

“NATURAL LAW IN THE SPIRITUAL WORLD.”

A DEFENCE.

FIRST PAPER.

WHAT is to be thought of a book which, in two years, reaches a circulation of thirty or forty thousand? Is this great and sudden popularity a sign of worth or of worthlessness? In a roomful of pessimists and optimists this question might prove a fine instrument for trying the spirits.

The pessimists would pronounce such a rapid success a sure proof that the book was bad and shallow. They would say that the best books have at first had few or no admirers, and the greatest authors achieved only posthumous renown. They would remark that an oak requires a hundred years to ripen, but “the quickest and completest of all vegetables is the cabbage.” They would declaim about the many-headed vulgar, and scoff at the transient fancies of the crowd. They would paint you pictures of the young lady, whose ordinary mental diet is a novel from the circulating library, puzzling over the philosophy of the popular volume, and the shopkeeper adorning the margins of the most commonplace paragraphs with marks of admiration.

The optimists would laughingly retort that the writers of books, even among pessimists, wait as anxiously as their neighbours for the verdict of the multitude, and prize it as highly when it is in their favour. They would point out that some of the greatest books and authors have won their popularity instantaneously. If Milton’s publisher only risked five pounds on *Paradise Lost*, *The Sorrows of*

Werther made Goethe the darling of the literary public at five-and-twenty, and he never afterwards lost this position. They would remark that the organs of publicity have now become so perfect, and the numbers of readers so multiplied, that a good book has a far better chance than in any former age of a speedy recognition. They would maintain that a writer on a serious theme who takes the public by storm must at least receive the praise of having discovered, and sympathized with, some deep need of the common mind.

The book named at the head of this article has given rise to many discussions of this kind. Its phenomenal success has compelled the organs of all shades of opinion to pass judgment upon it. In this case criticism has rather followed the general verdict than guided it. The public found out the book for itself by an instinct which it now and then reveals; and the critics, arriving late, have had to criticise their own constituents as well as the author.

On the whole they have confirmed the public verdict. They have unanimously praised the style of the book and the writer's aims and spirit. They have acknowledged the ingenuity of his reasoning and the originality of most of his views. And the majority of them have spoken with thankfulness of a writer who has succeeded in conveying so much wholesome truth into a multitude of minds with such telling effect. They have acknowledged that a new proof has been given of the keenness of the appetite for religious literature of a high order, and that religious teachers have received a lesson as to the anxiety which still exists in the public mind about the bearings of scientific discovery on religion.

But, whilst approving of the popular selection of this work as profitable reading, the critics have been by no means unanimous in approving of it as a contribution to human knowledge. They have found its positions novel

and perplexing, and some have come to the conclusion that, though it is valuable for its restatement of old truth in a setting of scientific illustrations, it has completely failed as a scientific or theological treatise. Its method of reasoning has been objected to, its central principle has been pronounced an illusion, and nearly every one of the applications of this principle has been denied by some critic or other.

Professor Drummond's pronounced Evangelicalism has of course exposed him at certain points to contradiction from the organs of the opposite schools of thought. It might perhaps have been expected that at least all Evangelicals would have recognised that a powerful blow had been struck on their side. On the contrary, however, one of the curiosities of the criticism of this book has been a small shower of pamphlets from certain earnest representatives of this school of thought, who wring their hands over the Professor as a misleader of the public all the more dangerous because of his general orthodoxy. The nature of these productions may be inferred from the circumstance, indicated on their coloured covers, that the authors of most of them have written other pamphlets on such subjects as "The Mystico-numerical System of the Hebrews," "The Millennium," "Daniel's Prophecies," and the Apocalypse.

Mr. Benjamin W. Newton, for instance, has written two hundred pages of remarks on Mr. Drummond. His pamphlet is garnished with quotations in French, German, Greek, and Hebrew, which would seem to be a guarantee of intelligence. But he blunders over the simplest statements of the book which he has undertaken to criticise. Mr. Drummond having, for instance, frequently to mention the fact that plants nourish themselves by the absorption of inorganic matter, describes this by saying that they stoop down to touch particles of the mineral kingdom which they elevate into the kingdom of life. But Mr.

Newton does not understand this simple fact, and calls it "an elevation which, if it ever had taken place, would have violated every law that has been stamped upon matter from the first moment of its existence." Having thus failed to understand one of the most elementary facts of natural science, he goes floundering on, page after page, dilating on it, and involving himself in deeper and deeper confusion. "It may be asked, if in order to effect the elevation of a mineral into a vegetable, there must be evolution from the mineral to produce the higher, but as yet non-existent, vegetable; and if it be also necessary that a power should come down from the non-existent vegetable to assist or stimulate the evolution from the mineral, how could the vegetable, which has no existence until the evolution from the mineral has taken place, supply, whilst non-existent, the stimulating or attracting power needed?" and so on. At the close of this extraordinary passage he has the grace to say, "I hope I have not misrepresented anything." But in this, and in twenty other places, he has utterly misunderstood and misrepresented the author. In this way he fancies he discovers errors in every page, and in general regards "such doctrine, however modified, as deadly and soul-destroying heresy, whose birthplace is the pit."

