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ORDINARY MEETING, FEBRUARY 16, 1885.

D. HOWARD, Esq., F.I.C., IN THE CHAIR.

The Minutes of the last Meeting were read and confirmed, and the following Elections were announced :—

MEMBER :—R. Tucker Pain, Esq., Woburn.

ASSOCIATES :—Rev. W. C. Barlow, B.A., London ; D. W. Ferguson, Esq., Ceylon ; Rev. S. C. Armour, M.A., Liverpool ; M. A. Brants, Ph.D., Zutphen ; D. McLaren, Esq., J.P., London ; H. Whiteside Williams, Esq., F.G.S., Solva.

The following paper was then read by Mr. H. CADMAN JONES, M.A., in the author's unavoidable absence :—

SOME THOUGHTS ON THE EVOLUTION OF RELIGIONS. By the Rev. W. R. BLACKETT, M.A.

THE Evolution of Religion is much too large a subject to be treated in a single paper. But a few stray thoughts on the Evolution of Religions may possibly be suggestive.

1. First, let us clearly grasp the distinction here referred to between religions and religion. Religions are the divers ideas and practices adopted by different peoples in respect of the Being or Beings whom they acknowledge as having supernatural influence over them. But religion, in the general sense, is something independent of all historical religions. Professor Max Müller remarks,—“If we say that it is religion which distinguishes man from the animal, we do not mean the Christian or the Jewish religion, but we mean a mental faculty ; that faculty which, independently of—nay, in spite of—sense and reason, enables man to apprehend the Infinite under different names and under varying disguises. Without that faculty no religion, not even the lowest worship of stocks and stones, would be possible.”*

* *Lectures on Science of Religion*, p. 17.

2. The distinction thus stated is true, but the statement invites criticism. The common usage of language hardly justifies us in defining religion as a faculty. Nor is this exactly the Professor's meaning, as appears from his remark, that without the faculty he refers to religion would be impossible. The faculty in exercise is religion, not the faculty itself. But upon what is the faculty exercised? Man is the subject of religion. What is its object? Or has it any object at all? I suppose most of us would maintain that there is a most decided objective element in religion,—in some religion at least,—and that religion in its highest sense is the conscious relation of man to God, or the inward life in relation to God as its environment.

3. In this sense, the question of the Evolution of Religion is a psychological question. Has the mind of man such powers or faculties as to enable it to work out the idea of God, and the idea of its own relation to Him, and to formulate rules and principles for the regulation of itself in that relation? It is difficult to understand how evolution can be supposed to accomplish this, unless we suppose the relation, or the consciousness of it, to be a mere delusion, a figment of the mind, having no distinct objective element whatever, but entirely furnished somehow by the working of the mind itself. The question whether religion has thus arisen by mere evolution from natural elements is surely not to be settled by simply begging it. Mr. Herbert Spencer thus opens his paper on "Religious Prospect and Retrospect": "The developing man has thoughts about existences which he regards as usually inaudible, intangible, invisible; and yet which he regards as operative upon him. What suggests this notion of agencies transcending perception? How do these ideas concerning the supernatural evolve out of ideas concerning the natural?"

4. Yes, but do they? That is the first question. And the way to investigate this question is surely not to begin with a hypothetical man in an undeveloped state, and assume that, having started in life without any religious ideas at all, he has gradually evolved such, in a way that is drawn from the inner consciousness of the investigator, not from facts. In this way it might be easy to show that religion is only built up of "such stuff as dreams are made of," and accordingly that it is certain to dissolve in time, and, "like the baseless fabric of a vision, leave not a wrack behind." But even the author of the Dream Theory of religion is fain to leave something, very substantial, of "a wrack behind." And those who have experience of religion bear witness plainly and

universally that it is made of sterner stuff than this. On such experience surely ought to be founded the investigation of the psychological question as to the reality of religion. And this method of investigation would bring out a very real objective element, demonstrated by very tangible proofs. This, however, has not yet been recognised as a matter of scientific knowledge.

5. We have at present to set before us the simply historical question of the actual course of religion in the world, and to examine it by historical methods. This question once settled might open the way for an inductive demonstration of the psychological question also. But we have to beware how we allow ourselves to be tempted to fill up the *lacune* of historical evidence by psychological speculation. Very curious conclusions are occasionally brought out in this way. Thus M. Reville asserts that "cannibalism, which is now restricted to a few of the savage tribes who have remained closest to the animal life, was once universal in our race."* What are the grounds of this conclusion, which is quite contrary to the idea of the most learned anthropologists? First, the historical fact, that "traces of the primitive sacrifice of human victims meet us everywhere." Secondly, the psychological theory that all primitive sacrifices "were originally suggested by the idea that the Divine Being, whatever it may have been—whether a natural object, an animal, or a creature analogous to man—liked what we liked, was pleased with what pleases us, and had the same tastes and proclivities as ours." This is a remarkable *bouleversement* of reasoning. It might perhaps be safer to argue that, as human sacrifices have been universal and cannibalism has not, the aim of sacrifices could not be merely to gratify supposed human tastes in the deities to whom they were offered. And thus we might be driven back to acknowledge, in regard to the origins of sacrifice, some of those "moral and metaphysical ideas" which M. Reville declares "really did not appear till much later." But the matter is here referred to simply as a protest against forming historical conclusions on psychological grounds.

