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1901.

ORDINARY GENERAL MEETING.*

DAVID HOWARD, Esq., D.L., IN THE CHAIR.

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

MEMBER :—Richard D. Dicker, Esq., Philadelphia, U.S.A.

ASSOCIATES :—Professor G. F. Fitzgerald, F.R.S., Trin. Coll., Dublin ;
Rev. E. H. M. Waller, M.A., Allahabad.

The following paper was read by the Author :—

ON THE BEING OF GOD. By the Venerable Arch-deacon W. MACDONALD SINCLAIR, D.D.

I. THE EXISTENCE OF GOD.

1. *Science investigating the Works of God.*

THE question “Do you believe in God?” is not as certain now of receiving an affirmative answer as it would have been one hundred years ago, but in many cases the answer would be more intelligent. Whatever may be the faults of the times in which we live, it is an inspiriting thought that our day has come in an age which seems to bring us, in some sense, very near to His self-existent Being.

Never was investigation so patient and so close into the myriad ways of His working in Creation. In a sense that never before was known, *the Heavens are declaring His glory, and the firmament showing His handywork.* The ray of light which left its distant orb scores or hundreds, it may be thousands of years ago, yields up its secret in the prism, and tells us the very elements of which that remote world is composed. The principles on which the very Creation itself is being perpetually built up, seem to be, in some small degree, revealing themselves to the understanding of man.

Man halts, of course, and makes mistakes ; he forms a supposition, and it may be that more than one generation

* Monday, May 7th, 1900.

will pass before the supposition becomes verified. It is probable that each supposition which succeeds the other will be greatly changed from its original appearance before it is generally adopted. But the majestic uniformities and combinations of nature are ever shining forth in more august and sublime proportions to the reverent gaze of the genuine student. Absolute Atheism seems to be more widely discredited, and the scientists who do not believe are for the most part saying just what we should expect; not that they *deny*, but that in the technical scientific sense they do not *know*. They are unconsciously echoing the very words of the Book of Job:—

Canst thou by searching find out God ?
 Canst thou find out the Almighty to perfection ?
 It is high as heaven ; what canst thou do ?
 Deeper than the depth ; what canst thou know ?

2. What is meant by Agnosticism.

That is most of what is really meant by the spectral bugbear of Agnosticism: Belief is not intended to be scientific knowledge. We seem to hear in the language of such men some note of the exclamation of St. Paul: *Here we see through a glass darkly.* “Whatever may be the difficulty,” says the late Professor Diman, “of demonstrating the existence of God, to prove that there is not a God is manifestly beyond the power of human intellect. That the Eternal Being exists is a proposition, the truth of which it may be possible to deduce from a circle of facts lying within our immediate range; but to prove that God does not exist we must have sounded the Universe in all its length and breadth. Even if you suppose that He had left no traces of His existence in the narrow field open to our inspection, we yet cannot affirm that no such trace exists in the measureless space which we have never explored; even if He has never uttered His voice during the brief years that we have lived, we still could not declare with certainty that He has never revealed Himself to other beings during the eternal round of Time.”

3. What is meant by Evolution.

And when some of us shrink back from the idea of the purpose of God in creation being unfolded as a contemporaneous process, and, neglecting the warning of St. Paul

that *the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God*, and that *the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now, waiting for the adoption*, we cling rather to the more clumsy and less enlightened notion that this purpose ceased when in the beginning He foresaw everything that was to be, the same writer continues :—

“Creation by fabrication (or actual direct handiwork) seems less a matter for admiration than creation by evolution; a man can bring a machine together; he cannot make a machine that develops itself. That our harmonious universe should formerly have existed undeveloped in a state of diffused matter, without form, and that it should gradually have attained its present organization, is much more marvellous than its formation according to the artificial method supposed by the unlearned would be.” “*Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory, and honour and power: for Thou hast created all things, and for Thy pleasure they are, and were created.*” “*My Father worketh hitherto.*”

4. *Matter the Externalization of the Thought of the Eternal.*

If we want some adequate though necessarily imperfect notion of the method of creation, we may remind ourselves that it is impossible to conceive of the Eternal Self-existent Being as subsisting without thought; and the expression or externalization of His thoughts was the beginning of matter. If He wished to create an infinite series of minds capable of enjoying His own happiness, it was, as far as we can see, necessary that they should have a mode of existence differentiated from His own. He thought of forming such a series, that His own illimitable perfection might be shared; and instantaneously the whole Universe glowed and shivered with unthinkable myriads of atoms, the materials for providing a differentiated existence for the innumerable mental units designed. Matter became a mode of being differentiated from spiritual self-existence. The processes of Evolution correspond to the execution of the Divine thoughts in their perfection. “The created Universe is a form of Divine force, endowed with such an existence as the Eternal found necessary to effect His creature purposes.”

5. The same idea in verse.

These considerations have been put with point by a recent poet :—

“What are stars
But God’s thoughts indurate—the burning words
That rolled forth blazing from His mighty lips ?
For thought is one
As souls are in their essence, and it works
By kindred laws and processes in all ;—
Whether it flames within Thy Mind, O God,
Or publishes itself in spheres of light,
In worlds of spirits (affluences of Thee),
Or show its mighty convoluted throes
In embryonic suns and nebulas.

What are suns,
Systems, and worlds, but mighty thoughts of God
All waiting to become the thoughts of man ?

Books are man’s worlds—his great attempts to speak
The meaning of the oracle within ;
And worlds are God’s books, in the which He writes
A memoir of Himself in love to man.”

