian theory, that man was not created in God's image, but had apes for his parents, and is merely one or two evolutionary steps in advance of them? Who is not aware that as fast as Darwin's theory of evolution took hold, it displaced the Bible theory of a *fall* of mankind into sin and death, and substituted the reverse theory – that man never fell at all, but has been coming grandly upward out of the bad condition in which his ape parents started him, to his present development; and that death, so far from being the penalty of Adamic sin, is really another grand step in evolution into a still higher condition than manhood?

Who does not know that Rev. Henry Ward Beecher, Dr. Abbott's predecessor in Plymouth church pulpit, was one of the first theologians to surrender to science, and that he publicly said to his congregation, "If Adam fell at all, he fell upward; and if you believe that legend of the Garden of Eden, the eating of an apple, original sin, etc., you have no farther use for my preaching?" Who does not recall Mr. Beecher's public recognition of Robert Ingersoll about the same time?

Who is so blind that he cannot see that the leading theologians have not only rejected the Bible account and accepted the deductions of science, falsely so-called, respecting the origin of man, but that many of the foremost of them, Mr. Abbott among them, have endorsed the so-called "higher criticism" views of Professors Briggs, Smith, Harper and others, which are substantially the views of Paine and Voltaire respecting the Bible – that it is not of divine origin or authority, and that the utterances of its writers are to be generally rejected, although a good thought may here and there be gleaned from the rubbish by the aid of these professors, so very wise and almost infallible in their own eyes?

And yet, knowing all this, one of these gentlemen tells us, as above, that a radical change has taken place in scientific circles, in their attitude toward religion. No wonder that a change has taken place! It would be strange indeed if the scientists would keep up the fight after they have captured their opponents; – and more, after those once opponents have become their strongest allies, astounding them continually with their vigorous attacks on the Bible from the inside, – while still drawing their salaries and holding their titles as Doctors of Divinity. Verily, while the trusted Doctors are administering poison to the trusting patients on the inside, the outside assailants can afford to keep quiet.

In evidence that Dr. Abbott's views have changed, we quote from a Religious Dictionary edited by him and published exactly twenty years ago – in 1875. Therein he says,

"We think that science *confirms at every point* the great religious teaching of the first chapter of Genesis." – Page 233.

But the first chapter of Genesis declares not only that God purposed to make man in his own image, but also adds, "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him." Dr. Abbott now rejects this, the greatest religious teaching of Genesis 1, claims that man was not created in God's likeness, did not fall from it and hence needed not to be redeemed nor restored to it; but that, evolved from an ape and in much of the ape's likeness, man has been going up to manhood grandly for six thousand years.

We might here remark that it is because what is true respecting Dr. Abbott's surrender to Infidelity is true also of nearly all prominent ministers in the pulpits of Christendom, that we think worth while to point out these matters so particularly. The poor "sheep" under guidance of such blind guides are following to the ditch of unbelief, as surely as did a similar class, warned by our Lord, at his first advent. – Matt. 15:14.

In further evidence that the *change* has been on the part of the theologians and not on the part of the scientists, we quote again from Dr. Abbott's book, published just twenty years ago (page 792), as follows: –

"The doctrine of Redemption is embodied in the promise with which the angel of the Lord accompanied his prophecy of the birth of Christ: 'Thou shalt call his name Jesus; for he shall save his people from their sins.' The doctrine of redemption, then, is that the human race have *come into bondage* to sin and sinful habits and propensities, and at the same time under just condemnation of God's law, because of them [See Rom. 5:12]; and that God has sent his Son into the world, not only *by his death to atone for their past sins*, so that they may be freely forgiven for the past, *but also* by his present power as a risen Savior, spiritually dwelling in the hearts of his people, to deliver them

from the power of sin, and enable them to become followers of him in their lives and conformed to him in their character."

How beautifully and simply the above quotation expresses the truth upon this subject! – man's sin, his just condemnation, the atonement by the *death* of our Lord as a ransom-sacrifice, the forgiveness and reconciliation thus effected, and the new life in his people fashioned after his as a copy. Alas! that one who so clearly saw the truth should so greatly change in twenty years as to say, as he did on Sunday, March 3rd, as reported in the *New York Times*: –

"I mean what I say, It was not by his death that Christ saved the world, but by laying down his life for the world. Passion week began when he was baptized."

Here Dr. Abbott distinctly denies the value of our Lord's death as the basis of reconciliation between God and the sinful, fallen race, and claims that it was the three and a half years of our Lord's ministry, his conduct and teaching (and not his death as man's ransom) that saves the world. The Evolution theory led him to this position. Having rejected the doctrine that man was created in God's image and that the race in Adam fell from it into sin and just condemnation, and having accepted the theory that all men have been advancing from apehood toward God's likeness by evolution, he would be compelled by the force of logic to deny that Christ's death *redeemed* anything or [R1792 : page 83] *atoned* for anything; for if the present development of our race is progressive, and according to divine arrangement, the race has no sin to be atoned for or forgiven. But Dr. Abbott and his hearers were not yet ready to cast the Word entirely aside, so he proceeds to endeavor to show that our Lord's work for the race "was *not by his DEATH*" as a propitiation [satisfaction] for our sins, as the just *for* the unjust, but by his *consecrated living*, during the three and a half years following his baptism. We have already pointed out that, as in the case of the Church each consecrated one is reckoned as beginning the sacrifice from the time that he consecrates himself even

unto death, so with our Lord and Redeemer, his sacrifice, which *ended* at Calvary, was *begun* at his consecration at baptism.* But the entire plan of redemption would have been a failure, and our race would have remained "strangers and foreigners" to God, sinners, – "without God and having no hope" had not his *death* sealed the New Covenant.

*See [TABERNACLE SHADOWS](#), page 43.

But that Dr. Abbott totally rejects the value of the *ransom*-price, Christ's death, and holds that merely the good words and deeds of our Lord were all that was needed and all that benefited men, and that his *death* at Calvary was of no *redeeming* value, but merely an evidence of his devotion, is clearly shown by other statements, as follows:

"The crucifixion was rendered necessary by the fear and hate of men....If the world had been willing to take Him and follow, the world might have been saved without a drop of blood or a throb of anguish."

It was with these words that this wandering star in the ecclesiastical heavens led a large congregation of professing Christians to the celebration of the Lord's Supper. Because his mind had been poisoned by "science, falsely so-called," and perverted from the simplicity of the doctrines of Christ, "as the serpent beguiled Eve," this once able man becomes a sophist who deludes his flock, so that when they read, "Without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sins," and again, "This is my blood of the New Covenant, shed for many for the remission of sins," they will, under his instruction, conclude the very reverse to be the truth, that his death was not necessary either for the forgiveness of their sins or their reconciliation to God, but merely their acceptance of and obedience to his pattern life.

Every child of God who has gotten awake to the present situation should lift up his voice like a trumpet and call the attention of all the true sheep to the misleading of their blinded shepherds. Tell them that

the true Shepherd is calling, "Gather my saints together *unto me* – those that have made a covenant with me by sacrifice."
