

ARTICLE X.

"CHRISTIAN SCIENTISTS."

BY G. FREDERICK WRIGHT.

THE rapid spread of the sect calling themselves "Christian scientists" is one of the closing wonders of the nineteenth century, and well deserves investigation from every point of view. The founder of the sect is Mrs. Mary Baker Glover Eddy, who claims to have discovered in the year 1866 the "science of metaphysical healing," which she named Christian science. In 1867 she opened a school of Christian Science Mind-healing, with one student. In 1881 she opened the Massachusetts Metaphysical College in Boston. During the following seven years, four thousand students were in attendance. In 1875 she published "Science and Health, with Key to the Scriptures," which is the text-book of the sect. This is a volume of 685 16mo pages, bearing the imprint of the University Press, and in the paper, print, and binding showing the highest skill of the printer's art. The copy before me as I write belongs to the 146th edition, and is by no means the last, while the claim of Mrs. Eddy's followers, that they number more than a million, is far from extravagant. Churches of the sect already exist in every leading town, while the edifice of the central church in Boston is one of the most commodious, substantial, and elegant in the city, and is situated in the most fashionable quarter. Probably there is scarcely an evangelical church in the United States whose members have not been more or less affected by the movement, and those affected are by no means the least in-

telligent or least worthy of their members. On the contrary, the doctrines of Christian science seem especially attractive to many of the most worthy Christian men and women.

The fundamental assumptions of Christian science accord closely with the crude forms of idealistic pantheism. Mrs. Eddy not only assumes, but constantly reiterates, her belief that the so-called material universe is a delusion and a nonentity. On almost every page she avers that the so-called laws of nature may be disregarded with impunity by those who have proper faith, or rather by those who have the proper conception of thought concerning these things. Thus she denies the authority of all that part of revelation which God has made to man in nature. That we do not exaggerate or distort her views will appear from a few extracts from Mrs. Eddy's text-book, taken almost at random:—

"Nothing we can say or believe regarding matter is true, except that matter is unreal, and is therefore a belief" (p. 173).

"Thus matter will be finally proven to be nothing but a mortal belief, wholly inadequate to affect man through its supposed organic action or existence" (p. 19).

"The first idolatry was faith in matter" (p. 39).

"Man is never sick; for mind is not sick, and matter cannot be. . . . To understand that sickness is not real, and that truth can destroy it, is best of all, for it is the universal and perfect remedy" (p. 392).

"The admission that any bodily condition is beyond the control of mind disarms man, prevents him from helping himself, and enthrones matter through error" (p. 393).

"The scientific and permanent remedy for fatigue is to learn the power of mind over every illusion of physical weariness, and so destroy this illusion; for matter cannot be weary and heavy laden" (p. 113).

"Treat a belief in sickness as you would sin, with sudden dismissal. . . . My method of dealing with fatigue applies to all bodily ailment, since mind should be, and is, supreme, absolute, and final" (pp. 114-115).

"Admit the existence of matter, and we admit that mortality (and therefore disease) has a foundation in fact. Deny the existence of matter, and we destroy the belief in these conditions, and with it disappears the foundation of disease" (p. 367).

"In proportion as matter to human sense loses all entity as to substance, in that proportion does man become its master" (p. 368).

"If exposure to a draft of air, while in a state of perspiration, is followed by chills, dry cough, influenza, congestive symptoms in the lungs, or hints of inflammatory rheumatism, your mind remedy is safe and sure. If you are a Christian scientist, such symptoms will not follow from exposure; but if you believe in the laws of matter, and their fatal effects when transgressed, you are not fit to conduct your own case, or to destroy the bad effects of belief. When the fear subsides, and the conviction abides that you have broken no law, neither rheumatism, consumption, nor any other disease will ever result from exposure to the weather" (p. 383).

"Whatever is your duty to do can be done without harm to yourself. If you sprain the muscles or wound the flesh, your remedy is at hand. Mind decides whether or not the flesh shall be discolored, painful, swollen and inflamed . . . You say or think because you have partaken of salt fish that you must be thirsty, and you are thirsty accordingly; while the opposite belief would produce the opposite result" (p. 384).

