

## ARTICLE V.

## SCIENCE AND CHRIST.

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AVAILING ourselves thus of the light of modern science in our attempted explanation of the eternal destiny of souls, we can but conclude, first, that whoever stubbornly rebels against these inexorable systems of law under which every one is necessarily placed at the very birth of being, and persists in that rebellion, which he has the power to do; whoever, in other words, refuses to hold in vitalizing subjection the under forces of his most complicate nature, and to yield lovingly to the vitalizing influences of the upper and divine, will under these very laws be finally pushed out of his present state of self-conscious being and lose forever his gift of sovereignty. If the body, the intellect, and the spirit are, as we have attempted to show, not only organisms in themselves but parts of the great world-organism, dissonance, disorder in any particular, will, unless arrested, spread confusion throughout the whole, and end eventually in total wreck.

Science thus reveals the awful fact of an impending doom of utter annihilation of self-consciousness and sovereignty to every incorrigible rebel in God's realm, for the very exigencies of the case demand this, the very fact that we are organized units, and as such are composed of complementary parts, having an intimate interplay and interdependence, and that we are parts of still wider organisms, and they of wider still, until the bounds of the human race

are reached, and it may be the very bounds of being, as the planets and solar systems and sun clusters of the universe circle at last orbit within orbit, in one vast sweep, in grand majestic harmony around God's central throne.

We witness every day the body as an organism passing under the doom of annihilation through the disintegrating power of the under forces which have broken away from the control of the upper. Faculty after faculty of the intellect we have seen disappear through violation of the laws of mind, until, finally, all evidence of any continued thought-life ceases. Science has furnished a strong presumption at least, through the analogies of nature, that the soul also is organic, and must depend for continued self-conscious existence, on the harmonious interplay of its parts, on the maintenance of its mastery over the under forces and its implicit and ready obedience to the upper. There are, as we have seen, no other conditions of liberty, and without liberty there can be no perpetuity of any organic life. It is now a rapidly growing belief among Bible students, that the final annihilation of the conscious self-hood of the incorrigibly wicked is revealed in God's word as well as in his works. Converts to this creed are now numbered by tens of thousands in the Christian churches. I was surprised to find, when my attention was called to it, how all the passages bearing on this subject were susceptible of such an interpretation, and that the vast majority of them fairly excluded any other. The symbols used are symbols of destruction, and not of eternal torment. It is said that the wicked are cast in where the worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. But the worm and the fire are instruments of annihilation, and the obvious meaning is that their work will go on uninterruptedly until it is complete, until the organisms on which they are delegated to feed have been utterly consumed. While there is food for the worm

or fuel for the fire they will gnaw and burn; but, as the processes of destruction are progressive, that on which they prey is constantly diminishing, and unless there is being wrought a perpetual miracle of creation, as in the liver of the fabled Prometheus on which the vulture fed, an end must surely come. This figure, and indeed all other figures in the Sacred Record illustrating the final condition of those who persist in their disobedience, are robbed of their rhetorical force, are carried wholly out of their natural meaning unless this be their prophecy of doom.

I would not be understood as considering it possible for a human spirit to be banished, even by divine power, absolutely out of all being—be reduced to nothingness, but only out of a state of organized, sovereign, self-conscious being; for scientists, as indeed all careful thinkers, while conceding that any particular form of existence may be made to permanently pass away; regard it as axiomatic that an entity can never come up out of nonentity, or ever be returned to it.

Many entertain the belief, born of hope it may be, that God is too kind and sympathetic to suffer any soul to be lost. Unquestionably he would rescue every one, had he the power. The disintegration of the body he can arrest by sheer force of will, but the decay of the moral nature is the sad consequence of the exercise of a will as sovereign as his own. Without its consent he cannot stop the process, except by destroying the life; for, as I have said, moral life is made up of sovereign acts of will. Liberty is its vital air. God can compel our obedience; but, so soon as compulsion begins, responsibility ends. The soul, after that, becomes a characterless machine. Unless divine love can win back the rebel, his moral life must gradually die out, in accordance with spiritual laws which it is not in the compass of even God's power to alter or annul. Though God cannot stay this destructive process against our will, however

his sympathetic heart may be wrung with grief, as was Christ's when he wept over favored yet fated Jerusalem, still, while there survives the faintest spark of hope of the soul's reclaim, his spirit will no doubt strive with all its kindest influences. I cannot see why the mere fact of physical death should be a signal to cease. Not until the heart has grown stony in sin, not until moral death has come, will God's hope perish, and his pleading spirit, with all its loving patience, be finally grieved away. Until then he will stand and knock at the door of the human heart.

