

NATURAL LAWS.

We all, indeed, frequently use the word Nature to avoid the necessity of naming that which we feel to be unnamable, in the sense of being beyond our comprehension, and therefore beyond our power of defining. Yet I think that not merely the almost universal, but the clearest, and therefore the best, perceptions of mankind, really distinguish what we call Nature from what we call God, just as we distinguish the ship, or other machine, that we personify, from the will which we recognize as exerted in its origination and being; and that at the bottom our idea is that of Pope:

"All are but parts of one stupendous whole,
Whose body Nature is, and God the soul."

It is from this conception of Nature as expressing or as animated by the highest will, that we derive, I think, the term "law of Nature."

We come here to another instance of the application to greater things of names suggested by the less. In original meaning, the word law refers to human will, and is the name given to a command or rule of conduct imposed by a superior upon an inferior, as by a sovereign or state upon those subject to it. At first the word law doubtless referred only to human law. But when, later in intellectual development, men came to note invariable coexistences and sequences in the relations of external things, they were, of the mental necessity already spoken of, compelled to assume as cause a will superior to human will, and adapting the word they were wont to use for the highest expression of human will, called them laws of Nature.

Whatever we observe as an invariable relation of things, of which in the last analysis we can affirm only that "it is always so," we call a law of Nature. But though we use this phrase to express the fact of invariable relation, something more than this is suggested. As John Stuart Mill, trained to analysis from infancy, and from infancy exempt from theological bias, says:

"The expression "law of Nature" is generally employed by scientific men with a sort of tacit reference to the original sense of the word law, namely, the expression of the will of a superior - the superior, in this instance, being the Ruler of the universe."

Thus, then, when we find in Nature certain invariable sequences, whose cause of being transcends the power of the will testified to by our own consciousness - such, for instance, as that stones and apples always fall towards the earth; that the square of a hypotenuse is always equal to the sum of the squares of its base and perpendicular; that gases always coalesce in certain definite proportions; that one pole of the magnet always attracts what the other always repels; that the egg of one bird subjected to a certain degree of warmth for a certain time brings forth a chick that later will clothe itself with plumage of a certain kind and color, and the egg of another bird under the same conditions brings forth a chick of a different kind; that at a certain stage of infancy teeth appear, later decay and drop out; and so on through the list of invariable sequences that these will suggest - we say, for it is really all that we can say, that these sequences are invariable because they belong to the order or system of Nature; or, in short, that they are "laws

of Nature."

The dog and cow sometimes look wise enough to be meditating on anything. If they really could bother their heads with such matters or express their ideas in speech, they would probably say that such sequences are invariable, and then rest. But man is impelled by his endowment of reason to seek behind fact for cause. For that something cannot come from nothing, that every consequence implies a cause, lies at the very foundation of our perception of causation. To deny or ignore this would be to cease to reason - which we can no more cease in some sort of fashion to do than we can to breathe.

Thus, whether civilized or uncivilized, man is compelled, of mental necessity, to look for cause beneath the phenomena that he begins really to consider, and no matter what intermediate cause he may find, cannot be content until he reaches will and finds or assumes intent. This necessity is universal to human nature, for it belongs to that quality or principle of reason which essentially distinguishes man from the brute. The notion that -

"The heathen in his blindness,

Bows down to wood and stone,"

is of the real ignorance of pretended knowledge. Beneath the belief of the savage in totems and amulets and charms and witchcraft lurks the recognition of spirit; and the philosophies that have hardened into grotesque forms of religion contain at bottom that idea of an originating will which the Hebrew Scriptures express in their opening sentence: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."

To such recognition of will or spirit, reason, as it searches from effect for cause, must come before it can rest content. Beyond this, reason cannot go. Why is it that some things always co-exist with other things? and that some things always follow other things? The Mohammedan will answer: "It is the will of God." The man of our Western civilization will answer: "It is a law of Nature." The phrase is different, but the answer one.

3 pages copied from "Science of Political Economy."

6 $\frac{3}{4}$ pages total number copied.