

## SCIENTIFIC LIGHTS ON RELIGIOUS PROBLEMS.

## VII.

## THE RELATION OF EVOLUTION TO HOLINESS.

WE have arrived at the conclusion that Nature, as interpreted by the system of Evolution, is not morally indifferent. We have seen the world of life—itsself the flower of the natural forces—proceeding by a steady growth from Individualism to Altruism. We have seen that the individual stage—what we now call selfishness—was not originally immoral. We have seen that self-preservation was the first law of Nature and that obedience to this law took the place of a duty. Nay, we have seen that self-preservation has never *ceased* to be a duty—that it is the last, as well as the first, law of Nature. The difference between the animal and the man—in other words, between Individualism and Altruism, is not that the former preserves *itself* and the latter preserves another. The primitive animal and the highest man both preserve themselves. The difference lies, not in their idea of *preserving*, but in their idea of self. Completed Altruism is not simply the *love* of others; it is the identification of others with myself—the incorporation of others in my law of self-preservation. The essence of Christ's preaching is expressed in a single sentence, "Inasmuch as ye did it unto the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me." Sin first becomes possible in Man, not because self-preservation *ends* in Man, but because in Man there is first presented to the mirror of consciousness the image of two selves—the one individual, the other corporate. Henceforth it becomes at once the duty and the difficulty of the creature to *extend* the law of self-preservation—to seek for no individual good which would dispel the larger image.

The difficulty of the new duty lies, as we have seen, in

the preliminary start given to the old principle. Selfishness, or Individualism, was already far on its journey ere the second image was formed. Will it be said that this itself proves the non-moral character of the system of evolution? I think it proves exactly the reverse. I hold that the evolution of Altruism would have been impossible if the state of individual desire had not preceded it. For, what is Altruism? It is the wish that another should have the thing I myself have loved. All charity is based on that principle, all help is suggested by that principle. You save a drowning child because you yourself would not like to be drowned; you contribute to the poor because you figure in yourself the pains of poverty. It is impossible that the sacrificial life should precede the personal life. When a man is told to go up to Mount Moriah and offer something for the service of humanity, the thing which he offers is always something which is dear to him. His gift, if it be Altruistic, implies the memory of something previously enjoyed. If it is given merely to show contempt for the possessions of life, it is not an Altruistic offering. No man would dower an object of his love with that which was, in his mind, associated with contempt. The treasure which I bestow on the world only becomes a gift of Altruism on the supposition that it has been already a treasure to me.

But while all this is true, and while it is corroborative of the moral trend of Nature, it remains a fact that the preliminary start given to the selfish principle makes the task more hard for Man. Of the many ages of animal life by far the larger part have been ages of Individualism. The primal man therefore starts with a disadvantage. Cain has not learned to love his brother as himself nor to regard the welfare of Abel's flock as equivalent to his own prosperity; accordingly, he rises up to slay him. The truth is, the progress of evolution has been more retarded by sin than by anything else in the universe. We are in a great mis-

take in this matter. We think of the problem of moral evil as one which affects religion but which is completely and triumphantly evaded by the theory of Evolution. There is no greater error conceivable. Sin is not only a problem of Evolution, but it is the distinct enemy of the evolution that prevails in *our* world. It is the greatest of all barriers to the progress of that Altruism which is the goal of human development. Our process of evolution is not so rapid as it ought to be. There is a drag upon the wheels. I heard a professor of divinity define sin to be "a necessary moment in a process of development." The saying was meant to be religiously naughty; it only succeeded in being scientifically weak. Of course we all know that evolution in the abstract is as compatible with a fall as with a rise. But the system in our world is not evolution in the abstract; it is a particular phase of evolution—evolution upward. The progress of organic life has been a progress from Individualism to Altruism. Any conquest, however temporary, of the Altruistic principle by the selfish principle is, for the time being, an interruption of that progress, and, to that extent, a thing to be deplored. The scientific definition I would give to sin would be "an unfortunate regress in a development whose trend is manifestly upward."

