

DARWINISM AND DIVINITY.

WE are going through that change in regard to Mr. Darwin's speculations which has occurred so often in regard to scientific theories. When first propounded, divines regarded them with horror, and declared them to be radically opposed not only to the Book of Genesis, but to all the religious beliefs which elevate us above the brutes. The opinions have gained wider acceptance; and whatever may be the ultimate verdict as to their soundness, it certainly cannot be doubted that they are destined profoundly to modify the future current of thought. As Darwinism has won its way to respectability, as it has ceased to be the rash conjecture of some hasty speculator, and is received with all the honours of grave scientific discussion, divines have naturally come to look upon it with different eyes. They have gradually sidled up towards the object which at first struck them as so dark and portentous a phenomenon, and discovered that after all it is not of so diabolic a nature as they had imagined. Its breath does not wither up every lofty aspiration, and every worthy conception of the destiny of humanity. Darwinists are not necessarily hooved and horned monsters, but are occasionally of pacific habits, and may even be detected in the act of going to church. Room may be made for their tenets alongside of the Thirty-nine Articles, by a little judicious crowding and re-arrangement. Some of the old literal interpretations of the Scriptures must perhaps be abandoned, but after all they were in far too precarious a position already to be worth much lamentation. It would be entirely unfair to accuse persons who have gone through this change of the smallest conscious insincerity. They are

not merely endeavouring to curry favour with an adversary because he has become too formidable to be openly encountered. They have simply found out, in all honesty and sincerity, that the object of their terror has been invested with half his terrible attributes by their own hasty imagination. They are exemplifying once more the truth conveyed in an old story. A man hangs on to the edge of a precipice through the dark hours of the night, believing that if his grasp fails him he will be instantly dashed to a thousand fragments; at length his strength will bear it no longer, and he falls—only to discover that his feet had been all the time within a couple of inches of the ground. The precipice was a creation of his fancy, and the long agony entirely thrown away. So we may believe that a good many sound divines have resigned themselves to the inevitable plunge, and are astonished to find all their vital functions continuing to operate pretty nearly as well after as before the catastrophe. Perhaps they feel rather foolish, though of course they do not say so. One could wish, certainly, that under these circumstances they would betray a little less uneasiness; and that the discovery that the doctrine is harmless might precede by a rather longer interval the admission that it is true. There would be less room for unkindly cavils. However, it is being discovered in one way or other, that religion is really not interested in these discussions. We have lately seen, for example, in a very orthodox Romanist organ, that theology has nothing, or next to nothing, to say to Mr. Darwin's theories. It is permissible to believe either that man was made by a single act of the creative energy, or that a pair of apes was

selected and improved gradually into humanity, as, if the comparison be admissible, human processes may gradually form the carrier-pigeon out of his wild congeners. We must, indeed, hold that the operation was miraculous; and as the tendency of scientific enquiry is to banish the miraculous, we may say that there is still a fundamental opposition between the teaching of the Church and Mr. Darwin. When we consider how easily the word 'miraculous' may itself be rarefied until no particular meaning is left, we may doubt whether this opposition may not be removed; the verdict of science as to the mode in which the phenomena succeeded each other might be accepted, though there would be a difference of opinion as to the efficient cause of the change, and thus a kind of compromise might be effected between the rival forces.

Meanwhile, whatever the validity of this and similar artifices, it may be worth while to consider a little more closely what is the prospect before us. Let us suppose that Darwinism is triumphant at every point. Imagine it to be demonstrated that the long line of our genealogy can be traced back to the lowest organisms; suppose that our descent from the ape is conclusively proved, and the ape's descent from the tidal animal, and the tidal animal's descent from some ultimate monad, in whom all the vital functions are reduced to the merest rudiments. Or, if we will, let us suppose that a still further step has been taken, and the origin of life itself discovered, so that by putting a certain mixture in a hermetically sealed bottle, we can create our own ancestors over again. When we endeavour firmly to grasp that conception, we are, of course, sensible of a certain shock. We have a prejudice or two derived from the Zoological Gardens and elsewhere, which, as it were, causes

