

# 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 Churchman* can be found here:

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_churchman\\_os.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php)

THE  
CHURCHMAN

---

OCTOBER, 1890.

---

ART. I.—THE GOD OF THE BIBLE AND THE GOD OF  
NATURE ONE.

THE question which really underlies much of the confused and uncertain thought of the present day is whether the God of the Bible is the God of nature and the God of nature the God of the Bible. Can the God of nature possibly be the God who claims to have spoken by the Bible? It is no part of my present duty to show that the Bible claims to be the revelation of a God; if it does not do so, there can be no meaning in language. The Old Testament most distinctly professes to be the record of the way in which Jehovah dealt with His people, and the New Testament no less distinctly claims to be a record of certain acts and events which had the special sanction of the ultimate God. If in either case this is not so, then I repeat there can be no faith in the meaning of words at all. It sometimes has been maintained that the Jehovah of the Old Testament was nothing more than the local God of the Jews; that what is referred to Him must be regarded merely as representing their conceptions of their national deity, whom they naturally preferred and placed above all other gods; indeed, we have such confessions as "The Lord (Jehovah) is a great God, and a great King above all gods," which is capable of being perverted into the statement that Jehovah is the greatest among gods—one among many, of whom He is the first. It can hardly be necessary to show that such a statement as this was never intended to concede any standing-ground to the other gods with whom Jehovah is contrasted, but merely to affirm that when for the moment He is regarded in comparison with those whom the nations around worshipped, they shrink into nothing before Him.

The religion of Israel, if it was anything, was not only henotheistic, but monotheistic. They were not only worshippers of one god, but worshippers of one whom they believed and professed to be the only God. In times like those of the Old Testament, when the thoughts of mankind were not perplexed by the philosophical aspect of religious belief, but only by its bearing upon action, it was more natural that they should proclaim that their God was greater and stronger than any other, than that they should trouble themselves about His nature.

The New Testament represents a later stage in the history of religious thought. The philosophers had long ago dealt with the nature of God, and it was no longer a question in the time of its writers as to who was the greatest or strongest of the gods, but whether or not the actions recorded were those of God, or whether He and His actions were to be alike rejected and disregarded. In our own days the matter is very different. Science has so entirely altered our conceptions of God, by enlarging and deepening the sphere of our observation, that what may have seemed to be compatible with His character at one time, or possibly not inconsistent with it now, strikes us as altogether unworthy of Him and totally irreconcilable with what we know or conceive of His character; and therefore while our knowledge of the God of the Bible remains very much what it was, our knowledge of the God of nature has expanded so indefinitely and so infinitely that the two seem to be inconsistent, if not in hopeless conflict, and, therefore, the question is only too likely to arise, Can the God of nature be the God of the Bible? is it possible that the revelation of the God of the Bible can be consistent with the revelation of the God of nature?

And this I repeat is practically *the* question of the present day, as it is destined to be more and more the question of the future. Every year, and almost every day, reveals to us more and more of the astounding wonders of nature; of the absolute infinitude of the realms of nature; of the exceeding subtlety of her methods of working. Year by year, and almost day by day, confronts us with some new and equally astounding theory as to the history and composition of the Scriptures, so that while our reverence for nature and our knowledge of the methods of nature is continually on the increase, greater and greater demands are continually being made on our faith in the intrinsic worth of Scripture as a record in itself, and consequently in its claim to be what we have traditionally received it as being: the special and unique revelation of the Most High.

Now, in all considerations of this kind there is one fundamental principle which we cannot too constantly bear in mind, as it is stated in the words of Hooker, that "truth of what kind soever can by no kind of truth be gainsaid," and not only so,

but that truth of what kind soever must be part of the essential revelation of God—that is to say, of God's revelation of Himself. The wonders of the telescope and the microscope are part of the revelation of God: they reveal the marvels of His creation and the subtlety of His methods of working; all the assured discoveries of astronomy and geology are part of the revelation of God: they declare the glory of God and reveal His handiwork; and all the discoveries of physiology and biology are part of the revelation of God, for they are glimpses, as it were, into the workshop of God, and show us the great Artificer Himself at work. If we reject the teaching of these we reject the teaching of God Himself just as effectually as the Jews rejected it. We must continually bear in mind, therefore, that the first essential of faith is that it is faith in truth as truth. It is absolutely impossible that truth should deceive us. We may be deceived by our notions about truth, but that is because we believe in our notions, and not in truth. It is the function of truth to substitute itself for and to displace our notions about it, for truth is and ever must be the revelation of the Supreme.

