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1912.

528TH ORDINARY GENERAL MEETING.

MONDAY, MARCH 4TH, 1912.

THE VENERABLE ARCHDEACON SINCLAIR, D.D., IN THE CHAIR.

The Minutes of the previous Meeting were read and signed, and the SECRETARY announced the elections of Mr. Sidney Collett, formerly an Associate, as a Member, C. H. F. Major, Esq., a life Associate, and T. A. Stewart, Esq., as Associate, and the Rev. Professor Hechler as a Missionary Associate.

The CHAIRMAN, in introducing the Bishop of Down, Connor and Dromore, said that it gave him great pleasure to do so, and that they all felt it a privilege to hear a paper from one who had taken high honours at Trinity College, Dublin, and whose career had justified his earlier successes. As examining chaplain to a former Bishop of what was now his own diocese, as chaplain to the Lord Lieutenant, as Donnellan Lecturer, as Bishop of Clogher, and then of Ossory, he had furthered the cause of Truth and laid a burden of indebtedness upon all who had studied his works.

He then called upon him to read his paper.

DIFFICULTIES OF BELIEF.

By the RIGHT REV. THE BISHOP OF DOWN, D.D.

THE difficulties of belief, which have so powerful an effect on modern minds, may be said to be due in the main to three causes:—

First, the influence of modern science; secondly, the tendency of modern criticism; and thirdly, the character of the modern ethos.

All these are related; for modern criticism is very largely the application of scientific methods to history and to historical documents, and the modern ethos has taken shape under conditions which owe their nature in a great degree to the transformation of the material environment of human life by the application of the discoveries of physical science.

We shall consider our subject in the three departments which have just been outlined.

(1) Every really thoughtful Christian believer in our day has, in some way or other, found means of adjusting his scientific creed so as to avoid conflict with his theology. There are people who find no difficulty in such an adjustment, because they think in water-tight compartments. They never dream of applying in the sphere of their religion the categories which dominate their science. There are some very powerful minds

which have this peculiarity. It makes life and faith easy for them. And, as we shall see, there are schools of thinkers in our time whose whole philosophy consists in an effort to prove that thinking in water-tight compartments is true and right thinking.

But the majority of thinking people are not thus constituted. Even when they accept scientific principles and methods on the one hand, and religion with its principles and methods on the other, they are constantly disturbed by the uncomfortable suspicion that somehow or other their whole life needs a reconciliation which they ought to effect but have no means of effecting, or, if their faith is of a very intense kind, they have a deep underlying conviction that there exists some reconciliation which lies beyond the grasp of their thought.

Let us consider briefly how this difficulty arises. It is due surely in the first instance to the fact that science goes upon the principle of physical causation. It regards the universe as a connected system of related things and events pervaded by necessity. Natural law governs the whole. According to this scheme of thought, the condition of the world at any moment is the necessary outcome of what it was at the previous moment: the universe is a vast mechanism in which every element is determined by relation to all the others. In the eighteenth century this idea was confirmed by the discovery and description of the mechanism of the heavens. In the nineteenth century its scope was extended by the great doctrine of evolution. True, this latter seemed to leave mere mechanism behind. It added to the idea of mechanism the higher idea of organic growth. But it did not get rid of the idea of an order dominated by necessity. Rather it seemed, in its earlier statements, at all events, to link biology to mechanism, and to show that elements which, for earlier thinkers, seemed to break free from the control of merely natural law are really in complete bondage. Thus arose that naturalistic monism of which Haeckel may be regarded as the most characteristic exponent.

Science certainly goes upon the supposition that the unexplained may always be explained on these principles, if we can only get deep enough. It does not, in practice, admit exceptions. Its aim is ever to banish the mysterious and unaccountable. If told that life, for example, is a new beginning which cannot be brought into one system with matter and motion, and explained in terms of mechanism and chemistry, it answers "Wait and See." If confuted by the facts of consciousness and will it urges the danger of hasty assertion in view of the steady

advance of scientific explanation throughout the domain of nature. Here is the strong foundation of materialistic and agnostic naturalism. And thinking people who feel the tremendous force of the contention may be pardoned their fears and their hesitations, and their doubt of mere dogmatic statements on the other side.

It is further to be observed that these ideas which, a generation ago, were current among the educated, and especially the scientifically educated, classes, have now become the property of the masses. Education of a sort is now widely diffused. The principles of science, in a rudimentary fashion, have penetrated almost all minds. The thoughts of the few in one generation are those of the many in the next. To Sir Oliver Lodge, Haeckel's *Riddle of the Universe* seems a survival from the past. To the multitude it seems the newest light of science. The reason is clear. The multitude has only just grasped the ideas which give that work its plausibility. To Sir Oliver Lodge those ideas are old and familiar and he has discovered their limitations.

On the whole I think it is true that here we have the difficulty which most of all affects the minds of the more thoughtful people who doubt or deny at the present time. Here is the basis of most forms of definite unbelief. What are we to say as to the outlook for the future?

