SCIENCE, RELIGION AND SOCIAL ETHICS

By Sir RICHARD GREGORY, BART.

Retiring Editor of Nature

Many reasons have been put forward to account for the origin of religion, but it can not be said that any of them have solved the problem. Ancestor worship, ghost propitiation, worship of the soul, belief in spiritual beings, reverence for tribal leaders, have all been suggested as originating causes of religious sentiment. Primitive man had no religion except such as was embodied in a system of social virtues. Men possessing these virtues to a high degree, and using them to make the tribe powerful or conditions of life more pleasant, would be esteemed as benefactors or heroes not only during life but after death, and this veneration would develop into ancestor worship and later into soul worship.

If it is assumed that the divine purpose of the existence and evolution of life upon the earth is that man should work out his own salvation, it is difficult to understand what the ultimate gain will be when the earth will no longer be in a condition to maintain life as we conceive of it. All that science can say as to the future of the earth, or of any other planet or system in the astronomical universe, is expressed in the words of the hymn, "Our little systems have their day: they have their day and cease to be." We may contemplate the progressive development of man and society to any stage that may satisfy our ideals, but, so far as we now know, the whole phantasms of man will eventually be dissolved, and the death of mankind will be the final penalty for achieving the highest type of humanity conceived by the human mind. This thought should not, however, be subservient of effort and aspiration on the part of humanity as a whole, any more than the
Editor's Summary

This copy is for your personal, non-commercial use only.

**Article Tools**  Visit the online version of this article to access the personalization and article tools: [http://science.sciencemag.org/content/89/2304.citation](http://science.sciencemag.org/content/89/2304.citation)

**Permissions**  Obtain information about reproducing this article: [http://www.sciencemag.org/about/permissions.dtl](http://www.sciencemag.org/about/permissions.dtl)