

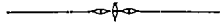
†
Hebrew, "Judah," with cross.

Hebrew, "Kuriakos."

HECOVC
Greek, "Jesus," with cross.

NATANIAOY
Greek, "of Nathaniel."

CHARLES R. CONDER, Major R.E.



ART. IV.—THE MIRACLES OF CHRIST IN CONFLICT WITH THE LAW OF NATURAL SELECTION.

IT is remarkable that the law of Nature, which is discernible as working towards the development of animal life on earth, is directly disturbed in its operations—at least, as far as human life is concerned—by the kind of miracles which Christ performed, together with the practical teaching suggested by them.

In the several grades and species of lower life on earth the survival of the fittest is the rule; the individuals best adapted to their surroundings, and capable of further adaptation, live their time and thrive, and fresh types may be evolved on occasions, while the weaker and worse adapted perish.

The same law, with like results, would work in the human race if it were not interfered with; but Christ, in the character of His miracles, directly opposed its operation, and conformity with the teaching of Christianity continues the disturbance and keeps an antagonism at work for the purpose of another kind of development belonging to a higher life in a different sphere of being. Man left to himself, as an animal, without such influence from Christianity, or a like influence, however derived, is subject to that law of Nature which regulates animal life in this world, which is the sphere of animal life. Where no interference has been introduced, the race, like a piece of mechanism, is conformed to such rule; the fittest survive and the best adapted develop in connection with the circumstance of existence and progress in this present sphere of being, while the feeblest and least ready for adaptation fail and die, and their unfitness and fall seem not to be noted or cared for by those that live and remain. In barbarous, unchristianized communities, infancy and old age, infirmity and disease, do not command the special care required by such conditions; there is a callous indifference to the weakness and need of any who are subject to them; they fail on the highway of human life, while those who have not fallen among such thieves of strength and fitness pass by on the other side. Nature seems the sole governess there. She nurtures some

and leaves others to die out, as she finds ability for adaptation or otherwise, in accordance with the law of natural selection.

But it is remarkable that Christ, in His miracles, introduced a direct interference with that law; He met with His mercy the commonest needs of man, and His works, for the most part, consisted in the healing of the sick and the restoration of the infirm. Those that were most unfit, as Nature would pronounce, who would not survive under her law of natural selection, appeared to be the fittest for consideration and care and benefit from Him, and not only many who were themselves unfitted for the circumstance of life in this world were the subjects of His pitying power, but some besides whose infirmities were congenital, and who by heredity might transmit the misery to their posterity. The blind, though born so, received their sight, and the deaf their hearing, the lame walked, the lepers were cleansed, the demoniac and the lunatic were restored to their right mind. The like kind of effort which obstructs and thwarts the operation of the law of natural selection is still being made by Christianized man. Not only are organizations formed through which the most unfit may be furnished with strength and opportunity, but there are also hospitals for incurables and asylums wherein lunatics and idiots find kindly care. All provision of this kind is a direct opposition to the working of Nature's law, and is similar in character to the miracles for the most part which Christ performed. Thus man strives to free himself from that rule of Nature in accordance with which conditions and developments of earthly life in lower grades and species are regulated, and he does so in conformity with Christ's teaching. God is the author of the natural laws and processes which work in connection with the progress of animal life on earth in its lower grades in this present environment, but He gives teaching, by obedience to which their operation is disturbed and impeded in relation to man; and so it would appear that this present is not the final sphere of man's being, that he must be dealt with not merely in view of the development of his animal life on earth and in the earthly house of this tabernacle, but in the prospect of a further environment and a higher life in a future sphere of being. The physical, the material part of man, his animal life here, has no future—it belongs to the world in which he lives now; but his spirit may be immortal, he may be born again "to an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for those who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation, ready to be revealed in the last time;" and the methods and exercises to which he is led by Divine teaching for the obstruction of natural law in relation to his