First, we must note the emergence of a philosophy which cuts the Gordian knot. Pragmatism does not deny the validity of science. On the contrary it maintains that validity, but bases it altogether upon its practical value. Its contention is that we believe science to be true because we find it useful. To extend the methods of science into realms where they are not useful is mere confusion. In those realms we must seek for the principles which are useful, and we shall find them true also—true in their own sphere. I regard this philosophy as a remarkable sign of the times. It is the revolt of the spirit of man against the dominance of mechanism. As such it is of supreme importance. I do not believe in pragmatism as a final philosophy. But it is surely a fresh proof, and one characteristic of our age, that man's spiritual nature can never finally submit to the bondage of the material. Naturalism (or monism) is only another name for materialism. And against all such forms of thought there is a witness which cannot be suppressed in the soul of every man.

At the present moment this witness is giving its testimony in many forms. Some of these are strange, even bizarre. From

the new psychology and psychical research to spiritual healing and Christian Science, from profound philosophical speculations to the most frantic forms of spiritualism, we can trace the movement of the human spirit in its revolt against mechanism. There is indeed in our time a wonderful re-discovery of the soul. A quarter of a century ago a clever materialistic writer wrote an article in one of the great monthlies which he called "The death of the soul." His point was that no serious thinker any longer believed in the soul as something higher than, and different from, the mechanism of the brain. It was a foolish thesis even then; but it had a certain degree of plausibility. It would now be impossible. During the last quarter of a century the spiritual side of our experience has been asserting its reality in a very wonderful way.

The thinker whose work is attracting most attention at the present time is Henri Bergson. A profound physiologist, as well as a profound psychologist, he is presenting to the world a new conception of life in its relation to the universe. And the most striking and important fact in this new doctrine is that it approaches the problem of life not from the side of mechanism but from the side of psychical and conscious experience. And this mode of approach has the effect of yielding a new justification of the freedom of the will and a view of the world in which is found ample room for the spiritual. Though I would deprecate any slavish adherence to Bergson's philosophy as a whole, I must welcome him as a pioneer who is opening out a new road into the realms of thought and revealing new visions of spiritual reality.

Side by side with Bergson's work must be placed the new realization, which is coming to many scientific minds, that the categories of mechanism are insufficient for the explanation of the immense variety of nature. As a most remarkable illustration, I would mention two articles in recent numbers of the *Hibbert Journal* with the suggestive title, *Is there one Science of Nature?*

The result of our enquiry into this first great difficulty in the way of belief is distinctly reassuring. We have reason to think that the bondage to the mechanical view of the world will not long hold the mind of man.

Before leaving this part of our subject let me point out that we have been in the habit of taking too narrow a view of the nature of science, and that this fact is to a very great degree the cause of our trouble. In considering science in relation to religion we have thought too much of only one branch of it, the theoretical.

We think of science as the discovery of the laws of nature. The result is that we have formed a conception of nature as a system completely under the domination of a rigid cast-iron rule, a system which seems unalterable by human power, a vast machine in which man himself is but an element. We have forgotten the most important part of science, the practical part. We have omitted to consider that the great purpose in the discovery of the laws of nature is that we may control the forces of nature for our own ends. And when we turn our attention to this side of science we find to our astonishment that we are able thus to control natural forces. Natural forces are not the inexorable things we imagine. Thus all human work is done. By his knowledge of the laws of nature and his using of that knowledge for his own purposes, man has been able to subdue the earth, to alter the whole aspect of the globe. Instead of making us the slaves of natural forces, the laws of nature are the means by which these forces are mastered by the free mind and will of man. Thus science itself yields us, when it is rightly regarded, a magnificent demonstration of the reality and essential independence of the spiritual. Thus also is proved the absurdity of imagining that the discovery of natural law implies the banishing of the Creator from the universe. For, if it is through his knowledge of natural law that man is able to control the forces of nature, how much more must it be true that these laws, and the forces which they rule, subserve the purposes of supreme Intelligence. Thus it would appear that the universality of law in the domain of nature is no argument against the efficacy of prayer and the occurrence of miracle. We cannot imagine that the Almighty is subject to a disability from which his creature man is free—that His freedom of action is bound by laws which do not bind the freedom of finite man.

(2) Secondly, we have to consider the difficulties of belief which arise from the tendencies of modern criticism. The higher criticism, as it is termed, of the Old and New Testaments is no new thing. But within the past twenty years its methods, and many of the views to which they have led, have attracted public attention and affected the popular imagination in a new way. As we all know, higher critics are of many kinds and degrees. Some are very distinctly and definitely negative and destructive in relation to the Christian religion. Others represent what may still be termed the broad school of religious thought. Some, it must not be forgotten, are in the strictest sense orthodox and conservative. It is well that we should remind ourselves that the higher criticism is really a method, not a school. That

method is the application of strictly scientific historical criticism to the sacred documents. I do not mean that as carried out this method has been always scientific. Far from it. It has often been marked by the unbridled use of hypothesis. Yet it is true that the intention of the higher critic is to be strictly scientific in his treatment of the documents. That is what he professes.

Now, looking at the world in a large way and at men in the mass, we must realize that the mere application of such a method to Holy Scripture marks a very great change and must produce a strong effect on the popular mind. In the days that our religious traditions come from, Holy Scripture was regarded as too sacred for criticism. It demanded interpretation, and there indeed the scholarly mind might find ample scope for study and investigation. But to question the sacred documents themselves; to treat them as, in many instances, probably composite; to apply to them the tests which would be applied to other documents, seemed altogether profane.