The world is but the Echo of the words
Spoken by Him to old Eternity.*

6. Little real hostility to a reasonable Faith.

The writers who have influenced thought on these subjects are not dogmatically hostile. Darwin never denied God, and will probably be some day claimed as a revealer of His Nature. Tyndall declared that in his happier moods he shared the common faith and the common hopes of mankind. “Many of the most illustrious scientific men of the present day are clear confessors of theistic faith.” Fiske, treating of Darwinism, says that it may convince us that the existence of highly complicated organisms is the result of a combination of circumstances infinitely various, each so minute as separately to seem trivial or accidental; yet the consistent believer in God will always occupy an impregnable position in maintaining that the entire series, in each and every one of its incidents, is an immediate manifestation of His creative action. “Yes,” says a thoughtful American writer, Washington Gladden, in dealing with this most tremendous of all subjects, “the sublime statement with which the Holy Scrip-

* J. Stanyan Bigg.

tures begin is as worthy of belief as it ever was: *In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.* There never were, and there never will be, more than two great theories of the origin of the Universe; it is the product either of *Chance* or of *Purpose*. Between these two theories you must take your choice. That it is born of purpose is intelligible, reasonable, probable. That it grew by chance always was preposterous, but it is tenfold more preposterous to-day than it was fifty years ago. We are sure that the sublime movements of the planets over our heads, and the crystalline glories of the earth beneath our feet, and the wonderful and beautiful forms of life about us, are not the outcome of any chance. The unity, the harmony, the progress that we see, disclose to us the working of an eternal Purpose. It is in that Purpose that Nature reveals to us the existence of that God who, in the beginning, created the heaven and the earth. It is not a demonstration, but the inference is clear and strong. Purpose means Intelligence, Purpose means Will; one Intelligence, one Will, one God."

II. THE OPERATION OF GOD.

1. *The Purpose of God in Creation suggested in Romans viii.*

What is that Purpose? With regard to the final destiny of the Universe, a recent writer (W. W. Howard) says: "Revelation here, as elsewhere, anticipates Reason. In Holy Scripture it is over and over again stated expressly, and nowhere with such fulness as in the eighth chapter of St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans. And it turns out to be nothing short of the EVOLUTION OF ALL CREATION INTO RATIONAL FORMS, CAPABLE OF KNOWING GOD, PRAISING GOD, AND SENSIBLY ENJOYING HIS FAVOURS. A most magnificent conception:—

"Too bold to believe it true :
If not far bolder still to disbelieve.

... "The Creation and the Creator assumed, what would pure Reason conclude to be the ultimate object involved in the bringing of all things into being? Would not that final aim be the highest that Reason could conceive? In possession of a perfect Deity as the universal Creator, could Reason hesitate to ascribe to Him the very highest purpose in His creative efforts? And can any purpose above this

be conceived by Reason in her greatest and most exalted flights? . . .

"Can Reason feel satisfied in concluding that God has created dead and thoughtless matter to remain dead and thoughtless for ever? Would the artist be satisfied to stop short of painting his picture when he had prepared his paints and stretched his canvas? Nay: when he had finished his production, would he not, like Pygmalion, go on to put mind and life into it, were it in his power to do so? . . . It is always assumed by us that a mechanician, an artist, a poet, a philosopher, a man of science, will carry his work to the highest perfection in his power—if indeed he be endowed with wisdom. Can we then conceive that God, whose perfection is infinite, will fail in contemplating, in His work, anything short of the very best? And is there anything else equal to the end we have referred to as involved in what the Bible affirms to be the ultimate end of the Universe?"

"Hallowed be Thy name—Hallelujah!

Infinite Ideality!

Immeasurable Reality!

Infinite Personality!

Hallowed be Thy name—Hallelujah!

We feel we are nothing—for all is Thou and in Thee;
We feel we are something—that also has come from Thee;
We know we are nothing—but Thou will help us to be.

Hallowed by Thy name—Hallelujah!"

Tennyson.

2. *Suggestions from the Higher Pantheism.*

The thoughts, I submit, of a Pantheist may be of use to us, because the transition seems so natural and reasonable from the admission of a Divine omnipresent Power to that Personal Father of all things whom we ourselves worship.

"The whole tendency of modern thought," says a writer whom I have already quoted (Fiske), "is to impress upon us ever more forcibly the truth that the entire knowable Universe is an immense unit, animated through all its parts by a single principle of life. . . . The fathomless abysses of space can no longer be talked of as empty; they are filled with a wonderful substance unlike any of the forms of matter which we can weigh or measure. . . . Radiating in every direction, from countless centric points, run shivers of undulation manifested in endless metamor-

phoses as heat, light, actinism, magnetism, electricity. Crossing one another in every imaginable way, as if all space were crowded with a mesh-work of nerve threads, these motions go on for ever in a harmony that nothing disturbs. . . . It means that the Universe, as a whole, is thrilling in every fibre with Life . . . all is quivering with Energy. From particle to particle without cessation the movement passes on."

Such language, I say, brings us not indeed to God Himself, but very near to His vesture. The unity of Matter leads us to think of the Divine Unity of Mind. We seem to approach to the very shadow of the Divine Being, to feel His omnipotent hand, to be encompassed by the externalization of His omnipresent Thought. We are reminded of the powerful way in which Tennyson converted Pantheism into Theistic thought:

3. The Higher Pantheism turned by Tennyson to Theism.

"The sun, the moon, the stars, the seas, the hills and the plains,
Are not these, O Soul, the vision of Him who reigns ?

Earth, these solid stars, this weight of body and limb,
Are they not sign and symbol of thy division from Him ?