Many profound scholars now affirm that it is nowhere revealed in Sacred Scripture that the body's death ends the soul's probation. Surely sound philosophy does not teach it. But that probation will certainly have an end sometime,—before death it may be for some souls, after death for others,—the immutable laws of spiritual growth and decay have most certainly decreed.

Thus, from the phenomena and principles which the researches of science have brought to light, we are irresistibly led to the conclusion, that in some far future all discords will cease throughout God's universe; that all souls which stoutly stand out against his overtures of love, refuse to come into harmony with the great world-organism of which they were purposed to form a part, withstand the spiritual vitalizing forces whose mission it is to organize all things into a divine order, will, through this perverse persistence, be finally pushed out of self-conscious, moral being; that the time is coming when that notable prophecy shall be fulfilled which declares that before Christ, who became obedient unto death, who is the perfect embodiment of the divine order, and of the divine love, the central heart, the mysterious vitalizing power of this vast world-organism,—that before this Emmanuel, the Mighty Counsellor, the Prince of peace, in that great day when the divine plans shall have

reached their final consummation, all knees shall bow and all tongues confess.

Does the doctrine that Christ was divine, and that he constituted the second person in the Trinity, contain any confusion of thought as to the true nature of personality, or in any way antagonize the conclusions of science on this the most perplexing of questions, or will modern discoveries in mental phenomena be found here also to be Christianity's most helpful allies? There are three widely different opinions prevailing among evangelical theologians as to Christ's nature: first, that he never possessed any human soul, but that a human body simply was animated for a season by the Divine Spirit; second, that, while he indeed had a soul, this was so completely and permanently blended with the Divine Spirit that they together constituted a single new and unique personality which will remain intact through all the eternal ages; third, that Christ was of a dual nature, lived a dual life, had two infinitely different spirits alternately animating and controlling his body, sending electric waves of thought and emotion over the brain, that most delicate and mysterious of all its organs, that at times only the human was manifest with its many weaknesses and limitations, its longings and its griefs, and then again only the divine appeared, teaching with authority, forgiving sins, scanning the secret intents of the heart, lifting the curtains of the future, healing the sick, restoring the blind, even raising the dead.

I seriously question whether the first two opinions can bear the searching scrutiny of this critical age, and as neither of them embodies my own belief, I will not now take time to state their grounds of defence. The third, however, seems to me to be in perfect accord, not only with the facts of history, but with the conclusions of science. Multitudinous instances are well authenticated of one personality being for a time completely submerged by another, through that marvellous power denominated mesmeric influence.

These show that duality of nature is certainly possible, that two spirits can alternately employ the same set of bodily organs. We have seen the mesmerized under this strange spell losing his identity, thinking the thoughts and thrilling with the emotional life of another. I, of course, would not attempt to designate or explain the precise mode of this particular divine-informing in the case of Christ, but simply to show that the facts we have unearthed in our scientific researches into the subtile power of mind over matter in the realm of nature serve to illustrate and confirm the third attempted explanation of the mystery that shrouds this the strangest visitant our earth has ever had. The testimony of our own self-consciousness convinces us that the *ego* is an indivisible unit, a wholly separate entity in itself, from which nothing can be taken, to which nothing can be added, with which no other *ego* can be so blended that they will permanently disappear and a new complete third *ego* result from this union. But that one *ego* can so dominate over another, so completely capture the body that encases it and through which alone it can operate, as to cause a period of oblivion to pass over it, is a fact that can be witnessed almost any day. The vanished *ego* is, however, not destroyed but simply repressed, and will promptly reassert itself the moment the dominating power is removed. There is here no blending of *egos*, no joint action or consciousness, nor is there the incoming of some new self, but simply the temporary domination of the stronger over the weaker one. This it seems to me is the only adequate explanation of the many apparent contradictions in Christ's life. In that forty days' combat with the tempter at the opening of his career, in that last all-night agony of prayer in the Garden at its close, in all the sufferings and strugglings and most glorious triumphings that filled the years between, in all his sense of weakness and weariness and most pressing need of help which his frequent seasons of secret prayer betray, we see

the brave battlings of simply a noble human soul; but when we hear him call out in tones of authority, as he stands with mourning friends at the door of a sepulchre, "Lazarus, come forth," when we hear him say to the helpless paralytic as he is laid at his feet, "Thy sins are forgiven thee," when we hear him assure the penitent brigand who hangs beside him on the cross, "This day thou shalt be with me in Paradise," we hear the voiced mandates and blessed assurances of a God.

