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'The Foundations of Belief.'

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I.

It is natural that Mr. Balfour's book should receive a great deal of attention. His eminent position, his high character, his great ability, and perhaps, also, the wonder that a man engaged in active public life should find time to write on such a topic as *The Foundations of Belief*,—all these things may have helped to call attention to the book. It well deserves careful study. A great body of literature has already grown around it, from the rapid appreciations of the daily and weekly press, to the competent and serious criticisms of Huxley, Martineau, and Fairbairn. There is a general consensus of opinion that the book is able, subtile, eloquently written, and singularly powerful in its destructive criticism.

The book has impressed me greatly both by its strength and its weakness. It is so strong in attack and so weak in defence, so irresistible in its destructive onrush and so inept in its attempts at construction. Mr. Balfour remarks that 'the decisive battles of theology are fought beyond its frontiers.' It is quite true that the difficulties of theology are not peculiar to it; they belong to science and philosophy quite as much as to theology. We have, therefore, to look with careful scrutiny at the theories of the world and of man which have a bearing on theology, that we may not give a hasty assent to views utterly subversive of the principles we seek to defend. In our anxiety to defend the truth, as we think it, to repel attack, and to find effective weapons against the foe, we should take heed lest we be found to be defending the truth by advocating methods and principles really destructive of it.

We have many examples of the sad fact that some of the most dangerous weapons ever turned against Christianity have been forged within the Christian camp, or by friends who dwell near the borders. We have many examples of the practice of exaggerating the difficulties of reaching the truth by the exercise of the rational faculties of man. All the resources of scepticism have been exhausted in order to drive men from any trust in their power to reach truth, and thus to cast them in abject prostration before some infallible authority. It is a dangerous process, and is sure to recoil on the inventors of it. The weapons of agnosticism were fashioned in the workshop of Sir William Hamilton, whose desire to help theology was as sincere and as single-hearted as that of Mr. Balfour can be; they were furbished anew, with sharper edge, and fitted for a larger sweep of destructiveness by Dean Mansel, whose main desire was to vindicate truth and to discomfit the adversary. Their weapons passed into the hands of Mr. Herbert Spencer with results only too well known to every student of the religious life of our time. When Huxley wishes to defend and define his agnostic position, he does so by quoting from the works of Sir William Hamilton." Now the argument of Mr. Balfour is not so able, so elaborate, or so wide reaching as that of Hamilton and Mansel, but it seems to me to be of the same kind, to be liable to be used for the same destructive purpose, and to be subversive, as theirs were, of the possibility of philosophy and theology.

Mr. Balfour's book is full of good intentions, but one cannot dwell so long as he has done in an atmosphere of philosophic doubt and of scientific scepticism without paying a price for it. To doubt philosophy and to distrust science is a bad preparation for the study of theology. Mr. Balfour often refers to his former work, *A Defence of Philosophic Doubt*, and we have read it over again with increased admiration of its subtile and varied power, but also with an increased distrust of the underlying assumptions of it. We are at a loss to know what his philosophy is. We compare his book with Green's *Introductions to Hume*, and we find that Mr. Balfour's book suffers greatly in comparison. For the most part these books deal with the same subject. No one ever did a greater service to philosophy than Green did in these famous dissertations. For ages and generations British philosophy had been trying to build up a self out of bare sensations, compounded and recompounded, until somehow a conscious self was supposed to arise. The task of Green was to show that this was a vain and hopeless endeavour. He did this piece of work in such a way that it

need not be done over again. There is nothing more drastic or dramatic in philosophical literature than his examination of English philosophy from Locke to Hume. He has done it too without the aid of sceptical weapons. He has not despaired of knowledge, has not lost the hope that man by the right use of his faculties may reach essential truth, nor has he left men to take despairing refuge in beliefs which are non-rational in their character. The effect of Green's destructive criticism is to leave us at the end with a positive principle, which we may hopefully use in our search after truth; the effect of Mr. Balfour's criticism is to leave us face to face with non-rational beliefs, a position as sad as possible for a rational creature to occupy.

The part of Mr. Balfour's book which is most weak, flat, and unprofitable is precisely that part in which he tries to deal with Green and his school. He tells us that 'it is not with overt or tacit reference to that system that I have arranged the material of the following Essay,' and his argument is complete without the chapter on Idealism. We should dispense with any examination of the chapter. It does not recognise in any degree the immeasurable service which Green and his school have done in philosophy and in ethics. By showing that every possible experience involves a reference to the one self, that without this reference experience is not possible, he has done more than any other man to rescue English philosophy from its fatal inherited tendency to toil in that Serbonian bog of Associationalism in which whole armies have been lost. Green's fundamental assumption is that we are in a rational universe, and that we may know it. He has many ways of putting this assumption, some of which are liable to be misunderstood, as Mr. Balfour has misunderstood them. He speaks often in such a way as to lead men to suppose that each solitary thinker constituted the universe for himself, and by himself. But a careful study of all his works shows that his meaning really is, that the finite thought of man, being akin to and of the same kind as the infinite thought in the universe, may recognise it, may act in measure like it, and may think over again those relations through which the rational universe is constituted. I grant that Green sometimes seems to say something more than this, but a fair construction of all his words makes it manifest that the essential moment of his philosophy is, that we are in a universe constituted by thought-relations, which we also may think.