Now, science is the discovery of truth, and therefore science is the revelation of God, and the truer the discoveries of science are the greater is its revelation of God. But, then, science itself is only the revelation of a part of God, and therefore is only a partial revelation of God—though, as far as it goes, a true revelation. There is another revelation of God, with which science has nothing to do, and that is the phenomenal revelation of God. It is absurd to say that God is not revealed in His works as we see them. The works of God as we see them, apart altogether from any scientific knowledge of them, are part of the robe of God—they give Him in outline, and no more; but if they half conceal, they also half reveal Him as He is. For God assuredly is in the sunshine and the shower; He is in the wing of the butterfly and in the exquisite hues and the delicious scent of the lily and the rose; He is in the earthquake and the storm, in the many-twinkling smile of ocean, the thunders of the storm-lashed coast, and the solitary grandeur of the snow-capped peak. All these are parts of His ways, though, because they are but parts of His ways, we cannot understand them.

And as the scientific revelation of God is a partial revelation, so also is the phenomenal revelation of God a partial and incomplete revelation of God; each is a true revelation as far as it goes, but they are revelations of a different kind, and the second revelation is so multifarious and so conflicting that we may well say with the divine historian, "The Lord was not in the wind, the Lord was not in the earthquake, the Lord was not in the fire." The phenomenal revelation of God in nature fails utterly of itself to bring us to a true conception of Him, and it

may land us, as it has done of old, in the degrading imagination of fauns and satyrs—of Zeus, Bacchus, and Pomona; for of all worship a nature-worship is the most debasing and debased, however true it may be that nature is a revelation of God. The phenomenal revelation of God needs to be supplemented by the scientific revelation, even though the result of the process may be, as it not seldom is, the substitution of no God for the debased conception of gods many and lords many.

There is, however, yet another revelation of God, and this also is not only a partial revelation, but is also more perplexing than either of the last; and that is the revelation of God in history. The survey of the historical field from first to last is not less bewildering and confused than is the survey of the azure fields of heaven on a starlit night. We may discern constellations, but no plan. The constellations may be detected by a child, the plan is the laborious and ultimate achievement of science; but the astronomer does not doubt the existence of the plan, though it is only after long and patient study that it reveals itself to him. So likewise is it with the survey of history: we may easily detect constellations in it. There is the great Orion of the majestic Greek episode; there is the orderly arrangement of the Great Bear of the imperial Roman story; there are the tangled Pleiades and the Milky Way of the Hebrew history shining brightly in the sky and spanning the vault of heaven; but who shall weave all these alien and distinct constellations into one compact and luminous whole? It cannot be but that in their separate grandeur they reveal the glory of One who calleth them all by their names; but where is the map to show how they all combine and whither they all tend? God's hand is seen in history, but who shall read the record which he writes in it? Nay, who *can* read it? For the mysterious legend is not yet complete, and, even so far as the letters can be spelt out, we require a Daniel to interpret them to us. Verily, the revelation of God in history is the profoundest and most mysterious of all, and that because it points to another conception, or, so to say, department, of the character of God, namely, Providence, or the relation of God to the unfettered actions of the race of man, the very existence of which depends upon the nature and conception of the God whom we postulate when we discourse of Him.

And then there is yet another revelation of God, in some respects the nearest and the most important of all, and that is the revelation of God in the moral nature of man. It is surely impossible to deny that revelation without doing violence and dishonour to ourselves. God has given a revelation of Himself in the conscience of man. There are the marks of the Divine stamp, the evidence of having come from the Divine mint, in

every one who bears the nature of man. Take the least favourable specimens of humanity, the Herods and Neros and Borgias of the race, and if they own to no evidence of God within them they at least serve to deepen the conviction of God in other men, and to make more manifest in them the witness to a Divine presence and a Divine law which they have outraged and belied. And what about this revelation? It is like the sun in the heavens on a cloudy day, it at least serves to enable us to distinguish day from night. We can form some conception of what it is, from how it would be with us if we had it not. We can imagine ourselves without it, and we know that we should not be as we are.

We have traced, then, at least, four revelations of God in science, in the phenomena of nature, in history, and in the moral nature of man. There is something that is common to all these revelations of God, which is, so to say, the want of demonstrableness. Science, if it reveals God, also puts Him so far off as to conceal Him altogether from many of its votaries. The robe of nature is so gorgeous as to hide the personal glory of the great King even from many of those who must love nature. The course of history is so perplexing as to be a trial rather than a help to faith, and if a man chooses to deny that there is any witness in his conscience to the person of a God, it is hopeless to confute him; so certain is it that in all cases the witness to God is conditional and not absolute, however clear and distinct that witness may be, if the ear is rightly opened to hear it.

