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## ARTICLE VI.

## THE PASSING OF AGNOSTICISM.

BY THE REV. A. A. BERLE, D. D.

“BEAUTIFUL without doubt is the world, excelling, as well in its magnitude as in the arrangement of its parts, both those in the oblique circle and those about the north, and also in its spherical form. Yet it is not this, but its Artificer that we must worship. For when any of your subjects come to you, they do not neglect to pay their homage to you, their rulers and lords, from whom they will obtain whatever they need, and address themselves to the magnificence of your palace; but, if they chance to come upon the royal residence, they bestow a passing glance of admiration on its beautiful structure; but it is to you yourselves that they show honor, as being ‘all in all.’ You sovereigns, indeed, rear and adorn your palaces for yourselves; but the world was not created because God needed it; for God is Himself everything to Himself,—light unapproachable, a perfect world, spirit, power, reason. If, therefore, the world is an instrument in tune, and moving in well-measured time, I adore the Being who gave its harmony, and strikes its notes and sings the accordant strain, and not the instrument.”

So wrote Athenagoras, the Athenian Christian and philosopher in the second century after Christ,—a splendid prefiguration of the type of thought which centuries after should produce when the marvels of the wonderful creation of God should have ceased to dazzle the mind of man for themselves alone, but also, and more, for their Creator and Governor, in fact the transition from the rule of world worship to the wor-

ship of Almighty God. Even in that early period the inadequacy of the Greek mode of thought was perceived and felt, and the search for that larger view of the world, wherein its true relation to the universe and to God should be more justly and fully expressed, was begun. The passionate admiration which was in its essence the Greek substitute for worship, by which the enamoured minds of the Greeks revelled in the beautiful forms and entrancing images which a highly cultivated æsthetic sense and a highly developed artistic energy produced, did not still the feeling after the God who made these aspirations and confirmed the permanent power of the beautiful in human life and experience. From the beauty of form and color to the beauty of thought and the pleasurable in sense was but a natural and onward development. But when the step from beauty of feeling and thought to beauty in life and service needed to be made, the impulsive force of the æsthetic idea spent itself, and failed to meet the ethical and spiritual necessities which the very worship of the beautiful had created. And thus the Athenian must ever be seeking to hear some new thing, and to erect altars to unknown gods, and live in the dreamland of aspiration, as it was in the beginning, and die in the wastes of agnosticism, as it finally proved.

Our race has a singular habit, the proper force of which has never been adequately recognized by the historians of human progress. It is the habit of verification. No matter how powerful the logic, or how severe the practical admonitions of experience, succeeding generations try the same experiments, and thresh over the same straw, and reach the same conclusions, and revolt from them, just as regularly as they come on. And by this means, though it would seem to be idle, and wasteful of human thought-power and energy, it strengthens itself, however unconsciously, in certain forms of belief and brings to itself a certain confidence in itself, the world, the universe, and human thought, which is it-

self a most sublime defiance to its own dicta and laws. It establishes, beyond reasonable doubt, the uncertainty of human conclusions with respect to any question whatsoever, and then honors its dogmatists and specialists and narrow-minded, determined leaders, just as heartily and reverently as though it had not proved the utter futility of their teachings. It erects great empires, and equips them with all the pagantry and splendor that boundless sacrifice of time, strength, wealth, and life can give, and glorifies itself for its achievement, and yet in the next mood these empires are crushed to the dust, literally wiped from the earth, and almost annihilated from the memory of the race. A few generations pass and it sends expeditions to exhume those very remains, if haply they survive, and canonizes the expositors of the thought-feeling or art of the age, and rears anew costly and marvelous mausoleums for the rescued relics of its bygone follies. It creates a literature, sublime in its outlook and simply astounding in its depiction of the subtle influences which move men in love and in war. It builds vast libraries and stores them with all the wealth of human thought that the ages have produced, but scarcely is this laborious task accomplished when the heyday of destruction begins again, and merrily the torch is applied, and we see an Alexandrian bonfire making the world bright with its dire illumination. But the moment the flame is out, it begins again, with an earnestness hardly less than terrible, to gather up the sacred ashes, and ransack creation to see how it may reproduce the lost treasures. And so well has this habit been established that the moods of any age can be found in every age. The types of thought, the awakened feeling, the passionate admiration, the insane destruction, and the anxious regathering—all are present and always present; so that, while one part destroys, the other slyly keeps back enough to tell us how we may find the lost part when the mood changes, and in the midst of the most triumphant blare of trumpets announcing

a feat of destruction we may hear a sort of consoling assurance that all may yet be well.

