

ARTICLE III.

REVELATION AND INSPIRATION.

BY REV. E. P. BARROWS, D.D., LATELY PROFESSOR OF HEBREW LITERATURE
IN ANDOVER THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY.

No. II.

MODERN ASSUMPTIONS AGAINST THE SUPERNATURAL.

BETWEEN the denial of the *supernatural in the sphere of nature* and of *revelation in the sphere of mind* there is a close connection. When a writer maintains an ominous silence in respect to the active presence of a personal God in nature, and proceeds to explain the present order of the universe in all its parts by an inward principle of development inherent in nature herself, and which produces all its results in and of itself, without any superadded energy from without, anywhere or at any crisis in the progress of this development, we infer with much confidence that the scriptural doctrine of divine revelation — the supernatural manifestation of himself to men by God — finds no place in his system of the universe. If he stands upon the platform of impersonal pantheism, then, as was shown in the preceding Article, he must deny, from logical necessity, every form of the supernatural, revelation included. But there is a class of philosophers who, while they admit the being of a personal God, or at least do not deny his existence, are yet strongly inclined to reduce his supernatural action in nature, over and above the operation of her inherent laws, to a minimum. Admitting, from the necessity of the case, a Creator of primordial matter, they seem to think that matter possessed, somehow, from the beginning the capacity of developing itself into the present orderly system of the universe — of producing out of dead matter life, vegetable and animal; then of diversifying life into the magnificent orders which we see around us, with the addition, as a crowning develop-

ment, of intelligent mind ; so that the Almighty Maker has nothing left him to do except to stand by in inactivity, and contemplate the onward course of his creation. Even upon this theory the marks of intelligence with which the world is filled must be referred to God. Whatever exists now in a visibly developed form must have been put into creation at the beginning in a germinal and undeveloped way. Design is a present reality, and it cannot be eliminated from the universe by crowding it back to the beginning of primordial matter. There is no back door in the abyss of past eternity through which it can be dumped into nonentity. It is not necessary that we should be able to decide *when* the present order of things began, or *how*, that is, in what particular way it has been brought to its present state. Independently of these questions, we certainly know that it is the work of a personal God. Were a mass of iron to develop itself before the eyes of men into a steam-engine without the help of mortal hands, we might not be able to comprehend the process ; but of one thing we should be sure, that it had in it the wisdom and power of an intelligent mind. Nor would the element of time be of any account. Whether the process occupied a day, a year, a century, a thousand years, or any conceivable period of time, its existence would equally need for its explanation an author possessing intelligence. And if steam-engines were produced from previously existing engines by some process of natural law, this process itself would be a proof of consummate wisdom, and as such would need to be referred to a designing mind. The law of generation that prevails in the vegetable and animal kingdoms, instead of accounting for the existence of these kingdoms, is the very thing that needs itself to be accounted for. We might then leave the advocate of this theory of natural development to the undisturbed enjoyment of it, assured that the evidence which creation furnishes of the existence of a personal God remains unimpaired. But when he attempts to impose upon us his doctrine of a *possible* development as being a true account of the *actual* system of the universe, to

the exclusion of all supernatural interposition on the part of God in the progress of the world's history since the creation of primordial matter, we have a right to inquire on what grounds he can demand our assent. For convenience of discussion we will consider the question of the supernatural: first, in the sphere of nature; secondly, in the sphere of mind, where it takes the shape of *revelation*.

I. *The Supernatural in the Sphere of Nature.*

It is certainly no intuition of reason that God must create once for all, and not at successive intervals; nor that he must confine his immediate supernatural agency to the epoch of creation. Far more consonant is it with the general analogy of his works that here, as elsewhere, he should observe the law: "First the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear"; that he should from time to time put into his universe new principles and forces, in harmony, indeed, with all that previously existed, but superadded by a direct exertion of creative power. We arrange our arguments here under the following heads:

1. *The origin of nature was supernatural in the fullest sense of the word.* We have a right to assume that the man who admits the being of a personal God possessed of infinite perfections — and it is with him alone that we are now dealing, impersonal pantheism having been considered in the previous number of this series — admits also that he is the Creator of primordial matter. The dualistic hypothesis of two self-existent and eternal, and therefore independent, first causes, violates the axiomatic principle of sound reasoning that no more causes ought to be assumed than are necessary. It limits, moreover, the power of God, so that he ceases to be infinite; since, if matter is self-existent and eternal, God has no control over its being, or its original inherent attributes, but must take it as he finds it and make the best of it. Nor could this dualistic hypothesis avail, after all, to set aside the supernatural origin of nature; for by nature we understand, not a chaotic mass of crude matter

with whatever properties it may chance to possess, but the present orderly system of the universe, in which matter, life animal and vegetable, and intelligent mind, are all combined into one grand and harmonious whole. It was shown in the previous Article that the marks of a designing mind are not confined to the arrangement and adaptation of matter in its masses; but that the *ultimate atoms* of matter — ultimate so far as analysis can go at present — give irrefragable proof of a designing Author, who not only moulds matter in masses, but who gave to these primitive atoms their diversified properties and relations to each other.¹ In these properties and relations, which underlie the whole system of nature, there is palpable proof of design. The atoms themselves are the subjects of it, not its authors. It must have come to them from without through the supernatural agency of God; so that nature had, after all, a supernatural origin. But if God thus gave to matter its inmost essence, why not go further, as logical consistency requires, and say that he created matter? We presume that all who believe in a self-existent personal God possessed of infinite attributes would do so. At all events they must admit that God is before nature, and gave to nature her constitution, so that she is of supernatural origin. Here, then, we have a starting-point in our inquiries. Nature began in a supernatural way. Supernaturalism enters, therefore, as a fundamental element, into the plan of the universe.

