

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Expositor* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_expositor-series-1.php

Bigotry as it is against Criticism. Let our modern Rabbis and Pharisees prate and anathematize as they will, let them demand what additions to our creed they may, if men believe in the simple Gospel first delivered to the faithful; if, that is, we believe that, in Christ, the Sinless suffered for the sinful, the Best for the worst; that the Highest came down to save and redeem the lowest; and that He who alone has life in Himself so conquered death as to confer the power of an endless life on men once dead in trespasses and sins, we believe all that is essential to salvation, all that Apostles and Evangelists, the first teachers and preachers of the Word, insisted on and demanded of those who listened to them. We have and hold the very Gospel, the Gospel in the Gospels, and should let no man make us afraid.

ALMONI PELONI.

*THE PRESENT POSITION OF EVOLUTION AND
ITS BEARINGS ON CHRISTIAN FAITH.*

THE death of Mr. Darwin has naturally led to renewed reflection on the scientific discoveries which are due to him, and on the principles with which his name has been associated—discoveries and principles which have of late years attracted so much attention and have acquired so much influence. More particularly has this been the case in respect to the relation of those discoveries and principles to the truths of our Christian Faith. The interest which men in general feel in the truths of Religion on the one hand, and in the great discoveries of Science on the other, is so intense and so persistent that it is inevitable they should watch with eagerness the relations between the two, and should be disturbed by any temporary appearance of diversity

between them. Great injustice, it must be observed, has often been done to religious men, and to theologians, in the judgment which is passed upon their attitude towards the advances of Science. In proportion to the depth of a man's faith in the Christian Revelation, in proportion to his belief that the Scriptures are inspired by God's Spirit, and that God Himself has thus spoken to us by holy men of old, and above all by our Lord, the Son of God, must he be perfectly sure that the revelation of God's words and that of God's works are one, and that every real discovery in Science must not only be in harmony with our Creed, but must illustrate and confirm it. But for the very same reason that Science, when correctly ascertained, must needs be in harmony with revealed truth, scientific hypotheses, when incorrect, must needs be out of harmony with it; and if such an hypothesis should for a time obtain popular acceptance, its influence might be as injurious to the cause of religious truth as to that of all other truth. Such instances have notoriously occurred in the history of natural and of all other philosophy; and it cannot, moreover, be denied that the very hypothesis to which I am more particularly referring has been used in many quarters, especially on the Continent, to disparage the traditional creed of Christians, and to undermine men's faith to a very formidable extent. With such evidence of the bad use to which science has sometimes been put, we are at least bound to be on our guard; and we cannot be accused of any unworthy suspicion if, charged as we believe ourselves to be with the maintenance of truths which are the very citadel of the moral and spiritual life of mankind, we challenge, like sentinels, every one who approaches it, and enquire strictly whether he bear the credentials of truth. In a volume very recently published, by perhaps the most distinguished supporter of Mr. Darwin's general views, Professor Huxley, we are told that the essence of the scientific spirit is criticism; it tells

us, says Mr. Huxley, that "whenever a doctrine claims our assent, we should reply, take it if you can compel it."¹ It might well be questioned whether the true scientific spirit be not more generous, and in St. James's words, more "swift to hear," than is implied in such a description; but if this be the avowed attitude of men of science towards each other, they have certainly no right to complain of theologians for questioning new scientific theories with caution, lest some principle should by mistake be admitted which might have the effect, for a time, of obscuring spiritual truths of a vital character.

Some questionings of this kind have probably been widely suggested by the awakened attention which, owing to the homage justly paid to Mr. Darwin's name, has been directed to the scientific doctrines with which he was popularly identified. It would not be reasonable to criticise too closely language used under the emotion which the death of a great man naturally occasions; but, apart from particular statements, the idea has certainly been spread that a certain scientific doctrine has at length been definitely established which conflicts in some manner with the received principles of our Faith, and that Theology has had to yield another part of her domain to Science. Many minds, moreover, which do not for a moment entertain such a supposition, are at least under the apprehension that some new difficulty has been raised and are consequently sensible of a certain perplexity. Doubts on the subject are at all events widespread, and it is necessary to take notice of them if satisfactory relations between our Faith and the thoughts of the day are to be maintained. It will not be necessary for such a purpose to enter into any scientific discussion, or to presume to intrude upon ground which men of science may justly claim as their own. The best way of dealing with any misunder-

