EVOLUTION AND CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY.

In speaking of evolution I use the word in a general sense as denoting the doctrine that this world with all its various forms of life has grown from small and remote beginnings under the influence of forces and laws which are still operative. It has been defined as "a continuous progressive change, according to certain laws, and by means of resident forces" (Le Conte), and it is in this broadest meaning that I use the term. And in speaking of the gains which this doctrine has brought to theology, I do not intend to make any attempt to prove that it is true or that such and such modifications of theological opinion are necessary or justified, but assuming them to be proved, I wish to point out the gains to our theological thought.

There must, I think, be many theologians who are conscious that the theory of evolution has proved to be to them a real Godsend, and has flooded with light some of the darkest problems. Theology, the doctrine of God, cannot be perfected until we know more than we yet do of the actual relation of God to the world. To know that God is and that He upholds all things by His all-pervading power, is scarcely worthy of the name of knowledge, until we know something of the *method* by which God creates and brings to pass what He wills. Evolution is our greatest, almost our only teacher in this department. It gives us a reasoned, intelligible account of the method and means by which God has produced the world as it now is—it brings us within sight of God at work.

Before speaking of this, however, there are one or two general remarks which may first of all be made. In the first place, the attractiveness, I may even say, the fascination of the theory of evolution may be noted. The human mind inevitably craves not mere completeness, but unifi-

cation of its knowledge. It cannot rest until it brings into one consistent whole all the truth it knows. Until it can do so, it is not sure either of itself or of its knowledge. How satisfactory then to have a theory that applies to the whole known universe, physical, mental, spiritual. In the remotest ages, in the furthest star, the evolutionist recognizes the same laws at work as are to-day governing the life of this planet. To have a key that unlocks so many hitherto closed doors, a master-key that gives us the freedom of the universe is unquestionably a great boon.

Again, it adds a new pleasure to all investigation, the pleasure which every human being owns, of watching things grow. In every department of study all that is now with us is traced to its origin, and its growth from less to more is watched and noted with eagerness and delight. Who does not find pleasure in watching the bowl grow under the potter's hand or the processes through which filthy rags become paper, or the marvellous ingenuities of man transforming the force of falling water into light and heat for our dwellings? The marvel of the spring never ceases to affect men; the growing plant, the growing child are ever objects of intensest interest. It is there we seem to get close to the reality and power of life, and there we renew our hope for the future and learn to believe in the continuity and oneness of what is past with what is to come, of the far-off beginning and the still more remote end. The same wondering delight is experienced wherever the human mind employs itself under the guidance of this great principle.

At the heart of this delight in growth there lies a great hope. The whole world with all its various life has for millions of years been growing from good to better, and the same laws which have so far fulfilled the purpose of the Creator are still in operation and will carry it forward ever and ever to what is still higher and better.

It may further be necessary explicitly to state, what almost every one now understands, that evolutionists may be Christian—that the adoption of this theory of the method used by God in bringing things to pass does not affect our faith in Him. In point of fact evolutionists belong to every shade of belief and unbelief. At the one extreme stands the late Prof. Mivart, one of the foremost anatomists, but whose zeal for anatomy was outdone by his zeal for his church, and who combined the learning of a theologian with the insight of a biologist. He declared that evolution was perfectly consistent with the most orthodox Christian faith, and that any conclusion drawn from it to the disadvantage of religion is an illegitimate conclusion. Darwin in his great work says, "I see no good reasons why the views given in this volume should shock the religious feelings of any one" (p. 421). And the other great pioneer of evolution, Alfred Russel Wallace, says, "I believe that the universe is so constituted as to be self-regulating; that as long as it contains Life, the forms under which that life is manifested have an inherent power of adjustment to each other and to surrounding nature; and that this adjustment necessarily leads to the greatest amount of variety and beauty and enjoyment, because it does depend on general laws and not on a continual supervision and rearrangement of details. As a matter of feeling and religion I hold this to be a far higher conception of the Creator and of the Universe than that which may be called the "continual interference hypothesis" (*Natural Selection,* 268).

Mr. Butler Burke, who is supposed to have discovered the origin of life, is reported as saying, "We cannot attempt to discuss the original cause—that is beyond the scope of science altogether. But to explain things on the principle of continuity of nature seems to me to reveal the harmony of the universe in the works of the Almighty. Should my

experiments prove the possibility of "spontaneous generation," it is a principle not in the least destructive of the deistic conception of the universe."

