

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 X.

EVOLUTION AND THE MIRACULOUS.¹

BY PROFESSOR GABRIEL CAMPBELL, HANOVER, NEW HAMPSHIRE.

IN large measure, Philosophy has to do with open questions; indeed, with discussions which there appears no prospect of closing. Here evidently a necessity is upon us. The limitations of our knowledge require us to act, to practise, although we cannot perfectly interpret. Our latest advances in self-consciousness lead us to emphasize belief as justifiable working process.² Kant's Practical Reason is, in the main, a determination of postulates in what we irresistibly believe, and yet cannot theoretically know. Could our present "pragmatic" reasoning reach a unity in its wide diversity of teaching, it would no doubt prove to be outcome more or less of Kant's valuation of practice as surmounting our theoretical intellection.

One of the most difficult, not to say important, of the open questions at the present time concerns the rational validation of the Miraculous. Our decision of this question will depend upon conclusions in several widely extended fields.

Notwithstanding difficulties, let us endeavor to grasp essentials and ascertain valid inferences. Perhaps the most popular

¹ This paper was part of the program of the American Philosophical Association at its annual meeting at Cornell University, December 26-28, 1907.

² For instance, the Presidential Address of Professor John Dewey on "Beliefs and Realities" at the annual meeting of the American Philosophical Association at Harvard University, Philosophical Review for March, 1906.

objection to acceptance of the miraculous is the claim that recent science has cleared away old-fashioned notions, delivering us from fraud and superstition, and establishing religious truth on a sound basis of facts. Science, of course, does not compass all truth. Physics still finds her problems vanishing in metaphysics. The natural looks beyond to the supernatural. We shall best avoid confusion by confining our discussion to recent advancement, and attending at once to the inquiry,

WHAT IS EVOLUTION?

The term "evolution" is not restricted to a technical, defined import. It designates the cosmic process as recognized by our modern scholars in their field work. At the same time it has a philosophic as well as a scientific bearing. Indeed, the evolution theory is not so much a recent discovery as an idea which has itself been evolved in the course of ages. From the earliest times man's studies of nature have involved a theory of progress, of development. Heraclitus declared that permanence is an illusion. Aristotle's familiar comparison of this law of progression in the world to the steps of a ladder was never more suggestive than at the present hour. Let us characterize evolution, then, as the highest critical method, philosophical as well as scientific, by which the world, non-living as well as living, may be estimated.

Perhaps the most noticeable effect of the acceptance of Evolutionism has been the displacement of the idea of fixity. Species had been regarded as permanent and independent. Their production was held to be a matter of specific fiat. Under tenets of evolution, species appear as result of a gradual development, in which selective processes were determinative of the mastery of environing conditions, and, as consequence, of survival in case of those fitted to hold their own and perpet-

uate themselves. As a result, the watchword of the developmental method became variation, instead of fixation. Indeed, so facile did nature prove to be, in her manifold variations, that it has not been possible to compute in advance what definite result would appear. According to Weismann, even germinal selections must be recognized; and our knowledge of the germinal is far from complete. Perhaps it will never be so perfect that we can predict the exact variation. Our theory compels us to assume that species as distinct from temporary varieties have been evolved. What the precise cause of this evolving is we cannot yet discover. Much less can we produce what is veritable species as distinguished from variety. It remains to be seen whether De Vries has evolved any variety which will take its place as new species.¹ If such should be the case he has, no doubt, builded better than he knew, utilizing causes he did not completely comprehend. We assume, however, that the method of development is adequate to explain all changes, that all results involve causation, nature being susceptible of variation, under latent causes, beyond the limit of our accredited scientific knowledge.

