


JOSEPH COOK

OSEPH COOK, LL.D., a popular American lecturer and author, was born at Ticonderoga, N. Y., Jan. 26, 1833, and died there June 24, 1901. He was educated at the universities of Yale and Harvard, graduating at Cambridge in 1865, first in philosophy and rhetoric. He studied theology at Andover Theological seminary and preached for a year or two at Lynn and other Massachusetts towns, but declined to accept a pastorate. In 1871, he set out on an extended tour abroad. He returned in 1873, after having studied one year with the learned Dr. Tholuck, and having seen much of England, Italy, Egypt, Syria, and Greece. He took up his residence at Boston in 1874, as a literary man and preacher. His name became familiar to the public in 1875, when he was pastor of a Congregational Church at Boston, and, as such, was invited by the Young Men's Christian Association of the city to speak in the prayer-meeting of that organization, held weekly on Mondays at noon. His audience was composed largely of ministers, and his reputation quickly grew as a thinker and rhetorician. Larger quarters had to be found to accommodate the crowd of people desirous of hearing the speaker, and it was found that the capacity of Tremont Temple was barely sufficient.

The lectures were under the auspices of the Young Men's Christian Association until May, 1876, when, at a meeting in the Bromfield Street Church, resolutions were passed founding the Boston Monday lectureship, and placing it, for the next season, under the care of a committee consisting of men of different evangelical denominations. The object of these lectures was to present the results of the freshest German, English, and American scholarship on the more important topics concerning the relation of religion and science. These lectures, which were delivered at noon, continued for close upon twenty years.

His utterances were published weekly in a hundred American newspapers, and had wide circulation in Canada and in Great Britain. In 1876, Mr. Cook's lectures and "preludes" first appeared in book form. In 1878, he delivered one hundred and fifty lectures, thirty of which were new. These have been translated into various foreign languages. In 1879, he began a series of Thursday evening lectures at New York, and in 1880-82 he made a lecturing tour round the world, addressing audiences in the principal cities of the British Isles, India, Japan, and Australia. In 1888, he established "Our Day," a monthly magazine of reform. His published works include "Biology" (1877); "Transcendentalism" (1877); "Orthodoxy" (1878); "Conscience" (1878); "Heredity" (1879); "Alcohol and the Human Brain" (1879); "Marriage" (1879); "Labor" (1880); "Socialism" (1880); "Certainties of the Soul and Speculations of Science" (1881); "Christ and Modern Thought" (1881); "Occident" (1884); "Orient" (1886); "Current Religious Thought" (1888).

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CERTAINTIES IN RELIGION

A LITTLE while ago we were not in the world—a little while hence we shall be here no longer. This is arithmetic. This is the clock. Demosthenes used to say that every speech should begin with an incontrovertible proposition. Now, it is scientifically incontrovertible that a little while ago we were not here, and a little while hence we shall be here no more.

De Tocqueville said that you will in vain try to make any man religious who has no thought of dying. Now, the first of religious certainties is that we are going hence soon. As to that proposition there is not a particle of doubt. In this audience we have assembled the eastern West and the western East. But among all the *coteries* of small philosophy which annoy our unrolling democratic ages, in the Mississippi Valley or the Ohio, or in that of the Hudson, the Connecticut, or the Merrimac, there is no one who can deny that we are going hence soon and that we want to go hence in peace.

Here, then, are two religious certainties, that we must go out of this world—and that if law is universal in its reign we shall not, in going out of this world, escape from the sovereignty of the moral law revealed in conscience here, and likely to be revealed in the next world quite as fully as it is in our present low estate.

I defy any man to deny that we are going hence. I defy any man to deny that we want to go hence in peace. I defy any man to show that we can go hence in peace unless we are harmonized with our environment.

What is that?

Our environment is made up of God, of the plan of our own natures, and of our record in the past; and therefore we must be harmonized with God in conscience and our record, or, in the very nature of things, there cannot be peace for us. Aristotle built his whole philosophy on the proposition that a thing can exist and not exist at the same time and in the same sense; that is to say, self-contradiction is the proof of error everywhere.

