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ASPECTS OF SCEPTICISM.

*WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE
PRESENT TIME.*

BY
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CHAPTER IX.

THE BIBLE AND SCIENCE—EVOLUTION.

‘Let him, the wiser man who springs
Hereafter, up from childhood shape
His action like the greater ape,
But I was born to other things.’

TENNYSON.

‘*Without God*, evolution, continuity of nature, natural selection, conservation of energy, or whatever other phrases happen to have currency for the hour, are mere sound and smoke, and imagination of science falsely so-called.’
—J. S. BLACKIE.

‘I have never been an Atheist, in the sense of denying the existence of a God.’—CHARLES DARWIN.

EVEN if the resurrection of Jesus Christ be accepted as a fact of history, and if the whole problem of miracle thus receive new illumination, we are by no means rid of all our difficulties. The Bible is not only a record of miracle, but also, it is alleged, a witness against what has now become the *creed of science*, the doctrine of Evolution. In the old book of Origins, man appears on the scene full-grown and perfect alike in body and mind, the product of his Creator’s skill and wisdom ; in the new book of Genesis, prepared by men of light and leading in science, he is said to have descended from some ape-like ancestor, and is but the last, if also the chiefest, of the mammals. And the same kind of explanation is given of the origin of all the creatures ; hence, for modern inquirers, men under the influence of the *Time-Spirit*, there is a stone of stumbling at the very threshold of Bible-story. The Book of Genesis asserts, or appears to assert, that God created by a simple exercise of Divine, and therefore Almighty, power, all things and all creatures, including man ; scientists assert most empha-

the Divine will; and so came to be, not by an artificial constructive, but by a natural productive, process.¹ A surface-reading of the Bible may lead us to say that creation and evolution are contradictory ideas; a deeper study may suggest to us that nowhere is the *method or process* made known, and the very forms of speech, which seem so necessarily connected with creation, may also be found to fit evolution moulds. This is admitted by eminent Biblical scholars as well as by eager apologists. Professor Huxley sneers at the elasticity of the Hebrew language, out of which meanings apparently so opposite may be drawn; sneering has been much used in the Darwinian controversy, as the professor well knows, and its effects have not been so powerful as the sneerers, intended. The exposition, for example, given by Professor Tayler Lewis, of the creative days of Genesis, is in harmony with *one view of evolution*.

‘The full formation of man in the sixth day,’ says Lewis, ‘does not oppose the idea that the powers and evolutions of matter that were finally sublimated into the perishable germ of the human body, and the types from lower forms that finally went into the human physical constitution, were being prepared during all the days. This was *his being formed out of the earth*, that is, out of nature in its evolving series.’ Lewis refers to the striking words of Psalm cxxxix. 15, language which would delight the heart of an evolutionist, if only it were found outside the Bible. ‘The reasons are strong,’ says the same writer, ‘for interpreting “man from the earth,” as we interpret the fish and the reptile from the waters. If the *formative* word is used in the one case, so is the word, which some regard as the more directly *creative*, employed in the other. And “God *created* the great whales and the moving things which the waters swarmed,” that is, all the marine animals, from the greatest to the least. *The one language is no more inconsistent with the idea of a process than the other.* There is nothing then to shock us as anti-Scriptural in the thought that man, too, as to his physical and material, is a product of Nature. But he is also a metaphysical, a supernatural, a spiritual being. To describe him in

¹ Fairbairn, ‘Studies in the Philosophy,’ etc., p. 77.

this respect there issued the higher word "the image," the image of God, in distinction from his male and female conformations, which belong wholly to the physical. The image of God the distinguishing type of man! Hold fast to this in all its spirituality as the mirror of the eternal ideas, and we need not fear naturalism. Many in the Church are shivering with alarm at the theories, which are constantly coming from the scientific world about the origin of species, and the production of man, or rather the physical that may have become man, through the lower types. The quieting remedy is a higher psychology, such as the fair interpretation of the Bible warrants, when it tells us that the *first man* became such through the inspiration (the in-breathing) and the image of God lifting him out of nature, and making him and all his descendants a peculiar species, by the possession of the image of the supernatural.¹ Professor Lewis may be said to belong to a past age, and to represent a state of things no longer possible. He represents a school of thought, at all events, *in which the Bible is revered as of divine authority*, and in which the advances of science are welcomed. His words are in harmony with what Darwin, Kingsley, and others have said about the doctrine of evolution. He sees nothing contrary *even to the literal reading of Genesis* in the belief that man's physical nature has been evolved out of lower forms; he also contends that this lower evolution, by itself, cannot account for all that is in man. Man is in nature, and through nature; he is also *above nature*, and, on the spiritual side, linked with the unseen and eternal. This is simple matter-of-fact, and is admitted, though in different ways, by evolutionists themselves.

