

CHARLES DARWIN, EVOLUTION, AND THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION.

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"That is not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural."—1 CORINTHIANS XV. 46.

THE year 1809 was perhaps the greatest year of distinguished births which the nineteenth century produced. It was the year when that tragic and baffled genius, Edgar Allen Poe, first saw the light. It was the year when Alfred Tennyson, who so loved Virgil and, like the great Latin poet, deeply pondered his own age and set many of its meanings singing in immortal music, began his adventure in this curious world. Proudhon, the founder of philosophical anarchy, was born in this year. Gladstone, whose wizardry in giving to the figures of a Budget a kind of purple romance, and whose capacity to capture the moral imagination of a great nation made him one of the outstanding leaders of the century, was born in 1809. And in this year Abraham Lincoln opened his eyes in that Kentucky cabin from which he was to go out to become the noblest product of his nation's democracy. Such were some of the children who were first sensing the sights and sounds of a strange environment in the year when Charles Darwin was born.

The story of his life is the tale of one supreme and mastering devotion. It was at Cambridge University that he found himself, and it was the five-year voyage of the ship "Beagle" which gave him his great opportunity as a naturalist. The ship went quite around the world, spending much time in and near South America. It was while reading Malthus's discussion of the increase of population that the idea of the struggle for existence dawned upon him in a new light. The idea of natural selection took on new meaning, and the conception for which another scientist found the phrase "the survival of the fittest" began to open up its possibilities. Darwin worked with a patience in gathering the facts upon which generalisations must be made which is quite beyond praise. The five-year voyage of the "Beagle" gave him unequalled opportunities. Then for twenty years he went on studying, collecting material, and pa-

tiently gathering together and classifying all his materials, verifying and correcting at every step. It is an almost unparalleled story of the patient and painstaking work of the greatest sort of scientist.

At last, in 1858, a curious and startling thing happened. From his friend, Alfred Wallace, Darwin received a communication announcing his reaching exactly the conclusions regarding evolution which had engrossed the mind of Darwin for twenty years. So modest and so eager to be fair to his friend was Darwin that he was willing to retire and let all the credit go to Wallace. This, however, was not to be. The work of the two men was presented simultaneously before the Linnæan Society, and it was at once clear, nobody acknowledging it more heartily than Wallace, that the flash of a great idea had indeed come to the younger man independently of the work of the elder, but it was Darwin who, by worldwide gathering of material and patient work through twenty years, had made the position in a singular way his own.

To be sure, Darwin was not the originator of the idea of evolution. Most distinguished among his immediate predecessors was Lamarck, whose work still has great significance. And the story does not even begin with him or with Goethe or St. Hilaire or with Erasmus Darwin, the grandfather of Charles. There is a fine sentence in Mr. J. St. Loe Strachey's fascinating volume "The River of Life," in which he describes the fashion in which the patient and painstaking mountain-climbing of some modern scientist brings him to the top of the range only to make the discovery that some keen-minded Greek has shot an arrow to the very summit a couple of thousand years ago. It was so with evolution. Aristotle taught the general doctrine. And when we pass from the Greeks to the Romans Lucretius paints a remarkable picture, unfolding like a cinema, of the development of animal life from simple origins. Darwin did, however, subject the idea of evolution to such scientific tests as had been unknown before. Nobody understood better than he that he could not say the last word even in the relatively small fields of the life of animals and the life of man to which he restricted his attention. The mutation theory of De Vries, the theories of orthogenesis, of isolation, of hybridization, and the revival of the position of Lamarck in new relationships, all suggest that there is a vast difference between the truth of evolution and

the adequacy of any particular formulation of its methods.

Evolution in Modern Thinking.

So germinal a principle was sure to be applied to various fields, and it was Herbert Spencer who, independently of Darwin, set the whole structure of the cosmos in the perspective of evolutionary thought. Every science and every art has felt the stimulus of this approach, and it is not too much to say that evolution has become not so much an explanation as a method which makes a place for itself in every sort of investigation and a spirit which suffuses all our thinking.

