

His life and death serve only to throw into relief our guilt and shame : His entrance into glory but gives us a glimpse into the Paradise from which we are shut out for ever.

Dr. Harnack calls his critical method the sundering of kernel and husk. Strauss warned the adherents of this method in his day of the danger attending their craft of "emptying out the child with the bath." The warning is still needed.

S. McCOMB.

SCIENTIFIC LIGHTS ON RELIGIOUS PROBLEMS.

IX.

THE SCIENTIFIC BASIS OF PRAYER.

WHAT has been the most prominent product of organic development? It is a question not of philosophy, not of metaphysics, not of speculation, but of simple fact. And yet it is probable that, if such a question were proposed to a public school, no two of the examination papers would agree in the answer. Of course there would be universal agreement as to the general trend of the development ; all would admit it was the working out of a *mental* process. But when the answers dealt with details, when they came to state what *phase* of mind is that which has most widened its borders, the diversity of view would appear. Let me look at one or two of the hypothetical answers.

Some would say that the manifestations of mind had increased in *wonderfulness*. I do not think they have. So far as mere *wonderfulness* is concerned, I do not think reason has any advantage over instinct. Nay, if we keep to the range of marvel, the latter has the pre-eminence. I once heard the criticism passed on a public orator, "He speaks above his talent." Is not this just the criticism

we pass upon the lower creation as a whole. We have the impression that it speaks "above its talent"—manifests an effect which its own power is not adequate to explain. This is the phenomenon which all animal instinct presents to the human eye, and it must remain a source of permanent wonder. However marvellous be the spectacle of an intelligence using means to compass a definite end, there is a spectacle which I have always felt to be more marvellous still—that of a living being who has attained the achievement of an end *without* the aid of what men call intelligence.

Others, again, would say that the manifestations of mind had increased in *variety*. And here, also, I am doubtful. It is quite true that, if you measure the human mind over against the mind of any single animal, you will get a startling transition from monotony to variety. But if you weigh the human mind, not over against any *single* animal, but over against the whole animal world, your increase of variety will, I think, disappear. Is there not as much variety in the sphere of animal instinct as in the sphere of human intelligence? There is a great difference, no doubt, between the genius of the poet, and the genius of the philosopher. But is there not as much difference between the genius of the bee and the genius of the spider. Each is great in its own occupation; each would be imbecile if transferred to the other's occupation. The bee could never make a web; the spider could never make a cell. I would say, that there is a greater bond of unity between the different manifestations of human intelligence than between the different manifestations of animal instinct. The names "animal world," "lower creation," "order of instinct," are words which cover a multitude of islands in the sea of life— islands separate, incommunicable, divided by a gulf as wide as that which severed the home of Lazarus from the latest abode of Dives. I do not think, therefore, that the second

answer has come any nearer than the first to a solution of the problem. I do not think that the increase of variety, any more than the increase of marvellousness, has been the distinctive note of organic development. The manifold aspects of the vital principle are nowhere more abundantly illustrated than in the life of the animal creation.

But I come now to consider a third answer which might be returned to my question. It might be said, the most prominent product of organic development is an increasing sense of *want*. It would be at first sight a startling answer, it would suggest the paradox that things get weaker as they grow; my earliest impulse would be to *reject* this examination paper. By and by I should ask if I were not under a false alarm. I should begin to question myself thus: "Is an increasing sense of want really an increase of weakness! Is it not rather a symptom of strength! Can conscious mental want come from anything but a taste of the desired object! How can a soul feel its incapacity except by being enlarged! Is not the sense of ignorance the result of knowledge! Is not the consciousness of sin the shadow of purity passing by! If there be an upward development in the evolution of life, how could it better manifest itself than by revealing at each step an increasing pressure of want!

Having cleared away this preliminary prejudice, I should then, ask what do we find? And here there would break on me a remarkable fact. At the top of the evolution line—so far as hitherto it has advanced—there stands an organism which is distinguished from all its ancestors by the amount of its unsatisfiedness. The thought is far from new. It was expressed some twenty-five centuries ago by a poet of the race of Israel, "Behold the sparrow hath a house, and the swallow a nest for herself; but my soul longeth, fainteth!" It may be safely said that, had this poet lived and sung in our day, his sense of Man's comparative unsatisfiedness would have been increased rather than

diminished. The sense of human want has deepened with human culture. It may be true that the ages of animal life are ages of greater struggle; but the struggle arises from the fact that there is actually waiting for the life that shall win it a supply of all its needs. Man, on the other hand, has come to the conclusion that what he seeks is not to be got by struggle—not to be found outside of him at all. His is an inner want—a want which would not be met by any success in physical struggle or any longevity in physical survival. It lies below sense and the objects of sense. It is capable of coexisting in the midst of outward luxury, in the heart of earth's music and dancing, in the enjoyment of fame and power. The struggles of *Man* are undertaken rather to hide this want than to conquer it.