This being so, it was inevitable that, when it became clear to the public mind that scholarship was testing Holy Scripture in the very same way in which it tests all other documents, that very fact had an extraordinary influence. And when, further, the views and theories of some of the more extreme critics gained currency, it appeared to multitudes of people that the very foundations of the Christian Faith were being shaken. The impression was created, and still persists, that the unusual events recorded in Holy Scripture are being shown to have no better foundation than the prodigies recorded in ancient legends, and that the documents which are thus fallible, have little claim on the reverence of mankind. The popular mind is very vague. It does not grasp the exact result of any new development of scientific thought; it receives an impression, and from that impression it derives its conviction, or want of conviction. So it is, I fear, in this case.

Now the truth is that at present the tendency of criticism is rather to restore than to destroy. Even as regards the Old Testament, there are indications that the extraordinary way in which the discoveries of the spade are driving back the dates assigned to ancient civilization is raising a suspicion that the current theories will very soon require revision. And, in relation to the New Testament, we can now say that there has taken place an amazing restitution. The wild theories which endeavoured to bring down the dates of the New Testament books into the second century have practically vanished. It is

now acknowledged, as regards the majority of these books, that they belong to the age, and in most cases were written by the authors, to which tradition assigned them. All this is true. Yet the fact remains that the impression prevails that these books tell their story with the uncertainties and inaccuracies which belong to old chronicles and folk-lore, and that, however elevated may be their tone spiritually and morally, their historical value is at the best doubtful.

Here is one of the most serious difficulties in the way of belief at the present time. How can we deal with it? First, of course, Christian scholarship must do its duty; and we can say with thankfulness that it is doing its duty. But, in the realm of pure scholarship, I fear it is true that negative results affect the public mind more definitely than positive. We certainly require more than scholarship. The continual fluctuation of opinion—of theory and of conjecture—in the realm of scholarly criticism makes us feel the necessity of something more permanent. Where is that permanent basis of truth to be found? The answer surely must be that we must find it, not in the mere book, but in the revelation which the book contains. It is surely true that all along the ages the source of power has been, not the mere letter of certain documents, but the personality and influence of Jesus Christ. Here is a great theme and one which has been much in the minds of thoughtful Christian people in recent years. It was inevitable that it should be so. The discordant voices of the critics and the unsettlement of the Christian mind on the subject of Inspiration drove the faithful back upon the great central truth. And here the unprejudiced mind finds a basis which cannot be shaken. The wonderful character of our Lord, with its simplicity and its profundity, with its amazing completeness, its union of the most opposite qualities, its freedom from all consciousness of sin, its realization of humanity in relation to God and in harmony with His will, its compelling moral force, its undying power of inspiration, its penetrating quality, its clearness of outline—it is this which makes Jesus Christ the most vivid personality in history or literature. Together with His wonderful character must be considered the teaching of Christ, His consciousness of union with God, His superhuman claims, the extraordinary way in which these claims have called forth a response in the hearts of men in all ages. He speaks to men as their Lord and Master and they acknowledge His supremacy and find in that acknowledgment new life. Through all generations of Christian history this is the source of all that is

truest and best ; and, in periods of spiritual decay, here is found power for regeneration. In our own time, the principle expressed in the words "Back to Christ" has proved the salvation of religion.

It is surely clear that the literature which presents us with such a fact as the fact of Christ must differ in some very essential way from all other literature. And we may well demand that, when this literature gives us accounts of events which seem to stand apart from our ordinary experience, these accounts shall be regarded as different from narrations of the marvellous occurring in other histories. Christ is unique in human history. His relation to mankind is, in some way, different in kind from that of other human beings. Therefore we must expect that, in connection with Him, there will be found circumstances and events which are in kind different from our usual experience.

The influence of Christ upon the human soul is, for Christian people, the ultimate fact. When that influence is, for a man, the supremely effective power of his life, then all that belongs to Christ is lifted out of the ordinary.

This argument is not now presented as anything fresh or original. It is nothing of the kind, thank God. Our present purpose is simply to show that the way out of the difficulty created by the criticism of Holy Scripture is to follow Him who says "I am the Light of the world : he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life."

(3) We have, thirdly, to consider the difficulties which are due to the character of the modern ethos. Our time is remarkable for its amazing mastery of material forces. The whole material environment of human life has been transformed by the application of scientific discoveries. The resources of man in his struggle with nature have been increased enormously. The globe has been covered with means of communication. The world has gained an economic unity which it never possessed before. The resources of luxury and of human enjoyment in all its forms have been vastly augmented. The result is that men are seeking more universally and also more reasonably than ever before for material satisfactions. The inevitable tendency is to concentrate attention on the visible and tangible, and to forget the unseen and spiritual. Earth has become so attractive that God and Heaven, if not disbelieved, are simply forgotten.