Taking then one view of evolution, one doctrine taught by great thinkers about the origin of life, we may even say the view of Darwin himself, it cannot be said that it either contradicts the Book of Genesis, or that it is opposed to the ideas and feelings of believers in Divine Revelation. True, it is contrary to traditional readings of the Bible; so are the doctrines of astronomy and geology now accepted; so the simple expressions used by

¹ Introduction to 'Genesis,' by Lewis. See Lange's 'Commentary on the Old Testament.'

Bible writers about the seat of feelings and passions, and the like, are opposed to scientific terminology. We must, however, bear in mind that the Bible writers were not professors of physical science, that they spoke in popular language suggested by the phenomena they described, and in words understood by the people. So long as professors of astronomy unite with peasants to speak of the rising and setting of the sun, so long as physiologists and psychologists speak of *lunacy* like other people, so long, indeed, as they use the traditional language rather than words intelligible only to the few, so long they must allow the Bible writers similar liberty without finding fault.

In thus admitting, even maintaining, that *a doctrine of evolution* may be in harmony with Bible teaching, we by no means wish to be understood as affirming the truth of either Darwin's view, or any other. We plead for liberty, alike of inquiry and utterance. Evolution is a working-hypothesis or plan, and as such must be allowed to live and, if possible, to justify its existence; we do not admit, even for argument's sake, the evolution propounded by some physicists. Darwin starts with a Creator, and thus gets rid of the Atheistic difficulty; to him, as to many others, it seems impossible to conceive that the universe with all its order, beauty, harmony of parts, and adaptation of means to ends, can have originated by accident. 'The birth of the species and the individual are equally parts of that grand sequence of events, which our minds refuse to accept as the result of blind chance. The understanding revolts at such a conclusion, whether or not we are able to believe that every slight variation of structure, etc., have all been ordained for some special purpose.'¹ So long as we attribute the origin of all things to the Creator, and revolt at the idea of the universe being an 'accidental cavity, in which an accidental dust has been accidentally swept into heaps for the accidental evolution of the majestic spectacle of organic and inorganic life;' so long as we regard this 'majestic spectacle as one as plainly for the eye as any diagram of the mathematician,'² there is not much

¹ 'The Descent of Man,' p. 613.

² 'As Regards Protoplasm,' by Dr. H. Stirling.

danger either to faith or morals in the provisional acceptance of the Evolution theory. That the leading Christian thinkers of all schools so regard this matter may be made plain by a few brief citations and references. Mr. Row, in his Bampton Lecture, thus speaks: 'It is no necessary consequence of a theory of evolution, that it should exclude the conception of an intelligent Creator. . . . Our duty is to hold ourselves in a state of expectancy, free from all *à priori* theorizing, and ready to accept the truth, from whatever quarter it may come.' Dr. Conder, while denying that evolution had been made good, admits that one form of the theory is quite consistent with Theism; he regards it as simply the *process* of creation.¹ Janet, in his work on 'Final Causes,' thus speaks: 'The hypothesis of evolution may lead in effect to a conception of *finality*, which differs from that commonly formed by being grander.' St. George Mivart, not only an able naturalist, but also a loyal member of the Catholic Church, affirms that 'Christian thinkers are perfectly free to accept the general evolution theory.' Dr. Rigg, whom no one will accuse of desiring either to abandon or betray the Evangelical faith, reminds us that behind natural selection we have still what old-fashioned believers call Providence, and so long as this is recognised he sees nothing Atheistic in one form of the theory.² Dr. Flint, in his work on 'Theism,' says: 'I have challenged the theology of Mr. Darwin, and those who follow his guidance in theology. I have no wish to dispute his science; I pass no judgment on his theories, in so far as they are scientific theories. In so far as they are true, they must be merely expressions of the way in which Divine intelligence has operated in the universe. Instead of excluding, they must imply belief in an all-originating, all-foreseeing, all-foreordaining, all-regulative Intelligence, to determine the rise and the course and the goal of life, as of all finite things.'