¹ "Science and Culture, and other Essays;" by T. H. Huxley, LL.D., F.R.S. Macmillan & Co., 1881; p. 312.

standing or anxiety of this kind is simply to offer a candid explanation of the state of the case. No observation is more familiar and more true than that quarrels and misconceptions arise much more from a want of mutual explanation than from real antagonism. It is to be feared, indeed, that too many scientific men in the present day are prone to draw certain inferences from modern discoveries which conflict with the truths of our Faith, just as theologians have at times drawn inferences from their own truths which have conflicted with facts of Science. But the only satisfactory way of meeting this danger is to endeavour to realize distinctly what are our relative positions. What are the truths of Science on the one side which specially claim the allegiance of students of nature in the present day? What are the principles of our faith which are affected by them; and on what grounds do we vindicate those principles, in the face of the new light which has been brought to us by natural philosophers? If we ask these questions, not in a spirit of jealous criticism of new truths, nor of undue anxiety for old ones, but with a simple desire to appreciate the truth on both sides, we may hope to obtain a steadier and calmer grasp of the bearings of what is undoubtedly a very important controversy, and may in some of its aspects be a prolonged one.

Now the scientific doctrine in question is that of Evolution; and the theological doctrine which is supposed to be challenged is that of the interposition of the Divine Will in the course of natural and human history. Facts are supposed to have been discovered which shew that all the phenomena of life have been developed by the gradual operation of purely natural causes, and thus a disposition is fostered, even where it is not urged to a definite conclusion, to contemplate nature as a mechanism in which no immediate action of the Divine Will is to be recognised. The tendency of the principle is illustrated by an argument which, with

a view of minimising its effect, has sometimes been used with a good intention, though, as I think, unfortunately, by Christian writers. It does not matter, it has been said, whether the Divine action is removed some stages further back from us than that at which we thought it was working, so long as it remains the ultimate source of all life and movement. Such an argument recognises the fact that there is a tendency in some applications of the doctrine of Evolution to remove God and God's action to an increasing distance from the present course of things; and it is not surprising, therefore, if, to many minds, it seems removed so far as to be practically inappreciable.

In view of this difficulty, let us ask, in the first place, what it is precisely that is believed to have been established by the doctrine of Evolution? In answering that question, I do not venture to offer my own impressions. It is, fortunately, possible to give the answer on the unquestionable authority of Professor Huxley, who, in the book already referred to, has in two essays¹ summed up, with his usual precision, the results which he considers to have been attained. That which he appears to regard as having been conclusively established is, that the various forms of life by which the world is now peopled have not been created separately in the forms they now present, but have been evolved, by continuous gradations, from other and often extinct forms, in the course of an immeasurable lapse of ages. He pronounces that, as a matter of fact, the links which connect various species apparently diverse have been discovered in the geological records, and that we can trace the gradual growth of an animal like the horse as distinctly as we can follow the successive stages of the development of animal life in an egg. Such, we are assured, is the fact; and no one can be insensible to its wonder and instructiveness.

¹ On "The Coming of Age of 'The Origin of Species;'" and on "Evolution, in Biology."

But a very important observation is next to be made, and one which is too frequently overlooked in general statements of the doctrine of Evolution. We may be assured of the fact just stated; but when we want to know what are the causes of the fact, our knowledge is imperfect, and we are on uncertain ground. "How far," for instance, "Natural Selection"—the agency on which Mr. Darwin chiefly relies—"suffices for the production of species"—this, says Professor Huxley, "remains to be seen." Few, he thinks, can doubt that it is at least a very important factor in that operation, but he adds that "the causes and conditions of variation have yet to be thoroughly explored." Again, he says, "the evolution of many existing forms of animal life from their predecessors is no longer an hypothesis, it is an historical fact; it is only the nature of the physiological factors"—in other words, of the causes—"to which that evolution is due, which is still open to discussion." Now to what does this amount but to a plain admission that, while recent researches in natural philosophy have thrown a brilliant light on the history of our globe and of the life upon it, they have not yet produced any sufficient explanation of that history? Neither the Darwinian hypothesis, nor any other known hypothesis, will cover the facts. "It is quite conceivable," says Professor Huxley, "that every species tends to produce varieties of a limited number and kind;" or, in other words, it is still conceivable that there is truth in the old doctrine, that there are limits to the variation of species. Similarly he regards it as possible that further enquiries may prove "that variability is definite, and is determined in certain directions rather than in others"—not by external circumstances alone, but—"by conditions inherent in that which varies."¹ But if so, then, in the opinion of the leading natural philosopher of our time, it has not been shewn

