

THE THEOLOGY OF DARWINISM.

Darwin's new work, the *Descent of Man*, will renew the controversy which was started some years ago by the publication of the *Origin of Species*. The main conclusion arrived at in the present work is what might have been anticipated, viz., that man is descended from some lowly organised form. This conclusion will be highly distasteful to many persons, and will be denounced as irreligious and atheistic. Darwin himself repudiates the idea of atheism, and expressly maintains that the new doctrine of evolution is as consistent with religion as the old doctrine which it is intended to supersede. "I am aware," he says "that the conclusions arrived at in this work will be denounced by some as highly irreligious; but he who thus denounces them is bound to show why it is more irreligious to explain the origin of man as a distinct species by descent from some lower form, through the laws of variation and natural selection, than to explain the birth of the individual through the laws of ordinary reproduction. The birth both of the species and of the individual are equally parts of that grand sequence of events which our minds refuse to accept as the result of blind chance." It is peculiarly significant of the progress of Darwinism that it seems to be now accepted by theologians of the Broad Church School. In a paper on the *Natural Theology of the Future*, read at a recent clerical meeting in the Hall of Sion College, Professor Kingsley says:—

We might accept all that Mr. Darwin, all that Professor Huxley, has so learnedly and so acutely written on physical science, and yet preserve our natural theology on exactly the same basis as that on which Butler and Paley left it. That we should have to develope it, I do not deny. That we should have to relinquish it, I do. Let me press this thought earnestly on you. I know that many wiser and better men than I have fears on this point. I cannot share in them. All, it seems to me, that the new doctrines of evolution demand is this. "We all come" from the same

seems to me, that the new doctrines of evolution demand is this. We all agree, for the fact is patent, that our own bodies, and indeed the body of every living creature, are evolved from a seemingly simple germ by natural laws, without visible action of any designing will or mind, into the full organisation of a human or other creature. Yet we do not say, on that account—God did not create me : I only grow. We hold in this case to our old idea, and say—If there be evolution, there must be an evolver. Now the new physical theories only ask us, it seems to me, to extend this conception to the whole universe : to believe that not individuals merely, but whole varieties and races, the total organised life on this planet, and it may be the total organisation of the universe, have been evolved just as our bodies are, by natural laws acting through circumstance. This may be true, or may be false. But all its truth can do to the natural theologian will be to make him believe that the Creator bears the same relation to the whole universe as that Creator undeniably bears to every individual human body.

I entreat you to weigh these words, which have not been written in haste ; and I entreat you also, if you wish to see how little the new theory, that species may have been gradually created by variation, natural selection, and so forth, interferes with the old theory of design, contrivance, and adaptation, nay, with the fullest admission of benevolent final causes—I entreat you, I say, to study Darwin's "Fertilisation of Orchids"—a book which (whether his main theory be true or not) will still remain a most valuable addition to natural theology.

For suppose, gentlemen, that all the species of orchids, and not only they, but their congeners—the gingers, the arrowroots, the bananas—are all the descendants of one original form, which was most probably nearly allied to the snowdrop and the iris. What then ? Would that be one whit more wonderful, more unworthy of the wisdom and power of God, than if they were, as most believe, created each and all at once, with their minute and often imaginary shades of difference ? What would the natural theologian have to say, were the first theory true, save that God's works are even more wonderful than he always believed them to be ? As for the theory being impossible : we must leave the discussion of that to physical students, It is not

for us clergymen to limit the power of God. "Is anything too hard for the Lord?" asked the prophet of old: and we have a right to ask it as long as time shall last. If it be said that natural selection is too simple a cause to produce such fantastic variety: that, again, is a question to be settled exclusively by physical students. All we have to say on the matter is, that we always knew that God works by very simple, or seemingly simple, means; that the whole universe, as far as we could discern it, was one concatenation of the most simple means; that it was wonderful, yea, miraculous, in our eyes, that a child should resemble its parents, that the raindrops should make the grass grow, that the grass should become flesh, and the flesh sustenance for the thinking brain of man. Ought God to seem less or more august in our eyes, when we are told that His means are even more simple than we supposed? We held Him to be almighty and allwise. Are we to reverence Him less or more, if we hear that His might is greater, His wisdom deeper, than we ever dreamed? We believed that His care was over all His works; that His providence watched perpetually over the whole universe. We were taught—some of us at least—by Holy Scripture, to believe that the whole history of the universe was made up of special Providences. If, then, that should be true which Mr. Darwin writes—"It may be metaphorically said that natural selection is daily and hourly scrutinising throughout the world, every variation, even the slightest; rejecting that which is bad, preserving and adding up that which is good, silently and incessantly working whenever and wherever opportunity offers at the improvement of every organic being,"—if that, I say, were proven to be true, ought God's care and God's providence to seem less or more magnificent in our eyes? Of old it was said by Him without whom nothing is made, "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work." Shall we quarrel with science if she should show how those words are true? What, in one word, should we have to say but this?—We knew of old that God was so wise that He could make all things: but behold, He is so much wiser than even that, that He can make all things make themselves.

But it may be said—These notions are contrary to Scripture. I must beg very humbly, but very

to Scripture. I must beg very humbly, but very firmly, to demur to that opinion. Scripture says that God created. But it nowhere defines that term. The means, the how of creation, is nowhere specified. Scripture, again, says that organised beings were produced each according to their kind. But it nowhere defines that term. What a kind includes, whether it includes or not the capacity of varying (which is just the question in point), is nowhere specified. And I think it a most important rule in scriptural exegesis, to be most cautious as to limiting the meaning of any term which Scripture itself has not limited, lest we find ourselves putting into the teaching of Scripture our own human theories or prejudices. And consider, is not man a kind? And has not mankind varied, physically, intellectually, spiritually? Is not the Bible, from beginning to end, a history of the variations of mankind, for worse or for better, from their original type?