

THE CONTRIBUTION OF SCIENCE TO CHRISTIANITY.

(Concluded).

FROM the contemplation of the flood of light poured by science over the doctrine of Creation, we might pass on to mark the effect upon many other theological truths which rays from the same source are beginning to illuminate. Nothing could be more interesting than to trace up the doctrines one by one in order, and watch the light gradually stealing over all. This must always be a beautiful sight; for this is the light of nature, and even its dawn is lovely. We should like to mark where the last ray gilded the last hill-top, and see how many higher peaks lay still beyond in shadow. And then we should like to prophesy that another light will rise, when physical science is dim, to illuminate what remains. We do not mean an inspired word, but a further contribution from nature itself. To many men of science, judging by the small esteem in which they hold philosophy, the day of *mental science* apparently is past. To an enlightened theology it is the science of the future. It were strange indeed, and a contradiction of evolution, if the science of atoms and cells were a later or further development than the science of man. Theology sees the point at which physical science must cease to help it; but encouraged by that help, it will expect a science to arise to carry it through the darkness that remains. The analogies of biology may be looked to to elucidate the mysterious phenomena of regeneration. When theology has received its full contribution from natural science it will be able to present to the world a scientific account of its greatest fact. The ultimate mystery of life, whether natural or spiritual, may still remain; but the laws, if not the processes, of the second birth will take their place in that great circle of the known

which science is slowly redeeming from the surrounding darkness. We shall then have an embryology, a morphology, and a physiology of the new man; and a scientific theology will add to its departments a higher biology. But this cannot exhaust theology any more than biology exhausts the account of the natural man, Further contributions must come in from higher sciences, and different classes of facts must be arrayed under other laws. Theology therefore predicates a science of man which is yet to come. There is nothing external to theology; it must collate the different revelations in mind and matter as science gathers them, one by one. The sciences are but so many natural history collectors, busy over all the world of nature and of thought in gathering material for the final classification by the final science. Without theology, the sciences are incomplete, and theology can only complete itself by completing the sciences

But we have only space at present to note one or two other examples of the contribution of physical science, and these of a somewhat general kind. One shall be the doctrine of revelation itself. That science shows the necessity for a revelation in a new way, and even hints at subtle analogies for the mode in which it is conveyed to human minds, are points well worth developing. But we can only deal now with the more familiar question of subject-matter and see how that has been affected by evolution.

According to science, as we have already seen, evolution is the method of creation. Now creation is a form of revelation; it is the oldest form of revelation, the most accessible, the most universal, and still an ever-increasing source of theological truth. It is with this revelation that science begins. If then science, familiar with this revelation, and knowing to it be an evolution, were to be told of the existence of another revelation—an inspired word—it would expect that this other revelation would also be an evolution.

Such an anticipation might or might not be justified ; but from the law of the uniformity of nature, there would be, to the man of science, a very strong presumption in favour of any revelation which bore this scientific hall-mark, which indicated, that is to say, that God's word had unfolded itself to men like His works.

Now if science searches the field of theology for an additional revelation, it will find a Bible awaiting it—a Bible in two forms. The one is the Bible as it was presented to our forefathers ; the other is the Bible of modern theology. The books, the chapters, the verses, and the words, are the same in each ; yet in form they are two entirely different Bibles. To science the difference is immediately palpable. Judging of each of them from its own standpoint, science perceives after a brief examination that the distinction between them is one with which it has been long familiar. In point of fact, the one is constructed like the world according to the old cosmogonies, while the other is an evolution. The one represents revelation as having been produced on the creative hypothesis, the Divine-fiat hypothesis, the ready-made hypothesis ; the other on the slow-growth or evolution theory. It is at once obvious which of them science would prefer—it could no more accept the first than it could accept the ready-made theory of the universe.

Nothing could be more important than to assure science that the same difficulty has for some time been felt, and with quite equal keenness, by theology. The scientific method in its hand, scientific theology has been laboriously working at a reconstruction of biblical truth from this very view-point of development. And it no more pledges itself to-day to the interpretations of the Bible of a thousand years ago, than does science to the interpretations of nature in the time of Pythagoras. Nature is the same to-day as in the time of Pythagoras, and the Bible is the same to-day

as a thousand years ago. But the Pythagorean interpretation of nature is not less objectionable to the modern mind than are many ancient interpretations of the Scriptures to the scientific theologian.