6. Our question, then, is as to the Evolution of Religions, not of Religion. And this question is historical. What do we find to have been the actual course of the history of religions in the world? How has the religious faculty of man actually

* Hibbert, *Lectures on Religion in Mexico and Peru*, pp. 86-90. See also the Duke of Argyll, *Primeval Man*, p. 135.

conducted itself within the known region of history, and within the borderland that is dimly revealed by tradition, or more dimly still by philological analysis?

7. This is a vast field for investigation, and can by no means be said to have been fully worked as yet. But great advances have been made in the exploration of it. Not a few learned and laborious inquirers have for the last seventy years been engaged in digging out the remains of old religions from amid the *débris* of popular traditions, of sacred books in forgotten languages, and of those languages themselves in which curious relics of still older strata had become imbedded. The Qurán, the Tripitaka, the Zendavesta, the Vedas have been studied and analysed. The hieroglyphics of Egypt, the wedge-covered slabs and bricks of Nineveh and Babylon, the rock-inscriptions of Persia and of India have yielded up their secrets. The traditions of the Aztecs and the Zulus, the wild ideas and wilder practices of the Tartars, the Red Indians, and even the Australian aborigines, have been collected and compared, not without results. Mythologies, Greek, Keltic, Scandinavian, and Indian, have been drawn together, and have supplied much interesting information. The primitive Aryan culture has been pieced out from the scattered elements of the Aryan tongues, and attempts in the same direction have been made with the Semitic. Altogether, much has been done in following out the course that religions have generally taken, so far as their history can in any way be traced. A mass of facts has been accumulated, too great almost for any one man to become acquainted with, at least without risk of portions being distorted through unequal approximation to the point of view. The Aryan scholar may magnify Aryan characteristics, the Semitic may take a wrong view of non-Semitic religions, owing to his familiarity with Semitic modes of thought. Moreover, the conclusions of all these scholars need to be checked again and again, and modified by a general acquaintance with other branches of culture, and, last but not least, by common sense. On the whole, the sorting and classifying of the accumulated and accumulating materials for the science of religions is a matter which will require as much skill, as much patience, and more breadth of mind than the collecting of them has demanded. Meanwhile, the vast array of facts should daunt a little the boldness of conjecture. No man has any right to lay down his own theory as to the origin of religion as unquestionably the right one, until he has shown its agreement with the history of the various religions as now made known. The dense and far-reaching forest of historical facts bearing on religion

is having paths cut through it here and there. But along its borders is inscribed in large letters the warning, "Conjecturers, beware!"

8. Vistas, however, are opening up. Here and there, in spite of the trees, one can manage to see something of the forest. In a matter like this, generalisations are for the most part formed gradually, coming into view little by little, and only concatenated with each other by degrees. The first attempts at forming them are often wide of the mark, and corrections are naturally to be expected. It will not do, therefore, to shrink from attempting them lest they should prove to be incorrect. They may at least serve as helps to some one else in generalising more successfully. There are one or two generalisations which are now widely accepted. Others are only just coming into sight, and need to be stated cautiously.

9. The first to be mentioned is one on which there has been fierce discussion, now almost obsolete. It is, that there is religion of some sort everywhere amongst men. Against this, tribes have been triumphantly pointed to amongst whom no trace of worship had been discovered. More careful investigation has generally shown such tribes to be by no means in the atheistic condition imputed to them. But, even if here and there a godless tribe were found, it would affect the general fact that man is a God-fearing animal no more than does the existence of a large number of non-religious persons within the fold of every religion alike. It must not be taken for granted—it would need to be clearly proved—that the nations most nearly devoid of religion were those which had remained "nearest to the state of nature," or which had developed least. They might be those which have fallen furthest from the original condition. The Duke of Argyll has shown that there is no necessary connexion between the development of nations as concerns the industrial arts, and their *spiritual* development as concerns religion.* Even the existence, therefore, of very degraded tribes almost or altogether without the idea of God would afford no presumption that religion was a matter of development, growing *pari passu* with civilisation. But this only by the way.