Dark is the world to thee : thyself art the reason why :
For is He not all but that which has power to feel 'I am I' ?

Glory about thee, without thee ; and thou fulfillest thy doom,
Making Him *broken* gleam, and a *stifled* splendour and gloom.

Speak to Him thou, for He hears, and Spirit with spirit can meet—
Closer is He than breathing, and nearer than hands and feet."

4. Suggestions from Herbert Spencer.

Valuable as are to us as a step the meditations of a writer who seems unable to escape from the hampering ties of Pantheism,* still more welcome are the frank admissions of one who declares himself to be an Agnostic. The most conspicuous of modern Agnostics, Herbert Spencer, insists, like Tennyson, that this force which is thus revealed to us is not self-existent; that it does not set itself in motion; that it is caused; and that behind all is the unknowable Cause. We know, not only the results of Force which

* *I.e.*, Fiske.

present themselves to our senses; we know that behind these results is an Infinite Reality. With most convincing Logic he shows that this Power behind all appearances is the necessary groundwork of all our reasoning; that we cannot think without assuming it; that "among our necessary beliefs this has the highest validity of any." He calls this Reality behind all appearances "the Unknowable Cause of all effects which constitute the knowable world." He calls it that Inscrutable Existence which Science, in the last resort, is compelled to recognize as unrevealed by its deepest analyses of matter, motion, thought and feeling. He calls it "the Infinite and Eternal Energy; the Ultimate Existence; the Ultimate Cause from which Humanity has proceeded." "This Inscrutable Existence . . . stands towards our general conception of things in substantially the same relation as the Creative Power asserted by Theology." "Very likely," he says, "there will ever remain a need to give shape to that indefinite sense of an Ultimate Existence which forms the basis of our Intelligence. We shall always be under the necessity of contemplating it as some mode of Being." "Religion," he writes in another place, "everywhere present as a weft running through the warp of human history, expresses some eternal fact." And to return for a moment to the Pantheistic writer, "The Presence of God," he says, "is the one all-pervading fact of life, from which there is no escape; and while, in the deepest sense, the nature of Deity is unknowable by finite man, nevertheless the exigencies of our thinking oblige us to symbolize that Nature in some form that has a real meaning for us; we cannot symbolize that Nature as in anywise Matter; we are bound to symbolize it as in some sense Soul."

5. The Nature of Human Belief.

These words of the most austere exponents of Science and Philosophy are to us a great help, because they show us that there need be no antagonism between the sternest and most abstract of their principles, and those vital beliefs for which we are prepared to die. When they say that the Infinite and Eternal Power that is manifested in every pulsation of the Universe is none other than the manifestation of the Living God, but that He is unknowable in the scientific sense of knowledge, we reply that such an answer

is exactly what we expect to hear. It was the Son of God Himself who said that *no man hath seen God at any time*. To the eye of Faith alone He is visible; by the Moral and Religious Sense He can be known; in the Conscience He can be recognized; in History His footsteps can be traced; in the Soul His still, small voice can be heard. "And falling," as one has said,

"Upon the great world's altar-stairs
That slope through darkness up to God,"

we join our voices with the hosts of light above us, and with the innumerable company of believing souls on earth, humble and firm in their unshakable trust; and we cry:—

"We praise Thee, O God !
We acknowledge Thee to be the Lord !
All the earth doth worship Thee,
The Father everlasting !"

III. THE PROVINCE OF FAITH.

1. *The Reasonableness of Faith.*

These are the gropings of Science and Philosophy in the direction of Faith, a region with which they suppose themselves not to be primarily concerned; and I say they are a help to us, because, if by any possible accident a reasonable account could be given of the material Universe without Almighty God, it might to some be a stumbling-block.

But, since the day when, in its earliest cradle, the human race first meditated on the riddle of existence, it has been the glorious province of a well-grounded Faith to hold devout communion with the omnipresent Being, and to learn that He is not only Power, but Light; not only Light, but Love.

The oldest writing in the world is perhaps the papyrus scroll of the mummy of the ancient Egyptian High Priest, Ahabanuk. Ahabanuk is supposed to have lived about 2800 years before Christ, 1000 years before the date at which it used to be said that Abram left Ur of the Chaldees. In Ahabanuk's tomb was found a copy of the Book of Prayers of that primitive race. From that venerable document has been translated this sublime passage:—

"There is a Most Holy One, a Creator of the fulness of the earth, a ruler of days: He is the God of gods, the exalted

Maker of the stars and of the heavenly hosts, which are praising Him above our head; the Creator of the exalted race of mighty Princes and Governors who sit in judgment, who condemn the wicked: He is the Ruler of the world, the Light which convicts the evil doer; the Judge of every deed, the Preserver of the Laws; He is the Light; with Him is no Night; He dwells in the exalted land of Light; in Him is joined together the glory of the Sun and the glory of the King of the world. The Most Holy One lives; He seeth as ye see; He heareth as ye hear; He standeth as ye stand; He sitteth as ye sit. Let the Lord God be exalted in His holy temple, and be worshipped on bended knees: for He is the End and the Beginning of all things."

There speaks the voice of Faith, in the dim and distant youth of the world. Without Faith, as was taught by the greatest master of modern philosophy, the German Emanuel Kant, without Belief in God and the Soul, no moral conduct is possible, and therefore no happiness. It is Faith which, telling you that the Eternal is Mind and not merely Force, Love and not merely Mind, raises you above the brute, and brings to maturity within you that life for which you were intended.