In characterizing the world process as an evolving, we do not thereby assume that the process has evolved itself. Darwin was quick to recognize that creation was not displaced by evolution. Indeed, the transcendent glory of the method in its results would necessarily argue the equal glory of its origin. The demand for an originator, all-wise, all-powerful, omnipresent, is only enlarged. The glory of the producer must develop with the glory of the product. Men should not be dazed by the supernal brilliance of the cosmic, and

¹ *Experimental Evolution*, by Henry De Varigny, Demonstrator in the Paris Museum d'Histoire Naturelle, page 256. See also Professor Howison's *Limits of Evolution*.

as consequence overlook the supernal Cause. This brings us, then, immediately to the inquiry as to origin. What is a satisfactory interpretation of the cause, the First Cause? Or, more concretely, we come to the question,

WHAT IS GOD?

Here, of course, we must proceed modestly. It remains as true to-day as in the olden time that no man can find out God to perfection.¹ The finding of God is, and is to be, the transcending task of our mental evolution. Let us not, however, underestimate our powers. We should avoid folding our hands and saying, God is unknowable, and, at the same time, confessing ourselves bound to assert what can only be cogently interpreted as progress in the ascertainment of the sovereign ruler of all events. Herbert Spencer could be quite dogmatic in declaring we cannot know God. At the same time he is led to acknowledge attributes of the Eternal Energy which largely substantiate ordinary theistic ideation.² There is extensively current at the present time the claim that God is immanent, so thoroughly identified with the universe as to be indistinguishable. Of course the Supreme Being is omnipresent. We cannot conceive him so limited as to be put into a corner, or seated on a throne, and, in any respect at any point, *in absentia*.

If we regard Him as bound by necessities, where does Necessity find its binding law? God as First Cause cannot be secondary. If any perfection develops in results, perfection at least equal must be resident in the causal. Is any finite being free, God the infinite must be equally free. Do not space and time as aspects of reality simply validate for us the fact

¹ Job xi. 7.

² See article "Herbert Spencer, the Apostle of Agnosticism," *Bibliotheca Sacra*, vol. lxii. (1905) pp. 304-322; also article "Caldwell, the Critic of Agnosticism," vol. lviii. (1901) pp. 580-586.

that something exists everywhere and always? The very thought of causation under evolution carries with it the postulate of adequate origin. The more perfect and potent the source of all energy, the more facile must be his execution. An infinite God can accomplish results with infinite ease. May we not say that his capacity to develop variations exceeds our ken unlimitedly? Let us avoid putting finite measures upon an infinite sovereign. If our Agnosticism tends to Gnosticism, let us keep our Gnosticism sane and workable.

And this will apply to affection as well as to intellection. Unmeasured perfectness doubtless involves unmeasured capacity to love. If love develops in human creatures, how veritably must it dwell in the all-sufficient Producer! Pity, mercy, love; surely these are the transcending attributes of the All-Father, whose children we assuredly are. If we in affection give gifts, how much more may He in whom is every resource. But it is answered, We admit that an infinitely perfect ruler could produce results even with comparative ease. As regards the miraculous, however, we fail to see the necessity for interference. Here the sufficient reason will depend mainly on the question,

WHAT IS MAN?

Is man simply an animal, creature of envioning conditions, or may he, does he, rise above his surroundings, and become sovereign over them? Let us inquire diligently. Can we not trace the evolution of freedom, yes of the consciousness of freedom? What is this struggle for liberty whose history fills to so large extent the literature, fittest to survive, of advancing civilization? Freedom, "the battle-cry of freedom," has been the inspiration of orator and poet, not to say the shout and song of thousands, tens of thousands, who "rally round the flag," chanting, "Let us die to make men free." "Glory,

Hallelujah." Moreover, the question of free choosing decides man's guilt or innocence before a jury of his peers. Courts of justice are developed on the basal fact that, as long as a man is sane and free, he is responsible for his deeds. As well in the moral world, it is our choices under free will that determine our consciences to condemn or justify. And our compunctions have more of the scathing of a fiery furnace if we find that we have freely travestied the perfect law of a God of perfect justice and affection. Evidently we are free to pervert ourselves beyond limit.