10. The existence, however, of religion of some sort throughout the human race does prove decisively that man is a religious animal, that his mental constitution enables and impels him to seek for and live with God. If God were unknowable, yet man's nature cannot do without Him, but demands, seeks,

* *Primeval Man*, p. 132.

imagines if need be, something that may fill the place of God in his inward nature. This is sufficient proof, surely, not that man can "by searching find out God," but that man is meant to have God consciously as part of the environment in which he lives. There are thoughts, feelings, "changes" of divers kinds in man's mind and heart within, which bear witness to, and demand the knowledge of, something really existing in the environment without. This does not, of course, prove the existence of an objective revelation. But it does show the existence of a nature ready to respond to such a revelation, and to live by it if it be granted.

11. The second generalisation to be noticed is likewise one that may be put forth with some confidence, inasmuch as it is supported by high authority. It is thus alluded to by Mr. Collins, in a paper read before this Institute the year before last.* "The only natural law which the science of religion has forced upon my own conviction is, that man has exhibited a constant tendency to drop the spiritual out of religion while he may retain the material. Deterioration from the original truth seems to have been the natural order of growth in religions. It was certainly so in the religion of Israel. It has been certainly so in the history of Christianity."

12. The same law of deterioration in religion is frequently laid down by Professor Max Müller:—"If there is one thing which a comparative study of religions places in the clearest light, it is the inevitable decay to which every religion is exposed. It may seem almost like a truism that no religion can continue to be what it was during the lifetime of its founder and its first apostles. Yet it is but seldom borne in mind that without constant reformation,—i.e., without a constant return to its fountain-head,—every religion, even the most perfect, nay, the most perfect on account of its very perfection, more than others, suffers from its contact with the world, as the purest air suffers from the mere fact of its being breathed." †

13. Deterioration, then, and not improvement, is the law of religions. But deterioration how, and in what respect? Into this the same great authority gives us some insight in another place.‡ "There are two distinct tendencies to be observed in the growth of an ancient religion. There is, on the one side, the struggle of the mind against the material character of

* Vol. xviii. p. 203.

† *Chips from a German Workshop*, i. p. xxiii.

‡ *Lectures on Science of Religion*, p. 268.

language, a constant attempt to strip words of their coarse covering, and fit them by main force for the purposes of abstract thought. But there is, on the other side, a constant relapse from the spiritual into the material, and, strange to say, a predilection for the material sense instead of the spiritual. This action and reaction has been going on in the language of religion from the earliest times, and is at work even now." The learned philologist dwells upon the phenomena of language with a persistency that reminds one of the suggestion that "there is nothing like leather." But the fact stated as to language indicates a far deeper one, a psychological tendency which had been noticed long before, even by Saul of Tarsus.* Nearly the same idea lay at the root of Plato's comparison of the mind of man to a chariot with two horses, one tending upwards to the skies, the other grovelling earthward, so that the charioteer can only obtain momentary glimpses of the spiritual realities above the clouds, losing sight of them speedily among the mists of earth. It is, however, interesting to find the tendency detected in the psychological field by the spiritual Apostle and the intellectual philosopher confirmed and illustrated in the regions of philology and history. For this "predilection for the material instead of the spiritual" may be traced as one of the principles of the deterioration of religions in almost all the nations of the world. However we may account for it, the deterioration is a general fact, and religions do tend everywhere, not to rise to a higher level of intellectual, moral, and spiritual perfection, but to sink downwards into superstition ever more immoral and more stupid. It were easy to illustrate this from the history of all the ages.

14. A recent example may be cited. There is in Bengal a sect called Karttá Bhajás, "Worshippers of the Creator." The designation is a grand one, and indicates a doctrine in many respects originally noble. It took its rise early in the present century, from a man who had probably come under the influence of Christian missionary teaching. At the present time the practices of the sect are marked by no little superstition, and, if report speaks true, by the grossest immorality. The body of the sect has been thought to furnish ground in some degree prepared for missionary effort, but converts from its ranks have often brought with them habits of thought and conduct which have created no little scandal. Just the same tendency to degenerate is found in all the thousand-and-one

* Gal. v. 17.

sects which have arisen within the bosom of Hinduism, some of them with very noble principles, but none with such a moral antiseptic power as could preserve them from the grossest and most absurd corruptions. The character of an Indian sect must never be judged of from a few quotations from the writings or traditional sayings of its founder.