Looking, then, at certain aspects of the Evolution theory, we see no reason why believers in the Divine authority of the Bible

¹ See 'Basis of Faith,' also the 'Evolutionary Hypothesis' in Bishop Ellicott's, 'Six Addresses on the Being of God.'

² Rigg's 'Discourses and Addresses on Religion and Philosophy.'

should feel alarmed at its progress. It is simply an attempt to describe the *process* or the becoming of all things, but behind the process there must be intelligence controlling all and guiding all to one great end. Some, indeed, look upon it as giving a grander view of creation instead of being in contradiction to the Bible record. They regard that record as independent or all explanations as to the *how* of all things, and in no way fettering those who accept its teachings; so regarding it, they plead for liberty either to accept or reject evolution, according as evidence leads in this way or that.

We must not attempt to conceal from ourselves that only one view of evolution can be so regarded; there is another theory of evolution which ignores a Creator, which substitutes *process* for cause, and which, if it does not in so many words deny a presiding Intelligence, leaves no room for its exercise in connection with the origin and progress of life. This is the Materialistic side of evolution, the acceptance of which is not only inconsistent with faith in Bible teachings, but with Theism under any form. Some have from the first contended that Darwin's view logically leads to Atheism; and certainly, if we accept as fact all the theories of the great naturalist, it might be difficult to resist this conclusion. Fortunately, it is possible to say that evolution, in this Materialistic sense, is not the teaching of science. It may be accepted by distinguished scientists; it is not, and we venture to say never can be, the sober teaching of true science. In spite of the high-sounding phrases and boastful words of many, *science has to admit that it knows nothing at all of the origin of life, whether human or otherwise.* When we say that evolution has become the creed of science, and that apologists and divines no longer dispute its claims, we do not mean evolution in the Atheistic sense. True, there are men of science who see in nature only matter and force and their results; but, as we have already seen, *science* does not justify a position like this; it is occupied in defiance alike of scientific method and accurate knowledge. Other evolutionists again admit what older thinkers called Divine interference, only they place it as far back as possible,

so as not to hinder the working of their plan of life. Grant interference at any point, and Materialism is no longer affirmed. 'It may, perhaps,' say Professors Stewart and Tait, 'eventually be possible, by means of an hypothesis of evolution, to account for the great variety of living forms on the supposition of a single primordial germ to begin with, but the difficulty still remains how to account for the germ';¹ this difficulty, as we have pointed out, Darwin simply passes over by the Theistic assumptions with which he starts. Mr. A. R. Wallace, who shares with Darwin the honour of having set the world right about the origin of species, 'sees in the production of man the intervention of an eternal Will,' and Dr. Maudsley, whose doctrine of the origin of the moral sense is certainly Materialistic enough, tells us that the more we reflect on the origin of all things, the more we are 'forced in the end to the recognition of a Power from which all life and all energy proceed, which has been from the beginning, is now, and so far as we can see ever shall be, and which cannot be comprehended and controlled by human thought and will. . . . We come back indeed to something which, however we forbear to name it, is very like the theological Trinity—God the Unrevealed and Unrevealable, God the Revealed, and God the Revealer!'² To the same effect, if followed to their logical issue, are many of Mr. Spencer's sayings about the unknown Power behind the phenomena we see and know. Thus, even the most thorough-going evolutionists find Atheism impossible, and are compelled to fall back upon ideas so like those found in the Bible, that they themselves are surprised at the analogy. Of course, we must not venture either to give Christian expression to these half-expressed thoughts of theirs, nor must we suggest that the Bible has helped them so to embody their conceptions of this mystery; the very thought of such an origin of their ideas exercises a disturbing influence upon their minds. But the unsophisticated reason of men will not long tolerate this view of life; if evolutionists have either to clothe themselves in mystery and utter oracular ambiguities, or else to speak of a Power *whose attributes are per-*

¹ 'The Unseen Universe.'