our gorge to rise; but when we have fairly allowed the conception to sink into our minds, when we have brought our other theories into harmony with it, and have lost that uncomfortable sense of friction and distortion which is always produced by the intrusion of a new set of ideas, what is the final result of it all? What is it that we have lost, and what have we acquired in its place? It is surely worth while to face the question boldly, and look into the worst fears that can be conjured up by these terrible discoverers. Probably, after such an inspection, the thought that will occur to any reasonable man will be, what does it matter? What possible difference can it make to me whether I am sprung from an ape or an angel? The one main fact is, that somehow or other I am here. How I came here may be a very interesting question to speculative persons, but my thoughts and sensations and faculties are the same on any hypothesis. Sunlight is just as bright if the sun was once a nebulous mass. The convenience of our arms and legs is not in the slightest degree affected by the consideration that our great-great-grandfathers were nothing better than more or less moveable stomachs. The poet's imagination and the philosopher's reason are none the worse because the only sign of life given by their ancestors was some sort of vague contractility in a shapeless jelly. Our own personal history, if we choose to trace it far enough back, has taken us through a series of changes almost equally extensive, and we do not think any the worse of ourselves on that account. Our affections and our intellectual faculties are in existence. They are the primary data of the problem, and as long as we are conscious of their existence we need not worry ourselves by asking whether they began to exist by some abrupt change

or gradually rose into existence through a series of changes. There is still quite as much room as ever for the loftiest dreams that visit the imaginations of saints or poets. The mode in which we express ourselves must, of course, be slightly altered; but so long as the same instincts exist which sought gratification in the old language, we need not doubt but they will frame a new one out of the changed materials of thought. The fact that religion exists is sufficient demonstration that men feel the need of loving each other, of elevating the future and the past above the present, of rising above the purely sensual wants of our nature, and so on; the need will exist just as much, whether we take one view or other of a set of facts which, on any hypothesis, happened many thousands of years before we were born, and in regard to which a contented ignorance is far from being an impossible frame of mind. One can understand, after a little trouble, how it was that at a particular period of history people fancied that disinterested love would leave the world, and a moral chaos be produced, if it should be made to appear that it was not literally true that we are all descended from a man who was turned out of a garden for eating an apple. The infidels who assailed, and the orthodox who defended that dogma, really believed that it was an essential corner-stone in the foundations of all religion, which once removed, nothing but a universal crash could follow. Even the statement that it might possibly be an allegory instead of a historical record nearly frightened our prosaic ancestors out of their wits. Remove one brick from the cunningly adjusted fabric of orthodoxy, prove that a line of the Hebrew Scriptures was erroneous, and God would vanish from the world, heaven and hell become empty names, all motives for doing good be removed, and the earth be-

come a blank and dreary wilderness. In remote country towns and small clerical coteries some vestiges of this cheerful opinion still linger. Most men have grown beyond it, and have found some broader basis for their hopes and aspirations. And yet, when one comes to think about it, is not the alarm which has been caused by the statement that Adam was the great-grandson of an ape equally preposterous? Why should it have so fluttered the doves of the Church? If science could have proved divines to be apes themselves, there would have been some ground for vexation; but that was obviously out of the question, and their alarm would only prove that they were drawing some very unwarrantable inferences, or else by association of ideas had become unable to distinguish between the essence and the remotest accidental accompaniments of the faith. What interest can the highest part of our nature really take in a dispute as to whether certain facts did or did not occur many ages ago? The *prima facie* presumption is, certainly, that any change in our opinions would affect rather the external imagery than the faith which it embodies. One would say at first sight that religion is no more likely to leave the world because we have new views as to the mode in which the world began, than poetry to vanish as soon as we have ceased to believe in the historical accuracy of the account of the siege of Troy. Man possesses certain spiritual organs, whose function it is to produce religion. Religion could only be destroyed by removing the organs, and not by supplying them with slightly different food.