15. Hinduism itself has had a similar history. The religion of the Hindus of the present day is far inferior to the religion that appears in the Vedas, with which, indeed, it has very little in common, although it must be presumed to be its lineal descendant. The Vedas, again, show a deterioration in the more modern portions as compared with the more ancient. We may not, perhaps, be able fully to accept Canon Cook's idea, that the most ancient hymns of the Rig Veda contain indications of a primeval Monotheism which was only passing, not passed, away when they were first chanted by the Rishis.* Yet Professor Monier Williams also states that there are to be found plain proofs that Dyans, the God of the Bright Sky, had been originally worshipped as the Great Supreme.† But lower deities, and lower still successively, usurp the worship of the people, and, spite of the ever-recurring tendency to Henotheism, objects of worship are multiplied beyond all numbering. The mode, too, of worship becomes more and more debased, till at the present day the commonest emblem of Shiva—the object of the most widespread, if not the deepest reverence—is a thing which cannot be explained to ears polite.

16. Not that all Hindus are grovelling idolaters. Many of them are proud and self-satisfied philosophers—Pantheists of the purest water. It is rather startling, on opening a conversation on religion with a village Brahman, to receive, as I have done, a reply like this:—"Oh yes,—God is everywhere, of course,—you are God, I am God, that cow is God." The practical outcome of notions like these, when thoroughly accepted, is a state in respect of religion hardly higher than that of the lowest fetish worshipper. If there is more intelligence, there is less reverence, or rather none. The distortion of the intellect has killed all real worship, and all real thought of God as well. The fact is that under the surface of most religions that are conjoined with any degree of culture there may generally be detected these two currents—the material and the philosophical. Both tend to deterioration, neither is likely to evolve anything higher. The intellectual proletariat sinks into spiritual barbarism, the intellectual aris-

* *Essays on Religion and Language.*

† *Indian Thought*, p. 11.

tocracy loses itself in a spiritual fog. This last result has been laid hold of by the modern agnostic, and propounded in the guise of a philosophical system. The last new phase of the philosophical Evolution of Religion is to find out that there is and can be no such thing.

17. If, now, history shows that deterioration has been the law of all religions among men, is it reasonable to suppose that in pre-historic times the opposite law prevailed? It can, of course, be supposed that the *acme* of religious evolution had been reached before history began, and that nothing but a waning phase has been visible since. But this would be pure supposition, and could only be adopted for the purpose of sustaining a previously-accepted theory. Experience points to nothing but deterioration as the general tendency manifested in the actual evolution of religions in the world.

18. But, if this be so, how happens it that any religion now exists in the world that is not altogether debased? This leads us to another generalisation which seems to me to hold good very widely if not universally. It is, that the Elevation of Religion takes place through Individuals. Particular men lay vigorous hold upon particular religious truths, and bring them into prominence, forcing them upon the attention and acceptance of men by their own personal energy in the grasp of them. Often they found new religions upon them, and sometimes devote their lives with heroic courage and endurance to the propagation of them. To say nothing of Christianity, which stands on a different footing, the Jews' religion rests upon Moses. Zoroaster is regarded as the founder of Parseeism. Buddha originated the religion—if such it can be called—that has spread most widely in the world. Mohammed is the Prophet of Islam. And most of the countless sects that exist within all the greater religions have their names, because they have had their birth, from some particular person.

19. It is in the nature of things impossible to demonstrate that such also has been the origin of traditional religions. For their origin is pre-historic. Yet the traditions themselves in most cases point to one person, or a very few, as having given rise to the *cultus* which the nation has received. At all events this is often the case when the religion contains any really spiritual elements, though it may not be so when the change, being towards the material, may have been the result of popular depravation. Thus it is difficult to determine exactly the position of the Rishis with respect to the Veda. But the Hindus themselves regard them as much more than the composers of particulars hymns or groups of hymns. In the "Rámáyan" and other popular poems they are exalted to a position in the skies,

and they are widely venerated as recipients of divine revelation. And we can hardly doubt that Vasishtha or Visvamitra had a good deal to do with the retaining or formulating those higher thoughts that ennoble the nature-worship of the Vedic songs. So, in Mexico also, the milder and more hopeful system that tempered the fierce and sanguinary religion of the Aztecs was connected with the name of a Being who, though regarded as divine, may perhaps, inasmuch as he had something of a history, be conjectured to have been a human teacher in the times gone by.* The same may probably have occurred in other traditional forms of religion. The one man elevates religion, the many corrupt and deprave it.

20. Now, how are we to explain this occurrence from time to time of high-souled leaders in religious thought, who are able by personal influence to raise the spiritual state of nations and generations? Are they merely the product of their age? It would be curious if a general tendency to sinking were to produce an occasional elevation. This would be a very abnormal kind of evolution. Not but that the character of the age has generally something to do with the formation of the character and opinions of religious innovators. They frequently retain something of the popular errors prevalent around them. And a reaction from prevailing absurdities or abuses often has some influence in bringing into prominence the truths they lay hold of and proclaim. But whence arises this reaction? And what gives rise to the intensity with which they grasp and preach their own special verities, often unpopular and strange to the multitudes around them? On this there may be many psychological conjectures, but the facts of history point in one direction only.