But let us come to particulars :—

1. Evolution gives us the knowledge of God's method *in creation.* Much of course remains undiscovered. The origin of matter and the origin of life are as yet beyond the ken of science. But at any rate science has drawn aside the veil so far as to allow us to see God at work. The account of creation we have in Genesis is sublime, and one cannot read it without feeling the majesty of God. The words "God said, Let there be light, and there was light," have appeared even to the heathen mind as among the most impressive ever written. And yet so brief is the whole record of the creative work and so confined to generalities that it fails often to convey to us a definite and lasting impression of the wisdom, patience and power of the Creator. But when evolution takes us by the hand and leads us into the dark "backward and abysm of time," when it shows us, as if we were ourselves present, the stars and worlds taking shape, when one is summoned to travel through millions of ages each with its work to accomplish, when we find each hour and day of it all forwarding the one result, when we recognize that through all this immeasurable time no change of dynasty has occurred, but we are everywhere face to face with one purpose, one supreme and unchanged will, one mighty hand, we see at last the very reality of God's greatness and measure His wisdom by the work it has done. It has been my experience, and I suppose the experience of thousands besides, to be quite overwhelmed by a sense of God's greatness when thus brought into the presence of the actual processes of creation. No general terms of description, however highly pitched and appropriate, can convey the impression made by the thing itself,

and it is when we trace God carrying His purpose of creating man through millions of ages and working towards it through what to us appear a thousand risks and hazards that we seem to see God's majesty and can truly adore His creating power.

It may be thought that this insight into the creative process with its accompanying vivid and convincing exhibition of God as Creator is more than counterbalanced by the knowledge it brings that instead of being directly created by God six thousand years ago, man has been slowly evolved from the lower creation and has actually existed on earth some thirty thousand years. But if this be the truth, it is a gain to know it; and our natural repugnance to finding in our pedigree animals of lower grade is alleviated by the general consideration that origins even of the most beautiful things in life are often unsavoury, and that if the alternative is that our origin was clay, there is little to choose between, so far as our own taste is concerned. As the ancient cynic said, "Why should a man be proud (like the Athenians) of being sprung from the soil with the worms and snails?" The loveliest flower may have its root in filth; and much of our present knowledge can be traced back to what is grotesque and even hideous; but in judging of any living thing you must take into account its end and destiny as well as its origin. There is a great truth in the old maxim "omnis origo pudenda": trace anything you please back to its remotest physical origin and you find yourself face to face with that which you would fain veil or forget. But this is only nature's testimony that she is ever passing from baseness to glory, and that out of rudest materials God can fulfil His bright and unsurpassable designs.

2. But on the evolutionary construction of the creation and origin of man what are we to make of the Fall, of Sin,

and of Death—these three great factors in the theology of Paul ?

a. The Fall. Accepting the evolutionary account of man's origin, we can no longer think of the Fall as a lapse from a condition of perfect righteousness, but rather as marking the point at which *the characteristic of man as a moral being* was reached. Slowly moving upward from the level of the lower animals the creature at last became man. But the point at which he could at length be quite distinguished from inferior races was not determined by his attaining the upright walk, or a greater power of communicating with his fellows, or even a power to use tools and weapons—though Tubal-Cain is posterior to Adam—but the power to discern between right and wrong. At this day there are living on this earth races which, though possessed of the *physical* characteristics of humanity, have not attained to the knowledge of good and evil. They are comparable to children, living out their natural instincts, innocently doing wrong, naked and unashamed, and so far as civilization goes as guiltless of it as the rhinoceros or the crocodile. These tribes, like young children, are ignorant of a moral law. They have the capacity of developing into fully equipped human beings, but as yet little more than the capacity.

