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ARTICLE V.

THE THEORY OF EVOLUTION AND RELIGIOUS
THOUGHT.¹

BY THE REVEREND JOHN R. THURSTON.

THIS title, "The *Theory* of Evolution and Religious Thought," is chosen, rather than "*Evolution* and Religious Thought," because the question whether "evolution" is a fact of history is still in debate. If it be proved to be a *fact*, our only course is to adjust all our thinking to it, however much it may compel change of old beliefs. For our only quest is truth. This only is safe and ever best.

To avoid confusion, "the theory of evolution" as used in this discussion will be defined. The theory is this: All events in history have been the result of the action of forces which have been existing and operative from the beginning.

There are two implications of this theory that should be kept in mind: 1. No new force has come in from without, increasing the sum of these forces, or modifying their operation. They have been, from the first, without addition or diminution or interference. There has been a conservation of force from the beginning; 2. The operation of these forces has been in accordance with unchanging laws. This definition and its implications can be amply supported by quotations from such thoroughgoing evolutionists as Spencer, Huxley, Romanes, and

¹This paper was prepared to be read in the Worcester South Association, Massachusetts, and is published in the same personal and familiar form of expression in which it was prepared and read.

John Fiske, and some will be given as we proceed. Mr. Darwin is not of these, as he holds to the coming in of a new force in the creative act of God as originating the first species.

The writer is well aware that, of late years, Professors Le Conte, Rice, and others have argued for a theory of evolution in which spiritual forces operate with natural forces, modifying and even controlling them. Dr. G. F. Wilkins's "Control in Evolution" and Professor Drummond's "Ascent of Man" have the same implication. But this is evolution *plus* a new force from without. It is not in keeping with the absoluteness of the law of "the conservation of force," or the axiom that nothing can be "evolved" which has not been "involved."

The wide acceptance of the theory of evolution is doubtless very largely due to the promulgation of the theory of Mr. Darwin as to the origin of species, and its general adoption by scientists. It is doubtless true that, as has been said by a scientist, "scientists almost unanimously *believe* that man has somehow been evolved"; and this belief, to many minds, warrants the belief of the larger theory of evolution. It is not strange, then, while scientists have believed and taught thus, that the public has very widely accepted evolution as a truth of science.

But it is forgotten that very few, if any, scientists claim that Mr. Darwin's theory has been proved in the strict sense of that word. Mr. Huxley said, indeed, in his last public address before the Royal Society, in 1894, that it "had never been shown to be *inconsistent* with any *positive observations*."¹ This was the most he could say. Observation *had not proved it false*. He remembered his insistence from the beginning, that, by experiment, a species must be produced which should be infertile with the species from which it was derived, in order to make the proof complete; and he remembered his confession in

¹ *Life and Letters*, ii. 412.

1891,¹ that "no approximation to infertility had been made" by the experimenters, and that, "in this matter, we are just where we were thirty years ago."

And now Professor Hugo de Vries tells us, that there *are no intermediate* forms found such as Mr. Darwin confesses are essential to his theory.² "No such intermediate forms have been found, and it is for this reason that many paleontologists accept a *sudden formation* of new forms from the older ones," that "they [new species] originate with a *shock* or *jump*, and then are *constant*."³ Then he tells of his experiments with the "evening primrose," and of the sudden appearance of new varieties, without any intermediate forms. Some have thought that here we have found the transmutation of species. But if so, by Mr. Darwin's own confession,⁴ it is fatal to his "theory." It is to be noted, also, that Professor De Vries has only found new *varieties* of the "evening primrose." He has not produced an admittedly new species, much less a new genus. Until one is discovered, we have no adequate *proof* of the transmutation of species and genera and families. It is, therefore, no wonder that "the assembled naturalists in Yale University about ten years ago, refused to indorse it [the coming of man by natural descent] as a scientific doctrine."⁵

Now, so long as this is the attitude of scientists as to the origin of species by natural descent, and so long as they *believe* it, and use it as a working hypothesis, not because it is *proved*, but because they *believe* it will some day be proved, we must maintain that this belief is not a sufficient warrant for

¹ Life and Letters, ii. 309.

² Popular Science Monthly, April, 1903, p. 480.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 496.

⁴ Origin of Species, p. 140.