How often has the human mind been resolved into a mere collection of reacting molecules, which by some curious conspiracy have brought forth what we know as the mental life of the world; how often has the will been annihilated, except as a delightful invention by which we could perform our little automatic parts with somewhat more of enthusiasm and interest, yet all the while conscious that behind the scenes that huge Thing called Natural Law was pulling the string; how often have we seen our noblest emotions shown to us, bare and devoid of their poetry, as the mere sensational results of excited motor nerves; how often have the beneficent coincidences of prayer been shown to be simply the accidental happenings in the vast realms of space; how often have we been convinced that the parental love, the nurture of the young, and the solicitude for offspring were only the developed utilitarian fancies of evolved anthropoids! Times innumerable, and as often as the generations of the race have come upon the scene. But, alas, the race has not heeded its own philosophy, and has spewed its own logic out of its mouth. Molecules the mind may be, but none the less we increase yearly its productive power and pay vast revenues to those who work their molecules the hardest; the world may be automatic, and yet we organize North Pole expeditions, and create weather bureaus, work our mines, experiment in electricity, and to harness our motive power build steamships, railroads, and other conveyances, just as if we were doing these things as real lords of creation, bringing the world under subjection to ourselves, and it looks and acts and feels, all things considered, very like a real world; we still marry and are given in marriage and make love, we suffer, fear, hate and are angry, have hopes and despairs, and they give us nervous prostration and produce realistic literature, just as if our emotions were something more than mere sen-

sations which can be produced at will; and when weary and worn, and the battle has gone against us, we pray just as though it were something else than mere mental reaction of some sort, thrust out into space with no particular aim or landing place; and we hold endless meetings, and give innumerable dinners, and develop myriads of new sciences about child nurture, and talk of the coming new generations, with a frightful altruism, just as though the sins of the fathers *were* visited upon the third and fourth generation of them that hate God, and He was yet showing mercy to thousands of them that love Him and keep his commandments. Yes, the race does all these things. The highest and the lowest alike join in these pursuits, and from the university to the hovel human nature is still one and the same thing, and moves in accordance with the established lines which the centuries have verified for us, the appropriate lines, whether proper or not, we do not venture to say, for a human race to follow.

#### STRIFE OR ORDER THE WORLD'S LAW.

That the world is a harmonious world, and one in which there is a proper adjustment of forces and proper balancing of the various agencies by which motion and action and coöperation are produced, would seem at this stage of civilization to be somewhat settled. That it has much in it that is beautiful and wonderful goes without saying; that in the centuries of which we have any record it has been behaving with a reasonable regularity and uniformity seems also to be pretty well established; that we have been able to proceed as though certain fixed results would not be disturbed, and in this belief have proceeded and builded all that we have, is also beyond doubt; but the vexatious question still remains as to the harmony of the whole. We know in part,—that is, we act as though we knew in part, but whether we have the harmony and the uniform relation of forces and parts which warrants us in saying that it is a harmonious world, opens a vast

field of discussion. In the first place, we have before us the evidences of the natural and steady development of species, and the differentiation and distribution of those species. We have a certain amount of reproductive energy upon which we rely for the perpetuation of these species; and we are much disposed to regard man as at the pinnacle of this development, with a certain relation to all that is below and behind him, even though the processes are yet, for the essential parts of the development, obscure and doubtful. But, side by side with this apparent harmony, we have a doctrine of the survival of the fittest which seems to indicate that the progress is inseparably linked with the regular and wholesale destruction of a large part of the created world. In some scales of organic life more, in some less, but present in all, is this fierce struggle going on which we call the struggle for existence. The evolution seems to be regular enough, and we find the types merging into higher and more advanced, as the case may be, with the new conditions, but in the midst of it all—struggle. Even if we take the modification of the struggle idea, as suggested by the neo-scientific orthodoxy, and discuss the struggle as for others, it is still struggle. The world organically viewed, under this theory, is simply a kind of huge fighting arena, where the gladiators come on at regular intervals, and rule until the next set of slayers is brought into fighting trim. It is said, in extenuation of this slaughtering process, that it is the unfittest that are destroyed, and that those most worthy to survive do survive, and this is thought to take off the keen edge of the doctrine. Be that as it may, the point still holds, that it is a struggle, and one that must persist unto the death; its keynote is, Fight for your life, or die. And the requisite, apparently the first requisite, seems to be a fighting capacity. It can mean nothing else. If it means something else, the doctrine as such disappears.

This "Struggle Doctrine" certainly is a dominant one in the scientific thought of to-day. It is universally accepted,

and it would be considered reactionary, or worse, to doubt it. But side by side with this doctrine there is another which is equally well established scientifically. It is the doctrine of uniformity. Miracles we are told do not happen. The operations of nature are regular and uniform. "There are indeed upheavals and catastrophes, but even these are regular, in that they have a place provided for them in the operation of natural law. Under this form of thought, it is indeed hard to see how there can be anything resembling the Christian doctrine of Providence, or what place there can be in the universe for prayer. The world is uniform, and the movements of natural law become each year more easily predictable than the last. When we know perfectly, we shall be able to adjust ourselves to every change which nature makes, readily and promptly, and shall be in perfect harmony and fellowship, so to speak, with the conditions under which we live. In fact, doubt will disappear, because the enlightened vision will see everything that it cares or needs to see. There can be no anxieties, for the uncertainties which produce them have become transformed into absolutely fixed conditions. It is become a new world wherein dwells perfect order. Now these two doctrines are held and advanced with equal force, and have been for many years, because they were understood to simplify the conception of the world and man's relation to it. The evidence was regarded as indisputable, and there was no room for argument, as indeed there seems to be none.