2. Various Reasons for Belief.

Whether your faith is grounded, like that of Kant, on the inherent necessity of a moral life, or like that of Cicero on the intelligent witness of all mankind, or that of Bacon on the mirror of the Divine Being which he found in the mind of man, or like the faith of Anselm and Coleridge on the impossibility of the very conception of the idea of God unless it were true, or like the thin faith of Spencer and Tyndall on the need of an ultimate Cause, or like the richer and warmer faith of Newton and Faraday on the splendid wonders of the Creation, or like the faith of Abraham, Moses, David, and Isaiah, on the voice of Revelation within, or the united voice of the great cloud of witnesses in the Catholic Church, or like that of the humblest Christian on the Divine Personality of the Lord Jesus Christ; whatever in your case may be its origin and development, Faith is the most perfect flower, the highest outcome of your soul, its noblest privilege, its healthiest exercise.

3. Duty of Gratitude for what we can see.

"God is unsearchable; the ages of His Eternity cannot be numbered, nor the spaces of His immensity measured; the depths of His Wisdom cannot be fathomed, nor the reaches of His Power bounded; the brightness of His Glory can never be described, nor an inventory made of the treasures of His Goodness. This is good reason why we should always speak of the Eternal with humility and caution, and never prescribe to him or quarrel with Him; why we should be thankful for what He has revealed of Himself, and long to be there, where we shall see Him as He is."

4. Immensity and Nearness of Deity.

"A million beats of man's united heart (so writes an Eastern poet)
 Are fainter than one throb of ocean's pulse,
 Which thrills her awful veins in every part,
 And throws up waifs and shells and crimson dulse.
 A million tides of ocean's weltering breast
 Are weaker than one glance that lights the sun,
 When in the bannered East he breaks his rest,
 His race gigantic round the sky to run.
 A million journeys of the sun's swift foot
 Are smaller than one limit of the space
 Through which the tree of life from Being's root
 Upsprings, powdered with stars, in heaven's face.
 A million trees of life, with all their loads
 But poorly God's profound domain reveal :
 The crowd of worlds that throng heaven's thickest roads
 Are letters of a word His lips unseal.
 A million worlds, with universes rife,
 His all-creative might can no-wise drain :
 When closing order bounds chaotic strife,
 His fulness as before doth still remain.
 That fulness such, in earth's stupendous force,
 That, to His thought serene and tender gaze,
 The frailest insect, humming in its course,
 Is just as near as seraph in his blaze.
 Yes, though all worlds of space would be, combined,
 Too small to fit His finger to a ring,
 Yet is He not to humblest creatures blind,
 But daily spreads their board, and hears them sing.
 Each tear forlorn that trickles down man's cheeks
 He marks, and pities every aching sigh ;
 To give them consolation ever seeks ;
 Their life-woes shares ; and takes them when they die."

IV. GOD CAN BE LOVED.

1. *We can love as well as Believe.*

This omnipotent, omnipresent, eternal Mind, before Whom the very angels bow their faces, and Whom even to contemplate is our delight, to us who have received the revelation of Jesus Christ is given the inexpressible privilege of *loving*.

2. *The Lovable Qualities of God.*

To us the Eternal is no mere abstract idea, that we should find it hard to give Him our hearts. Throughout His Word, in perfect harmony with the voice of Nature, He has revealed Himself as the source of all goodness, beauty, truth, strength, loving-kindness, pity, purity, light, love ; of every virtue, of every excellence. To us He has spoken in tones suited to the apprehension of our race in its different stages, by the long array of psalmists and prophets ; in their incomparable words we have His message clothed with varying degrees of clearness. But, above all, we know Him in the Divine and Unique Person of Jesus of Nazareth. "*He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father.*" "*God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spoke in times past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son; Whom He hath appointed heir of all things; by Whom also He made the worlds: Who, being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His Substance, and upholding all things by the word of His Power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on High.*"

3. *The Revelation of God's Love.*

The Eternal as He revealed Himself to Moses, was, indeed, an object of the most exalted affection and the deepest devotion :—"The Lord passed by before him," we are told, and proclaimed, "The Lord, The Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin." The Eternal, as He is revealed in His Son, the Father of all Light and Love, is even more powerful to touch our hearts, because all can see and understand His incarnate truth and glory. It stirs in us an inexpressible motion to find that the lessons of the dread Creator of all

things for His human children are the Blessings of the Sermon on the Mount ; that He is the God of healing and pity, the God of the most righteous and absolute justice, and yet the most tender sympathy and condescension ; the God of the Cross of Calvary.

4. The Human Response in Self-sacrifice.

It is to Him, holding as He does in His hands the issue of life and death, watching us at each moment of our lives, and telling us by every line of His message that this life is only the brief preparation for the true life beyond, that in the exercise of our faith, if we desire our religion to be effectual, we cannot withhold the sacrifice of the whole heart and soul and mind and strength. Ah ! my brothers, I know how many are the competing interests. The daily affairs of life, the associations of business, home and ordinary occupations, these humble things are often in combination strong enough to blunt our faculty for the divine, and to hold us back from the full devotion of ourselves to Him Who alone is great. Then there come flocking about us all the various kinds of pleasures and amusements, which, to many, especially to those in the light spirits of youth, are a still more potent spell to hinder. Sometimes there are intellectual substitutes for the Eternal which claim our allegiance, and which prevent us from approaching near His spiritual and invisible throne. But all these are transitory and disappointing, and we find them so.

5. The Devotion of Browning.

“Therefore to whom turn I, but to Thee, the ineffable Name,
 Builder and Maker Thou of houses not made with hands !
 What ? have fear of change from Thee Who art ever the same ?
 Doubt that Thy power can fill the heart that Thy power expands ?
 There shall never be one lost good ! what was shall live as before ;
 The evil is null, is naught, is silence implying sound ;
 What was good shall be good, with for evil so much good more ;
 On the earth the broken arcs,—in the heaven a perfect round !”
Browning.

