

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 Expositor* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_expositor-series-1.php

CREATIVE DEVELOPMENT AND EVOLUTION.

IN the previous parts of this paper we have discussed the claims of spontaneous evolution to account for the origin of species of living beings, in comparison with that view of nature which regards it as the development in time of a great creative plan, by agencies determined by the Creator, but for the most part as yet very imperfectly comprehended by us; and have endeavoured to show, in the light of recent discoveries, that the ablest advocates of spontaneous or mechanical evolution have failed to make good its case.

It may be asked, however, What relation does our idea of creative development bear to that of "special creation," so much decried by evolutionists?—on the same grounds which caused the Athenian philosophers to "mock" when St. Paul referred to the resurrection. On this it may be observed that, as we have already seen, even Darwin had to admit the necessity of a primary "inbreathing of life" to afford the initial species for the work of selection; and, though many of his disciples fail to see the necessity for such creative act, this must be because their mental vision is less acute than that of their master. What may have occurred once in this way might have occurred again. But, waving this, we are, no more than Darwin, obliged to maintain that every so-called species, recent or fossil, is the product of an independent creative act. There is the best reason to believe that many of these species are merely varietal forms elevated into specific standing by species-making collectors, who desire to have the credit of discovering something "new to science," or have not been sufficiently critical in their discrimination of characters. A vast amount of detailed and thankless labour will be required to settle this question, especially with regard to

fossils. So far as this labour has been undertaken, as, for instance, by Barrande and Davidson in the case of the Brachiopods, the long lists of synonyms attached to many of the species indicate the present uncertainty on a point which requires to be definitely settled before we can enter with confidence into any discussion of the origin of species, or even into that of the preliminary question of their fixity or liability to incessant change. In so far as the mollusks are concerned, my late friend, Dr. P. P. Carpenter, who had devoted years to the study of the more variable shells, had arrived at important conclusions in regard to the limitation and fixity of the species, which, unfortunately, he did not live to publish; and in the same department another deceased friend, Dr. Gwyn Jeffries, of London, has told me that in visiting collections on the continent of Europe, he had found that the species in some of them bore the same relation to his as that of a shilling to a sovereign, they were split up so finely. Who can tell how many of our received species are only the small change of God's coinage?

Again, there were "critical periods" in the introduction of species and groups of species, as when, at certain geological crises, large areas of the continents subsided and became shallow seas, tenanted by hundreds of species of marine animals not found in the formations of previous ages. Le Conte, the geologist of California, has given much attention to this, and his results are sustained by the study of fossils in the more northern parts of America as well as in Europe. It may be that the present human period is one of stagnation—a "rest of the Creator." There seems indeed good geological evidence of this in the rich and varied fauna and flora of the middle and later Tertiary ages in comparison with the more meagre character of that which now exists. Darwin might here have obtained another hint from the author of Genesis, who

speaks of the Creator entering into His rest after the introduction of man.

The destruction of faunæ in critical periods, and their renewal thereafter, seem to be referred to in the following lines from that "hymn of creation" which has come down to us in Psalm civ.,¹ and which Humboldt justly characterized as the finest general view of nature to be found in poetry:—

"These all wait upon Thee;
That Thou mayest give them their food
In due season.
That Thou givest them they gather:
Thou openest Thy hand, they are filled with good.
Thou hidest Thy face, they are troubled:
Thou takest away their breath, they die,
And return to their dust.
Thou sendest forth Thy Spirit, they are created:
And Thou renewest the face of the earth."

It has also been suggested that just as species, by gradual loss of vitality and by access of unfavourable conditions, become extinct, they may have their periods of vital exaltation and advancement, recurring at long intervals, and causing them to assume new characters, which may have been regarded by naturalists as specific. In the articles already referred to, the Duke of Argyll has very ably presented some of these possibilities; and if we do not know more of such principles of mediate creation, as I have elsewhere termed it, this may be owing to the limited scope of our observation.²

But a more profound and practical question arises here. What does nature teach as to the character and purposes of its Author, and as to His relations to ourselves considered as rational and moral beings? There is no room here for

¹ An anonymous psalm of uncertain date, but on internal evidence probably one of the most ancient.

