

attracts my eyes, a region where they can never enter, and which would endure unaltered were the earth and its attendant clouds all swept away.

But there are many details of practice that are passed over in silence, as, though of profound importance to the individual life, they do not bear upon the religious thought of our age and nation. One thread of the vast complex web of our century has been traced through, worthy of attention only because it lies parallel with hundreds and even perhaps thousands more, and it ends not in darkness but in light. When once the scale had turned, help after help came in of the best things in all the world—love, friendship, and the power of giving sympathy and counsel to those who were still in bewilderment. The loneliness was over, and life began again to be thronged with interests and irradiated with beauty. Even guidance from Heaven itself was not unknown. The deep voice of the years and the centuries spoke first, and drowned the insistent wail of the disappointed hours; but even the hours now and then had a voice at last, and the single-worded whisper close at hand is apt to be more convincing to the individual mind than the thunder up in the air.

Yes, God is faithful, and my lot is cast;  
 Oh, not myself to serve, my own to be;  
 Light of my life, the darkness now is past,  
 And I, beneath the Cross, can work for Thee.

## SCIENTIFIC LIGHTS ON RELIGIOUS PROBLEMS.

### VIII.

#### "IS GOD A PRESENT GUIDE?"

THE question has often been asked, What is the common element in the religious life of all nations? There is the vastest possible diversity in creed, there is infinite variety in the rites of worship, there are impassable differences in the

intellectual culture of the worshippers ; is there any point in which they are at one? You cannot pitch upon any doctrine and say, "You will find that everywhere." The Jew had no Incarnation. The Buddhist had no Resurrection. The Brahman had no Fatherhood. The Parsee had no universal Providence. The Greek had no Fall. The Roman had no Divine Sacrifice. The Mohammedan had no place for human freedom. Where can there be found a centre of unity?

I answer, You will find it if you turn from doctrine to fact. There is one thing which I think every religion seeks, and that is Divine Help. There is complete diversity of opinion as to what is Divine ; but there is none as to the relation in which Man desires the Divine should stand to the human. There is no religion in the world that has not been embraced for the sake of the help it is thought to bring. Jew, Buddhist, Brahman, Parsee, Greek, Roman, Mohammedan, are divided by the poles in sentiment ; but they are all united in one practical wish—the desire that their respective creeds should each conduce to the achievement of their various ideals of heaven.

Here, then, is a basis for unity ; we all want help from the Power we worship. Now, if the doctrine of Evolution be a religious system, it must conform to this attribute of all religions. We have seen that Evolution is not indifferent to Morality. That is much ; but to make Evolution a religion we need more. It is not enough for me to know that the life of holiness is my highest good ; I want strength to attain it. Does Evolution admit of such a connexion between the human and the Divine as can secure this strength for Man? If not, it is not a religious system. I hear people speak of a "vague theism." I do not care how vague the theism is provided this one point is clear and definite. It is an old saying, "No man can by searching find out God." But the vital question is whether God can

find out Man. Call Him "the Unknowable," if you will; the question is, Is He "the Unknowing?" It is a mere truism to say that I cannot comprehend *Him*; the interesting inquiry is, Does He comprehend *me*—embrace me in His plan? Without an affirmative answer to that question *any* theism is too vague; *with* such an answer, no amount of mist will cause faith far to stray.

You will observe, what we want, what religion wants, is not a *violation* of the laws of Nature. It is a co-operation with the laws of Nature—a Presence *in* these laws. What we want to know is whether the study of the laws of Nature is compatible with devotion. The poet's study of Nature is compatible with devotion; and why? Because he looks upon Nature as a *present* source of inspiration. If the poet were compelled to believe that the forms on which he gazes were simply the painting by a dead artist, he would only be able to admire, not to adore. The adoration of Nature is incompatible with mere retrospect, whether the spectator be poet or theologian. The thing wanted by each is the sense of a living presence; neither will accept compensation in the shape of a mere memory. Shelley will lose his inspiration if, instead of the Spirit of Nature, he is called to adore the mechanical work of a retired architect; Thomas a Kempis will cease to worship if he is required to substitute the six days of creation for the perpetual working of a living God.

The question, then, simply is, Is the belief in a Divine Presence compatible with the Order of Nature? Is it possible without breaking that order to introduce into our universe the helpful action of God? Is the religious sense capable of union with the scientific sense? Can I accept the agency of the factors of evolution and at the same time recognize the working of a Power over and above these factors—a Power which can impart strength to my spirit without suspending the functions of natural law?