6. Self-devotion in the Smallest Things.

Moved by such thoughts as these, raised on the wings of devotion and praise, we feel that we can in sincerity dedicate ourselves to Him in whom alone we live and move and have our being. Well would it be for us if we never entered into

the service of His courts without such conscious renewal of our sacrifice ! Too soon, alas ! when we go forth again, the world breaks in on the atmosphere of worship in which our souls have been uplifted. But there is one means by which, in the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, we can hope that the impulse of absolute, unreserved affection may be persistent. It is contained in the old words : " Whether ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God." In the humblest things, your recreations, your meals, your pastimes, your objects of pursuit, your interests, your occupations, your friendships, your family relations, your domestic duties, you can go through your round of actions either to the Divine glory or not. You can do everything in a right spirit and a wrong. Yes, in the very highest things of all, even in your worship itself, a wrong disposition is just as possible as a right. O, ask God Himself this day that henceforth, in everything connected with your whole lives, things great or things small, all may be solely and wholly for His honour, and the spread of His kingdom on earth !

7. The Ultimate Result in the Future.

And we know, from this intimacy of communion with the Eternal which we have experienced, that He will not throw us away when our work in this life is over. We have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts, face to face, and we know that if we have been found worthy for that sight, He will not forget us. And we have within ourselves the beginnings of this eternal life : faith, hope, charity, wisdom, calmness, humility, self-control, gentleness, strength. We know that these are of God, and can never die. We know that they are eternal, not merely as abstract virtues, or qualities of God, in which we have our share for a time, and then pass away ; but that just as they are all centred in the eternal Personality of God, so also they will never die even in their developments in our own personalities, who are created in His image. All else :—all that is not of God—the wishes of our earthly nature, the deceptive appearances that dazzle our eyes for a time, the shows and mummeries of all that is temporal and external, that which belongs to this world and not to the inner eternal world of virtue, of morality, of faith, of God—this will perish from our character more and more.

But all that is of God, in the same proportions as we have it here (else we should lose our individuality), but, thank God! in a degree that can only be limited by His love and wisdom, this is our insight already into eternal life, and it will be our undying personality hereafter. *God is in the midst of us; therefore shall we not be removed for ever. We know that if our earthly tabernacle be dissolved we have a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens!*

DISCUSSION.

Mr. E. SCHINZEL.—Before speaking on this subject I wish to convey the customary thanks to the able lecturer. It strikes me forcibly, however, that he is somewhat imperfectly acquainted with the first part of his subject; he will, I hope, forgive me if I try to correct his view of the subject.

The author in his treatise recommends to our notice Darwin's theory of evolution, and then later on he unconcernedly speaks of purpose and design. These are the words he uses, "The unity, the harmony, the progress that we see, disclose to us the working of an eternal purpose. It is in that purpose that nature reveals to us the existence of that God who, in the beginning, created the heaven and the earth. It is not a demonstration, but the inference is clear and strong. Purpose means intelligence, purpose means will; one Intelligence, one Will, one God." I quite agree with that view. Darwin, in the *Origin*, says, at p. 382, "Nothing can be more hopeless than to attempt to explain the formation of animals by utility, or by the doctrine of final causes." And boldly attacking the venerable champion he says, "The old argument from design in nature as given by Paley fails now that the law of Natural Selection has been discovered."

It has never been discovered—it has been *conjectured*—"There seems to be no more design in the variability of organic beings than in the cause which the wind blows." And further on he says, "No shadow of reason can be assigned for the belief that variations were intentionally or specially guided." (*Variation of Animals and Plants*, first edition, II, p. 431.) Huxley and

Professor Sidgwick (the latter Darwin's opponent) confirm my opinion. The former, in an essay of December 26th, 1859, says—

Archdeacon SINCLAIR.—I think I may save a little trouble if I say that I am not in the least a supporter of either Darwin or Spencer. I say on page 4 of my paper, "yet the consistent believer in God will always occupy an impregnable position in maintaining that the entire series, in each and every one of its incidents, is an immediate manifestation of His creative action."

Professor ORCHARD.—We are all, I am sure, glad to have the author's disavowal so frankly and sincerely made to us. I am sure also, we shall all concur in thanking the author very much for bringing before us so interesting a paper, so poetical and so eloquent.

There are one or two points in the paper in which I cannot altogether concur. For instance, the author appears to say that most of what is really meant by the spectral bugbear of Agnosticism is that belief is not intended to be scientific knowledge. He appears to connect that with the fact that man cannot find out the Almighty to perfection. No one in his senses, I suppose, would assert that by searching any one could find out God to perfection, certainly no Christian would do so. But by Agnosticism, as taught by Herbert Spencer, and others, something very different indeed to this is meant. It is meant that it is impossible, by any process whatever, to *know* God. That is what Herbert Spencer avers, and that is, undoubtedly, the essential idea of Agnosticism, that God is, from His very nature and character, absolutely unknowable.

