

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

PayPal

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *Journal of the Transactions of the Victoria Institute* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_jtvi-01.php

JOURNAL OF
THE TRANSACTIONS
OF
The Victoria Institute,
OR,
Philosophical Society of Great Britain.

EDITED BY THE SECRETARY.

VOL. XXXVII.



LONDON :

(Published by the Institute, 8, Adelphi Terrace, Charing Cross, W.C.)

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.
1905.

THE ANNUAL ADDRESS.

RECONSTRUCTION AND RESTATEMENT.

By Dr. SILVANUS P. THOMPSON, F.R.S.

HOWEVER inadequate may be some of the arguments employed by advocates of the school of philosophy styling itself Monism, there is undoubtedly a bottom truth underlying the idea that life is in its widest sense *one*. Nature is not infinitely divorced from art; matter is not separable from form; thought is not indefinitely remote from energy; nor is the gulf between religion and science incapable of being bridged over. Faith and reason are not mutually incompatible, however different may seem at first sight the provinces in which each appears supreme. For neither is the human being constructed with intellectual bulkheads which prevent intercommunication between the faculties, nor is man's nature so delimited off from the nature of other kinds of organic life as to preclude the direct interaction of forces whether physical or psychic. Man is in fact to an extent more largely understood in recent times than of yore, a product of his environment. Religion is a part of that environment, and has had no small share in moulding man to that which morally, socially, and intellectually he is to-day. He has been slowly learning the laws of the physical part of his environment; he is also, but more slowly, learning those of the spiritual part. If of late he has been beginning to understand that the physical part of his environment, the world of things and forces, is not so exclusively dominant as his teachers of thirty years ago would have had him think; and if he has become more willing to admit the existence of moral and spiritual things as a complement to the physical cosmos, he has also had his eyes opened to see that in the world of moral and spiritual forces there is a call for the play of his trained reason. The widening of outlook on the physical side finds its counterpart on the moral and religious side. The development which has brought about the reconstitution of science involves in fact a restatement of religion.

Man cannot remain stationary in a state of arrested development amidst the play of forces by which he is surrounded. Evolution takes its course whether he is conscious of it or not; its operations are not dependent, save to a very secondary degree, upon his will or his consciousness. The child

grows, and his growth is effected by food, climate, air and light, independently of his consciousness or will. The development of his mind and of his moral nature for good or ill is very largely determined by his surroundings. What is true of the individual is true also of the race; and its development physical, intellectual, moral and religious, is, whether acknowledged or not, unquestionably dependent upon environment. It is impossible that it should be otherwise. The very condition of life is changed. Decay and death are processes inseparable in the order of nature from the possibility of life. And this is true also of intellectual and religious life. No advance in thought is possible without involving some change, some abandonment of earlier, less advanced thought. In ethics as in morals, men advance as "on stepping stones from their dead selves." In religious thought no progress is possible, save by the renunciation of some earlier beliefs, once held sacred in the childhood of the race. Not that eternal truth changes, but man's appreciation or perception of it does. Newer revelations supersede old ones, or furnish proof that part of that which, in the childhood of the race, had been taken for revelation was rather revelation misinterpreted by human minds; treasure in earthen vessels; wisdom but half understood, and admixed with human imagination. The problems of one age differ from those of another: the temptations of one age may differ from those of another. It may be easy to mistake, amid different surroundings, the precise import of words uttered to men of a former time; for words themselves change their meanings and connote different ideas to men of different generations. If for no other reason than this, it is needful from time to time that there should be restatements of the things held to be true; for if the statement persists when the meanings of its terms have changed, the statement ceases to be entirely true even though the truth it is supposed to state remains unchanged. All this may be admitted, nay, must be admitted, by the reverent and intelligent seeker after truth. And the greater his reverence for truth, the more freely will he make the admission.