If this, then, is the way in which God has dealt with us, if in science, nature, and history, He has given glimpses of Himself, which He has straightway withdrawn, may we not expect to find the like want of absolute certainty if He gives a verbal revelation which can be committed to writing. At the same time we may say there is something of an antecedent probability that such a revelation would be given, for if the Psalmist was right in asking, "He that made the eye, shall He not see? and He that made the ear, shall he not hear?" may we not well add to his questions, He that gave the power of speech, shall He be dumb and unable to speak? or, possessing the power of speech, shall He forbear to use it, or use it only in the manner He has prescribed for us?

It will be observed that I postulate the existence of a personal God, it were mere waste of time to attempt to prove that; I am content with the conclusion of the Psalmist that it is only the fool who says in his heart there is no God; but postulating the existence of a God, we must enquire into the evidence of His having spoken, and there is, we may surely say, an antecedent probability in the gift of speech that God would condescend to make use of it. And it is conceivable that if this were so, the

fact of His having spoken would be recorded and preserved. It would not be suffered to pass away and be forgotten, because in that case God would have spoken in vain. He would have put forth an energy for a presumable end, which would nevertheless have been fruitless as regards that end.

Now there is one book, and one book only in the world, which purports to contain the historic record of God's having spoken from the very first, and that is the Old Testament. The Old Testament was entrusted to the care of one particular nation, not, of course, ostensibly and professedly, but as a matter of fact; and the known history of this nation and the conditions under which it at present exists are in striking accordance with these records themselves, and especially with the details of what was announced as its future destiny more than three thousand years ago, so that there is no parallel whatever in the history and literature of the world to the phenomena which confront us in the history and literature of the Jews.

There can, therefore, be no reasonable doubt that this Old Testament professes to be, as its name implies, the record of the way in which God made His spoken revelation to the world. I am not now concerned to establish this point, but rather to inquire what indications there are of this spoken revelation of God being consistent with the revelation of God in nature, science, and history.

And the first indication to which I shall point is the evidence of plan in Scripture. It is quite impossible not to see that there is an essential and inherent connection between the Old Testament and the New, which is not to be explained by the supposition of any design or collusion on the part of the several writers. There is an interval of nearly five centuries between the last events in the Old Testament and the first in the New, and the opening of St. Matthew is a most improbable and extraordinary sequel to the close of Malachi. It would have been so if all that follows the first chapter of St. Matthew were a pure fiction, but as there cannot be the slightest doubt that the narrative was the result of the history, and not the history the invention of the narrative, we are all the more perplexed to account for it. In like manner the history of the Acts of the Apostles, dissimilar as it is from that of the Gospels, is not the kind of sequel that we should have supposed would have followed them. It is intelligible on the basis of the Gospels and on the supposition that they are true. It is inconceivable if we regard them as a fiction. In like manner the Epistles of St. Paul are explained and accounted for if we pre-suppose the truth of the Gospels and the Acts. They are not to be accounted for if the first disciples did not act as they are said to have acted, or if the motive for their so acting was not supplied by the essential truth of the

gospel history. In no sense can they be regarded as the natural result of any process of natural evolution of the Psalms and Prophets, whether we eliminate the intermediate factors of the Gospels and the Acts, or choose to regard them as necessary steps in any such natural process. And yet there is an orderly plan, not only in the arrangement of the books of the New Testament, which we may readily concede as the effect of human design, but likewise in the sequence of events which would most naturally bring forth its firstfruits in the form of epistolary correspondence, and develop subsequently the written record and memorial of its history. And in this, which is a purely natural process, lies the strongest proof of the reality of the antecedent events, inasmuch as the manifest results, as seen in Rome, Corinth, and elsewhere, are the best vouchers for them. If at a given time and place we find an edifice erected, we know that there must have been a process of building and a builder at work before, and so, if we find an organized Christian society in existence, presenting the greatest possible contrast to the surrounding society, and not to be accounted for by the ordinary forces acting thereon, we know that we must postulate the operation of other forces akin to the results produced and adequate to producing them. The evidence of design in the relation of the New Testament to the Old is so strong as to compel us to seek for an explanation of it which we cannot find in any conceivable compact or agreement between the writers; and yet there it is, as an actual fact, without any parallel instance in the history or literature of the world. We may therefore fairly point to it as an indication of unobtrusive design or plan which becomes the more striking the more it is contemplated.