⁵ See art. "The Origin of Species and of Man," by George Macloskie, Bibliotheca Sacra, April, 1903.

the acceptance of the larger theory of thoroughgoing evolution.

Besides this, there are two gaps in the claimed evolution, which seem to defy all efforts to fill them.

1. At the appearance of *life*.—Mr. Darwin avoids the difficulty by premising the creation of plant and animal life. But few of his disciples have been willing to follow him. Yet "spontaneous generation" is discredited, and almost unanimously the scientists admit that they have no answer to the question "How did life originate?" According to Professor Rice, "It must therefore be confessed we have *no definite knowledge of the origin of life*. The belief in the evolutionary origin of life has *absolutely nothing* in its support except the force of general analogies."¹ Yet he thinks that "the transition from the *lifeless* to the *living* may yet be within the reach of human discovery."² That, he believes, is the attitude of most scientific men to-day. Now, until this *discovery is made*, we believe we are not only warranted in saying, "Evolution is *not proved*," but also in insisting that it shall not be accepted on analogies, and then allowed to dominate our religious thinking, as if it were as much a fact as the Copernican system.

2. At the appearance of *mind*.—Upon this point, Professor Rice declares, "However intimate may be the correlation between states of consciousness and cerebral changes, the two orders of phenomena are utterly disparate and incommensurable."³ To the same effect does Mr. Huxley say, "Energy is the cause of the movements of body, i. e. of things having mass. Therefore, even if they are caused by molecular movements, they would not in any way affect the store of energy."⁴ Where then, we may ask, is the law of the conservation of energy?

¹ Christian Faith in an Age of Science, p. 249. ² *Ibid.*, p. 250.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 264.

⁴ Life and Letters, II. 299.

Now, with such concessions as these from the most pronounced advocates of evolution, we beg to say that there must be found some evidence of the *how* and *whence* mind, even the lowest, appears and advances, before we accept as *proved* the theory of thoroughgoing evolution. Both in the origin of *life* and of *mind*, we still believe a new power comes in. In this we hold, with Mr. Darwin, certainly as to the origin of life, that there is a creative act of the Author of nature and of spirit, and that life and spirit are not a development of nature.

For these reasons we do not accept the theory of evolution. It is not claimed that it *has been proved* that it not true, but that the evidence given for its truth is insufficient to warrant its acceptance.

This non-acceptance of this theory does not mean the refusal to see and use the wonderful progress that recent study has revealed in the natural and spiritual worlds, from the lower to the higher. All this we may see and rejoice in, and by it be filled with inspiring hope for the future, and rejoice in the more clearly discerned power and glory of our God. The question is, whether this progress has come from forces resident in the material universe in the beginning, working on through uncounted ages without any new force coming in from without, as is claimed by the thoroughgoing evolutionist. This claim we contend is *not proved*. But the evidence favors rather, and very strongly, not only the original creation of all matter with all its possibilities, and their orderly working under the Maker's supervision, in accordance with unvarying laws of his own constitution, but also the coming in of new forces, from time to time, as in the introduction of life, of mind, of moral beings, and at last of the Son of God. The *facts* of such progress belong to all of us. It is only an unproved theory of their connection, we are dealing with.

And now comes the question, What influence should this theory of evolution have in our religious thinking? Our answer might be, that its coming into our thought on religion with any *controlling* influence should be made to wait until it is proved. *Then* may we ask how it should affect our views. But we cannot take this course, and keep its influence out of our thought on religion, until it has proved its right to be. It *has for the past few years* affected religious thinking most widely and profoundly, and our saying, "It is illegitimate to allow it such influence," is idle.

There is one thing we must all see, that many are accepting this theory as a proven fact with which we must reckon. They tell us we must adjust our religious views to this newly discovered fact, as men had to adjust all their thinking to the Copernican theory when it was established, and it is idle to resist its inferences, and that we are belated in our thinking, are falling behind the age, if we do not accept it in all its bearings on religious thought and belief. Dr. Munger, for instance, in speaking of the growing lack of interest in the churches on the part of the people, tells us that "the trouble is in the preacher's failure to come fully under these ruling ideas [of evolution and the higher criticism], and of course the people doubt either his sincerity or his ability to grasp them. When he fully submits himself to modern thought, and follows where it leads, he finds himself at the very heart of the revelations of God, in nature and in Scripture." He quotes approvingly Mr. Brierly, who says, "We talk of creeds. What are the *creeds* of science, and how does it express them? When we have understood the bearings of that question and its answer, we shall possess, if not the solution of our theological problems, at least a substantial help towards it."¹ In this acceptance of the theory of ev-

¹ London Christian World, July 2, 1903.

olution, and its use in religious thinking, is there among theologians the caution which scientists so widely observe, who would only say, "We believe it, not because we can say it is proved, but we think it will be"?