Now this is a fact of science, of evolutionary science. It has its correlate in the brain; it could be described in terms of matter and force. If we describe it in terms of consciousness, it is because consciousness is nearer to us than the movements of the brain. What, then, is the scientific value of this consciousness—this feeling of want? It is that the Instinct of Prayer—that instinct which of all others is supposed to be at variance with the laws of Nature—has been the final issue of that great march of development which has marked the epoch of organic life. The evolution of the earthly system has in its last result been an evolution of the sense of need, an unfolding of the feeling of emptiness. To this goal the ages have been climbing, to this point the powers of Nature have been tending. All the struggles for possession, all the strife for survival, all the efforts to secure the prize of natural selection, have resulted in a product of the tree of life whose distinctive feature is the multiplicity of its unsatisfied desires.

There is then a place for prayer in the order of science—a point in which it conserves the development of the

organism. What is that place? What is that precise door in the Temple of Evolution which answers to the act of prayer in the Temple of God? This is the question and the only question with which I am concerned. Other points may be left to the theologian, to the religious teacher, to the man of Christian experience. But the point with which *we* have to do is the discovery of a place for prayer in Nature, the determination of that particular end which it serves in the economy of human evolution.

If I were asked, then, to define the province of prayer in a scientific order, I should say, It is the premonitory symptom of a larger life. We shall best see this by fixing our attention on the *elementary* stage of prayer. Its first form in the heart is a dumb sense of need. In that day it asks for nothing, cries for nothing. There is abundance of *unsatisfiedness*, but not yet *dissatisfiedness*. These do not mean the same. To be *dissatisfied* is to murmur against something; to be *unsatisfied* is simply to murmur without knowing what is wrong. This latter is the earliest form of prayer. Strictly speaking, it is prayer *without* a form. It is a simple state of unrest. It is a feeling of want which cannot be localized, specialized, described in any way. There is no definite complaint; there is simply an indefinite complaining. There is no appeal to any one; there is just a cry into the air. This is what I would call the germ-cell of the life of supplication. It is not limited to infancy. Elementary as it is, it will be found in thousands of adult lives. It often takes the form of that feeling for which the Briton has no word but which the French call *ennui*—a nameless and unaccountable inability to reproduce the glow of things that once made us glad.

Now whether it appears in infancy or in adult life, I say that this germ-cell of prayer is the premonitory symptom of a higher stage of evolution. It originates in the fact that a few grains of the gold to be inherited in the promised land

have already been wafted into the wilderness. So far from being a rising of the individual against the law of Nature prayer is the law of Nature prompting the individual to rise. Take the cry of physical pain. That is a prayer—whether it be uttered to God or Man; it is the protest of the human body against a particular phase of its environment. But by whom is the protest made? Is it the cry of an unruly member against the government of natural law? No, it is the government of natural law protesting against the conduct of an unruly member. That form of prayer which we call the cry of physical pain is not the invention of the sufferer; it is dictated to the sufferer. It is dictated by the law of Nature itself. When a part of my body is hurt, I am prompted to cry by the part which is whole; the prayer which seems to be uttered by a cut finger is really dictated by the brain. Disease and the pain of disease have not the same origin. Disease is that which interferes with the function of the organism; pain—the act of appeal—is the protest of the organism against the interference. The appeal of prayer is put into the heart of the individual, not by his own rebellious instinct, but by the constitutional government of Nature. It is intended to prevent the disease from running its course to a fatal issue. Its function is remedial. It is the telegram of Nature announcing that there is something wrong in one of its provinces and that things ought to be put right.