¹ "Evolution in Biology," pp. 306, 307, 309.

that the life now on the globe is the mere result of a blind struggle for existence, and no presumption even has been established for supposing that human life and history are subject to a similarly mechanical law. In the language of science, there may "be conditions inherent in that which varies"; or, in the language of religion, with respect to each organism and stream of life, a Divine hand may have "laid the measures thereof," or "stretched the line upon it," may have "set bars and doors," and said, "Hitherto shalt thou come but no further, and here shall thy waves be stayed." It is with this momentous qualification that, by the confession of the highest authority in this country, all that has been said of late respecting the establishment of the doctrine of Evolution must be accepted; and it is obvious that, thus stated and limited, the doctrine still leaves open questions which had been hastily assumed to be closed, respecting the nature of the Divine operation in the development of life.

But it may be replied that this ignorance is but temporary. We know that Natural Selection, "if not the whole cause" of Evolution, is at least "a very important factor" in it; and there is no reason to doubt that science will eventually discover the other factors, and that the natural process of Evolution will some day lie open before our eyes. Well, considering the infinite complexity of life as it now exists, and the extreme difficulty, if not impossibility, of knowing all essential circumstances respecting past ages, that seems a good deal to assume. But, for the sake of argument, let us assume it. Let us suppose that science has at length revealed to us the whole natural process by which species has passed into species, and even, if you will, by which man himself was developed. Let us imagine that the whole vast and infinite development lies before us, from its imperceptible beginning to its brilliant close. What then? Does it follow that, because the methods

of operation are thus visible to us, no Divine Mind has selected those methods, and no Divine Will has controlled them to their end? Does it follow that, because those methods have been regular, all working according to fixed laws, that the process has been a mechanical one, and that the personal agency, if it exists, can only be conceived of as at a distance, and as having given the machine no more than its original impulse? There appears an extraordinary fallacy in any such conclusions. The only facts we have to go upon are that certain results have been produced by certain methods. How do you know that the results were not deliberately intended, and that the methods were not designed and adopted for the express purpose of producing the results? How do you know that the laws you have observed were not established, and controlled in their action, by a living agent, in order to do the very things which have been done? In short, suppose natural science to have solved all these problems, and to be able to describe the mechanism of the whole workshop of nature, what will it have done to render in the slightest degree improbable the belief of the Christian, that God Himself has throughout been the Workman, at every stage of the work? It seems continually assumed on the one side, and apprehended on the other, that as soon as a man of science has shewn that an effect is sufficiently accounted for by certain natural laws and causes, the idea of Divine action in producing the effect may be set aside. But why may we not, with at least equal right, suppose that it was the express design of the Creator to produce that effect, and that He has used all these laws and causes with that object? We may not see the reason for which these innumerable individual results have been produced; but, to say the very least, there is absolutely nothing in the fact of their having been produced in due order and measure to lead us to doubt the fact of a designing Will having been present to main-

tain that order, and to assign that measure. Nature may not of itself reveal the Agent distinctly, or compel us to believe in his presence and constant action. That belief may need to be supported by the further testimony of conscience or of revelation. But, by the very conditions of the case, nothing that we can observe of the course and processes of nature, in respect to the regularity of the means by which certain effects are produced, can afford any presumption against the belief that God is Himself present, producing those particular results by means of those particular causes.

But let us, again from regard to our opponents, make a further concession in the argument. Let us suppose it could be shewn that, in all the past history and development of the globe before the appearance of man upon it, in all that concerns the perfection of the animate and inanimate world amidst which we live, nature has been left to itself, subject only to the maintenance of certain general laws. Does it follow that this been the case since man has been on the earth, and since new reasons have thus arisen for the interposition of God, and new methods for that interposition have been provided? Let us suppose it conceivable that, with a view to the mere production of vegetable and animal life, of creatures without conscience and without a future, nature was allowed to work by a mere mechanism, as it were, which took no heed of individuals: what reason does this give to conclude that a similar method has been pursued since man appeared on the earth, and every individual human soul has been born with capacities for eternal happiness or misery? Of course, if it be denied that it is possible for the Creator of all things so to use, and if I may employ the expression, to manipulate the laws and the creatures He has made as to produce any particular result He may please, all further considerations on the subject are vain and not worth