But the average mind will at once begin to inquire, how can the "Struggle Doctrine" and the "Order Doctrine" live side by side, or is the prize ring an orderly affair because there happen to be a couple of referees in the ring? Order suggests harmonious relationship, and, even though it has a little suggestion of the ethical, we must say it also suggests coöperation. It seems to be committed against waste, and seems to see in every part something that makes it coherent with the whole. This is what order means if it means anything.



The wanton destruction of any part of the whole it regards with repulsion, even when this destruction is dictated by the interests of the whole. It seems to be the only bulwark in thought against wild and licentious destruction. It is wholly antagonistic to systematic destruction, since by its own creation destruction ceases. And yet if there be such a process as the struggle for existence, and the struggle for the survival of the fittest, these must be directly opposed to the orderly world, which we have been persuaded we have. The ordinary reasoning human being cannot see that it helps the problem any by simply bringing in referees in the shape of natural laws, which say, in effect, Pound the life out of each other, only remember that you must be governed by Queensberry rules. It is destruction that stands in the way. It is the invasion of the right of being *per se* which makes our conception of an orderly world require that if things are destroyed that destruction must be distinctly and unquestionably vicarious. And unless the vicarious element is not only present but overrulingly present, the world is not one of order but of disorder, in spite of all protestations of regularity and uniformity.

As a matter of fact, the average human being, while conscious that there is a definite battle to be fought, wherein his own destiny is the stake, fully recognizes that that battle is not fought out in the "world," at all, but in himself, as a sort of microcosm, determining for itself what place it shall take in the larger world around him. The doctrine of order is in the main right, and justified both by the intelligence and the spiritual nature of mankind. It lies at the root of all activity. But the doctrine of the struggle either for self or for others, except in a sense wholly at variance with the recognized forms of the doctrine, is repulsive to the nature of man, wherever he is found. The world for the most part is harmonious enough, just as, in the beautiful illustration of Athenagoras, the palace is beautiful, but men admire the palace

because of the rulers, not the rulers because of the palace; so they have ever revolted from the notion that beings stand in essential antagonism to each other. Destruction they have recognized from time to time as needful; but such destruction was justly or mistakenly recognized under some form of the vicarious notion, by which alone destruction of any kind can ever be rationally justified.

In practical affairs this is never doubted. When have revolutionists paused in their efforts against tyranny because of the palatial splendor or the æsthetic traditions of the oppressor? When has the solid demand for human right and justice ever yielded to picturesque power? When has there been a time when the human spirit has not responded to the idea of helpful coöperation as against individual prerogative and usurpation? Has not alliance been the keyword of national progress and defence? Has not protection been the mightiest of weapons for mutual upbuilding and aid? Why do we talk of the "fatherland" or the "mother country"? Because these best express the necessities and the helps which the land of birth imposes and offers. And they have in them the essence of the vicarious doctrine, and are thought of only in connection with that idea. The struggle is not in the world, it is in the men; and not primarily with each other but each with himself.

"Men at some times are masters of their fates;  
The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars,  
But in ourselves, that we are underlings."

#### REVELATION AND KNOWLEDGE.

It is not necessary for our purpose to discuss the rise of the various modern theories of knowledge. It is not with the theories themselves that we have to do: it is rather with knowledge, as an instrument considered in itself, as capable or incapable of meeting the spiritual necessities of mankind. Now with the growth of knowledge of one kind and another

we have gradually widened our horizon to a degree that is hardly comprehensible on the old theory of the relation of things. Knowledge has, in our day, become nearly, if not quite identified with the so-called scientific knowledge; that is, the vast domain of experimental and theoretical science which has grown up from the sensational theories of the early experience philosophies of England. Never was there a bondage more complete than that of modern science to the eighteenth-century materialists. How complete that bondage is, and how futile as answering the needs of a philosophy of religion, or of the ethical basis of life and intercourse, has been pointed out recently in a most entertaining manner.<sup>1</sup> But the matter is not with the form of our scientific knowledge, it is with the knowledge itself. With the Gnosticism which has developed under the immense scientific activity of recent years has come a kind of fashion to make knowledge the basis, or at least the alleged basis, of our life and thought. At the same time it is the custom to meet all reference to revelation, especially the Christian revelation, with a sort of sneering pity.