I think that here we have the explanation of most of the thoughtless unbelief, the carelessness, of the present day. Why is

it that in our great cities the busy multitudes pass the churches by without a thought or a qualm? Why is it that in an age when education is, in a manner, universally diffused, the enlightenment of the mind does not mean the illumination of the soul? It is surely because the modern world has given its heart to the material, having found the material world so eminently responsive to its demands. It is notable, as illustrative of this characteristic, that the dreams of social reconstruction, which are so many and so widely attractive at present, and which we sum up under the familiar term socialism, are for the most part endeavours to find happiness in a re-arrangement of the material means of life and enjoyment. It is strange that there are people who so far mistake the spirit of Christ as to quote his authority for efforts of this kind. It is hard to understand how the blessings which He pronounced upon the poor can be regarded as providing a sanction for the doctrine that poverty is a curse and the summing up of all evils. A materialistic socialism is indeed the very antithesis of Christianity as taught by Christ. But it is very characteristic of the age; and the prevalent conviction that all well-being can be measured in terms of pounds, shillings, and pence, which it represents, is one of the greatest obstacles in the way of religion at the present time. The truth is that the primary conviction of the materialistic socialist and of the materialistic individualist is precisely the same. Both are seeking human happiness in material satisfactions and both are doomed to exactly the same disappointment. The rush for wealth, the race for amusement, the greedy competition of the capitalists, and the equally greedy envy which fills the hearts of the needy: all these things are symptoms of one and the same disease. And, though these things always existed in the world and had at all times the same meaning and created the same difficulties in the way of religion, the conditions of the present age are such that they have attained a volume and a power unknown in former ages.

It is possible that the modern world is only at the beginning of a period during which the material resources of civilization will be augmented beyond anything which is now conceivable. On the other hand, it may be that we have reached almost the limit in this respect. But surely we must be convinced that, whatever the future may have in store for the human race, a time must come when the realization that material things are incapable of satisfying the deeper needs of man's nature will be forced upon the attention of mankind. History shows that,

from time to time, there comes an epoch when the need of the spiritual awakens in the human heart. Such is every great revival of religion. And is it not possible that the more complete man's victory over the forces of nature proves to be and the more he finds it possible to satisfy his material cravings, the more decisive will be his disappointment and his reaction towards the spiritual when that disappointment awakens his spiritual faculties?

The present materializing of human life with the carelessness of religion which it has brought ought not then to sink us in despair. We believe in God: we believe in the human soul: we believe that the soul of man cannot be permanently satisfied with material things. "O God, thou hast made us for Thyself and our souls can have no rest until they find their rest in Thee." There has never been an age when the truth expressed by those words has remained without witness. Is it not true that the questionings of the present day, the eager striving after everything novel and exciting connected with the borderland of our experience, the interest in the theosophies of the East and the pseudo-philosophies of the West, indicate a deep dissatisfaction of the soul with the material joys of the modern world? They express in their own imperfect way the cry of the soul after God: "O that I knew where I might find Him, that I might come even to His seat." They are the groping of man in his blindness for that which all the while is near him, though he knows it not: "Behold I go forward, but he is not there, and backward, but I cannot perceive him: on the left hand where he doth work, but I cannot behold him, he hideth himself on the right hand that I cannot see him."

In considering the unbelief of the more thoughtful minds of our day we saw that there has already taken place a re-discovery of the human soul. May it not be that this is the beginning of a great spiritual awakening which will affect the great unthinking masses as well as the more select souls?

The re-discovery of the human soul must mean also the re-discovery of God. Practically the two go together. When man knows himself as a spirit, he cannot recognize any cause of an inferior kind as the source of the universal order. And here we come to the last great difficulty of belief which demands our consideration. If the order of the universe is the manifestation of supreme and beneficent intelligence and will, how is it that nature and human life are so full of pain and suffering in various forms? What about the awful tragedies and disasters which overwhelm men—even good and

noble men—from time to time? There are many minds in our time to whom this difficulty is a positive nightmare. More than any other it oppresses those who, possessing sincere and real faith, are gifted with strong imagination and sympathy.

To such I would say, in regard to this problem above all, it is true that if the difficulties of belief are great, the difficulties of unbelief are greater. The horror of the pain of the universe becomes unspeakable if we lose our faith in a God who will bring blessing out of evil and make all things work together for good.

And we have the greatest and best of reasons for believing that it is of the very essence of the Divine Nature to bring good out of evil and over-rule all things for a final blessedness. For underlying all our thought and all our life—our commonest experiences as well as our science and our philosophy—there is one fundamental principle. It is this: the supreme power which works in the universe is trustworthy. Here is the basis of our confidence that what is true to-day will not be false to-morrow. It is the bed-rock on which rests our conviction that there is an order in the world which will not put us to utter confusion. It is the principle on which science depends in its discovery of the laws of nature, a principle which is ever gaining a larger relation to all that we hold for truth and certainty. And, in the last resort, what can this principle mean but this, that God will not fail the creatures whom He has made and who put their trust in Him.

DISCUSSION.

The CHAIRMAN proposed a hearty vote of thanks to the Bishop for his admirable paper and deferred further remarks to the close of the discussion.

Professor HULL seconded, and discussion followed.