The supreme contribution of Evolution to Religion is that it has given it a clearer Bible. One great function of science is, not as many seem to suppose to make things difficult, but to make things plain. Science is the great explainer, the great expositor, not only of nature, but of everything it touches. Its function is to arrange things, and make them reasonable. And it has arranged the Bible in a new way, and made it as different as science has made the world. It is not going too far to say that there are many things in the Bible which are hard to reconcile with our ideas of a just and good God. This is only expressing what even the most devout and simple minds constantly feel, and feel to be sorely perplexing, in reading especially the Old Testament. But these difficulties arise simply from an old-fashioned or unscientific view of what the Bible is, and are similar to the difficulties found in nature when interpreted either without the aid of science, or with the science of many centuries ago. We see now that the mind of man has been slowly developing, that the race has been gradually educated, and that revelation has been adapted from the first to the various and successive stages through which that development passed. Instead, therefore, of reading all our theology into Genesis, we see only the alphabet there. In the later books we see primers—first, second, and third: the truths stated provisionally as for children, but gaining volume and clearness as the world gets older. Centuries and centuries pass, and the mind of the disciplined race is at last deemed ripe enough to receive New Testament truth, and the revelation culminates in the person of Christ.

The moral difficulties of the Old Testament are admittedly

great. But when approached from the new standpoint, when they are seen to be rudiments of truth spoken and acted in strange ways to attract and teach children, they vanish one by one. For instance, we are told that the iniquities of the father are to be visited upon the children unto the third and fourth generation. The impression upon the early mind undoubtedly must have been that this was a solemn threat which God would carry out in anger in individual cases. We now know however that this is simply the doctrine of heredity. A child inherits its parents' nature not as a special punishment, but by natural law. In those days that could not be explained. Natural law was a word unknown; and the truth had to be put provisionally in a form that all could understand. And even many of the miracles may have explanations in fact or in principle, which, without destroying the idea of the miraculous, may show the naturalness of the supernatural.

The theory of the Bible, which makes belief in a revelation possible to the man of science, Christianity owes to the scientific method. It is not suggested that the evolution theory in theology was introduced to satisfy the mind of the scientific thinker, any more than that his appreciation of it is the test of its truth. As regards the latter, it is to be weighed on its own evidence and judged by its fruits; and as regards the question of origin, its ancestry is much more reputable, for it was not a concession to any theory, but rose out of the facts themselves. Indeed, long before evolution was formulated in science, discerning minds had seen, with an enthusiasm which few could at that time share, the slow, steady, upward growth of theological truth to ever higher and nobler forms. "Wonderful it is to see with what effort, hesitation, suspense, interruption,—with how many swayings to the right and to the left—with how many reverses, yet with what certainty of advance, with what precision in its march, and with what ultimate com-

pleteness, it has been envolved; till the whole truth, 'self-balanced on its centre hung,' part answering to part, one, absolute, integral, indissoluble, while the whole lasts! Wonderful to see how heresy has but thrown this idea into fresh forms, and drawn out from it further developments, with an exuberance which exceeded all questionings, and a harmony which baffled all criticism."¹ These are not the words of modern science. They were written forty years ago by John Henry Newman. Since then the central idea of this passage, which though it does not refer to the Bible is equally applicable to it, has been carried into departments of theology, in ways which were then undreamed of; and however physical science may have contributed to this result it is certain that the method is not the creation of science.

Evolution is the ever-recurring theme in theology as in nature. We might indeed almost have grouped the entire contribution of science to Christianity around this point. The mere presence of the doctrine of Evolution in science has reacted as by an electric induction on every surrounding circle of thought. Whether we like it or not, whether we shun the change, or court it, or dread it, it has come, and we must set ourselves to understand it. No truth now can remain unaffected by evolution. We can no longer take out a doctrine in this century or in that, bottle it like a vintage, and store it in our creeds. We see truth now as a profound ocean still, but with a slow and ever rising tide. Theology must reckon with this tide. We can store this truth in our vessels, for the formulation of doctrine must never stop, but the vessels, with their mouths open, must remain in the ocean. If we take them out the tide cannot rise in them, and we shall only have stagnant doctrines rotting in a dead theology. But theology, surely, with its great age, its eternal foundation, and its countless mysteries,

¹ Newman, *University Sermons*, p. 317.

has the least to lose and the most to gain from every advance of knowledge. And the development theory has done more for theology perhaps than for any other science. Evolution has given to theology some wholly new departments. It has raised it to a new rank among the sciences. It has given it a vastly more reasonable body of truth, about God and man, about sin and salvation. It has lent it a firmer base, an enlarged horizon, and a richer faith. But its great contribution, on which all these depend, is to the doctrine of revelation.

What then does this mean for revelation? It means in plain language that Evolution has given Christianity a new Bible. Its peculiarity is, that in its form, it is like the world in which it is found. It is a word, but its root is now known, and we have other words from the same root. Its substance is still the unchanged language of heaven, yet it is written in a familiar tongue. The new Bible is a book whose parts, though not of unequal value, are seen to be of different kinds of value; where the casual is distinguished from the essential, the local from the universal, the subordinate from the primal end. This Bible is not a book which has been made; it has grown. Hence it is no longer a mere word-book, nor a compendium of doctrines, but a nursery of growing truths. It is not an even plane of proof texts without proportion or emphasis, or light and shade; but a revelation varied as nature, with the Divine in its hidden parts, in its spirit, its tendencies, its obscurities, and its omissions. Like nature it has successive strata, and valley and hilltop, and mist and atmosphere, and rivers which are flowing still, and here and there a place which is desert, and fossils too, whose crude forms are the stepping-stones to higher things. It is a record of inspired deeds as well as of inspired words, an ascending series of inspired facts in a matrix of human history.