The precise nature of the fears entertained by the orthodox is revealed by the arguments generally brought to bear against the new doctrine. There is, for example, what may be called the metaphy-

sical argument, which, in one form or another, seems to be regarded as important. It is substantially an attempt to prove that the gap between the brute and the human mind is so wide that we cannot imagine it to be filled up by any continuous series. It is argued at great length that instinct differs from reason not in degree but in kind, or that brutes do not possess even the rudiments of what we call a moral sense. The argument has long been more or less familiar. Animals have always been regarded with a certain dislike by theological arrogance. It has been held to be a conclusive objection to the validity of certain arguments for the immortality of the soul, that they would open the path to heaven to our dogs as well as to ourselves. It does not seem very easy to give any satisfactory reason for the extreme abhorrence with which such a consummation is regarded, or to say why we should claim a monopoly in another world which we do not enjoy in this. Philosophers, indeed, have gone further, and denied to animals even the most moderate share of our own capacities, and have set them down as nothing better than machines. One is really rather glad to see the poor beasts getting their revenge in public opinion, and being recognised as our relations after having been almost repudiated as fellow-creatures. The distinctions, indeed, which have been drawn seem to us to rest upon no better foundation than a great many other metaphysical distinctions: that is, the assumption that because you can give two things different names, they must therefore have different natures. It is difficult to understand how anybody who has ever kept a dog, or seen an elephant, can have any doubts as to an animal's power of performing the essential processes of reasoning. We have been saying in thousands of treatises on logic, All men are mortal:

Socrates is a man, therefore Socrates is mortal. The elephant reasons: All boys are bun-giving animals; that biped is a boy; therefore I will hold out my trunk to him. A philosopher says, The barometer is rising, and therefore we shall have fine weather; his dog says, My master is putting on his hat, and therefore I am going to have a walk. A dog equals a detective in the sharpness with which he infers general objectionableness from ragged clothes. A clever dog draws more refined inferences. If he is not up to enough simple arithmetic to count seven, he can at least say, Everybody is looking so gloomy that it must be Sunday morning. If he is a sheep dog, he is probably more capable of finding his way over hills than most members of the Alpine Club, and capable of combining his actions with a view to making the sheep—whose reasoning powers are limited—follow the right track. He can found judgments on cautious experiment, as anybody will admit who has seen a dog testing the strength of a plank which he has to cross, or measuring the height of a jump. In fact, a dog is constantly performing rudimentary acts of reason, which can only be distinguished from our own by the fact that he cannot put them into words. He can understand a few simple words; and though he cannot articulate, he can make sounds indicative of his wants and emotions, which are to words what the embryo is to the perfect organism. He cannot put together a sentence; but to found a distinction of kind between his intellectual performances and those of man upon that circumstance, seems to be as unreasonable as to make a similar distinction between the intellect of the savage who cannot count five, and that of the philosopher who can use mathematical symbols. The power of abstraction has been carried a step, and a very important

step, farther in each case; but there is no more cause to suspect the introduction of an entirely new element in one case than the other.

The condemnation of the poor brutes as non-moral (if we may use such a word) seems to be still more monstrous. We need not speak of exceptional stories, such as the legend in a recent French newspaper of the sensitive dog who committed suicide when deserted by his friends; but who can doubt that his dog has something which serves as a very fair substitute for a sense of duty? Could anything be more like human heroism than the conduct of the poor collie who drove home her master's sheep, leaving her new-born puppies by the side of the road? Or, to avoid particular instances, is there a barrister in England who can blush half so expressively as a dog found out in sharp practice—blushing, of course, being taken in a sense applicable to the dog's tail? Whether wild animals have such a sense of the value of any positive laws is more than we know; but wild animals, down to the lowest orders, show at least the maternal instinct. The devotion of beasts to their young belongs, one would say, to the highest order of moral beauty—except that it extends too low down amongst animated beings to please some people. Yet we may presume that the most hard-hearted of metaphysicians would find it hard to suppress an emotion of sympathy and approval at the sight of a bird overcoming its timidity to fight for its little puff-balls of children. It is a more pathetic if not a more sublime sight than those starry heavens with which we are so often bored. There is a bit of metaphysical quibbling, by which it is endeavoured to evade the obvious inference. It seems to come to this, when analysed, that though the bird performs a heroic action, it has never framed the general proposition,

Mothers ought to love their young. That is undeniable; but surely the bird is on the high road to it. Light up its feeble brain with a little more intelligence, and it will have no trouble in fitting its instincts with the proper strait waists-coats of formula. To deny virtue to the bird would be to deny it equally to the savage, who has movements of generosity and self-devotion, though it has never occurred to him to speculate on moral philosophy. There is, of course, a difference between the virtue which merely results from the spontaneous play of unselfish instincts, and that which includes a certain list of definite propositions on the subject formed by reflection and observation. But where the first is present, even in a high degree, it is not difficult to account for the gradual development of the second.

