

DRIFT-WOOD.

SCIENCE AND SCRIPTURE.

PHYSICS, like theology, has an arrogance of its own; unlike theology, it is free, for the most part, from cloudiness of phrase and conception. There is a certain narrowness in the question which Tyndall makes his "Lucretian" put to Bishop Butler: "What you call the true self has a local habitation in each of us; thus localized, must it not possess a form? If so, what form? Have you ever for a moment realized it?" As well ask for a mental picture of love or thought. Still, in flinging down his gauntlet at Belfast to the Christian faith, Mr. Tyndall may perhaps accomplish the service of driving evangelical Christianity into a consistent hostility to the views of Darwin, Huxley, Häckel, and Spencer touching the origin of man. Certainly there is no mistaking Tyndall when he commends the declaration of the martyr Bruno (who was burned to death A. D. 1600, for opinion's sake), that nature is not "that mere empty capacity which philosophers have pictured her to be, but the universal mother who brings forth all things as the fruit of her own womb." Nor can the same mind easily concede that "radical extirpation of caprice and absolute reliance upon law in nature" which, according to Tyndall, science demands, and yet consider the prayers of Christians effectual to procure the suspension for an instant of a physical law.

Now, within our generation the physicists, if they have not conquered, have certainly cowed the ecclesiastics. Many years ago, when geology (reading at that time only the testimony of the rocks, nor as yet fishing up proofs from the floor of the sea) discovered the world's antiquity, it was arraigned for contradicting the Mosaic story of creation. What might have come of this contention, if prolonged, it is hard to say; but geology speedily unlocked a flood of fact and proof that overwhelmed and drowned opposition. Every intelligent student, outside of the Romish church, saw that if there were really an issue on that point between science and inspiration, inspira-

tion must go to the wall; and thereupon the theory, ingenious, reasonable, and inexpressibly timely, was broached, that the "day" in Genesis meant an age. The harmony between physical science and Judaic revelation was then, on that point, restored.

But from this palpitating and for a time perilous experience a marked result survived to evangelical Protestantism. Some of its leading minds shrank from raising direct issues with science, deprecated disputes upon the physical phenomena mentioned in the Scriptures, and accounted it enough to let fly general invectives, drawn from the Pauline arsenal, against the conceit of the human intellect, while resolutely inculcating a breadth of Scriptural interpretation, on the score of oriental metaphor, such as had never before been encouraged.

So far, this policy proved sound and wise; but therewith was begotten a timidity which now seems excessive. When the theory of the plurality of inhabited worlds was put forth, some evangelical thinkers seemed inclined to accept it forthwith, and even to try to turn it to religious account; although the question whether such starry races have had or will have their Edens and their Temptations is perplexing. The theory itself is a pure assumption, which, however founded, can be safely shunned, since it is not now probable that we shall ever know the truth about it; nevertheless, the previous tilt between science and theology had made many preachers too cautious to try another on this later issue, so obviously safe. At length, Darwin launched upon the world his doctrine of the origin of man in the apes, and the origin of the apes in an ascidian tadpole; and some leaders in evangelical Protestantism at once made up their mouths as if to swallow that. Surely we can only account for a spectacle so incongruous on the ground of sheer timidity—an unreasonable fear lest the result of rejecting Darwinism might turn out like that of putting the supposed Mosaic history of creation against the chronology of the

rocks. The true danger was not in making, but in avoiding such an issue; for if man has steadily risen through brutish forms from an ape-like quadruped, whose ancestral line can be traced back to a "hermaphrodite marine creature, hardly appearing like an animal, and consisting of a tough, leathery sac, with two small projecting orifices," what must we say of that system of doctrine which teaches that God created the first man in his own image, from which perfected state he so fell as to need a divine sacrifice and redemption?

