

# Theology on the Web.org.uk

*Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible*

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

**PayPal**

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

---

A table of contents for *Journal of the Transactions of the Victoria Institute* can be found here:

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_jtvi-01.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_jtvi-01.php)

JOURNAL OF  
THE TRANSACTIONS  
OF  
The Victoria Institute,  
OR,  
Philosophical Society of Great Britain.

---

VOL. LX.



LONDON:

(Published by the Institute, 1, Central Buildings, Westminster, S.W.1.)

---

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

1928

711TH ORDINARY GENERAL MEETING,  
HELD IN COMMITTEE ROOM B, THE CENTRAL HALL,  
WESTMINSTER, S.W.1, ON MONDAY, APRIL 2ND, 1928,  
AT 4.30 P.M.

ALFRED W. OKE, ESQ., LL.M., F.G.S., IN THE CHAIR.

The Minutes of the previous Meeting were read, confirmed, and signed. Lieut.-Col. HOPE BIDDULPH, in the absence of the Hon. Secretary, announced the election of the following as Members:—Henry W. Beedham, Esq., M.A., M.D., B.Ch., and Mrs. Katherine A. Beedham.

The CHAIRMAN then called on Mr. Avary H. Forbes, M.A., a Member of Council, to read his paper on "Science in the Book of Ecclesiastes."

---

*SCIENCE IN THE BOOK OF ECCLESIASTES.*

By AVARY H. FORBES, M.A.,

Author of "The Tree of Knowledge," etc.

SCIENCE has been defined as "organized knowledge." That is surely a vague phrase. I would rather define it as "the reduction of facts to law." As soon as you begin to discover laws underlying facts or phenomena, you are scientific.

Ancient science was mainly deductive—that is, jumping at conclusions, and then making the facts fit in with the preconceived conclusion. They jumped, for instance, at the conclusion that the earth was at rest, that it was the centre of the Universe, and that the sun, the planets and the stars revolved around it. This jumping at a conclusion, however, could only be done after making a number—perhaps a large number—of observations; possibly also after making a few crude experiments. At the present day, when observations and experiments are very much

more numerous and elaborate, there is also often a great deal of the jumping at conclusions process still. The case of Darwinian Evolution seems one in point. Though the experiments and observations on the physical side have been extremely numerous, it is admitted that no proof has been forthcoming to show that Evolution is in actual operation around us ; while the moral side, which flatly contradicts the theory, is practically boycotted by the scientists. Evolution, then, is a speculation merely ; in other words, a conclusion jumped at.

Ethical and metaphysical facts have laws underlying them, equally with physical facts ; and they, therefore, come under the term "science." And so at some of our Universities, the students can graduate in what is termed in the calendar "Mental and Moral Science." On the subject of metaphysics, it may safely be said that the philosophers have discovered nothing. What comes nearest to a discovery is perhaps the Idealism of Berkeley ; but so far from that good Bishop claiming novelty for his discovery, he frequently appeals to the man in the street—"the plain man," as he calls him—for confirmation of his teaching.

In psychology it may be that philosophers have made some partial discoveries, though even that is a doubtful proposition. In ethics, or moral science, they certainly have not been more successful than in metaphysics. "We know," wrote Burke, "that *we* have made no discoveries, and we think that no discoveries are to be made, in morality." The Bible is, in fact, the only book that makes great and real discoveries in that subject, as everyone who has been truly enlightened by the Holy Spirit will admit. The agnostic, with the unregenerate man, will deny this statement ; but in doing so he is unconsciously confirming the truth of Scripture, which distinctly says that the "natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God ; for they are foolishness unto him ; neither can he know them because they are spiritually discerned."

It is often asserted that the physical science of the Bible is all wrong ; and the usual answer is, that the Bible was not written to teach science. Both statements, as thus worded, I regard as incorrect. The *speculations* of scientists (their jumping at conclusions) are often contradicted by Scripture ; but I know of no clearly established *fact* of science with which Scripture is at variance.

I also maintain that there are parts of Scripture which *were*

written to teach science ; and, further, that those parts teach correct science, and science up to date, and in many cases beyond what the majority of people are familiar with. The two outstanding books in this respect are, I think, the *Book of Job* and the *Book of Ecclesiastes*. There was an excellent paper on science in the Book of Job read here some two years ago, bringing out a number of scientific facts which were commonly believed to be modern discoveries. I am going to attempt something similar in the case of *Ecclesiastes* ; but I shall not feel prohibited from making excursions into any other parts of Scripture, should it seem advisable. Let me divide science (for the occasion) into Moral, Economic and Physical.