material being in this world are just such as tend to the development of his spiritual life into a fitness for the future state which awaits him. Thus it would appear that there is a twofold life in man—the animal life in the flesh, which has its provisions in this world, which is the present sphere of his being, and wherein there are fitting supplies for the needs and appetites of such life, and also the spiritual life which has not its proper environment in the circumstance of this world, but may nevertheless be developed through present conditions into a fitness for the sphere of future being beyond this world in which an enduring existence may be hoped for. There does not seem to be any ground on which might be built an expectation of a place outside this world which would furnish supplies immediately suitable to man as he is conditioned in the earthly house of this tabernacle. His immediate requirements here are of the earth earthy; he seeks instinctively, and finds, “the things of the flesh”; but when this tabernacle is dissolved, when the body dies and the world, for him, perishes and passes away, the wants of his lower nature are extinguished and their storehouse is demolished as far as supply to him is concerned. There is no discernible indication of a reproduction in him of a like life in similar environment with requirements of the same kind; but there are indications of another kind of life in him, for which fitness of circumstance is prepared when he has survived and developed through the process of spiritual evolution of which this world is the scene. The conditions and surroundings and opportunities and exercises of that future life cannot accurately or fully be known now—“It doth not yet appear what we shall be”—but the feeling and action to which Christ leads His disciples, which He exemplified by the nature of the miracles which He performed, that appear like a building up of barriers against the operation of the law of nature which would secure the survival of the fittest in this sphere of life, the partaking of such feeling and the exercise of such action, by which Nature’s method in evolution is obstructed as to the present environment, place man on a higher plane of evolution for the development of his spiritual life into a fitness for its nobler circumstance in the future state beyond this world. Of the requirements there, nothing in detail can as yet be perceived, but the pity, the compassion, the charity, the self-sacrifice evoked and exercised in obedience to Christ’s example and His call to take part with Him in antagonism to the law which would govern otherwise the present stage of human life, constitute an adaptation for man’s further state of being. It may not be imagined now that there will be definite occasions or objects for the outgoings of these virtues then; but the cultivation of the spirit to which they

belong tends to form in man a fitness for his conditions in the future, whatever the actual opportunities of that future may be. Conformity with the example and teaching of Christ, according to opportunities which are now presented, supplies a process through which we may be "changed into the same image," in being thereby fitted to receive the permanent impress which will characterize our life in the future state. Such method of adaptation for the life beyond, through opportunities of the present life, seems to be intimated by Christ: "I was an hungered and ye gave Me meat; I was thirsty and ye gave Me drink; I was a stranger and ye took Me in; naked and ye clothed Me; I was sick and ye visited Me; I was in prison and ye came unto Me. Come, ye blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you."

But not only does the continuous effort, in opposition to the law of natural selection, to make the burden of life lighter for the unfit and to secure their survival, enter as an element of preparation into the evolutionary process through which a fitness of the spiritual life is formed for the future state, but the actual conditions of unfitness according to the law of Nature now in animal life can contribute to the spiritual development. Bodily infirmity, sickness and suffering, adverse circumstances which would shunt victims aside from the path of progress in the way of this world, which would obstruct and at length destroy them, may become occasions and means for the greater growth of spiritual life. Thus, not only the exercise of antagonism to that law of Nature which works towards the survival of the fittest, but the fact of a fall under the stern tread of its cruel march can furnish the discipline by which the spiritual man is fitted for his higher life in the better sphere that is the goal of the evolution of which he is now the subject. Does it not seem as if the Apostle Paul had some discernment of this truth when he wrote: "Most gladly, therefore, will I glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me"; and again: "Though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day; for our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory"? Thus it appears that spiritual development makes better progress by reason of circumstances which would hinder the evolution of the animal type in and through one's self; and also that one of the conditions of spiritual evolution is the conscious resistance of that law of Nature which regulates animal evolution. Nature smites the weaker and stamps out the feeblest types; the disciples of Christ would raise the fallen, heal the sick, and strengthen the infirm for the battle of life. God has designed the evolutionary methods in both cases in regard to the char-

acters of the two kinds of life and the times appointed for them. The animal life belongs to this world; there is no further sphere for its existence; it has its fitting supplies in this environment, and no fitness arranged for it beyond; so the law which regulates its conditions has relation to this, the sole sphere of its existence and the limited time of its duration; but the spiritual life belongs to the eternal sphere of being in the future, where fitting supplies for its completed receptivity are provided; it does not find fitness in the present surroundings, but it can grow more and more into fitness for the future supplies through occasions furnished now in the operation of the law that governs life on earth—through the being crushed beneath the progress of that law or through conflict with it in the effort to rescue others who had fallen under its chariot wheels.

There is apparently a strange clashing of laws in relation to the aspect of the whole complex human life in the appointed spheres for its being. St. Paul seems to have perceived this when he proclaimed the paradox, though with a special application, "As dying, and; behold, we live; as chastened and not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, yet possessing all things."

Truly, from this point of view, "there are diversities of operations; but it is the same God which worketh all in all."