Nor is the Old Testament devoid of similar indication of plan. The arrangement of these writings has for the nonce been thrown into the most admired disorder by the rash theories of modern writers, who usurp to themselves the name of scholars and critics; so that the prophets have been made to precede the law, and the Psalms have been relegated to the times of the Maccabees and the second temple, and the book of Genesis assigned to the eighth century after Moses. Fifty years ago this would have been accepted as sufficient evidence of lunacy; now we are obliged to deal with it as a sober and enlightened theory: and the difficulty is to know how to deal with it, as the difficulty is to know how to reason with a madman. But let us suppose that the book of Genesis was later than many of the prophets; let us suppose that Amos or Hosea is the oldest writer in the Old Testament; let us suppose that the Pentateuch, as we have it, is Babylonian; that all the Psalms are post-Captivity, and the history a late compilation that we may accept or reject as we



please. Then what follows? Most undoubtedly this: that at some period or other, by whom we know not, and when we know not, but certainly long before the Maccabees, the Hebrew Scriptures were arranged as we now have them. That is to say that from a condition of absolute disorder and of entire and casual independence, they were for a definite purpose and of deliberate human design cast into the traditional form in which we now find them. Then, if this were so, we must account for the selection of this particular form in preference to any other. Because as far as we can historically trace it for at least two hundred years before Christ, this particular form, of the Law, the Prophets and the Psalms, was the only one that was known. We must therefore suppose that in the third century before Christ the condition and order of the Old Testament was virtually much what it now is. The history had been arranged in its present form, the Prophets had been edited and arranged in their two groups of greater and lesser, and the other books were much as they are now. We must infer, therefore, that whatever traces of plan we can discover in the history from first to last were designed and arranged by the human compiler or compilers. We must suppose that the history of the call of Abraham and the sequel of it was deliberately fashioned with reference to the period of bondage in Egypt; we must suppose that all the promises with reference to the occupation of Canaan were deliberately inserted long after that occupation was a fact; we must suppose that the story of David's selection and the definite promises made to him were at all events thrown into their present form long after his throne was deprived of its latest occupant, and yet for some unaccountable reason were so retained; we must suppose that notwithstanding the many disparaging allusions to sacrifice in the various prophetic writings and the Psalms, the most elaborate ritual and sacrificial directions were successfully propounded by the priests and consciously accepted by the people as the work of Moses more than a thousand years before, though they must have known for the most part that they had been concocted in Babylon and introduced as innovations after the return. Is this conceivable, probable, or possible? for upon the supposition we must allow it to have been so, or else the hypothesis falls to the ground. It is consequently unnecessary to dwell upon the certain fact that Hosea himself evinces acquaintance with every book of the Pentateuch; that he is familiar with the history of Jacob and the Judges, and that as those histories cannot have been compiled out of his writings, it is certain he must refer to those histories, and that, therefore, they must have been in existence then; that Deuteronomy displays in like manner such an acquaintance with the earlier books as must either have been based on them, or was itself the impossible source from which

they were derived ; that the prophets from first to last imply more or less a knowledge of the law, and so pre-suppose the covenant of God with man, of which the law was the ostensible instrument and the abiding memorial ; that their mission comes to an end if there was no human evidence of any such covenant ; and that the Psalms involve throughout so much national acquaintance with the national history that they form an independent witness to the facts of that history even as the historical plays of Shakespeare do to the main facts of our own. I say that if we set aside the received order of Scripture and ignore the plan which that reveals, we are confronted with these insuperable obstacles without and within, as well as with the fact that of the historical books there is not one that does not bear witness to acquaintance with its predecessor. Kings shows acquaintance with Samuel, Samuel with Judges, Judges with Joshua, and the like ; and the way in which this is shown, if not an undesigned proof of it, can only be regarded as evidence of having been adopted with the deliberate purpose of imposing upon the reader, and suggesting to him a false inference. If this is consistent, I do not say with inspiration (which I am especially anxious not to assume), but with any degree of that sanctity which was universally attributed to the Scriptures, the whole Jewish and Christian community must have been wilfully blind and fatally mistaken.

