

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *Bibliotheca Sacra* can be found here:

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

ARTICLE V.

WORLD KNOWLEDGE IS HUMANISTIC IN
ITS NATURE.

BY CHARLES H. LERCH, EASTON, PA.

"THE world exists for the education of each man," says Emerson. Not a small, contracted, specialized sphere, this, which the New England Philosopher conceives, but a cosmos, projected from a mind, which, as Lowell tells us, "is equally at home with the potato-disease and original sin, with pegging shoes and the oversoul." Omniscience, however, should not and can not well be now the prize of the high calling of modern scholarship. It may have been the foible of some students of the past and maybe of a limited few of the present. But if I had my choice between a large acquaintanceship with many subjects or a comprehensive view of wide-minded knowledge on the one hand, and a thorough mastery of all the subtle and confusing intricacies of so-called truth, of a specialty within a specialty, on the other hand, I would select the former, on the basis of sanity, practicability, and even accuracy. Extreme specialization is in grave danger, often, of dissipating itself into the thin ether of solipsism. The rarefied Ego vanishes, and should vanish, through the mist of its own illusiveness. The end is vanity and vexation of spirit.

I am aware that many-sided, broad-minded scholarship, such as the intellectual men of a generation or so ago possessed, is scouted now with suspicion. Versatility is syn-

onymous with shallowness and superficiality. But their inclusiveness more than compensated for our exclusiveness. Their culture in the humanities furnished them with insight into the meaning of terms and the power of lucid interpretation which are denied many of the specially-trained minds of to-day. The Field of Knowledge is now, as it always has been, the world, and the right of eminent domain cannot be granted to any part of its possession to one who does not know that it exists. Only he "who hath access to this universal mind is a party to all that is or can be done." If one makes an excursion into any region of Truth, he must become aware that the line of demarcation by which it is bounded from some adjacent truth cannot clearly be ascertained. All truths are but parts of one stupendous whole, and it would seem as if the whole were in each part.

One of the distressing aspects of present-day education is either the inability to recognize or the deliberate determination not to do so, that every particle of truth however near, or however remote, is an integral part of the whole fabric and cannot be eliminated. A correct understanding of matter implies a knowledge of that which is spirit. A psychology without a soul in it is only the darkness visible of physiological envisagement. The metaphysics of old-fashioned psychology cannot be supplanted by a psychology without metaphysics of the new. The new psychologists "require," says Professor Ladd, "for the effective working of their psychological theories at least so much metaphysics as consists in the assumption of an entity called the brain." The demand seems to be in some quarters for a religion without a definitely defined scheme of theology. But the gift without the giver is bare. "A christology is either the doctrine of Christ's Godhead or it is nothing at all," argues Kaftan. One touch

of truth at any point makes the whole world of truth kin. "This planet," as Dorner declares, "may be the Bethlehem of the universe." But it must not be forgotten that there are Jerusalems, and Samarias, and uttermost parts of the earth, likewise. "All the arts," contends Cicero, "which pertain to humanity have a common connection and are held together by a certain bond of relationship."

It would be mistaking the meaning of the writer of this article if any one would imagine that his idea of specialization is universal knowledge. He is only pleading for a catholic temper, for a proper attitude of mind towards the whole realm of truth. Dr. Parkhurst once said that he was ready to believe anything. He did not commit himself to the belief of anything and everything by this assertion, but he simply predicated the necessity of that openness of mind which is absolutely essential to true scholarship.

It seems as if the need of broad-mindedness were imperative at this time. Enthusiasm for the practical is in danger of sweeping educators and thinkers off their feet and of converting institutions of learning into factories and machine-shops. We must believe in the concrete, to be sure. We must transform the airy nothings of the vocationalist into substance, into reality. But man is not to live by bread alone. Humanism is more than a philosophy of the stomach. There are things above as well as things below. Culture is more than agriculture; it is more than mere skill of the hand. True vocationalism must not forget to be invocational. That which is without must be derived from that which is within. The pattern must be constructed in the head before it can be manipulated by the hand. "A man," after all, "is only a bundle of relations, a knot of roots whose flower and fruitage is the world. His faculties refer to natures out of him

and predict the world he is to inhabit." That world may be a star, but it might be nothing short of a cosmos.

I am interested to show in this paper that all knowledge, whether it be of many worlds or of one, is in its nature humanistic. Its language cannot be meaningful if it is translated into the jargon of the impersonal. Anything short of the personal, of the anthropomorphic, will not define it. World knowledge is for man, can be rendered intelligible only in terms of man.