Why should such persons read apologetic literature? They can have no need of it to strengthen their own faith. One of them declares: "Acknowledging the Bible as a Divine gift, we have received it with reverence, and submitted without denial or doubt to its teaching. It has never occurred to us to seek proof elsewhere, either to establish or confirm any truth which comes to us from Heaven. With such an origin, unreadiness to accept it, or any suspicion as to its value, so far from being praiseworthy, is positively sinful." It need not be said that persons occupying such a position can be of no service to those whose faith has been shaken; for the first qualification

of the apologete is sympathy. Why then should they read that which can only excite and enrage them?

At the opposite extreme from these worthy souls, who dread the Professor as a monster of heresy disguised in a garment of light, stands a writer who in *The Cambridge Review* pronounces "Mr. Drummond's method of argument from first to last to be unsound," and has to find an excuse for criticising the book at all "in the large number of persons who have purchased and presumably read the work." The weight of this juvenile judgment may be inferred from a flight like the following: "A whole treatise on the reconciliation of science and religion, twenty thousand copies sold, and nothing further to show for it than an overstrained parable about a hermit crab! 'Parturiunt montes, nascetur ridiculus—pagurus.'" Mr. Drummond has, indeed, escaped no single species of criticism, not even the lowest—that of the theological clown, jeering at his success and holding his sides with the merriment of the circus.

I. Strong exception has been taken to what may be called the Apologetic Method of Mr. Drummond. "The old ground of faith, Authority," he has said in his Preface, "is given up; the new, Science, has not yet taken its place. Men did not require to *see* truth before; they only needed to believe it. Truth, therefore, had not been put by theology in a seeing form. But now they ask to see it." And he proposes to comply with this demand.

This is a complete change in the method of meeting theological inquiry. The old method was to conduct the inquirer to the Bible, which was held to be the only abode of knowledge on religious subjects, and convince him that it was a Divine book; and, when this was accomplished, of course logic compelled him to accept all the doctrines which could be proved to be taught in the Bible. This method is stated with admirable clearness by a critic already

referred to. "Knowledge of spiritual truth can only be gained by a diligent and devout study of the Scriptures. In the Bible God has given us a full and faithful record of His will. . . . By all means examine and re-examine the statements made in the inspired Word, to avoid either misunderstanding or misrepresentation; but when we have ascertained the precise meaning of the language, we have reached final truth." This was long the only method of Apologetics: the natural is experienced, it was said, the spiritual is revealed; the facts of science lie beneath the eye of observation, but the facts of religion are mysteries inaccessible to human observation.

Mr. Drummond holds, on the contrary, that the spiritual is experienced no less than the natural, and many facts of religion are as accessible to human observation as the facts of science. If the inquirer be a religious man, he can see them in his own soul; and if not, he can see them in the souls and lives of his religious neighbours. Conversion and holiness, and many other religious phenomena, are as hard facts as the earth's crust or the procession of the seasons or the growth of plants, and they are as deserving of scientific explanation. Their explanation is theology: it is impossible to explain how a religious man has come to be what he is without postulating the greatest truths of religion.

It will be observed that this is an additional method of dealing with religious inquiry. It leaves the old method unimpugned, to be practised by those who think they can use it. But the truth is, this new method has long been used practically, whether theology has acknowledged it or not. Suppose a religious inquirer is asking the most vital of all religious questions, What must I do to be saved? He may be directed to the Bible, and go to it trustfully, either having convinced himself that it is a Divine book or taking this on trust without investigation. There he will

be told that Christ is the Saviour, and instructed how to come to Him. Suppose he comes and trusts in Christ and is saved, and the work of salvation pursues in his soul its normal course, till it transforms his being and life with its Divine influence. Has he not now in this influence and its results a set of facts lying under his own most immediate observation as pregnant with the truths of religion as the side of a mountain is with the doctrines of geology? He believes there is such a thing as salvation, not merely because the Bible has said so, but because he is a saved man; he believes Christ is a Divine Saviour, not only because this is stated in Scripture, but because Christ has saved himself. Certainly he will be in no mood to think little of the Bible; and yet he might turn round to it and address it in words of friendly pleasantry like those addressed to the woman of Samaria by her fellow-townsmen, "Now we believe, not because of thy saying; but we have heard Him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world."

