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SCIENTISTS AND REVELATION.

BY DR. J. H. GLADSTONE, F.R.S.

I HAVE been asked to respond to your request for information as to the actual attitude of scientific men towards revelation. I do so with sincere pleasure, feeling sure that many of your readers would be gladly relieved of a misapprehension that seems to be very common.

You remark that "the recent meetings of the British Association at Birmingham, and of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, have done much to roll away the reproach of any supposed antagonism." This remark possibly had its origin in the accounts that have been published of the Devotional Meeting at Birmingham during the Association week. That meeting did not differ, however, from several previous ones in any important particular, unless it be that this year the president of the Association, and the presidents of two of the sections, took an active part in the proceedings. These Devotional Meetings have been held annually for the last twenty-four years. They are arranged privately by members of the Association, and those only are invited who are attending the scientific meetings. The usual time—at least of late years—has been Sunday afternoon; and, notwithstanding the claims of our hospitable entertainers, and the natural desire for a day of complete rest, the attendance at these meetings now generally numbers from one to two hundred.

I have known the British Association under forty-one different presidents—all leading men of science, with the exception of two or three appointed on other grounds. On looking over these forty-one names, I count twenty who, judged by their public utterances or private communications, are men of Christian belief and character, while, judged by the same test, only four disbelieve in any Divine revelation. Of the remaining seventeen, some have possibly been religious men, and others may have been opponents; but it is fair to suppose that the greater part have given no very serious thought to the subject. I do not mean to say that all these twenty have been men of much spirituality, and certainly some of them would not be classed as "orthodox," but the figures at least indicate that religious faith rather than unbelief has characterised the leading men of the Association.

As to "the actual attitude of the scientific world as a whole towards revealed truth," of course the scientific world, as such, does not and cannot pronounce upon the subject; each man will form his individual opinion, and keep it to himself or express it as he pleases. We have, however, some statistics that bear upon the matter. Mr. Francis Galton in 1873 asked one hundred and eighty of the most eminent scientific men a number of questions relating to their ancestry, education, mental characteristics, &c., including their "religious bias." About half of them answered his inquiries, and he gives a careful and honest analysis of the replies, without mentioning names, in his book called "English Men of Science: their Nature and Nurture." This analysis extends over many pages, but the substance may be gathered from some extracts.

It appears that out of every ten scientific

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men, seven call themselves members of the Established Church of England or Scotland, or of the now Disestablished Church of Ireland, and three belong "to other religious bodies," or to "none whatever." Referring to his correspondents, and taking religion in a wide sense, he says, "There appear to be about eighteen instances of scientific men who have a decided religious bias; being, I should estimate, at the rate of two or more in every ten." Afterwards he mentions seven of his correspondents as having "religious sentiments weak, accompanied with more or less scepticism." Further on, he says: "In answer to my direct inquiry, 'Has the religious creed taught in your youth had a deterrent effect on the freedom of your researches?' I have met with an overpowering majority of negatives. Seven or eight say 'No,' justifying their assertion by various reasons, to one who says 'Yes.'"

It may be urged that these gratifying statistics are thirteen years old. The list of president, officers, and council of the Royal Society elected on November 30 last, may be cited to show that things have not altered for the worse. The proportion of those who make no secret of their religion is at least three out of ten in that list.

This comparatively high percentage of the servants of Christ among leading scientists is not peculiar to our own country. Among the fifteen presidents of the French Association since its foundation, there have been three, of whom I can speak, from my own personal knowledge, as sincere Christian men. Nor is this peculiar to our own times. Many of the best-known discoverers of the past have been followers of those wise men of the East, who brought their homage to the Infant Saviour; and even among those who suffered the anathemas of the Church, some might have exclaimed with Paul, "After the way that they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers."

It may be asked whether the above favourable estimate applies also to the rising men of science, and to the semi-scientific. It is hard to say. Materialistic views do not seem to be in so much favour as a few years ago. I believe, too, that the students of science are sharing in that increased religious earnestness which is so apparent among the students of other professions. Yet it is well to bear in mind that there are some peculiar difficulties in their way: (1) In the words of Bacon, "It is true that a little philosophy inclineth man's mind to Atheism, but depth in philosophy bringeth men's minds about to religion." (2) The methods of modern science are the reverse of those frequently employed in theology. When religious truths are inculcated merely on the authority of the teacher, the young mind is apt to rebel, and belief cannot be re-established unless mature thought should happily show that the essential facts and principles of Christianity do rest upon reasonable evidence; (3) As long as infidel advocates alone assert that science and religion are diametrically opposed, it does not much matter; but it is disastrous if young men and women of our religious communities perceive that their teachers are afraid of the advance of science, or hear them argue, even from the pulpit, that the long periods of geological time, the antiquity of man, theories of development, &c., are incompatible with the Word of God. Such young people often find themselves placed on the horns of a fearful dilemma, and being convinced of the truth of the scientific conclusion, feel bound

sorrowfully to give up the faith of their fathers.

I trust that these particulars may serve to reassure any who may have supposed there was a real antagonism between the serious study of the works of the Lord, and that of the higher revelation through his Word.

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