Darwin's books, "The Origin of Species" and "The Descent of Man," precipitated the most acrimonious sort of controversy. A good many people felt that everything which they held dear was not only endangered but quite destroyed if it became necessary to admit that man was descended from lower forms of life. People who had accepted with complacency the idea that man was made from dust drew back from the idea of an ancestry in the lower kingdoms. Someone has suggested that, after all, man is not much more dignified than monkeys, and, of course, no scientist suggests that man is descended from monkeys, but only that men and monkeys are twigs from a common bough. The truth is that the curious distaste with the thought of owing anything to lower forms is a strangely inconsistent thing. All the while we keep eating lower forms of animals, and the subtle miracles of digestion and our own organic life change what a little while ago was a cow grazing in a field into a poet writing lovely verses or an orator speaking eloquent words. What a little while ago were sheep grazing on the hillside appear upon dinner tables in appetising form, and a little later have become the strength of working men and the insight of patient scholars. Even pigs are not disdained by many people as the source of energy which they like to believe they apply to great moral and spiritual tasks. Of course, you can regard it either as a miracle or as a humiliation. To some of us it seems a good deal of a miracle that from the lower animal forms there can be appropriated energies which express themselves in the beauty of architecture, the grace of poetry and the stability of civilization. At all events, if a man could see in one collection all the turkeys and chickens and geese and other fowl, all the cows and sheep and swine which have contributed to his

physical organism, he might come to think of simian ancestry as a rather incidental matter.

The Question of Genesis.

It is probably true, however, that a good many people have become hostile to the idea of evolution not so much from distaste in respect of the thought of descent from lower forms of life as because the account of creation as given in the book of Genesis seems to them clearly to contradict the account which the scientific evolutionist gives of these matters. The whole subject requires clear and close thinking. It may be granted without hesitation that the all-knowing God held in the area of His thought every fact which has become the possession of modern scientists at the very time when the materials which make up the book of Genesis had their origin. Why then is not the book of Genesis a frankly and clearly evolutionary document? When we begin to think about the matter we see that it is not at all as simple as may at first sight appear. Suppose the great Master of Life had inspired the writings to be found in the book of Genesis in such a form that they would clearly and perfectly represent the state of scientific knowledge in this year of our Lord 1925. It is clear at once that such writings would have been perfectly incomprehensible to every man alive when they were written. They would have looked upon them with dumb and amazed astonishment. You have to speak to men in the language of their own day, and the scientific thought and speech of the twentieth century would have puzzled and baffled and bewildered the men and women of that ancient time. More than that, it would have been completely without power to give a gripping and intelligible message to the men and women of every century since until the coming of our own time. But more than this. Science is all the while advancing. Soon the particular forms in which we clothe our knowledge will be antiquated, and if the book of Genesis were written in these forms in all the untold generations and centuries which are yet to come it would speak in the language of an outgrown and more or less discredited state of knowledge. Suppose, then, that the great Master of Life had inspired the writing of the materials to be found in the book of Genesis in language which would express the ultimate truth which is yet centuries and centuries beyond our ken. It is at once clear that in the age when it was written and in every

succeeding age, including our own, until that very distant time when the final forms of knowledge begin to appear, such writing would be incomprehensible. It would be completely baffling and completely bewildering. Is there any other way in which the problem could be met? There is, indeed, the method which in the wisdom of God was actually used. This method would give great and compelling moral and spiritual truth in the very language and the very thought-forms of the people to whom the moral and spiritual message was to be given. Then they could understand it, and men of later day could see just how it was given to them, and just how it was brought within the range of their mind and conscience. This moral and spiritual message would be quite independent of the mental thought-forms of the period when it was given, and would be commanding and authentic long after those thought-forms had ceased to be compelling. From the first prophet until Jesus every messenger of God had to speak in the thought-forms of his own day, and in doing so there was no blind commitment of mankind to the passing utensils through which the eternal truth was conveyed. The Genesis stories give an interpretation of the character of God, of the nature of man, of the tragedy of sin, which probe to the very depths of human experience. And these are seen all the more clearly when they emerge from primitive forms of thought and command the conscience of men of every sort of civilisation and mental life. Seen in this light, there is nothing in the moral and spiritual message of the book of Genesis which comes into conflict with any assured results of modern science.

Evolution Neither Christian Nor Un-Christian.