The fact is that here, in the twentieth century, we do not stand precisely in the same position as our fathers stood in the nineteenth, or our forefathers in the centuries before. The steam-engine and the printing-press, the telegraph and the dynamo, the telescope and the microscope, the camera and the spectroscope, have wrought revolutions not only in the material aspect of town and country but in the thoughts of men concerning the material world in which they live. During the last sixty years

or so in particular, men's minds have widened. The outlook in the physical, the biological, and the historical sciences subtends a vastly greater angle than heretofore; while the means of observation have multiplied, the instruments of research are far more powerful and more numerous, and the storehouse of accumulated facts awaiting co-ordination is overwhelmingly full. We have learned both how great the universe is and how small; what a microcosm after all is the solar system, what a macrocosm the structure of the atom. We are able to discuss the chemistry of the stars. We can with our own eyes behold the skeleton within a living man, and see his heart beating—can even watch the progress of digestion in certain cases. We have learned how to preserve in permanency accurate automatic pictures of men and of events, and can register and even reproduce the tones of their actual speech. We have seen the air we breathe condensed into a liquid and frozen into a solid. We have been taught how to manufacture light out of electrical discharges. The synthesis by the chemist of organic substances proceeds in an ever-widening circle of triumphs. To-day we can manufacture by synthesis sugar and indigo; to-morrow it may be albumen or cellulose; protoplasm itself, though it may be far off, is not beyond the possibilities of which the chemist dreams. The mechanical theory of the universe, due to Kepler, and Newton, and Laplace, has been extended by the discovery of the principles of energy, and the formulation of them in the laws of thermodynamics. The sciences of optics and electricity have become one, being parts of the science of the ether. The discovery of the radio-activity of certain elements and minerals, with their singular emanations, has revealed a new and surprising field of research. The recognition of the electron has given a new basis to chemical hypothesis; and Dalton's atomic theory, which won its way by its general correspondence with observed facts, is being swallowed up in a chemistry still more fundamental.

If the vast complexity and beauty of the universe as it was known to our fathers could excite their wonder and imagination, how much more must ours be excited by the immense and marvellous development that has been opened in our time. But it is not alone in the physical sciences that such developments have come about. Biology has made advances almost equally great. The physical bases of life have been explored as never before. Diseases which formerly baffled the skill of the most experienced physician have been discovered to be due to specific micro-organisms; and we have learned how

to combat them by antiseptic and aseptic treatment. For a whole class of organic poisons known as toxins, antitoxins have been found, and the processes of manufacture of them by cultivation have been worked out. The immense part played in all organic life by ferments has been discovered and partially explored. Biology has been found amenable to statistical mathematical treatment; even the laws of heredity are becoming clear. There has also been a remarkable advance in the study of psychic phenomena, and psychology has found new generalisations from which fresh advances may be expected.

The methods of science have penetrated into the work of scholars and historians. Antiquarian research has taken new lines. Scholarship is daily becoming more constructively critical and less pedantic. The study of ethnology has thrown a flood of light upon many puzzling points of ancient lore. Such a work as Frazer's *Golden Bough*, antithetical as much of it seems to the religious mind, cannot fail to produce an immense and clarifying effect upon the study of the ancient religions of the world. It is useless to denounce such sincere and profound investigations because we do not like the conclusions to which they lead. If the facts are those which have been gleaned, there are men of intelligence who can draw their own conclusions from them, and can confute the author if he is wrong; but the facts remain. One thing the author of that book has made abundantly clear, that in every primitive religion of mankind there is an admixture of folk-lore and myth interwoven almost inextricably with glimpses of the truth. No one can read it without being profoundly impressed with the weight of evidence which it adduces; and none who sincerely hold the religion of Christ can leave it without the conviction that not even the purest of religions has in the historic past escaped from the inevitable consequences of its human environment; nor can he rise from the perusal of the treatise without the earnest prayer that the spiritual teachings of Christ may be purged from such accretions of human origin.

For, the restatement of religious truth in terms adapted to the present age has indeed become a pressing necessity of our time. Alike from the leaders of the various Christian churches and from those outside the borders of any church, we hear the complaint that to an increasing degree Christianity is ceasing to serve the needs of our age. The preachers and teachers complain of the empty state of churches and chapels, and denounce the indifference of the people; while the columns of the socialist newspapers (such as the *Clarion*) declare roundly

that Christianity is played out. But the people will be indifferent if those who profess to be leaders of Christian thought are blind to the changes that are going on all around them, and address the men of the twentieth century in terms of the sixteenth or of the sixth; and the socialist writers would be quite justified in declaring that Christianity was played out, if Christianity meant no more than they can see in it—a mass of external observances and ceremonials tied up with formal beliefs in a number of metaphysical propositions which to them are unintelligible.