Dr. Gordon, also, tells us, "The credit of mastering this new scientific conception of nature, of animal life, and of men, and of bringing it into harmony with the permanent intellectual and spiritual possessions of the race, belongs primarily not to *scientific* men, but to poetic and *religious* men."¹ The reason for this may be different from the one he suggests. It may be that scientists do not feel so *sure* of evolution as some who have accepted it, because scientists believe it. What a stinging sarcasm on the clerical acceptance of the teachings of science, in Mr. Huxley's question to his friend Foster, "Do you see how evolution is getting made into a *bolus*, and *oiled* outside for the ecclesiastical swallow?"²

But what shall we do with this theory, seeing it is *in* the religious thinking, and affecting it so greatly? Here we need to see and keep in mind the fact, that, were the theory proved in the realm of nature, as in plants, the lower animals, and even in man as to his body, it would have no place in the realm of man as a *free* spirit. For there is in man an element that takes him and all spirits out of the realm of nature, i.e. out of the realm of necessitating causation, an element which separates him from all below him by the whole diameter of moral freedom and character. We do not forget the evidences of mentality and of feelings, as affection and loyalty, in the lower animals; but, for all this, there is in man what there is not in the lower animals, and we can see no possibility of its development out of anything in them, i.e. *rationality* and *freedom*, which

¹ *Ultimate Conceptions of Faith*, p. 77.

² *Life and Letters*, II. 60.

are the conditions of moral character, and which take him forever out of the category of nature.

Rationality gives the capacity to discern the *absolute obligation of right*. An example will best show what is meant by this "absolute obligation of right." A gentleman approached a friend of the writer, who was the owner of vessels, many years ago, and sought to induce him to use them in the African trade, to which he said they were well adapted. He set forth the great profits of the trade, but he at last said, "I ought to mention one thing, the cargo is mainly New England rum." The gentleman approached said at once, "That is enough. You need say no more." Now had he said, "But the vessels shall come home *loaded* with full cargoes of ivory, all they can carry; yes, with gold; yes, with diamonds," the reply to each would have been, "That makes no difference." And the peculiarity of the case is, that, in adding manifold to the gain, there is no *approach* to *removing* or *lessening* the obligation not to do it, which cannot be affected by any increase of gain in doing the wrong, or of loss in doing the right.

Joseph saw this absolute obligation when he said, "How can I do this wickedness and sin against God?" and the young men, when they looked into the burning fiery furnace, and said to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we are *not careful* to answer thee in this matter"; so Peter and John, when they said to the authorities, "Whether it be *right* in the *sight of God*, to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye, for we *cannot* but speak the things which we have seen and heard"; and this is the meaning of the "must be" that our Lord so often uses of his action, and especially of his death.

Man has a second capacity of *choosing* to act under the direction of the absolute obligation of the right. Doing this, he becomes a *free* man. The capacity to see the absoluteness of

the obligation of right, and to choose it, gives him "formal freedom," the capacity of freedom; the choice of it as supreme gives him real freedom. Without this seeing of the absolute obligation, and choice of it, he is just as much under the control of "motives" as the ball on the billiard-table, which will always, and *must* always, move in the direction of the strongest motive or force. Without this, there is no escape from Jonathan Edwards's argument, that the human will always moves in the direction of the strongest motive, or from that of John Fiske for "determinism."

But, seeing and choosing this, man is free to act against every motive to evil, for he has an absolute consideration for the right, that knows neither more nor less; and all considerations of more or less of gain, or pleasure, for anything wrong, are of no weight against this absolute consideration. Now this capacity of seeing the absolute obligation, and of choosing it, makes man a *free spirit*, and takes him forever out of the realm of "nature," which is the realm of necessitated and necessitating causation.