This brings us to inquire further as to man's future. How is he related to the eternal? Is man free to perfect or mar an endless destiny beyond limit? Under habituation he is manifestly builder of abiding results. What about his "restless longing after immortality"? Why does conscience "make cowards of us all"? Is it possible for man to develop permanent impairment? Here we encounter the evolution of man as the religious animal.¹ Is it not man as immortal and free that calls upon a Divine helper? Free and immortal, but with limited knowledge, man appreciates his dependence as deeply as his independence. He becomes conscious that he cannot avoid penalties of his free choosing. Man's eye flashes through illimitable space. He contemplates time as unbeginning and unending. His intellection rises and embraces the celestial. He gains the matchless vision of a helper infinite and divine. His aspirations for the Perfect may be satisfied. He may possess a heavenly kingdom. Yes, he may become a total wreck. Such is the potency, the promise, the peril, of man, the transcendent evolution,

¹Die Entwicklung des religiösen Bewusstseins der Menschheit, Von Professor Dr. A. Lasson. Philosophische Vorträge herausgegeben von der Philosophischen Gesellschaft zu Berlin. Neue Folge. 3 Heft.

“Created half to rise and half to fall;
Great lord of all things, yet a prey to all;
Sole judge of truth, in endless error hurled;
The glory, jest and riddle of the world.”

Before attaining a correct inference as to the miraculous, we must furthermore answer the inquiry,

WHAT IS A MIRACLE?

Miracle does not imply simply what is wonderful, admirable; it has definite reference to what is beyond, beyond the natural. Inasmuch as the field of nature is imperfectly understood, it is impossible to ascertain scientifically where or when the supernatural begins. This, of course, makes the interpretation all the more difficult, and calls for inferences that are most carefully weighed, most securely founded. Still, possibility of deception does not displace a fact. The existence of counterfeit money may be an inevitable outcome of our financial system; indeed, the counterfeit may exist in large amount. Yet this does not prove the non-existence of the genuine article. The very upcoming of the counterfeit depends upon the valid reality of the genuine. However multitudinous the claims of the pseudo-miraculous, the valid reality of the veritable miracle abides, abides undispossessed.

Furthermore, we recognize the miracle not as merely supernatural, but as definitized working of a perfect God, a God who makes himself accessible to his children. Earthly parents heed requests of their little ones, proffer gifts as result of request. Surely the Heavenly parent is not less free and gracious than the earthly. Kant, contemplating religion on a purely rational basis, maintains that all men are inspired more or less. It was one of our science leaders (Tyndall) who declared that the Divine Presence affects him most when his mind is clearest. Indeed, man as rational develops under the

inspiration of prayer. In all lands, in all ages, men have appealed to the power that overrules. They have been satisfied that God hears and answers.

From the answering of prayer to the working of the miracle we pass on by indiscernible gradations. Indeed, the objection to the miracle is involved in our recognition of prayer. How far does God accomplish results in answer to man's petition? It is impossible to determine. While we declare all results traceable to uniform causation, we cannot exclude the possibility of higher laws, higher causes. To say God cannot, is to overlook the infinite faculty of a perfect Ruler. It is to decide that the rational praying creature is deceived as to his reception of Divine guidance and gifts. It is to assume that our knowledge of the world does not permit the development of higher harmonies. It is to disparage the glory of an unlimited God.

And the miracle is but the further proceeding of inscrutable wisdom. The ongoing of nature we have not fully interpreted.¹ To Huxley the cosmic field presented miracles on every hand. There indeed the silent miracle may go on from hour to hour. God is not limited by our ignorance. His freedom to vary his universe is unbounded. We must inquire further, however, as to whether we can see a reason, a sufficient reason, for God's interference. What can we infer as to the

NECESSITY FOR THE MIRACULOUS?

As we have already noted, our greatest modern thinker maintains that men in perfect obedience see for themselves. Aristotle, however, had declared that no man reaches the perfection for which he is empowered. We find, furthermore, that lack of perfect obedience develops incapacity, even depri-

¹ See a suggestive article by Professor Greene, "The Relation of the Miracle to Nature," in the *Bibliotheca Sacra* for July, 1906.

vation of vision. Indeed, the Greeks signally failed to interpret and realize the one Divine Being idealized and realized by Aristotle. Stoics and Epicureans represent a retrogression. The polytheistic pantheon, it is true, has vanished from Olympus, from sky, and earth and sea, but the one recognized reason that rules is, according to the Stoic, impersonal, certainly unpaternal; while the recognition of a future life has well nigh ceased to be.