It is, indeed, questionable whether many Christians have either arrived at certainty about religious truth by the old apologetic method or revert to this method when their faith is shaken. Is not the normal history of religious conviction rather somewhat as follows? The child learns the truths of religion from his parents and teachers, and believes them simply on their testimony, and not because he has satisfied himself by argument of the divinity of the Bible, and found the articles of belief recorded there. Knowing with the head in this way his own need of salvation and the means of salvation to be found in Christ, the boy or young man is led through grace to believe these things with the heart, and his religious experience begins and goes on playing a larger and larger part in his life. He now seeks his friends among the religious and their life lies open to his observation. Later on doubts perhaps arise, and his beliefs are

shaken to their foundations. When these storms are past, and he feels round to see if there is anything still holding him to the Christian system, what is it generally that he finds? Not, we venture to say, the belief still unshaken that the Bible is an infallible book; but his own religious experience still remains an indubitable fact in his memory, or perhaps it is even more unquestionable to him that one or two fine Christian characters he has known must have been of Divine workmanship, and not mere products of nature. This is the rope by which he is saved and pulls himself gradually back to the *terra firma* of faith.

Although, therefore, the Bible is the principal abode of religious truth, it is not the only one to which the religious inquirer may be guided. Many religious facts are accessible to inspection in Christian experience; and it may be best to take the inquirer there first. If he be a student of science, this will probably be the case; for it is only a step from the fields which he has been investigating to this new field. He may have been studying plants and animals—the phases of their life, the incidents of their history, the inferences which these compel him to draw. It is but a step to man—the phases of his experience, the forces which have formed him; and if the subject of investigation is a religious character, he cannot be explained without the recognition of the forces of salvation which have made him what he is. This is what Mr. Drummond means by making the inquirer *see* the truth.

It is possible that this may yet become the universally recognised method of apologetics. The old method was an extremely circuitous and cumbrous one. You had to prove that there is a God first; then that He so inspired the writers of Scripture as to give all their statements infallible authority; then that your interpretation of the statements of Scripture was correct, before you could ask the inquirer to believe any doctrine of religion. It is a much more short

and easy method to call upon the inquirer to account for what lies immediately before his eyes. The converted man, the life of the saint, may yet become the apologete's field of demonstration. Someone once threw out the taunt that, during the great apologetic epoch in the last century, the dissenting churches produced none of the great apologetic works, which were all the lucubrations of churchmen. "It is true," a wise man replied; "but Methodism was at that very time furnishing England with a far more convincing proof of Christianity in the myriads of men and women whom it was converting."

Of course though the apologete begins, he ought not to end, here. From the saved individual he will work his way back to the facts of redemption; and from these he will pass to the record of redemption in the Scriptures, thus leading the inquirer step by step to the most elevated position occupied by the old apologetic. Mr. Drummond has emphasized the evidence for Christianity supplied in the experience of the individual; he has said little or nothing of the ample evidence to be found in the experience of the body of believers—the Church. Roman Catholic theology finds here its principal field for religious demonstration. Mr. Drummond seeks truth in the experience of the Christian individual; Romanists seek it in the Christian Church; the old apologetic sought it in the Bible. Perhaps there may arise in the future an apologetic which will seek it in all three: beginning with the experience of the individual Christian, and there finding something; passing on to the collective experience of the whole Church and of the Christian generations, and there finding more; and finally finding in the Bible both a test for the conclusions formed at these preceding stages and the bountiful source of all else that may be needed to complete the rounded whole of Divine truth.

II. The guiding principle of the whole book is expressed in these words of the Introduction: "The position we have been led to take up is not that the Spiritual Laws are analogous to the Natural Laws, but that *they are the same laws*. It is not a question of analogy but of *Identity*."

This position has been almost unanimously rejected by even the most appreciative of Mr. Drummond's critics. Many of them have omitted, however, to mention the reserve with which the author has stated it. Thus Mr. J. J. Murphy, in an able article in *The British Quarterly Review*, begins with saying: "Professor Drummond's claim is that he has set forth a system of religious philosophy;" and then proceeds: "We maintain that, although there is much religious philosophy, and true religious philosophy, in his book, there is not a system at all, but only a number of detached suggestions somewhat elaborately wrought out." But Mr. Drummond has advanced no such claim. On the contrary he has, in the Preface, described what he has attempted in almost the very words in which Mr. Murphy describes what he has performed.

"When this," he says [*i.e.* the principle of the identity of the laws in the two spheres], "presented itself to me as a method, I felt it to be due to it to begin again at the beginning, and reconstruct my spiritual world step by step. The result of that inquiry, so far as its expression in systematic form is concerned, I have not given in this book. To reconstruct a Spiritual Religion, or a department of Spiritual Religion—for this is all the method can pretend to—on the lines of Nature, would be an attempt from which one better equipped in both directions might well be pardoned if he shrank. My object at present is the humbler one of venturing a simple contribution to practical Religion along the lines indicated."