In the description given us in *Genesis* of man before the Fall, we find much that is reproduced among savages. Man does not as yet till the ground, but lives on fruit or nature's spontaneous products. He does not recognize the desirableness of clothing of some kind. He has no house or fixed abode; no tools, no books, none of the ordinary equipment of civilized life. Above all he has not yet tasted of the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil. He is innocent: but innocent because he has not yet recognized that there is a law; that there is good and evil. There are two

sayings of St. Paul which throw much light on this condition: the one is "First that which is natural: afterwards that which is spiritual"—the other is, "where there is no law, sin is not imputed." First that which is natural: creation furnishes a nature capable of moral perfection, but moral perfection is not of nature but of will. Where there is no will, there is no morality. Trial is essential to morality. Man does not become a moral being, does not become man, until in presence of evil he can choose the good. He cannot know good until he knows evil. The child strays into a garden and eats dangerous fruits and destroys costly plants, but does nothing worthy of punishment because no commandment has been given him. He is neither evil nor good, but innocent. It is when the law comes, when this and that is marked as evil that man's trial commences and that he becomes a moral being.

The Fall marks this point—the point at which he recognizes that there are certain things he must not do—that he is not like his fellow-creatures to whom nothing is right or wrong, but that he is capable of something higher than following his instincts, can conquer and command these instincts and obey a higher will and set before him an ideal perfect if as yet unattainable. In a word the Fall marks a point at which the merely animal condition is left behind and *man* is born.

As to the *designation* by which this great step has been known, little stress need be laid upon that. It *was* in one aspect a "Fall," while in another aspect it was a step in advance. It is conceivable that man should have triumphed in his first temptation. It is conceivable that his first experience of the distinction between good and evil should have been signalized by his choice of the good in presence of and in preference to the evil. That is conceivable, but certainly it was not probable—one might almost venture to say that,

all things considered, it was impossible. And it is significant of the keen moral insight of the author of the narrative of Genesis, that he so clearly intimates that man's first knowledge of the distinction between good and evil was marked by his choosing the evil, in other words by disobedience to what he knew to be his duty, and therefore by sin which he recognized as sin and so worthy of punishment. And this is placed at the very beginning of the history of the race—before this, there is no history—this is marked by the very first step in human history—the step by which man became man, with all his tremendous responsibilities and tragic unfitness to bear them.

The first sin then was a Fall, inasmuch as it was man's first acquaintance with moral evil and culpability and severance from God: it was an advance because it marked man's growth from the innocence of the animal, the child, or the savage, to the responsibility, the knowledge of good and evil, which characterises man.

It is frequently stated that if you remove the idea of the Fall as given in Genesis the whole Pauline system of redemption falls to the ground. This, however, is a hasty and unwarranted statement. What Paul's gospel requires as its basis is the conception of sin as offence against God and its universality. A theory as to the origin of sin he no doubt held, but it was not on this theory that he built his gospel but on the fact everywhere visible that men are sinners.

β. Sin. But does not this idea of human origin and development very seriously modify or even alter the character of sin? Evolution assures us that we are slowly finding our way upwards from an animal origin; like Milton's lion pawing to get free from the mud which encumbers and detains his hinder parts. All men sin, if by that

you mean that all men give way to appetite or are roused to violence or adopt crafty methods of attaining their ends, because the whole race has but a short time since been detached from its animal progenitors and as yet is only working its way towards the ideal manhood. Sin, or what we call sin, is a mere survival, reminding us of our origin. The animal passions that survive in us are as little blameworthy as are the rudimentary hind-legs of the boa-constrictor. They tell us what we once were. They somewhat hinder our present life; but they will ultimately disappear by the operation of the laws of evolution. We are destined to

> Move upward, working out the beast,
> And let the ape and tiger die.

But even though we accept the evolutionist account of man's descent from creatures without responsibility, this cannot prove that our sense of responsibility is a delusion. To explain the origins of things is the task which men of this generation have been confronted with, but supposing this task to be finished, we have still to ask, What is the present value and character of things? This is not determined by their origin. Our intellect may be the developed product of the unthinking instincts and sensations of unreasoning animals, but this explanation of origin does not discredit or diminish the powers of a Shakespeare or a Newton. And similarly, from whatever germs in primitive man or by whatever methods the sense of responsibility has been produced, here it is now, telling us our duty, keeping before us an ideal, an ethical standard, and making intelligible the words "guilt" and "punishment." Supposing we are being slowly evolved from the brute creation, we must accept the new responsibilities of this growth; as the head of an important department or service who has developed out of an irresponsible office-boy accepts his responsibilities. At each stage of evolution the functions,

organs, habits, and ends of the animal change. The quadruped, though developed out of the fish, can no longer live as the fish lived; nor the bird as the reptile. Neither can the man any longer live as if he were on the lower level of his origin. The power of conceiving the good carries with it an obligation to achieve it.