² 'Physiology of Mind.'

sonal, if they have to preserve their theories at the expense of consistency, we shall be able to judge as to the ultimate value of their philosophy of life and their contributions to the sum of human knowledge. The evolutionists may vehemently deny that the Power they postulate is in any sense *will*, or that their Creator has any affinity with the Power acknowledged by Bible writers; the facts are not altered by such denials. The highest attributes of which we have any knowledge are mental and moral, *and if we are to deny to a power attributes seen in its products and operations*, there must be an end to all correct thinking. The Bible, so despised by many, may here come to our aid and help us to remember that the power creating, or evolving, the eye and ear *must itself see and hear*. Nor is this inconsistent with Spencer's view that the power manifested is as much above any mere personality known by us as personality is above the fetish; the Christian Trinity is not by any means a simple, it is rather a highly complex, idea of personality, but until we fully understand the highest, we must be allowed to speak in terms and use analogies that are understood by us. And this brings us back to where we started. An evolution which ignores or denies an Evolver,—a mind presiding over the process,—is contrary to the teaching of science, as well as to the teachings of the Bible and the instincts of faith. Grant, if you will, that evolution and not creation is the proper way of reading the past history of the earth and the origin of man; 'special creations,' says Dr. Fairbairn, 'are not necessarily the ways of God, though it may suit Mr. Spencer to represent these as the only possible modes of His working. . . . Spirit is essentially energy, and the God who is a spirit can never be inactive, must be everywhere and at every moment a living Force, a producing and efficient Will. Continuous and universal action is given in the very idea of God; it is impossible to conceive Him without conceiving it. Then, as to His relation to nature, it is and must be natural. . . . In evolution then, the creative action does not exclude God; its process is one that only the more demands the exercise of His energy and the direction of His will.'¹

¹ 'Mr. Herbert Spencer's Philosophy,' *Contemporary Review*, August, 1881.

To sum up what we have to say. There is a doctrine of evolution which may be held by believers in the Bible record, and which is accepted, *provisionally*, by many loyal and eminent Christian thinkers ; there is another doctrine which is opposed both to Scripture and science, which denies all creative power, which resolves the whole into an *eternal process* with neither real cause nor rational end. If, therefore, we are told that it is impossible for an evolutionist to be loyal to Bible teaching, we must ask those who so speak to distinguish between things that differ. We must not refuse, in accepting Bible forms of speech, to find room for ideas whose meanings go beyond these forms, and whose fuller sense may indeed be better expressed by thoughts that appear at first sight rather foreign to the Bible. The poet, seeking to glorify the Bible, reminds us that 'it gives a light to every age,' and that while it gives to all, it 'borrows' from none. This is not all the truth. Not only is light needed, but also reflectors for the light, and while no age can give light to the Bible, the thoughts of one age may *better reflect its light* than those of another.

The Bible affirms the existence of a Creator, and, according to some, it even declares that evolution is His method of working ; it is quite conceivable that ages before the mode was understood or even surmised, the fact itself should have been quite evident. The Bible affirms a 'beginning,' and even science declares that this is the testimony of creation itself. A distinguished philosopher of our time, so far from considering matter eternal, speaks of the atoms as 'manufactured articles.' These, and others might be given, are positive indications that there may be more real harmony between the Bible and science than at first sight appears. It is perfectly true that many evolutionists are opposed to the Bible, and that they reject Christian Theism ; it is also true that Darwin and his co-workers have supplied more proofs of 'design' than before were known, and while they have often ignored, often rejected, the doctrine of *ends*, they have furnished many new and striking illustrations of purposive acts and of adaptations in nature. This being so, we may well afford to await, with hope too, the results of fuller

knowledge. When botanists like Carruthers and Asa Gray assure us that the *design argument* will gain rather than lose from the investigations of the last quarter of a century, we may find in 'quietness and confidence' our truest strength.