But while knowledge has been uppermost in the thought of the time, and while the age-spirit has been one of knowing, at the same time there has been more activity along the lines of non-rational religious activity than ever before, and apparently in utter abandonment of the first precepts of a scientific age. A few illustrations will suffice to prove this assertion. In the first place, take the question of physical restoration from the effects of disease. It is well known that the varieties of mind cure, faith cure, Christian science, hypnotism, magic, mesmerism, magnetic healing, thought transference, pain absorption, and other theories are far beyond the power of enumeration. To these must be added, astral influence, theosophy, kindred communion, mental dieting, and others. And the singular fact about all these is that

<sup>1</sup> Balfour's Foundations of Belief.

their votaries cannot be ridiculed out of existence by the imputation of mild lunacy or similar aberrations. They are people of the highest culture and exceptional character, that is, apart from these particular things. They are reputable citizens, honorable fathers and mothers, nay more, they establish mighty temples, and build costly tabernacles. They gather together great congregations, and at least one of them was compelled, in the work of building a splendid house of worship, to make public announcement that no more funds were desired or needed. This in the face of the frantic appeals of missionary societies and humane propaganda of every description, clamoring for relief from the stringency of the hard times. Most of these beliefs pass with their votaries for religion of some kind. But their great power is the resultant from real or supposed physical effects in the matter of healing or restoration. Leaving their truth or falsehood out of the discussion, what shall we say of the scientific age which produces and sustains at once an immense coterie of scientists who are proving that nothing is certain, and that faith is absolutely untenable, and, if tenable, useless, and at the same time crowds a spiritual temple, where a deceased bishop materializes weekly to pronounce a benediction, and where a short cut to health can be secured without the medical college and the practicing physician. Surely here is faith of a kind which defies even the most destructive blows, in an age which delights to call itself an age of science. And the paralyzed professor, waiting anxiously for endowment funds, says, with the priests of old, "and we cannot deny it."

As an illustration of a different form of the similar activity, take the various theories of psychic science and influence. We have even books now on the "law" of psychic phenomena; so strong is the power of a scientific nomenclature that the ludicrous combination of terms involved in this expression is given to us in perfect sincerity. It reminds us of Fichte's attempt to define the necessary characteristics of

“all” revelation. But here again we have a range of belief and mental movement which is simply enormous, a reaction from extreme unbelief, or rather from the extreme scientific temper, to the utter antipodes of mental habit and procedure. And so on through the list, spiritism and manifestations, mental imagery, mental telegraphy, ideal suggestion, and a host of kindred ideas, for all of which the orthodox science of to-day would say there is not the slightest foundation in reason and experience, not only find acceptance, full, abject, and self-sacrificing, but what in this money-loving age is peculiarly significant, an acceptance which is furnishing ample funds for further investigation and propagation. In vain are exposures and protestations. In vain the appeal is to “reason.” In vain is the cry of ridicule and fraud raised. In vain are the fixed laws of science quoted and explained. They simply find no response whatever, and the belief in these tenets gains in vitality and strength daily.

Now the interesting thing about all these manifestations is, that they are attributed to a common source. That source is what we should have to call, in the scientific thought of to-day, the impossible, that is, the supernatural. If it is not so called, it is simply that the realm of the natural is enlarged to take in these exceptional demonstrations, which amounts to the same thing. But it is none the less a thoroughgoing and more or less devout acceptance of a new form of supernaturalism. It is a statement of theory and an avowal of faith by the side of which the mildest of Christian creeds is the rankest rationalism. And what is more amazing is, that all these believers are absolutely unconscious of the effect, which, according to orthodox science, these beliefs ought to have upon themselves, their world, and their associations. They keep on paying their debts, buying and selling, and getting gain. They meet the ordinary man with the full recognition of the ordinary needs for rational intercourse. Scientifically they are, and ought to be, lunatics or knaves.

They are neither. They are simply believers in supernaturalism, more or less revealed, as they believe, to themselves and their associates.

But what is really at the bottom of all this activity with all its grotesqueness and admixture of folly and foolishness? The real thing at the bottom of it all is the ineradicable belief of men in revelation. Either it is a spurious revelation, or the Christian revelation, or a personal "vision," or what not, but it is the solid, well-grounded belief in revelation of some kind, that makes all these things possible. And nothing touches its temper and conviction less than the attitude toward life, the world, and God which has passed among us as agnosticism. These "revelations," of course, command no intellectual assent from the vast majority, but the activity which they engender is no less in evidence than the same amount of zeal in the work of Christian missions or the same labor if expended in humanitarian effort.

Meanwhile the great body of the Christian world moves on in the even tenor of its way, and carries on its vast philanthropic enterprises. The fact that the practical life of Christendom remains unmoved in the midst of all its theological agitation and its alleged scientific annihilation is in itself a great commentary upon the common sense of the race. But this has been in evidence so long that it has ceased to have the weight that it should as mere argument. But from these other and newer sources the failure of the doctrine of knowledge, which results in agnosticism, is even more clearly demonstrated, while faith in revelation of some kind gains new strength, and is affirmed with added impressiveness.