In the Romanes Lecture delivered by Professor Huxley in Oxford last May, it is stated that "the practice of what is ethically best—what we call goodness or virtue—involves a course of conduct which in all respects is opposed to that which leads to success in the cosmic struggle for existence; that such influence is directed not so much to the survival of the fittest as to the fitting of as many as possible to survive; that the ethical progress of society depends not on imitating the cosmic process, but in combating it; and that ethical nature may count on having to reckon with a tenacious and powerful enemy as long as the world lasts."

There, the fact of a conflict with the law of natural selection, begun and carried on by the higher life in man, by that which is defined in the lecture as his "ethical nature," is admitted; the battle is pointed to, but the cause of it is not traced, nor is the object of it explained.

In reference to that strife, agnosticism can only adapt the puzzled utterance of old Kaspar in Southey's familiar lines in "The Battle of Blenheim":

What they fight each other for, I cannot well make out.

There can be no question as to the fact that war is being

waged between what is called "the ethical nature" in man on the one side, and the cosmic process on the other; but how the champions came to be equipped for the combat, and how they were brought into conflict with each other, and what may be the meaning and object of their strife, form a complete enigma to agnosticism. No ultimate permanent result is acknowledged as likely to be consequent on the conflict, and it would seem to be simply accepted as an incomprehensible condition occurring through the clashing of parts of the whole imperfectly arranged mechanism of nature. Whereas the complex life in man, the spiritual and the animal, the prospect of a future environment which waits for him, and for which he is now passing through a state of probation and discipline, would suggest an explanation of this conflict between his "ethical nature"—or, rather, his spiritual life—and the cosmic process working by laws which distinctly belong to the present sphere of his being. If he do not suppress an instinct within him, man must feel that this world is not the sole sphere appointed for his existence, that there is a further and higher life in a future state where a place is prepared for him. The supplies from the world do not meet the aspirations and capabilities of his spiritual being, for which—as an instinct must be met by its object—there are fitting supplies in a further sphere of life, into conformity with which he may develop through the subjugation of his lower nature, which has its suitabilities in this present environment. Thus is he led into "the good fight" of faith in Him who points to a differently conditioned life beyond this: "Every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself even as He is pure." Such provision and prospect give some account of this conflict; a meaning is attached to it, and the destiny of man may be discerned.

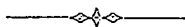
This condition of the present and this hope for the future enter into the Divine revelation which has been given to us. But even if we put aside revelation and regard its statement as a theory, such a theory, so to call it, would let some light in upon the mystery of human life and would furnish a sustaining power in the conflict which it involves.

The mass of men would not be constrained into such conflict, and scarcely any would be sustained for the continuance of it, if the ultimate result of it might only be the slowly attained improvement in the conditions of the human race, to be experienced by a far-off posterity in this environment. But if this life could be looked on as a stage for development into fitness for a higher life beyond where an individual immortality may be secured, an incentive would be supplied which would account for the entrance on the struggle with unfriendly conditions and the perseverance in the effort to

overcome them. Even as a mere theory the Christian faith and hope would seem a plausible explanation of the whole perplexity of human life; a design, a meaning and an object are so communicated to that which appears otherwise inexplicable.

The Founder of the Christian ethics puts the truth before us as a reality. He signifies a fellowship with Him in the strife: "Ye shall indeed drink of the cup that I drink of, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with." He asserts an estrangement of His disciples from the present incongruous surroundings: "They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world." He proclaims their adoption to a higher life after the life here: "I go to prepare a place for you." And He, in a sense, secures them as to the prospect when he prays for them to God, "Father, I will that they whom Thou hast given Me be with Me where I am."

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ART. V.—A PLEA FOR FORBEARANCE IN DISAGREEMENT.

SPEAKING in Convocation in 1864 on the difficult question of the discipline in the colonial churches, and of the determined line taken by Bishop Gray, the Metropolitan of South Africa, Dr. Tait, who was then Bishop of London, said: "I consider him to hold very strong opinions on one side, differing from myself and much more than half of the Bishops of the Church of England. He is fully entitled to hold these opinions; but I think there is this fault in his character, that he is not content with merely holding these opinions, but that he wishes to make every other person hold them too." It is an inseparable characteristic of any earnest and conscientious theological movement that its adherents should desire to influence by every means in their power the opinions of others in their own direction; and there is also the tendency, as time goes on, and new circumstances develop, or new suggestions are made, to adopt rules of conduct and thought, increasing in strictness and in their claim to obedience. The leaders of such movements have always been in the habit of telling us that a certain new restriction is part of their system, a certain new action a necessary corollary of their principles. And if in any such theological movement there are ideas which are of the same arbitrary character, it may be very necessary for those who are jealous for religious truth to scan such ideas very closely.