The author also quotes, apparently with approbation, some words by Professor Diman, "Creation by fabrication (or actual direct handiwork) seems less a matter for admiration than creation by evolution; a man can bring a machine together; he cannot make a machine that develops itself." I have met with a variety of statements in this controversy, but I must say that this is one of the most unfair that I have met with. Who denies that man cannot make a machine that develops itself—or who denies that God does make such machines? Who, knowing anything of biology, denies that the human body, or dog or toad, can develop itself? But what has that to do with evolution? It is absolutely beside the question. We all know that God makes machines to develop themselves; but believing that does not make me an

evolutionist. In order to make me an evolutionist I must accept something that is very monstrous; I must believe that God made machines which not only developed themselves and produced others for immense periods of time, but that all at once those machines made something quite different, and that after that God went on making machines of broader character until at last machines were produced which had little or no relationship to the original machines. We do not believe such statements without a particle of evidence; but instead of having evidence for it, it is devoid of evidence. It is an unfair statement of the difference between two processes, and I hope the Archdeacon does not himself adopt it. I do not suppose he does. Professor Diman proceeds, "That our harmonious universe should formerly have existed undeveloped, in a state of diffused matter, without form, and that it should gradually have attained its present organization, is much more marvellous than its formation according to the artificial method supposed by the unlearned would be." The idea that evolution is a very marvellous theory has a certain truth in it, because it supposes so many extraordinary miracles, one on the other, without ground or reason; but to suppose that the theory of evolution is a grander theory than the theory of special creation is to propose what to my mind is quite preposterous.

There is a very interesting and beautiful thought that the author has brought before us, "the expression, or externalization of His thoughts was the beginning of matter." I think that very beautiful, and I wish to express my thanks to the author for it.

I would also thank the author very much for what he says on page 8 in regard to faith not being antagonistic to science and philosophy. He says "there need be no antagonism between the sternest and most abstract of their principles and those vital beliefs for which we are prepared to die."

The CHAIRMAN.—I hope in discussing this paper we shall keep quite clearly before our minds what I suggest is the most important part of it, and that is that true belief in the being of God is not merely compatible with certain particular modes of thought; but, if carefully examined, it will be found that even very different modes of thought and very different views lead up as a necessity to a belief in the existence of God.

I do not think it is exactly in point to discuss particular processes of creation. Probably, if we do, we shall then represent

other views of creation in a somewhat grotesque manner. But it is a matter of the most vital importance to see how the very views which are sometimes thought to be destructive of any belief in God are found to be not one whit more antagonistic to a belief in God, when worked out reasonably and when not taken as mere weapons to fight faith, than those of a different nature, and it is very instructive to find how a particular attack on faith has failed. The real result of modern thought seems to me to be this, that with regard to "Agnosticism" (it is a most perplexing word from the Greek, and one wishes there was something simpler to express it in English), the mere fact of not knowing a thing is no evidence of its non-existence. Which of us understands the telephone? Which of us has the faintest knowledge of what electricity is? Which of us has the dimmest conception of the forces of gravitation? On those points I am an Agnostic. I have not a full comprehension of any one of those points, and yet one's whole practical life is made up of the acceptance of such things, and therefore the one point in the argument of Agnosticism—that full knowledge is necessary to belief—is a thing that the more one thinks of it the more absurd it is. The fact that every thinker who seems to have tried hard to get away from the acknowledgment of design underlying creation has to come back to underlying laws, suggests the question, "If there be laws who and where the law-giver?" Those who have tried to escape from belief by Agnosticism find themselves compelled to acknowledge underlying verities. It seems to me we may consider that if we follow, upon the lines of this paper, the study of modern thought and the investigation of nature we shall find that though men may proceed by difficult paths, if that study be fairly and honestly followed, it leads up to God. (Applause.)

The Rev. JOHN TUCKWELL, M.R.A.S.—There is an allusion to a subject in the paper which seems to me to be of very great importance, and I should like, if I may, to call attention to it so that it may be a little more fully considered than it has yet been.

In the paper we have some very felicitous expressions concerning the method of creation. It is suggested that "we may remind ourselves that it is impossible to conceive of the Eternal Self-existent Being as subsisting without thought." We all concur in that view—"and the expression or externalization of His thoughts was the beginning of matter." That is very mysterious—

very profound. I think we are obliged to say, concerning that, as concerning electricity—that we do not know much about it. Whether, or not, the beginning of matter was the externalization of the divine thought, and if so, how that was accomplished, is far beyond our powers of conception and, certainly, far beyond our powers of discovery. But we must be on our guard against being led into the substitution of monotheism for modern Pantheism. Monotheism properly understood represents that there is only one Divine Being, or Person, or Substance. But according to certain modern ideas, if there are other beings besides the Divine, He cannot be infinite. It is said there may be other *persons* but there cannot be other *beings*. There must be an error here, I think, in the way in which the term “infinite” is understood. I confess I have not yet been able to solve the question how a variety and multiplicity of personalities should be possible with only one Being. I should certainly like that subject more thoroughly thrashed out, for it seems to me that it certainly leads to something that I am not able to differentiate from Pantheism. If there be only one substance, I am at a loss to understand how there can be different persons, and it leads us to this—that men, angels, demons and God are all of one substance or being, and are in some way inseparable from the Being of God. It leads, therefore, to this, that if I am at one time tempted, it is one part of God tempting another part of God. If I pray, it is one part of God beseeching another part of God for help. There are so many contradictions arising in my mind in this matter that I should like, if possible, that there should be some further discussion of the subject.

Professor ORCHARD.—May I ask you, sir, if you have read the accounts of the conference of Zoologists last year in this country? If so you will find that the testimony of Embryologists was decidedly against the theory of evolution.

Dr. WALTER KIDD, F.Z.S.—I think, sir, we have wandered rather away from the main subject, the Being of God, into by-ways. For the time being the question is;—how modern philosophy and thought bear on this profound question of God’s existence—I should say more than His existence—His operations in the world.