But looking at the Old Testament in the broadest way, and regarding the plan of it as the work of human design, we are nevertheless compelled to acknowledge traces that are not human. What about the tone of expectation that is so clear from first to last, the cry for redemption, the hope of possession of the land that flowed with milk and honey, the promises connected with both, the desire for sovereignty, the promise of dominion, the partial fulfilment of it, the eventual overthrow of all national hopes, the sense of failure and incompleteness with which the Old Testament closes, the gradual development, the sudden and ultimate termination which expires with a definite promise and with forward-looking hope ? All combine to show that there is an unsuspected, unobtrusive, but very manifest thread of design running through the whole, which is enough to warrant the conviction that there is something more intended to be seen than is apparent on the surface. But as far as this is the case it was not put there by the human authors, but is independent of them, as, indeed, they must have been unconscious of it. In short, there is a composite unity produced by the individual diversity of the parts that is not found in any other writings ; and this is of a kind with that unity that is characteristic of the living organism, and which, in spite of infinite variety, is found to pervade the whole of nature.

And if there is one point that serves to demonstrate this unity more than another it is the consciousness of God's election, first of a man, then of a family, and then of a nation, for a special purpose, which is indicated as early as Gen. xii., but is not discovered in the breadth and far-reaching character of its significance till we have closed the volume of the Old Testament and opened that of the New. It is because the nature of this election has been misunderstood that it has in many cases proved a stumbling-block, and been the source of bitter controversies. But if natural selection is taught by modern science, adopting a term almost identical with, if not borrowed unawares from, the language of theology, shall we be wrong if we discern in natural selection a principle which may at all events serve to illustrate that of the election of grace, even if the two may not point to community of origin, and to oneness in the method of working towards an end. What if the election of grace so plainly taught in Scripture, should after all be but another form in human history of that same method of working towards a predetermined end, which is observable also in natural selection, supposing we accept that principle as a true interpretation of the method of nature? That while the process is going on the final result should be concealed in either case, is inevitable to the human observer; and in the realm of human history, while we contemplate the process in ignorance of the end, our only course can be to say, with Abraham, "Shall not the judge of all the earth do right?"

Obviously the great problem with regard to nature is, What does it tell us of the character of God? And as our survey of nature must of necessity be partial, it is shown by experience that our conclusions about His character will be uncertain, imperfect, and contradictory, depending largely upon the aspect under which we view nature—the eye with which we behold it. Thus the God of the tempest, the tornado, and the earthquake will be very different from the God of the opening year, and the first fragrant breath of spring, redolent with the scent of flowers, and resonant with the varied notes of birds: and the God revealed in the awful solitudes of the glacier and the Alpine peak, will be very different from Him whom we think we see in the rich and abundant luxuriance of the Italian plain, and the soft and gorgeous beauty of the Italian lake. But the question is, Which is the true God? And to this question nature gives, and can give, us no answer. One of her latest observers was taught by the contemplation of nature to disbelieve in the godness of God. And certainly whatever may be the ultimate verdict of science, the God whom history seems to reveal to us is too terrible to contemplate. When we survey the long thousand years' tragedy of Rome, with its almost unceasing wars

of tyranny and subjection, with its temple of Janus shut but thrice, our faith in a presiding God, who takes any interest in human affairs, is sorely tried, and our belief in the goodness of God, to say the least, is severely shaken. Or if we go further back and think of the fall and rise of mighty kingdoms—Egypt, Babylon, Assyria, Persia, and the like—it is hard to understand the ways of God, and we can only confess with the Psalmist, “Thy footsteps are not known.” Or if we look again to the experiences of modern times, with its Lisbon earthquakes, its Indian and American cyclones, and its Chinese famines, and think of the countless millions of creatures like ourselves who have fallen victims to desolating wars and ruthless famines, and all-devouring pestilences, we can only ask again with him, while we wait in vain for the answer, “Wherefore hast thou made all men for nought?” In short, the reply that we get to our perplexing question, What and where is God? from nature and from history, is at the best uncertain, dubious, and obscure, and also throws it back upon ourselves with hollow and heartless mockery, “Yea, what and where is He?”

Now there is one book—and one book only—which, while admitting to the full that clouds and darkness are round about the ways of God, is, nevertheless, from first to last unfaltering in its faith in God, uniform and emphatic in its encouragement to trust in Him; and that book is the Old Testament. “Trust in Him at all times, ye people; pour out your heart before Him. God is a refuge for us.” This book, like the book of nature, tells us of the ruthless extermination of the Canaanites, and that by Divine command; it tells us of the almost total destruction of the tribe of Benjamin by civil war; it tells us of the cutting off of entire armies, with their thousands and tens of thousands; of the destruction of Sennacherib’s host, of the slaying of the sons of Zedekiah in the presence of their father, and of the putting out of his own eyes; and lastly, of the deportation for seventy years of one-half of the nation, and of the obliteration from history of the other half. And yet, notwithstanding all this it is absolute in its demand upon our unreserved trust in God, and unswerving in its own conviction as to the wisdom and rightness of trusting in Him, while, in the knowledge of all this, one of its greatest writers does not hesitate to say, “Thy mercy is over all Thy works;” and in the fulness and depth of this conviction is perfectly unconcerned to make good his statement, knowing that God cannot but be justified when He speaks, and be clear when He is judged. I am bold to affirm that in the whole range of secular literature there is no such magnificent conception of the character of God as this, and no such sublime consciousness of the glory and praise that is His due.