2. *Finite life and mind have a supernatural origin.* This proposition can be denied only by those who deny to life and mind all real entity, thus reducing them to mere organization of matter, ponderable and imponderable; in other words, making them to consist of *form* alone without substance. This theory reminds one of the old adage: *lucus a non lucendo*. It makes life and mind the very opposite of what is indicated by all their manifestations. Let us consider, first, the question of life. Of finite life separated from its connection with matter we have no knowledge. But we see

¹ See *Bibliotheca Sacra* for 1867, Note v. pp. 625, 626.

it operating in matter as a formative power, and thus accomplishing results altogether peculiar—results to which we cannot reasonably believe that any mere combination of atoms is competent. Each ponderable, elementary substance in nature has its specific sensible properties and affinities; and, when capable of being reduced to a solid state, its specific form of crystalization; all which chemists rightly refer to the constitution of its ultimate atoms. In the same way each compound substance has its peculiar sensible properties, affinities, and form (sometimes forms) of crystalization. But here the capacities of dead matter end. Elementary and compound substances are alike incapable of anything like *development*, even in its lowest forms. If some compound substances of the same composition and atomic weight have more than one set of properties, these are few and definite, and probably due simply to dissimilar molecular arrangement. A crystal has no growth, unless we choose to call the outward accretion of the same homogeneous substance a growth. It has no growth by internal circulation, selection, and assimilation. It cannot develop itself into a systematic whole, having parts of dissimilar constitution and office. It was never alive, and therefore cannot die.

But a living body manifests the presence of an invisible formative power, pervading every part of it, availing itself, indeed, of the properties of the substances, ponderable and imponderable, within its reach, without which it is neither able to operate nor to maintain its place; but still acting above them, keeping up a continuous internal circulation, and producing combinations to which these substances, when left to themselves, have no competency. Thus there is produced, by a true process of growth, an organization which has perfect unity, and in all the higher forms of life diversity of parts also, each having its own special constitution and function. And when life departs, though it be by violence in the very height of its activity, we see all the substances which, under its formative influence, have entered into the organization, immediately resuming the exercise of

their natural affinities, which have never been lost, but only held in check by a stronger power. Here we have satisfactory evidence of a true force, over and above all the forces which belong to the different substances that make up the body.

But the argument does not end here. As we rise to the higher forms of life we meet the phenomenon of *mind*, and, finally, of intelligent mind, with its consciousness of *unity* and *identity*. Every one knows intuitively that he, the intelligent, thinking being, is a unit; and that he is the same unit to-day that he was a year ago, notwithstanding all the changes that have passed upon his material organization. He — that one identical being — has had myriads of thoughts and feelings, but they are all his, and on this ground he is conscious of being responsible for them all, so far as they have a moral character. Here, assuredly, we have perfect evidence of a substantive power which is in the body, but does not consist of its changing organization. Either the Creator has placed us under the necessity of living in perpetual delusion, of seeing as intuitive truth what is only a lie, or the theory which makes mind the product of bodily organization is a delusion. We take the latter alternative. But mind and life are so correlated that whoever admits the supernatural origin of one, must admit that of the other also.

But *when*, it may be asked, did life begin? May it not have been put into matter at the beginning, as a germinal and undeveloped principle; since we see that life, when once existing, may be propagated, according to natural laws, through an indefinite series of ages? We answer: Such an hypothesis is not to be admitted without evidence; and no evidence exists in its favor. The only propagation of life by natural laws with which we are acquainted is *from living beings through organic germs*, whence come other living beings of the same kind. Of the origination of life where no living organic germ existed before, not a single decisive example can be adduced. All experiments looking to this result fail the moment due care is taken to exclude from the matter

operated upon, the accidental presence of undeveloped germs. Of the existence in inorganic matter through vast geologic periods of an undeveloped life-principle we have not a particle of evidence, and have, therefore, no right to assume it. We know that this earth was once a molten mass, incapable of receiving any of the existing forms of life. These cannot have begun until its surface was cooled, and otherwise prepared for their reception. Then, according to all the evidence before us, they were introduced in a supernatural way.

But geology shows repeated eras of extermination, whether suddenly introduced in the form of catastrophes, or gradually supervening upon the existing orders of life, we will not stop to inquire. These exterminations were some of them universal, or extended at least over vast portions of the earth's surface. After them we always find new species, of which the only satisfactory account that can be given is, that they were, in some way, created by the supernatural power of God. A distinguished living geologist sums up the whole evidence from geology in the following words:

“At the close of each period of the Paleozoic ages there was a general extermination of the living species, which was nearly and sometimes quite complete. Again, as each epoch terminated, there was an extermination of life, but in most cases much less general. With the transitions between strata of different kinds in the course of an epoch there were usually some exterminations; and even in the passage from layer to layer, the extinction of one or more species took place. In a corresponding manner there were often one or more new species with each new kind of layer, and generally several with each change in the strata; while many appeared with the opening of an epoch, and a whole fauna nearly, with the commencement of a period. There is, then, this grand principle:

“Creations and extinctions of species were going on through the whole course of the history, instead of being confined to particular points of time; but at the close of long periods

and epochs there were nearly universal extinctions, followed by abundant creations.”¹

8. There is a preponderating weight of evidence in favor of the supposition that *species have a supernatural origin*. We do not propose to enter at large upon the investigation of this much-disputed question. We can only indicate a few salient lines of argument, which, to avoid misapprehension, we introduce with two general remarks: First, the magnificent systems of plants and animals show *in the internal relation of their several parts*, not less clearly than in their relations as general systems to each other and to the inorganic world, the marks of infinite intelligence. Whatever theory therefore we adopt, the relations of species to each other, and the function of each in the great whole must be referred to the Creator's wisdom and power. The only question will be as to the *manner* in which he has chosen to exert these attributes. The devout believer can, then, hold a theory of continuous development, if the evidence in the case requires it. Secondly, the proposition that species have a supernatural origin should be carefully separated from that of the *mode* in which this supernatural agency was exerted. In a late address before the British Association for the Advancement of Science, by its President, William Robert Grove, Esq., we find the following language:

“A curious speculator might say to a palaeontologist of even recent date, in the words of Lucretius,

‘Nam neque de coelo cecidisse animalia possunt
Nec terrestria de salsis exisse lacunis

‘E nihilo si crescere possent,
(Tum) fierent juvenes subito ex infantibus parvis
Et terræque exorta repente arbusta salirent;
Quorum nil fieri manifestum est, omnia quando
Paulatim crescunt, ut par est, semine certo,
Crescentesque genus servant.’

which may be freely paraphrased thus: ‘You have abandoned the belief in one primæval creation at one point of

¹ Dana's Manual of Geology, pp. 397, 398. Edition of 1863.

time. You cannot assert that an elephant existed when the first saurians roamed over land and water. Without, then, in any way limiting Almighty power, if an elephant were created without progenitors, the first elephant must, in some way or other, have physically arrived on this earth. Whence did he come? Did he fall from the sky (i.e. from the interplanetary space)? Did he rise moulded out of a mass of amorphous earth or rock? Did he appear out of the cleft of a tree? If he had no antecedent progenitors, some such beginning must be assigned to him.' I know of no scientific writer who has, since the discoveries of geology have become familiar, ventured to present in intelligible terms any definite notion of how such an event could have occurred: Those who do not adopt some view of continuity are content to say God willed it; but would it not be more reverent and more philosophical, to inquire by observation and experiment, and to reason from induction and analogy, as to the probabilities of such frequent miraculous interventions."