γ. Has the doctrine of evolution any light to throw on those constant problems of human life, the presence of pain, the inevitableness of death, and the obscurity of the state that follows?

(*a*) On the mystery of pain, some ray of light is shed. For evolution convinces us that we live in an imperfect world, imperfect both physically and morally. In such a world pain and suffering would seem to be inevitable. We are a part of nature and share its fortunes, exposed physically to the accidents, diseases, and death which necessarily form a large ingredient in the physical world. We are in a growing world. The best attainable world lies ahead. This world may become the best, but on the evolutionary hypothesis, it is not yet the best. It may, for all we know, be the best possible. It may have been necessary to begin at the beginning. Certainly it is impossible to conceive a world better fitted for the training of human beings. Whether we could have been in any other kind of world is a question beyond our scope, involving the discussion of the creation or eternity of matter, and the examination of various forms of monism. The human mind is not naturally capable of determining what is possible and what impossible for God. He is limited in the moral region—that is to say, in dealing with moral beings He must deal with them as moral beings, not as clay or gas or metal. He is so far conditioned, and for all we know He may be similarly conditioned in dealing with the physical worlds. And though we know so little of such conditions it somewhat reconciles

us to things as they are, to know that they are moving on to something better, and that this progress cannot stop till perfection is attained. And this is the lesson of evolution.

After all, as Dr. Ward suggested, we are but mice shut up in a harpsichord, seeing the hammers strike and hearing the music, but unable to see the player or to understand the whole symphony. Or, as Seneca puts it, "What that is, without which nothing, is, we have no capacity of knowing —the greatest part of the universe, God Himself, is hid from us. How much of nature has first become known in our own time, and how many things unknown to us will the men of to-morrow discover; and for those future ages when our memory shall have wholly passed away, how much remains to be known" (*Nat. Quaest.*, vii. p. 371).

(*b*) While some in passing through this life may have little pain, or at least only what seems light when put in the balance against the joy they have had, there is no one who can prolong his days or add a cubit to his measured portion. Death is universal. So far as we know, there is nothing possessed of organic life on this planet which does not die. The inconceivable abundance and variety of life is only the obverse of the inconceivable range and ceaseless impact of death. By day and by night, on land and sea, in the air above and in the depths below, death reigns. Countless myriads enter life every hour, and countless myriads leave it; often probably with little or no pain, but not rarely in a paralysis of terror or in torture that elicits screams of agony. Constant warfare is the law of life among animals. The multitudinous life of the lower creation is supported to a large extent by as multitudinous a death.

Now regarding this universal, natural, and yet in many aspects obscure fact of death, evolution has at any rate two suggestions to make. If, as this hypothesis assures us, this world is in a condition of flux, not yet having attained its

end, but always making progress towards it, then death is, so far as we can see, an absolute necessity—not merely the physical necessity arising from the circumstance that being dust we must return to dust, or, in other words, being derived from and upheld by the material of this world we must share in the necessary decay of this material; but also that unless generation after generation were removed from earth the progress designed could not be achieved. For were men not compulsorily removed, new and fresh generations would become impossible, and all human thoughts, customs, institutions, would harden to a worse than Chinese stagnation. The generation in possession would allow of no alien immigrants to consume the barely sufficient fruits of labour and lower the conditions of pleasant living. The increase of human population would cease—the white-headed multi-centenarians would hold the world; and no new blood being admitted, no aspiring dreams of youth, no men with their way to make and their life to live, looking at the world with fresh eyes and from other points of view, all progress would cease and the physical end might as well come at once.

But further, evolution has found for us the most satisfying argument for immortality, apart from revelation. Natural arguments for immortality, as they are called, really avail very little. Cicero's experience in connexion with the argument of the Phaedo is repeated in the case of every one who follows any of the usual pleadings: "As I read Plato," he says, "I assent, but when I lay the book aside and begin reflecting by myself upon the immortality of souls, all that assent slips gradually away." So it is always: there seems considerable force in what is urged in favour of personal existence after death, and yet the mind falls back to the appalling fact that with those who have passed out of the present bodily life we can have no communication, and can-