Now if the revelation of God in Scripture is a true revelation

it will probably—and may justly be expected to—throw light upon the revelation of Him in nature, while it certainly will not be found to be contradicted thereby. What, then, are we to say to the naturalist's verdict about the goodness of God? Shall we take his verdict, or that of the Psalmist as the truest? Which was the best and most accurate observer of nature? He who had learnt from nature to disbelieve in the goodness of God, or he who said, "Thy mercy is over all Thy works?"

And the answer to this question will be supplied by two features which we may find in nature, and which are distinctly taught us in Scripture; but as the subject is one of almost endless, or indeed of infinite application, I will confine myself to these two features. That there are opposites in nature it is impossible to deny. There is a positive and a negative in the magnet; there are attractions and repulsions in chemistry and the like. From the very vastness of nature we are precluded from forming an adequate interpretation of it as a whole, because our survey, however extended, can be but partial. Still, there are certain broad features which are plain and distinct, and these may serve to guide our interpretation.

Now, one feature which is very obvious in nature, and is common to the whole animal and vegetable kingdom, is the provision made for reparation and healing. That there are cases in which these processes are ineffectual is manifest, as also is the universality of death which forecloses both; but in spite of this, which is ultimately inexorable; there is an equally conspicuous tendency in nature to make good her own losses. No sooner do we receive a wound than a principle at once manifests itself which tends to repair the damage sustained. The wound may be immediately or ultimately mortal, but at all events the secret principle which strives after reparation is there and in activity. Nature is ever at strife with death, and for a long time death is held in abeyance; and though in the individual death at length prevails, yet the struggle is continually prolonged in other individuals. So the race between life and death is, as it were, neck and neck; and each alternately prevails, though the very fact that the struggle is continued shows the virtual superiority of life, inasmuch as nature exhibits a power which death itself cannot destroy—namely, the power, notwithstanding the universality of death, to continually and permanently renew life. Indeed, so true is this that death itself may be regarded as a necessary incident in life, and, in fact, as stimulating life.

It is needless to pause to show how marvellously the fact of the resurrection supplies the complement to this teaching of nature, and effectually vindicates and establishes the tendency of nature to sustain and impart life. Without the resurrection we might be at a loss to know why life seems always to be

stronger than death, or might even be in doubt and despair as to which side the victory would eventually and at the last incline. And in a lesser degree we see the same principle at work in the curative processes which are so active and universal in nature. No sooner is any injury inflicted on a plant or an animal than healing processes are called into activity, which show that the tendency of nature is towards health and life rather than towards disease and death. When we inquire into the antecedent cause of the existence of disease and death we are indeed baffled, for that is involved in inscrutable mystery, and we can get no further than it is so because it is so; but as practical men we are concerned only with that which is, and are forbidden to weary ourselves with why it is. Seeing that the question is idle and the investigation fruitless, it is much more salutary for us to note with satisfaction and gratitude that the tendency towards reparation and healing is conspicuously characteristic of nature. Even the battlefield which has been the grave of thousands, after a few years bears no other record of the fact than that the harvests yielded may be more abundant and the fruit richer. And so it ever is: the tree may be cut down to the roots, but it will infallibly sprout again; the body may be dismembered limb by limb, but, however great the loss, nature will do her best to repair the damage, and habit will speedily learn to supply the deficiency or to do without what cannot be replaced.