Before considering the scientific barrier supposed to lie in the way, I want to make a preliminary remark. It is this, that in my opinion the doctrine of Evolution is more favourable to belief in a Present Divine Action than any other system since the days of the Old Testament. What I mean is, that, if you once accept the existence of God, the doctrine of Evolution will lead you to regard Him as the Jewish prophets regarded Him—as a *living* God. You will not be able, in the light of modern Evolution, to think of Him as a spent energy—as a Power that has just wound the watch and let it run. The conception of such a Power has always been to me the weak point in the theology of James Martineau. Recognizing, with all others, the massiveness of his mind and the loftiness of his range, I have yet been impressed in his writings with something which I can only describe as incongruous with modern requirements. I would say of his God what Wordsworth said of John Milton—He was “like a star, and dwelt apart.” I do not think it was a separation in time so much as a separation in space. The God of Martineau is not relegated to the past; but He is doomed to be inactive in the present. He occupies a contemporary throne, but He occupies it as an anachronism. We feel that He belongs to an earlier day. He is not of the twentieth nor even of the nineteenth century; He is essentially a survival of the eighteenth. He belongs to that age when Nature was looked upon as a passive thing, when matter was believed to be dead, when the doctrine of Evolution was yet unborn—the age when rest was deemed more regal than action, and when it was the prerogative of a king to be isolated from his people. The God of James Martineau is perfect, but He is moveless. He sits in the circle of His universe wreathed in an atmosphere of purity; but He *sits*. His is a quiescent attitude. It is the Sabbath rest after the six days’ creation. The most a spectator can *say* is, “He has done all things well.”

The spectator wants more. He wants to see his God at *work*. To him the act of helping is more than the help given. The aphorism he would prefer to use would be, "He is *doing* all things well."

Now, I say there is one respect in which the doctrine of Evolution is more favourable to that desire than is the old theory of the universe. The old theory of the universe is that of a world whose central principle is at rest. Whatever the centre is supposed to be—whether earth, or sun, or distant star, it is supposed to be a sphere of rest. But in the doctrine of Evolution there is no place for rest, because, as we have already seen, there is no place for a centre. Everything is in movement; it would be more correct to say, Everything is itself movement. There is no room for quiescence; even things which seem to stand still acquire that appearance by the exertion of a force. We have come to realize that we are living in a dynamical world. Rest has ceased to mean the absence of motion; it has come to mean the absence of impediment to motion. The idea of Divine rest must share in the transition. I can no longer think of God as reclining. I can no longer, to my own mind, represent Divine Majesty as equivalent to movelessness. In a world whose essential being is constituted by the play of forces such a conception seems lowering to the Divine. There was a time when the highest ascription of majesty to God was to say, "His rest shall be glorious"; we should now think Him more honoured when we say, "My Father *worketh* hitherto."

And then there is that other consideration, to which I alluded in a previous study—the unfinished character of the building in which we dwell. This too, as we have seen, is a doctrine peculiar to Evolution. Other systems gaze on a completed temple; the Evolutionist uncovers his head in a temple which is still in process of building. And if so, the Evolutionist more than all others requires a Divine Power

*in exercise.* The believer in an immediate and final act of creation may worship a God of retrospect, may reverence a Power that has finished the fabric and has now retired to rest. But if the fabric is *not* finished, if the process of construction is still only half way to completion, the conception of such a God would be grotesque in the extreme. I think all scientists of the present day would agree that, if the existence of a God be granted at all, it must be the existence of an active God—what the poets of Israel called a "living God." Once concede the necessity for a Supreme Being, and the doctrine of Evolution will make you go further. It will force you to give Him wings. It will oblige you to recognize Him as fulfilling a part in the great drama of time. It will ask you to assign Him a co-operative work, a present helpful work, in the building of that fabric which, in its completed form, is to be the temple of His glory.

But now we come to what is supposed to be the special religious difficulty of the doctrine of Evolution. The earliest cry of Christian scepticism was, "They have taken away the Lord, and we know not where they have laid Him." Some such cry has been awakened in religious circles by the latest developments of science. The fear which they suggest is not so much that of a God dethroned as of a God displaced—removed from that sphere of daily life where the man in the street is wont to seek Him. The plaint is somewhat like this: "If science be true, we do not find in the practical world any *room* for God. Where shall we place Him? where in the immediate circle of things shall we find space for Him? Has not science told us that every available inch in the House of Nature is already filled with furniture! Upstairs, downstairs, in room and ante-room, in passage and corridor, she points us to the presence of material things—things so closely heaped together that there are no interstices, no spaces between. Where, then, in this circle of ours, shall God move? At what point is there left room for

Divine co-operation in a world where every crevice is occupied by secular forces? The Psalmist asked whither he could flee to *avoid* His presence; *we* are constrained to inquire whither we shall flee to reach it. The House of Nature seems to be monopolized by other forces; if henceforth we seek for God, it surely can only be in some garden *behind* the house! Must we not abandon all search in the precincts of the dwelling!"