The argument, however, has another fatal weakness, if it is intended to raise a presumption against the possible passage from apehood to manhood. Assume, if you please, that the difference is as wide as possible. Suppose that reason and the moral sense are as different from the rudimentary thoughts and passions that animate the feeble brute-brain as water from fire or as mind from matter. That will not raise any presumption that there must be a sudden gap in the chain of animated beings, unless you can prove that the new element, whatever it may be called, must enter, as it were, at one bound. If reason be radically different from instinct, yet reason may be present in some creatures in a merely rudimentary form. The question, indeed, does not admit of argument. We always have before our eyes a perfect and uninterrupted series. The child of six months old is less intelligent than a full-grown dog; and if we would imagine the development of man from monkey, we have only to suppose the first

monkey to be the equal of an average baby (say) of one year old, the monkey's son to be equal to a baby of a year and a day, and so on. We may thus proceed by perfectly imperceptible stages, and in the course of three or four thousand generations we shall get a man-monkey fully equal in intelligence to the average Hottentot. Thence upwards we cannot deny the possibility of development without heterodoxy. In short, by interpolating a sufficient number of terms we may form an ideal, which, for anything we can say, may be an actual series ending with the man and beginning with the inferior animals, in which there shall not be a single violent transition. The question whether reason is or is not specifically distinct from instinct is simply irrelevant. In one case we must suppose that it begins by entering in homoeopathic doses; in the other, that it is simply the development of certain lower faculties; in either case the animal will shade into the human intellect by degrees as imperceptible as those by which night changes into dawn. Indeed, it is impossible to see why—except from fear of certain conclusions, which is not a logical ground for dissent—the possibility of a passage from brute to man should ever have been denied on *à priori* grounds. Whether the theory is confirmed or confuted by observation is an entirely open question; but it is strange that it should be pronounced impossible when we are ready to admit infinitely greater changes. If you can imagine a monkey to have been developed from a sea-anemone, an animal from a plant, or living from inorganic matter—and none of these changes, however little reason we have to believe in their actual occurrence, are supposed to be obnoxious to any insurmountable objection *à priori*—why can we not admit that a monkey may possibly become a man?

It is here that we come upon the confusion already noticed. It results from mixing metaphysical enquiries about the what? with scientific enquiries into the how? A man of science says (possibly he makes a mistake, but that is not to the purpose), Mix such and such elements under such and such conditions, and a living organism will make its appearance. The theologian sometimes meets this statement as if it were equivalent to an assertion that life is nothing but an arrangement of matter. He has really said nothing of the kind: he does not know what is the essence of life or of matter; he has merely to do with the order in which phenomena occur; and has absolutely no concern with the occult substratum in which they are supposed to inhere. The utmost that he can ever say—if he can ever say so much—would come to this: Bring together a set of the phenomena which we call molecules and there will result a series of the phenomena which we call vital; but what molecules are, or what life is, is a question beyond his competence. Similarly, when he proceeds a step farther and traces the origin of our moral sense to some dumb instinct in the animal world, he is not really speaking treason against the dignity and importance of morality. Mr. Browning, in one of his poems, speaks of some contemptible French author who explained the origin of modesty by referring, as only a very free-speaking person could refer, to the mode in which the sexual instinct operated upon savage natures. If that Frenchman meant to infer that the modesty of a civilised being is no better than the semi-bestial instincts of a manape, he was as contemptible as the poet could wish, but he was also grossly illogical. His observation merely went to show by what means one of the most essential of social instincts was originally

generated in the world; and it is not the less essential because in its first origin it partook of the grossness of the animal in which it was implanted. Mr. MacLennan has written a very interesting book, tending to show that the original marriage ceremony was everywhere like that which survives in Australia to this day, where the wild human being knocks down his beloved with a club, and drags her off to his own den. Suppose this to be true, would it follow that marriage in the most refined and purest societies was no better than forcible abduction as practised in the Australian bush? Surely it would follow no more than the development of a man from a monkey would prove that men have still tails, or that the brain of a Newton is no better than that which directs a chimpanzee in its search for nuts. In short it is sufficiently plain that we do not diminish the value of any human accomplishments by tracing them back to their remote origin in the brute, or even the insect creation. That shudder which runs through us when we are invited to recognise our poor relations in the Regent's Park is gratuitous. The philosopher may have thrown more light upon the process by which we came to be what we are; but he does not, for he obviously cannot, argue that we are other than we are. Whether in pursuing our genealogy we stop short at 'who was the son of Adam' or carry it back through a vast series of links to 'who was the son of a monkey' the fact of our present existence, with our present instincts, aspirations, and endowments, remains precisely what it was. The prospect, indeed, is improved for our remote descendants, 'far on in summers that we shall not see;' but for us poor creatures living and moving in this nineteenth century after Christ, the circumstances remain unaltered.

