

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 *Bibliotheca Sacra* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_bib-sacra_01.php

ARTICLE IV.

CHRISTIANITY AND THE EVOLUTION OF
RATIONAL LIFE.A STATEMENT MADE ON SOLICITATION OF THE LATE
GEORGE H. ROMANES.

BY THE REV. JOHN T. GULICK, PH. D.

[The author says of the following article, that it "was not written with any thought of publication, but simply as a reply by letter to a correspondent who asked 'On what lines of Christian evidence do you mainly rely?' and saying that his own belief had been shattered by what seemed to him overpowering assaults from the side of rationality." He is willing, however, to have it published in the *BIBLIOTHECA SACRA*. The interest and value of it is greatly enhanced when it is known that the person who solicited the statement was the distinguished George H. Romanes, late editor of *Nature* (the principal scientific periodical of England), and that this reply, with the distinguished savant's personal acquaintance with Mr. Gulick, was among the prominent influences which led to Mr. Romanes' substantial return to the Christian faith.¹

It will naturally be asked, How did this intimate acquaintance spring up between Mr. Romanes, the recognized expounder of Darwinism after Darwin's death, and Mr. Gulick, the obscure missionary in foreign lands? The answer is a most comforting one to those whose lot is cast in apparent obscurity, and who are tempted to lament that their lamp is hid under a bushel; for, in what we are here to relate, there is a striking illustration, that, under the direction of an all-wise Providence, there is no such thing as obscurity. Like their Master, the true servants of Christ, wherever they are, are doing a work which cannot be hid.

Mr. Gulick was born of missionary parents, in the Sandwich Islands, and was for some time himself a missionary there, though later he has been assigned a field in Japan. While in the Sandwich Islands he occupied his spare time in making an exhaustive study of the land mollusks of the archipelago. As the immediate result of this work, carried on for many years, numerous articles were published by Mr. Gulick in the scientific journals, beginning with one entitled "The Variation of Species as related to their Geographical Distribution, illustrated by the Achatinell-

¹ See review of Romanes' Thoughts on Religion, in the *Bibliotheca Sacra* for July, 1895, pp. 572, 573.

linae," published in *Nature*, July 18, 1872, in which it was demonstrated that "the degrees of divergence between nearly allied forms are roughly measured by the number of miles by which they are separated, and in the fact that this correspondence between the ratios of distance and the ratios of divergence is not perceptibly disturbed by passing over the crest of the island into a region where the rainfall is much heavier, and still further in the fact that the average size of the areas occupied by the species of any group varies, as we pass from group to group, according as the habits of the group are more or less favorable to migration. I perceived that these facts could all be harmonized by assuming that there is some cause of divergence more constant and potent than differences in nature external to the organism; and that the influence of this cause was roughly measured by the time and degree of separation."

Without mentioning others which intervened, we notice finally two, filling one hundred and fifty closely printed pages of the *Linnaean Journal*, published in London in 1887 and 1889. The first of these is entitled "Divergent Evolution through Cumulative Segregation," and was presented to the society by Alfred W. Wallace, F. L. S. The second is entitled "Intensive Segregation, or Divergence through Independent Transformation," and was presented by W. Percy Sladen, F. L. S.

The main conclusions established by these investigations are embodied in the two following propositions:—

1st. "*Divergent Evolution does not necessarily depend on either change in or change of the environment.*"

2d. "*The average radius of distribution for species of the same value in different groups of closely allied species varies in the different groups directly as the power and opportunity for migrating, and inversely as the plasticity and variability of the several groups.*"

Those familiar with recent Darwinian literature will readily see in these propositions (which were abundantly supported by the facts collected by Mr. Gulick) a far-reaching argument both for Darwinism and for Theism, for they rule chance out of the problem, and reveal a law whose source is invisible but all-powerful, and which can be no other than the eternal, omnipotent fountain of all orderly movement.

The tribute which Mr. Romanes paid to Mr. Gulick is most remarkable, and should be prefixed to the communication drawn by him from his admired missionary friend and which we here print for the first time. In publishing an article of Mr. Gulick's, which appeared in *Nature* in the issue for April 10, 1890, Mr. Romanes writes as follows: "I cannot allow the present communication to appear in these columns without again recording my conviction that the writer is the most profound of living thinkers upon Darwinian topics, and that the generalizations which have been reached by his twenty years of thought are of more importance to the theory of evolution than any that have been published during the post-Darwinian period."—E.D.S.]

MAN is rational and he finds himself part of a universe that is capable of being interpreted and used by reason. The arts and sciences, through which his power is constantly advancing, are proofs that he is justified in the assumption that every part of the universe is constructed on principles that will yield an ever expanding meaning to his search for unity, law, and order. The progress of science rests on man's faith that he cannot be wrong in applying this assumption to new realms; and the rationality of the assumption is justified by the result. But rationality includes not only the adjusting of means, but the weighing and choosing of ends;—not only intelligence, but morality; not only knowledge, but love guiding in the use of knowledge. Man finds himself part of a social system in which regard for the good of all is the guiding principle that brings order out of confusion. The history of social evolution shows that, in proportion as man gains faith in this principle, and applies it intelligently to wider groups of society and to each and all of the relations of social organization, in that proportion has he advanced in happiness and dignity.

We also find that a very large share of this advancement has been due to Christianity. Though other systems of teaching have dimly apprehended the ideal, they have none of them been able to inspire men with new motives that are able to hold the brutal tendencies of the race strongly in check. In populous regions there seems to have been a slow biological evolution through which altruistic instincts have gained increasing force; but no power outside of Christianity seems able to take man as he is, in any and every land, and set him on a new course. The cause of this wonderful power in Christianity seems to lie in its ability to assure men of the fatherhood of God as well as of the brotherhood of man. Indeed, judging from my own experience and from what I have observed in China and Japan, it seems as if a strong hold on the latter idea, such as will awaken the enthusiasm of humanity, is attained only by those who are filled with the former idea.