Prove the evolutionary theory, and we do not get out of the realm of nature. But man, a free spirit, cannot be the outcome of an evolution which is only in nature. When we come to consider religion, we are in the sphere of free spirit, and not in that of evolution, with its necessitating causation. As John Fiske, the great expounder of Herbert Spencer, says, "No theological system or philosophy can be called *cosmic* [i. e. evolutionary] while admitting miracle, special creation, or any *other denial* of the *persistency of force*"; and no ontological system can be called "cosmic" while professing to deal with existence not included within the *phenomenal world*."¹ Yet,

¹ Cosmic Philosophy, Preface, p. 11.

strangely enough, as Professor Royce tells us,¹ Fiske to the end held that "the gulf between the phenomena of *consciousness* and all other phenomena is an impassable gulf." Remembering this spiritual nature of man will help us, in our religious thinking, to keep clear of this realm of *force* and *phenomena*.

But now, while we hold that evolution has no *legitimate* place in religious thought, yet we must see that it has come into this highest realm of our interests, and many are seeking to adjust their religious thinking to what they feel obliged to accept as a system of fact, revealed by science, which gives a law as inflexible as that of gravitation. Let us, then, ask what its tendencies are, and how it is affecting religious thought and belief.

1. It has a powerful tendency to vacate the *supernatural element in man*.—By the "supernatural" in man is not meant the miraculous. This is the divine supernatural. As Nicodemus said to our Lord, "No one can do these signs that thou doest, except *God* be with him." But there is a supernatural in man, just as really as in God, and it is the essential condition of his freedom, and of his capacity of character. It is in this that he and his acts are not in the chain of necessitated and necessitating causation, as is all of nature. He is, in his spirit, *above* nature, as in his body he is *of* nature, and he acts on and through nature by a direct power of his will over it,—not in contravention of her laws, but always and only in accordance with them.

Now there is a strong tendency, from the theory of evolution, to minimize, and even vacate, this essential element in man, and to lessen his sense of responsibility for his character and destiny. So much is attributed to heredity and environment, that little is left to the human spirit for its self-control

¹ Introduction to his *Cosmic Philosophy*, p. 59.

and self-formation. As Mr. Huxley says, "The actions we call *sinful* are *as much the* consequence of the order of nature, as those we call *virtuous*. They are part and parcel of the struggle for existence through which all living things have passed, and they have *become* sins, because man alone seeks a higher life in voluntary association."¹ How much room is left here for human responsibility and character, with both *sinful* and *virtuous* actions equally "the consequence of the order of nature," and becoming *sinful* or *virtuous* because "man seeks a higher life" ?

It is true that man's *consciousness* of his responsibility, and the necessity, for the very existence of society, of holding men responsible and treating them as so, prevents the application of the implications of the theory; but still its influence is powerful and harmful. It is one of the causes which have contributed to the strong tendency to Universalism, especially among our teachers of religion.

2. The theory of evolution would vacate the divine *supernatural agency in human history*, i. e. the miraculous.—We have already quoted Mr. Fiske's declaration that "the miracle, special creation, or any other denial of the persistence of force," must be excluded. All evolutionists do not go as far as this (although it is difficult to see how they can avoid it). As Mr. Huxley says, "In arguing about the miraculous, the assumption that they [miracles] are impossible, is illegitimate, because it involves the whole point in dispute." "*Improbable* they certainly are, and therefore they require specially strong evidence. But this is precisely what they lack; the evidence to them turns out to be of doubtful value."² And I believe he never admitted that any miracle ever occurred.

¹ Life and Letters, ii. 299.

² *Ibid.*, p. 297.

Here an important word as to the definition of miracle should be said. It is frequently spoken of as an interference with, a suspension or infraction of, the laws of nature. This is unfortunate, especially now that the new conception of "the reign of law" has taught us all, and rightly too, that the laws of nature (or better, God's laws in his action in nature) are unchanging, and that their *uniformity* is essential for the conduct of life. There is in a miracle no infraction or suspension of any natural law any more than in our non-miraculous action in and with nature. Her law is, that every *force* shall act in a certain uniform way and to its full extent; and it does so in the case of the miracle.