#### SIMILAR MOVEMENTS IN SCIENCE.

One is reminded at this stage of the inquiry of the attitude of mind which the agnostic unbeliever is likely to assume, by the attitude of Jeremiah the prophet when running to and fro in the streets of Jerusalem in search of a man.

"Surely these are poor; they are foolish: for they know not the way of the Lord nor the judgment of their God." We can fancy the contempt with which the evidences cited in the foregoing section will be received, and the passage from Jeremiah fitly represents its spirit. But, like Jeremiah, we will betake ourselves to the ranks of the scientists themselves. "I will get me unto the great men and will speak unto them, for they *have* known the way of the Lord, and the judgment of their God: but these have altogether broken the yoke and burst the bonds." We will see what contemporary science is saying on the question, and whether it has any testimony similar to that of the foolish and unlearned mob.

It has been one of the curious characteristics of the theological discussions of the half century now closing that they have been so largely engaged in by men who, according to their own statements, were not theologians at all. That they were perfectly truthful in this statement was often painfully manifest to their readers. But that this fact should operate as begetting a kind of modesty which should be natural to a tyro in a field where there are present highly trained experts was the vain wish of many who, valuing their knowledge in their own chosen fields of scientific investigation, looked for a truce to the misrepresentation and abuse which have generally been the accompaniments of the scientific man's advent into the theological field. And these additions to the number of those who were striving to enlighten the world on problems of theological thought, were not content to bring with them the vices of their own methods of discussion. They adopted those of the theologians as well, and with the increased vehemence and virulence of new converts; so that the best model of theological vituperation and unfairness is not some hidebound ecclesiastic who is still thinking in the fourth century, but our accomplished and eminently respected theologian Mr. Huxley. He would probably scorn being styled a theologian, but he has all the arts of

what he thinks peculiar to theological controversy so well cultivated that it would be unjust to deny him the title.

This increase in the ranks of theological investigators and disputants was not however an intrusion. Far from it. It has been a genuine gain to the science, and has been of immeasurable advantage to the cause of truth. It has brought to the surface elements which in the natural order of things would certainly have been neglected. It has lifted theology into the fellowship of the other sciences. It has enriched it with illustrations and suggestions, as well as new truth, which more than ever makes it the most majestic of all branches of human knowledge and research. It has led to a temper in the thought of the time which cannot be regarded as other than reverent. It has revealed in their true light the mere ranters and railers, and produced for them the disgust which is their proper heritage. It has both broadened the minds of the theological scientists and extended the horizon of the others. It has produced a respect for thought along theological lines which could have been secured in certain types of mind in no other way. It has actually established a *modus vivendi* between religion and science. It has been thoroughly helpful for all concerned, and should be a matter of congratulation by scientific men of all ranks and creeds.

What these laymen probably meant when they said that they were not theologians was that they were not ecclesiastics, as that term is commonly used, that is, they were not in the body of the organized and representative leaders of the church. But it would be vain to deny that they were, and are, in a proper sense theologians. If Mr. Balfour's book is not a truly theological work, then it would be hard to find one; and yet, as he truly says, it is not an introduction to the study of theology in the conventional form or with the conventional content. It consists of "Notes Introductory" to the study of theology, but it is really much more.

The expansion of theological literature which has thus



been described is due to the cause which is evident on the very surface of the inquiry. All questions which have the human species as a part of the subject-matter of the investigation are forced, at some stage of the research, to consider the motives and beliefs which move men in the thoughts and the endeavors which make the sum of human history. This provokes the study of anthropology. And anthropology, pursued faithfully, must consider a large variety of topics, in which it is soon seen that questions of religion, of faith, of sin, of holiness, of providence, of chance and accident, of birth and environment, and a hundred other things are indissolubly involved. Moreover the quest for character and the tremendous activities growing out of its attainment and preservation add to the need for investigating that side of human life which begins, not with the habits of anthropoid apes, but with the first conscious transgression of a known law of righteousness. In other words, a history of the human conscience is desired. It is seen to be absolutely necessary before further progress can be made.

At the same time the social agitations of the world supplied a further incentive. From the study of men the world is becoming scientifically anxious about man. And any inclination to defer the inquiry is sharply reprovèd by significant demonstrations of unrest which are not merely awakening in themselves, but very unhappy prophecies of what may come in the near future. The great strike of the miners in England, with the aid and coöperation of their fellow-workmen in France and Belgium, and the promise of similar assistance by those in Germany, was a kind of argument which was worth any number of volumes on the question of supply and demand. It was nothing more or less than the highwayman's argument. And it was as effective. But this was only one of many similar occurrences. And when these continued multiplying for a decade or two, it occurred even to the pagan gentry, amid the classic shades of Oxford, whom