² *Story of the Earth and Man.*

agnosticism other than of that kind which Romanes has called "*pure agnosticism*," which consists in placing ourselves in the position of inquirers, uninformed but open to conviction. Causes in nature are generally known to us rather by their effects than by their essence, and this must apply *par excellence* to the First Cause of all, who must to some extent be revealed to us by what He has made. But this is an inquiry to be entered into with much caution, in view of our own limitations, and the certainty that we can never penetrate the whole of the designs of the Creator, however we may be able to investigate "parts of His ways."¹

On the one hand, we cannot fail to see the surpassing grandeur, the beauty and marvellous complexity of nature, and the admirable way in which means are provided to serve all purposes therein. But, on the other hand, in view of the fact that it is to so great an extent invaded by pain, suffering, and death, men have been found to deny that the Ruler of the universe can be either a benevolent or moral being in our sense of the terms; or that, if He is so, He can be omnipotent. These doubts are probably as old as human thought. They appear in some of the oldest of the so-called natural religions, and are among the topics discussed in that patriarchal philosophy which we have in the book of Job, and which is as sound and far-reaching in its conclusions as any later attempts to solve the problem. In modern times Stuart Mill has ably discussed it in his essays on theism, and Spencer and Romanes have entered into its detailed investigation, and the latter, in his latest work,² has, like the "Man of Uz," been able to emerge from the darkness of his earlier agnosticism into the light of

¹ "Lo these (the structure of the earth and the visible heavenly bodies) are parts of His ways: but how little a portion is heard of Him? and the thunder of His power who can understand?" (Job xxvi. 14).

² *Thoughts on Religion*.

theism and of Christianity. It is perhaps not surprising that in the shallower popular reasonings of the day it is still bandied about between the extremes of pessimism and optimism, or given up as insoluble, or treated with the senseless remark that science cannot consider such matters, as if there was anything in nature that is not of God, providing that there is a God. It is, however, strange to find some of the more "liberal" theologians of the time so perplexed by the current diatribes of agnostics against the alleged cruelty and destructiveness of nature, as to be disposed to accept the Darwinian doctrines of Natural Selection and Struggle for Existence, as a means of throwing the responsibility on Nature itself rather than on the Creator. They do not seem to perceive that this subterfuge will not avail them unless they abandon the ideas of the omnipotence or benevolence of God, and also the whole of the teachings respecting nature in Holy Writ, except in so far as the existing evils depend on the misconduct of man; and in regard to this the "fall of man" is as much implied in the Darwinian evolution as in the Bible.¹ It may be true that, in the present condition of the world, nature affords no complete solution of the mystery, and that while, as Paul affirms, we can learn the power and divinity of God from nature, we can form no adequate idea of His love until the final restoration of that creation which "groans" under the tyranny of man. Still in this connection the great Apostle of the Gentiles holds that we can learn enough of His kindness to feel the obligation to thankfulness.²

There are, however, certain misconceptions current on this subject which it is well to notice here.

(1) Though man is made in the image of God, and though men, on this account and as having delegated

¹ See *Eden Lost and Won*, and *Story of the Earth*, by the author.

² Epistle to Romans i. 20, 21.

authority in the world, are "sons of God," and may even be called gods in a subordinate sense,—his representatives,—yet it is plain that God's thoughts and decisions must rest on infinitely broader grounds than ours, which must always be partial and imperfect. This is well seen in Christ's doctrine as to final rewards, in reply to the question of His too impatient disciples James and John, as to their positions in His Kingdom. These can be awarded only by Omniscience and at the final judgment. Any present human decision could reach only up to the actual date, might extend only a little way back, and would be founded on imperfect evidence. God's perception of character on the other hand goes back to the remotest inheritance from ancestors, and reaches forward to the last influences of any thought, word, or action, down to the end of time. What applies to our judgment of our fellow men, applies still more strongly to our judgment as to the ways of God.

(2) Any manifestation of the eternal and spiritual God in things material or phenomenal must necessarily be in some respects the converse of His own nature. He is eternal and unchangeable. His material works are temporal and transitory. Besides this, the little they can reveal of God is seen but for a short time, and then vanishes away in so far as our vision is concerned. It is like a few figures in a long procession seen by a momentary flash and then relapsing into darkness. I have elsewhere compared our ideas as to God's plans to a momentary glance of an uninformed spectator at an unfinished picture or building, which may have been the work of years on the part of great artists.

(3) When it pleases God to create beings having intelligence and freedom of will, whether men or angels, He voluntarily limits His action, in so far as they are concerned, by the scope of power and movement which He

has allowed to such creatures. Such free-will may injure or destroy works of God, producing thereby long trains of irregularities and interferences, which may go on till corrected by Divine intervention, and are to be considered distinctly from the main course of the great plan from which they diverge, or appear for a time to diverge.

(4) This great plan cannot be rightly judged till we are in view of its ultimate results. At present we can scarcely see in most cases even its general tendency. In this regard the demand made upon us in Holy Scripture that we should have faith in God for the present, and be assured that the Judge of all the earth will do right, is surely reasonable. I confess that nothing impresses me more with the divine origin and inspiration of the Bible than the lofty attitude which it assumes from the beginning to the end on this subject. God is responsible for the goodness of all His works in physical, organic, rational and moral nature, and regulates their introduction, advance, maturity, decline and extinction, and their subsequent renewal from age to age of His working. This appears everywhere,—in the first chapter of Genesis, in the book of Job, in the Hymn of Creation (Psalm civ.), in the teaching of Christ, in the arguments of Paul and Peter respecting the sovereignty and justice of God, and in the destructions and final renewal predicted in the Apocalypse.