We are somewhat surprised that a writer, when earnestly contending for the theory of the transmutation of species into each other in a continuous line by natural causes, should have quoted the last three of the above lines from Lucretius which are omitted in his free paraphrase:

" Omnia quando
Paulatim crescunt, ut par est, semine certo,
Crescentesque genus servant."

which may be literally translated: "Since all things grow gradually, as is reasonable, from a definite seed, and growing preserve their kind"; words which are flat against the theory of transmutation. Mr. Grove must ultimately come to *some* living being "without progenitors." Perhaps he would make it an animalcule, or an order of animalcules; and here he meets, upon his own theory, the impossibility of being able "to present in intelligible terms any definite notion of how such an event could have occurred." But to let all criticisms on this quotation pass, we remark that we are not shut up to the two alternatives of the development

of species by transmutation according to natural laws, or the creation of species in the gross form assumed by our author — falling from the sky, rising moulded out of a mass of amorphous earth or rock, or appearing from the cleft of a tree. "If he had no antecedent progenitors," says the writer, "some such beginning must be assigned to him." By no means. Mr. Grove cannot be ignorant of the fact that a theory of *divine* development has been maintained. We do not presume to assert that species have been actually produced, wholly or in part, in this way, being "content to say," in regard to the whole system of species, "God willed it." But the thing is entirely conceivable. If, for example, the swamp white oak (*quercus bicolor*) is older than the upland white oak (*quercus alba*), one is at liberty to suppose that God, by the immediate exercise of his power — a power *qualitatively* creative — impressed on some germ or germs of the former species a new law of development, or rather a modification of the former law, whence came, in a silent and invisible way, the new species. And so of animals.¹ We doubt whether all the facts of geology are explicable on such a theory; but those who hold to the development of all the past floras and faunas of our planet in an unbroken line cannot reasonably object to it, unless it be on atheistic grounds. God is always present in his own creation. Why deny, as irreverent, his supernatural agency as often as he sees good to exert it? To us the irreverence seems to lie on the side of those who find difficulty with the manner in which a pair of elephants could be brought into being by God's creative act, if he willed their existence. With these explanatory remarks, let us consider very briefly how the question stands in regard to the origin of species.

Looking, first of all, to the existing animal and vegetable kingdoms, we do not find the weight of evidence preponderating on the side of a theory of universal transmutation — the production of all the existing orders, genera, and species,

¹ See on this subject the interesting Article on The Origin of Species by Prof. Parsons, in the American Journal of Arts and Sciences, Vol. xxx. pp. 1-13.

by a natural law of development, from older forms in an unbroken lineal series, which is supposed to have begun with the very simplest forms of life. The great difficulty of determining with exactness the limits, and therefore the true idea, of species is admitted. Among both plants and animals some species have a capacity of very wide variation ; and we are sometimes at a loss, as in the case of the dog and the wolf, to decide whether the difference be that of species or variety. But these capacities of variation which belong to the original constitution of certain species, thus specially adapting them to the uses of man, manifest no tendency to indefinite expansion. They are variations within the limits of given species, or at most of closely allied species, where the question between species and varieties is not clearly determined. Within the historic period there has been not only no general confusion of species, to say nothing of genera, but not an inch of visible progress in that direction.

But it may be argued that the historic period is as nothing in comparison with the immense series of geologic ages that preceded it ; that for visible progress in the line of natural transmutation vast cycles of time are requisite. The analogy of the starry firmament may be urged, all whose constellations are doubtless undergoing change of relative position, but at so slow a rate that it is inappreciable to unaided human vision. Let us look, then, at the testimony of these geologic ages, where the advocate of a theory of universal transmutation by natural laws has all the time that he can ask for. Here we find a grand succession of orders, genera, and species in both the vegetable and animal world, adapted to the varying condition of our planet. But throughout the mighty series, stretching back into the abyss of past time, we everywhere find the same great law of *definitely marked species* which now prevails. If we go back ever so far into hoary antiquity, far beyond the beginning of any of our existing species, we find not the slightest approach towards a blending of species by intermediate links. In this respect " all things continue as they were from the beginning of the

creation." "Missing links," in the shape of true species, intermediate between more distantly related species, often come to light. But no links are found by which species run into an indistinguishable mass of varying forms. The plan of creation from the beginning has manifestly been that of definite species, each propagating itself in its own line, without confusion with other lines,

"Omnia quando
Paulatim crescunt, ut par est, semine certo,
Crescentesque genus servant."

The advocates of the derivative hypothesis lay great stress on the fact that only a small part of the forms which have existed in past geologic ages are preserved to us. But they fail to show why among those that are preserved a due proportion of the assumed links of transmutation do not appear. If one millionth part, for example, of the successive floras and faunas have been embalmed in the rocks of geologic ages, then, upon the simple doctrine of the calculation of chances, we ought also to find a millionth part of these transitional forms. The absolute number of all the forms should be reduced a million times, but their relative proportion ought, for anything that appears to the contrary, to remain without essential change. But geology does not reveal these assumed transitional forms. If in some of the lower forms of life, the variations are so great as to make classifications by species a difficult task, we yet want, as Mr. Grove himself admits, the evidence of progression by natural development "from a simpler or more embryonic to a more complex type"; and he quotes Professor Huxley as showing that "though there is abundant evidence of variation, there is none of progression."¹ The sum of geologic evidence goes to show that, if new species have arisen from previously existing species, it has been *per saltum* — by a sudden leap from the older to the newer form. Such leaps cannot be regarded in the light of monstrosities, mere freaks of nature; for a wonderful harmony and mutual adaptation reigns in

¹ Ubi supra, p. 31.

the grand orders of species thus produced, showing that they have taken place after an intelligent plan. The alternative lies between the theory of a *divine* development, as already explained, or that of their immediate creation. Perhaps we shall do well to combine the two. That there was at least one new beginning of organic life by the creative act of God will be conceded by all who believe in the existence of a personal God; and there seems to be no valid reason why the Creator may not have thus interposed to restore life or to enlarge its domains many times since its first introduction.

