

ARTICLE X.

CRITICAL NOTES.

WHAT IS THE APOSTLES' CREED?

HISTORICALLY it is a growth. From the time when Peter said to Jesus near Cæsarea Philippi, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matt. xvi. 16), four centuries went by before the form of the Creed now commonly used was completed. In the numerous expositions of the Creed by Augustine, there is no hint that he had ever heard the phrase, "He descended into hell." We are in agreement with Augustine when we omit that phrase. Nor do our latest compilers of hymn-books hesitate to make verbal modifications, such as changing, "He sitteth *on* the right hand of God," to "He sitteth *at* the right hand of God." That is, the Creed is not regarded and treated as Scripture, but as a human summary of Scripture.

How rapidly the Creed grew we do not know. It is interesting to find much more of it in the preaching of the Apostles than the first brief word of Peter already quoted. In Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost (Acts ii. 22-36), there is little more than the elaboration of these points: Christ's supernatural life, his crucifixion, his resurrection, his exaltation, the gift through him of the Holy Ghost, the forgiveness of sins. Paul's sermon to the Jews at Antioch in Pisidia (Acts xiii. 27-38) is confined to almost the same points, but adds the name of Pilate, and specifies the burial. In Acts iii. 13-21 and iv. 10-12 are variations of the theme by Peter in briefer form, but introducing almost all the same points. One of these is specially interesting in its brevity for naming Pilate as the Creed does. Peter before Cornelius (Acts x. 36-43) is still closer to the Creed. He elaborates almost nothing here, omits some points that were in the Pentecost sermon, but adds the judgeship of Christ, as well as adding a reference to Christ's works of mercy, which has not been retained in the Creed.

In form the Creed is poetic, rather than scientific. It does not give a catalogue of Christ's offices and works, but deals in suggestive single items. It puts a part for the whole. It is not a concentrated metaphysical statement of the gospel, but the simple statement of a few concrete facts which imply the whole gospel. This accounts for its acceptance by so many generations, its attraction for great but diverse minds like Augustine, Calvin, Luther, Wesley, its hold on the common people and the children. The exaltation and the humiliation of Christ are in the

Creed, not as philosophical statements, but in graphic single features, in such phrases as "conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary." The atonement is there not as a theory, but as a fact, in the phrase "suffered under Pontius Pilate," and the later reference to "the forgiveness of sins." The Creed is not a scholastic exposition of the Trinity, although its affirmations mention the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost in the same order as the baptismal formula. Of the Father only omnipotence and creation are affirmed, leaving providence and love to be inferred. The existence of the Holy Ghost is simply stated without analysis or definition of His work, though the attributing of holiness to the church in the next clause perhaps suggests that holiness as a fruit of the Spirit. The emphasis of the Creed is properly on Jesus Christ, the Son, for Christianity centers in him.

While poetic concreteness and brevity characterize this portion of the Creed, as all the rest, the divinity of Christ is made prominent by implying it in more than one way. The Creed takes time to declare Jesus the only Son of God, and to call him our Lord. Then in graphic phrases it sets forth his supernatural birth as "conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary."¹

If it be said that the Creed errs in making so much of a point not emphasized in the Scripture, it may be replied, that a great purpose of the Creed is to make prominent the supernatural character of the Christian religion. How could that be done more effectively than by what it says of Christ's birth and resurrection? When his supernatural nature has thus been declared at the beginning and at the ending of his earthly career, no more need be said on that point. That Christ was "born of the Virgin Mary" is a statement of great value, also, for the distinctness with which it sets forth his full humanity. He was made like unto his brethren. He can feel for our infirmities. Satisfied with this hint that his life in the flesh was filled with kindness and mercy toward men, the Creed passes at once from his birth to his crucifixion under Pilate. Brevity imposed limitation of topics in the Creed, and the early church recognized in Christ's death the finishing of his work, as did Christ himself and the Apostles. The mention of Pilate is not accidental, but locates Christ in a definite time and place. He is not a myth, but an historic person.

The Creed makes no statement of duties. It is occupied with the facts that are the foundation of our hopes and the incentive to duty. The

¹ The challenge of the virgin birth, on the ground that it is mentioned only in the beginning of Matthew and Luke, and never referred to again in either the Gospels or the Epistles, is not well taken. The supernatural birth of Christ is so thoroughly of a piece with his supernatural life and work that it did not need to be mentioned repeatedly. Some things can be taken for granted. The boy was not reasonable who blamed his mother when he cut his thumb, because, when she warned him not to cut his fingers, she never said anything about his thumbs.