As to general ethnic evolution, in ancient Egypt the intellection of one supreme Divine being everywhere existent and paternal did not reach full completeness. The emphasis on future life seemed to develop for a time, but on low range. In China, the impersonal reason was an unforgiving, all-powerful, far-away agency, the idea of existence in the future having evidently a minimum expansion. In India, the recognition of one personal supreme God was but dubiously evolved. The acme of individual immortality was *Nirvana*, the happy negation, the absorption of the personality in all-controlling essence. Even under the Judaic dispensation, if we acknowledge complete monotheism, the one God rules rather as a king than as a father, and the future life was claimed for the regimen, an eternal Jewish kingdom, rather than for the individual.

In the arena of philosophy we still see the inadequacy of the philosophic in the thought and life of men. At the zenith of development in the ancient world, Plato gives us immortality as ideal rather than real. His ideation failed to take possession of the psychic energies even of the Greeks. Similarly, in our modern time, Kant's well-known claim that the postulate of immortality resides irresistible in the human soul has commanded the admiring recognition of able thinkers, but has signally failed to inspire the working forces in practical life.

As to the field of science, modern science, science in the

light of evolution, have we here adequate solutions? If science says, God is unknowable, we will simply acknowledge that science has reached no final analysis of the eternal energy. A first cause is not determinable by man's finite measuring. As for the eternal energy, science is dubiously certain that man rises to fully fledged participation, personal immortality. Finally, mayhap science will be able to discover adequate evidences of man's evolution into such perfect and permanent regimen. Thus far, however, her limitations do not admit the all-sufficient proofs that can satisfy. While then we acknowledge progress, much progress, in the arena of science, we must as well acknowledge her failure to substantiate. God as a paternal sovereign, freedom as a fact verified by empirical discovery, immortality as outcome of science-intellection, remain still among the veiled mysteries which our modern evolutionism is striving to resolve.

In the meantime, a freedom which is perfectly safe and saving, freedom indeed; a God who is love and truth, ready to rescue where freedom has dethroned itself; and an immortal life in which man reaches the ultimatum of perfect development, free divine sonship,—these we must still reach and verify elsewhere. Man in his freedom and longings and failures requires light. His independence may become self-destructive. Light for a struggling world is demanded. If there is any such realization as perfect peace, man needs intelligence from beyond the fields of science. Has such miraculous verification been supplied?

HISTORICAL VALIDATION.

The ethnic religions evidently failed to satisfy the demands of advancing civilization. They failed to develop a life of the highest order, a life able to maintain itself in a solidarity of the

free and the Good. With the collapse of the Greek and Roman civilization came a leader who announced that peace and goodwill were still possible on earth. At the same time, while a kingship of righteousness is to dominate from sea to sea, he declares that his "Kingdom is not of this world." He preaches glad tidings, saying, Blessed, Blessed, proclaiming the highest and the truest freedom, that a God of infinite love offers salvation to blind, lost men, and that an eternal life is an absolute reality. "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father"; "Because I live, ye shall live also"; "I am the light of the world." He evidently speaks with authority. God is "manifest in the flesh." How did Christ verify his claims? By his wondrous works he made adequate proof of his divine mission. By miracles he established his teaching. A ruler of the Jews echoed the general conviction,¹ No man can perform these miracles "except God be with him." "The Word was God." The miracles were sufficiently numerous, were unmistakably public, and representative of Divine beneficence. Fatherhood of God and sonship of men are declared and, as far as possible, substantiated. Eternal life, conquering the grave, is sufficiently proven by the miraculous rising of the Divine teacher.