II. *Revelation in the Sphere of Mind.*

Whoever attentively studies the history of modern scepticism in regard to divine revelation, will be profoundly impressed with the conviction that it is deeply rooted in error respecting God, man, and the relation of man to God. Unworthy views concerning man's nature and destiny, unworthy views respecting God's nature and character, and, as the consequence of these, a false conception of religion in respect to both theory and practice—or, in modern phraseology, a *false anthropology*, a *false theology*, and a *false system of religious doctrines and duties*—these errors everywhere underlie the denial of supernatural revelation as a part of God's plan of moral government in this world. The biblical history of God's supernatural revelations to man is so connected with the biblical doctrine respecting the nature of God and man and their relation to each other, that the two can never be separated. Whoever receives the doctrine as true will find no difficulty in admitting the history as true also. The denial of the doctrine, on the other hand, underlies the denial of the history. We will give, then, a brief survey of the scriptural doctrine on the three fundamental points above named—man, God, man's relations to God.

The *anthropology* of scripture has nothing to do with metaphysical subtilities. It rests on the broad and solid foundation of unperverted reason and conscience, consciousness and intuition, the whole illumined by the supernatural light

of revelation. It regards man, first of all, as a *moral being* in the very essence of his nature, for whom the highest good is righteousness, and the highest evil, sin. If, as some affirm, all holiness is resolvable into benevolence — a point which we will not here stop to consider — it still teaches, in accordance with the dictates of conscience, that I *ought* to be benevolent. This idea of moral obligation is as distinct from that of benevolence as it is from that of happiness; and it lies at the foundation of everything. The law of right is absolute. What particular actions are conformable to this law may be, in some cases, a matter of question; but the law itself cannot be called in question. It speaks to men with supreme authority, and nothing in the shape of expediency can be weighed against it.

That man has true *inward freedom* is implied in the fact that he is a moral being. The idea *I ought* is inseparable from the idea *I can*; and this latter idea is not to be metamorphosed by any metaphysical jugglery into the idea *I must*, in the sense in which water must run down hill, or the heavier weight in a pair of balances must preponderate over the lighter, when it has *outward freedom* to obey the law of gravitation. The scriptures everywhere assume man's freedom as a moral being, and consequently man's responsibility as the subject of God's moral government, and here they leave the matter. They never sacrifice man's moral freedom and responsibility to the doctrines of God's universal sovereignty and man's dependence for salvation on divine grace; nor do they deny or conceal these two fundamental doctrines of revelation in the interest of human freedom. To show the inward harmony of these great truths is a problem that belongs to human philosophy. But whether the task can or cannot be satisfactorily accomplished, the truths themselves remain immovable, each on its own foundation. The Bible has nothing to do with shams. The freedom on which it rests its commands and its appeals to man's conscience is no empty show without substance. Upon the right use or the abuse of it hang the dread awards of the last day.

The strong tendency in man's moral constitution to *fixedness of character*, whether it be on the side of good or evil, is fully recognized in the Bible in such declarations as the following: "The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day";¹ "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil."² This, in connection with the doctrine of his *immortality*, invests his destiny with a grandeur and solemnity corresponding to the dignity of his nature. He is a candidate for an immortality of wickedness and misery — wickedness and misery beyond the hope of recovery, as in the case of Satan — or of holiness and blessedness beyond the fear of change, as in the case of Gabriel. We are well aware how stoutly many, in the face of scripture, deny the being of Satan as a true personage. But if we look at wicked men as they are, not as we might wish them to be, we discern in the increasing strength of their sinful habits, according to the great law of man's nature, the awful foreshadowings of a day when the dread sentence shall go forth: "He that is unjust, let him be unjust still"; and this is all that is necessary to make a character like that of Satan. The fact that God has implanted in man's nature this powerful tendency to fixedness of character is in perfect harmony with the scriptural doctrine that man's probation is for a limited period only, beyond which he will be unchangeably good or evil. If it be objected that this is inconsistent with God's goodness, let the objector show how it is consistent with the same goodness to allow sin at all in the moral universe, and to visit it with such fearful penalties as we everywhere witness in this world.

In perfect harmony with the grandeur and dignity of man's nature and destiny as a responsible subject of God's moral government is the scriptural view of *the supreme importance of truth*. We find in the Bible no vestige of the popular notion that *sincerity* is the main element in religion. The scriptures do indeed insist upon sincerity as an indispensable

¹ Prov. iv. 18.

² Jer. xiii. 23.

quality of the good man's character and they denounce hypocrisy with unsparing severity. But they nowhere teach that sincerity in error is as acceptable to God as the belief of the truth. On the contrary, they insist upon earnestness in the pursuit of truth as the very foundation of a righteous character. "Buy the truth, and sell it not";¹ this is the burden of Moses and the prophets. "This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent";² such is the doctrine of Christ and his apostles. Herein the Bible only carries out the analogy of the natural world. We do not find, in the sphere of nature, that falsehood ceases to be destructive because it is received as truth. A poisonous substance poisons still, though it be taken as wholesome food or beverage. So error, which is the poison of the soul, destroys men none the less certainly because it is received as truth. This is only saying that God remains consistent with himself in the two spheres of nature and of mind. It would be well if some superficial moralists, who seem to be never more in their element than when they have an opportunity to brand as bigots all who believe in good earnest that a knowledge of the truth is necessary to salvation — it would be well if these superficial and flippant moralists could be induced to ponder seriously this great and all-pervading principle of God's government.