As a matter of fact, taken by themselves, the postulates of evolution are neither Christian nor un-Christian. You can so interpret evolution as to make it anti-Christian. You can so interpret evolution as to make it express the very genius of Christianity. The evolutionary doctrine is a good deal like a Pullman car. It carries saints and it carries rogues. It carries bootleggers and it carries Christian missionaries. Because a traveller found a good many bad men on a Pullman car he would not thenceforth refuse to ride on a Pullman. The passengers are responsible for what they bring to the car. The car is not responsible for the sort of passengers it carries. If we were to allow anti-Christian forces to con-

trol the means of intellectual locomotion known under the name of evolution, it would simply mean that we are allowing the enemy to gain for themselves the most effective means of transportation. That would be an extremely strange thing to do in a war.

The question then is not one which has to do with whether we are going to be evolutionists. It has to do with the sort of evolutionists we are going to be. Now, the man who interprets evolution as a perfectly mechanical and material process with no causal or controlling power outside the mechanical and impersonal relationships which the process reveals, has, of course, given away the whole Christian position. But there is nothing in the facts of evolution which makes such a position necessary. The man who does this sort of thing is simply using the letters of the evolutionary alphabet to spell atheism. The evolutionary alphabet furnishes just the letters needed to spell God. After all there is no particular use blaming the alphabet if men insist on using its letters to spell the wrong words. Men have been godless who have never heard of evolution. And men have been saints who have believed in evolution. The house of evolution—to change our figure—is a good deal like the material world in this respect, that it supports both saints and sinners.

The man who holds a personal and ethical and spiritual view of the world is sometimes almost startled at the fashion in which his positions enable him to be an evolutionist in a deeper and more understanding and fruitful fashion. Let us inspect the matter in the light of some of its possibilities in this regard. When our organist plays the "Pilgrims' Chorus" on the great organ, which has brought so much happiness to us all, we instinctively feel a great evolutionary movement in the noble composition. On it goes, and we feel that each movement is an advance toward a great consummation, which comes at last. But nobody would think of calling one note the father or the grandfather of the notes which follow. The unseen organist is the really effective power which gives us the gracious and inspiring music. You can think of the composition very completely as the evolution of a musical idea. But if you want to explain it you must remember the musician unseen by so many of you. And that great "Pilgrims' Chorus," which we call life, moves with a series of characteristics which the scientist can note and

catalogue. He can tell us the tale of its unfolding evolution. But if you want to explain it you must go to the great unseen musician. You must go to Almighty God.

Here you come to the great divide. When you have asked one question you have reached the ultimate matters. And this is the question: Is evolution a self-sufficient and self-running process, without any place for moral and spiritual values and without any place for Almighty God, or is it the perpetual activity of the perfectly good and loving Father whose face we see in the face of Jesus Christ? Here the issue is sharp and clear enough. The man who answers the question in the first way is not a Christian, and the man who answers it in the second way does not cease to be a Christian, though he is a firm and eager believer in evolution as the chosen method by which God works. The man who refuses to believe in the unseen musician because the notes can be fitted together in a mathematical plan will, after all, not prevent our loving the musician, who has poured his very heart out in melody and harmony, which have given us a new sense of the meaning of life.

"God at Work."

The Copernican theory of the universe ran the same gauntlet which other scientific views must face. Doubtless it seemed very clear to some pious men that it was impossible to believe in God if the earth moved around the sun. The literal interpretation of the Bible was, of course, all against the Copernican view. And so good men set themselves against advancing knowledge. But there remains no one so poor mentally as to do them reverence. And the last strange brilliant defence of the old position was by an astonishingly gifted negro preacher, who was a genius in his way, who held great audiences enthralled by his adroit and telling logic as he delivered his lecture, "The Sun Do Move." There is, I suppose, not a single advocate of the position which has gotten for itself the name of Fundamentalism who would not gladly admit that the Copernican theory holds all the field. In that concession he really concedes his whole case. A man who can believe in the Copernican theory has admitted in principle every position which the Christian believer needs as he relates the new knowledge to the Biblical statements. And the man who sees in the Copernican view of the universe only a sublime view of God at work has already in prin-

ciple accepted just the position from which to interpret evolution from the Christian view.

The really searching question, of course, has to do not with the solid saints who will hold to the religious verities whatever comes and whatever goes. It is the new generation, to whom evolution is the very framework of all knowledge, of whom we must think. Believers in evolution they must be if their whole intellectual integrity is not to be shattered. Believers in the Christian religion many of them—most of them, we trust—would like to be. Are we able to help them? Have we a vital word in an hour which, for them, is a time of intellectual crisis? There are many of us who believe that at this very point Christianity meets one of its greatest and one of its happiest opportunities.