21. The men who have elevated religion have generally presented themselves, and been regarded by their followers, in one or other of two aspects. They have come forward either as Revealers or as Reformers. Or these two claims may be combined. Mohammed, for instance, on the one hand, declared that he was only going back beyond the modern corruptions of the dominant religion to its purer condition nearer to its source. There had existed in Eastern Syria from the second or third century the semi-Christian sect of the Elkesaites, who claimed to have returned to the original religion of Adam and Seth. It may be that Mohammed had taken a hint from these in his assertion that his religion was but the primeval one restored. But, if so, he, like other

* Reville, *Hibbert Lectures*.

religious leaders, was not content to repeat the lessons of his teachers. In order that the new-found views put forth by such men may impress others as they impress themselves, it is necessary in most cases that they should have the sanction not merely of hoar antiquity, but of direct revelation. It must be observed, however, that the appeal to antiquity involves an indirect claim to the support of revelation, since it is usually taken for granted that the first fathers of the race received from the Creator directions for His service. Yet this is seldom felt to be enough. Whether the felt intensity of conviction has really arisen from an objective revelation or not, perhaps the teacher himself is hardly able to judge. But, at all events, that intensity itself renders it impossible for him to profess to be a mere reproducer of tradition. What the Hindus call Smriti, "the remembered," the traditional, is always a very secondary authority in religion. Sruti, "the heard," that which comes from the divine voice itself, can alone be decisive of spiritual truth. At all events, in hardly any case do the originators of new religions claim to have thought out their ideas for themselves, by their own unaided powers. If they did make such a claim, their followers would not allow it, and the less so the more enthusiastically they adopted the new doctrine. We can hardly understand how Sakya Muni, who, to say the least of it, left God out of sight, could claim to have arrived at his new light by any other process than that of thought. But, to constitute him an authority, he was very soon elevated, if he did not elevate himself, to the position of a "Buddha," an incarnation of Knowledge itself.

22. Thus it appears that man does not and cannot believe in his own power of religious discovery. Shall we say that men are wrong in this, and that all the great and high religious thoughts that have ennobled large portions of the race have been, after all, the product merely of human intellect? If they were all delusions, they might well be so. But, if religious experience demonstrates a powerful and energising reality in them, the supposition is absurd. In any case, historical evidence of the elevation of religion by the mere widening thoughts of men in general is not forthcoming.

23. Again, the manner in which new ideas in religion are generally received is equally instructive. They are rejected by the many as new-fangled and therefore false. They are accepted by the discerning few because they commend themselves to their religious judgment and instincts. The many are stupid and unspiritual; the few have a mind and conscience open to higher truths. The many judge only by their

familiarity or otherwise with what they hear; the few have a receptiveness which, though it could not discover, can appreciate and accept the better things that are brought to their ears. Gradually the higher ideas prevail, leavening and elevating the masses by their own intrinsic force, till they become at last the common property of all. There is something in all men's minds which gives a purchase for higher truth to lift them to a higher spiritual level.

24. But, as surely as the ideas put forth by the spiritual leaders are accepted by the multitude, so surely are they corrupted. Spiritual terms are taken perversely in a material meaning, and spiritual thoughts vanish away, leaving nothing but material and often unmeaning forms behind. This process often amounts to a reversal of the doctrines propounded by the first teacher, whose name, nevertheless, continues to be venerated. Nay, he himself may be elevated into the place of the idols he had striven to abolish. Buddha, though he is supposed long since to have passed into Nirvána, has become an object of popular worship in most Buddhist countries. Much more rapidly does this corruption take place when the new religion comes into contact with older and more material worships. You may see in Buddhist temples the image of Buddha seated in the same glass-case between Shiva and Vishnu. And Mohammedanism, with all its intolerance, is mingled, in most countries, with innumerable fragments of idolatry. The shrines of its saints are in many cases but the successors of heathen temples, and are often more assiduously visited than the Musjid itself. But this corruption of the higher religion by the lower is familiar to all. It is only one instance of that general tendency to deterioration which we have seen to affect all religions among men.

25. The thoughts we have been passing in review are but fragmentary and tentative. But they seem in a general way to bear witness to the fact that the religious faculty in man is rather receptive of spiritual ideas than active in the formation of them. The tendency of the mind of the race is ever to the material, not to the spiritual. And yet the wants of man's soul are not satisfied with the material in religion. Man seems to suffer from an inability to hold fast God as the environment to which his inward life corresponds. He is continually dropping the spiritual connexion, and taking up something material in its place. Nevertheless, he is not content. He demands a real spiritual environment, and without it sinks into ever deeper degradation.