Intimately connected with this supreme value which the scriptures attach to truth is the further assumption that, within the sphere of duty to God and man, *men are able to know the truth with certainty*. That human knowledge has its boundaries beyond which it cannot pass they teach in the boldest terms: "Canst thou by searching find out God? Canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection? It is high as heaven; what canst thou do? deeper than hell; what canst thou know? The measure thereof is longer than the earth and broader than the sea."³ The attempt to explore these unfathomable depths they rebuke with withering sarcasm: "Vain man would be wise; though man be born like

¹ Prov. xxiii. 23;

² Jno. xvii. 3.

³ Job xi. 7-9.

a wild ass's colt."² But within the sphere of practical life the same scriptures upbraid men with their ignorance, because they have the faculties and opportunities requisite to a knowledge of the truth, and might know it with certainty, if they would address themselves to the earnest pursuit of it. God has placed men in a world of truth, and given them the capacity of apprehending it within certain limits. It would be the worst of libels on his character to suppose that, having created men with an innate love of truth, he is only mocking them with a delusive show that has no reality. The Bible never allows the suspicion that either the testimony of the senses, or the intuitions of reason, or the inward witness of conscience can be illusory. It regards men as living in a world of solid realities, and bound by the high sanctions of eternal weal or woe to believe and act in accordance with these realities.

/ The *theology* of scripture commends itself at once to unperverted human *reason* by its glorious simplicity, symmetry, and consistency. To the *conscience* it commends itself also, because it is in harmony with all its dictates. And finally, it commends itself to the human *heart*, so far as its primitive instincts are not oppressed by sinful passions, because it meets all the wants of man as a being made for love, faith, and spiritual communion. How perfectly it avoids, on the one hand, the sunken rocks of pantheism and fatalism, and, on the other, the mazes of polytheism, all who read it understand. It exhibits one infinite personal God, our Father in heaven, who cares for us, and can hear and answer our prayers; who governs the world of free moral beings which he has created in perfect harmony with their free moral nature; who directs and controls all events, even to the fall of a sparrow, without interference with the proper activity of second causes, interposing in a supernatural way above nature only on special occasions and for special ends; not in a random and indiscriminate way, like the supernaturalism of

² Job v. 12.

polytheism and popular superstition, but according to a fixed plan, without deranging the general course of nature.

But it is on the *harmonious proportion* in which the Bible exhibits the divine attributes that we need especially to insist. It teaches that "God is love";¹ that "the Lord is good to all; and his tender mercies are over all his works."² It teaches also, with equal clearness and fulness, that "God is light, and in him is no darkness at all;"³ where the connection shows that the predicate "light" represents absolute holiness and truth, as darkness does falsehood and impurity. Holiness, not less than love, is the essence of God's nature. If any one chooses to maintain that benevolence is the sum of all holiness, he must also maintain, as the true logical inference, that God's infinite benevolence determines him to hate sin, as antagonistic to benevolence, with infinite strength of feeling and will. The scriptures abundantly teach that such hatred is an essential attribute of his infinite perfection: "Thou art not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness; neither shall evil dwell with thee. The foolish shall not stand in thy sight: thou hatest all workers of iniquity."⁴ And this hatred is no inoperative feeling. It falls, like the lightning of heaven upon the wicked. Hence the Psalmist adds: "Thou shall destroy them that speak lying: the Lord will abhor the bloody and deceitful man."⁵ Since God has made men free responsible subjects of moral law, he will govern them by moral law, with its high and awful sanctions. To all who persist in violating his law, his love will be a consuming fire. If God is love, rebellion against him is rebellion against love, and his infinite perfections are pledged to visit it with condign punishment.

We believe, however, in the more direct way of bringing home to the conscience the guilt of sin. It is *rebellion against God himself*, a direct blow aimed at his supremacy as the Creator and Ruler of the world. It is to be received as a self-evident axiom that he who made man has a right to his

¹ 1 Jno. iv. 16.

² Ps. cxlv. 9.

³ 1 Jno. i. 5.

⁴ Ps. v.; iv. 5.

⁵ Ps. v. 6.

supreme love, trust, and obedience, and that to withhold these is the sum of all wickedness. It is proper to insist on the proofs of God's benevolence with which the world is filled. But we are not to make the obligation of submitting ourselves with unlimited confidence and love to God's authority conditional on our ability to solve all the dark problems of the universe which involve the question of his goodness. Herein we must walk by faith, not by sight.

On the subject of *man's relation to God* the scriptural doctrine is very simple and definite. It represents that man was made in the image of God that he might be capable of knowing him, having spiritual communion with him, and rendering to him a rational and free service. Thus it exalts man's relation to God, and consequently the duties which grow out of this relation, to the first place. It makes the first and great commandment: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart," the broad and deep foundation on which rests the second: "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." This order commends itself to unperverted human reason; for it requires that we love God and man in accordance with the intrinsic dignity and excellence of each, and our relation to them. It can be set aside only by the false assumption that in fulfilling the duties which we owe to our fellow men we fulfil all that we owe to God. We call this a false assumption, for it denies at the outset man's immediate relation to God as a rational being, capable of knowing his Maker and having communion with him; for if we are capable of such knowledge, the obligation to acknowledge God's presence, seek his guidance and protection, adore him for his greatness and excellency, thank him for his goodness, and conform our lives to his will, so far as it is revealed to us, flows immediately from it. So the apostle argues when he affirms that the gentile nations are inexcusable, "because that when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful."¹ The scriptures are luminous with the doctrine that man's highest end is to know and serve God,

¹ Rom. i. 21.

and this knowledge and service of God comprehends in its wide sweep all his social relations and duties. The view that they give, consequently, of sin is that of *apostasy from God*—making one's self, instead of God, the centre and highest end, which brings in its train a disturbance of all the social relations; and finally they assume, as a fact that shines forth in the whole history of the race, that man is in this state of apostasy, and that nothing but redemption from it can give him true happiness in this life or prepare him for happiness in the life to come.