But the first chapters of the Book of Genesis, what are we to make of them? If either evolution *or* creation, where are we to stop? Shall we not admire, with Huxley, the elasticity of language capable of such different interpretations?¹

We are not prepared to give any dogmatic utterance on this vexed question, but a few remarks may not be deemed out of place. First of all, it is admitted by men of science who have examined with any degree of care the Book of Genesis, or, speaking more generally, the Bible, *that where we have statements about matters of fact, or about the order of events in creation, there is an accuracy that is most remarkable.* The order of creation, or of evolution, given in the Book of Genesis, is the very order seen in the records of the most recent science. Call this an accident if you will, it is a sufficiently noticeable thing, and deserves attention. As Dr. Dawson, a high authority, says, this 'accuracy is remarkable, unexampled, I believe, in any other literature; so much is this the case, that if you will take a page of any of our modern poets, and one from the Bible, you will find errors in the one and not in the other.'² To say the least, this introduces an element into the problem that must be accounted for, and that is not accounted for on the 'Freethinking' theory. Just as Moses, or whoever may be supposed to have first written the story preserved to us in Genesis, is familiar with the facts in their order, so is Peter, the fisherman, wonderfully well acquainted with aspects of truth supposed to be known only to our generation. We glory in the ideas associated with the conservation, transformation, and dissipation of energy, and consider them new and peculiar to our time, yet Peter's account of the future of this planet is, so to say, based on these principles and laws.³ Of course, this may all be accidental; but such

¹ See the early pages of his 'American Addresses.'

² See on this subject Principal Dawson's lectures on the 'Bible and Science;' also his larger work on the 'Origin of the World.'

³ See closing chapter of the 'Unseen Universe.'

accidents, especially when surrounded by other and similar ones, create a presumption in favour of the accuracy of the record.

Whatever may be said about the Bible as a whole, its accounts of the origin of things cannot be said to be wanting in interest or suggestiveness. A comparison of the Book of Genesis with other accounts of the origin of all life, might lead men of science to think and speak more generously about a story so simple and so straightforward. That there are portions of this story that cannot be taken literally, that it has suffered much from the over-literal readings of some of its friends, are positions familiar enough. Nobody ever saw, nobody ever expects to see, knowledge growing on trees, whether in or out of Paradise. Hence it may be doubted whether those read wisely who read those early chapters as they would a work on natural history, or the annals of some ancient family. Those who call it poetry or mythology may be wrong on the other side, but no one can study Dr. Dawson's work on the 'Origin of the World,' for example, or the masterly 'introduction' of Professor Lewis to the Book of Genesis, without feeling convinced that there are in these chapters grand thoughts very grandly expressed, and that they are full of suggestive thought and spiritual truth. Or, take, from a slightly different standpoint, Professor Blackie's 'Lay Sermon' on the 'Creation of the World,' and it may be discovered after all that the Book of Genesis reveals truth never taught by the more prosaic methods of history. According to the learned Professor, himself a poet and an original thinker, the first chapter of Genesis seems a 'perfect model of sublime and simple wisdom,' and it has too often been 'confounded with Playfair and Hutton, and the minute shell-fish of Murchison's Silurian rocks, not as it ought to have been with Homer, and Hesiod, and Thales, and Heraclitus, or the portentous cosmogonies of the Indian Puranas.'¹ This sublime chapter gives, he thinks, the true philosophy of creation, tells us not about 'making out of nothing,' but of order and how it is produced, of design and its true nature, of progression and the 'principle

¹ See Blackie's 'Lay Sermons.' See also 'Genesis the Third: History not Fable,' by Rev. Edward White.

of development by progression,' up to its highest summit, man. Whether we are able to follow Blackie in everything or not, no Theist can refuse to admit that he has made out a good case for the 'sublimity' of the Book, nor need the interpreter refuse to see, in the comparisons and analogies he suggests, hints towards a more correct theory of the Old Testament story of Creation. And starting here, with the grand truths affirmed at the very outset of the record, we shall, at least, be kept from falling into the Free-thinker's fallacy of assuming that order, reason, and adaptation, of which the universe is so full, have no significance for man's spiritual nature. He who accepts the Book of Genesis will neither be Pantheist, Atheist, nor Deist; he will behold in nature, and through nature, an ordering Mind, and in all parts of the Kosmos traces of the presence of reason. *And these are the very thoughts suggested by the facts to which evolutionists make their appeal.* They are for ever reminding us of 'natural selection,' of the 'survival of the fittest,' or the 'struggle for existence,' a struggle in which there are seen wonderful adaptation of means to ends. These are mere phrases, high-sounding indeed, but absolutely meaningless, unless we see behind the process a cause, behind the strife and struggle, with its resulting fitnesses, a presiding genius, a power marshalling its forces, guiding their action, and securing by its wisdom and power the fittest ends.