But in the miracle another force, a new one, comes in from without, from a spiritual source, and counteracts the natural *force*, not the natural *law*. And there is no more an infraction of law than there is when the upward force of the hand, in obedience to the *will* of the person who lifts a book, *counteracts* the natural *force* of gravitation, which, uncounteracted, would have kept the book down; but it *is* counteracted, and the book rises. The *pull downward* is just as strong, however, while it rises and is held up, as it would have been had it remained down, i. e. the *force* of gravitation acts to its full extent when the book rises or falls. The rising of the book does not affect the operation of the *law* of gravitation: it only shows that another force under the control of the will of a person is strong enough to counteract it.

In the miracle, this new force comes from the divine supernatural action direct, and without the intervention of secondary causes, as means; as in healing the sick, raising the dead, multiplying the loaves, by the direct power of God, in accordance with his will. In every case, natural forces operated in accordance with their laws and to their full extent, but the power of

God counteracted forces of disease and decay, and brought health and life; or of the winds, and brought calm; or it produced directly what the forces of nature would not have produced, as in multiplying the loaves.

It may be asked if we do not ascribe a supernatural power to the human will, like that in God. Yes, but with two differences: (1) that the power of the human will is limited to the direct control of the physical forces of the body in which it dwells; and (2) that it can affect physical forces outside the body only as they can be affected by the physical forces of the body under its control, i. e. by secondary causes or means. In the divine supernatural, or miracle, we see no limitation in the extent of its action, as in our case to the control of the forces of our body, and no limitation to the use of physical means. It is direct in action and unlimited in extent.

Now the assumption of evolution is that *no forces ever come into* the course of nature and history from without. In evolution we have only the outworking of forces resident in nature from the beginning: no force is lost, no force is added. This is the real question of miracle. Has any spiritual divine force come into the course of history since the beginning? We see how a right definition relieves it from all prejudice from the objection to admitting the infraction of law. It is simply a question of evidence. We see how, with this exclusion of all forces from without, the theory of evolution vacates miracle in human history; and, most of all, it vacates the supreme miracle of all history, on which our hopes depend, that which is the very substance of our gospel,—the coming of the divine into our world and its life, in the person of the only-begotten Son of God, Jesus Christ.

No one can have observed the currents of thought the past few years, without having seen a strong tendency to deny the

divine supernatural element in the person and work of Christ. He is but a human person, to be accounted for as other persons are. And this tendency has been manifest among some of our teachers of religion. Take such cases as that of Professors Gilbert and Paine. The latter says,¹ "The inductive historical method brings Christ back to us a *true member of the human race*, and turns Christology into *anthropology*"; and such men find many defenders.

It is true we are told that we do not need the miracle to attest any teaching as of authority from God. Indeed, some say that the miracle is rather a hindrance to faith, for the ever-present and orderly working of God in nature and history is a more impressive witness for him, than the occasional and special working from without. Note in this the strange failure to see that the object of the miracle is not as a sign and proof of God's being and action in nature or history, but a witness of his intervention for man's help, a sign that the Son of Mary is also the Son of God. As John wrote, "These [signs] are written that ye might believe that *Jesus* [the name given to the Son of Mary] is the Christ, the Son of God." God's manifest and usual work in nature and history does not touch this. Only the *miracle* is the sufficient sign of this.

They delight to tell of the immanence of God in the world. And this is sometimes spoken of as if it were a new discovery; whereas, it is as old as the Psalms, which have the finest expressions of it possible. It is God ever working in all the operations of nature, and the events of history. But the great difficulty with this emphasis on the immanence of God, is its strong tendency to pantheism, threatening the personality of God himself. The great objection to the slighting of the value of the miracle as a sign of God's intervention is that it is in

¹ Evolution of Trinitarianism, p. 281.

such plain contradiction to the plain teaching of our Lord.

3. This vacating the divine supernatural is especially seen in the *influence* of the theory of evolution *in shaping the new views of the Bible*.—There are three assumptions growing out of the theory of evolution, which have confessedly dominated “the higher criticism” *so-called*, or unconsciously influenced it. Any one familiar with the literature of this subject sees this on almost every page.