With this massive and self-consistent body or scriptural doctrine concerning man, God, and man's relation to God, the scriptural record of God's supernatural interposition for man's redemption is in such perfect harmony, that whoever receives the doctrine is prepared beforehand, as already remarked, to receive the historic record also. If man is in the very essence of his nature a moral being, endowed with the high prerogative of moral freedom, and as such the responsible subject of God's moral government, with its high and solemn sanctions; if he is an heir of immortality, which is to be to him an immortality of blessedness or woe, according to the use which he makes of his moral freedom; if truth is the nutriment of the human soul, and error its destruction; if God's love is pervaded throughout by the element of righteousness, which determines him to maintain with infinite strength of affection and will the sanctity of his moral law; if man's supreme end is the knowledge and willing service of God, and apostasy from God the sum of all wickedness; and if the sad record of human history shows that man is in such a state of apostasy, involving the derangement of all his social relations here and his ruin hereafter—then it is in perfect harmony with unperverted human reason that God should interpose supernaturally for his redemption, and should certify this interposition in a supernatural way in the sphere of nature, since nature (at least in the domain of this world) is subservient to the interests of man; nature being made for man, and not man for nature.

We ask, then, which one of the bulwarks in this compact chain of scriptural doctrine respecting man, God, and man's relation to God, has been successfully assailed by modern philosophy? There is, as we all know, a class of philosophers who seek to explain the origin of our idea of moral obligation—of right and wrong—by experience, that is, sensational experience, and the association of ideas thus gained. But they utterly fail to show how the association of any number of ideas can generate an idea which is altogether new in kind, and has all the marks of originality and simplicity.¹ But explain the origin of the idea as we will, it exists in every man as an ineradicable part of his nature. It is not simply the abstract idea of right and wrong as a moral distinction, but the self-evident and necessary idea: *I ought to do the right and shun the wrong*; and it points the sinner with steady finger to the tribunal of a personal God, whose eternal righteousness is pledged to hold him to the law of right written by his own hand on the tablet of his conscience.

The truth of man's *inward moral freedom* has been assailed in many ways, covert and open, but never with success. The *metaphysical* schemes for bringing the human will under the law of necessity have been sufficiently considered in the preceding Article, to which the reader is referred.² The *physiological* scheme, as held by some phrenologists, would make, if not the mind itself, yet its entire capacity of action according to its various functions—"animal propensities," "moral sentiments," "intellectual faculties"—dependent on certain corresponding organs of the brain. If this scheme be rigidly carried out to its logical consequences, it makes human action simply the *resultant* of all the different propensities, sentiments, and faculties in their reciprocal action upon each other; just as the moon's place at any given instant is the resultant of all the different attractions of the sun, earth, and planets that are constantly operating upon

¹ See on this point McCosh, *Defence of Fundamental Truth*, p. 193 et. seq.

² See *Bibliotheca Sacra* of Oct. 1867, pp. 609, 611, and Note vi. pp. 626, 627.

it. Thus the will is brought wholly within the sphere of physical laws, and we have a system of fatalism. But it should be said, to the honor of many phrenologists, that they do not accept this result of their system. They admit a true inherent capacity of the mind to make its election between the different and often antagonistic impulses of these physical organs, and its obligation to make this election according to the dictates of the higher moral and intellectual faculties; otherwise they could not talk of *duty* and *wrong* action.

“The propensities, and also the moral and intellectual faculties, may act singly or in groups, in opposition to the whole moral sentiments and intellectual powers enlightened by knowledge and acting in combination; all such actions are wrong. Hence right conduct is *that which is approved of by the whole moral and intellectual faculties, fully enlightened, and acting in harmonious combination*. This I call the supremacy of the moral sentiments and intellect.”

“To fit them to discharge this important duty, they must act in harmonious combination, and be illuminated by knowledge of science and of moral and religious duty.”¹

Here and elsewhere, the author, though he does not directly assert man's moral freedom, yet assumes it as the foundation of his reasoning; without which assumption, indeed, his language would be sheer nonsense. But this admission of the reality of human freedom is, if not an abandonment of the scheme in its foundation principle, an immense modification of it. For inherent liberty to do right or wrong necessarily implies that, *all the organs of the brain being in one and the same state*, the man can, at one and the same instant do *wrong* by following the dictates of the lower propensities in opposition to the higher, or *right* by obeying the dictates of the higher “acting in harmonious proportion.” There is, then, an action of the free responsible man himself, above all the impulses that come to him through the tissues of the brain, which impulses can only *incite* but never *compel*. Here we dismiss the physiological argument against human

¹ Combe on the Constitution of Man, chap. ii.

freedom, without the necessity of inquiring whether the science of phrenology rests on a true or a false foundation. The following remarks on the subject of human freedom are exactly in point.

“In spite of physiologists, philosophers, and divines, we take refuge in the indestructible testimony of consciousness. Whatever be false, *this* must be true, and lies at the foundation of all truth; there is no truth in the universe *for man* if this be false; we can trust to nothing evermore, if this deceive us. The absolute veracity of consciousness is a first principle of all knowledge, all true science, all sound philosophy. Standing on this immovable basis, unable, perhaps, to go beyond it, or to clear any of the difficulties which on so many sides are started, and in such appalling array, we are perfectly secure. The clear, loud voice of consciousness to every human being is, that as he is constituted by God, he is entirely free to choose for himself, and is endowed with the appropriate faculty for this purpose.”¹

That the scriptural view of man's *grand and solemn destiny*, as an heir of immortality under a government of moral law, is in harmony with right reason and conscience, is a truth too obvious to need extended illustration. Here the old arguments from natural theology have, so to speak, a good and strong staple. They have never been set aside by fair reasoning. They cannot be thus set aside, for they are grounded in man's inmost nature. Their weakness lies simply in their want of positive authority; and here the voice of revelation comes in, not to contradict, but to supplement them. The modern doctrine of the final annihilation of the wicked is not supported by a scrap of evidence from man's constitution as a rational and moral being, and it is at war with the whole analogy of natural religion. It has its origin simply in the assumption that the endless punishment of the wicked cannot be consistent with the divine goodness. As

¹ *The Mystery of Evil and God.* By John Young, LL.D (Edin.). Part iii. chap. i. sec. 2.

it professes to support itself by scriptural arguments, the consideration of it does not belong here.