I repeat, then, that the influence of sin is as disquieting a problem for science as it is for religion. No religious man seeks his heaven more pertinaciously than the Evolutionist seeks his optimistic world. It is beyond all question that the retarding element to the realizing of the dream of faith has been also the retarding element to the realizing of the dream of science. Sin is not merely a spiritual calamity; it is a secular calamity. What we call, in the sphere of faith, the march of holiness we term, in the sphere of science, the march of Altruism; what religion calls the *retardation* of holiness, Evolution terms the retardation of Altruism. The resisting element to religion is identical

with the resisting element to evolution; it is in each case the stream of a heredity which for ages has been running in a different channel and bent on a different way. The obstacle in each case seems naturally stronger than the counteracting force. I say "naturally"—"looking only at what we see." Standing at the dawn of the human race, and considering how much longer has been the pedigree of the man's selfish principle than the pedigree of the man's Altruistic principle, we should be disposed to pronounce the hope impossible that the new creature should ever be emancipated from the old thralldom.

And yet there *has* been a process of emancipation. Man has attained in theory and has approximated in practice to the standard of perfect Altruism. In Christianity he has reached the theory; in hundreds of self-denying lives he has essayed the practice. In its centre and in its rear humanity is still outside the city of gold; but the van is already within the gates, and the firstfruits of the promised land have touched the lips of men. How are we to explain this moral progress in the face of moral disadvantages? The nearest approach I can make to an explanation is to call it a deliberate choice on the part of Nature—a choice which in theological language would be termed a manifestation of Divine holiness.

There is a difference between holiness and morality. Morality is goodness; holiness is separation from evil. To the mind of the Jew—the man who of all others emphasized the holiness of God, the distinctive feature of this holiness was its separativeness. The Holy Place in the Tabernacle was screened and curtained from all beside, and the man who entered in entered by a special door. Now, in the process of evolution the nearest approach to this I know is the slow march of humanity towards a completed Altruism. To me the slowness of the march is the main proof of a separative choice. Had it been quick, it would

have failed to suggest to me the idea of purpose. I do not think the idea of purpose is ever suggested where there is not the sense of an obstacle. We never associate the spontaneous with the purposeful. The popular mind speaks, of course erroneously, of "the wayward winds." Why so? Just because of their seeming unimpededness. There is not sufficient sense of obstacle to suggest definite and determinate design. On the other hand, to the popular mind the river does suggest purpose; we describe it as moving "at its own sweet will." Why so? Is it not because the river has a winding course, a course which seems full of impediments, and where the waters appear with difficulty to reach the sea. These, no doubt, are poetic fancies; but they are fancies which reveal a great truth. They tell us that the idea of purpose is suggested by the overcoming of obstacle, and that Man first reaches the notion of design, not by the sight of omnipotent action, but by the vision of resisted effort.

Now, when we turn from the physical to the mental life, the sense of an obstacle to the plan of Nature ceases to be poetry; it becomes fact. It is no longer an illusion; it is a reality. You and I feel within us the action of two hereditary influences—the one driving us in, the other drawing us out. The one has existed from the beginning; the other is but of yesterday. The one has been rooted and grounded in the very foundations of the animal life; the other has been an offshoot, an excrescence. Both are forms of self-preservation; but they are different forms of the "self." To the one the self is the individual man; to the other the self is the outside world—the sphere originally deemed foreign. The conditions here are manifestly those of antagonism; and even a writer far advanced in the Christian life is obliged to confess that the deepest note in his being is that of conflict: "There is a law in my members warring against the law of my mind and bringing me into

captivity." The further a man advances on the road to Altruism, the more he feels this bondage to Individualism. It is the cry of science as much as of religion, "Who shall deliver us from this body of death!"