Let me try to answer this by a little parable of my own. There once was a man who from childhood had been impregnated with the belief that a certain room of a certain house contained a jewel of priceless value, and that if he entered there, he would find it. He reached the door of the room and found it open; but, as he looked in, his spirit sank. Instead of being confronted by the glittering gem, he saw an apartment in which there was no remaining space for such a thing. Every niche was occupied with piles of boxes. They traversed the length and the breadth; they climbed the height from floor to ceiling; they shut out the light entering by the windows; they prevented entrance *anywhere*. And the seeker of the gem said, "In this room at least it cannot be; the spaces are all filled with other things." So he abandoned the search and descended the stairs, disconsolate. On one of the landings he met a little boy ascending, and questioned him about *his* knowledge of the room, pouring forth at the same time his tale of pessimism. The boy lifted up his eyes and said, "Did you never think of looking inside the boxes?"

And that childlike question is the crucial question. We speak of the things of Nature crowding out the Divine. Do we know what any one natural object is in itself—what it is "inside"? It will not do for us to say that science has banished the gem because she has filled Nature with iron boxes. What if the gem is contained in the boxes themselves—in the very space which has been occupied!

You and I have been so privileged as to get inside *one* of these iron boxes—the thing called Vital Force. We have been allowed to awake in the inside of it and to find out, not how it looks to others, but how it appears to itself. And we have made a wonderful discovery. We find that from the inside it is an entirely different thing to what it looks outside. When I see it in my brother-man it is a mere form of motion—a movement of certain converging currents identical with those which seem to exclude God. But *inside*—what a change! It is no longer movement; it is thought, feeling, reflection, soul. So far from excluding the possibility of a Spirit in Nature, it is itself a Spirit in Nature—a protest against the doctrine that the material fullness of the universe leaves no room for a guiding and co-operating Intelligence. To *see* the force called Life is to see only a bit of moving furniture; but to *become* that bit of furniture is to find room for the *Spirit*.

Have you any reason to think it would be different if we got into some other of these iron boxes? Suppose you were permitted to live for five minutes in the experience of a sunbeam—not merely to feel it but to feel with it—do you think it would be the same piece of furniture which to your eye blocks the Divine Way? It is absolutely certain it would not. Do you think that ether and electricity have their nature represented by their physical actions? If you were permitted to observe the brain currents that accompanied the composition of Macbeth or Hamlet, would you thereby have any clue whatever to the personality of William Shakespeare? Assuredly not. Still less can you tell the nature of the ether from the movements of the ether. For all I know, for all you know, these movements may themselves be only brain currents—the physical accompaniments of an underlying Life whose pulsations are the source of all that is, and the promise of all that is to be.

And, whatever may be said of Evolutionists personally,



the doctrine of Evolution demands such a Life. It will never be a complete science until the existence of such a Life is postulated as its foundation. I have no hesitation in saying that, more than any other system, the creed of modern science demands the agency of a Power within Nature. The creed of modern science is the reduction of physical nature to a system of forces. And yet, by the admission of science itself, there has not been found in physical Nature one single instance of a self-acting forc e. Evolutionists are never weary of telling us that there is no spontaneity in Nature. What does that mean? It is a wonderful admission. It is a confession that they cannot find in Nature the key to their own system. They profess to reduce everything to movement, to force, to energy. But where shall they find a physical form of real energy? No man has ever seen in Nature an object moving of its own accord. Nothing is stationary, and yet nothing is self-acting. Everything is pushed by something behind it. You look at the sea in a storm; it seems a spontaneous thing animated by a life of its own. Presently you find that it is not—that it is stirred by the winds of heaven. You turn to the winds and say, Surely *these* are spontaneous! By and by you discover that they too are not—that they have originated in a previous state of heat. Shall heat, then, be the spontaneous thing? have we found *here* a resting-place in our search for a self-acting object? Nay, not here; for heat is not an object at all; it is itself only the wave of a great sea—the circumambient ether. Shall we fix, then, upon the ether as the primal force, the original mover? In vain. There is nothing original about the ether. It is not a mover at all; it is the movement caused by another thing; it is itself only an effect. What is the cause behind it; what is that which moves it? To that question physical Nature returns a dead silence. Science confesses to the absence of a voice. The field of physical

research has brought her to a barred gate almost on the threshold ; on the first day of her journey she is compelled to sit down.