From the frank and intensely interesting account of the genesis of his book given in the Preface, it is evident that, during his investigations on the boundaries between Religion and Science, the author was struck with the identity of a few of the laws governing both regions. This became a clue to him, and he leapt to the vast generalisation that

the laws of both worlds might be identical. This dazzling anticipation served as an attraction to draw him on. But he does not pretend to have proved it; as yet it is merely a hypothesis awaiting proof. His own faith in it is strengthened by its agreement with the general scientific Law of Continuity and by such extensions of Natural Law into apparently alien domains as Mr. Bagehot has made in politics, and Mr. Herbert Spencer in sociology; but he does not yet ask public assent to it except to the extent of the few illustrations of it which he has produced. He already sees himself that his generalisation, however far it may be carried, cannot be established in its completeness, and frankly acknowledges it: "So general has been the survey, that I have not even paused to define specifically to what departments of the Spiritual World exclusively the principle is to be applied. One thing is certain, and I state it positively, the application of Natural Law to the Spiritual World has decided and necessary limits." The portions of the Spiritual World to which he here allows his principle will not apply, are doubtless those provinces of it most remote from human experience. But at the other end also he will have to allow that there are laws of matter which do not run up into the spiritual world; for his attempt to show that gravitation, for instance, may apply to spirit cannot be called a success.

Some of his critics have maintained the impossibility *a priori* of any identity. They hold that the objects of the two regions are so diverse in their nature that they cannot be regulated by the same laws. But can any diversity in the nature of two different sets of objects render it certain, before observation, that the law of their existence, in the sense of "an ascertained or working order among phenomena," which is all that Mr. Drummond means by the term, cannot be identical? The primary laws of logic are well-known instances of laws which apply equally to

objects the most diverse in the world of matter and the world of mind. But it is with laws of life Mr. Drummond is dealing ; and it is said that life in the natural world and life in the spiritual world, though they chance to have the same name, are essentially such distinct things as to make any identity among the laws which regulate them impossible. This is a somewhat hazardous statement, since in either case life is so difficult to define. But even if the two kinds of life be utterly diverse in their nature, it still does not necessarily follow that the behaviour of the objects in which they inhere may not proceed according to the same "working sequence or constant order." It is not a question for *a priori* speculation, which cannot settle it, but for patient observation.

Mr. Drummond has patiently observed, and in his eleven chapters has indicated, a number of laws which rule in both spheres. In the majority of instances the correctness of his observations has not been seriously assailed. It seems to us there can be no doubt that in many cases the laws of natural life and spiritual life may be stated with scientific exactness in identical terms. Here is an instance from Mr. Drummond : *Any principle which secures the safety of the individual without personal effort or the vital exercise of faculty is disastrous to character.* He has shown that this is an important law of science, guiding the student into wide fields of inquiry and bringing them under his intelligent survey. Is it not also a law of the moral and spiritual world, which brings a hundred experiences into view and shows their significance and the connexion between them? But these are the very uses of the discovery of laws. The truth is, Mr. Drummond is less original in this matter than has been supposed. Already in Scripture there may be found laws enunciated of wide sweep which are identical in both spheres ; as, for example, the favourite saying of our Lord, "*To him that hath shall more be given,*

and he shall have abundance; but from him who hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath." Mr. Drummond's merit is that he has taken the laws whose discovery is the principal boast of the modern scientific school, and which are familiar in their mouths as household words, and shown that they are to be found regulating a still higher order of phenomena in a sphere which to some men of science appears to be a chaos or a world in the air.

It would be a far greater service, however, to the cause of truth if he would pursue the generalisation which has been his guiding clue to its utmost limits, and let the world know how far the theological territory is capable of being reorganized by his principle. No wonder it drew him on and imparted to his thinking the glow of enthusiasm which all readers have recognised in his book. It is the same dream of unity in the works of God which, in one form or another, has been the inspiration of all the profoundest thinking. In every mind there is a latent faith that this dream will some day be found to be a reality, when all things in the universe will be seen to form "one vast circle, in which a few well-known laws shall form the radii." No one has before brought home so fully to the common mind that the facts of religion must also form a part of this gigantic circle. While absolutely loyal to the distinction in theology between nature and grace, Mr. Drummond has taught his generation to think of the experiences of grace also, from the point of view of biology, as forming part of that Divine whole of nature which is an emanation from the recesses of the Divine wisdom, power, and love.

In next Number the objections will be met which have been made to (3) Mr. Drummond's Law of Biogenesis; and a reply will be given to the charges brought against him of (4) ignoring the Doctrine of the Atonement, and (5) teaching several heresies.