"The rounded world is fair to see,
 Nine times folded in mystery:
 Though baffled seers can not impart
 The secret of its laboring heart,
 Throb thine with Nature's throbbing breast,
 And all is clear from east to west.
 Spirit that lurks each form within
 Beckons to spirit of its kin;
 Self-kindled every atom glows,
 And hints the future which it owes."

Why should there be any need for dwelling on the thought that the proper expression of the knowledge of the Cosmos, as well as of man, is in the language of person? Because there is a tendency, in our day, of crowding the humanities out of our curricula of studies and of inserting the natural sciences. It would seem as if the purpose were to exchange the vagaries of anthropomorphism for the solid facts of scientific earth knowledge. The argument runs that in science one's feet are planted on the solid ground of this rock-ribbed earth, and not on the shifting sand of speculation. Professor Louis T. More, of the University of Cincinnati, exhorts scientists "to confine their efforts to the legitimate functions of science — the discovery of natural phenomena and their classification into general laws derived by logical mathematical processes."

It is a delusion of Edison, and of others who worship at the altar of pure earth science, that this planet called Earth is the circumscribed boundary of all knowledge, that Naturalism is the only sound philosophy and theology. These men are specially fond of drawing the line of demarcation between this world and the other world, and of calling attention to the thought that, since you cannot be immediately present in both, it would be well to limit the range of your investigation and speculation to the solid earth upon which you live. It would tax, however, the genius of the great Inventor, as well as the resourcefulness of others who agree with him, to show convincingly that all that can be known must be understood in terms of earth. There is a material world and a non-material world; there is a natural world and a spiritual world. Materialistic monism will spring a leak in its effort to compress the Universe within the compass of its mud-philosophy, and will discover that the best parts of its contents will be dissipated into the tenuous ether of a mystical duality.

What is this world of ours, regarded structurally? Can there be things seen, apart from things not seen? Can there be appearance without reality? This world will not reveal its full and real nature in sense qualities. It is really what it shows itself to be by its activity. What it does and how it performs its functions are the image and superscription of its true self. Its activity is according to law, and law is made and given by a lawgiver. The world "is the incarnation of a thought, and turns to a thought again, as ice becomes water and gas. The world is mind-precipitated, and the volatile essence is forever escaping again into the state of free thought."

Law, as it is understood by some minds, is the apotheosis of the Eternal Mind. Law does this, and that, and the other

thing. The Law is clothed in the garb of personality. And yet law, *ipso facto*, cannot do anything of itself. It is only a "rule," as Professor Huxley defines it, "which we have always found to hold good and which we expect always will hold good." It is formulated of something or about something by the mind of man and requires mind for its interpretation. The world as force existed from its foundation; the world as law came into being through the acquisitive power of mind. The laws of Science are nothing more than an attempt at reading the thoughts of the Universal Mind. It is inconceivable that mind can be read where none is posited. In all knowledge-getting, a thinker is assumed at both ends. The Cosmos bristles with mind; it is the concrete embodiment of the thought and will of the Eternal Thinker.

How, then, can knowledge of any kind be expressed in any other way than in the language of personality? Even the good Darwin nods when he says: "If man can by patience select variations useful to him, why, under changing and complex conditions of life, should not variations useful to Nature's living products often arise, and be preserved or selected?" "Over and over again," says Professor Underhill, of Oxford, "Darwin thus personifies Nature, and he does so because he cannot help it—neither is there any reason why he ought to help it. For our conscious mind is the only key we possess to unlock the secrets of Nature, and if this key will not fit, we have no other."

If our conscious mind is the only key to Nature and her secrets, then it would seem that the most broadly cultivated mind should be the most competent to discover her comprehensive and hidden secrets. The content of Nature's thought must be translated into language; and language, to be the expressive vehicle of the lessons of Nature, should be fraught

with a varied and rich culture. Humanism here comes to its own. Science, pure natural science, must appropriate for its use the linguistic output of humanism. The vocabulary of the Ancient Languages supplies it with its nomenclature. The Literature of the Greeks and Romans furnishes it with the verbal facility of exact statement. Science is a debtor to the Classics without being always conscious of the value of the debt. The logical orderliness inculcated by the study of the humanities fits snugly into the logical orderliness of the humanism of Nature. "If it were not for the metaphors he borrows from mind," declares Principal Fairbairn, "the biologist" — and this is true of the scientist in general — "would never be able to make his processes seem natural."