It is, I think, manifest that the present trend of human thought is definitely against the mechanical theories of the universe which

were so lately held by men of light and leading; and against the philosophical teachings of Mr. Herbert Spencer, in particular, there appears to be an uprising among eminent men. In so far as this philosopher's teaching is agnostic, we may be thankful for the frequent protests that one now hears. His evolutionary teachings are less opposed, and the number of those who accept his description of the processes by which inorganic and organic existence is carried on is much greater than of those who accept his whole scheme of philosophy, into which metaphysics enters so largely. His doctrine of the Persistence of Force, as laid down by him, is much questioned, and yet to his scheme, as a whole, it is essential, as also is the other principle which he lays down—that *mind* is a series of states of consciousness, which, again, is largely denied.

But his doctrine that there *is* a first cause, and yet that this is unknowable (not merely at present unknown), is the stumbling-block against which many a would-be follower of Mr. Spencer has stumbled. It has often been pointed out what a strange assumption it is for Mr. Spencer to make that;—God is unknowable, when he is prepared to predicate so many profound attributes—such as that the First Cause possesses causal energy, is eternal, is infinite, is inscrutable. The Rev. Jas. Iverach says, “when we gather together into one thought all that Mr. Spencer affirms regarding the ‘unknowable,’ we find that it is an omnipresent power, that it is incomprehensible, and that it is the proper object of religious reverence, and that we are ever in its presence and from it all things proceed. Truly we must come to the conclusion that the word ‘unknowable’ is used only in a Speucerian sense.”

I submit that for every branch of science there is an ultimate beyond which investigation seems unable to go, such as the organism for biology—the atom for chemistry—the ether for physics, and that every special scientist will acknowledge in his own department a remainder, often a very large one, of mystery. No theologian or metaphysician professes to deny that an immense remainder of mystery belongs also to his “ultimate”—which is a personal God. He may, however, just as well object to any teacher, however great, telling him his “ultimate” is “unknowable,” as the chemist if he be told that his atom, or the physicist that his ether is unknowable. We know God in measure and expect to know Him better even in this life. Mr. Iverach again asks :

"If a consciousness like Mr. Spencer's can do so much (as the construction and conception of the formula of evolution), what may not a greater consciousness effect?" And therefore why may not an originating mind bring into being and lay down for its governance an ordered universe? The originating mind Mr. Spencer stoutly denies, while admitting, as Archdeacon Sinclair has said, that Humanity has proceeded from the ultimate cause which he postulates.

We have as little reason for submitting to this summary taking away of the key of knowledge as would an astronomer, 70 years ago, before Leverrier and Adams, have submitted to be told that the causes, which were found to disturb the movements of the planet Uranus, were unknowable, though, very soon after, it was found that the hitherto unknown Neptune was the disturbing cause.

Surely no better argument for Theism is to be found than that of St. Paul: "The invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead." An argument summed up also by Kant in his well-known saying: "The starry heaven above me and the moral law within me." And by Gibbon: "The God of nature has written His existence on all His works and His law in the heart of man."

The CHAIRMAN.—If there are no others who wish to speak, I will ask you to join with me in a most hearty vote of thanks to Archdeacon Sinclair for this most valuable and interesting paper. There may be some diversity of opinion on the subject; but of the general force of his argument and of its value I am sure we can have no doubt.

The vote of thanks was then put to the meeting and carried unanimously.

The Ven. ARCHDEACON, in reply, said: There is very little that I want to say on the subject, except that I think we may all agree that men of science and philosophy, as a rule, when they are on the unbelieving side, put into the word "know" a restriction which we are not willing to concede to them. They use the word "know" in a scientific and demonstrative sense; and when we use the word "know" in a theological sense, we claim its use in the province of faith; and we are bound to admit, I think, in justice to science with all its restrictions, that the province of Faith and

the province of demonstration are not precisely the same. There is a line that may be drawn between them ; and we are very glad when we find men of science coming to the end of so-called scientific knowledge, or demonstration, obliged to draw on Faith. I believe that many men of science have to do so. I think we should bear that in mind that when in science they use the word "know," they use it as equivalent to having proved a fact by demonstration in mathematics or by personal observation. I think that discussion is important, and may help us a good deal in discussing these matters with men of science. We do not lay claim to the kind of demonstration that they claim. We agree that the province of Faith is a matter where we have to exercise what we consider the higher faculty of mind than that of a mere collection of facts and arguments upon them.

Evolution, I think, is often mixed up with natural selection. There may be evolution which has nothing to do with natural selection. There may be evolution which is strictly divine—the progress of God's creation and every one of its variations, as Darwin has properly pointed out, is due apparently to circumstances which are, in reality, the result of real fixed laws, quite as important as the great uniformities of nature—the particular species having been placed in their position by the Almighty, and subjected to the varying conditions of sun, heat and cold. Those are not blind forces ; but the results of God's laws, just as much as the grandest principle on which the universe is tied together. For my own part, I really cannot see anything in the least antagonistic in that belief to divine power, omnipotence and love, when properly understood.

I am much obliged to you for the kind way in which you have received my paper, and for Dr. Kidd's valuable illustration of the line I have adopted—also to those who dissent from me. If we all agreed, there would be no discussion at all. (Applause.)

The meeting then closed.

COMMUNICATIONS RECEIVED.