The young men and women who are coming in such amazing numbers from our institutions of learning have a knowledge and an understanding of the whole biological process which would have been a little disconcerting to their fathers and entirely astounding to their grandfathers. They have watched the emergence of vegetable and animal life from the water in the great adventure of living on the land. They have watched the vast and varied struggle of life up to man and through all the stages of civilisation; and they are ready to ask, "What is back of it all, and whither does it lead?" They are ready to hear the great reply: "God is back of it all, and its goal is revealed in the stainless and glowing and radiantly self-forgetful personality of Jesus Christ." When once they have followed the long and dramatic story, the great epic of life upon this planet, seeing in every stage the presence and the activity of the invisible God, a new sacredness and a new glory come to all of life. And when they have seen emerging at the very heart of this tale of struggle and survival the mighty and glorious personality of Jesus Christ, when they have seen that everything else was on the way to Him, and that everything is still on the way to the achievement of His kingdom, religion ceases to be an incidental part of life; it becomes the defining meaning of the biological process itself.

There is an understanding of the significance of Jesus so profound and so deeply related to the new knowledge which has come into our possession, that "that One Face" looks out of every page of a text-book on chemistry, gazes forth from the most

intricate analysis in physics, gives a genius and a soul to biology, becomes the inspiring genius of the new psychology, so that in a new and most glorious fashion the old word is fulfilled, "that in all things He may have pre-eminence." All these realms belong to Him. It would be a poor, foolish mind which would retain for Him the realms of phrases which have lost their vitality and prevent His entering in triumph the vast and far-reaching realms where He has the right to rule.

Christianising the Intellectual Adventure.

It is a wonderful characteristic of the vital writers of the Old Testament and the New that they make their own every potent word in the contemporary vernacular. Ezekiel makes the prophetic message a thing with new and vital seizure because he uses the very forms of Babylonian thought and experience to make it commanding. Paul bends the stately Roman Empire itself to the purpose of being a vehicle for the making vivid of the conception of the Empire of Jesus Christ. Why cannot we be as wise in our own time? One can imagine with what zest and zeal Paul and Ezekiel would have used the very pass-words of evolutionary thought to make more potent and more effective the message of Religion to the men of this tremendous day. The whole intellectual adventure of scientist and philosopher and artist belong to Jesus Christ. We claim then all for Him. We come with a right of eminent domain to make them a part of the vast Empire of Jesus Christ.

It is not strange that Paul, whose mind played over such vast areas, used a phrase which it was more than fitting to select as a sort of watch-word at the beginning of this sermon. We are not claiming that Paul was an evolutionist before the days of evolutionists. We are claiming that there is a suggestiveness and a significance not soon exhausted in his seminal phrase: that is not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural. The phrase is capacious enough to hold the whole Christian interpretation of evolution. Life indeed begins on low levels. But it does not remain there. It aspires; it climbs. It seeks great goals. And the spiritual is the consummation toward which it moves. Why the movement, we ask, and why the goal? There is only one answer to such questions. God Himself sets in motion the movement. God Himself presides over it. God Himself provides the goal. The evolu-

tionary process cannot account for Jesus Christ; but Jesus Christ can account for the evolutionary process. It is in His face that the new knowledge is seen in all its human meaning and in all its human relationships. It is He who gives a soul to the age-long struggle. It is He who changes a process into a moral and spiritual progress. It is He who brings to light the divine fellowship which has been implicit in the whole evolutionary process. It is in Him that the new knowledge becomes redemptive, and science itself the joyous handmaid of religion.

PURE RELIGION AND UNDEFILED.

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OUR extensive knowledge of the religions of the world has this value: it shows us how universal is the religious instinct in mankind and how imperative that instinct is for satisfaction. Like all other instincts, the religious instinct has no particular character; it is just a primitive instinct, like hunger or sexual attraction, and claims, like these, attention to its needs. This is so often forgotten and results, when forgotten, in such disasters, that it needs special emphasis in days when mankind is being forced down by circumstances and the struggle for existence to the more instinctive basis of his being.