Then Mr. Balfour might have been expected to have recognised, in some degree, the magnificent contribution of Green to the study of ethics. There is, however, not one word of recognition. The few remarks which he makes on Green's doctrine of Freedom shows that Mr. Balfour has not the most remote conception of what Green meant. He is thinking of freedom as it was wont to be discussed in English philosophy, which dealt with the problem as if it were a problem in mechanics, in which an unrelated will was supposed to swing like a pendulum between attracting motives, to settle down finally in the direction of the strongest motive. Now Green changed the character of the problem, and made it a discussion not of abstract freedom in a vacuum, but of the actual freedom of a rational being in a real universe; a harder problem, but one that could be solved. By self-determination through self-satisfaction towards complete self-realisation; thus Green conceived the ethical problem, and the literature of ethics reveals with what fruitful results. But we may not dwell on this subject. We simply protest against the inadequate and misleading treatment of it by Mr. Balfour, and pass on to a closer view of his book.

The one part of the book which we can regard with unmixed satisfaction is that which deals with naturalism. 'Agnosticism, positivism, empiricism have all been used more or less correctly to describe this scheme of thought, though in the following pages, for reasons with which it is not necessary to trouble the reader, the term which I shall commonly employ is Naturalism. But whatever the name selected, the thing itself is sufficiently easy to describe. For its leading doctrines are that we may know "phenomena," and the laws by which they are connected, but nothing more. "More" there may or may not be, but if it exists we can never apprehend it; and whatever the world may be in its reality (supposing such an expression to be otherwise than meaningless), the world for us, the world with which alone we are concerned, or of which alone we can have any cognisance, is that world which is revealed to us through perception, and which is the subject-matter of the natural sciences.'

The criticism of naturalism is masterly. It is looked at from many points of view, and from all

it is found to be inadequate and defective. In fact, it is too thorough, for we do not know what Mr. Balfour is to put in the vacant place. He speaks 'of the two elements composing the naturalistic creed; the one positive, consisting, broadly speaking, of the teaching contained in the general body of the natural sciences; the other negative, expressed in the doctrine that beyond these limits, wherever they may happen to lie, nothing is, and nothing can be known.' It is unfortunate that the criticism should look so like an attack on science. For naturalism is not science; in fact, has no necessary connexion with science, and is simply a wrong and incompetent way of interpreting those experiences which lie at the foundation of science. Whatever answer may be given to these questions, science stands. The sciences, as systems of sifted, verified truth, are in possession of the field, and any criticism which seems to cast doubt on their validity is so much labour thrown away. There may be problems lying at the basis of our scientific beliefs which are unsolved as yet, but these have no bearing on the truth of the law of gravitation, or on the principle of the conservation of energy. Two and two make four whether we regard this truth as *à priori* or as the outcome of experience. The sciences are man's interpretation of the order of the world, assumed to be intelligible, and to exist in relations which can be thought. It is unfortunate that Mr. Balfour, in his desire to destroy naturalism, has advocated principles which in their turn have destroyed science and made knowledge impossible. No greater service could be done to naturalism than to identify it in spirit, aim, and method with the sciences, and this service he has unwittingly done to it. For science can point to its many conquests, its railways, telegraphs, steam-machineries, and other appliances, and triumphantly show how its aims and methods are realised in nature; if, therefore, we identify science and naturalism, we simply hand over to the latter all the prestige and the influence gained by the former. The effective way of dealing with naturalism is to show, if we can, that the methods it pursues, and the assumptions it makes, are not those of science, and here again we prefer Green's refutation of naturalism to that of Mr. Balfour.

We shall not even at the bidding of Mr. Balfour, nor for the sake of a doubtful victory over naturalism, surrender our faith in science and its methods; for these are valid within their own sphere. 'The sciences,' says Bishop Lightfoot, 'are our proper heritage as Christians, for they are manifestations of the Eternal Word, who is also Head of the Church.' But Mr. Balfour's criticism is simply and wholly destructive; he seems to doubt for the sake of doubting, and to leave us in a world where everything is insecure and open to doubt. Others have questioned and doubted in order to reach, if they could, some central truth which could not be doubted, which had such a character that as soon as it was understood it could not be doubted; for its truth was self-evident. No matter how destructive criticism may be, we may still have some hope of reaching truth, if it has been conducted on some positive and intelligent principle. But a criticism which is simply destructive, which employs sceptical weapons alone, and has no constructive thought at the heart of it, can serve no good purpose, and can give no help to theology. He has used reason to make us distrust all rational processes; he has left us helpless and bewildered, without any clue to truth, and with no hope of real knowledge. The outcome of it all is, that we are left with a number of non-rational beliefs, of which no rational account can be given, and for which no rational justification is forthcoming.

In his work, *A Defence of Philosophic Doubt*, Mr. Balfour said: 'It is never a final answer to philosophy to say of a particular belief it is innate, connate, empirical, or, *à priori*, the result of inheritance, or the product of the association of ideas. Psychology is satisfied with such replies, but to make psychology the rational foundation for philosophy is to make a department of science support that on which all science is by definition supposed to rest.' In his present work he deals with the foundations of belief, and we should expect from him something which might serve for a rational foundation for philosophy and theology. It is scarcely credible that what Mr. Balfour gives us is simply a psychological statement of the causes of belief which, even if true, has already been set aside by himself as inadequate. Let us accept his distinction between the causes and the grounds of belief as so far true and valid, it was all the more binding on him not to confine himself to a mere statement of the causes of belief which on his own showing belongs to psychology alone.

(To be concluded.)