But no one who earnestly desires to see a reconciliation between science and religion, no one who really believes in the Oneness of God's Universe, no one who sincerely regards the religion of Jesus Christ as intended—divinely intended—for the regeneration of mankind, can for a moment admit that Christianity consists (either wholly or essentially) in either the ceremonials which are observed within its churches and chapels, or in the metaphysical propositions embalmed in its orthodox creeds. Common honesty at least will compel them to acknowledge that the primitive Christian church existed for at least a century or more before any of the three Creeds was formulated; that infant baptism is never once mentioned in the Christian Bible; and that the celebration of the Eucharist, whether in Saint Peter's or Saint Paul's, is a totally different affair from the simple evening meal which Christ shared with His disciples. No more need be said here on this point. There are amongst sincere and devoted Christians some to whom these later developments of sacramental Christianity are entirely helpful, precious, and sacred; there are others equally sincere and devout who regard them as wholly non-essential, or even as hindrances to the spiritual life. But none of them would say that there is nothing in Christianity except ceremonies and creeds. Behind ceremonies and creeds there lies something that if all these were wiped out would remain—the revelation of God to man in the soul, and the revelation of God to man in the face of Jesus Christ. One who after many years of thought has deliberately decided to leave aside as futile and unedifying all metaphysical disputes as to the particular way in which the divine and the human were combined in the person of Jesus Christ, and who therefore abstains conscientiously from either Trinitarian or Unitarian views, may be permitted to place on record an acknowledgment how in that reservation of belief, that deliberate suspense of judgment, that deliverance from partisanship, he has found an

immense spiritual gain and an enlargement and deepening of faith.

Man is possessed of a religious faculty, of a something which manifests itself to him in his conscience, something which brings to him the elemental perceptions of mercy, justice, love ; something which not only enables him to distinguish more or less clearly between right and wrong, but which influences him towards a choice of conduct. Whether it be regarded as a single faculty or as consisting of several, we must treat the fact of its existence as beyond dispute. It brings to man a consciousness of something which, though invisible, intangible, immaterial, is greater than himself ; something which he did not make and of which he cannot rid himself ; a spiritual environment which, though in one aspect it seems to be independent of him, in another seems to be within himself. It is in the recognition of this elementary fact in human consciousness that religious thought begins. The possession of this consciousness is not confined to any one race or tribe of men, nor to any one age. It is a common property of the human race, however various the systems of religion which have grown up upon it. Doubtless it is more highly developed in some individuals and in some races than in others. But being thus shared amongst the human family it becomes an objective fact, a matter of evidence, not to be ignored or ruled out as a product of imagination. But beside being thus shared by the race, it is in a peculiar sense the property of the individual. Whatever he may learn of the workings of the religious faculty in others, his knowledge of it at first hand, as it lives within himself, is to him a much more real and vital matter. Whatever may be the evidence from without, the conviction from within is, at least in most cases, far more cogent. The instinct of religion is then innate, as natural as the instinct of hunger, or of self-preservation, or of sex. The existence of this instinct constitutes a domain of human experience, concerning which the facts may be collected and co-ordinated, and their laws discovered. To investigate facts and co-ordinate them, and to deduce conclusions is, however, the work of another faculty, that of reason. Hence in the discovery of religious truth both faculties are essential. But because one faculty has the function of perceiving, and the other of co-ordinating or testing that which is perceived, there is no possibility of denying to each its work. In this connection we may recall an aphorism propounded by Victor Hugo: "Il y a aussi une philosophie qui nie l'infini. Il y a aussi une philosophie qui nie le soleil. Cette

philosophie s'appelle cécité." Because these perceptions are arrived at, or communicated, through a faculty that is not the reason, we must, therefore, neither on the one hand deny their reality, nor on the other refuse to apply our reason so that we may understand them. None of our faculties—that of sight, for example—would be of real use to us, did we not use our intellects to comprehend the perceptions afforded by the faculty that receives them. The intellectual testing of religious perceptions is therefore a prime duty.

But what is it to which this religious faculty impels the seeker after truth? He finds himself, in common with all Christians, Brahmins, Buddhists, Moslems and Jews, impelled toward an ideal of perfect being, of a Most High. He finds himself in the presence of a conviction that He is: he experiences an indestructible impulse to worship that which he feels to be Best. He may have gone further, as many of us have done, and may have found that in none of these religions he can discover a higher ideal of righteousness than in the Bible of the Jews, and in none a more sublime example of human devotion than in the records of the life of Jesus Christ, whom, whether human or superhuman, as His followers hold Him to be, he feels to represent the supreme development of human character, a presentation of the divine possibilities in man, nay, even a revelation in human form of the Divine. Alike in obedience to the religious instinct within him, and in wondering admiration of the perfect life, how can he, having travelled thus far in the spiritual pilgrimage, but attempt at least to become a follower of Christ? Nay, if he be a real truth-seeker, one who has no other aim than to find and follow truth, there is for him no alternative; follower of Christ he must strive to be; nay, by that very striving a follower of Christ, at however great a distance, he has already become.