The Rev. F. A. WALKER, D.D., F.L.S., writes :—

In reference to Archdeacon Sinclair's paper, "On the Being of God," one cannot refrain from paying a well-deserved tribute to the deep spirit of devotion and reverence which breathes throughout, to the profoundness of thought by which it is characterized, to the wide research displayed by the author; and the knowledge which he exhibits of writers, sacred and profane, of prose as well as of poetry, of ancient as also of modern times. He has ably enlisted in his service quotations from the Pantheist and the Agnostic; he has fortified and established his arguments by adducing passages from philosophers who can hardly be regarded as upholders of Revelation. Of him, in fine, it may indeed be said that since, in the exercise of his sacred office, he became a dignitary of the cathedral church of our great city, in other words,

*Ἐπει τοῖς ιερον πολιέθρον ἔπερσεν
πολλων ἀνθρώπων νόου ἔγνω.*

I note that Rev. c. iv, v. 11, is quoted, and in respect of the clause, "For Thy pleasure they are, and were created,"—probably a more literal, and at the same time more correct, rendering of the original Greek than the one given in our Authorized Version would be. "Through (or by reason of) Thy will they exist and were created." Certain superficial readers and students of Holy Writ may otherwise fall into the error of imagining that the words mean "They are created, and were created." It may be objected that few are likely to be guilty of such a transparent blunder, but if it should be made, it gives colour to the theory of what has been termed "the subsequent Creation," and which, I contend, can neither be proved from the pages of Scripture, nor by the researches of modern scientists. On the other hand, the accurate translation, "By reason of Thy will they exist," is simply tantamount in signification to the declaration of another Apostle on Areiopagus, "In Him we live, and move, and have our being." But further, in the words that immediately follow St. John, v. 17, is also quoted, "My Father worketh hitherto." Now the only logical interpretation possible of these words is that the work of

the First Person of the Trinity is constantly being carried on throughout the centuries until the coming of the Son of God upon earth, and until the day when the Son of God uttered these words. It is a manifestation of the ceaseless activity of the everlasting "I Am" with whom is no past, and with whom equally there is no future. It is, in fact, to speak with the utmost reverence, the absolute realization, in fact, of the end which Aristotle would have all votaries of true wisdom seek after, an *ἐνέργεια ενώπιον παρουστή*.

There have not been wanting those who contended that as Revelation in the historical period covered by Holy Writ was essentially progressive from Moriah to Sinai, from Sinai to Tabor, from Tabor to Calvary, so there was a Revelation in after centuries progressive also. That as from each successive mountain peak an ever-widening vista was disclosed to view of the glory of our God, and at the same time of the Divine counsel and purpose of redemption as its fulfilment drew nigh, so the men of a later age were in their turn in a position to add to the things written in this book.

There have not been wanting those who contended that as creation may possibly have taken eons of years to accomplish with all its right marvellous works, its manifold manifestations, and its elaborate organization, so also the creation of new organic forms of life is continued during the comparatively recent period of man's existence on earth. Now if this assertion cannot be disproved, it is, believe me, equally hard, and probably a great deal more difficult to substantiate. We are all agreed as to the truth of our Lord's own declaration, "My Father worketh hitherto." The point at issue is that we maintain that the passage refers to another work entirely distinct from that of Creation, and that the upholders of "subsequent creation" claim that the coming into being of hitherto unknown forms of life has been going on since, and is even continued now.

Let it be granted that an interval of unknown duration, and it may be too vast for finite minds to grasp, took place between that beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, and the day when the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. That in the light of one primæval morn there was "a little rift within the lute," and that henceforward from a tiny cavity in the tide-washed boulders the musical echo of the far-

off surge was heard, dashing down once more to be reunited to its native deep, and that in that tiny cavity a few spores of a very elementary species of lichen, one of the lowest forms of all vegetation, settled. Long succeeding years may have intervened before the decomposition of that lichen and the accompanying disintegration of the surrounding rock were continued for a sufficient time to allow of the herb yielding seed within itself to gain a foothold and maintain a local habitation there. Multitudinous centuries may have separated the appearance of the *Eucalyptus* from the development of the more complex and elaborate foliage of the oak, the beech, and such trees as are better calculated to afford shade and rest and refreshment to various products and later manifestations of organic life. I can credit that long (I cannot say how long) ages separated the glacial and thermal periods of our own land, the days when the rocks of Snowdon were grooved by the descending glacier, and of which I have seen the marks in the present day. I reverently believe that *finis coronat opus*, and that though God is Almighty to make such addition, no such addition has been made to the number of existing species since "God saw everything that He had made, and, behold, it was very good."

The Rev. R. C. OULTON, B.D., Rector of Glynn, writes:—

This paper by the Archdeacon of London is valuable as drawing attention to common ground between those who hold the orthodox belief and those who diverge from it. But it appears to me that one passage in the paper (p. 8, No. 5) is open to criticism. The passage runs thus: "When they say that the Infinite and Eternal Power that is manifested in every pulsation of the Universe is none other than the manifestation of the Living God, but that He is unknowable in the scientific sense of knowledge, we reply that such an answer is precisely what we expect to hear. It was the Son of God Himself who said that *no man hath seen God at any time*. To the eye of Faith alone He is visible."

Now, I cannot help thinking the Archdeacon's answer fails to meet the point of the agnostics' objection. That God is not level to the understanding—just what we believe—in a scientific sense, is, to my mind, not an assertion of our opponents. Rather their thesis is that there is *no personal God*, mysterious in His nature and attributes, "in the scientific sense." On the contrary we hold that there *is* such a personal God, though He is not cognizable by

the senses. The late Professor Tyndall in endeavouring to account for primal forms of matter, said that he supposed there was a "Thing" or Force in nature that would account for the origin of such forms. Thus it would appear that the question between us is not the mysteriousness of God, but His *personal existence at all* in "a scientific sense." With this solitary exception, I think the Archdeacon's paper a valuable one.