It should also be said that a strong sense of God's love does not remain with the man who refuses to love his neighbor.

Science rests on the assumption that unity, order, and law pervade the universe. Morality rests on the assumption that the obligations of benevolence are a reality, extending to the uttermost bounds of our influence. Religion rests on the assumption that power, wisdom, and love underlie the foundations of the universe. The first is the condition for any rational use of means, methods, and opportunities; the second is the condition for wisdom in the choice of ends and in the regulating of our lives; the third is the necessary condition for courage, confidence, and joy in realizing the two previous conditions. There is also an interdependence between the first and second conditions which seems to make it necessary that they should advance together. An individual may indeed be skillful in the use of means without listening to the dictates of morality, but a community without morality will relapse into barbarism, losing the sciences and arts they once possessed.

But is it wise, is it rational, to act on these assumptions before we prove that they are in accordance with fact? I believe it is. This is, it seems to me, just what rational man has always done, in some degree; and I believe he will always have to, unless he abandons rational life. Does not the very essence of rational life lie in conscious or unconscious acceptance of these higher postulates? Irrational creatures, as well as man, put faith in the reality of the objects revealed by their senses, though the only proof that the assumption is not a delusion is that it works well in serving the purposes of life, and that the knowledge derived from different senses is harmonious. Now, it seems to me that confidence in the postulates of our reason is justified in the same way. They are necessary to the continuance of rational life. They give vigor, enthusiasm, and joy to life; and they bring all parts of our knowledge into a harmonious whole.

Again it may be asked, Are not the first two of these postulates sufficient without the last? And does the last stand on as sure a basis as the other two? It seems to me that the three are inseparably connected. The last is an implicit assumption underlying the two previous assumptions. Rational man is the fruit of nature, and the nature that bore him everywhere responds to his reason. When reason is the interpreter of such a universe, will it not find reason as the interpretation? What can be more rational than to believe that the nature of the universe is rooted in reason?¹ But a full answer to these two questions can be reached only by a careful study of the evolution of rational life, a subject which may be pursued in a thousand different ways, and concerning which I can make only a few suggestions. To give definiteness to our investigations we need to take actual cases. We need to observe the influence of systems of thought that have shaped the lives of individuals or nations. What systems have done the most to invigorate rational life? Which ones have shown the most power in restoring to rationality those who were wasting their own energies, and bringing ruin to others? I am sure Christianity could not retain its hold on the modern world, any more than Buddhism, if it did not show superior power in elevating the lives of men.

But the great power of Christianity lies in the direct effects of the character of Christ. His influence on the world is due not only to his elevated conception of the fatherhood of God, but to the new aspirations awakened by his realization of the most exalted life and his promises to lead others to the attainment of a similar life, in their devotion to him and to the kingdom of God which he establishes on earth. This kingdom of God is a kingdom of love, which he assures us is to spread its influence into all lands; "for the meek shall inherit the earth." Not only has Christ become a leading factor in

¹ For a fuller statement, see Dr. A. M. Fairbairn's *City of God* (2d edition), pp. 66-74.

the evolution of society, but, in the survival of the meek and the righteous he has opened to us the philosophy of this higher evolution, and the truth of the philosophy is sustained by the gradual fulfilment of the predictions based on the philosophy.

Concerning the nature of Christ's authority, and the ground on which he makes such great promises, and assumes such absolute leadership, I try simply to understand what he claims for himself. Though the most humble of men, he assumes greater authority than any other teacher ever thought of assuming. His life and its influence on the world seem to me as unique as his death and resurrection. Each sustains the other, and the harmony and consistency of the whole seem to me unlike the fabrications of the myth-making faculty or the productions of idealizing art. An extraordinary life may be the occasion for myths attempting to explain that life; but it is entirely incredible that myths and subjective delusions should originate a character on a wholly new range of thought, and then give it power to transform, first the original subjects of the delusion, making them consistent and persistent witnesses and martyrs, and then through them the whole structure of society. But, although the lives of his disciples show that they were moved by the deepest conviction of the reality of what they have told us about him, we must remember that their method of describing events is necessarily shaped in many respects by the ideas of the time; when, for example, we read that the waters of a pool with curative powers were at intervals moved by an angel, I have no difficulty in supposing that it was an intermittent spring; and when mention is made of people possessed by devils, I believe them to have been what we now call epileptics, or hypnotics, or insane people. Making allowance, however, for the fact that the very names of things sometimes express the causes to which popular belief attributes them, we find that the records of Christ's life are chiefly the simplest possible recitals of what he did and

said, with only the briefest references to the explanation of the facts. And of the facts recorded, nearly all relate to the last three years of his life. Passing by all explanations of the nature of his life, and giving attention simply to the main facts of these three years and to their influence on those who were with Him, and through them, on the world, we are brought to the irresistible conclusion that he was a new type of man, possessed of a character of complete devotion to the good of others, and of unparalleled power in transforming and elevating the lives of others. In biological evolution a new type has influence only as its offspring multiply to the exclusion of other types; but, in rational evolution, a new character may propagate itself by transforming other types into more or less conformity to its own standards without any infusion of new blood. This is the method of Christ's influence on the world. In the language of the New Testament it is called, giving power to become the sons of God.

In closing, I may say, that our philosophical explanations undergo transformation, but the great facts of Christianity seem to me to remain untouched.