These grand and far-reaching conceptions, so conspicuous in Scripture, are often equally conspicuous by their absence not only from the arguments usually employed in opposition to design and teleology, but in those in defence of these principles. Perhaps no external consideration is more fitted than this to show us the necessity in religion of some direct communication between the spiritual Creator and His rational offspring, in addition to the indirect teaching of natural phenomena, which are neither fully representative of the Creator nor fully understood by us.

If now we turn to the teaching of revelation as bearing on the points discussed in this paper, I think we shall find, though we can look at it only in a very summary manner, that it throws a flood of light on man as a part of nature, and as at the same time a spiritual being allied to his maker, and thus furnishes the solution of the perplexities which surround us in inquiring into the Divine and human relations of the material world.

To every careful and earnest student of the Bible the scheme of creation and redemption, as presented therein, has neither the aspect of a series of fortuitous occurrences, nor of a spontaneous evolution, and rather appears as the development of a great plan running through all the ages of the earth's existence, and culminating in new heavens and a new earth, with their appropriate inhabitants. This is so obvious, and has been so often dilated on in different ways, that I may here be content merely to sketch its general features in so far as they are parallel with the history of the world as we gather it from other sources, and to point out some portions of the analogy of nature and revelation which impress themselves more strongly at the present day than was possible formerly. In the first chapter of Genesis we find a chaos "without form and void," developed by one advance after another, till it blossoms in the garden of the Lord, with man in God's image as its happy inhabitant. So in the history of God's chosen people, the childless pair who migrated from Ur of the Chaldees expand into several nations, and ultimately constitute the nucleus of the empire of David and Solomon. Christ Himself compares His kingdom to a grain of mustard seed, which grows to be a tree, and we see the early stages of this growth portrayed in the spread in the apostolic ages of Christianity throughout the Roman empire. So in the bold imagery of the Apocalypse there appears the great scroll of destiny with its seven seals, waiting to be un-

rolled to display successive pictures of the future of the world and of the kingdom of Christ.

More especially is this developmental progress marked in the unrolling of the scheme of redemption which is the great and special theme of the Bible. Appearing as a germ in the promise to fallen man in Genesis, it is further specialised in the successive revelations to Noah, to Abraham, to Jacob, to Moses, and to the Hebrew prophets, until its primary realisation appears in the mission of Jesus the Christ, and its final perfection in the future and everlasting kingdom of this same glorified Christ Jesus. The late Dr. Romanes, the most subtle of English evolutionists, thus refers to this in the posthumous fragments published in 1896 under the title *Thoughts on Religion*.

“Supposing Christianity true, it is certain that the revelation which it conveys has been predetermined at least since the dawn of the historical period. This is certain because the objective evidences of Christianity have their origin in that dawn, and these evidences are throughout (parts) of a scheme in which the end can be seen from the beginning . . . The mere fact of its being so largely incorporated with secular history renders the Christian religion unique. So to speak, the world, throughout its entire historical period, has been constituted the canvas on which this Divine revelation has been painted—and painted so gradually that not until the process had been going on for a couple of thousand years was it possible to perceive the subject thereof.”

There are two features of this development of Christianity which deserve especial notice in considering its natural analogies. The first is that the Divine power takes the initiative in all progress. Nothing arises by a spontaneous evolution from the phenomenal or created. In the work of creation the Divine fiat is the sole cause of change and elevation. The Divine power and contrivance provides for the residence and destiny of man, and for the means of restoration from the moral degradation and death which he has brought on himself. Throughout the whole history,

men left to themselves tend to relapse into evil and degradation, and their conflicts too often tend to the survival of the rudest and worst types. It is only the Divine Spirit that calms the tumult of the sea of human passions. Even after the advent of Christ, apostasy soon tends to set in, and continues to deepen till new spiritual life descends from above. So it does also in the final culmination, where the city of God is not the product of the endeavours of men, however well meant or valuable in their way, but descends from God out of heaven. Indeed, all our scientific, educational, and social efforts are but like the gas and electric lights, which aid us in the darkness, but must be extinguished before the light of the rising sun of the Divine appearing.