And now, since we have an environment made up of God, conscience, and our record, we must be either in harmony or in dissonance with it; and if we are in dissonance we are not in harmony with it; and if we are in harmony we are not in dissonance with it. And so it is incontrovertible that with whatever environment we cannot escape from we must come into harmony, and that environment consists of conscience, and of God, and of our record.

But, before I proceed to state analytically the propositions I am to defend as the basis of natural religion, let me call pause to your thoughts and endeavor to bring for a moment a solemn hush here, such as will exist in our souls when eternity breathes on our cheeks.

You say it is a very commonplace proposition that we are going hence; but did you ever calculate how many mature working hours there are in an ordinary lifetime?

Very few men begin labor for themselves earlier than at the period of twenty-five years of age. Very few continue such labor beyond the seventieth year. Now, between the twenty-fifth year of life and the seventieth there are forty-five years, and if you throw away in each year fifty-two days for Sundays, and thirteen for vacations and illness and other interruptions, you have 300 working days a year. That is to

say, in forty-five years you have 13,500 working days. Now, suppose that you labor ten hours a day, a very large average to be continued through forty-five years, you will therefore have in the forty-five mature years of life 135,000 working hours. At the end of that very short stretch of time you will go hence. Some of you have about 100,000 working hours left. Some of you have not 60,000, some of you not 30,000. Really there is no doubt about the proposition that at the end of 135,000 working hours any man's life which has already had twenty-five years in it will be over, and Gettysburg will be fought and won in that time, and America! it will not be half as interesting as the unseen holy into which all men haste.

We say that we are to remain here. America is to remain; but it is the tree, we are the leaves. The leaves fall, although the tree endureth. Over the stringy bridges of the Atlantic mountain ranges and the Pacific God will draw the cords of civilization many an age yet, and thrum them to his own glory and to the good of men. But you and I will listen to the music from the upper and not from the under side.

"Onward storms my strong-limbed race,
And pause, for Time is nigh,
Long on earth will men have place,
Not much longer, I.

"Thousand summers kiss the lea,
Only one the sheaf;
Thousand springs may deck the tree,
Only one the leaf:
One, but one, and that one brief."

Mrs. Browning used to look toward the Alps and repeat the words of one of her famous poems:

"Above the star.
Pricked by the last peak of snow,
My Italy is there."

So our America, my friends, is not on the shore of a great lake, the valley of the Father of Waters, or in that delicious nook of the world we call New England. Our Mississippi is yonder with the Father of spirits. Mrs. Browning would repeat often the words of an old English poet:

"Although the day it seems so bright,
Long after the day cometh the dark night."

At last the bell ringeth to evensong, ringeth, she would say, with a melody that is prodigal of echoes.

Now, in that hushed silence, in that attention of the whole spirit which is given to religious truth, the moment we say we are going hence, and that we wish to go hence in peace, ring any bell of merely negative philosophy, ring any tocsin of audacious self-conceit in the field of mere speculation, and ask how satisfying are the echoes.

We want truth, and we want that on which we can depend as we take our leap into the unseen; and we want, therefore, certainty guaranteed, both by natural and by revealed truth. We want, when we go hence, "a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens," and in which we may at this moment take up our residence, provided only we bring ourselves into peace with our environment.

But that house not made with hands, perhaps it is about us now, perhaps we are not at peace with it at this moment, perhaps we do not like the company in the house not made with hands. There are in that palace things that we can see from this present low position of the human race, and some of the things in it I assure you this morning, some pictures you have turned with their faces to the wall, I would turn with their faces toward the front; and in the house not made with hands where we stand already, I would raise the question whether it is possible for us to live happily in that

house unless we love what its Lord loves and unless we build according to the pattern of his own palace. . . .