1. *Moral Science*.—Except in the case of a few—a very few—Oriental monarchs, there were no individuals in former times to correspond to the millionaires of the present day. Nowadays it is not monarchs but subjects who are millionaires, and these indeed are quite numerous. This is the result of an ingrained factor of human nature. A generous-minded and wealthy merchant was interviewing one of his clerks who had got into money difficulties through misfortune. “ Well,” said the merchant at last, “ what would really set your mind at rest in the matter—what would make you happy about it ? ” “ Why, sir,” replied the clerk, “ if I had a hundred pounds I should be perfectly happy.” “ Then you shall have it,” said the merchant, and, writing out a cheque for the amount, he gave it to the clerk. The latter, after expressing his profound gratitude to his principal, retired ; and on passing out, he told his fellow-clerks how he had fared. “ Oh, you lucky dog ! ” they exclaimed. “ Yes, am I not ? ” replied the clerk, “ but I wish I had said two hundred pounds.” That is human nature up to date. When a man has made a £100 a year he wants to make £200, and then £500. When he has made £500 he wants to make £1,000, when he has made £1,000 he wants to make £10,000, then he wants to make £50,000, then £100,000, then he wants to be a millionaire, and when he is a millionaire he wants to be the greatest millionaire in the world.

Among the ancients barter was largely practised, for there was far less money than there is with us. And, therefore, a saying of Juvenal’s has been fastened on and made a proverb, as displaying a profound insight into human nature, and as far more applicable now than ever it was : “ The love of money increases as much as the money itself increases ” (“ *Crescit amor nummi*

quantum ipsa pecunia crevit.”—*Sat.* 14, 139). The wise man, however, expressed exactly the same sentiment many centuries before Juvenal: “He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver, nor he that loveth abundance with increase” (*ch.* v, 10).

When I was a boy I never heard of such a thing as a nervous breakdown. There probably were such cases, but they were certainly extremely few compared with those of the present day. That indeed is not to be wondered at, considering the strenuousness of our congested city life, and the struggle to get rich quickly. But that the malady should affect Christian workers is a much more novel phenomenon, yet very common at the present day. Nearly every popular preacher has a breakdown at some time or another. Most of them have several; and probably the lives of the majority of them are shortened by the strain of fulfilling their engagements. Numerous laymen, too, class-leaders, deaconesses, Bible-women, missionaries, and other Christian workers suffer from severe heart-strain, and sometimes pay the extreme penalty. The mischief, I suppose, existed in the time of Solomon, yet I think it must have been more for our sakes that he wrote that warning: “Be not righteous over much . . . why shouldest thou destroy thyself?” (*ch.* vii, 16).

Modern Germany is a nation of great scholars—philosophers, psychologists, metaphysicians, etc. They have also shone in oriental lore, philology, archæology, etc. But the Germans are said to be peculiarly lacking in wit and humour; they have no Cervantes, no Rabelais, Voltaire or Le Sage; no Swift, Addison, Sheridan, Dickens or Thackeray. Nor in this country do I think that *Punch* draws its chief support in wit and humour from the learned Professors of our Universities! Erudition has indeed a depressing effect on the spirits, and great scholars have often acknowledged this. Our poetry abounds with this sad, but inevitable, truth. Listen to Wordsworth’s confession:—

“Heaven lies about us in our infancy!  
Shades of the prison house begin to close upon the growing boy.”

“The sunshine is a glorious birth;  
But yet I know, where’er I go,  
That there hath passed away a glory from the earth. . . .”

“Those obstinate questionings  
Of sense and outward things,  
Fallings from us, vanishings; . . .  
High instincts before which our mortal nature  
Did tremble like a guilty thing surprised.”

Coleridge echoes it likewise :—

“ When I was young ? Ah ! woeful when !  
Ah ! for the change ’twixt Now and Then ! ”

Tennyson echoes it. He was no longer a boy when he wrote *Locksley Hall*, and in that poem pessimism and optimism jostle each other, but optimism plainly predominates : he was

“ Yearning for the large excitement which the coming years would yield,  
Eager-hearted as a boy when first he leaves his father’s field . . . ”  
“ Not in vain the distance beacons. Forward, forward let us range ;  
Let the great world spin for ever down the ringing grooves of change.”

In *Locksley Hall—Sixty Years After* there is a palpable change :

“ Hope the best, but hold the present fatal daughter of the past,  
Shape your heart to front the hour, but dream not that the hour  
will last.

\* \* \* \* \*

‘ Forward ’ rang the voices then, and of the many mine was one.  
Let us hush this cry of ‘ Forward ’ till ten thousand years have  
gone . . .

Ay, for doubtless I am old, and think gray thoughts, for I am gray :  
After all the stormy changes shall we find a changeless May ? ”

The whole poem is full of it.