To such a one, whose religion is thus an inner conviction, not founded on any external authority, no intellectual proofs of Christianity are needed: none can replace the personal revelation that is his own. Arguments founded on "analogies" and "evidences" are largely wasted on him. He needs no miracle-mongering to convince him. Nay, he will hold to his faith in Christ in spite of all the miracles that a credulous and non-scientific age heaped up around the historical narratives of His birth and life and death. Not even the wildest of them—and the orthodox Church rejected many more than it retained—will shake his faith. He knows that exactly the same kind of sacred

legend has grown up amongst every primitive people around any hero of commanding personality.

To such a one the pious legends woven about the Christ will appear just as natural, just as right in their place, and just as unnecessary of belief now, as any of those narrated of Moses, or Buddha, or Plato. In a primitive people the ascription of such legends was one way of expressing sincere adoration, a pious act quite irrespective of the historic facts. There is a frame of mind which regards the adoring legend, because it is adoring, as of vastly greater moment than the historic truth, because it is true. Those who have never inquired into this wonderfully interesting branch of human history, or who have never even attempted to comprehend that frame of mind, cannot understand how the reverent seeker after truth in these days can frankly admit that some of the things supposed by our forefathers to be a vital part of religion are myth, and yet not lose his reverence towards those earlier ones whose pious hearts wove, repeated, believed, and were even edified and spiritually strengthened by believing those legends. To each age its own conception of the divine stands to serve its own purpose. And the age which finds it better to hold simple unvarnished truth than to weave pious fancies, must not harshly condemn the age which thought it greater honour to God to weave these pious fancies than even to ask what the facts were. It will not do for the twentieth century to rise up in judgment against the second century, nor for the Western mind to rivet condemnation upon the Eastern, because the Eastern mind of the second century took different views of life and truth from these the Western of the twentieth century takes. To the uninstructed of all ages that which is abnormal has always presented itself as something sacred. To the oriental mind, untutored in science, the abnormal still always presents something calling forth an instinct of reverential worship. Of very recent growth, even in the better educated of westerns, is the idea of the reign of law. We forget too often that in this respect a whole chasm lies between the England of Edward VI. and the England of Edward VII. Only those who either fail to understand or else despise the reign of law and all that the phrase connotes, can continue to suppose that the truth of any doctrine can be established by the occurrence of some abnormal phenomenon. So convinced are all the clearest thinkers on this point, so scrupulous in their regard for ascertained truths, that they will rightly demand for any abnormal occurrence a testimony of evidence much more strict and

precise than that which is required for an occurrence of normal kind.

Only those who misunderstand the reign of law or ignore it can hold an abnormal event to be more sacred than a normal one. On the other hand those who have attained to this scientific clearness of vision, and who can see as a simple and obvious truth that in abnormality there is nothing of itself that is sacred, that the normal is just as sacred as the abnormal, must not, because it is obvious to them, despise or condemn those who in the pre-scientific ages did attribute some sort of sacredness to abnormality.

There are still those, and possibly they are still a majority amongst professed Christians, who would think it derogatory to the person whom they worship as wholly God as well as wholly man, to be a man in the fashion of His birth as well as in the fashion of His death. Let us honour them for their sincerity of heart and for their reverential souls even when we deem their sincerity and their reverence to be founded in this respect on no adequate basis. If we find ourselves in the cause of what we consider truth unable to share all their beliefs, let it be ours to see that we neither plume ourselves on any superiority of discernment, nor fall behind them in the devotion with which inwardly and outwardly we follow the Master.

Our minds are not all constituted alike; it is impossible for us all to see truth in the same aspect. But we can all follow truth as it is discoverable by us, and we can all pray for a clearer revelation of it. To our own Master we stand or fall. There are idols of the temple as well as the idols of the cave, and of the tribe, and of the market-place. It has been largely the part of scientific investigation to show us how well-meaning piety has not always held a clear distinction between idol and emblem, between the symbol and the thing symbolized; and "Nehushtan" has had to be pronounced, and still will have to be pronounced, over some of the survivals before which men, thinking to worship God, have offered incense, and bowed themselves down.