(1) It is assumed that man has come up slowly from the brute, through a long series of slow improvements, to his present civilized condition. His brutal nature clings to him, and only slowly does he divest himself of it. Indeed, what we call his lower nature, or, in Scripture phrase, “the flesh,” which seems to be the seat of so much evil, is simply the brute nature from which he has not yet gotten free. “The only fall of man has been a fall upward,” as the writer once heard Emerson say.

Now there is a fatal objection to this assumption. *It is, that it is in complete contradiction to the law of the introduction of new species.* It should be remembered here, that the theory of development, which we have argued is “*not proven*,” does not touch the fact of the appearance of new species, nor of their condition when they appear. These are *facts which all see.* The theory only affects the *genesis* of the new species, claiming that it is *developed* out of a previous species. There is, thus, an observed condition of every new species when it appears, and this is so constant that we may rightly call it the *law* of introduction of new species. *Now* this assumption as to the condition of man when he appeared, is in direct conflict with this law.

This conflict is best stated by Professor D. W. Simon, of the United College, Bradford, England, in a volume “*Some Bible Problems*,” and will be stated largely in his words. It is point-

ed out that every species appears with its normal habits, and suited to its environments. There is no slow and painful acquisition of its normal habits, nor slow adaptation to its environments. It is a bird or fish, as normal and as adapted to its conditions, in the beginning, as it ever was. Now how is it with man? We should expect the same normality in his habits, and adaptation to his circumstances, and no long struggle up to normal manhood.

What is the case with man? Let Mr. Huxley tell us: "I know of no study which is so unutterably saddening as that of the evolution of humanity, as it is set forth in the annals of history. Out of the darkness of prehistoric ages, man emerges with the marks of his lowly origin strongly upon him. He is a brute, only more intelligent than other brutes; a blind prey to impulses, which as often as not lead him to destruction; a victim of endless illusions, which make his mental existence a terror and a burthen, and fill his physical life with barren toil and battle. He attains a certain degree of comfort and develops a more or less workable theory of life, in such favored situations as the plains of Mesopotamia or of Egypt, and then for thousands and thousand of years struggles with varying fortunes, attended by infinite wickedness, bloodshed, and misery, to maintain himself at this point against the greed and the ambition of his fellow men."¹

This is indeed a sad picture; and the thing to be remembered is, that the like cannot be said of any other species of all the thousands whose history is open to us. It is the one awful exception "to the law of the introduction of new species." As Professor Simon asks, "If this is not a break in the process of evolution, what is a break? Why should the flower of the process be in some respects the least perfect of its produc-

¹ Some Bible Problems, p. 210.

tions? Why has not man lived from the very first a life as normal for him as the life lived by the races which preceded him was normal for them; or that lived by *contemporaneous* species of living creatures is normal for them? *Had the great demiurge grown weary, or exhausted his skill? Or were the materials on which he worked no longer as plastic as of yore?*

“Or what can be the reason why hundreds of centuries *must* elapse *before* man began to live a man, ere he began to live, as *normally* as the brutes in their kind. . . . The brutes indeed are not *brutes* in the reproachful sense in which it is applied to man, and one would be almost justified in parodying Burns’ well-known line—

“ ‘ Her prentice hand she *tried* on man,
And then she made the beasties, O! ’ ”

Can we believe that man alone, of all the species almost countless, began his career without the endowments and adaptations to his surrounding necessary to a normal life? Can we believe that he began as “a brute, only more intelligent than other brutes,” in the phrase of Mr. Huxley?

No; we must believe he was normal man in faculty and in adaptation to environment in the beginning. This does not mean that the arts of life were his, for these are not *instinctive*, but acquired. But there may have been speech and all knowledge needed for continuing life. As the Lord in repeated instances gave not only the organs of speech, but the knowledge of language and the power to use it, and the *knowing how to walk*, as well as perfect limbs, so we may believe man had given to him all the power and knowledge needed for the simple life of the beginning, that he began, not as a babe, but as a full-grown and adequately endowed man. Is it not true, also, that in all discoveries of early man in the region where, by common consent, he began his career, we find him not a half

¹ Some Bible Problems, pp. 213, 214.

brute, but *normal* man in capacity and physical comforts, and that the relics of a barbarous condition are found far away from this common center of the race at the first? He has *lost* what was in the beginning. And, most of all, is there not evidence of a moral lapse, in every part of the race, which is best set forth in Genesis? Shall we not best account for man's low condition and slow ascent, by accepting the Fall there described? Now this contradiction to the law of the introduction of species in the case of man, which the theory of evolution assumes, has been strangely overlooked, and it warrants our rejecting the assumption, and our refusal to take it with us as a regulating axiom in our religious thought.