Unquestionably learning increases this pessimistic frame by presenting to the mind fresh “ riddles of destiny,” fresh problems that we cannot solve. To support such a burden requires a strong will and a well-balanced brain. This poor Cowper had not, and the weight of the burden drove him, on no less than six occasions, to attempt suicide, and left him at the last demented. If Bunyan had been as learned as Cowper, we should never have had *The Pilgrim’s Progress*. Milton was a very learned man, and there is a complete absence of wit and humour in his writings, while his later poems were far more serious and sober than his earlier ones. Dr. Johnson was a very learned man, and everyone familiar with his life knows what fits of melancholy he suffered from in his later years. George Eliot was a very learned woman, and she was something of a martyr to melancholy. At the age of forty she wrote : “ The weight of the future presses on me, and makes itself felt even more than the deep satisfaction of the

past and present." Her biographer, Leslie Stephen, tells us that "Each of George Eliot's novels was the product of a kind of spiritual agony"; and, later on, "She was," he says, "as usual, tormented by hopelessness and melancholy." At the age of sixty-one she married Mr. Cross, and speaks about this as a "wonderful blessing." "But, deep down below, there is a river of sadness; but this must always be with those who have lived long." (*English Men of Letters.*)

Such cases might be cited almost *ad infinitum*, and probably I may seem to be only "breaking a butterfly upon the wheel." The evil was no doubt felt in Solomon's time; but how much more applicable to our time, how thoroughly up to date are the Preacher's words: "In much wisdom is much grief; and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow" (*ch. i, 18*).

*Ecclesiastes* is sometimes labelled as the composition of a pessimist. But the fact is that it is true to human nature, and there is also a rare vein of *prophecy* in it. What Matthew Arnold said of poetry is as applicable to *Ecclesiastes* as it is inapplicable to poetry, viz., that it is a "criticism of life." Pessimism varies much in individuals, but we may take it as a general truth that the older we grow, the more pessimistic we become. This is almost capable of demonstration, for the mind reveals itself in the face. Consider the countenance of a person whom you have not seen for fifteen or twenty years; you will find that the expression has changed for the worse. I have often noticed this in a series of photographs of the same person, taken at intervals of ten or twenty years. The wrinkles are multiplied, and the furrows are deeper. The eyebrows are thicker, and they never fall off (as the other hair does); and this gives a harsher, darker, or more stern expression to the face. Altogether the bright eye and the cheerful smile of youth has degenerated into a frown, or a look of pain, or, at least, into an expression of sad sobriety. The causes of this are obvious. Death is one; every one who lives to be old has more graves than friends to look after. But the chief cause, I think, is the more extended knowledge of human nature and of oneself. "The history of the world is its condemnation": the history of the individual is also *his* condemnation, and, therefore, the more we learn of both histories the sadder we are bound to become. Sometimes the daily papers are industrious enough to supply us with a series of such graduated portraits of eminent men, and they are always a striking confirmation of the fact I am seeking to establish.

One more observation before leaving the moral aspect of the question. Dr. A. Shadwell, writing in *The Times* (January 28th, 1928), called attention to the fact that man is the only animal that is cruel for the sake of being cruel, that inflicts pain for the pleasure of doing so. He illustrates this fact by referring to recent Soviet cruelties in China: "It is not merely massacre, but massacre with fiendish delight in cruelty, and in gloating over the agonies of the victims . . . with new refinements of cruelties, before they were allowed to die . . . We talk of such conduct as inhuman, but it is essentially and peculiarly human." Beasts, he reminds us, inflict great pain on each other, and kill each other without remorse; "but they do not inflict pain for the sake of inflicting it." Moreover, they are not "cannibals"; they do not prey on their own kind, "they leave that to man . . . A cat plays with a mouse, as a thing that runs; and is equally ready to play with a leaf or anything else that will run. It does not rejoice in the pain caused, of which it knows nothing. The position of a man who deliberately inflicts pain is totally different. He knows what he is doing, and that is why he does it." We call his cruelty "brutal," but that is a libel upon the brutes; the brutes are not guilty of such conduct at all.

The ape is a non-combative, harmless, fruit-eating animal; if, then, man be descended from the ape, when, where, or how did he acquire his fiendish propensities? The record of human nature leaves us nothing to boast of, and everything to be ashamed of—seeing that, after the Fall in Eden, man has degenerated so woefully. According to Evolution, however, this is a *process still going on*. And if this is what a million years of Evolution has made man into, what will another million years make him into? The convinced Evolutionist, who really thinks out the matter, ought to be the most horror-stricken pessimist in the world.