Turn it as you will, we are the base from which the line is measured, and not the indeterminate point to be discovered by a process of trigonometry.

Is, then, the alarm which has been excited in men's minds totally unreasonable? In one sense it would seem to be so. The speculations of which we have been speaking are absolutely harmless to anyone who holds—as surely every sincere believer ought to hold—that religion depends upon certain instincts whose existence cannot be explained away by any possible account of the mode by which they came into existence. Property is not less sacred in the eyes of a reasonable man because it may have originated in mere physical force; nor religion because it first dawned upon mankind in the vague guesses of some torpid brain, which fancied that a bigger Caliban was moving the stars and rolling the thunder. But it may be true that the new theories will transform the mode in which men interpret the universe to themselves, and will therefore destroy some of the old formulæ which involved different perceptions. To those who have succeeded in persuading themselves that any set of Articles constructed some centuries ago were to be final and indestructible expressions of truth, the prospect may certainly be distressing. There may, indeed, be no positive logical irreconcilability between orthodoxy and Darwinism. A little more straining of a few phrases which have proved themselves to be sufficiently elastic, and the first obvious difficulty may be removed. The first chapter of Genesis has survived Sir Charles Lyell; it may be stretched sufficiently to include Mr. Darwin. But in questions of this kind there is a kind of logical instinct which outruns the immediate application of the new theories. The mere change of perspective does much.

When the sun was finally placed in the centre of the heavens instead of the earth, the few texts which apparently opposed were easily adapted to the new theories. But there was a further change of infinitely greater importance, which, though not so easily embodied in direct logical issues, profoundly modified all theological conceptions. When people began to realise the fact that we live in a wretched little atom of a planet dancing about the sun, instead of being the whole universe, with a few stars to save candlelight, the ancient orthodoxy was shaken to its base. It is impossible to read the controversies which marked the great intellectual revolt of the last century without seeing how much men's minds were influenced by the simple consideration that Christians were a small numerical minority of the human race, and the habitation of the race a mere grain of dust in the universe. The facts were more or less known before, and were not capable of furnishing syllogisms absolutely incompatible with any orthodox dogma. And yet the mere change in the point of view, working rather upon the imagination than the reason, gradually made the old positions untenable. A similar change is being brought about by the application of that method of which Darwinism is at present the most conspicuous example. Possibly the change may be of even greater importance. Certainly it is of far too great importance to be more than dimly indicated here. Briefly it may be described as the substitution of a belief in gradual evolution for a belief in spasmodic action and occasional outbursts of creative energy; of the acceptance of the corollary that we must seek for the explanation of facts or ideas by tracing their history instead of accounting for them by some short *à priori* method; and thus of the adoption of the historical method in all

manner of investigations into social, and political, and religious problems which were formerly solved by a much more summary, if not more satisfactory method.

It is curious to remark how the influence of new methods penetrates the minds of those who would most strenuously repudiate some of the results to which they lead. We may illustrate the point by an analogy drawn from the theory of which we have been speaking. Mr. Wallace has described what he calls protective resemblances. A butterfly which precisely suits the palates of certain birds would be speedily exterminated if it were not for an ingenious device. It cleverly passes itself off under false colours by imitating the external shape of some other butterfly, which the bird considers as disgusting. So oysters, if they were quick enough, might evade the onslaught of human appetites by taking the external resemblance of periwinkles. A very similar variety of protective resemblance may be detected in the history of opinions. The old-fashioned doctrine remains essentially the same, but it changes its phraseology so as to look exactly like its intrusive rival. We have already given an instance. It is permissible, it appears, for orthodox Catholics to hold that the series of facts alleged by Mr. Darwin actually occurred, and that the ape changed by slow degrees into the man; only they must save themselves by calling the process miraculous, and thus, for a time at least, the old theory may be preserved. Perhaps it will strike people in the course of years, that if all the phenomena conform to the law established by philosophers, it is rather absurd to say that they do not conform in virtue of the law, but in virtue of a specific interference of Divine power. Still the ingenuity of the artifice is obvious, and it affords an instructive example of the method of recon-