pursuing. But, on the supposition of an omnipotent Creator, no limits can be placed to his power of either employing existing methods, or bringing new methods into action, to carry into effect anything that He may will. Assuming that He possesses this power, arguments derived from his action with respect to irrational beings cannot be held conclusive as to his action with respect to beings of so entirely exceptional an order as men. New purposes, moral and spiritual purposes, come into play, and new methods may be necessary for carrying them out. It becomes, therefore, to say the least, perfectly conceivable that God may have seen fit to interfere in the course of human history and development, in a manner which was not necessary in the course of natural history and development. It will be understood that I am far from saying that there was not that constant interposition before man appeared. On the contrary, the more reason we have for believing that the whole of nature is one, and that all has led up to the creation of man, the more reason have we to believe that God's mind and will have been everywhere, and at all times, present, preparing all things for so great a birth. But it may none the less be the case that He has specially intervened in human history, in a manner of which indications are not to be discerned before; and consequently that conclusions deduced from observations on inanimate nature cannot be applied without modification to the circumstances of human nature. Even if it were the case that the facts of nature exclude the supposition of personal intervention during the ages when there was no moral agent to be influenced, this would afford no presumption against such personal intervention when such an agent exists. In other words, even if such interference were not observed when there was no moral cause for it, is that any presumption against its occurring when there is such a cause?

It would thus appear that the presumptions which have been raised as to the tendency of the doctrine of Evolution to exclude that personal action of God, which is the first principle of the Christian creed, break down at every point when they are strictly examined. In the first place, by the admission of the most authoritative living exponent of that doctrine, no natural causes have yet been discovered which suffice to explain Evolution. Further, even if they had been discovered, there would still be no reason to assume that God Himself was not personally acting at every step of the process, or that every particular result was not designed by Him, and the methods by which it was produced specially adapted for that purpose. Once more, even if it were the case with respect to inanimate matter and irrational creatures that general laws have been allowed, so to say, to work their will, without interposition or special control by any personal Providence, yet, on the supposition of the existence of an omnipotent Creator, this could afford no presumption that He would not thus interfere for the moral control and guidance of a moral being.

Here, in fact, it is, to speak with that plainness which at the outset I said was desirable, that the real question of importance on this subject arises. It may not be a matter of very grave consequence to Christian faith by what means or processes the world was brought into that condition in which man appeared upon it. Evolution, as it affects the past, may in great measure be a matter of curious and even unpractical speculation. But when the doctrine is extended so as to imply that all things now go forward by natural processes, and that no direct and personal Divine interference in the course of our daily life is to be admitted—scientific theories which are pushed to this extent touch a point with which Christian faith must either live or die. The whole of Christian life rests on the belief that we

are under the immediate personal government of God, and that He deals with us at every moment as freely and as directly as we deal with each other. Our Lord's constant and most characteristic teaching would fall to the ground without such a belief. He declares that the care and the will of our Father in heaven is exercised over the most insignificant of his creatures, over the sparrows and the very grass of the field, and bids us appeal to Him in every need as a child does to an earthly father. Similarly his Apostle declares that God's hand is over us in every temptation, tempering it to our moral capacities, not suffering us "to be tempted above that we are able," but with every temptation making "a way to escape," so that if we fail to resist it the moral responsibility is all our own. We cannot doubt the possibility of such direct personal intervention on the part of God without doubting the reality of our own sense of personal freedom and responsible action; and accordingly the ablest and boldest reasoners who question the former, question also the latter. The old argument of the Centurion in the Gospel remains unanswerable. If we, who are men under authority, finite and imperfect beings, can nevertheless interpose for moral and intelligent ends in the course of nature and of human life, it must be possible for God to exercise a similar interposition. Here, it should be clearly recognised, is the point at which we can make no compromise with supposed scientific inferences. The spiritual life of the Christian day by day, the truth of the most characteristic principles of the revelation of the Scriptures, involve belief in the constant personal action of God in nature and in human nature. To these truths we cling, with the same conviction of personal and general experience with which men of Science cling to the facts which they have ascertained; we could not surrender them without the most absolute demonstration that we are under an illusion;

and, meanwhile, we maintain with profound confidence that any scientific hypothesis is erroneous which cannot reconcile itself with these moral realities.