When will the scientist fairly and squarely face this moral problem, instead of ignoring it or flying from it? For it is of far greater importance than the physical problem. While, according to his own teaching, the whole creation is threatened with a fearful tempest of fire and brimstone, the Evolutionist hides his head in the sand, and, busying himself with bones and teeth, declares that these things promise an eternity of power, happiness, and virtue!

2. *Economic Science*.—"Back to the land!" is a familiar cry of the present day. With the increase of machinery and factory life, cities have grown into a bloated and factitious importance.

and for millions of persons life has been entirely changed. Men, however, are beginning to rediscover the value of land and the country. Political economists are calling attention to its vital importance to all classes. They bid us look around in the room where we are, and see how everything comes out of the land—the bricks, the stones, the lime, the sand, the metals, the glass, the paper, the woodwork, and even the clothes we wear; the cotton and the linen growing on the land, and the silk and wool from animals entirely dependent on the land. Thousands of years before, however, the wise man had made a similar pronouncement, when he said: “The profit of the earth is for all; the king himself is served by the field” (*ch. v, 9*).

Modern political economists are also agreed on the discovery of a profoundly important economic law, namely, that the increased production of wealth is always accompanied by an increase of population, which soon destroys the initial benefit. Here are J. S. Mill's words: “According to all experience, a great increase invariably takes place in the number of marriages in seasons of cheap food and full employment . . . Let them work ever so efficiently, the increase in population could not, as we have so often shown, increase the produce proportionately” (*Political Economy, II, 11.2, and II, 12.2*).

But here again the wise man was thousands of years in front of our philosophers, for did he not announce the same economic law when he said: “When goods increase, they are increased that eat them” (*ch. v, 11*)?

3. *Physical Science*.—The indestructibility of matter and motion is another great modern discovery of science. Physicists tell us that an object once set in motion will go on moving for ever, unless interfered with by something else; and that, in the case of stoppage or hindrance, the object's motion is not destroyed, but is communicated to the hindering body, either in the form of motion, or heat, and so on *ad infinitum*. Matter, in like manner, is found to be indestructible, irreducible, and unaugmentable. Gases, liquids, and carbon may go from an animal to a vegetable substance, from a vegetable to a mineral, from a mineral to the atmosphere, and back to a mineral or vegetable again; and so on everlastingly, but not one atom is ever lost, increased, or diminished. Here, again, our wonderful “discovery” was anticipated by the Scriptures thousands of years ago: “I know that, whatsoever God doeth, it shall be for ever; nothing can be put to it, nor anything taken from it” (*ch. iii, 14*).

I have asked many educated persons if they could explain the law of the winds. A few understood that the winds were caused by the sun's heat producing diversity of temperature in the earth's atmosphere, but I never could get a clear explanation of the theory which investigation has proved to be the true one. My hearers will pardon me for stating the process simply. The principle is exactly the same as that of a room with a fire in it. The fire heats the chimney ; the heated air ascends the chimney ; to supply its place cold air comes in through door or window, or wherever it can (or else the fire goes out). This cold air makes for the chimney and becomes heated ; it ascends, becomes cold again outside, mixing with the atmosphere, which again has to supply the heated room. And so a regular circuit is kept up continually. Now, in the case of the earth, the tropics are the chimney of the world. There the air is hottest, and there it ascends continually. To supply the place of this ascending air at the Equator, and to prevent a vacuum, cold air must come in from the Poles, causing a continuous current of wind from the South Pole and the North Pole. These currents, on approaching the Equator, in turn gradually become warm, then hot, and in due course they likewise ascend. And to prevent a vacuum at the North Pole and the South Pole, they, on ascending to a great height, travel *back*, part towards the North and part towards the South, cooling as they go, only to be again drawn towards the Equator and made to repeat the same revolution. This process would require a good many long words to describe it scientifically, but the Preacher has hit it off in very simple language : " The wind goeth toward the South, and turneth about unto the North ; it whirleth about continually, and the wind returneth again, according to his circuits " (*ch.* i. 6). The preacher was in the Northern Hemisphere, and therefore he would speak of the North current in particular ; but he speaks of " circuits " in the plural, there being two great circuit systems.

Some people might object that, according to this theory, we should have a continuous North wind in the Northern Hemisphere and a continuous South wind in the Southern Hemisphere all the year round. So of course we should, were the earth homogeneous—all water or all land, all sand or all forest, etc. ; were it all of the same altitude—no valleys and no mountains ; and above all, were the earth at rest, we should have nothing but two winds, the North and the South all the year round. As it is, the two great circuits are, in most parts of the world, interrupted and

modified by these conditions. On the ocean within the tropics these "trade winds" (as they are called) are exceedingly regular.