ciling old things and new. In the same way, the theological doctrine of development mimics the historical accounts of the process by which opinions have actually been formed. Just as the sceptic rashly fancies that he has brought matters to a conclusive issue, the theologian evades his grasp by putting on the external form of the very doctrines which he has been opposing.

Thus, for example, Dr. Newman argues in the *Grammar of Assent* for the doctrine of the Atonement, on the ground (amongst others) that a similar belief is found to exist in all barbarous nations. It may seem strange, he goes on to say, that he should take his ideas of natural religion from the initial and not from the final stage of human development. His 'answer is obvious,' and it comes shortly to this, that our 'so-called civilisation' is a one-sided development of man's nature, favouring the intellect, but neglecting the conscience; and that therefore it is 'no wonder that the religion in which it issues has no sympathy with the hopes and fears of the awakened soul, or with those frightful presentiments which are expressed in the worship and the traditions of the heathen.' In simpler times the resemblances between the heathen and the orthodox religion would have been indignantly denied, or regarded as diabolic parodies. Now the Catholic divine is as ready as the philosopher to trace out the analogy, though he puts a different interpretation upon it. The philosopher, that is, regards the Catholic religion as preserving the remains of older forms of thought which are gradually expiring under the influence of free enquiry. The divine accepts just the same facts, but he regards the old barbarous superstition as a dim reflection of revealed truths, whilst a satisfactory reason is found for putting the civilised intellect out of court alto-

gether. The verdict of the stupid, ferocious savage, who makes an idol out of a bit of wood and a red rag, and then pacifies its spite by slaughtering fowls or prisoners in its honour, is not at first sight superior to that of the modern philosopher; but the philosopher is 'one-sided.' This, however, is beside the point. It is clear that modern tendencies have penetrated into the hostile camp. It is the much-abused philosopher who has taught us to take a new interest in the lower religions of the world instead of summarily rejecting them as the work of devils. The mere fact that we have risen to such a conception as that of a comparative study of religion is certainly not sufficient by itself to confute the pretensions of what claims to be an exclusive revelation. It is possible to adapt the old to the new beliefs by the methods of which Dr. Newman's argument is an example. After Mr. Darwin and his followers have traced out the resemblance between men and monkeys with the utmost possible clearness, it is always possible for a dogmatist to discover some good reason why the transition should have required a miraculous intervention. In the same way, the analogies which the philosopher may discover between the various religions of the world will never convince him that his own special creed is not of supernatural origin, though the others which resemble it so strangely are traceable to the spontaneous working of the human intellect. A very little dexterity is required to raise the resemblance to that point at which it becomes an argument for the reasonableness of the supposed revelation, and is yet no argument against its supernatural character. Admit your naked savage to prove that man has a need for the belief in Atonement, but do not let him be produced as evidence that the belief

finds its most congenial element and grows to the largest dimensions in a debased and torpid intellect. By such logical manipulation as this, the accumulation of uncomfortable facts may long be rendered harmless. It all depends upon the way in which you look at things. The acute thinkers who have helped to elaborate any ancient system of thought have always provided a proper set of pigeon-holes in which inconvenient facts may be stowed away. It is long before the facts become weighty enough to break down the framework. But no agent is so powerful in bringing about the change as the subtle and penetrating influence of a new method. It may not follow logically that because catastrophes have been banished from geology, and the series of animated beings has been proved to be continuous, therefore the same conceptions should be applied to the religious beliefs of mankind. And yet nobody can doubt that in practice the influence would be unmistakable. The burden of proof would be shifted, and that in itself makes an amazing difference. The popular belief has hitherto been that, unless you could prove the contrary, it would be reasonable to suppose that the transition from monkey to man involved a sudden leap. If it came to be the popular belief that, unless you could prove the contrary, men must be supposed to have developed out of monkeys by the forces now at work, the imagination would outrun the reason. It would be assumed that a religion was the growth of that stage of development at which the human intellect had arrived, and not the work of a series of sudden interferences. Christianity would be a phenomenon to be studied like others by the investigation of the conditions under which it arose, and the advocates of a theory of supernatural intervention would have to encounter a set of established