Dr. W. WOODS SMYTH said: We are indebted to the Lord Bishop of Down and Connor for his brief but masterly sketch of Faith's difficulties, and we must be pleased to find that he lays the blame at the door not of Science only, but at the door also of those who have originated them and continue to cultivate them, namely, the theologians. It is not long since Professor Orchard contributed to us a paper pointing out that men of science were not perplexed with the worst of these difficulties. And it was shown that they existed mainly in the minds of the theologians themselves, and

largely owing to their ignorance of modern science. It is with mingled feelings of regret and satisfaction that I wish to draw attention to the mistake of regarding Bergson as a pioneer in the views he has given us upon life. These so-called new views have long since been contributed to the Victoria Institute by the late Professor Beale, and, as regards life's relations to free-will, are fully expounded in several of my own works. In short, Bergson does not here contribute one original thought, but, as I have pointed out to Mr. Balfour, lays himself open to having drawn heavily upon others without any acknowledgment.

Upon the ever burning question of Biblical Criticism I could wish that his Lordship had been more explicit. The critics continually declare that archæology, "the discoveries of the spade," make no difference whatever to their views—they show no tendency whatever to restore anything. The fact is, all their views have been framed without regard to the principles of right evidence or right reason or anything in the shape of any true science, and therefore they can still hold them in the face of the most convincing facts to the contrary.

We have before us at this present time an object lesson pointing to the entire truth of what I have just said. The *Times* has been reporting the lecture of the Rev. J. M. Thompson, Dean of Divinity, Magdalen College, Oxford, in which he rejects the Virgin Birth and Resurrection of our Lord. The late Professor Huxley said that from the standpoint of modern science the doctrine of the Virgin Birth and the Resurrection presented no difficulties to him. Men of science have generally followed Huxley's pronouncement. But here is a theologian almost absolutely ignorant of modern science, with a leading College of Oxford at his back, parading his difficulties and rejecting these doctrines, through sheer ignorance of the subject itself.

Mr. ROUSE said: When, by diligent excavations and careful decipherments, archæologists have proved that in the earliest dynasties of Egypt, Babylonia or Elam, men were already skilled artists and builders, wrote inscriptions or books with an elaborate alphabet, and gave other signs of a high civilization, one would expect thoughtful men to conclude that, since the Bible was correct in its description of men and manners at that early epoch, it was in all likelihood correct in its account of the first building of Babel

and of the events that preceded this, and the short existence that it ascribed to mankind prior to this—only about 2,000 years. But, instead of doing so, many archæologists and teachers of natural science simply extend the period much further backwards from 12,000 years to 50,000 or 100,000 or even to 1,000,000 years; because, say they, if man has developed so imperceptibly in 4,500 or 5,000 years since those dynasties, how much vaster than even we supposed must have been the lapse of time during which he had previously developed from an anthropoid ape. And, leading newspapers write articles in keeping with such views; and the public read them with avidity, and pay little heed to the confirmation of Holy Writ yielded by the excavations and decipherments.

Colonel G. MACKINLAY said: I wish to add my sincere thanks to the eloquent author for his very admirable description of the conditions of thought at the present time. I am glad to note the hopeful spirit which pervades the paper, as evidenced by his assertion (bottom of p. 170), that at present the tendency of criticism is rather to restore than to destroy belief. May not a similar hopeful view be taken of the growing appreciations of the historical value of the books of the New Testament, as evidenced by the wonderful accuracy which Sir William Ramsay has shown exists in the book of Acts? Good progress is being made by others also in the same direction.

Mr. JOHN SCHWARTZ said: I heartily endorse our lecturer's view that the personality and influence of Jesus Christ is the great central truth of Christianity, I go further and state that this rockbed is the only foundation on which the Christianity of the twentieth century can be securely built. The clergy and most good Christian people seem to me quite out of touch with the virile opinions of the modern world, which recognizes that the sound historical basis of Christianity, as of all other religions, is found some century or centuries after initiation, when their votaries are sufficiently numerous and important to attract public notice, and the real facts are always garnished with myth and amalgamated with current religions and philosophical ideas. I agree with our author that "The continual fluctuation of opinion—of theory and of conjecture in the realm of scholarly criticism" is unsatisfactory, but I prefer it to the uncritical dogmatism of the middle ages and church fathers on which orthodoxy is based. We see Christianity in Roman Catholic countries drifting

down to the intellectual dregs of the population, and if the same unfortunate position is to be avoided in our own land the broadening of the bases of official Christianity appears to me the only safe course. I quite agree that many wild theories about New Testament dates have practically vanished, but I cannot agree that the majority of these books belong to the age and were written by the authors to which tradition assigns them, particularly the gospels, in fact, it is all theory and conjecture. Our author's thoughts about the laws of Nature (p. 169) appear to me to be confused: to control natural forces is surely not to alter their inexorable order. All that man can do is to move matter, so that the inexorable result is to his advantage. True science is not materialistic, on the other hand, Sir Ray Lankester, I think, rightly repudiates emphatically, in the name of the men of science in general, Sir Oliver Lodge's little flirtations with mysticism.