"The notion that mind and matter commingle, in the human illusion as to sin, sickness, and death, must eventually submit to the Science of Mind, which denies this proposition. God is Mind, and God is All; hence all is Mind. On this statement rests the Science of Being, and its Principle is divine, demonstrating harmony and immortality" (p. 488).

In respect to the views here and elsewhere repeatedly enunciated, it is pertinent to remark, that the only warrant for maintaining them exists in the half-truth, that human mind is only partially subjected to the laws of matter, and that within certain limits matter is controlled by it. The effects of the mind upon the body are generally recognized. Every one knows that the health is affected to a considerable extent by hope and fear. An alarm of fire will temporarily drive away the sense of hunger, and sudden excitement may paralyze the heart, or induce death by apoplexy. To secure good digestion it is important to think as little of one's stomach as possible. The thought that others are looking at us may cause us to blush; while the fear of impending evil withdraws the blood from our faces, causing us to turn pale.

Man in his earthly state is a composite being. He has both a mind and a body, bound together in a mysterious

union. The reality of the mind's influence upon the body cannot reasonably be denied. But there are manifest limits to this influence which the so-called Christian science does not recognize.

A broken limb cannot be set by thought alone. Poison kills when administered secretly as well as when its nature is known to the victim. Small-pox is contagious even when the victim does not know of the exposure. Typhoid fever is the result not of mental disturbance, but of the action of microbes upon a limited portion of the intestines. The heat of summer and the cold of winter are realities which must be contended with by material agencies.

It would seem needless to make these statements, but for the fact that many thousand most excellent people have so magnified the half-truth of the mind's limited power over matter that they are in danger of being led into serious practical mistakes. They are putting asunder what God has joined together, and overlooking that half of God's revelation which is made to us through the material world. In the hands of the great philosophers who have maintained similar views of matter, the errors have proved practically harmless, because of counteracting, regulative doctrines, cherished in connection with them, but which are not present in the system of Christian science as promulgated by Mrs. Eddy. It is to be presumed, also, that the mass of the followers of Mrs. Eddy possess such a measure of that practical knowledge of the world which we call common sense as will, in general, prevent them from putting into practice the principles which they theoretically maintain. We have no fear that many of these intelligent and good people, even when cherishing the views of Christian science, will carry out their principles to their logical effect. They will not put poison into food, or adulterate it with any injurious elements, on the plea that, as a man thinketh, so is he, and that if he is ignorant of the poison in his system he

will not be injured by it. They will not disregard the sanitary precautions necessary to check the spread of diphtheria, small-pox, typhoid fever, and other contagious diseases. They will not neglect to properly ventilate their houses, to wear rubbers in wet weather, and warm clothing in winter. But if they do not neglect these things, it will be because they disregard the fundamental principles of their so-called science. The fear is that some will become fanatical, and will endeavor to show their faith by their works in ways that will be disastrous.

Nor is this fear altogether theoretical. In an increasing number of instances the devotees of Christian science are beginning to practice what they preach. We have heard of more than one case where children with broken bones have been neglected, with the result of making them permanent cripples. The journals of Christian science even boast of the triumphs of their faith over the effects of deadly poison. Large doses of carbolic acid are said to have been counteracted in their effects not by a material antidote, but by the firm belief of the surrounding friends that carbolic acid was a nonentity, or at least could be thought out of existence.

In view of these facts, it is incumbent upon us to bear our testimony against the delusion, and to warn those who are accepting the principles of Christian science of the fruitlessness and folly of their efforts to disregard the material laws of the universe through which the Creator both aids and sets bounds to the present activities of the human mind.