26. But, when spiritual ideas are set before him by those who form a religious aristocracy in the race, he can appreciate them,

and often is strongly moved by them, just because he wants them. Whence come these higher spiritual views of the things concerning the life towards God? There is certainly no proof that they are merely the result of evolution. There is nothing to show that the spiritual elevation in which they have their source is a product of the age in which they rise, and nothing more.

27. At all events, Religion, spiritual life, life with God for its environment, is a fact in nature, patent, certain, and widespread. Some men have it not. Some men have no appreciation for harmony, some have hardly any comprehension of geometry or arithmetic, some are colour-blind. Yet all these inward faculties are believed to correspond to outward facts. As to the origin of spiritual life, science may perhaps explain it when it has first explained the origin of physical life. What science has to do in each case at present is rather to trace the course of the river than to guess at the causes that produce the fountain.

THE CHAIRMAN (Mr. DAVID HOWARD, F.I.C.).—We have, in the first place, to thank Mr. Blckett for his very suggestive essay on a point of great importance, one which, as it seems to me, requires the very careful attention of every one who really follows modern thought on the subject with which it deals. We use that unfortunate word "Evolution" in countless different meanings, and there would appear to be a serious danger that the employment of it—rightly in one sense—has led to its very inaccurate use in a different sense. I think that this essay deals with two different conceptions of the word "Evolution" as applied to religion. If we accept Mr. Herbert Spencer's theory—that man is naturally evolved from the ascidian, and therefore must have evolved his religion in the same way—that, as he has evolved his complex heart and all the infinite complexities of his physical formation, so has he evolved all the mysteries of his moral and spiritual nature. If we accept this theory, we shall be bound to explain the point which the author of the paper has put before us as to the universal tendency of religions to fall back—not to progress in any given direction, but rather to show a continual straining upwards, and then a sinking away downwards. The usual method of explaining the existence of religion is to assume that those savages who have least of it represent the earliest stage of the human race, and therefore must represent the childhood of the human race. I do not think the study of dotage would be found a very successful mode of explaining the mind of a child; and to take the degraded races, which have fallen from a better state, as the representatives of the early progress of those races is a very unphilosophical process. The study of geology is better prosecuted in the quarry than among the stones of ancient ruins; and, surely, to study the

beginning of religion in its end is a singular perversion of ideas. I cannot conceive how any one, looking on the facts as they are—and I may say that this essay has put the facts very moderately as they appear to tell against the progress upwards of the human race in regard to religion—can really imagine that religion is a mere development of physical force evolved by the ordinary processes which are imagined by a particular school to govern evolution. Of course, there is a very different sense in which we use the word "Evolution." One might call it, more strictly, development. There is the question of the development of religion, which is a most interesting study. It is, however, one we can hardly deal with without regarding it in the light of revealed history; and, therefore, it hardly comes within our province to-night. But we cannot trace the source of the earlier dispensation without being struck with the fact that amid all the evil failure that marked their history there was a progress in the realisation of their religion among the Jews, of a kind which we do not notice in any other religion, for we do not find a progress upward rather than downward in any other religion. But, on the other hand, there is the point which the author of the paper puts most forcibly and which I think well worthy of careful thought. I cannot imagine any more powerful evidence for theism than the fact that there is that constant yearning for a higher and purer spiritual life which gives strength to all movements for reformation; and that yet, in spite of this, there is also the undoubted counter tendency, dragging the human soul downwards, which the author has so vividly put before us. We cannot trace the history of the past without being deeply struck with this, and without tracing the history of the past we cannot justly and wisely deal with the history of the present. I hope that some of those present, who may have studied the subject more profoundly than I have, will now give us the benefit of their views upon it. (Applause.)

REV. F. A. WALKER, D.D., F.L.S.—I have only risen to say a few words with reference to one statement which has been alluded to in the interesting paper we have before us, that alluding to a tribe said to have no conception of religion at all. I believe this may be the case with reference to certain of the African races. I was lately in conversation with the Bishop of Maritzburg, and may state that, in the course of a very interesting drawing-room lecture which he gave with regard to the mode of dealing with the Zulus and the work in progress among them, he seemed to say that, so far from their fulfilling the popular conception, that "the heathen in his blindness bows down to wood and stone," there were, as a matter of fact, no idols among that nation at all. They have no conception of a Supreme Being; but at the same time they are very superstitious, and in seasons of drought they give all their cattle to the rain-makers, all they believe as to a future state being that the spirits of their deceased ancestors entered the bodies of the numerous snakes in their land, and did so with the malignant intent to exercise their influence against mankind. I suppose it is pre-eminently true of the Semitic religions that they tend to degenerate. Many of them began with a worship of the most beautiful object in creation—the