Another great fact in physical geography is, that water obeys similar circuit laws. Evaporation is greatest in the tropics. There principally, but everywhere more or less, the water is sucked up by the heat of the sun and is carried about by the wind, until, meeting with a colder atmosphere, the moisture is condensed and precipitated on the earth in the form of rain. Thus it rejoins the ocean, or, falling on mountains, valleys, plains, etc., collects into rills, rivulets, streams, and rivers, eventually reaching some lake or the sea; where it is drawn up again by the heat of the sun, to repeat the same process continually. Here again the Preacher has forestalled our physical geographies: "All the rivers run into the sea; yet the sea is not full; unto the place from whence the rivers come, thither they return again" (*ch. i, 7*).

This leads me to a final remark, namely, on the Weather. If we ask a meteorologist, or any man of science, how the weather is caused, the answer will be, that the weather is the natural and necessary result of certain fixed causes which are perfectly well known. And probably most men of science, and not a few earnest Christian people, think that to pray for rain or for fine weather, or for any change of weather, is to ask God to suspend the laws of Nature, and is therefore wrong. Nowhere, I suppose, is cause and effect taken for granted as ruling absolutely more than in climate and the weather.

Now I am audacious enough to join issue on this view. I maintain that *no* connection can be shown between the weather-changes and their so-called causes; and in this, I believe, I have not only Scripture but facts behind me. The regularity of the *Seasons* is promised in Scripture, but not regularity in the weather. What are the causes to which the weather is attributed? The chief are the sun, its size, heat and distance; the earth, its size, its diurnal rotation, its annual revolution, its polar obliquity and its elliptical orbit. The character of the earth's surface, too, has its say in the matter—masses of land and their altitude, masses of water, forests, mountains, deserts, etc., modify the climate. Now, except to a negligible extent, all these are fixed and permanent. Forests may be cut down, marshes drained, deserts flooded, etc., and the climate thereby slightly altered. But these facts do not touch the problem; for once done, such changes are permanent, and the weather should correspond.

Now, according to the "laws of cause and effect," the weather

should be the same exactly *on the anniversary of every day in the year*, for the conditions are the same.

On June 21st, 1919, I find by a note I made, that we had showers of hailstones. I am pretty sure that on June 21st, 1918, and June 21st, 1920, the weather was totally different. But if the weather obeys fixed laws, how is it that, *the conditions being exactly the same*, the weather on anniversary days is not the same? It is often the very opposite. One day is hot and cloudless, and its anniversary cold and wet. The weather of no day can be relied on as a guide to the weather on its anniversary. Nor can the weather of any week, or even the general weather of any month, be thus relied on. East winds are sometimes confined to a portion of March; they sometimes begin in January or February, and last through March, and April, and May, and even into June and July, as they did in 1919. Sometimes March is a lovely sunny month; sometimes it is chilly, wet and stormy. Sometimes May is fairly uniform in its conditions; sometimes it is a collection of weather samples of every kind. Sometimes December is bitterly cold and frosty; sometimes it is so mild that primroses may be seen blossoming. In the early days of March this year (1928) we had glorious summer weather. The *Morning Post* for March 5th said: "Yesterday was a miracle of early March; it was indeed the hottest day this year." Four days later, on leaving our homes in the morning, we found the country *covered with snow!* It was snowing hard, and hailing, and freezing later on.

Even in tropical countries like India, where the weather is, on the whole, extremely uniform, there is sometimes a terrible change, giving rise to famine and great loss of life. What causes the failure at times of the Indian monsoons? No one can tell us.

We have been taught for centuries that the weather obeys fixed laws. If so, one would think we ought to know enough about them now to prognosticate at least the great and fateful variations that take place.

I know that some meteorologists talk about sun-spots and weather cycles, etc. But these are guesses and of no practical value; they are only a euphemistic way of confessing that they cannot account for the changes. As a matter of fact, beyond a period of three or four days, *Old Moore's Almanac* is just as useful a weather guide as meteorology.

I do not mean to belittle Meteorology, or those who study it: far from it. It is quite right that we should try and "discern the

face of the sky"; but that is all we can do. It is very useful to have stations on the Atlantic seaboard, for instance, to telegraph to us when westerly gales are coming our way. But how, and when, and where those *originate* they cannot tell us. "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh and whither it goeth," is as true as ever. The "Weather Forecasts" are a mere matter of *signalling*, and even as signals they are only approximately reliable; for a cyclone or anti-cyclone, travelling west (for instance) across the Atlantic, may be diverted or dispersed long before reaching Europe. Scientists, therefore, are entirely helpless in endeavouring to account for the weather changes which we have, or in foretelling those which are in store for us.

Now, all through Scripture the weather is spoken of as sent by God for reward or punishment. Rain and sunshine, fruitful seasons and desolating droughts, are referred to as God-given, according to the behaviour of the inhabitants of the land. And it seems to me that that is so still.