The Rev. C. L. DRAWBRIDGE, M.A., said: Before commencing to read the paper, his lordship mentioned the fact that the title of it had not been chosen by him, but by the Institute. What was the idea in the Bishop's mind when he made this explanation about the title, "Difficulties of Belief"? I think that the contrast between the spirit displayed by some speakers in the discussion which followed the reading of the paper, and the spirit of the paper itself, sheds light upon the point. One of the chief objects of some members, I gather, is to lessen the difficulties of retaining certain specific beliefs, *i.e.*, to find arguments to substantiate certain definite opinions—which some of the members entertain and do not intend to relinquish—rather than to go to the Bible and to nature with a perfectly open mind to find out what beliefs are suggested by an *impartial* study of the actual facts. There is, of course, a fundamental difference between (1) seeking the truth, for its own sake, wherever it may lead us, and (2) searching for arguments to support one's existing opinions. If any specific belief becomes more and more difficult in the growing light of modern investigation, with the result that ultimately it is impossible to retain it, what then? Surely the result is by no means to be deplored, because the discovery of the truth is of much more importance than the dogged retention of any old beliefs if they are not justified by the facts. The attitude of biblical scholars towards the Bible has changed considerably since the days of our grandparents. Whether that

fact is an advantage or the reverse depends upon what the Bible really is. It is much more important to know the actual nature of the Bible than to successfully retain any particular hypothesis with regard to what it is. One of the speakers in the discussion which followed the paper said that theologians are largely responsible for creating doubts : that the specialists, instead of removing "Difficulties of Belief," increase them. Does he mean belief in opinions about the Bible which the careful study of Holy Scripture itself renders it exceedingly difficult to retain, opinions which therefore are rapidly becoming extinct? Are such opinions superior to belief in what the great authorities consider to be the facts? Archbishop Temple once remarked : "To bid a man study and yet compel him under heavy penalties to arrive at the same conclusions as those who have not studied, is to mock him. If the conclusions are prescribed, the study is precluded."

Another speaker quoted the words of Our Master, the Son of God :—"Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my word shall not pass away," interpreting "My word," apparently, as referring to the words and phrases, *i.e.*, the text of the New Testament. But we have to go to the critics who compare the countless different texts together in order to discover what the correct text really is. And if Jesus Christ intended by the expression "My word" to refer to verbal phrases, He would presumably have written our New Testament Himself. Instead of doing so, He carefully avoided writing anything, except on one occasion with his finger in the dust where there was much traffic. And He told us that "the letter killeth but the Spirit giveth life." He also said :—"Lo, I am with you always even unto the end of the ages"; and, "I have many things to say unto you but ye cannot bear them now, but when He, the Spirit of Truth is come, He will guide you into all truth." One great effect of modern scientific study of the Bible has been to divert excessive reverence from the mere letter, and to concentrate attention rather upon the spirit of the Bible; also to attract the attention of the modern Christian ever more and more to the "Word" of God, in the sense in which St. John uses the term, namely, the Logos, the eternal Son of God, rather than to the mere words of what His followers wrote about Him. In proportion as the belief in verbal inspiration and infallibility has become more and more difficult of credence, the faith of Christendom has been

transferred more and more from the phraseology of the written scriptures to the living God. If, as we are convinced, He once inspired the ancients, He is presumably also inspiring the moderns, and gradually leading them into all truth. We have been driven to go behind the written record of the revelation, to the Holy Spirit Himself who inspired the writers of the record.

One speaker said that he did not believe that the Gospels were written by the authors, or at the time, ascribed to them by tradition. But even the Rationalist Press Association, in spite of considerable anti-Christian bias, recently published a book by a Rationalist who has come to the conclusion, forced upon him by modern criticism, that tradition was, after all, more or less right with regard to the dates and authorship of the Gospels. The book I refer to is by Mr. F. C. Conybeare, and represents an attack upon the essential beliefs of Christianity, but in it the author shows that the "difficulties of belief" in the Tübingen school have become too great for him. In his introduction Mr. Conybeare says:—

"On the whole the traditional dating (of the Gospels) seems to me to be the most satisfactory. Thus I should set the composition of Mark's Gospel, as we have it, about A.D. 70, of Luke at any time between 80 and 95, of Matthew's about 100, of John's about 110. I see little difficulty in supposing that the John Mark mentioned in Paul's Epistles drew up, some time after Peter's death, as Irenæus affirms, the Gospel named after him; and I am inclined to think that Luke, the companion of Paul, really wrote the third Gospel and the Acts. . . . How far back the Aramaic traditions exploited by Mark may go we do not know. . . . The sayings of Jesus must have been written down at an earlier stage, because they were wanted as a manual of moral teaching. . . . I should not, therefore, be surprised to learn that the Aramaic text of these sayings was current within a short period after the death of Jesus."

Some Christians are apt to give the erroneous impression to outsiders that they are afraid of investigation, because they doubt the conclusion, and that, in their opinion, faith is an act of violence exercised by the will upon the intellect, a suppression of reason in the interests of what happen to be their present opinions. Genuine faith in *God* includes, surely, the conviction that the most searching investigation can but result, under the inspiring and

revealing Spirit of God, in the discovery of the truth. And whatever the truth may be, it is God's truth and therefore preferable to human error, however venerable.

The following communications were then read :—

The Rev. CHANCELLOR LIAS wrote :—There are only a few comments which I desire to make on the Bishop's paper, and those rather of a confirmatory than of a critical kind.

1. I cordially agree with him in thinking that there is not, and never has been, the slightest contradiction between revealed religion, properly understood and explained, and modern science, when kept within its proper limits. Science concerns itself with the laws which govern phenomena. With the cause of those laws it does not concern itself. It is here that religion comes in, and tells us that the will of an intelligent Creator is that cause.