Now it is to be marked that this is not the product of

any destructive movement, nor is this transformed book in any sense a mutilated Bible. All this has taken place, it may be, without the elimination of a book or the loss of an important word. It is simply the transformation by a method whose main warrant is that the book lends itself to it.

It may be said, and for a time it will continue to be said, that the Christian does not need a transformed Bible; and fortunately, or in some cases unfortunately, this is the case. For years yet the old Bible will continue to nourish the soul of the Church, as it has nourished it in the past; and the needy heart will in all time manage to feed itself apart from any forms. But there is a class, and an ever-increasing class, to whom the form is much. Theology is only beginning to realize how radical is the change in mental attitude of those who have learned to think from science. Intercourse with the ways of nature breeds a mental attitude of its own. It is an attitude worthy of its master. In this presence the student is face to face with what is real. He is looking with his own eyes at facts, at what God did. He finds things in nature just as its Maker left them; and from ceaseless contact with phenomena which will not change for man, and with laws which he has never known to swerve, he fears to trust his mind to anything less. Now this Bible which has been described, is the presentation to this age of men who have learned this habit. They have studied the facts, they have looked with their own eyes at what God did; and they are giving us a book which is more than the devout man's Bible, though it is as much as ever the devout man's Bible. It is the apologist's Bible. It is long since the apologist has had a Bible. The Bible of our infancy was not an apologist's Bible. There are things in the Old Testament cast in his teeth by sceptics, to which he has simply no answer. These are the things, the miserable things, the masses have laid hold of.

They are the stock-in-trade to-day of the free-thought platform, and the secularist pamphleteer. And, surprising as it is, there are not a few honest seekers who are made timid and suspicious, not a few on the outskirts of Christianity who are kept from coming further in, by the half-truths which a new exegesis, a re-consideration of the historic setting, and a clearer view of the moral purposes of God, would change from barriers into bulwarks of the faith. Such a Bible scientific theology is giving us, and it cannot be proclaimed to the mass of the people too soon. It is no more fair to raise and brandish objections to the Bible without first studying carefully what scientific theologians have to say on the subject, than it would be fair for one who derived his views of the natural world from Pythagoras to condemn all science. It is expected in criticisms of science that the critic's knowledge should at least be up to date, that he is attacking what science really holds; and the same justice is to be awarded to the science of theology. When science makes its next attack upon theology, if indeed that shall ever be again, it will find an armament, largely furnished by itself, which has made the Bible as impregnable as nature.

One question, finally, will determine the ultimate worth of this contribution to Christianity. Does it help it practically? Does it impoverish or enrich the soul? Does it lower or exalt God? These questions, with regard to one or two of the elementary truths of religion have been partially answered already. But a closing illustration from the highest of all will show that here also science is not silent.

Science has nothing finer to offer Christianity than the exaltation of its supreme conception—God. Is it too much to say that in a practical age like the present, when the idea and practice of worship tend to be forgotten, God should wish to reveal Himself afresh in ever more striking ways?

Is it too much to say, that at this distance from creation, with the eye of theology resting largely upon the incarnation and work of the man Christ Jesus, the Almighty should design with more and more impressiveness to utter Himself as the Wonderful, the Counsellor, the Great and Mighty God? Whether this be so or not, it is certain that every step of science discloses the attributes of the Almighty with a growing magnificence. The author of *Natural Religion* tells us that "the average scientific man worships just at present a more awful, and as it were a greater, Deity than the average Christian." Certain it is that the Christian view and the scientific view together frame a conception of the object of worship, such as the world in its highest inspiration has never reached before. The old student of natural theology rose from his contemplation of design in nature with heightened feeling of the wisdom, goodness, and power, of the Almighty. But never before had the attributes of eternity, and immensity, and infinity, clothed themselves with language so majestic in its sublimity. It is a language for the mind alone. Yet in the presence of the slow toiling of geology, millennium after millennium, at the unfinished earth; before the unthinkable past of palæontology, both but moments and lightning-flashes to the immenser standards of astronomy; before these even the imagination reels, and leaves an experience only for religion.

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*THE AIM, IMPORTANCE, DIFFICULTIES, AND
BEST METHOD OF SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY.*

FIRST PAPER.

EXACTLY thirty years ago Bishop (then Mr.) Ellicott published the first edition of the first volume of his Commentaries on St. Paul's Epistles. Of those years no feature in