To *obedient* Israel God said: "I will give you the rain of your land in his due season, the first rain and the latter rain, that thou mayest gather in thy corn" (*Deut.* xi, 14). "I will give you rain in due season, and the land shall yield her increase, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruits" (*Lev.* xxvi, 4). "I will cause the shower to come down in his season; there shall be showers of blessing" (*Ezek.* xxxiv, 26). "He hath given you the former rain moderately, and he will cause to come down for you rain, the former rain and the latter rain in the first month" (*Joel* ii, 23). "Thou, O God, didst send the plentiful rain, whereby thou didst confirm thine inheritance, when it was weary" (*Psa.* lxxviii, 9). "The Lord shall open unto thee His good treasure, the heaven to give the rain unto thy land in His season" (*Deut.* xxviii, 12). "Ask ye of the Lord rain in the time of the latter rain; so the Lord shall make bright clouds, and give showers of rain, to everyone grass in the field" (*Zech.* x, 1).

To *disobedient* Israel God said: "I will punish you seven times more for your sins . . . and I will make your heaven as iron, and your earth as brass" (*Lev.* xxvi, 18, 19). "If I shut up Heaven that there be no rain" (*2 Chron.* vii, 13). "When the Heaven is shut up, and there is no rain, because they have sinned against thee; yet if they pray towards this place . . . then hear thou from Heaven, and forgive . . . and send rain upon thy land" (*2 Chron.* vi, 26 and 27). "Yet have ye not returned

unto Me, saith the Lord, and also I have withholden the rain from you" (*Amos* iv, 6 and 7). "Whoso will not come up of all the families of the earth into Jerusalem to worship the King the Lord of Hosts, even upon them shall be no rain" (*Zech.* xiv, 17). And with all this the words in the Book of Job entirely agree, when, speaking of the rain, we read: "He causeth it to come, whether for correction, or for His land, or for mercy" (*Job* xxxvii, 13). Passages like these might be multiplied, and it is the same in the New Testament (see *Acts* xiv, 17; *Matt.* v, 45).

Unquestionably there have been great changes of climate in certain countries, and these changes have produced great political consequences. Mesopotamia was once the most fertile country in the world. Herodotus tells us that its crops yielded four-hundredfold profit! Palestine used to be extremely fertile; and Isaac, we are told, reaped one-hundredfold (*Gen.* xxvi, 12). Yet in later times it became so poor and barren, that Voltaire and other infidels denied that Judea could ever have supported the great and numerous cities which history tells us once flourished there.

How God would work in such a case we saw in 1911. In that year we had a terrible drought in these islands, which had far-reaching effects, and which should teach us how greatly dependent we are upon the weather for our national well-being. First, the grass and all green crops were very scanty, so that the cattle, sheep and other live-stock deteriorated. The corn was burnt up, and horses and poultry suffered greatly. Very many cattle had to be killed, as the root crops were not sufficient to feed them through the winter. Milk was in consequence short in quantity and poor in quality. Cheese and butter fared similarly, and child-life suffered all over the country. The long-continued heat, moreover, produced multitudinous insects, grubs, and garden pests, which left their eggs in the soil and in the bark of the trees, and proved very destructive in the following year. The unaccustomed heat had also a bad effect on human health, weakening the physical powers when they were most needed. In fact, a few more seasons like that would have spelt ruin for the nation.

Yes, the *Book of Ecclesiastes* is a great "criticism of life," and a great prophecy as well. It looks forward to the Dispensation of Grace, and of Salvation through the death of Christ, as revealed in the New Testament, bringing life and immortality to light through the Gospel. How so? There are in the New Testament new commandments. One is that God "commandeth all men

everywhere to repent." Another is, "A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another." Another is, "I know that his commandment is life everlasting." Inseparably linked with this Gospel of God's Grace is the final verdict of Ecclesiastes, addressed to all—to pessimist and optimist alike:—"Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and **KEEP HIS COMMANDMENTS**: for this is the whole duty of man" (*ch. xii, 13*).

#### DISCUSSION.

The Rev. J. J. B. COLES remarked that Mr. Forbes's paper was a very interesting one. His application of the lessons to be learnt from Ecclesiastes were singularly useful. As to the interpretation of the book, which very many have found a difficult matter, it was well to notice that the "pessimism" referred to the things "under the sun." The Creation had been subjected to "vanity," but it would be delivered from the bondage of corruption. The wisdom given to the Apostle Paul, and the revelation of the future glories of Christ's Kingdom in the New Testament, should be before our hearts when we are in difficulties in reading the Book of Ecclesiastes.