The scriptural warrant for these vagaries is very naturally found in the interpolated verses at the close of the Gospel of Mark, in which it is said of those who believe, that "if they drink of any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; and they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover" (Mark xvi. 18). It is significant in this case, as in several others, that the science of textual criticism, in dis-

crediting the genuineness of the passage, has relieved us from a real difficulty in securing an interpretation which should be both reverential to the inspired writers and in accord with facts; for we can now show that these words were not a part of the original Gospel. But even if they were, it is unwarranted to apply to all generations what may have been designed for the immediate hearers only. Our Lord and his apostles did not fail duly to recognize the limitations of the material world. Christ was hungry and thirsty, and wearied with the labors that fell upon him, so that he needed to retire into the mountains for rest. The apostle Paul preached the gospel in much weakness of the flesh. The miracles which Christ performed were exceptional, and are not to be taken as the standard for his followers, any more than they were to be taken as the universal criterion of his own work. The dead whom he raised were not brought back to life through faith which they themselves exerted, but by Christ's command; while the number of miracles that Christ wrought was limited by principles of wisdom which we cannot fully understand. Only two or three dead persons were raised from the grave; only a small portion of the sick surrounding him were healed; while to the apostles the power to perform miracles was granted in still more sparing degree. "It is enough for the disciple that he be as the master, and the servant as his lord." At the same time, it must be confessed that the church is constantly tempted to limit both the willingness and the ability of God to answer prayer in the realm of the material world.

But God is not a God who is afar off. He is nigh at hand, to every one that calleth upon him. The importunate prayer of a child of God is a recognized power amid all the forces of the universe. Through prayer we can move the arm that moves the world. As a father pities his children, so the Lord pities them that fear him. As

the mother runs to the cry of distress sent up by her suffering child, so the Lord comes to the help of his children when they express their need. God is ever ready and able to do for us more than we ask or think. It is a law of his spiritual kingdom as firmly established as any law of nature, that when we ask we receive, that when we seek we find. Nor need we limit ourselves to asking for spiritual blessings. Among the petitions of the Lord's Prayer is one that our Heavenly Father would give to us our daily bread. It is our privilege to pray for the sick and for deliverance from all manner of evil. Mind influences matter. Every bodily movement in response to the effects of the human mind proves this. In our present state probably no spiritual change occurs without a corresponding material change. The mind has not only an immediate but a far-reaching influence over the body. But the range of this influence is limited. Finite mind is not omnipotent.

It is therefore incumbent upon us always to remember that our expectation of answer to prayer is to be subjected to the wisdom of God. We have only partial knowledge of what is best for us. We do not know what things to pray for as we ought, except the Spirit make intercession for us. Our petitions are to be put up in the name of Christ and in accordance with his will. In our ignorance, it is quite as possible for us to ask as to labor amiss. In all our petitions we are to follow the example of our Lord in Gethsemane, and say, "Nevertheless, not my will, but thine be done." As our Lord was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, so it is not to be expected that we should be freed from bearing our part of the burdens and sorrows incident to human life. In much weakness and suffering, and through tribulations of every sort, and amid worldly disappointments of every degree, the disciples of our Lord were called upon to show forth the love of their

Master. But they endured as seeing him who is invisible. They ran with patience the course that was set before them. They fought the good fight, and won the race, receiving at last the martyr's crown. The ministry of sorrow has not yet ceased in the world, and we should not complain at the portion of it which in God's providence is suffered to fall to our lot. The devotees of Christian science do not rightly estimate the providential mission of sorrow in this sinful and imperfect world.

Let it be far from us to speak slightingly of the good things which the Christian scientists with so much dross have incorporated into their system. According to their exhortations it is well for us at all times to turn our thoughts away from our worldly cares and sorrows and fix them upon the nobler and more permanent realities of the spirit. But this is no new discovery of Christian science. It belongs to the very essence of Christian faith. We are exhorted in the Scriptures to behold the cloud of glorified witnesses who have already washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb, and who now look down upon us from those shining seats above whence all sorrow and sighing have fled, and where all tears are wiped away. The hunger of the soul for these great consolations is insatiable. To the gospel, and to the church as its embodiment in the world, and to these heavenly visions, sinful and sorrowing humanity naturally turns for light and help. It is the duty and the privilege of the church to see to it that to such is given not a stone, but the very Bread of life which comes down from heaven. If any turn away from us unsatisfied, to seek spiritual satisfaction in other circles, it may well lead us to inquiry concerning the possible deficiencies in our presentation of Christian truth.