beliefs instead of finding them in their favour. This is the imperceptible intellectual influence which gradually permeates and transforms the prevalent conceptions by a process which is as irresistible as it is difficult to define by accurate formulæ. Religious instincts, we rightly say, are indestructible; but the forms in which they may be embodied are indefinitely variable, and no one can say how fast and how far the influence of a change worked in one department of thought may gradually spread by a silent contagion to others apparently removed from it.

Thus, admitting to the fullest extent that Darwinism not only does not threaten, but does not even tend to threaten, the really valuable elements of our religious opinions, it is quite consistent to maintain that it may change the conceptions in which they are at present embodied to an extent to which it is impossible to assign any limits. Darwinism, for example, does not make it more difficult to believe in a God. On the contrary, it may be fairly urged that any theory which tends to bring any sort of order out of the confused chaos of facts which we have before us, makes it so far more easy to maintain a rational theism such as is now possible. It helps us to form some dim guess of whence we are coming and of whither we are going—to see, as it were, an arc of the vast orbit in which the world is revolving, instead of being limited to an infinitesimal element, lost at each extremity in hopeless darkness. But it is true that it weakens that conception of the Creator which supposes Him to intervene at stated periods in order to give an impulse to the machinery. How deeply that change may affect all manner of theological conceptions it is unnecessary to consider. There is another doctrine which seems to be more nearly affected; and probably, though we seldom

give open expression to our fears, it is this tendency which is really the animating cause of the alarm which is obviously felt. Does not the new theory make it difficult to believe in immortal souls? If we admit that the difference between men and monkeys is merely a difference of degree, can we continue to hold that monkeys will disappear at their death like a bubble, and that men will rise from their ashes? So vast a difference in the ultimate fate and the intrinsic nature of the two links should surely correspond to a wide gap in the chain. We are too proud to admit a gorilla or a chimpanzee to a future world, and yet, if they are only lower forms of humanity, we do not quite see our way to exclude them. The difficulty in one shape or another has long been felt. 'Nobody thinks,' says Voltaire, 'of giving an immortal soul to a flea; why should you give one any the more to an elephant, or a monkey, or my Champagne valet, or a village steward, who has a trifle more instinct than my valet?' The difficulty of drawing the line is enhanced to the imagination when we assume that the flea is the remote ancestor of the village steward, and believe that one has melted by imperceptible degrees into the other. The orthodox may be excused for trembling when they see that central article of their faith assailed, and are in danger of being deprived of the great consolations of their religion—Heaven and hell. It would be preposterous to attempt to argue so vast a question in our space. This much, however, may perhaps be said without offence: Whatever reasons may be drawn from our consciousness for the belief that man is not merely a cunning bit of chemistry—a product of so much oxygen, hydrogen, and carbon—must remain in full force. We may doubt how far the belief ever rested on metaphysical arguments, and, indeed, it seems to be

the orthodox opinion that it must be accepted on the strength of revelation. It would therefore only be affected so far as Darwinism and the methods to which it gives rise tend to explain the origin and growth of a faith to which all believers cling so fondly. And, whatever the result may be, it is at least natural to suppose that it would rather tend to modify than to destroy the belief, to set bounds to the dogmatic confidence with which we have ventured to define the nature of the soul than to uproot our belief in its existence. After all, it would not be a very terrible result if we should be driven to the conclusion that some kind of rudimentary soul may be found even in the lower animals. The *Spectator*, which is a very amiable and reasonably orthodox journal, has lately been asking whether we have any excuse for refusing immortality to well-conducted cats, or to that admirable and fortunately authentic dog which watched for ten years upon its master's grave. Poor beast! we should be willing to hope that he has found admission to the equal sky; but without jesting on so awful a subject, or venturing into mysteries where the boldest metaphysician walks with uncertain tread, we would simply say that we can see no reason why our new conceptions of the facts—assuming that they establish themselves—should not be accommodated to a spiritual form of belief. After all, it will be hard to convince men that because thought and feeling arise from certain combinations of matter, therefore they are made of matter. But we pause at the threshold of such speculations.