Mr. W. E. LESLIE said: One cannot but admire the literary qualities of this paper. There are, however, one or two references to scientific matters which call for comment. It is difficult to understand the author's doubt as to whether any progress has been made in psychology—when research and discovery have been so prolific that we have almost witnessed the rise of a new science since the days of the old "faculty psychology."

Turning to p. 182, is it certain to-day that matter is indestructible? We know that atoms are subject to change and decay. With regard to the science of meteorology, does not the author's argument assume that at the end of a year, all the complicated processes set up by the movement of the earth, etc., will have arrived at the condition in which they were at the commencement of the cycle? This, of course, is not the case. The second cycle starts with a large number of modified factors. I fail, however, to see why we should

be anxious to discover an untidy spot for God in the universe. Our God is a God of order, and His universe is orderly. This by no means precludes the intercourse of a free Creator with his creatures.

Mr. PERCY O. RUOFF said: This extremely interesting lecture is marked as much by lucidity as by literary charm. The law of the winds, as illustrated by a fire in a room, is vivid and arresting, and a happy figure. Perhaps Professor Forbes goes beyond the bounds of fact in saying that parts of Scripture were written to teach science. For my part, I should prefer to speak with greater reserve, and say that the Bible undoubtedly records a number of scientific facts.

On p. 178, the interpretation of the words "Be not righteous over much" does not appear to fit in with its setting. Lord Bacon propounded the view that it was the "vain affectation" of righteousness which Solomon had in mind. It may be that what is referred to is over-scrupulousness in secondary matters. But it obviously cannot mean that a person can be too righteous or too holy, for the Bible makes constant appeal for whole-heartedness.

Again, with regard to knowledge increasing sorrow, it is necessary to ask "What knowledge?" Surely not spiritual knowledge—knowledge of God and the revelation of His Word, for it is true that "The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day."

The argument of Mr. Forbes that a change for the worse is seen in the human face as age advances, is not normally true as regards Christians. Long fellowship with God, and experience of spiritual things, mellows the expression, and produces true beauty, attractive tenderness, and grace in the countenance.

The argument about the weather is well presented. With reference to prayer about weather, there is a story told about a prayer-meeting in which there was constant prayer that fine weather might be given on the day fixed for the annual excursion. A scholar in the Sunday School, with the insight of a philosopher, said to his mother, "Mother, why don't they pray to God to lead them to choose a day which will be fine?"

Mr. D. RAMSAY SMITH said: I should like to thank Mr. Avary Forbes for his faithful handling of the physical facts taught us through Solomon. The beautiful cycle by which the living God supplies

our needs for fresh water on the land—by evaporation and elimination of salt from the water of the ocean, and carrying it in His sealed clouds to the spot where the earth awaits its benediction—has been a real tonic to many seekers after God's truth, in Nature as in Grace.

The circulation of the blood in our bodies, as discovered by William Harvey, and the invention of the surface condenser observed by James Watt—the latter to condense the steam generated in his boilers, and put it in again (after it had done work in his engines) to be regenerated once more—were great revelations in their day. Both these men, I believe, got the circular idea from the Bible through Solomon. The teaching of cycles, viz., progression by retrogression, has not yet come to its own.

Given an Immutable God, whose works were finished from the foundation of the world, involves in its conception a working out in cycles and *not* on a straight line ahead. Matter is not self-existent, neither are laws. All matter is conserved by God; equally so is all energy; and again all life.

A circle is the emblem of ETERNITY—it has neither beginning nor end. If this is true (and all sound evidence is in its favour), there is absolutely no room for the disgruntled and factless theory termed “the evolution of man.” God gets His Glory from each individual “life.” Man is too poor to buy it, and God is too rich to sell it. Life is the gift of God; He gives it suddenly, and takes it suddenly. “All are of the dust, and all turn to dust again. Who knoweth the spirit of man that goeth upward, and the spirit of the beast that goeth downward to the earth?” (Eccles. iii, 20 and 21.)

“I know that, whatsoever God doeth, it shall be for ever: nothing can be put to it, nor any thing taken from it: and God doeth it, that men should fear before Him. That which hath been is now; and that which is to be hath already been; and God requireth that which is past.” (Eccles. iii, 14 and 15.)

Lieut.-Col. SKINNER said: I find myself in such complete agreement with the lecturer, that I have no comment to offer, though, if I may, I would be glad to supplement what he has said as to the teaching of science in the Bible. He has referred specially to two books, Job and Ecclesiastes, as inculcating science; I would like to add the book of Genesis.