sacraments are not mentioned. But the forgiveness of sins and the resurrection of the dead are there in phrases that often come to our lips at the grave of friends, and mark the distance between Christian and pagan burial. In what it says of the resurrection, the Creed makes no attempt to distinguish between the corruptible mortal body and the incorruptible resurrection body. What it expresses in trumpet tones is belief in the identity of the individual life before death and after the resurrection. When we recall the shadowy inanity of the life beyond death that appears in Homer and Virgil, what triumphant assurance of a better message of life and immortality through Christ vibrates in the affirmation, "I believe in the resurrection of the body"! The older forms of the Creed said more grossly "the resurrection of the flesh," and Augustine found it necessary to warn against materialistic interpretations of the phrase. But the Creed itself contains a sufficient warning of the limit to be set to the poetic use of "flesh" or "body" as the case may be. The "life everlasting" of the following clause cannot belong to the flesh or body considered as matter. But the Creed promises us a future totally different from the Nirvana of Hindu philosophy. It promises life everlasting and personal identity.

Enough has been said to show how the Creed appeals to simple, sympathetic believers who repeat it for its spiritual impressions. Criticisms do not alter their delight in it. A technical lawyer can pick to fragments Portia's plea in the Merchant of Venice. The play and the plea will delight generations when the lawyer's criticisms are forgotten. The Merchant of Venice is not a treatise on law, but a great piece of literature. The Apostles' Creed is a great statement of Christian truth. As Augustine said: "These words are in the divine Scriptures scattered up and down, but thence gathered and reduced into one, that the memory of slow persons might not be distressed, that every person may be able to say, may be able to hold, what he believes."

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"THE MYSTERY OF EVIL."

JOHN FISKE, in his recent book "Through Nature to God," makes a strong argument for the indispensable function of evil in the cosmic process, and thus aims to vindicate, in a world in which evil exists, the goodness of an omnipotent Creator. "We are forced," says he, "to admit that whatever may be the function of evil in this world, it is an indispensable function." "If there were no such thing as evil, how could there be such a thing as goodness?" "But for tasting the forbidden fruit, in what respect could man have become a being of higher order than the beasts of the field?"

His book as a whole is an impressive defense of religion as an eternal

reality; for, although he here and there manifests a spirit not altogether kindly toward religious conservatism, as when he speaks of the "bats and owls of orthodoxy," yet he places the Christian church under great obligations to him, by his powerful argument for the great facts of which, in the history of human thought, orthodoxy has, for the most part, stood as the lonely defense. The book may justly be regarded as a distinct contribution to the literature of apologetics.

But his treatment of the function of evil is not satisfying to the ethical sense, and leaves a legitimate question in the mind, whether he has not, either lowered the conception of God as a moral being, or minimized the heinousness of evil. It seems, therefore, a fitting time for a new statement of the idea of evil.¹ We refer especially to the idea of moral evil.

In all the literature on the subject, evil has been treated chiefly as a thing in itself, a principle, a mystery of creation. Against this conception we place the following *proposition*.—

Evil is not a mystery of creation. It is not a thing in itself in any other sense than is *doing* and *choosing*. Evil is vicious choosing. Good is benevolent choosing. Choosing, or selection, was not created nor interpolated into the universe from without. Life was created, and *choosing*, good and bad, was involved in the creation of life with liberty. Evil itself is a superfluous calamity.

LIFE AND LIBERTY.

The thing which God did create was life. And liberty in some form is the indispensable condition of all life. To say that God created life, is to say at the same time that he gave it the liberty of growth, selection, and choice.

THE COSMIC PROCESS EXISTS PURELY FOR MORAL ENDS.

The grandest possible purpose which creation could embody, is that the cosmic process, so called, should tend toward the realization of a society of beings in which there will exist the power to do evil, but the choice to do good. No more glorious fact could ever be accomplished. No more benevolent design could ever be conceived. There can be no dissent from Mr. Fiske's conclusions, that "a society of Human Souls living in conformity to a perfect Moral Law is the end toward which . . . the cosmic process has been aiming," and such an end is to be realized only by the liberty of selection and choice. The liberty of choice is indispensable to the evolution of a moral society. We shrink, to be sure,

¹ For the confidence I feel in giving publication to this argument, I am indebted to Mr. Fiske more than to any one else. He has read it in manuscript, and has been kind enough to call it "able and well-stated." He takes exception, however, to the statement, that, in speaking of "the bats and owls of orthodoxy," he meant to discredit religious conservatism. It was human dullness, not religious conservatism, that he had in mind.

from applying any term to God which implies necessity. If Lessing was constrained to say of man,