It is not on the side of metaphysical argument, but of *supreme worldliness* that the scriptural doctrine of man's high destiny as an immortal subject of God's moral government is in danger of being lost sight of and practically disowned. To men continually engrossed in the pursuit of worldly objects, God's being and government soon come to appear as shadows devoid of substance. To them the things of time and sense are practically the only realities. In scriptural phraseology their treasure is on earth, and their heart there also. Such a worldly state of mind naturally brings in its train a materialistic and worldly philosophy; for between the two there is an entire congeniality. It is precisely here that the so-called "Positive Philosophy" of Comte and his followers has its hold on the human mind. It is a philosophy born of worldliness, and bearing on its forehead the image and superscription of its origin. It begins by buffeting in the face all man's aspirations after a knowledge of reality, whether in the sphere of nature or of spirit. It announces that the *theological* is the lowest stage of human progress, the *metaphysical* the next, and the *positive* the last and highest, in which the human mind, abjuring all inquiry concerning causes, whether efficient or final, occupies itself wholly with the phenomena of experience, its sole aim being their generalization according to their laws of succession. Comte, as is well known, began with atheism (for in the repudiation of all investigation concerning causes, that concerning the great first cause was included), and ended with the establishment of a system for the worship of humanity. This was certainly a fit conclusion. It was suitable that a philosophy born of worldliness and worldly in all its features should have for its object of worship something belonging to this world.

The scriptural doctrine respecting *the supreme importance of truth* is in harmony with the entire system of the universe. It only carries into the sphere of human freedom and respon-

sibility — in other words, into the sphere of morality — the analogy which prevails everywhere else. In the sphere of nature we find that realities remain realities, and exert their power as such for good or evil, whether we believe them or disbelieve them. To believe that the door is locked and bolted when it stands open will not keep out the burglar. The traveller who has lost his way does not reach his home by thinking that he is in the road to it. Confidence in a dishonest man does not make our property safe in his hands. Why, then, should any one think it a mark of profoundness to discard religious *doctrine* as the foundation of religious *duty*? Can there be any duty that does not have its foundation in some truth? and that truth, embodied in human language, is doctrine. Can there be, on the other hand, a doctrine in the sphere of moral freedom that does not bring a corresponding duty in its train? "He that cometh to God," argues the writer to the Hebrews, "must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that seek him."¹ Here we have the duty, coming to God, conditioned by the belief that he is, and is a rewarder of them that seek him. This scriptural view of the supreme value of truth in religion commends itself to the robust common sense of mankind. It is not very complimentary to the profoundness of the present age that books which openly or covertly depreciate the value of religious doctrine, and thus reduce religion itself to a mere blind sentiment, have so many admirers and eulogists. It seems to argue the growing prevalence of religious systems, if they may be called such, whose essence is the negation of positive beliefs. When we can have a man without bones and muscles, we can have a true system of religion without a doctrinal basis of truth; and since the moral government of God presents some stern and rugged features, the same features must appear in due proportion in any system of doctrine that rests on a foundation of reality.

The scriptures insist much, not only on the supreme value of truth, but on man's competency, within the sphere of

¹ Heb. xi. 6.

practical life, to *know the truth*, and this as the foundation of a righteous character, which consists in willing obedience to the truth. The writings of David Hume gave an immense impulse to philosophic scepticism. His doctrine was that of materialistic empiricism, according to which we can know nothing of the reality of things, all our knowledge being limited to a succession of experiences, in which cause and effect are confounded with invariable antecedent and consequent. This, by a logical necessity, landed him in theoretic nescience. Some of the most prominent metaphysicians of the present day are pursuing substantially the same way, and with substantially the same results. They first assume "that of the outward world we know, and can know, absolutely nothing, except the sensations we experience from it"; and then infer, logically enough, that because "an east wind is not like the feeling of cold, nor is heat like the steam of boiling-water," we can know nothing of the real nature of things;¹ as if, forsooth, we could know nothing of an east wind and steam, as veritable substances, but only the sensations that we receive from them. The original error here is the denial of all intuition of things through the understanding and reason, and thus the limitation of knowledge to the succession of experiences — sensational experiences — of which we are the subjects. But there is a form of transcendentalism, also, which leads to the same results only in a deeper and more scientific way. It holds that all thought is according to certain necessary *a priori* forms, which belong to the original furniture of the mind; but then it raises a doubt whether these *a priori* forms correspond to the reality of things. My mind is *so constituted* — thus it reasons — that I must think of everything as existing in time and space. But how do I know that time and space are anything more than the subjective forms by which all human thought is conditioned? I am *so constituted* as to conceive of everything which begins to be as having a cause. But how do I know that there is in the nature of things outside of my mind any such reality

¹ Mill's Logic, chap. iii. § 7.

as cause? If this mode of reasoning be carried, as it may be with logical consistency, into the sphere of morals, it may be said with equal pertinence: I am *so constituted* as to believe in the necessary and eternal distinction of right and wrong. But how do I know that outside of the *a priori* structure of my mind this distinction has any existence? For anything that I can tell, there may be to the Infinite Mind no such immutable and eternal principle of right and wrong, but he may make it, unmake it, and vary it for his rational creatures at pleasure, according to the *a priori* forms of thought which he imposes upon their minds. Thus we arrive at a scepticism which unsettles all the foundations of moral obligation. What a phenomenon in metaphysics to see the two opposite schemes of materialistic empiricism and transcendentalism shaking hands across the bottomless gulf of universal scepticism!

Of the existence of *a priori* forms of thought we do not doubt, if by these be meant what are commonly called *the laws of thought*. But why should any man assume, not only without reason but against the dictates of unperverted reason, that these laws of thought do not correspond to the reality of things — their reality according to the measure in which we are able to take cognizance of them? Instead of saying: I am *so constituted* as to believe that the distinction of right and wrong is necessary and eternal, a simpler and more philosophic statement would be: God has given me the capacity of discerning the necessary and eternal distinction of right and wrong; and so of all our intuitions.¹ An ineradicable conviction of my moral nature is the supreme excellence and obligation of veracity. Why should I allow myself to think, without a scrap of evidence, that God who has given me this apprehension of the excellence and obligation of veracity, is practising on me perpetual deceit in respect to all my primary convictions? In a philosophical point of view, this scheme of universal scepticism is nothing but shallowness under the show of great profoundness: in a

¹ See on this point the very pertinent remarks of Dr. McCosh, in his *Defence of Fundamental Truth*, chap. x.

moral point of view, it is worthy of the severest reprobation. Sir William Hamilton himself, the great expounder of the so-called doctrine of "the relativity of human knowledge," declares that to suppose the falsehood of our primary beliefs is "to suppose that we are created capable of intelligence in order to be made the victims of delusion — that God is a deceiver, and the root of our nature a lie. But such a supposition, if gratuitous, is manifestly illegitimate."