Thus we see that science cannot rightly urge against the claim that Christ was both human and divine, the objection that this is in direct conflict with the testimony of self-consciousness as to the essential unity and indivisibility of the *ego*. Neither can it urge any such objection against the further claim that there are three persons in the Godhead of which Christ is the second, and that now, as the Son, he sitteth on the right hand of the Father interceding for men. As these phases are interpreted by the great mass of Christian believers, such an objection would no doubt be valid, but it would not if they are taken as they may and, as it seems to me, should be. The word "persons" can be used in a restricted sense, and indeed has been in the polemical writings of some of our most eminent theologians. It is unquestionably impossible for us to conceive of three absolutely distinct *egos* being combined into one, and that too during the very time they each maintain intact their own individuality. This is simply a contradiction and confusion of thought, or rather we might say it is a mere jugglery of words; for to us, constituted as we are, with our clear consciousness of a unified and indivisible self; such a proposition is absolutely unthinkable. But there is a sense in which we ourselves possess a triune nature, the *ego* in us being made up of the intellect, the sensibility, and the will. We are capable of self-communings, of self-criticism, of self-conflict, of general introspective thought. In this sense,

and only in this, can we form any adequate conception of a triune God, and without a conception, a picture in the mind, belief is impossible. It is said that we are created in God's image. Certain it is that the very utmost we can conceive of God is as a spirit possessing in infinite perfection faculties and attributes similar to those which we ourselves possess in but partially developed germ, the difference being not in kind, but simply in degree and in healthfulness of development. If he has any quality or attribute radically different from ours, of which there is in us no likeness, we can have no knowledge of it whatever, it cannot possibly be revealed to us, we having absolutely no conceptual capacity for such a thought. As well attempt to teach the horse we drive a proposition in Euclid. Therefore all we know of God or can believe about him must necessarily come through the medium of our own self-knowledge, and through that alone. The three persons in the Trinity can possibly mean to us nothing more than different phases or presentations of the same divine *ego*, and any language of Scripture which seems to mean more than this must be regarded simply as bold poetic personification, a mode of thought peculiarly fascinating to the quickly kindling fancy of the Orient, and a marked feature of its literature.

The blessed assurance that Christ now sitteth at the right hand of the Father interceding for the repentant and believing can, on final analysis, signify nothing more than the debate going on in the Divine mind between its stern sense of justice and its pitying, yearning, hoping love, preliminary and preparatory to the final decision.

St. John has summed up the whole matter in the opening clauses of his Gospel, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." There we must leave it.

Nineteen hundred years ago there appeared in Palestine a Jew artisan. He lived a life without a flaw, a life free

from the slightest taint of selfishness, marked by no effort to secure wealth or ease, political or social preferment. He came into closest sympathetic touch with the poor, the despised, the forsaken, and that touch was to save. There was no interest of self he did not sacrifice with noble gladness to free souls from the guilt of sin and the power of it. The French sceptic, Renan, testifies in his world-famed "Life of Jesus," "In him is condensed all that is lofty and good in our nature. . . . Never has any man made the interests of humanity predominate in his life over the littleness of self-love so much as he. Devoted without reserve to his idea, he subordinated everything to it to such a degree that toward the end of his life the universe no longer existed for him. Whatever may be the surprises of the future, Jesus will never be surpassed. His worship will grow young without ceasing. His legend will call forth tears without end; his sufferings will melt the noblest hearts; all ages will proclaim that among the sons of men there is none born greater than Jesus."

Though his youth was passed amid most contracted surroundings in a despised country town, and though he was of Jewish parentage, yet he proved himself absolutely free from the proverbial narrowness and the petty prejudices of his race. His sympathies and his plans of reform were as wide as the world. In the three short years of his public ministry in a degenerate and superstitious age, this young mechanic taught a system of ethics which has borne the test of the keenest criticism of the world for a score of centuries, and to-day stands abreast of the world's best thought, quickens it, leads it, uplifts it, glorifies it still. The present advanced forms of civilization are the outcome of the leavening influences that went out from his life and lips.