"*Kein Mensch muss müssen,*"

we naturally hesitate to say that God *must* do anything, and yet we do say that, if a moral society, the end for which creation exists, is to be realized, God must give his creatures, in their advancing development, the liberty of selection, the liberty of choice. This does not curtail his omnipotence. He simply chooses as the grandest of all aims that we should become moral beings, and we cannot become moral beings without the liberty to choose. He may blot out man from the face of the earth; he may destroy all life and recall his creation, but he cannot perfect a moral universe, in which his creatures will have *the power to do evil, with the choice to do good*, without taking his chances in our liberty of choice. He cannot deprive us of liberty without destroying his own purpose. In other words, he cannot take freedom from us and leave us still free. And to speak in such terms puts him under no compulsion or necessity. His arm is not shortened. He is still free; and that he leaves us still free, is because, for the greatest of possible reasons, he so chooses. In creating life and giving it the liberty of selection and choice (the only liberty man can appreciate), he took the deliberate risk that choice would not always be used as it ought to be. Liberty makes room for all the evil choosing and evil doing in the history of the earth. We find, therefore, that the existence of evil is accounted for, not on the ground of the indispensability of evil, as in Mr. Fiske's argument, but on the ground of the indispensability of liberty; and the omnipotence and benevolence of God are vindicated without casting suspicion on his moral character or shocking the ethical sense.

THE PARTIALITY FOR GOOD IN THE TREND OF THE COSMIC PROCESS.

The objection that may arise to the contention of the preceding paragraph, is that it robs the universe of any guarantee of the ultimate triumph of good, and destroys confidence in the moral efficiency of the cosmic process. If life is to be left to unhampered evolution through its own selection; if man is to be left to the caprice of choice,—what assurance have we that we shall ever advance consistently to any rational or moral end? Such a theory, it will be objected, might as well dispense with God altogether, since it places him at the mercy of his creation, and makes him a spectator, only, of the processes by which life flounders in the mire of its own whims. In answer to this, we call attention to a potent factor in the cosmic process, which scientists have either overlooked, or for the most part otherwise explained, viz. *the divine partiality for good, and the divine displeasure at evil*. This may be a prejudicially theological way of stating a scientific fact; but there are abundant evidences that this is the precise factor that makes the cosmic process a much larger affair than natural selection. The cosmic process has

many times in the history of the earth, been made to overwhelm the more cruel and destructive developments of natural selection. From the time of the destruction of the Dinosours in the Jurassic period to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, of Pompeii and licentious Rome, there has been a super-cosmical choosing in the cosmic process,—a fact which modern scientists have been less scientific in observing than were the Hebrew prophets. It has been the deciding factor at all critical points. It has guaranteed an upward trend to the cosmic process. It is something other than natural selection. It has time and time again resisted natural selection and driven it from its path. We may call it, for the sake of contrast,

SUPERNATURAL SELECTION ;

or the divine preference for good. It is the only conceivable guarantee of the triumph of good. God never withdraws the freedom of choice, but he stands as the eternal friend of the good, and enemy of the wrong, —ready at any time to blot out any portion of his creation when its choice of evil far outweighs its choice of good, and when it has filled up the measure of its iniquity, and when the ground of moral hope has dried up within it. Not only does he exhibit his preference for good on critical occasions, but he has written it deep in the constitution of things. Evil, selfish choosing, carries with it the seeds of death. Many physical diseases, such as syphilis, are the stern curse of God against evil. The moral suasion of the Eternal is brought constantly to bear to encourage his creatures to good choosing, and to dissuade them from bad, in ways not accounted for by natural selection. But he does not touch their liberty. They are still free—there are countless æons of disastrous choosing, of ruin, of death, but if life is given liberty, and God, patient of evil, continues to manifest his strong partiality for good, there will at last appear a society in which the power to do evil will be joined with the choice to do good.

THE INHERITANCE OF EVIL.

Disastrous and destructive choices in the early stages of the cosmic process become vicious and immoral choices after the dawn of the ethical consciousness. Vicious choices run into vicious habits, and habits into heredity. The first vicious choice and every subsequent vicious choice is a cosmical calamity, but we perceive, after the dawn of the ethical consciousness, that we are not the slaves of heredity. Our choice is free. The son of a vicious father may choose to be good; and he often does so choose, under influences which we have no hesitancy in calling the grace of God, or the divine partiality for good, influences which he is free, however, to receive or reject. On this theory we are compelled to discharge from God all responsibility for the heartless proceedings in the history of life. He does not make our choice for us. He has not done all the *selecting* in the process of evolution. This theory of

the inheritance of evil accords with the doctrine of original sin, as held by Athanasius, Basil, the two Gregories, the two Cyrils, and by the Eastern Church generally, viz. that "it is an inherited disorder of the sensuous nature, from which temptation issues, and to which the will yields; and not until this act of the will is there any sin, properly so called, in man."¹

"UNDE MALUM?" THE QUEST FOR THE ORIGIN OF EVIL, ELSEWHERE THAN IN FREE CHOICE IS VAIN AND MISLEADING.

