

When You Want to be Convinced. V.

Huxley.

scientific Agnosticism! The term sounds formidable -- and humble. What is more humble than for a great man to bow down and acknowledge that his scientific mind is limited in its possibilities, that while it may know all that is knowable, it pauses when it comes to the unknowable! Huxley thought so well of his state of mind that he found a name for it: His "I don't know" (which connoted "I don't care") he termed Agnosticism.

How did Huxley come to adopt this attitude towards God? Did his scientific studies convince him that there could be no God? that the universe contained in its beginning (or what?) everything that it now contains, and that there is no difference between mind and matter, there is no soul? Or did he start out with this as an assumption and spend his life trying to find grounds to justify it? His own words tell us how he formed his outlook on life:

"Kicked into the world a boy without guide or training or with worse than none, I confess to my shame that few men have drunk deeper of all kinds of sin than I. Happily my course was arrested in time -- before I had earned absolute destruction -- and for long years I have been slowly and painfully climbing, with many a fall, towards better things. And when I look back, what do I find to have been the agents of my redemption? The hope of immortality or of future reward? I can honestly say that for these fourteen years such a consideration has not entered my head. No, I can tell you exactly what has been at work. Sartor Resartus led me to know that a deep sense of religion was compatible with the entire absence of theology. Secondly, science and her methods gave me a rest-place independent of authority and tradition. Thirdly, love opened up to me a view of the sanctity of human nature and impressed me with a deep sense of responsibility."

In spite of the fact that he denies the existence of the soul and of free will, Huxley uses such terms as "responsibility", "better things", "earned", "redemption". And what brought about his reform? 1. Carlyle told him that he could be religious without thinking; 2. He went to work; 3. He got married.

He found the question of the historical character of the Gospels "of small moment;" his mind was made up that God was "unknown and unknowable," and there he let the matter rest.

Was he in good faith? Pere Hahn, S.J., who listened to his class lectures for several months, said to him: "I have never heard you mention evolution (in class), while in your public lectures everywhere you openly proclaim yourself an evolutionist." His reply was astounding: - "Here in my teaching classes I have time to put the facts fully before a trained audience. In my public lectures I am obliged to pass rapidly over the facts, and I put forward my personal convictions; and it is for this that people come to hear me." They came to hear his opinions which he could not sustain with facts before a trained audience. Worse than that: he made sport of the way in which he wrecked the faith of his half-baked audiences. In a letter he writes: "My workmen stick to me wonderfully, the house being fuller than ever last night. By next Friday evening they will all be convinced that they are monkeys." And again: "I went in for the entire animal more strongly in fact than they have reported me. I told them in so many words that I entertained no doubt of the origin of man from the same stock as the apes. And to my great delight, in saintly Edinburgh itself, the announcement met with nothing but applause."

On one occasion, after a lecture on the Nervous System, a lady asked Huxley to explain just one point which she had not understood: "I did not quite gather whether what you called the cerebellum is inside the skull or outside." Facts are not necessary with such audiences.

Prayers.

Vic Yawman was called home yesterday by his father's illness. Don Baldwin's grandmother