the late Thorold Rogers so aptly described as "the army of the unemployed in England," that the thoughts and feelings and beliefs of these men must be looked into and understood. The glamour of the well-behaved and easily regulated "economic man" faded away, and the real man of flesh and blood and feeling came to the front. Naturally enough all the discussions which had to do with the amelioration of the needy and unfortunate classes of society took on a tone which seemed to approach the language of those engaged in the habitual philanthropic work of the church. With wider knowledge this harmony of tone grew more and more pronounced and gradually the pure humanitarian and the pure religionist found themselves together by the necessities forced upon them in the study of their respective problems. Mr. Huxley,<sup>1</sup> no less than General Booth, is working at the problem of the "submerged tenth." The diverse methods or antagonism of these to each other is the least significant thing about it. They are both busy with the same question. This is the impressive fact. Thus the horizon of theological discussion has continually broadened, and, one after another, the various sciences which could have any possible bearing on the past, present, or future of man have been annexed, and have become more or less infected with the theological spirit of the times. And never in the history of the world as to-day were scientific results regarded with so much interest as concerning their human effect and consequence. The result has been that the study of theology has become enlarged in extent, and diversified by method and material, to a degree which makes it the most comprehensive and interesting of all fields of investigation. And this the scientists have now begun to discover.

One of the most impressive of recent works has already been alluded to, namely, Mr. Arthur Balfour's "Foundations of Belief." This author has already achieved distinction in

<sup>1</sup> See *Collected Essays*, Vols. vii. and viii.

the field of philosophic discussion by his "Defence of Philosophic Doubt," a book of seriousness and power. In the present work, among other things which he undertakes, he surely, and with a rare sense of humor, punctures the huge bubble of naturalism which has been the outgrowth of the type of scientific thought which we have already presented. Mr. Balfour sees very clearly that the present foundations of science are no less unstable than those of theology as these are understood by the scientists. And for naturalism as a finality he has only an amused contempt which sees at once the utter absurdity of the position. One single passage will make his temper clear. Discussing naturalism and reason, and criticising Mr. Spencer's prophecy that the ultimate result of natural development will be full accord between man and his environment, which will produce perfect righteousness, he says: "Mr. Spencer, who pierces the future with a surer gaze than I can make the least pretence to, looks confidently forward to the time when the relation of man to his surroundings will be so happily contrived that the reign of absolute righteousness will prevail; conscience, grown unnecessary, will be dispensed with; the path of least resistance will be the path of virtue; and not the 'broad,' but the 'narrow way' will 'lead to destruction.' These excellent consequences seem to me to flow very smoothly and satisfactorily from his particular doctrine of evolution, combined with his particular doctrine of morals. But I confess that my own personal gratification at the prospect is somewhat dimmed by the reflection that the same kind of causes which make conscience superfluous will relieve us from the necessity of intellectual effort, and that by the time we are all perfectly good we shall also be all perfectly idiotic."<sup>1</sup>

In this passage the author finds the core of the naturalistic theory in a single stroke. It is made perfectly clear to us, therefore, what we have to expect, and here we have not

<sup>1</sup> *The Foundations of Belief*, p. 75.

a poor and unlearned fanatic, but a clear-headed and astute publicist, with a scientific mind piercing the error through, and impaling it upon the sharp point of utter absurdity. The book abounds in passages of this same kind, and our author has no less contempt, though somewhat more delicately expressed, for that class of thinkers who seek to retain the naturalistic philosophy without accepting the naturalistic results. Moreover he shows with exacting clearness that the hypotheses of the scientific investigator of to-day are no more tenable, if at all so, than those of the most *a priori* theologian. Certitude in science is no more obtainable in the last analysis than certitude in theology, when the fundamental propositions of both are compared, and it seems to be established that the foundation of both lies somewhat deeper than in the mere hand-to-hand experiments which mean something to-day and nothing to-morrow. Mr. Balfour also recognizes that, sooner or later, there must come a certain congruity between opinions and practical ideals. That the ethical ideals prevailing to-day certainly on their practical side are preëminently Christian, will hardly be denied. But these have rested for centuries upon the supposition of the possibility and the reality of revelation. And in this confidence the most difficult moral undertakings as required by the ethical code of the New Testament have been cheerfully and successfully carried out. Of the ethical results which the absence of faith in revelation would bring about, we can have no idea at all, except that we are morally certain that one of the strongest incentives to virtue is withdrawn, with nothing to take its place. And that authority has gradually gathered around those precepts and that life which is apparently best sustained by revelation, is also clear; so that the naturalistic hypothesis not only leaves us without proper ethical footing, but with it destroys probably the strongest bulwark of authority, and that without substitute or regard for consequences. This Mr. Balfour holds, and properly, to be practical lunacy and phil-

osophic insanity. Nothing can be more significant than that so eminent a public man should at this stage of thought bring before us this contribution to the discussion.