Now what can be said of the validity of these claims and proofs? Of course, there were those who doubted, who rejected at the time. The Christ was crucified. This, however, only gave best opportunity to demonstrate his triumph, triumph over death. We have written testimony of impartial witnesses. The records have been subjected to criticism, to destructive criticism. But clearly the constructive critics are able to hold the field.² Hume in the name of empirical phi-

¹ John iii. 2.

² See articles by a famous critical authority in archæology, Dr. Emil Reich, on the Bankruptcy of the Higher Criticism, in the *Contemporary Review* for 1905 and 1906.

losophy has pronounced the miracle unprovable. If we depend on empirical investigation alone, as we have seen, Hume is correct. Validation does not come through ordinary experiment. It has been claimed by Strauss and Renan that the supernatural in Christianity can be accounted for as delusion, on a merely mythical basis. Strauss, however, failed to convince the solid thinkers of Germany.¹ He did succeed in dividing the Hegelian school, the most noted school of philosophy in modern times. The Left Wing, following Strauss, declares the very idea of a miracle irrational. The Right Wing, however, is not prepared to set aside the miraculous on *a priori* grounds. They find the historic proofs as satisfactory as the accepted proofs that verify history in general,² and recognize no valid reason for regarding these verities as insubstantial.

But preëminently do we find valid evidence of Christ's infallible teaching in the evolution of modern civilization, Christian civilization. The truth is making men truly free. The precepts of the cross-bearing Christ, the risen Christ, have become the leaven of the most enlightened nations. Love, self-sacrifice, righteousness, are giving increasing power to those who lead. The dawn of the kingship of the heavenly becomes unmistakable. The Prince of peace is taking the throne. His followers bring hope and joy to a needy world. The old civilizations, the old religions, fail as they compete. By their fruits they are known. In the words of Professor Wright, who is a thoroughly critical scholar in both science and religion: "The historical proof of Christianity rests upon a much firmer basis than can be found underneath the great

¹ See his expression of deep disappointment in his later volume, *The Old Faith and the New*.

² Dorner, *Christology*.

mass of beliefs which inspire and direct the general activities of the human race. To abandon, for hypercritical reasons, our belief in the main correctness of the original documents of Christianity which have come down to us from the first century is to cut loose from the line of historical progress, and unnecessarily doom ourselves to spiritual death by a slow process of mental starvation.”¹

FINAL EVIDENCE.

Our latest science is far from being purely negative in regard to what is beyond its limits. Many men of science are larger, greater, than science. They recognize with reverence what overpasses discovery. Their logic involves axioms of universal validity. Even would-be agnosticism, which proclaims the unknowable, is truly though unconsciously agnostic as to its assumption to know, to know absolutely, the limits of man's intellection. In the evolution of religion, man, approaching the zenith of his development, becomes increasingly rational and realistic in his interpretation of transcendent facts. His theistic ideas attain validation more and more.² The higher felicity which could revel as it would “mingle with the universe” (Byron) becomes highest felicity as man finds that he may become one with the Ruler of the universe.

Man, in the arena of science, worships and serves none the less devoutly and fervently because he appreciates that an infinite God cannot be absolutely interpreted. Indeed, even common finite objects are not knowable perfectly. If man cannot know perfectly, he may recognize sufficiently, glorying in his progress as he reaches the unspeakably adorable source of his

¹G. Frederick Wright, *Scientific Aspects of Christian Evidences*, page 350.

²For a discussion of moral freedom under divine law, see *Religion and Science*, by Joseph Le Conte, page 292.

being. He thus determines for himself increasingly the spiritual realities that are evolved for his higher vision, and which are not attained by the vision of the undeveloped underling. Man's godlike possibilities thus emerge into consciousness. Sonship with the Divine, partnership with the eternal, sovereignty evolving through service,—these are the potencies which verify themselves as man rises to the attainments of an unlimited progression. By participation in highest things, spiritual discerning, men realize, actualize, the words of the Nazarene, "Ye shall know the truth." Yes, the evidences of immortality develop in consciousness more and more. The clearest, finest minds become most appreciative of conscious unity with the everlasting Father. Christ's teachings, his claims, his miraculous works, have all the verification that is required.