(2) Another assumption coming from the theory of evolution is, that man has come up slowly from the lowest and most unworthy conception of religion, and the most rudimentary forms of religious expression, to his present knowledge and worship. That is, he has developed in religion, as in the arts, by his own discoveries and inventions. Beginning in fetishism, he has risen, through animism, nature worship, polytheism with its idolatry, henotheism, until at last he reached monotheism, and an elaborate ritual. This is a natural inference from the doctrine of his coming up slowly from bruteism.

Now it is easy to see what influence this must have on the interpretation of the Bible. We must find there a slow and gradual development of religious knowledge and ritual; and, if we do not find it in the Bible as it has come to us from the past, we must rearrange it until it shall conform to our axiom; as, when we find a clear statement of monotheism in the Pentateuch, it shows it must have been written late in Jewish history, for such advanced conceptions of God could not have existed at the date formerly held as that of the writing of these books. This, too, is one great argument for the late date

of the great majority of the Psalms.¹ So as to ritual the same development is to be found. This gives color to the theory that the history in which the ritual law is set is largely fictitious, made as a setting for the ritual, which did not come to its fulness, as given in the Pentateuch, until during and after the exile.

Now there are great difficulties in accepting this assumption, and its consequences, in dealing with the Old Testament, some of which are intellectual, and some moral. But of these we will not speak, as they do not grow out of the theory we are considering. There is difficulty, however, in the evidence from the comparative history of religions, which goes counter to this assumption, which should be noticed here. Professor Moffat, of Princeton, has taught us that the farther we get back in our study of the Gentile religions which have a literature, the purer and truer are the conceptions of God. The earliest books of the Hindus, for example, are far in advance of the later; so that the awakened Hindus are seeking to resist the advances of Christianity by reviving the older teachings, which are so much superior to the later. We come nearer to monotheism the further we go back. It thus looks very much as if monotheism was the first religious doctrine, from which men have sunk to polytheism, and as if they had not reached it by slow ascent. The evidence from Egypt and China is in the same direction.

But the force of this now well-known fact, as to religions with a literature accessible to us, has been weakened in many minds by the fact that, among uncivilized and barbarous peoples, we do now find these lower and seemingly rudimentary forms of religious faith and ritual. This has seemed to many to prove that this is the natural history of religion, that all have

¹ See Cheyne's *Bampton Lectures*.

begun here, and have come from these rude beginnings up to monotheism, which we are told was reached only in the days of the prophets. But recently Andrew Lang,¹ after great research of the religious ideas and rituals among savage and barbarous people of to-day, shows that their earlier conceptions of God, of his character and government, and of man, were purer and higher than their present ones; all showing not progress, but decline. As he concludes, "There are two chief sources of religion. First and earliest, the belief [how obtained we know not] (the hypothesis of Paul (Rom. i. 18-22) seems not the most unsatisfactory) in a powerful, moral, eternal, omniscient Father and Judge of men [This is the earliest]. Second. The belief in somewhat of man which may survive the grave. This second belief was necessary to Religion, (1) as giving a help to conceiving of God and (2) as elevating man's conception of his own nature."

The witness of our missionaries, who are in close touch with the heathen mind, is to the same effect, that they always find deep down, in the most depraved races, the idea of God, and of the moral law. Now these facts must be reckoned with before we accept the assumption as to the development of religious ideas and worship, as regulative in our study of the Bible.

(3) There is, as a corollary of these two assumptions, a third, which has had very large influence in the present criticisms of the Bible. It is that the Bible is the record of the discoveries of men as to religion, rather than a record of a supernatural revelation which God has given to men. In the words of Dr. Lyman Abbott, "The volume is the product of about sixteen centuries of national life."² Strangely enough,

¹ See *Making of Religion*.