It is for this cause that as our convictions deepen and strengthen we must be the more ready to preserve open minds towards the convictions of others, to hold judgment in reverential suspense even toward some things which large bodies of devout men have regarded—perhaps for centuries—as closed questions. Revelation has not stood still, nor will it in our time. We stand not on the limited territory

where our forefathers stood : we have a larger heritage, we look out upon a larger landscape, there are before us greater heights to be climbed. Why should we feel anything but hope and courage in the larger vision ? We are no longer children, and must look to outgrowing many of the thoughts and even of the beliefs which were accepted as final in the childhood of the race.

It is well known that one of the first-fruits of the invention of the telescope was the discovery of the spots on the sun. History records that the discovery was denounced as impious ; and the doctrine that there are sunspots was banned as heretical. It is narrated, and the narrative is of significance to-day, how an ecclesiastic being invited to examine for himself and to see whether there were not spots on the sun, refused even to put his eye to the telescope for fear that he should see the spots which the astronomers asserted to be there, and so discredit should be brought on the reputation of Saint Thomas Aquinas.

That same spirit which first denounces the results of investigation, and then refuses even to look whether they exist, is by no means extinct, as the recent correspondence on Faith and Reason in the columns of the *Standard* has shown. To fear that which one does not understand may be natural ; but to refuse to try to understand is a defect of character worse than cowardice. Those who pin their religious faith to an outward authority have had many shocks of late, and may need more for their soul's health. The spirit of inquiry cannot be stemmed by an appeal to the fourth century or to the sixth. If men ask us to accept as final the decisions of the Council of Nicea, we are bound to inquire whether that body had before it all materials needful for a *final* judgment, whether history has shown its composition to be representative and unbiased, its deliberations to be conducted in the scientific spirit of calm inquiry, its decisions to be taken without heat or partisanship. Nay, even if in all these respects it had been perfect—and alas ! in some of them it was a miserable failure—the question would still remain why any thinking person in the twentieth century should be bound by the thoughts of the fourth. The fact is we are not bound by the decisions of the Council of Nicea. It has closed no question which we are not at liberty to reopen. Except to those who are in bondage to ecclesiastical systems, there are no closed questions that a reverent mind may not beneficially reconsider. We have as much right to reconsider the problems of religion in the light of our own age and of its

special revelations, as the men of any former age by the light of theirs. There is an open door before us, which no man, and no body of men, alive or dead, can shut. We cannot be denied the right to look through the telescope lest we should see spots on the sun. When, forty years ago, Bishop Colenso drew general attention to that which devout scholars had already several times observed, the "stratification" now so evident in the books of the Pentateuch, he was hounded out of the communion of the Orthodox. Even now there are pious souls who refuse to read his scholarly works—lest they should see spots on the sun! We are to a lesser extent witnessing a like attitude assumed toward those who in our day are pointing to the undeniable evidences of stratification in the composition of our Gospels. It is not a question of science but one of scholarship. Scholarship is now in possession of the records of ancient Babylon and ancient Egypt, which antedate our Bibles and which were not known until recently. Already these have been sufficiently deciphered to throw much light upon the stratification previously observed, and have vindicated the earlier perceptions of the scholars.

All the more reason have we, who can from a lower plane appreciate the labours and conscientious care of a scholarship that is itself far beyond us, to keep that open mind which the study of science continually reminds us to be essential in all true progress. Depth of faith for some of us is measured not by the quantity of pious beliefs which we can accept, but by the simplicity of those which we find needful for guidance and conduct. A man's religious life consisteth not in the abundance of the beliefs which he professes. Credulity is not faith. Even in spiritual things there is a sacred renunciation of the self, which enables one to lay aside many hindering things that are but old garments inherited from our forefathers. When we observe the greatest source of hindrance to all united work for the spiritual betterment of mankind, to have been those endless theological controversies which have embittered and estranged the earnest and the devout, and have been ever followed by persecution and spiritual cruelty, shall we not at least declare that in the name of the Master whose we are and whom we serve, we will have nothing to do with them or with the un-Christ-like spirit that characterises them. We need to have faith enough to believe that suspense of judgment is often a more sacred duty than acceptance of any particular dogma. For our age one of the greatest blessings that could befall us would be to possess that reverential open mind which