sun. This was the case in Peru, in Persia, and in Egypt, and we have also the worship of the moon-god in Haran and in Ur of the Chaldees, and I suppose the countless bulls, and rams, and hawks, which we find at a later stage in Egypt, were partly derived from the fact of the sun passing through the different signs of the zodiac, and partly from being fierce and powerful animals, unconquerable as the sun in his strength, as also the lion, another sign of the zodiac, from the fierce heat of that luminary seeming to convey the idea of a lion in his resistless might. In this way, ideas such as these led not only to degeneration by the adoption of a multiplicity of gods, but to an embodiment of the various attributes of the one God in regard to His moral qualities, and His goodness and greatness also. (Applause.) As others will wish to take part in the discussion, I will say no more.

REV. R. ABERCROMBIE.—I wish to be allowed to say a few words in regard to some statements on the second page of the paper. The author does not say that the evolution of religion implies that religion is purely subjective; but that "it is difficult to understand how evolution can be supposed to accomplish this, unless we suppose the relation, or the consciousness of it, to be mere delusion, a figment of the mind, having no distinct objective element whatever, but entirely furnished somehow by the working of the mind itself." We must all be aware that Herbert Spencer believes that there is an absolute, and the writer of the paper speaks of its being easy to show, by such views as those of Herbert Spencer, that religion will dissolve in time and "leave not a wrack behind," but he adds that "even the author of the Dream Theory of religion is fain to leave something very substantial of "a wrack behind." With reference to this question, we do not take it for granted that that which has been evolved by man's own powers is a figment. I would say that we look on geometry and algebra as the result of the development of man's powers; but, nevertheless, we do not look on the truths of geometry and algebra as merely subjective, we recognise that they hold good in reference to the outer world: therefore, if the mind of man does evolve thoughts which correspond to a reality, how can it be said that it is difficult to understand that the result of evolution in the case of religion can be any other than a figment of the mind? I think the second page of this paper requires some explanation; but I should like to add, that I very much appreciate the paper as a whole, and especially the great stress the writer lays on the idea of individualism in religion. (Hear, hear.)

R. J. HAMMOND, Esq.—With regard to the argument as to whether individuals carry on and develop religious thought in the human race, a proposition to which the author of the paper would appear to be adverse, the Chairman has told us that the Jewish religion is an exception to the view the writer has expressed. In the Jewish religion we have a succession of the prophets divinely raised up to carry onward the religious movement. The Jewish religion culminated in the Temple, and the Temple seems to be the model of the Christian Church. When the Apostle goes to Athens, he

seems to teach the doctrine that God had been preparing even the Greeks; and the paper leads us to the supposition that all those persons who came forward from time to time to carry on this divine movement were inspired. The Apostle says, "I found an altar with this inscription—'To the unknown God.'" Why should there be an altar to an unknown God at Athens if the people had not souls, yearning and crying out for something better, something deeper, something sweeter than the Greek mythology afforded them? They did not know who it was they needed; and the Apostle seems to play on this, for he tells them that He was the one he was going to introduce to them—the one they had been groping after—"the Divine Comforter." Then he says, "This ignorance God winked at," having brought His own Son into the world, and given all things into His hand, He would wink at their ignorance no longer, and therefore commanded "all men everywhere to repent." There certainly does seem to have been a progress from the first until now; and this, I suppose, may be regarded as a prophecy of the still further progress of the human race.

The CHAIRMAN.—With regard to the reference that has been made to the second page of the paper, I am sorry the author is not here to answer what has been said, because he could, undoubtedly, explain his own meaning best. I cannot help thinking that his meaning is given in the last sentence of the third paragraph, where, quoting Mr. Herbert Spencer, he says, "How do these ideas concerning the supernatural evolve out of ideas concerning the natural?" With regard to our mathematical conceptions, Helmholtz maintained most strongly that they are all absolute and actual experience, and he works it out, starting with what the mathematical conceptions of a being of two dimensions living on a sphere would be, and showing that a right line would not be the shortest and most direct as connecting two points, but that the arc of a great circle would be the shortest. I, for one, do not think we evolve mathematical truths out of our own minds at all, and the author certainly can hardly have meant that which has been ascribed to him as the evolution of religion. I think the apprehension of an objective reality can hardly be spoken of as the evolution of ideas of the supernatural from ideas concerning the natural. It is, in fact, difficult to know what Mr. Herbert Spencer means by that sentence; and this, by the way, is not an uncommon difficulty in regard to what he says. The sentence would seem to suggest that supernatural ideas have not an objective reality. If they have, it becomes a question of observation and knowledge which can hardly be accurately called evolution; it would rather be development. With regard to what has been said as to the progress of the Jews, I should be sorry if any one were to suppose I have overlooked the very steady degeneracy the Jews at times exhibited, showing, unfortunately, a stronger power in that direction than in an upward progress through the succession of the prophets. They certainly have shown deterioration to an extent that is perhaps all the more marked to us because of the height from which they fell. (Hear, hear.)