The great Evangelical Alliance of last year was the first body of the kind to meet after the appearance of Mr. Darwin's "Descent of Man." The confronting of its doctrine was left to the giants of theology there convoked, including some of the foremost in Christendom. President McCosh himself read a paper on "The Religious Aspects of the Doctrine of Development." Some maintain, he said, that there is no power in nature to change species, while others contend that there are "powers in nature (religious men say conferred by God) which gradually raise species into higher forms by aggregation and selection. I am not sure that religion has any interest in holding absolutely by the one side or the other of this question." He found a general "correspondence" between the scientific and the Biblical view of creation, with "no contradiction as to chronology," for Scripture "contains no inspired chronology of early history"; and as to man's origin, "It is useless to tell the younger naturalists that there is no truth in the doctrine of development, for they know that there is truth, which is not to be set aside by denunciation. Religious philosophers might be more profitably employed in showing them the religious aspects of the doctrine of development. How curious, should it turn out that these scientific inquirers, so laboriously digging in the earth, have, all unknown to themselves, come upon the missing link which is partially to reconcile natural and revealed religion!" When Dr. McCosh had ended, the Rev. Mr. Weldon of London said that "We have to decide whether or not we are to accept the theory of the amiable, but, I think, mistaken Professor Darwin of England, or, in other words, whether we ought to believe that

man, as he is, came from clots of animated jelly, or whether he is the immediate work of the Almighty Being." The former, or Darwinian man, he thought, "cannot be the man spoken of in Genesis"; but still, on the other hand, it was only fair to remember that "the Bible was not intended to instruct us in science." Dr. Brown then frankly announced his adhesion to the evolution theory, adding that it had not affected his views of dogmatic theology, which were those of the Westminster shorter catechism, and that he thought its confirmation would have a beneficial influence on religion.

So far as I have chanced to see, no other evangelical assembly, whether synod, congregation, conference, or convocation, has met this new departure of science in any more hostile way. In the discussion before the Alliance, some of the speakers seemed to be afraid that the theory of evolution might turn out to be true, and hence adopted a dallying, deprecatory tone. The logic which theologians carefully avoided it was apparently left for Mr. Tyndall to supply, by explaining, in his address on "Science and Religion," at Belfast, how Darwinism is the long-sought theory which eliminates God from intervening in the creation of man, except so far as human possibilities were packed by Him in the larvæ of the ascidian; which proves that man acquired for himself, in his rise from monkeyhood, the soul that Christianity holds to have been directly breathed into him by his Maker; and which shows that there is no necessity for introducing Divine Providence upon the human stage within the last few millions of years—that is, since natural and sexual selection began their work. All this may or may not be truth, but it is extremely unlike Scripture. It is the doctrine, nevertheless, which some evangelical divines good-naturedly accept as their "working hypothesis," and think to be quite in harmony with their shorter catechism.

It may be said that the triumph of the theory of evolution would not destroy religion. Very true. No disclosure of science, however startling, can destroy religion—that is, the worship of a creator. Even upon the atomic theory which Tyndall revives from Democritus, we must suppose a Power fit for our worship—the

Power that created the ultimate atoms ; for the first principle of the Greek sage was "from nothing nothing comes." Darwin, who holds that all animal life has been developed out of "one of three or four primordial forms," does not deny the work of God in creating that one form. Tyndall, who at Belfast demurred to this pause of Darwin on the brink of materialism, and wished "either to open our doors freely to the conception of creative acts, or else abandon them wholly," yet admits that "it is by the operation of an insoluble mystery that life is evolved." He claimed the human understanding to be a material product—"a result of the play between organism and environment"—but he did not expressly teach the soul's mortality. And besides, no conceivable grasp of science could ever uproot the religious sentiment from man—you might as well fancy the destruction of love or thought in the human race through a scientific discovery. Dr. McCosh was safe, therefore, in saying he was "not sure that religion has any interest in holding absolutely by the one side or the other of the evolution question." But if religion has no such interest, the Christian religion has. If man's origin does not concern religion, it apparently much concerns Revelation.