Among the certainties in religion I rank these first: that there are three things from which we cannot escape, our own natures, God, and our record. When the battle was fought between the "Monitor" and the "Merrimac," the ship "Cumberland" was sunk in water so shallow that her top-gallants remained above the wave. A friend of mine who was in the cabinet of Governor Andrew of Massachusetts had a friend in the hold of that vessel—a surgeon attending to the wounded. When the ship went down he was nearly strangled by the rushing in of the brine, but, keeping in view the light that was streaming down the hatchways, he aided himself out on the rigging, and at last, almost dead, was taken into a boat at the surface of the sea in safety.

Now, the insidious and almost unseen persuasion of human nature is, that when we go down in the sea of death and eternity we shall leave ourselves behind ourselves at the bottom of the sea, and escape through the engulfing torrents from ourselves, and be taken into a lifeboat on the surface of the eternal ocean and saved.

Now, the trouble with that precious theory, my friends, is in the nature of things. We are the "Cumberland," and the "Cumberland" cannot swim out of the "Cumberland," can it? While you continue to exist you will have to keep company with yourself, will you not? Is there any doubt about that? Is there anybody here so surprising in his doctrinal unrest as to deny that while his existence continues it will be necessary for him to keep company with the plan of his own nature?

We are in existence, and while we continue in existence we cannot flee from our own individualities. One wife I

cannot be divorced from—that is, my conscience. Your Indiana divorce law may be lax, but the supreme powers do not pass divorce laws between man and conscience. We are to stay with ourselves, for the “Cumberland” cannot swim out of the “Cumberland,” that is one certainty. But it is sure the “Cumberland” cannot escape from the water in which it floats. It cannot float among the sands.

We never shall escape from omnipresence. There is no fleeing from a being who is everywhere and who is omnipotent. The old Latin proverb says, “*Si vis fugere Deo, fuge ad Deum*”—“If you wish to flee from God, flee to God.” For the only way to flee from an omnipotent being and an omnipresent one is to flee to him. There is no cloud at this moment shot through by the sunlight so saturatingly as we all are, and always shall be shot through by the omnipresence. There is no sedge in the seething white and green below the terrible majesty of Niagara yonder that is so boiled full of water as we all shall be, and are, with God’s presence, whether we feel it or not.

Undoubtedly the dull surge yonder in the foam knows little of the sublimity of Niagara; and so we, tossed to and fro, in natural law, know little of the awesome depth and height below us and above us; but the day will come when we shall know, and we are to be filled, as never was a floating seaweed with the ocean, with God. And it is sure that he will be our environment, as well as our own nature its own environment. Faculties touch faculties, and, as I may say when I clasp my hands, one hand is the environment of another. So I may say, when my faculties interact, that one faculty is an environment of the faculty that stands next to it. So I call our own individualities a part of our own environment.

But the past is unchangeable. Not only can the “Cum-

berland” not swim out of the “Cumberland” and out of the sea: it cannot escape from its own weight, can it? You were born in the commonwealth of New York. Omnipotence cannot make it true that you were not born there. You have done things in the past which form pictures which you would gladly turn to the wall. Omnipotence cannot make it true that those things never were done. Even God’s power cannot make a thing that has once been not to have been. In the nature of things what once has occurred will always be an event that has occurred, and the nature of things is only another name for God’s nature. Our record in the unchangeable past, our conscience must face it, and God must face it.

And now I will hold that I am on firm scientific ground when I say that there are three things we cannot escape from, these interacting faculties in our souls, this power of the universe which brought us into existence, and which reveals itself in physical and moral law; this omnipresence, this omnipotence, this unswathing somewhat and someone; and, lastly, our record which we must face, and which he must face.

Consequently it is incontrovertibly certain that these three things constitute our unalterable environment while we continue to exist in the next world as well as in this.

Just here my friends the skeptics will say that I am passing into the region of conjecture; but all I ask of them to-day, or on any other occasion, is to be true to the scientific method. You say that law is universal.

Very well, then. If I can measure a little arc of a law here I will draw the whole circle from the arc. Any three points determine the direction of a curve. You say that if you can make here the truth about gravitation clear, you