When this is remembered a great deal that passes for religion to-day will be seen in its true character as the restless demand for instinctive feeling and not the exhibition of "pure religion." The symbols of all and any religion are equally capable of meeting the demands of the religious instinct. The pious Buddhist, the devout Hindu, or the zealous Mussulman, as well as the earnest Christian, all meet in perfect equality when they derive satisfaction from the practices of their faith and the inner impressions of their religious symbols, whether of creed or ritual.

The recognition of this equality will, in time, render us tolerant towards the religious expression of the faith of other peoples and more sincere in the observance of the real genius of our own. The destructive side of religion which has been the main urge of religious endeavour in the past has come from the clash of raw instincts and not from their sublimations. It is the differences of race and temperament through

which the raw religious instinct has achieved recognition that have caused religious intolerance and persecution, rather than the differences in the purity of the religious revelations given to the world.

Raising the Level of Instinct.

We are beginning to realise that if we are to maintain a human level in the world of the future we must learn to understand the differences of race and temperament, with their great varieties of expression, and no longer judge them. And we must begin by trying to understand men in the most profound of all movements of their being, viz., the religious. Moreover, we must begin at home, for we are living amid a great clash of instinctive and temperamental demands in the region of religious feeling in our own land and Church. There is undoubtedly a great quickening in the world of the religious instincts, but we are thinking more of satisfying these instincts than of raising them up to Christ. What we must remember is, that these instincts are equally capable of satisfaction under the ægis of any religion or of all of them if we wish to pick and choose, and that the satisfaction is no more entitled to the name of religion than is that which allays any other instinct. Our feelings are at rest. That is a good result, but it is not in itself a religious sequence. And since all the efforts at satisfaction which abound to-day claim to be distinctively or exclusively Christian, it is particularly desirable that we should examine the credentials of our faith, in the exercise of which so many good people are mistaking the following of instinctive demands for the following of Christ's demands.

It must be remembered that Christ never claimed to establish a new religion. He claimed to give to religion a new and deeper meaning in man's life—not to satisfy an instinct which was all too well and too formally satisfied in His day, but to sublimate this instinct to a unity in God's love which it had never and could never experience at the hands of any but the unique Son of God.

Religious ceremonies, gorgeous ritual, liturgical sacrifices and sacraments abounded in His day in even more profusion than they do to-day, and the most casual reader of His life will at once realise that He did not step down from Heaven to direct men to a more meticulous observance of these satisfactions of the religious instincts. He came to fulfil them and lift them up to a clearer recognition of God, which was now to be

found in the complete Personality of Christ.

At the moment many among us have lost their own hold upon life, and their restlessness is a token of this loss, and not so much a token of religious searching. To repair this loss we must come back to Christ, Who holds the key to life not by way of any new faith or old forms of faith, but by virtue of His Personality, which gives unity and direction to our religious instincts. The present demand for satisfaction of religious feeling, either by the revival of externalism, as among the Anglo-Catholics, or by a narrow certitude, can be met, but the result will be that the appetite sickens and dies, for this demand has no goal but death. The alternative is the organisation and direction of this demand towards the Person of Christ, and in consequence of such organisation and direction there will come a consciousness of vital forces passing between us and God.

Religion Directed to Social Ends.

There are only two ways open to humanity to-day: the first is the effort to sterilise or hypnotise this quickened religious instinct; the other is to continually organise and direct it towards social ends. There is no doubt which of these two belongs to "pure religion and undefiled." Nowhere do we find that Christ desired the religious instinct to become atrophied into formalism through the allurements of externalism. Indeed, He poured His undying contempt upon all such efforts. On the contrary, He became Flesh that He might give to our natures the impulse for continual regeneration of all desire and its definite transformation into divine energy. This is the way to peace. The other way is the way to ceaseless unrest, because by remaining in the allurements of external symbolism we are only feeding our emotions upon the images which they themselves create. And no progress is possible.

It is only in days like these that we are privileged to enter into the true meaning of Christ, for then we see how His uniqueness fades away into the general chaos of religious feeling, and is obscured by the demands of an instinct common to all humanity. His real message flashes into the consciousness of those who have tried to keep close to Him. His real message is that He enters into our being and banishes all previous images created by emotional restlessness, and replaces them by Himself, the uncreated source of companionship and power. This