I cannot but, in passing, direct attention to the remarkable similarity between this statement of the case from the side of science and the statement made by Paul from the side of Christianity. Speaking of that phase of unrest which I have called the germ-cell of prayer, the Apostle says, “The Spirit helpeth our infirmity; for we know not what we should pray for as we ought; but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.” You will observe here that the cry of spiritual

pain is said to be prompted by the *Divine Spirit*. Let me try to paraphrase Paul's words: "You and I have an infirmity—the infirmity of ignorance. We are by nature unconscious of the disease that is preying upon us. By no effort of mere *reason* could we ever come to the knowledge that we are the victims of a serious malady which, if not arrested, must end in death. But, to meet this ignorance, the *Divine Spirit* has created within us a great unrest. Ere yet we have any words in which to clothe a prayer, ere ever we can formulate the nature of our need, there has come to us a sense of want for which we have no name, but which is accepted in room of a petition. The higher law of Nature has wakened within us a sense of dissatisfaction with the lower—a discomfort which, while it has no expression but a wordless groan, is yet a promise from the Father."

Nothing can exceed the scientific character of this statement by Paul. It never occurs to him to regard Christian prayer as an attempt of the worshipper to alter the law of Nature, or, as he called it, the Will of God. This, indeed, is the distinctive feature of Christian prayer—its conformity to the *Divine Will*. It is professedly the *inspiration* of aspiration. It is not in the first instance an appeal from Man to God; it is an appeal from God to Man. It is not originally the creature asking something of the Creator; it is the Creator telling the creature what to ask. It is not primarily a message from earth to heaven; it is a message from heaven to earth. "Teach us to pray" are the words of the disciples to the Master; and they are the keynote of a refrain which has never varied. Every Christian disciple has looked upon his prayer as a prompting from heaven. He has regarded it as a *Divine intimation*, as a prophecy of the purpose of God. "Whatsoever things ye have need of, believe that ye receive them; and ye *have* received them." What do these words mean

if not this, that need is prophetic of its own satisfaction. You will observe, however, it is the *need* that is prophetic—not necessarily the asking. A man's need does not always—I had almost said, does not often—correspond to his asking. Many a soul prays for outward change when the thing it needs is inward rest. Not the wish but the want, not the desire but the deficiency, not the craving but the crudeness, is the ground of my premonition. The wish may be only a symptom, and it may change to-morrow for another symptom; but the want is the disease, and to the want belongs the promise.

And now I come to a crucial question—a question which is supposed to press with special discomfort on the present age. Is it scientifically possible that Nature should respond to the needs of one of its members? The religious mind would put the question in four words, Can God answer prayer? But we have no right to assume that the religious mind is the questioner. It is no longer alone in the temple of God that men inquire. It is no longer merely within the sanctuary that we seek the solution of mysteries. Like the patriarch of old we have stood under the stars of heaven and said, “*This* is none other than the house of God!” We have proposed to bring everything within the test of the visible, to judge all things by their conformity to natural law. Accordingly, I have put the question in the language of the twentieth century. Looking upon Nature as a vitalized organism, and considering men and women as individual members of that organism, I ask, Is it scientifically possible to believe that the conscious need, or prayer, of one of these members should receive an answer from the organic life of Nature?

And the reply I should give is this, It *must* be scientifically possible since, under scientific conditions, it happens every day. As a matter of simple fact, there is conducted by the physical forces a process by which the needs of dilapidated

members are signalled to and answered by the sound part of the organism. Have you ever considered in terms of science the phenomenon called human benevolence? Of course we all know how to describe it in terms of feeling. From that side it seems a most *unscientific* process. I am suffering hunger; I utter a cry of pain; you overhear that cry and send me succour. To a man who witnessed the phenomenon for the first time it would have all the mystery that the shooting of a man by a pistol had to Mr. Rider Haggard's savage; there was, he said, a speaking tube in the distance, and, as it spoke, the man fell. Quite in the same manner, to appearance, we are all in turn shot by the pistol of human prayer; the self-life is killed out of us without any visible contact with the suppliant. But now look at the scientific side. This cry for sympathy, this answer of sympathy, does *not* move through blank space. It is not an interference with natural law. It does not act by pushing aside the forces of Nature; it works *by* the forces of Nature. It does not neglect a single stage of the physical process; it moves upon lines as mechanical as those traversed by the steam engine. If a spectator of the working brain were possible, he would tell us that these answers to prayer called almsgivings have violated no dictum of science. He would tell us that prayer and response alike have been transmitted by the nerves of motion and borne on the waves of ether. He would trace the special wires on which the message travelled, would count the number of the nerve vibrations, would calculate the time required for a reply by estimating the strength of the ethereal current. He would demonstrate, in a word, that the organic life of Nature had responded through its own laws to the cry of one of its weakest members.