We have finished our survey of scriptural *Anthropology*, and found it everywhere impregnable to the assaults of modern philosophy. We need not dwell at large on the topics of scriptural *theology* and *man's relation to God*; since these are so inseparably interwoven with the question of man's nature and destiny as to constitute a grand self-consistent whole, which must be received or rejected as a whole.

First, then, as it respects scriptural *theology*, it is to be received as an axiom of natural theology that God has not made man's nature in contradiction with his own. If man is, in his inmost essence, a moral being to whom righteousness is the binding rule of action and the supreme good, and sin the sum of all evil, it is because his Maker is himself such a being; because he is absolute and eternal light, and in him is no shadow of moral darkness; because, in the language of scripture, he is "a God of truth, and without iniquity; just and right is he."¹ If God has endowed man with the high prerogative of inward moral freedom and responsibility, it is because he means to govern him as a free responsible being; that is, by moral law, with its high and solemn sanctions, not by physical force, as the planets are made to revolve in their orbits. If God has implanted in man's bosom a conscience that speaks to him with absolute authority, visiting his transgressions with the sting of remorse, and pointing him forward with steady finger to the tribunal of him who made conscience, it is because the hour is hastening on when man must meet his Maker, and render up to him an account of the deeds done in the body. If man's

¹ Deut. xxxii. 4.

nature is capable of unlimited development, and thus contains in itself a prophecy of its immortality, it is because such is its destiny under God's eternal government. If God has implanted in man's constitution a solemn tendency to fixedness of character, it is because it is not his plan that we should fluctuate forever between holiness and sin; but rather should be at no distant day confirmed beyond change in holiness and happiness by the right use of our moral freedom, or in sin and misery by the abuse of it. If the entire constitution of this world enforces upon us the necessity of knowing and obeying the truth, as the indispensable condition of our well-being; and if, furthermore, God has implanted in us an intuitive perception of the excellence of truth and our obligation diligently to search after it and conform our lives to it, it is because he is himself a God of truth, and will hold us to the love and practice of it as the indispensable condition of enjoying his favor here or hereafter. Thus we see that scriptural anthropology and scriptural theology constitute together an indissoluble web, from which we cannot take the warp without taking the woof; and if we leave the warp, we must leave the woof also.

And yet there is a rose-water theology very fashionable at the present day, which is equally out of joint with human nature and with scripture; which practically leaves out of view the element of divine justice, and talks of God's benevolence as if it were nothing but indiscriminating good nature, that could not treat sin with awful severity. This, too, in the face of all the solemn indications that God gives in conscience and in the terrible natural penalties which he attaches to vice, that he is just, as well as good; and that, if he forgives sin, it will not be in such a way as to sacrifice his righteousness and truth to his mercy. How pertinent to this soft sentimentalism is the scriptural rebuke: "Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself; but I will reprove thee, and set them in order before thine eyes. Now consider this, ye that forget God, lest I tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver. Whoso offereth praise glorifieth

me; and to him that ordereth his conversation aright will I show the salvation of God."¹

Next, as it respects *man's relation to God*, this is given, as already remarked, in the anthropology and theology of scripture, and need not be further discussed.

It follows at once from the nature of God and the nature which God has given to man, that "man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy him forever." All ethical systems which leave out of account man's primary relation to God and the primary duties growing out of this relation begin with fundamental error. Of them we may pertinently say: The light that is in them is darkness, and how great is that darkness. All religious and ethical systems which practically make human reason the supreme arbiter of revelation — which not only use reason in examining the evidence that God has made a supernatural revelation to men (as all honest inquirers must do), but claim, in the face of all possible historic evidence, the *a priori* right of judging what may and what may not be contained in such a revelation, and of receiving or rejecting its contents accordingly — begin also with fundamental error. Since God's infinite reason is the author of man's finite reason, the revelations of the former will never be in contradiction with the primary intuitions of the latter, which are God's own light in the human soul. But these primary intuitions, though they lie at the foundation of moral duty, do not themselves constitute the whole field. They have innumerable practical applications which are far from being self-evident, and where God's infinite wisdom is needed to supplement man's fallible judgment. Much less do these intuitions give us the needful light on the mighty question of man's restoration from a state of apostasy from God — which, if confirmed, must bring in its train endless misery and ruin — to one of holy communion with him. That man is in such a state of apostasy, the whole history of the race shows. Who can show why God should not interpose in a supernatural way, as the scriptures affirm

¹ Ps. xl. 21-23.

he has done, to save from an immortality of sin and woe this crowning work of his creation, this lofty being, *man*, to whom he has given such an exalted nature and destiny? It is only by denying what God is, what man is, what is the nature of the government which God exercises over man, and what is man's destiny under this government, that the objector to supernatural revelation can make any show of argument. Until he succeeds in establishing these denials, which he has never yet done, we have a right to treat his assumptions against the necessity and reasonableness of such a revelation as baseless prejudices.

ARTICLE IV.

THE IRISH MISSIONS IN THE EARLY AGES.

BY REV. RUFUS ANDERSON, D.D., LATE FOREIGN SECRETARY OF THE
A. B. C. F. M.

In a religious point of view, Ireland of the present day is painfully contrasted with Ireland as it was a thousand years ago. Yet one would scarcely think so on reading what Hume says of it, previous to its conquest by Henry II., in the year 1172. "The Irish," he says, "from the beginning of time had been buried in the most profound barbarism and ignorance; and as they were never conquered, or even invaded, by the Romans, from whom all the Western world derived its civility, they continued still in the most rude state of society, and were distinguished by those vices alone to which human nature, not tamed by education or restrained by laws, is forever subject."¹

He adds, indeed, that "the Irish had, by precedent missions from the Britons, been imperfectly converted to Christianity; and, what the Pope regarded as the surest mark of their imperfect conversion, they followed the doctrines of their

¹ Hume's History of England, Vol. i. p. 328.