Another feature of the development is that, like the course of life in geological time, it is accompanied by the rejection and loss of many important things. Of this kind are the exile of Cain and the destruction of the antediluvians by the flood; the rejection of so many of the peoples descended from Noah, and their lapse into idolatry and barbarism; the special selection of Abraham and his family, and of Jacob instead of Esau; the failure of Jesus and His Apostles to convert the Jews as a nation, and the consequent overthrow of Jerusalem and dispersion of the Jewish people; the subversion of the Western and Eastern Christianised empires by the barbarians and the Moslem; and, according to the Apocalypse, the still more stupendous catastrophe awaiting the present nations of the world. Thus blessing and cursing, building up and pulling down, progress and retrogression, go hand in hand, and the advance of humanity as a whole leaves behind a series of wrecks which seem loss and waste, unless God has plans respecting them unknown to us. They resemble at the moment the perished animals of bygone geological ages, of which only crushed and distorted skeletons remain to us, sometimes testifying even yet by their attitudes to the pain

of their dissolution. The facts of history strike the historians and prophets of the Bible much as these crushed and distorted skeletons of fossil animals affect some of our modern naturalists, and give rise to similar questions, the only solution of which seems to be in absolute faith in the wisdom and justice of God. Paul testifies that the apparent rejection of Israel was to him a cause of much grief and continual sorrow of heart. Christ Himself weeps over the Jerusalem which would not permit Him to save it, vindicating perhaps the strange verse of Charles Wesley which says:—

“ For those that *will not come* to Him
The ransom of His life was paid.”

So far as God's dealings with man in his wilfulness and disobedience are concerned, the reasoning of St. Paul in the ninth, tenth, and eleventh chapters of his letter to the Roman Christians gives us the most full explanation, one that applies to nature in general as well as to man. It is simply this, that if we believe in God at all, we are bound to believe that He understands what He is doing, and that before we undertake to “reply against God,” we should consider how very little we have in the way of data to enable us to judge of His plans or of His capacity to bring out of the whole the greatest possible good at last. This may be a humbling conclusion, but it is surely better than the pessimism and mental confusion which result from supposing that we are the sport of insensate and pitiless natural forces, crushing us in their mechanical progress toward ends in which we have no personal interest. We have also the right to take the whole in connection with the Christian doctrine of personal salvation provided freely for all who will accept it, and leading to reconciliation with God, and ultimately to entering into His counsels, so that we shall “know even as we are known.”

Thus there is a remarkable analogy between the difficulties that meet us in explaining the pain, suffering, and loss that appear in nature and those that appear in human history, and neither can be solved unless from the point of view of theism and of personal faith in a divine Redeemer we can acquiesce in the dealings of God with us, and can entertain the assured trust that He doeth all things well, and that eventually we shall understand this.

In the meantime, in so far as science and common sense are concerned, we may consider the case of evolution of the kind held by Spencer and Darwin, as closed, and that the way is open to consider a Divine Development in nature as the process of the origin of the world. If we find this complex and difficult to resolve into its true secondary causes, that is what we should expect; but we should also expect it to be in harmony with any true revelation from God respecting our own welfare and our relations to God on the one hand, and to the world we are to rule over on the other.

I have only to add, as the personal conclusion of the whole matter, after more than half a century of study of nature and revelation, that when I regard the material universe as seen in the one or represented in the other, I am overwhelmed with a sense of my own ignorance and insignificance, and can but say, "What is man that Thou art mindful of him?" while, in regard to my natural inability to fulfil the ends of my own existence, I must regard myself as an altogether unprofitable servant, and, like the old patriarch depicted in the book of Job, must "abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes,"¹ asking God, not to "forsake the work of His own hands."² But when, on the other hand, I know that "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but should have eternal life," I am

¹ Job xlii. 6.

² Ps. cxxxviii. 8.

content to leave in His hands all the perplexities that arise from nature and human life and history, and am ready to join St. Paul in his great ascription of praise :—

“O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God ! how unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past tracing out ! For who hath known the mind of the Lord ? or who hath first given to Him, and it shall be recompensed to Him again ? For of Him, and through Him, and unto Him, are all things : to whom be glory for ever.”¹

J. WILLIAM DAWSON.

KING JAREB.

HOSEA v. 13; x. 6.

ON my return after a long absence, I find on my table the last number of the *Zeitschrift* for Old Testament Studies. Prof. W. Max Müller, of Philadelphia, here offers the same correction of מלך ירב which I had put forward in the November EXPOSITOR, p. 364, with the exception that he retains the ' in ירב, and attaches it to מלך, thus producing the archaic form מלכי. “The old termination was preserved,” he says, “in *malki*, because the entire expression was to Hebrew feeling a proper name.” He does not, however, refer to the possibility of a reading מלך רם (or מלכי), “high king,” though a final *m* is favoured by LXX. Michaelis was already on the right track; he however retained ירב in the sense of “great.” The emendation appears to me both obvious and correct.

T. K. CHEYNE.

¹ Rom. xi. 33.