For a very different reason, but in much the same spirit, comes Mr. Benjamin Kidd in his now famous book on "Social Evolution," and also shows the inadequacy of the present scientific standpoint, and questions whether the primary facts of human existence have not been entirely overlooked in rounding out the theory of life and the ends of existence and the method of their attainment. After proving that there is no rational sanction for human progress, that is, that the ordinary rational dicta do not supply us with sufficient dynamic for the world, as we know it, he says, in his chapter on the "Central Feature of Human History": "One of the most remarkable features which the observer [from another planet] could not fail to notice in connection with these religions, would be, that under their influence man would seem to be possessed of an instinct, the like of which he would not encounter anywhere else. This instinct, under all its forms, would be seen to have one invariable characteristic. Moved by it, man would appear to be always possessed by the desire to set up sanctions for his individual conduct, which would appear to be *super*-natural against those which were natural, sanctions which would appear to be *ultra*-rational against those that were simply rational. Everywhere he would find him clinging with the most extraordinary persistence to ideas and ideals which regulated his life under the influence of these religions, and ruthlessly persecuting all those who endeavored to convince him that these conceptions had no foundation in fact. At many periods in human history, also, he would have to observe that the opinion had been entertained by considerable numbers of persons, that a point had at length been reached, at which it was only a question of time, until the human reason finally dispelled the belief in those unseen powers which man held in control over him-

self. But he would find this anticipation never realised. Dislodged from one position, the human mind, he would observe, had only taken up another of the same kind, which it continued once more to hold with the same unreasoning, dogged, and desperate persistence."<sup>1</sup>

This is, indeed, the fact, and it is more remarkable in our century, indeed in this decade of the century, than ever before, as we have already shown. With all our pride of scientific achievement the race continues to defy its most cherished logical convictions and to build temples to the most outlandish fetiches of irrationalism. It is singular that it is so. But the facts are before us, and to find the real cause, the *vera causa*, for this phenomenon, is the actual problem before us at this point. Mr. Kidd has been more frank than other scientific observers, and has said, and said bravely, what has been held to be one of the strongest arguments against the agnostic-naturalistic theory of life. Again and again the church affirmed substantially what is here so powerfully stated, and, presumptively, without theological interest or bias. And this is merely giving scientific statement for the same movement, the grosser form of which we have already presented. The populus simply defy the logic, the scientist re-examines the premises. But both are engaged in the same undertaking substantially. Here the social scientist joins hands with the publicist in the revolt against satisfied ignorance and scientific helplessness.

But there remains a stronger witness still. There is probably no name among scientists that will command reader homage to his splendid genius and candid thoroughness than that of the late Professor George J. Romanes. In his little posthumous work, entitled "Thoughts on Religion," after an elaborate statement of his view of the present status of the doctrine of causality and its necessary consequents, he says, in a chapter on "Faith in Christianity": "Moreover, in

<sup>1</sup> Social Evolution, p. 98 *seq.*

those days [when he held the agnostic position], I took it for granted that Christianity was played out, and never considered it at all as having any rational bearing on the question of Theism. And, though this was doubtless inexcusable, I still think that the rational standing of Christianity has materially improved since then. For then it seemed that Christianity was destined to succumb as a rational system before the double assault of Darwin from without and the negative school of criticism from within. Not only the book of organic nature, but likewise its own sacred documents, seemed to be declaring against it. But now all this has been very materially changed. We have all more or less grown to see that Darwinism is like Copernicanism, etc., in this respect; while the outcome of the great textual battle is impartially considered a signal victory for Christianity. Prior to the new [Biblical] science, there was really no rational basis in thoughtful minds, either for the date of any one of the New Testament books, or, consequently, for the historical truth of any one of the events narrated in them. Gospels, Acts and Epistles were all alike shrouded in this uncertainty. Hence the validity of the eighteenth-century scepticism. But now all this kind of scepticism has been rendered obsolete, and forever impossible; while the certainty of enough of St. Paul's writings for the practical purpose of displaying the belief of the apostles has been established, as well as the certainty of the publication of the Synoptics within the first century. An enormous gain has thus accrued to the objective evidences of Christianity. . . . But, as in any other science, experts are apt to lose sight of the importance of the main results agreed upon, in their fighting over lesser points still in dispute. Now it is enough for us that the Epistles to the Romans, Galatians and Corinthians, have been agreed upon as genuine, and that the same is true of the Synoptics so far as concerns the main doctrine of Christ Himself." <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Thoughts on Religion*, p. 154 *seq.*

Such is the verdict of an impartial scientist who has himself wandered in the byways of agnosticism, and fully tested what the reality of that position is, and we cannot forbear to add his closing words on the pure agnostic position, as contained in the same section from which we have already quoted: "Observe, when we become honestly pure agnostics the whole scene changes by the change in our point of view. We may then read the records impartially, or on their own merits, without any antecedent conviction that they must be false. It is then an open question whether they are not true as history. There is so much to be said in objective evidence for Christianity that were the central doctrines thus testified to anything short of miraculous, no one would doubt. But we are not competent judges *a priori* of what a revelation should be. If our agnosticism be *pure*, we have no right to prejudge the case on *prima facie* grounds."<sup>1</sup> This is possibly the strongest recent word that has been said for Christianity in the contest with agnostic science, and it is a striking tribute to their author that they come with such dignified clearness after all these years of a habit of thought which would make such an utterance strange at least.