But here comes the remarkable thing. In spite of this state of conflict, we have conceived a perfect ideal of Altruism. In the very midst of this struggle, in the very heart of this conflict, we have aspired to a height of brotherhood which is absolutely insurmountable; the rain is still on the river but the sun is on the hill. This anticipation of the side of victory is what I call Nature's choice of holiness. It is as if, ere yet the battle is over, she had waved a flag of goodwill to that one of the combatants whom she loves best. The human verdict in favour of Christ is a verdict in advance of the environment; we accept an ideal of Altruism which we do not yet follow. What else does Paul mean when he says that we are justified by faith and not by works! None of us have completely exercised the practice of Altruism; the majority of us have not *begun* to practise it. Yet the verdict of humanity has been given in advance. Millions have accepted Christ as the way, the truth, and the life while yet they are outwardly environed by absolutely opposite conditions. The force of the old life—the selfish life, is still too strong to be repelled by the *hand*; but it is already repelled by the heart. The heart environs itself in an ideal atmosphere while yet the real atmosphere remains impure. From the scientific side I call this "Nature's choice of holiness." It is the deliberate act of separation from a force which is still in possession of the field—the selection of an Altruistic path at a time when the path of Egoism is still the beaten and frequented one.

I wish to emphasize this fact, that the distinctive step of human Altruism is not an act but a choice. Coleridge says, "He prayeth best that loveth best." That is quite true;

but it is equally true that this Altruistic love begins with a prayer. It is at first a wish, an intention, an aspiration; and the actual life lags far behind it. This is a platitude of Christian theology; but it is not limited to theology. Science too has had her advocates for what I may be allowed to call "Evolution by Faith." At the beginning of the nineteenth century Lamarck propagated the doctrine that the first organs of sense came from the animal's feeling of a want *without* them and its struggles to supply that want. Here is faith preceding fact. Then came Darwin with violent denunciation of Lamarck, crying to all points of the compass that the fact must come first, and that good *breeding* must precede good thinking. At first Darwin commanded the audience and Lamarck was everywhere decried. But opinion has swung round somewhat and science is divided. I do not think the majority would now say that the good breeding is alone sufficient; Darwin himself in his later letters expressed great doubt of it. The simple question is whether the things we call "inward" have or have not modified the process of evolution. That they have, seems to me as certain as that two and two make four.

In that familiar illustration of evolutionary power—the blind fish in the Kentucky cave—there is a somewhat novel problem which has often suggested itself to me. The fish have lost not only their sight but their eyes. The loss of the organ has come from the disuse of the faculty. They have fallen into an aperture from which light is excluded; and, as they have ceased to have any reason to exercise the eye, the eye itself has ceased to exist. Now, the problem in my mind is this: When we say that the loss of the organ has come from the loss of the light, do we mean that it has come exclusively from the loss of the *outward* light? If we do, we are in my opinion wrong. These fish have lost something *besides* the outward light—the image of light in the brain. I have no hesitation in saying that if, even

while resting in rayless darkness, they could have preserved the *memory* of sight, the organ would have been alive to this day. For, I take it that the memory of sight is itself a use of the organ—a movement of the optic nerve. Every time you imagine a beautiful landscape you are, even though you be blind, making use of that nerve and conserving the form of the organ. Here is the power of *intention*. The memory of sight is simply the will to see, the effort to see. The effort in the blind is abortive so far as vision is concerned; but it is not abortive so far as the organ is concerned. It keeps the organ alive; doubtless it preserves its beauty.

There is a remarkable exhortation by a Christian writer of the first century, "Labour to enter into rest." It is an utterance peculiarly suggestive, and one which has a deeper bearing on our age than it had on his. It is the exhortation not so much to goodness as to the effort at goodness—to the intention, the determination, the striving of the will. The doctrine of heredity will in my opinion bear out the value of this precept. What *is* that which we transmit to posterity? It is not actions, but tendencies, intentions, strivings, "the labouring to enter in." Even where the desired haven may not have been reached the *straining* to reach it becomes a possession for posterity. Here, for example, is a young man with a bias towards inebriety. He makes a strenuous effort to conquer that bias. He fights against his temptation; he practises abstinence; he labours to enter into rest. For fifteen years he is victorious. At last, one depressing day, he reels and staggers in the street. The popular view is that by this one act of apostasy he has fallen to his original level and forfeited all the promise of the long years. The man himself thinks so. He believes that all his past efforts have gone for nothing; and it is this belief that often drives him to despair and forbids him to try again. But is this a just estimate?