2. I am glad to find myself in agreement with his lordship when he says (p. 170) that modern Biblical criticism has not always been genuinely scientific. No doubt the critic *intends* his methods to be such. But "the unbridled use of hypothesis" forms, I cannot but think, a very large part of modern critical processes. And the repeated assertion of the finality of such criticism is about as unscientific as any assertion can be. Science is continually correcting its *data* by the light of new discoveries. The discovery of a single additional inscription might overturn the whole fabric which has of late been so positively affirmed to be "demonstrated beyond contradiction." Such a possibility true scientific criticism would unreservedly admit.

3. I desire also to associate myself with the remark (p. 169) that the Divine freedom of action is *not* bound by laws which do not bind the freedom of God's creatures. Natural laws, though irreversible, are, nevertheless, found to be plastic in the hands of finite beings like ourselves. Cannot God control and use them without either "suspending" or "violating" them? Some of the greatest scientific discoverers have been unable to conceive of force except as the expression of will.

4. I have not had an opportunity of studying carefully the recent researches into psychology. But one has always felt confident that a purely mechanical theory of the universe must eventually fail to satisfy the intellectual and moral cravings of humanity.

Sir ROBERT ANDERSON wrote : I cannot but fear that the Bishop of

Down's paper will hurt many whom it is intended to help. May I venture to suggest a revision of one of his lordship's statements. I would read it thus: "It was inevitable that when the public were duped into supposing that scholarship was testing Holy Scripture in the same way in which it tests all other documents, that fact had an extraordinary influence" (p. 170, line 19). For the sham Higher Criticism has tested "scripture in a way that would not be tolerated in the case of other documents." The movement originated, as we all know, with German Rationalists, who with the skill and subtlety for which the German mind is famous, produced a "clear and complete" case against certain of the sacred books. And English scholars who have traded on their labours are the dupes of the egregious fallacy that "a clear and complete case makes an end of controversy." But no accused person is ever committed for trial in our Courts unless a clear and complete case is *made out* in proof of his guilt. The object of a trial is to sift that case, and to hear what is to be said on the other side. If the critics could be brought before a competent tribunal, their case would be "laughed out of Court." For it is exploded not only by facts which they ignore, but by a fuller knowledge of the Bible than any one of them has given proof of possessing. For no one with an adequate acquaintance with the typology of scripture, or with the scriptural scheme of Divine prophecy would accept their "assured results." Therefore it is that no archæologist of note is on their side. And though many book scholars and popular preachers help to distribute their German wares, not a single front rank theologian of our time in Britain has been with them.

P. 171. Then again, the passage discriminating between "the mere book" and the revelation which the book contains, will, I fear, be generally misunderstood. I am not sure, indeed, that I understand it myself. Renan would have accepted that entire paragraph, and in his *Vie de Jésus* he has expressed similar thoughts in glowing words. But while there is in such thoughts and words a basis for "the religion of Christendom," this is not Christianity. For Christianity is a revelation and a faith. A revelation of, and from, the Lord Jesus Christ as risen and ascended, and a faith based upon that revelation as contained in the God-breathed scriptures of the New Testament. The blind and bitter infidelity that refused belief in "Jesus Christ" as "the most vivid personality in history or literature," belonged to a

bygone age. But this is quite apart from that faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, which brings us the forgiveness of our sins and eternal life.

Professor LANGHORNE ORCHARD wrote: That much modern unbelief is traceable to one or more of the three sources, to which attention is directed in this able paper, there can be no question. Mistaken views as to natural laws, and disparaging (if not irreverent) treatment of the Bible, have combined, with a feverish thirst for pleasurable excitement, to blur the clear perception of Truth, and to chill love for that spiritual beauty from which some eyes have wandered.

Natural law has been imagined as a fetish, some mysterious entity, a phase or aspect of a stern inexorable necessity, toward which, as regnant in the universe, man's only fitting attitude is the submission of the slave and vassal. It has not been generally recognized that natural laws are simply force-uniformities, *i.e.*, uniform manners of spiritual action, essentially expressions of Will which is not the less free that it chooses to act in certain uniform modes. Misconception as to the character of natural law has fostered a lazy acquiescence in the supposition of a blind deity called Fate, and led to indisposition to that will-effort without which can be no intelligent acceptance and belief of truth.

Disparagement of the Bible has produced a weakening of moral principle and a loosening of moral restraints. Sin has been made easier, and in many minds has arisen despair of finding certainty anywhere, truths the most solemn and most sure coming to be regarded as matters of opinion, or of probability only.

The modern "Higher Criticism," to which this disparagement of the Bible is due, is largely based on the theory of Evolution. The Evolution speculation is also to a great extent responsible for that thirsty craving after materialistic satisfaction which is a characteristic of our age, and of which the inevitable tendency is, as stated on p. 172 of the paper, "to concentrate attention on the visible and tangible, and to forget the unseen and spiritual."

But behind these "second causes" lies the love of the pleasures of sin in the fallen hearts of men. Difficulties of belief of God's word have their roots, and find their nourishment, here. We are reminded of this by Holy Writ, ". . . they do always err in their *heart*." "Out of the heart of man proceed evil thoughts . . . foolishness."