Thus we have not only the testimony of the modern excrescences of faith and confidence in revelation, but, as we now see, a parallel movement among the scientists themselves, which gives the promise of a renaissance of faith, and not only of faith, but of supernatural Christianity. To be sure there are discordant elements in this group of opinions, and these there will possibly always be. But on the main fact the note sounds clear and strong from all, namely, the hour of agnosticism has struck, and this too at length will be laid away in the sepulcher of its fathers of unbelief until some new specter is evolved to supply the necessities of the godless and to terrify the faithless.

<sup>1</sup> Thoughts on Religion, pp. 156-157.



## THE REAFFIRMATION OF THE SUPERNATURAL.

These and similar manifestations of a new era in religious thought which is approaching, suggest both the opportunity and the duty of apologetic writers with reference to the evidences of Christianity. For the fifteen years past the tone of thoughtful writers on the evidences has for the most part been one of doubt and caution. Even the most fundamental doctrines of the Christian religion were uttered in a manner that could hardly be called other than half-hearted. Where the old ring of certainty prevailed, it was generally joined with obscurantism that only added to the burden of the serious and the thoughtful. Resistance to the new truths of critical science tended more than ever to alienate the scientific mind from the temper required for a fair examination of the evidences. Violent handling of the most fixed truths of nature did the rest. But happily there is now an opportunity when the newest truths of science and the oldest doctrines of Christianity may be examined with a view to their absolute and permanent harmony. That such is the case must be clear from what we have already stated. But there is one fact to be borne in mind in this new era of positive declarations of the faith. That one fact is that the stress must be laid upon the supernatural, not only as a possibility but as a reality, and as a permanent part of the divine activity in the world. The form in which this can be done most effectively probably is by the recasting of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit along the lines laid down in the New Testament. With a doctrine of the Spirit which is broad enough and inclusive enough, there must be a certain recognition of the supernatural character of the divine life of believers, and persistence in it will add to the evidential strength of the doctrine. At the same time emphasis is to be placed upon life as the medium for the expression of the Holy Spirit's activity. And the gathering of the illustrations of divine power in the experience and practice of the race at large, and of the

church in particular, must develop what, of course, cannot be a scientific statement of the Christian doctrine of the Holy Spirit, for this is manifestly an impossibility, but such a statement as will have the convincing clearness of science, as well as the impulsive power of a genuine spiritual force. The ethical life also can be thus directly linked to the Spirit's power which was promised to his church by Christ. And the science of ethics can be made to feel the thrill of this new element as it has not felt it for generations past. It may lead to a return to the intuitional school, but possibly the return will be without the difficulties which have made intuitionist ethics philosophically untenable. The ethical life and the power of the Holy Spirit will be seen thus to be inseparably joined together. This will, of course, not be a new doctrine, but it will be based on entirely new premises and have the force of an entirely new truth.

From the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, as affirmed in life and the practice of the church, it will be but a single step, and a perfectly legitimate one, to the reaffirmation of a supernatural Bible. With the recognition and acceptance of the universality of the activity of the Spirit, grounded upon the reality of revelation, the evidences for a particular revelation will be immeasurably strengthened. Professor Romanes has already indicated this. Thus will be given a double impulse to the authority of the Divine Word for the rule and guidance of life, which it never had before except upon the theory of verbal and plenary inspiration. Moreover the doctrine is not left in the mists of definition and explanation of the limits of inspiration, but is affirmed by the direct appeal to the consciousness of the reality of revelation itself. All the evidences of the past which have value will stand. The new evidences will more than compensate for the loss of those which will have to be abandoned. Supernaturalism will be seen not in the light of a stupid, mechanical defiance of the known laws of the Almighty, but rather

a recognition of the power of Him who setteth up whom he will and putteth down whom he will. In fact the antithesis between the supernatural and the natural will disappear, and the dictum "miracles do not happen" will be as silly as the dictum that "fishes do not fly." It will be simply a statement of the experience of the speaker. Fishes do fly, and miracles will be seen to be happening in the divinely appointed order, and that their form changes, will not change the fact. The age of miracles will be seen to be the continuous age of the divine activity in the world, and the power of the Spirit of God upon the hearts of men. The proof will be given in the one case, as in the other, and will rest as genuinely upon the authority of the spirit of man, when it shall have witness borne to it of the Holy Spirit, that we are the sons of God.

Thus supernaturalism will have a new birth. But it will be the supernaturalism which will have its strongest affirmation in the spirit of man, rather than in the objective evidences of divine revelation. But these two will be so closely united that they will be inseparable in the thought of all. A supernatural life will mean a supernatural church, resting upon a supernatural revelation, and the oppositions of science falsely so called, will have made another epoch of victory for the gospel of Christ.