There are questions which may be asked still, like those which Augustine puts in the seventh book of his "Confessions": "Whence came I to choose to do evil? Who was it that put this in me, and planted in me the root of bitterness? If the devil is the author of it, whence is the devil himself? And if also by a perverse will he became out of a good angel, a devil, whence also was the evil choice in him that he became a devil?" We content ourselves with taking the position that Augustine himself subsequently took, that such questioning is vain. "Let no man therefore look for an efficient cause of the evil will."²

Such searching grows out of an erroneous conception of evil as originating somewhere further back than in free choice. To all such searching it is sufficient to say, that if evil could be traced farther back than in free choice, it would cease to be evil. Whoever so asks for the origin of evil as to turn attention from the free choice as the sole and efficient source of it, confuses and clouds the whole subject under discussion. The mystery of evil has never and can never be solved by any such quest, for the simple reason that the quest itself is false. When we have said that the disastrous effects of vicious ancestral choices may be transmitted, that a disordered condition of the sensuous nature may be inherited, and that temptation to do evil may proceed from this inherited disorder, we account for all that the quest for the origin of evil is in search of. But an inherited disorder is not a moral evil, and any effort to trace specific crime back to it, as its efficient cause, is disastrous to clear ideas of good and evil. Confusion on this subject is all too common these days, and much of the superficial fiction that prescribes the philosophy of the thoughtless thousands is engaged in the task of spreading it. The doctrine of the helplessness of choice in heredity and environment has displaced that of the freedom of choice, and for large numbers of people crime and morality have become meaningless terms. This is the legitimate product of the search for the origin of evil somewhere else than in free choice.

THE SUPERFLUOUSNESS OF EVIL.

"But for tasting the forbidden fruit, in what respect could man have become a being of higher order than the beasts of the field?" Against

¹ Shedd, *History of Christian Doctrine*, Vol. ii. p. 37.

² *The City of God*, Bk. xii. chap. 7.

this theory of Mr. Fiske, we maintain the absolute purposelessness of evil in the cosmic process. It is a calamity, and a calamity only. Always and everywhere in sight, it is however a continuous surprise. It has retarded the progress of life, and has made its journey unnecessarily sore.

On the ground of the necessity of antagonism as an element of consciousness, Mr. Fiske tells us, that "in a happy world there must be sorrow and pain, and in a moral world the knowledge of evil is indispensable." We are given, however, to understand that this moral antagonism is not conditioned on the perpetual existence of actual evil. We are permitted to look forward to a society in which evil will be non-existent, but where conscious life will still be abundant. The time will come, in the days of the perfected society, when evil will have ceased long since to exist, leaving, however, its deep impress upon the human soul to serve as a perpetual element of moral contrast. If that is a correct theory, and we are not especially moved to take exceptions to it, we cannot suppress the Hebrew psalmist's cry: "How long, O Lord, how long?" If, as Mr. Fiske gives us to understand, it is the element of moral contrast that is the indispensable thing, and if this element can be maintained in the future by the conceiving of evil based upon the past experience of the race, without its actual continuance, may we not insist that the past already furnishes us with sufficient actual evil to maintain the element of moral contrast for all time to come, and that the present existence of actual evil is not indispensable. May we not insist that the evil which exists to-day, and that has existed for countless ages, is thus superfluous and cruelly unnecessary? And is not this the very reason that it is conceived as evil? Without debating the question whether actual evil is necessary to furnish the element of moral antagonism, we do insist that the smallest conceivable amount of evil is sufficient to reveal the power to do evil, and the consciousness of that power abundantly supplies the element of moral antagonism. We admit that there is no such thing as the joy of sinlessness apart from the sense of overcoming, of victory, but it may be the joy of victory over actual or over potential sinfulness. The latter is what Dr. Wayland meant when he said, that but for the grace of God he would have been a pirate on the seas. And what is true of the individual is also true of the race. To have the power to do evil supplies the element of moral antagonism sufficient for the moral training of human souls, finally to constitute a society conformable to a perfect moral law. Actual evil stands, therefore, so far as practical purposes are concerned, a superfluous, unnecessary, and purposeless fact. And it is this very element that constitutes its awfulness. The feeling is written deep in the heart of the race, that *it is evil because it is unnecessary*. It is a perpetual "dissonance." It is the chaos and discord of unnecessarily vicious choices. To attempt to believe that the mystery of evil "belongs among the profound harmonies in God's creation" is to do violence to the moral perceptions.

In conclusion, let us sum up what we have been trying to say: Moral evil is an affair of the free choice, and God is not to be held responsible for it. He is to be held responsible for life and freedom, and if his purpose is to bring forth a perfected moral society, he cannot do otherwise than leave the choice free. He has throughout the cosmic process manifested his constant preference for good. Any attempt to trace evil further back than in free choice is based on an erroneous conception of its character. Propensities to evil are inherited, but heredity does not constitute moral bondage. The superfluosity of evil is the thing that constitutes its awfulness.

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