² *Evolution of Christianity*, p. 39.

too, he declares, as the writer heard him in public address five years ago, that discovery (or *uncovering*) is the same as Revelation (or unveiling). One is prompted to ask, Is not discovery man's act, and revelation God's act? Man's claimed discovery is often mistaken, but God's revelation is always true. Our apprehension of it may be defective, but the revelation abides for our study, and the correction of our mistake. So we are told that the Bible is the religious literature of the Hebrew race which has survived, as the books of the Hindus and the poems of Homer. Mathew Arnold is the apostle of this view, and we are told we must treat the Bible as we treat the literature of other peoples that have come down to us, and as no more sacred than they are.

And now we are hearing much of the discoveries of religious truth which we get from our own religious experience, which may be used to modify even the interpretation of the Bible. Dr. George A. Gordon's last book is especially commended for this quality. In a previous one, "The New Epoch of Faith," he says of the Hebrew prophets, "They knew life to a great depth, and over a wide expanse, and *out of this amazing insight* were able to forecast the general movement of mankind. In general they were right, in particulars they were wrong" (p. 386).

There is, certainly, a great plausibility in this assumption of the *discovery* of religious truth, just as we have the discovery of scientific and other truth. But we notice one thing which is very significant. This is by no means the theory the Bible suggests as to its origin. It constantly assumes that it is the word of God; as, "*God* having of old time *spoken* unto the fathers in the prophets by divers portions, and in divers manners, hath at the end of these days spoken unto us

by his Son"; and "Men spake from God, being moved by the Holy Ghost."

Another difficulty is that there is no account which can be given, on this theory, of the great superiority of the Bible; the remnant of the so-called religious literature of the Hebrews, over the religious literature of the other nations, many of whom so surpassed them in literary capacity; nor, again, for the fact, that, while other religious literature degenerates, the Jewish constantly advances, until we have the life and teachings of Jesus Christ, which, by common consent, have never been matched or approached.

Nor does this assumption account for the fact, that, after the apostles and the apostolic men recorded his teachings in the Gospels, and the "yet many things he had to say to them" by the Holy Spirit, in the Acts and the Epistles, "discoveries" in religion ceased. The power of "discovery" became extinct. In eighteen hundred years we have had no addition to our Scriptures. With all the light in which such wonderful discoveries are made in other branches of knowledge, we have no additions to the teachings of God by prophets, by his Son, and by the Holy Spirit in the Apostles. This surely looks as if the Bible were a record of a revelation from God to man, and not a mere record of what man has discovered.

But we are hearing much of *reason* as a source of religious knowledge. Will this bring us new truth? We understand reason to be competent to the recognition of a professed revelation. It is, indeed, our only instrument of knowing what has been revealed, and of testing the evidence that it is from God. And we may discover, in a *revelation* given to us, more and more of the truth, but this is not the discovery of religious truth independently of revelation. Nor the right to say, in our use of the Bible, as Dr. Gordon does, "The Christian

thinker is independent of the texts [i. e. texts making against the salvation of all men]. If there are texts inconsistent with this truth, so much the worse for the texts." This expression reveals the harmful influence of this assumption as to the Bible, and this assumption has had very powerful influence in the higher criticism.

These three assumptions, which almost inevitably come from the theory of evolution, have wrought most serious harm in the study of God's word. Without the wide acceptance of this theory, with these implications, it is doubtful if the destructive views of the higher criticism could have gained the wide currency they have. Our business is to guard against its insidious influence, and insist that it must be *proved* before it be allowed to dominate our religious thought.

But is there no progress in religious knowledge? Yes, indeed. But not by the *natural* evolution from forces resident in the beginning, which have never been added to or subtracted from,—no, but by the constant working of the creating God, working in these forces by unchanging laws of his own enactment, and by his addition to these forces as we believe, but more still by the bringing in of free spirit to use nature, and measurably control its action, and then revealing himself unto him in personal relations more and more fully, and working in and with this free spirit, and most of all by the revelation of himself in his Son. Him he sends as a new divine force into human history for man's saving. This revelation and work he continues in the Holy Spirit, the divine indwelling helper of men. And the knowledge and power of God, increasing in their power and operation, shall fill the earth as the waters cover the sea, and his work of redemption shall be complete, and his kingdom shall have come in earth as it is in heaven.