rises above all bigotries, scientific as well as religious. For while we need knowledge and insight, just as much do we need reverence : reverence for the truth because it is true, wherever we find it. If in the sole pursuit of truth we find ourselves called upon as a sacred duty to renounce some things hallowed by usage and pious association, that renunciation must be itself no hasty act, no passing impulse, no wilful breaking away. It must be under the supreme conviction that it is required of our hands. Return to the simple faith long overlaid by tradition and sacramentalism may not be easy, but it may be none the less a duty laid upon us. The renunciation with which for most of us the restatement of religion necessarily begins, must be a renunciation not for renunciation's sake, not born of spiritual pride, no truckling to popular pressure, no weak compromise for the sake of intellectual peace. It must be a renunciation made in obedience solely to the dictates of truth, a renunciation *ad majorem Dei gloriam*.

DISCUSSION.

Dr. WALTER KIDD.—I have been asked to move a vote of thanks to Professor Silvanus Thompson, thanking him for his kindness in coming this afternoon and putting before us this valuable address ; we recognise the value of the source from which it comes, from one who is well known for his Christian character. You will see how valuable it is for us to have this address presented to us from such a source. We have all been brought into a high plane of thought, into spiritual regions, and into regions of high science, and we have heard an address which is marked by extreme clearness of thought and loyalty to truth on both sides ; and I could only wish that our President had been able to be present to the end of this address, that he might have expressed the value of evidence as it has been presented to us ;—it is a question of evidence, all through, and the task remaining for us is simply to interpret the evidence. We shall all be set thinking on these lines and be prepared to learn much more. We may be startled to find we have to learn so much. Years ago we thought we knew a great deal more than we do now,

but we must be still learning—religion and science are progressing and we must be prepared to learn more and more. Let us show we are of open mind and desire to recognise the truth.

Lieutenant-General Sir HENRY GEARY, K.C.B.—It gives me great pleasure to be allowed to second this vote of thanks to Professor Silvanus Thompson. I am sure we have all listened to it with the greatest possible interest, and I think it has been a great opportunity for us to have heard the subject handled this afternoon by so high an authority. It would be quite premature to attempt to make any remarks upon the paper, because when it comes to be printed it will require most of us to take it home for careful study; but I think an additional reason for our thanking Professor Thompson for coming amongst us is the particular era at which this paper has been read. Even the most careless cannot be blind and deaf to the unsettled state of the minds of people at the present moment. It is a time when every thinking man and woman has to go to the foundation of the faith in which they have been brought up and examine it by the light of modern study, and I think in a few words we can sum up the Professor's teaching, and that is, that perhaps the greatest crime a man can commit in the twentieth century is to close his mind to any influx of light.

Mr. MARTIN L. ROUSE, B.L.—As one deputed to ask Professor Silvanus Thompson to come to lecture before us, and who has heard him most delightfully hold forth to large audiences of the British Association an exposition of electric power, I should like to concur in the vote of thanks that is now being given; but I would say I am most firmly convinced that the evidence that we have of the truth of the holy word of God, the Bible, as it stands, is overwhelming. I would also like to call attention to this fact, that this very age is foretold by the Bible in more than one way. One way is that when Daniel was about to close up his prophecy the angel said to him: "Shut up the words and seal the book, even to the time of the end; many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased." There, in that very book we have embodied this most distinct prophecy of the character of the age just before the winding up of God's purposes and the setting up of Christ's visible kingdom upon the earth.

The CHAIRMAN.—The Resolution which has been moved, seconded and now spoken to, is that we present our best thanks to

Professor Silvanus Thompson for the address now delivered, and our thanks to those who have read papers during the session.

Of course, an old man of eighty-three, I stand here as one of the children having yet not got beyond childhood, and am still wrapped up in some of the old arguments of the early, first, second and third century beliefs. But our resolution is by no means that we are prepared to accept all that Professor Thompson has put before us, but that we still owe our thanks to him for his address.