Other and perhaps deeper questions arise in connection with the relation of science to the Bible; questions about the real meaning and proper use of the record; questions also about the manner in which these sublime ideas were communicated to man, and the relation they hold to later and higher parts of the Divine Revelation. Into these we do not enter; it is enough to show that evolution is no solvent for getting rid of revelation; enough to show that some of the most ardent evolutionists are men who cordially accept the Bible. It may be, indeed, that this very idea of evolution, which is itself a Biblical conception, may help us to understand and interpret the Bible better. Smyth, in his 'Old Faiths in New Light,' gives various illustrations of this suggestion. He shows that

the Bible itself is an historical growth, and that it is adapted to the spiritual education of mankind; he shows that the ideas contained in and expressed by the Book of Genesis have themselves been the grandest factors in the spiritual culture of the race, that, in fact, evolution is the method alike of the old and new creation. Thus, it may be found that this 'development theory' throws as much light upon religion as it has shed on the realms of nature, and that the men of faith, who have often shunned and feared it, may yet find it one of their most helpful allies. We may not be able at present to demonstrate the harmony,—the two ideas may even appear to wage deadly war; but in the days that are coming Smyth's words may be seen to be true, and with them we conclude: 'We may feel, some of us personally, toward the first chapter of Genesis in particular, very much as one might feel toward an old friend, whom for a time he had come to suspect and to wish out of sight, and from whom he grew all the more estranged by the indiscreet claims of others on his behalf; but whom at length he has learned to know better, and to take at his real worth, and has found after repeated trial to be a friend indeed. Cleared of false interpretations, relieved of the suspicions cast upon its truthfulness by imprudent defenders, known in its genuine worth, and prized for its really exceptional virtues and grand character, the Mosaic Genesis is found to have been all the while the firm, steadfast friend, both of science and religion.'¹

NOTE.—We have assumed, in what has been said about the Darwinian-evolution, that the author of the 'Origin of Species' wrote from a Theistic standpoint. This is hotly disputed by some; according to them, there is no evidence in the works of the naturalist that he believed in a *Creator*. It has always appeared to us impossible for anyone intelligently reading the 'Origin of Species' and the 'Descent of Man' to arrive at such a conclusion. Whatever views Darwin might have held, whatever *private opinions*, so to speak, he entertained, he must be regarded as upholding Theism, if judged simply by his writings. The following note, written in May, 1879, may be of interest. It is marked *private*, and has, therefore, never been used; now that its illustrious writer is no longer with us, we may allow it to appear. Its history is as follows: A lecturer on Christian Evidences, in

¹ 'Old Faiths in New Light,' p. 83.

a public lecture delivered in Great Grimsby, called Mr. Darwin an Atheist. The present writer felt that both justice and religion demanded truth-speaking, and wrote to the *Grimsby News*, demonstrating from his published works that Darwin was a Theist, that he started with God and matter, and did not attempt to solve the problem of the origin of all things. This letter was sent to Mr. Darwin, and the hope expressed that no injustice had been done to his position. The following reply was received :

Down, Beckenham, Kent.

‘DEAR SIR,

‘It seems to me absurd to doubt that a man may be an ardent theist and an evolutionist. You are right about Kingsley. Asa Gray, the eminent botanist, is another case in point. What my own views may be is a question of no consequence to anyone except myself. But, as you ask, I may state that my judgment often fluctuates. Moreover, whether a man deserves to be called a Theist depends on the definition of the term, which is much too large a subject for a note. In my most extreme fluctuations I have never been an Atheist in the sense of denying the existence of a God. I think that generally (and more and more as I grow older), but not always, that an Agnostic would be the most correct description of my state of mind.

‘Dear sir, yours faithfully,

‘CH. DARWIN.’