I claim, then, this curative principle as one of the undoubted characteristics of nature, and as pointing distinctly to what may justly be regarded as a tendency in nature to repair and to heal. I turn then to the Old Testament, and what do I find there? In what, I am persuaded, is one of the earliest records of the nation, whatever the critics may say, I read: "If thou wilt diligently hearken to the voice of the Lord thy God, and wilt do that which is right in His sight, and wilt give ear to His commandments, and obey all His statutes, I will put none of these diseases upon thee which I have brought upon the Egyptians; for I am the Lord that healeth thee." Here is a twofold claim put forth on the part of God: first, that He put diseases on the Egyptians; and secondly, that He was the healer of the Israelites—that is to say, He claims to be the author of disease and the author of health; in other words, the Lord of nature as nature is manifested in disease and health. Frequently in the Old Testament healing is claimed as the work of him who professes to speak by it. "See now that I, even I, am he, and there is no god with me: I kill, and I make alive; I wound, and I heal:" "I will heal thee and add to thy days fifteen years," said God to Hezekiah; "What is the sign that the Lord will heal me?" said Hezekiah to Isaiah; and the like, till in New Testament times

our Lord distinctly claimed to be the Son of God on the ground that He did the works of His Father, which were notoriously works of healing.

Thus the God of the Old Testament claims to be the God of nature, because he challenges to Himself one of the most conspicuous works of nature; and the acts of nature are found to be in a very significant way the acts which we are taught to recognise as the acts of God, and by performing which Christ our Lord claimed to show Himself to be the Son of God. Nature is a healer. Christ manifested Himself as a healer. God claims to be He who is the healer of His people, and Who on certain special occasions put forth and displayed His power as the healer of certain favoured individuals.

The last point, which is the most remarkable of all to which I shall appeal in evidence of my position that the God of the Bible and the God of nature are one and the same God, and that the voice of God in revelation confirms and establishes His voice in nature and the universe, is the doctrine and law of sacrifice as observable and obvious in both. It is a matter of fact that the origin of sacrifice is lost in obscurity. We meet with the practice of sacrifice as early as the fourth chapter of Genesis, without a word of explanation, as though it were the expression of a natural dictate; and we may weary ourselves in vain to discover any more about it. We meet with it again on the first morning of the restored and regenerated earth after the flood, when it is especially recorded in the language of the Mosaic law that the Lord smelled a sweet savour, and gave His blessing and promise accordingly. We meet with it again in the dawn of patriarchal times, as prevailing in the family of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. In the case of Abraham we find it especially enjoined by God, and adopted as the occasion of making a covenant with him; and shortly afterwards, on the memorable occasion when he was bidden to sacrifice his only son. We may regard this as an important stage in the history of sacrifice, as the means whereby God would instruct Abraham, that however natural and instinctive sacrifice might be, it could not be complete till it embraced all that the worshipper held most dear—as dear, indeed, as his own life. It thus raised sacrifice from the level of a mere gift, involving the life of other creatures and the shedding of their blood, to the more searching and absolute demand of a spiritual and personal surrender. At the same time Abraham was taught that it was this absolute surrender of conformity to the Divine will that was the acceptable element in sacrifice, and not the mere shedding of blood or the taking of a fellow-creature's life. Abraham was placed, therefore, in a higher position with regard to sacrifice than was attained probably by his descendants for many ages afterwards. The sacrificial ritual of the law, however

Divinely significant it may have been, must surely have failed in the great majority of cases to convey to the worshipper the higher lessons of sacrifice; and it required the special illumination and the painful experience of David to affirm "The sacrifices of God are a troubled spirit; a broken and contrite heart Thou wilt not despise." Not that the spiritual lessons of sacrifice were alone important, or that the others might with safety be neglected; otherwise the outward form of sacrifice, involving the shedding of the blood, would not have been retained in so prominent a manner and with such obtrusive emphasis, if it had not been that the surrender of life was an indispensable element in ideal sacrifice, however pure and spiritual it might otherwise be. And thus the two elements were persistently retained, if only to foreshadow—and perhaps with the very purpose of foreshadowing—the great culminating and final sacrifice of Christ upon the cross.

And it is here that we find such perfect and marvellous harmony between the law of God in Scripture and the voice of God in nature. For if there is one universal, all-pervading, self-evident feature in the natural world, it is this very law of sacrifice. Think of the vast extent to which we are indebted to the animal creation. It would not be possible for us to subsist without the flocks and herds, the birds and beasts and fishes of the air and earth and waters. To a very great degree they exist for our sakes.