In the second chapter we are told that God brought the creatures to Adam to see what he would call them ; and, whatever name Adam gave them, that was the name thereof. Here, I am convinced, we have the very beginning of scientific classification ; elementary, no doubt, but sufficient for a beginning ; and the, to me, significant fact about it is that it shows that God intended man to be scientific : having endowed him with a brain, an intellect, He meant him to utilize it to the full, and that, moreover, notwithstanding the seeming paradox of having already forbidden him, under pain of death, to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil.

At the same place we read that, with that one exception, permission was given man to eat freely of every tree of the garden, the permission, therefore, including the tree of life in the midst of the garden, from its location perhaps the most accessible of all.

In the third chapter of Genesis we have the subtle question of Satan : “ Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree ? . . . Ye shall not surely die ; for God doth know that in the day that ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.” With knowledge comes discernment, and, when able of yourselves to choose the good and avoid the evil, the world is at your feet, and nothing shall be impossible to you. Gods you will become. And man fell into the trap, little knowing that knowledge of evil brought no power to withstand it.

Then followed the fall, the arraignment, and the eviction from Paradise, lest, having tasted rebellion, if man were now to take of the tree of life, he would, like a bad negative once fixed, become unalterably bad, incurably evil ; in fact, a devil. Thus was his exclusion planned in infinite mercy ; and even so, not before a promise had first been given of salvation through the seed of the woman who should bruise the serpent’s head.

Thus in disobedience man chose knowledge and lost the life, and my thought is that, had he honoured God in trustful obedience and meanwhile taken of the tree of life as he was free to do, in due time, perhaps after further probation, God would have released to him even the tree of knowledge and would have trained him from the outset to co-operate with Himself in His purposes in the world. But, alas ! he preferred the pride of intellect, the light of reason, to life of the soul.

But when, in fullness of time, came the promised Redeemer, we are told of Him that "In Him was LIFE, and the Life was the Light of men." In Eden man chose light and lost life. In Christ we take Him as our life, and the light follows; "For, with Thee is the fountain of life, and in Thy light shall we see light." Thus it seems to me that, where, generally speaking, to-day scientists are seeking after knowledge in independence of God, they err, and are bound to go wrong, since, to ransack the universe for material facts while disregarding the facts of Faith, is to ignore the prerequisite of all true knowledge—the fear of the Lord, which is the beginning of wisdom—and to exclude the operation of the Holy Spirit, who alone can guide us into all truth and save us from error.

#### THE LECTURER'S REPLY.

I wish Mr. Leslie had given some examples of the "prolific discoveries" made in psychology. Some scientists have, I know, invented new labels for old goods, and seem to think that this amounts to a new science. Swift reminds us that the Scholiasts were sorely exercised over the discovery of a mouse with a beak, a lamb with five legs, or some such monstrosity. They could not place it in any category, till one of their number suggested that it was a *lusus naturæ*. This solution, which explained everything, delighted them.

This, it seems to me, is what our modern psychologists have done. In a series of papers in the *Morning Post* (March and April, 1926) Dr. Percy Dearmer explained the new psychology. The miracles were once regarded as the chief proof of Christianity; but, after the rise of modern science, they became the great obstacle to its acceptance. "Advanced thinkers said they could only accept a non-miraculous Christianity. . . . Now all this is being changed," and the miracles "have already received a scientific explanation." How was this done? Simply by inventing a new vocabulary!

When Zacharias was temporarily struck dumb (St. Luke i, 22), this, Dr. Dearmer, informs us, was a case of "*Aphasia*," i.e. "incapacity of coherent utterance, not caused by structural impairment of the vocal organs."

When Christ healed the centurion's servant without visiting the

patient (St. Matt. viii, 13), it was simply a case of *Telepathy*, or "communication of thought independently of the channels of sense."

When Christ saw Nathanael under the fig-tree, and when He told the Samaritan woman that she had had five husbands (St. John i, 48, and iv, 18), it was a case of *Telæsthesia*, or "perception at a distance."

When the Lord foretold Peter's denial (St. Matt. xxvi, 34), it was a case of *Prevision*.

The man who had the Legion of demons (St. Luke viii, 27) was an instance of *Possession*, "A condition in which the subject's personality disappears for a time, while there is a more or less complete substitution of some secondary or foreign personality."

Christ and Peter walking on the water (St. Matt. xiv) was an example of *Levitation*, "How natural it was," adds Dr. Dearmer, "that Peter should fail as soon as he lost the necessary psychic conditions!"

Could any explanations of the miraculous be more original, satisfactory or scientific!

To Mr. Ruoff I should explain that the "knowledge" discommended in Scripture is always, I think, secular knowledge. True wisdom, as Archbishop Trench remarks, "is never in Scripture dissociated from moral goodness."

I thank the speakers one and all for their remarks, and for the fresh light they have thrown on the subject.