Rev. W. C. BARLOW, M.A.—I think that the account given in Genesis points to a fact which far more directly concerns the question dealt with by the paper before us, namely, that religion does not evolve itself by any natural, or mechanical, or other law, from the unaided human intelligence, but that there is within us the power of conceiving a Being—a consciousness of relationship to some power external to and higher than ourselves. To say nothing of “the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day,” the very command in the beginning implied, by man’s being in the garden “to dress it and to keep it,” that there was a faculty in him for perceiving obligations. Here we have the very element of religion ; and the Book, if it is to be brought into the argument, indicates in its first pages that religion begins in revelation, but that it must be correlated to a faculty in man which can respond to that revelation. Of course, the next step in this backward argument would be to question the whole history that is beyond. I was glad to hear the Chairman correct an impression that seemed to have been created by some of his remarks. The history of the Jewish people, after we once find them in possession of written documents, is one of constant and strenuous endeavour on the part of the nation and Church as a whole to go further and further away from the truth, in agreement with the principle to which I think the author of the paper really did refer in his foot-note (Galatians v. 17) that there is that constant lusting of the flesh contrariwise to the spirit. I believe the whole history of the Jewish Church from the date of the written revelation is entirely of the character indicated by the author of the paper. But, then, we have to begin a good deal earlier than that with regard to the historical religion of the Jews, and we are confronted by recent discoveries with the fact of the so-called parallelism between certain early chapters in Genesis and certain Assyrian, Babylonian, and Chaldean legends. Does it not seem that these coincidences and differences strongly confirm the line of argument used by the essayist of this evening? We find in Chaldea traces of legends every one of which shows marks of progress downwards. Man’s view of nature tends entirely to unify that which he observes, until he begins to view from the standpoint of his own moral and immoral tendencies. The Chaldean legends all manifest diversity. If those legends existed in anything like the form in which we find them at the date when communication may be supposed to have taken place between the Chaldeans and the fathers of the Jewish nation, then we have to account for this, that in the Jewish nation the legends were entirely free from anything of the monstrous character indicated by the name Heabini. It seems to me that the earliest writers of the Jewish legends show that they are the re-affirmation of an old revelation, and not by any means an evolution by the ancestors of the Semitic race, who, when left to themselves, only managed, out of the simplest elements of truth and thought which they once possessed, to create such legends as those which are now being picked out from the Assyrian tablets. (Hear, hear.)

The meeting was then adjourned.

THE AUTHOR'S REPLY.

A few words in explanation, with reference to the criticisms made at the meeting on my paper. I quite agree with the Chairman that the evolution of religion is one thing, its development another. There is a development of religion starting from Revelation. But, if the origin of religion be from evolution merely, then the subsequent development is only the continuation of the same process. It is *all* evolution "of ideas concerning the supernatural out of ideas concerning the natural," and there is no need to distinguish the different stages of the process.

Of course it is quite possible for ideas evolved out of the mind in the course of its intercourse with external things to have realities corresponding them, and so to be not a mere figment but actual knowledge. But if, as Mr. Herbert Spencer seems to maintain, the relation between the soul and that "absolute" which he concedes as existing be absolutely unknowable, then, however much the ideas evolved concerning the supernatural out of ideas concerning the natural may happen to correspond to realities, it is impossible to *know* that they do so, and they are for all practical purposes a figment merely. Moreover, Mr. Herbert Spencer, in the paper alluded to, proceeds to explode and even ridicule all the highest known ideas of the relation between the soul and God, as mere figments, and absurd ones too. So that we can do him at least but little injustice in the statement that a religion drawn from evolution merely is purely subjective and has no basis of reality. Personally, I hold that there is a relation, and a knowable one, between the spirit of man and God, and that consequently religious ideas corresponding to realities may be developed by experience, though, as a matter of fact, they are only truly and rightly developed by Revelation.—It might certainly seem that all those individuals by whom religion has been really advanced have been inspired. But there is need of a distinction between what we may call *religious genius* and Inspiration. Every religious genius whom God has not made use of by inspiration to add to His revelation has made some mistake in his religious ideas, and caused some aberration in the development of religion. But these matters are, as I understand, beyond the scope of the Institute, and I meant merely to suggest them without stating them.