Will science rest there ? She is professedly in search of the forces of Nature. The physical field has refused to reveal to her a single force properly so called. She cannot find in that field anything that is self-moving, anything that is not driven by something else. All the movements seen or heard or felt are movements propelled by other forces. Neither eye nor ear nor hand can detect any primal movement. The things of sense are in constant change and yet they have no real activity. What is pushing them, what is changing them ? Truly that is a question which presses not more on religion than on science !

Do not imagine you will get rid of the difficulty by saying the world had no beginning. The question of the world's beginning has nothing to do with it. Proclaim to-morrow that Matter has existed from all eternity, and the necessity for a Primal Cause will press upon science as strongly as ever. What we want to account for is not the origin of something in the *past* ; it is the origin of something in the present. Suppose I saw a cart beginning to move without any visible agency, the immediate question in my mind would not be, who *made* that cart ? nor would my curiosity be in the least modified if I were told that it never was made at all. Made or unmade, it has apparently done an unscientific thing—moved without horse or hand. That, by the admission of science, is exactly the position of the so-called physical forces. Each one of them has a movement received from the other ; but we see not the hand that moves the whole. It is not a question of time ; it is a question of space. The mystery does not lie in past ages ; it is a riddle proposed to the day and hour. It is for *present* Nature that we need a God. None of the recognized factors of physical Nature are sufficient to explain physical

Nature. To explain it, to explain any one of its agencies, you must introduce an *unrecognized* factor—a primal Force, an originative source of movement.

Can we, then, say that scientifically there is no room for Divine co-operation! It is just scientifically that there *is* room. There is a factor wanting to the evolution process—not only to the *beginning* of the process, but to every phase of it, every step of it. Does not this imply that at every step of life I am entitled to believe in the concomitance of Divine action. We are told, indeed, again and again that no one man can rise above his environment—which is thought equivalent to saying that the human cannot co-operate with the Divine. But is it equivalent? That in the scientific sense no man can rise above his environment, I admit; but what in the scientific sense *is* my environment? When I throw a pebble into the water, what is my environment? Is it that little piece of water within reach of my hand? No; the whole extent of the water is, however silently, affected by the pulsation. Nor does it stop there. The atmosphere on the surface ripples at the stroke. There is a movement of the adjacent particles of air; this moves others; these others impinge upon a series beyond—until there is no conceivable limit to the environment I have woven. It is hard to see how any act of mine can touch a part without being taken up by the whole—welded into the Great Mosaic of Nature's universal life. Those who think they have limited Man when they say "the environment is everything" have wonderfully miscalculated. *Of course* the environment is everything; but the environment is God Almighty! What is the environment of the acorn? Is it the little plot of ground where it has been planted? No. It is all the influences of the natural day, all the forces presently at work in the cosmos. Nay, it is more than that. *Present* influences do not exhaust the environment of the acorn. The past con-

tributes also. The climate and soil of to-day are what they are by reason of yesterday, and the environment of the hour is the effect of past millenniums. It takes all Nature to make an oak.

To sum up: Three agents co-operate in every act of my life—my will, my surroundings, and the environment of these surroundings. The last is an unlimited quantity; it is nothing less than Nature as a whole—the sum of existence—God. When my action leaves my hand, it passes into the hand of the universe. It is modified there. It acquires new momentum. It stimulates other forces; it is stimulated by other forces. It assumes relations which I never contemplated. Perhaps I meant it to retard the progress of things. If so, I shall be disappointed. The moment it passes from my hand into the hand of the universe it becomes an agent for the universal good. It loses its particular character, its special character; it becomes a phase of the Spirit of Nature—what theology calls "a worker together with God." And the co-operation is reached by no gap, no miracle, no interference with natural law. It is attained on the path of science, in the order of natural forces, in the work of the world's evolving. For, in that work, by the confession of Mr. Herbert Spencer, there is always something which is *not* evolved—which persists steadfast, invariable, behind the scenes which itself is conjuring. This Primal Force, this unevolved Existence, is the real Environment of all that lives.

G. MATHESON.