For I think that any candid reader of the two Testaments must conclude that their assertions and doctrines regarding the nature and history of man all from beginning to end contradict the evolution theory. No Scriptural authority, saint, prophet, or apostle, from Moses to David, from David to St. John, seems to have suspected that the first man's soul was not breathed into him by the direct act of the divine spirit. No word of the Founder of Christianity on this vital point leads us to fancy that He knew that an ape developed himself into Adam, after having been himself developed upward from a jelly. Now, the issue raised by Darwin between science and Revelation is of a different sort from any ever before started. Those that went before usually touched alleged errors of the Bible regarding physical facts which in no way concern its great spiritual theme, the Atonement. What matter to that theme if the earth goes around the sun instead of the sun around the earth? It is wasted breath to anxiously argue that the Mosaic

"day" meant an age, when, after all is done, it is discovered that "the evening and the morning were the first day," and that the sun, and moon, and stars were not created until the fourth day, although Day and Night were made on the first, while even on the third "the earth brought forth grass, and herb, yielding seed after his kind, and the tree yielding fruit." Touching myriad points in Revelation, it is idle to dispute. Should modern science successfully attack them, they are still not an indispensable part of that central theme of the Bible which distinguishes it from the highest pagan morality; namely, the need and the way of salvation through Christ. But how shall we reconcile the body of doctrine, embracing man's fall and the need of a vicarious atonement, with the theory that the "fall" of man is only his "descent," as Darwin dryly puts it, from an ape? Is that steady evolution from a lower to a higher form the sort of "fall" from "God's own image" that requires a divine sacrifice to divine justice? A theologian who finds that his acceptance of the theory of evolution does not disturb his "dogmatic theology," or throw any doubt on the propositions of his shorter catechism, is more to be admired for his attainment in physics than his prowess in logic.

Again, in our day, a great part of divine worship consists of prayer; and with what sincerity can a man who holds to the "extirpation of caprice and the invariability of law" also maintain the efficacy of prayer in procuring rain during a drought, the staying of a storm, or safety from shipwreck? With what faith can he ask God "to restrain those immoderate rains wherewith, for our sins, thou hast afflicted us," or to "increase the fruits of the earth by thy heavenly benediction"? With what honesty can he say the thanksgiving, "Thou hast heard the devout prayer of thy church and turned our dearth and scarcity into plenty"? Whether the first man was created 5,200 or 52,000 years ago, whether the world was "made" in seven days or seven billion years, is of slight import to current Christian doctrine. But if, as Tyndall says, biological science must "close to some extent with Lucretius when he affirms that nature is seen to do all things spontaneously of herself without the med-

dling of the gods," then biological science toils to undermine Scripture theory. The Scriptures declare to us that Christ died, and on the third day rose from the dead; and St. Paul truly affirms that the Christian belief is built on the resurrection of its Founder. Without faith in miracles and in special Providences, which have repeatedly interfered with the operation of natural laws, the Bible becomes of no more authority for us than the Koran, nor Christ than Confucius. The choice is open to everybody; but it is hardly honest to preach in one breath the efficacy of the prayer of faith to secure divine interference in the cause of nature, and in the next to avow a belief in the unvarying course of natural laws.

We may well smile at the elaborate treatises made to show that evolution does not undermine religion. Why not prove that it leaves us the sense of taste and the faculty of reflection? The question is not what effect its establishment might have on religion, but what effect it would have on Revelation. Undoubtedly, worship under the evolution theory would be as becoming as now; but preachers who should conduct it in public ought to cease pitying "the heathen in their blindness," since that theory seems to imply that Democritus spoke more accurately upon man's origin than St. Paul, and Lucretius than Christ. Tyndall "discerns in Matter the promise and potency of every form *and quality*;" but he discerns this only by doing what no scientific man is forced to do; namely, "prolonging the vision backward across the boundary of the experimental evidence." A like exercise of faith is needed for the evolution theory, which is also a pure hypothesis, unaccepted by many physicists, including Agassiz. Without lack of candor, either that can be rejected or the Scripture theory of the same subject. The hardest feat is to hold both theories at once.