Just now schools and colleges that still teach the old-fashioned classics receive their share of criticism. One aspect of complaint is that students are wasting their time in trying to decipher the language and thought of a people whose social condition was different from and foreign to theirs. The exhortation is that young men and women, in their preparation for life, should apply their minds to learning things that are real and tangible and worth while. And what are these? The mastery of the indisputable facts of science. But how far can one enter into the realm of science without becoming cognizant that his feet are walking in slippery places? Scientific orthodoxy of to-day may become heterodoxy tomorrow. The scientific imagination is always busy giving to airy nothings local habitations and names. Some of the nothings will always remain so and will never yield to localization. The Scientific man without imagination is as helpless to render a vivid portraiture of scientific things as they seem to him, as the poet is to transcribe the consciousness of his inspiration. Professor Osborne Reynolds thought, some

time ago, that he had made the discovery that "Matter is a persistent strain-form flitting through a universal sea of æther. . . . Æther in its turn is described as a fairly close-packed conglomerate of minute grains in continual oscillation." Here the scientific imagination breaks down, and poetry becomes dull prose when it is inquired of what substance the grains of which the æther is composed are made.

Again, according to some critic of the higher education, the minds of young people could be more profitably employed by mastering the theories of scientific men, such as the theory of evolution of Darwin, than by critically examining the masterpieces of ancient Greece and Rome. This kind of education would bring the young into stable intellectual equilibrium, and would put them on the road of original thinking. But what is the theory of Evolution? Is it Darwinism or some other ism? There seem to be as many theories of Evolution as advocates. In spite of Professor Le Conte's insistence that Evolution is no longer a theory but a fact,—what is that fact? At the meetings of the Ethnological Society in 1895, in Germany, so stormy were the discussions upon Evolution that they almost assumed a dramatic character. "In the diverse opinions of Dubois, Virchow, Nehring, Kollman, Krause, and others, we have almost an epitome of the present state of the Darwinian question." What are the cold scientific data which might be extracted from this Darwinian muddle, which would be of educational value to the High School scholar?

"We find that in science," says Mr. Merz, "as well as in philosophy, every period starts from certain assumptions and proceeds according to certain methods, that certain habits of thought become general and certain views become accepted; but in the course of one or two generations we find these

assumptions questioned, those methods criticised, a new habit of thought introduced, and those general views which seemed so natural and convenient giving way to new ones." In the course of this evolution of scientific thought the movement and spirit of romance are as clearly defined as in the mythologies of Greece and Rome. Mythology is mythology whether in science or literature, in ancient or in modern times. Science in this advanced day has not been able to rid itself of "obstinate questionings, of fallings off, of vanishings, of black misgivings, and of movings about in worlds not realized." All this contention is not for the purpose of disparaging the noble study of Natural Science. All that is attempted is to show that it is a poor substitute for the Humanities on the ground of authenticity and finality. It takes as many theories and as great faith to prove the very existence of this Earth to one who gets lost in the fog of solipsism as to convince some modern psychologists of the reality of the soul or agnostics of the validity of the conception of the Deity.

What further, it may be inquired, is the educational value of the purely scientific method of searching for the truth? The answer is, that it encourages and demands exact observation and accurate compilation. But is sound and satisfactory knowledge of any subject to be attained by the mere bringing together of data attained through observation, however accurate? The *disjecta membra* of mere information can never be dignified with the name science. Is it not necessary for philosophy and logic to step in and melt observations and data into law and coherent thought? There is the theory as well as the practice of any science, and the theory is something more than the collected facts of painstaking investigation. The exegesis of the language of nature requires as

much critical acumen and as thorough mastery of the logic of natural events as that of a literary composition or of a compact piece of scholastic reasoning, of mental events. The personal factor enters into this scientific ratiocination as much as in the most self-conscious interpretation of experiential knowledge. "Sit down before the fact" (of Nature), says Huxley, "as a little child, be prepared to give up every preconceived notion, follow humbly wherever and to whatever end nature leads you I have only begun to learn content and peace of mind since I have resolved at all risks to do this." The fact of nature, according to this exhortation, is to record itself in terms of consciousness, and the ego is not to be eliminated from the ordeal. The language and the philosophic content in which this fact of the ego-experience is to be registered must be nothing short of the personal equation stated in the symbolism of Nature's teaching.

What, then, is the conclusion of the whole matter? The world exists for the education of each man, and nothing short of the whole world will do. Not simply the humanities, but also the sciences, are to make their contributions to this education. This education is, after all, not an abstraction but a concrete embodiment in person. In the somewhat transcendental eloquence of the author of my text: "There is no age or state of society or mode of action in history"—and, one might add, of scientific exploration—"to which there is not somewhat corresponding in man's life he should see that he can live all history (all science, likewise) in his own person. He must sit solidly at home and not suffer himself to be bullied by Kings or empires, but know that he is greater than all the geography and all the government of the world."