not form any mental conception of their mode of life or their employments. Through the foolish mire in the Hippolytus Euripides has once for all uttered the universal sentiment of the hopeless natural man : " Whatever far-off state there may be that is dearer to man than life, Darkness has it in her arms and hides it in cloud. Therefore, infatuated, we are in love with this that glitters here on the earth, because no man has tasted another life, because the things beneath are unrevealed and we float upon a stream of legend " (Hipp. 192). Almost as pathetic is the manful resolve of Simmias in the Phaedo (85D), who declares that a man in search of the knowledge of a future life should persevere until he has achieved one of two things : either he should discover or be taught the truth about it ; or, *if this be impossible,* I would have him take the best and most irrefragable of human theories and let this be the raft upon which he sails through life—not without risk, as I admit, if he cannot find some word of God which will more surely and safely carry him." But the most eminent expositor of evolution, the late John Fiske, puts into our hands an argument for immortality of the most persuasive kind—an argument too long to quote in full, but which proceeds upon the fact fundamental to the theory of evolution, that all development of organ has been accomplished in response to " actual existences outside." From this it is argued that man's religious life has also been developed in response to the appeal of a really existent spiritual world.

3. The doctrine of evolution illuminates not only the past but the future. It has taught us the all-important truth that *progress* is of the very essence of this world's constitution. Growth, advance, approximation to the ideal, lies at the very heart of things. God is always going forward, never going back ; always bringing in something better ; superseding the crude by the mature ; introducing the perfect

and the eternal by means of what is always growing old and passing away. Rigid conservatives are out of harmony with the living God and His method. If the world is a world in process of growth, how foolish and fatal is the delusion that possesses those who obstinately cling to what is crumbling in their hands, who do not recognize that when the old has served its generation it must give place to that which it has itself begotten, to the new ideas and activities and methods which are its own necessary result.

But the thought arises, If things are so ordered that progress is the necessary law, may not the world of men be left, as the other creatures are left, to be improved by the operation of the laws which preside over the evolutionary process? Is there any need of so catastrophic a redemption as we have in Christ; so pronounced a break in nature's evolution as we believe occurs in the Incarnation? This opens the gate into a field very inviting but too wide to explore, and it can only be said that Christ is a fact; His interference and the measurelessly beneficent consequences are facts; He is *there*, and His contribution to the world's progress must now be taken into account. That He is not the mere evolutionary product of what went before, is the faith of the Christian. He stands ever separate from sinners; a new insertion in this world's life, not explicable by or referrible to natural forces. He brings in a new life, a new world, a new outlook. Like those great breaks in continuity, the beginning of life, the brain of man, which evolutionists have as yet not accounted for, Christ stands unaccountable save by the direct interference of God. Coming thus He starts a fresh era in the evolution of man. Science assures us that in man the culmination of physical evolution is reached and that henceforth it must run on mental and moral lines. In Christ we have the dynamic for this further and finer evolution. In Him reside and from Him proceed

those very forces which at length will accomplish the utmost for man and fulfil the grand purpose of the Creator.

It may indeed be objected that such results of Christ's entrance into human history are not discernible—that nothing is more obvious or distressing than the fact that that which was meant for our redemption should be to so large an extent a failure or even an aggravation of the disease—that Christianity should so slowly gain access to all men and that even where it has long been known the results should be so disappointing—that in many parts of the world where it once prevailed, it can now be traced only by a few surviving superstitions, a casual inscription, a faint echo in a dead land. But here also evolution steps in with its lantern and bids us see *real* contents in the words that a thousand years are with God as one day, it turns our gaze upon the past millions of ages and shows us with what deliberation and apparent slowness, with how many refluxes of the wave of progress the high-water mark was at last gained, and how without haste as without rest God marched towards His end. If man's physical constitution was so slow in elaboration, if a hundred millions of years were consumed in preparing a dwelling place for him and in evolving his wonderful body out of the lower creation that slowly yielded its treasure and as if reluctantly disclosed its wealth, can we marvel that the final result, the manifestation of the sons of God, is not to be achieved in a few centuries or with fewer hazards, disappointments, and delays ?

> All tended to mankind,
> And, man produced, all has its end *thus far ;*
> But in completed man begins anew
> A tendency to God. Prognostics told
> Man's near approach ; so in man's self arise
> August anticipations, symbols, types,
> Of a dim splendour ever on before
> In that eternal circle run by life.—*Paracelsus.*

MARCUS DODS.