He spoke in bold, uncompromising denunciation against all forms of sin, however entrenched behind social custom or church sanction, or bolstered up by wealth or power. He

paid the forfeit of his fidelity with his agonies on the cross. His utterances and his conduct were pervaded with an unwonted, awe-inspiring spirit of command. He repeatedly claimed with unperturbed assurance that he was divine, and never once weakened with a single word of retraction when the powerful leaders of the synagogue confronted him before the multitude with the charge of blasphemy, but simply reasserted his claim and calmly pointed to the proof.

In his person, in his surroundings, in the incidents and spirit of his ministry, in the manner of his death, he fulfilled with startling accuracy those old Messianic prophecies that had been handed down in the Sacred Books of his people. It is true that only a few of that race, which has been marvellously preserved till this hour, notwithstanding it lies scattered and peeled among the nations, have ever accepted him as their long-looked-for deliverer, for it was a spiritual, and not a temporal, kingdom he came to found; it was from their personal sins, and not from the heavy Roman yoke, he sought to free his people, yet they have watched for some other one to come while nineteen centuries have one by one crept slowly by, and watched in vain.

In the facts which have been brought to light through scientific investigations we have abundant evidences, as I have attempted to show, that the human race is of sufficient importance to warrant just such a divine mission as Christ's, and that through this alone can that vast scheme of life succeed on whose unfolding through the untold ages God has already lavished such wealth of creative thought.

Christ must have been either a myth, an impostor, a lunatic, or a God. The theory that Christ is a myth, the product of the thought-accretions of some reverent, ignorantly worshipping period of antiquity, a demigod like Hercules, the product of dim, distorting tradition,—a theory put forth by the Bauer school of philosophy,—has long since been abandoned by all historical critics of any standing as utterly

untenable. Listen to the deliberate judgment of one of the most pronounced and keenest sceptics of modern times, John Stuart Mill: "Whatever else may be taken away from us by rational criticism, Christ is still left; a unique figure, not more unlike all his precursors than all his followers, even those who had the direct benefit of his personal teaching. It is of no use to say that Christ as exhibited in the Gospels is not historical, and that we know not how much of what is admirable has been superadded by the tradition of his followers. The tradition of followers suffices to insert any number of marvels and may have inserted all the miracles which he is reputed to have wrought. But who among his disciples, or among their proselytes, was capable of inventing the sayings ascribed to Jesus or of imagining the life and character revealed in the Gospels; certainly not the fishermen of Galilee, as certainly not St. Paul, whose character and idiosyncracies were of a totally different sort; still less the early Christian writers, in whom nothing is more evident than that the good that was in them was all derived, as they always professed that it was derived, from the higher source."

Infidels are still puzzled to explain how unlearned Galilean fishermen two thousand years ago, when superstitions and most contracted views were rife, could have conceived and pictured with their pens an ideal God-man so masterfully that his acts and sayings as recorded in their pages should be found and universally acknowledged, after the searching test of so many centuries, to be in perfect accord with what would be expected in such a strange and august personage. To fashion such a hero, a hero who should in every exigency maintain the decorum, manifest the spirit, and teach with the wisdom of a God, would be an achievement far transcending even the creative genius of a Shakespeare. We can but admire the wise discretion of the writer of "Ben-Hur" in rigidly adhering, whenever he intro-

duced Christ into his story, to the severely simple outlines given in the Gospel histories. He seems to have recognized with true artist-instinct that the least deviation from the grand original would but mar his work, if not ruin it.

As to Christ's being either an impostor or a lunatic, there is no infidel who has proved so reckless of his own reputation for insight or for candor as to venture on such a plea.

There is but one other answer left us to that great question of the hour, "What think ye of Christ? whose Son is he?" That answer has fallen from the lips and been embodied in the lives of millions of nobly trusting souls in every age since Christ's coming. Faith in his divinity is the foremost force in the world to-day, quickening, uplifting, and purifying the lives of its mighty multitudes as no other force has or can. The spirit of scientific inquiry is now abroad in the earth as never before, uncurtaining the past, analyzing and classifying the phenomena of inanimate and animate nature, carrying its torch far into the abysmal depths of personality, discovering the laws that prevail in the departments both of physics and of metaphysics, leaving no subject untested, suffering no sacrifice to check its ardor. This spirit of inquiry which owes its impetus directly or indirectly to this same Christ of history will, as I confidently believe and have attempted to show, finally establish beyond all controversy that this very Christ is indeed that Divine Deliverer to whose advent Nature and Revelation so long pointed with prophetic fingers, and of whose reign of love we have the blessed assurance there shall be no end.