Has this one act outweighed the strivings of the fifteen years? In power of hereditary transmission shall these years of inward struggle be less effective than an outward deed performed in one moment of one day? Without hesitation I answer, no. If there be transmission of acquired qualities at all, the stream of this man's heredity will be influenced infinitely more by the long period of inward effort than by the single act of outward backsliding. Indeed, from the view-point of heredity, the momentary outward lapse can go for very little. The tendency is everything, and the tendency has been upward. I would say to this man, "Grasp again the thread of yesterday; it has not been snapped by the deed of to-day."

There is an old saying, "Hell is paved with good intentions." In the light of modern Evolution my aphorism would be just the reverse; I would say, "Heaven is paved with good intentions." What is *sustaining* this world? Theologians tell us that we are "dead in trespasses and sin," and, from the side of science, Professor Huxley's latest utterances are not much more cheering. I shall not take such strong ground. But I do believe that if you measure the mere outward works of men, men as separated into good, bad and indifferent, you will find that the good occupy a space comparatively small. If, on the other hand, you measure the good and the bad *intentions* of men, you will find a reversed estimate to that given by the deeds. You will find that the good intentions outnumber the bad by a hundred to one. What will be your conclusion from these two separate calculations? Can it be any other than this, that it is human *intentions* that are keeping the moral world alive! I believe, as a scientific fact, that the world would have been morally dead long ago if the preservation of the moral organ had depended on the outward acts of Man. It has been preserved by the predominance of good intentions. The suffrages of the outward acts have been in favour of a

fall ; but the overwhelming majority of votes among the intentions of the heart have been in support of a reign of righteousness.

Let us suppose for a moment that the case had been reversed—that the majority of human intentions had been bad and the majority of human deeds good. I am not aware that this problem has ever been suggested before ; but it seems to me to open up a most fruitful question. Let me take an imaginary case from the vice already referred to—inebriety. Here, let us say, are a hundred generations of men every one of whose members have had a strong tendency to excess in the use of alcohol. Let us say, however, that by a process of hypnotism these generations had been made to believe that cold water was alcohol, and that in point of fact none of their members had ever been intoxicated. The question which I put to the Evolutionist is this, How would subsequent generations be affected as regards transmission ? As a matter of fact—beyond an initial experience in each generation—there has been nothing drunk for ages but cold water ; would this favour the sobriety of the coming race ?

I answer, no, and I am convinced that every intelligent physician will agree with me. Every one of these men has yielded *in intention*. They have taken water ; but they have taken it believing it to be alcohol. Their faith, in this instance, has *not* “made them whole.” It is their faith in the identity of water and alcohol that makes them use the water so copiously ; and this is as much a yielding to temptation as if alcohol were the actual beverage. I prophesy that in this fancy world of mine the coming race will be a generation of weak-willed men—men liable at the withdrawal of the hypnotic influence to succumb to the seductions of the wine cup and sink before the spell of Bacchus. So far as heredity of temptation goes they will be in exactly the same position which they would have

occupied if their forefathers had been the actual victims of alcoholic excess.

I arrive, then, at the conclusion that the most potent instrument of human evolution has been Thought. I think the continued life of the moral organism is mainly due to the fact that the majority of human intentions have remained pure even where human acts have been inconsistent with them. It is to Christianity that mainly belongs the credit of having discovered this ground of hope for Man. Judaism looked at the *outward act*—the observance of law. It measured exclusively the *deeds* of men and valued intentions only as they issued in deeds. And so its outlook upon humanity was one of gloom. To the eye of the son of Israel the bad predominated over the good, because the bad and the good were estimated not by work planned but by work done. His verdict on this estimate was clear and uncompromising, "By the works of the law shall no man be justified." Christianity homologated the verdict; but it did not stop there. It proclaimed that there was another estimate of human worth—an estimate founded not on deeds but on thoughts. It proclaimed justification by faith—by will, by intention. It proclaimed that while the outer man was perishing the inner man might be renewed day by day, and that the renewal of the inner would counterbalance the fading of the outer. It emphasized before all things the desires of the heart. It said, "Whatsoever things are pure and honest and lovely and of good report, think of these things." One would have expected the word to have been "'do' these things." But science has justified the wisdom of Paul; Evolution has confirmed the testimony of the Christian consciousness; and heredity has put its seal upon the doctrine that men may be led upward by the power of good intent.

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