Rev. JOHN TUCKWELL, M.R.A.S.—Mr. Chairman, I rise to propose that our very best thanks be given to the Lord Chancellor for kindly promising to come, and remaining with us as long as he could, and to General Halliday for having so kindly and promptly taken the seat which the Lord Chancellor would otherwise have occupied. Perhaps I may be allowed to say a word or two concerning the basis of this Society, and if I refer to what has been said this afternoon I hope it may not be out of place. The Society professes to maintain an open mind, both in the direction of science and in the direction of religion; and I hope it is the endeavour of all to do so. We, I trust, recognise that no religion can be accepted by us as true which is not strictly in accordance with reason; in the same way as we regard no fact of science as being acceptable to the human understanding which is not in accordance with reason. But I may be permitted to say that there is a mistake somewhere. What is science but the systemisation of the facts of nature as known to man? I think that is a correct definition. Taking that as correct there is, of course, ample ground for recognising changes and advances which science may make; but I think it ought to be recognised that the changes and advances are simply in human knowledge. Facts of science do not, and cannot, change until the Almighty Creator shall see fit to introduce some new fact. We know that electricity existed centuries ago before it was discovered. There have been no changes in the facts; what has changed has been the knowledge of man concerning them. On the other hand, what is religion? or what is theology? but a systemisation of the facts concerning the relationship between God and man. These facts are the same to-day as they were thousands of years ago; and there has been no change in the relationship between God and man. Theology has made progress in the same way as science has made progress; and progress in theology can

only be a modification of man's knowledge concerning the facts, until the Almighty Creator shall see fit to introduce some new fact, or modify existing facts concerning the relationship between man and Himself. We can know very little concerning this relationship beyond that which He sees fit to make known to us. "Man by searching cannot find out God." Whence are we to look for the revelation of the mind of God on these matters? There is no other source whence we can obtain any information except the Scriptures. I know of none other. I know of no truth that has ever been advanced for the acceptance of man of a general character which cannot be found in the Scriptures. If that be so, then I think it becomes us to search our Bibles, and it may be that in the search for truth there, we shall be able to correct any mistakes into which we may have fallen.

May I be permitted to say concerning archæology that whilst modern criticism has spoken of the different "strata" in the Old Testament Scriptures, and has suggested that something of the same kind may be found in the New Testament, I do not know of a single fact which has been revealed to us by archæological knowledge which supports the modern theories concerning these "strata"; so far as I understand the question, it is purely hypothetical.

Rev. CHANCELLOR LIAS, M.A.—I have been asked to second the Resolution of thanks to General Halliday and those who have taken part in the present meeting, and I am sorry that I do not oftener appear here. It is nearly thirty years since I read a paper, but I have been a member of the Council almost consecutively since then; and so as the question has been raised by Mr. Tuckwell about the basis of the society to which one belongs, perhaps one has a little right to speak for it. I most cordially concur with Professor Thompson that we are bound to keep an open mind. It is a most wicked thing to "close one's eyes to the telescope," but I must ask whether sometimes one is not asked to see something that is not there? About modern science there is one thing I notice, that it deals largely on assumptions. Let us make sure that we shall see the thing, and do not let us assert that it is *there*, and then call upon people to see it, when the very reverse is the fact.

I think I caught something from Professor Thompson about holding the truth because it is the truth. Everyone I hope wishes to do that. What is the truth? Is the truth contained in the

Revelation of God which is handed down, or is it contained in what are said to be the ultimate conclusions of science in the twentieth century? I remember people talking about the nineteenth century, and in a very high-minded way a curate uttered a philippic against this so-called nineteenth century. Well, this is the twentieth, and then there will be the twenty-first, and the twenty-second, and the twenty-third century, which may negative some of the things which are held at the present time.

I should like to correct a mistake which some people fall into about the Fathers of the Council of Nicæa. It is supposed that the Nicene Fathers took upon themselves to say, "this is the faith which men ought to believe because we say so." They did nothing of the kind. When Constantine brought ecclesiastical authorities from all parts of the Christian world, he said:—Here is a question to be settled. Will you kindly tell us, you who have come from France, from the East, from Egypt, can you tell us what are the doctrines of Christianity you have believed in your various localities? Then they all decided that it had been handed down that Christ was "of one substance with the Father." The answer shows the opinion of Fathers of the Council which has been handed down from time immemorial; and therefore let us understand that the Fathers were not commissioned to dictate to us what we ought to believe.

I think we ought to thrash everything out, and I hope the subject of the address may be discussed at a future meeting of the Society, when all will have an opportunity of expressing their opinions upon it.

The meeting closed with a vote of thanks to the Chairman.