The CHAIRMAN in closing the discussion said: With regard to the contradictions among modern critics I should like to refer to *The Quest of the Historic Christ* by Schweitzer, where these contradictions are admirably shown in historic detail. The author criticizes each but seems to think that there has been some general result from the investigations. That result seems to me to be purely negative, and that it leaves us in the position of rejecting or accepting anything that Christ said or did, according as it suits any preconceived theory, until nothing is left at all.

We cannot get away from three facts: The fact of Christ, the fact of His teaching, and the fact of the results.

And in this connexion it is clear we must expect something unique in the circumstances of His earthly history.

He then called upon the Bishop to reply.

The BISHOP OF DOWN in reply said: Mr. Chairman and friends, I have to thank you very warmly for listening to my paper with such close attention and I have to thank the speakers for their kind words of appreciation.

Though certain criticisms have been made, I feel that I need not detain you long with any reply. A few words will suffice. Dr. Woods Smyth seems to me to underestimate the volume and amount of the unbelief which bases itself on the ideas and principles due to modern science. We must take account of things as they are. As regards modern criticism, I do not think it can be dealt with in the way he proposes. Criticism must do its work and do it thoroughly. Only thus can the truth emerge.

I cannot agree with his estimate of Bergson. There never was a great thinker, but people said of him, "We have heard all this before." But it is one thing to put forward an opinion, it is another thing to open up a path by which that opinion may be justified.

Some speakers have mistaken what I said about the laws of nature. A law of nature is, of course, only a statement of the way in which things are found to happen. Its constancy is a witness to the trustworthiness of the power which is manifested in nature. My point is that our experience shows that this constancy, instead of limiting man's freedom, gives to that freedom its great opportunity.

In connexion with the remarks of Mr. Drawbridge, while I agree with him that we should ever seek truth for its own sake, we must, I hold, consider that we prize our Christian Creed not merely because

we believe it to be true, but also because we have found in it the satisfaction of all the deepest needs of our spiritual nature. It is the greatest of our treasures. And just as a man will fight for his daily bread so a Christian will contend for his faith. He has found it so good that he must struggle to hold it fast when an effort is made to take it from him.

I must confess that I disagree considerably with Sir Robert Anderson. Christ says "I am the light of the world." He says "I am the way, the truth, and the life." He does not say "A book which shall be written is to be the light of the world, the way, the truth, and the life." The supreme value of the Bible is to be found in its witness to Christ.

Communication from Rev. A. IRVING, D.Sc., B.A.—

While appreciating very warmly the excellent paper of the Bishop of Down on "Difficulties of Belief," and as one who for more than half a lifetime has given his best thoughts to the subject, I crave permission to offer a little friendly criticism on several points, on which I think the argument of the paper might be strengthened—

1. There seems to me a certain weakness in Dr. D'Arcy's remarks about what he calls the "scientific creed" and "thinking in watertight compartments." They suggest the unsatisfactory position of those people who have a "mere reading acquaintance with science," as Professor Michael Foster, F.R.S., put it in his Presidential Address to the British Association at Dover, in 1899. To think in watertight compartments seems to me to set up a barrier to any advance towards the establishment of those harmonious relations between the scientific *Geist* and the theological *Geist*, which are essential to the working out of a Christian Philosophy, such as Dr. Arnold Whateley has contended for (*Transactions of the Victoria Institute*, vol. xliii)—a philosophy which shall include in one perspective the truths of Nature and the truths of Revelation.

2. "Pragmatism does not deny the validity of Science," writes Dr. D'Arcy (p. 167). It would talk nonsense if it did so. But surely *Faith* (which is wider in its scope than the mere intellectual process of "belief") has its pragmatic value.

3. Not having seen the recent articles in the *Hibbert Journal*, to which the Bishop refers, I may say that two years ago I suggested an affirmative answer to that question,—“Is there one Science of

Nature ?"—the possible answer being found in the full recognition of the Divine Immanence, as the consistent and persistent (though not of necessity rigidly uniform) expression of Transcendent Creative Thought and Will* ; and the able paper by Dr. D'Arcy, supplemented by Bergson's *Creative Evolution*, lends strong support to the contention that any complete theory of Evolution must "include the immanence of Divine power."

4. The "revolt against mechanism" in recent years, and its necessary challenge to the mechanistic (so-called) philosophy of the Herbert Spencer school, following upon the re-affirmation of the reality of the spiritual side of existence, and the reference in that connexion to Henri Bergson, is upon the whole well considered. But one feels a sort of twinge at the phrase "the re-discovery of the soul." There is no "re-discovery" in our later advance, except to those whose acquaintance with science has been mainly formed from the superficial magazine literature of the last two or three decades, which too often displays a conceited unconsciousness of the limitations of science.

5. In the second part of his paper Dr. D'Arcy deals with the difficulties of belief which arise from *modern criticism*. Here he seems thoroughly at home. As the author leads on to the ineffable Personality of Jesus of Nazareth he reminds one of Archbishop Temple's *Bampton Lectures* (1884)—

"In the midst of present conflicts, in the war of opinion, and amid the fires of criticism, let us ever bear in mind the fact that Christianity is much more a living and life-giving principle than a theological system ; that it is not so much a philosophy as *loyalty to a life*, as that life was manifested in the Son of God."

* See my paper on "Light, Luminaries and Life," *Trans. Vict. Inst.*, vol. xlii.