Do not say that to quote a human answer to prayer in proof of its Divine possibility is to reason from analogy. It is not; it is to reason from fact. If a savage says, "I

believe in the possibility of death because I have seen the sun go down," that is an argument from analogy. But if he says, "I believe in the possibility of death because I have lost by death three friends this week," that is not an argument from analogy; it is the most perfect of syllogisms. And that is *our* syllogism. We say: There is evidence that part of the organic life we call Nature does actually respond to the needs of another part. We have proof that in this act of helpfulness, so far from interfering with the natural forces, it makes direct use of these forces—utilizes the existing order of things. Shall not that which is proved in the part be possible in the whole! If through these laws, recognized by science, I can receive help from a section of the organism, does it not become a scientific possibility that, through the same laws of Nature, I might receive help from the *entire* organism—from that Primal Force, called by what name you will, which works at the base of all things! Nay, ought there not to be *less* barrier to the whole than to the part. The Primal Force must be—what none of the other forces is—free, spontaneous, untrammelled, the originator of independent movement. I have not the slightest scientific doubt that to the Primal Force each moment is a moment of re-creation—a moment in which the parts are constituted anew. If it be so, then the action of the part is already the act of the Whole, and Man's answer to the needs of Man becomes a phase of the response of God.

And I cannot but observe how this latter view is the view both of the Jewish and of the Christian Scriptures. The Old Testament is a ministry of *angels*. It is a vicarious government of God in which He elects to act through others. It is the creature that is sent to the *help* of the creature. One would imagine that the Divine fire would itself have been the immediate support of the fainting Elijah. Not so says the narrative: it is an *angel* that

strengthens him, and it is with earthly, not heavenly bread. Then with the New Testament there is a change of government; the ministry is *taken from* the angels. But it is not taken from the angels to be directly resumed by the Father. No, it is transferred to humanity. "The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into *His* hand." What does that mean? That Humanitarianism is to take the place of Celestialism, that *Man* is to become his brother's keeper. The angelic ministry is transferred to the human soul. In a more pronounced sense, it is again the creature helping the creature. Whence this early reverence of men for a vicarious answer to prayer—an answer through the lips of emissaries? Was it because they thought of God as overburdened with His universe? On the contrary, the essence of their creed was, "He fainteth not, neither is weary." But I think they had a deep motive for preferring an answer through the creature—a motive in which modern times will fully share. It was because they felt that miraculous help would kill charity. They saw that if God spoke directly, man would not speak at all. They recognized that to a human soul the serving was of more value than the service, and that the greatest gift which the Father can bestow is the gift of a brother's sympathy.

Therefore these men felt, and we feel with them, that the great Primal Force is most glorified when it acts through the human forces. If I had the power of answering prayer, I should prefer the vicarious mode. I would rather heal disease by suggesting a remedy to the mind of a doctor than by sweeping the malady away. I would rather cure the pestilence by the plan of sanitation than stamp it out by imperative command. I would rather relieve the famine through the work of human hands than shower down streams of manna from the heights of heaven. The former course would be greater, diviner. I should choose it on the same principle that the long

road was chosen to the land of Canaan. It would require more time. It would employ more hands. It would exercise more hearts. It would elicit more enthusiasms. It would supplement the gift of benefits by the richer gift of kindness, and identify the answer to prayer with the practice of human altruism.

G. MATHESON.

RECENT NEW TESTAMENT CRITICISM.

VI.

"NUNQUAM SIC LOCUTUS EST HOMO."

JESUS is by universal consent the greatest of religious teachers. "Never did man speak thus" was the testimony of the servants of the Sanhedrin (John vii. 46); and when He preached in the synagogue of Nazareth, "they all bare witness unto Him, and marvelled at the words of grace that proceeded out of His mouth" (Luke iv. 22). Nor is the modern world less lavish of applause, anxious often, one might imagine, to atone for lack of faith by excess of admiration. "'Christianity,'" Rénan writes,¹ "has become almost a synonym of 'religion.' All that is done outside of this great and good Christian tradition is barren. Jesus gave religion to humanity as Socrates gave it philosophy and Aristotle science. There was philosophy before Socrates and science before Aristotle. Since Socrates and since Aristotle philosophy and science have made immense progress; but all has been built upon the foundation which they laid. In the same way, before Jesus religious thought had passed through many revolutions; since Jesus it has made great conquests: but no one has improved, and no one will improve, upon the

¹ *Vie de Jésus*, xxviii.