Are we asked, Where is the plain and sensible evidence, which might be expected in a matter of such consequence, to prove, even to the senses, that God does interfere for the purposes of the moral government of man? Our answer is ready. We point to the miracles recorded in the Scriptures, and, in the first instance, to those recorded in the New Testament. Those miracles were avowedly wrought in great measure for this very purpose—that of revealing to men the hand and will and power of God, acting for their individual guidance, help, and salvation. They were exhibitions, by extraordinary methods, of that which is ever going forward by ordinary methods; and, in this sense, they are among the most precious credentials of Revelation. The God who did the works which our Saviour wrought while He was upon earth cannot but be capable of all that personal control of even the minutest matters which concern us, of the very hairs of our heads, which our Lord attributed to Him. There is no answer to this argument, except the tacit assumption of too many minds, embodied in the avowal of M. Renan and the sceptical school of the Continent, that miracles cannot be believed in because we see no sign of them in the course of things around us at present. But on what reasonable ground can the past experience of mankind be regarded as of less value on a point like this than its present experience? What would become of the doctrine of Evolution itself if the evidence of past ages were to be excluded? The very objection to that theory which was admitted to be most formidable by Mr. Darwin was that, in the present order of nature, the links which form the connexions between the various species are no longer to be discerned; and this difficulty has been met by the discovery that those links existed in remote ages, in

the forms of creatures of whom no living trace now remains. We appeal similarly to the evidence afforded by the experience of man in the past, at the great crises of human history and development. Then, at the very moment it was needed, supernatural gleams of light flashed through the twilight in which we ordinarily live, and they have illuminated to all future time the mysterious heavens around us.

But, to meet one last objection, the answer to which may bring these considerations most closely home to us, it may be urged that the facts revealed by the geological records are at least analogous to those we see around us now; and we may be asked what analogy is to be discerned between our ordinary course of life and those miraculous interferences of which I have spoken. It is a fair question; and there is none which the Christian divine would more gladly meet. For the answer to it we need only appeal to the testimony of men's consciences. Looking back on the moral experiences of your life, have you, we may ask, never felt any analogy between them and those records of God's personal guidance and government of his people which are recorded in the Scriptures, accepted in their simplest and most literal sense? Have you not heard a voice within you, at critical moments of your life, of which the most natural interpretation is that it was the voice of God's Spirit, warning you against yielding to temptation, and urging you, by gentle appeal to your sense of right and wrong, into the true path? Have you not, moreover, felt at many such critical periods as though a Divine hand were guiding your course, protecting you from danger, or marking out your path in life in a way you would not have chosen for yourself? The more the controversy we have been considering is finally driven home to this appeal to the witness of conscience, the more will the Christian faith be found to rest on ground which cannot be shaken. It will never be a demonstrative argument, because it is an appeal not to

logic but to experience; there will always therefore be those whom it will not convince, and such persons, as has been shewn, we are prepared to meet on intellectual grounds. But, after all, for the purpose of an appeal to men in general, we need no stronger argument. Our hearts will suffice to bear witness to the truth of the gracious revelation of the Gospel; they will assure us, in proportion as we listen in truth and simplicity to their testimony, that we have a Father in heaven, and that He has ever been, and is now, and ever will be, our gracious Guide, Preserver, and Friend.

HENRY WACE.

SOURCES OF ST. PAUL'S TEACHING.

I. THE WORDS OF THE LORD JESUS.

IT is always interesting to trace out the influences that have been at work upon a man's character and writings, and their effect upon his thoughts or style of composition. Some men are, of course, more open to external influences than others; but, even in the case of original thinkers, it is often possible to trace back to some earlier teacher a thought which has been developed and expanded by the later writer in a manner that has given it a new force and a new power, and made it, in fact, almost a new truth. Take, for example, the case of the late Dr. Mozley. Some years back his volume of "University Sermons" took the world by storm, and was greeted with a chorus of praise from all quarters, the *originality* of the thoughts coming in for no small share of the admiration lavished upon the the volume. And yet many of those sermons are clearly suggested by Bishop Butler's Analogy, [and] are expansions and developments of thoughts, and even of single sentences, in that great work, which Dr. Mozley had [read and re-