There is, however, one other thing to be said, and it may be said plainly and without irreverence. After all, why is the belief in immortality so essential to the happiness of mankind? It is not because we, as virtuous people, think it necessary that a place should be

provided where the virtuous may receive an interminable pension for their good deeds, and the bad be tormented to the end of time. Some people, it is true, ask for a kind of penal settlement in another world, in order to save our police rates in this. But that doctrine, though it has been preached with amazing emphasis, has not been found to be, on the whole, very edifying. It may serve to remind us that even a belief in immortality may be made as degrading as the grossest forms of materialism. It may convert religion into a specially clever form of selfishness, and take the grace out of the Christian character. The persons who call themselves spiritualists in the present day sometimes claim to be providing an excellent substitute for our old superstitions. The objection which one really feels to them is not so much that they are misled by a contemptible juggle, but that they encourage a kind of prurient religiosity which is inexpressibly revolting. What they really try to persuade us is not that man has a soul which may be elevated far above our earthly wants and longings, but that there are a set of invisible beings who walk about this world playing tricks with tables and talking nonsense, to which the twaddle of the Yankee young ladies in *Martin Chuzzlewit* is refined and elevating. Their so-called spirits are of the earth, earthy; and it would be more satisfactory to believe that at death we became parts of the ocean and the air—that we formed part of the raw material from which, in the course of the ages, new sentient and thinking beings may be evolved, than that we sank into the likeness of a set of stupid hobgoblins, playing conjuring tricks for the amusement of fools. Gross as some such doctrines may be, they may also be cited for another purpose. Men are virtuous, it is sometimes said,

because they believe in hell. Is not this an inversion of the proper order of thought? Should we not rather say that men have believed in hell because they were virtuous? There has been so general a belief that vice was degrading, and was to be discouraged by the strongest possible motives, that even the material part of mankind have exhausted their fancy in devising the most elaborate sentiments to express the horror with which they regarded it. It is painful to dwell upon the pictures of hideous anguish which the perturbed imaginations of past generations have conjured up and regarded as the penalties which the merciful Creator had in store for imperfect creatures placed in a state where their imperfections could not fail to lead them into error; but there is this much of comfort about it, that at least those ghastly images were the reflections of the horror with which all that was best in them revolted against moral evil. It is needless to say how easily those conceptions might be turned to the worst purposes, and religion itself be made an instrument not only for restraining the intellects, but for lowering the consciences of mankind. For our present purpose, it is enough to remark that a similar reflection may convince us that, whatever changes of opinion may be in store for us, we need not fear that any scientific conclusions can permanently lower our views of man's duty here. The belief in immortality, diffused throughout the world, was not, more than any other belief, valuable simply on its own account. It was valuable because it enabled men to rise above the selfishness and the sensuality which otherwise threatened to choke the higher impulses of our nature. But it was the existence of those impulses which gave it its strength, and not any of the metaphysical arguments which can only appeal to a very few exceptional minds.

Religions thrive by a kind of natural selection; those which do not provide expression for our best feelings crush out their rivals, not those which are inferred by a process of abstract reasoning. To be permanent, they must bear the test of reason; but they do not owe to it their capacity for attracting the hearts of men. The inference, therefore, from the universality of any creed is not that it is true, for that would prove Buddhism or Mahomedanism as well as Christianity; but that it satisfies more or less completely the spiritual needs of its believers. And, therefore, we may be certain that, if the various tendencies which we have summed up in the name of Darwinism should ultimately become triumphant, they must find some means, though it is given to nobody as yet to define them, of reconciling those instincts of which the belief in immortality

was a product. The form may change—we cannot say how widely—but the essence, as every progress in the scientific study of religions goes to show, must be indestructible. When a new doctrine cuts away some of our old dogmas, we fancy that it must destroy the vital beliefs to which they served as scaffolding. Doubtless it has that effect for a time in those minds with whom the association has become indissoluble. That is the penalty we pay for progress. But we may be sure that it will not take root till in some shape or other it has provided the necessary envelopes for the deepest instincts of our nature. If Darwinism demonstrates that men have been evolved out of brutes, the religion which takes it into account will also have to help men to bear in mind that they are now different from brutes.

L. S.