But it is not we only that are subservient to this law, it is of force in every province of nature. One set of creatures is the sustenance of another; it is not merely the wild beasts that prey upon the tame, but throughout the whole realm of nature the presence and action of the law is felt. God has written the law of sacrifice in conspicuous and indelible letters on the world, and this law is not fulfilled till it attains the highest possible form of absolute and voluntary self-sacrifice. Nor is it only in the animal world that we discover the presence of the law, for the entire vegetable kingdom subsists for the purpose, immediate or remote, of man and animals. And may we not go further, and say that it is this law, and this law alone, that expresses the character of God Himself, inasmuch as though the heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament showeth His handiwork, and though the fulness of the whole earth is His glory, yet neither in earth nor heaven can we catch the faintest glimpses of His person. We may and must adopt the language of the prophet, and say, "Verily Thou art a God that hidest Thyself, O God of Israel, the Saviour." He has left His footprints on the earth, and the track of His chariot wheels is in the sky, and the clouds are the dust of His feet; but He is not there, for He is risen far above all heavens, and beyond the reach of every eye, though He



fillet all things. Is not this self-sacrifice of the highest and most Divine type? and if this character were to express itself in the conditions and limitations of humanity, and to strike its being into the bounds of mortality, how should it do so but by the perfect sacrifice of the agony and the crown of thorns, the shame, abasement, and desertion of the death upon the Cross.

I think the several points I have now mentioned, which may indefinitely be increased, may fairly be taken as indications that the mind which claims to speak in Holy Scripture is the same mind whose characteristics we trace in nature, that the God of the Bible is the God of nature, and not another and a partial God, who has been fashioned by conjecture out of the human mind itself. That there are difficulties connected with a spoken revelation must be only too plain to everyone—difficulties not only as to the subject matter, but as to the means and method of communication, and the like; there are difficulties, also, in nature, and in the revelation of nature, and it is, of course, possible to shut one's eyes to the God of nature, and then to say that we cannot see Him; if God has anywhere revealed Himself, we may be quite sure He has only done so partially; but the practical question we have to determine is whether the broad and patent features of the Old and New Testaments, and the history they record, can be accounted for by the application of merely natural principles, and the operation of merely natural laws, or whether, being what they are and as they are, they do not justify the claim which they distinctly make to be the expression of the will and mind of God. If this is so we may expect to find in them features that are common to them with nature; and this it seems to me we do find, and may expect to find more and more, according as we conduct the search in the spirit of faith. This, however, we cannot doubt, is a sure and certain fact, that neither in the Scriptures nor yet in nature has God spoken in such a way as to preclude the possibility of not hearing Him. If the final revelation of God is that God is Love, then it stands to reason that that revelation itself will be no revelation to the unloving. It is not the revelation adapted to them, nor the kind of revelation they desire; but it by no means follows that it may not be a true revelation, and the revelation of the truth.

But in this case there is a degree of like-mindedness required, the want of a certain receptivity to which it will not appeal in vain. And this in either case is faith. We cannot see God in nature if we have no faith. Nature tells us only of a succession of causes which explain themselves no further than we can trace them; of the cause of causes it says nothing, and only by inference and induction suggests it; but if we postulate such a

cause, much that before was unexplained becomes intelligible; and we must add that if the cause we postulate is that God who in the beginning created the heavens and the earth, and breathed into man's nostrils the breath of life, and finally sent His Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to atone for sin, and to be the Saviour of the world, nature becomes invested with a glory that is otherwise hidden from us; for then everything speaks to us of Him, and conveys a message from Him which makes us feel that His mercy is over all His works; and then the revelation in the Word and the revelation in the world mutually interpret and confirm each other. The great world's altar-stairs, which slope through darkness up to God, do not leave us in the dark when we embrace Him with whom is the fountain of life, and in whose light we see light. And the revelation and message of God's love as presented and offered to us in the Scriptures seems to be brought nearer and yet more nigh to us as we trace the action of His handiwork in nature. For that reveals to us the actual living God of the present, and as we have learnt to love Him from the message which assured us that He first loved us in the distant and historic past, when He spake to the fathers by the prophets, and in later ages spoke to us by His Son, we hear, as it were, repeated in the present the familiar accents of that blessed voice, the voice of the unchangeable Son, whose nature and whose name is Love.

And as it is certain we shall not interpret nature aright nor receive the full message of nature if we do not regard it as the voice and work of Him who is our heavenly Father, because He is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, so the strength of our faith in Him will be increased by nothing so much as by the recollection that the ever-present voice of God in nature is not the voice of an unknown God, but the voice of that God who out of the clear and cloudless eastern sky spake to Abraham, when He promised that his seed should be as the stars of heaven for multitude, and on the mountain of transfiguration said of Christ, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased," and who, as the Word of the Father which was in the beginning with God and was God, has yet to be heard once more in the consummation of the ages, when He shall unfold the mighty secret of nature and of providence, of revelation and of history, and say to His elect, "Come, ye blessed children of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the beginning of the world."

STANLEY LEATHES.

