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NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

# DARWIN ON GOD

BY

G. W. FOOTE.

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ONLY a few feet from the tomb of Sir Isaac Newton, in Westminster Abbey, lie the bones of Charles Darwin. The two men are worthy compeers in the scientific roll of fame. Newton's discovery and establishment of the law of Gravitation marked an epoch in the history of science, and the same may be said of Darwin's discovery and establishment of the law of Natural Selection. The *Principia* and the *Origin of Species* rank together as two of the most memorable monuments of scientific genius.

In a certain sense, however, Darwin's achievements are the more remarkable, because they profoundly affect our notions of man's position and destiny in the universe. The great English naturalist was of a modest and retiring disposition. He shrank from all kinds of controversy. He remarked, in one of his letters to Professor Huxley, that he felt it impossible to understand how any man could get up and make an impromptu speech in the heat of a public discussion. Nevertheless he was demolishing the popular superstition far more effectually than the most sinewy and

dexterous athletes of debate. He was quietly revolutionising the world of thought. He was infusing into the human mind the leaven of a new truth. And the new truth was tremendous in its implications. No wonder the clergy reviled and cursed it. They did not understand it any more than the Inquisitors who burnt Bruno and tortured Galileo understood the Copernican astronomy; but they felt, with a true professional instinct, with that cunning of self-preservation which nature bestows on every species, including priests, that the Darwinian theory was fatal to their deepest dogmas, and therefore to their power, their privileges, and their profits. They had a sure intuition that Darwinism was the writing on the wall, announcing the doom of their empire; and they recognised that their authority could only be prolonged by hiding the scripture of destiny from the attention of the multitude.

The popular triumph of Darwinism must be the death-blow to theology. The Copernican astronomy destroyed the geocentric theory, which made the earth the centre of the universe, and all the celestial bodies its humble satellites. From that moment the false astronomy of the Bible was doomed, and its exposure was bound to throw discredit on "the Word of God." From that moment, also, the notion was doomed that the Deity of this inconceivable universe was chiefly occupied with the fortunes of the human insects on this little planet, which is but a speck in the infinitude of space. Similarly the Darwinian biology is a sentence of doom on the natural history of the Bible. Evolution and special creation are antagonistic ideas.

And if man himself has descended, or ascended, from lower forms of life; if he has been developed through thousands of generations from a branch of the Simian family; it necessarily follows that the Garden of Eden is a fairy tale, that Adam and Eve were not the parents of the human race, that the Fall is an oriental legend, that Original Sin is a theological libel on humanity, that the Atonement is an unintelligible dogma, and the Incarnation a relic of ancient mythology.

Let it not be forgotten, however, that Darwinism would have been impossible if geology had not prepared its way. Natural Selection wants plenty of elbow-room; Evolution requires immeasurable time. But this could not be obtained until geology had made a laughing-stock of Biblical chronology. The record of the rocks reveals a chronology, not of six thousand, but of millions of years; and during a vast portion of that time life has existed, slowly ascending to higher stages, and mounting from the monad to man. It was fitting, therefore, that Darwin should dedicate his first volume to Sir Charles Lyell.

Darwin was not a polemical writer; on the contrary, his views were advanced with extreme caution. He was gifted with magnificent patience. When the *Origin of Species* was published he knew that Man was not exempted from the laws of evolution. He satisfied his conscience by remarking that "Much light will be thrown on the origin of man and his history," and then waited twelve years before expounding his final conclusions in the *Descent of Man*. This has, indeed, been made a subject of reproach.

But Darwin was surely the best judge as to how and when his theories should be published. He did his own great work in his own great way. There is no question of concealment. He gave his views to the world when they were fully ripened; and if, in a scientific treatise, he forbore to discuss the bearing of his views on the principles of current philosophy and the dogmas of popular theology, he let fall many remarks in his text and footnotes which were sufficient to show the penetrating reader that he was far from indifferent to such matters and had very definite opinions of his own. What could be more striking, what could better indicate his attitude of mind, than the fact that in the *Origin of Species* he never mentioned the book of Genesis, while in the *Descent of Man* he never alluded to Adam and Eve? Such contemptuous silence was more eloquent than the most pointed attack.

#### DARWIN'S GRANDFATHER.

Before Darwin was born his patronymic had been made illustrious. It is a curious fact that both Darwin and Newton came of old Lincolnshire families. Newton was born in the county, but the Darwins had removed in the seventeenth century to the neighboring county of Nottingham. William Darwin (born 1655) married the heiress of Robert Waring, of Wilsford. This lady also inherited the manor of Elston, which has remained ever since in the family. It went to the younger son of William Darwin. This Robert Darwin was the father of four sons, the youngest of whom,



Erasmus Darwin, was born on December 12, 1731, at Elston Hall.

The life of Erasmus Darwin has been charmingly written by his illustrious grandson.<sup>1</sup> Prefixed to the Memoir is a photographic portrait from a picture by Wright of Derby. It shows a strong, kind face, dominated by a pair of deep-set, commanding eyes, surmounted by a firm, broad brow and finely modelled head. The whole man looks one in a million. Gazing at the portrait, it is easy to understand his scientific eminence, his great reputation as a successful physician, his rectitude, generosity, and powers of sympathy and imagination.

Dr. Erasmus Darwin practised medicine at Derby, but his fame was widespread. While driving to and from his patients he wrote verses of remarkable polish, embodying the novel ideas with which his head fermented. They were not true poetry, although they were highly praised by Edgeworth and Hayley, and even by Cowper; but Byron was guilty of "the falsehood of extremes" in stigmatising their author as "a mighty master of unmeaning rhyme." The rhyme was certainly not unmeaning: on the contrary, there was plenty of meaning, and fresh meaning too, but it should have been expressed in prose. Erasmus Darwin had a surprising insight into the methods of nature; he threw out a multitude of pregnant hints in biology, and once or twice he nearly stumbled on the law of Natural Selection. He saw the "struggle for existence" with remarkable clearness. "The stronger

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<sup>1</sup> *Erasmus Darwin*. By Ernst Krause. With a Preliminary Notice by Charles Darwin. London: Murray, 1879.

locomotive animals," he wrote, "devour the weaker ones without mercy. Such is the condition of organic nature! whose first law might be expressed in the words, 'Eat or be eaten,' and which would seem to be one great slaughter-house, one universal scene of rapacity and injustice." Mr. G. H. Lewes credits him with "a profounder insight into psychology than any of his contemporaries and the majority of his successors exhibit," and says that he "deserves a place in history for that one admirable conception of psychology as subordinate to the laws of life." Dr. Maudsley bears testimony to his sagacity in regard to mental disorders; Dr. Lauder Brunton shows that he anticipated Rosenthal's theory of "catching cold"; and a dozen other illustrations might be given of his scientific prescience in chemistry, anatomy, and medicine. He was also a very advanced reformer. He believed in exercise and fresh air, and taught his sons and daughters to swim. He saw the vast importance of educating girls. He studied sanitation, pointed out how towns should be supplied with pure water, and urged that sewage should be turned to use in agriculture instead of being allowed to pollute our rivers. He also sketched out a variety of useful inventions, which he was too busy to complete himself. Nor did he confine himself to *practical* reforms. He sympathised warmly with Howard, who was reforming our prison system; and he denounced slavery at the time when the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel held slaves in the Barbadoes, and absolutely declined to give them Christian instruction.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> *Erasmus Darwin*, p. 47.

No one will be surprised to learn that Erasmus Darwin was a sceptic. Indeed there seems to have been a family tendency in that direction. His sister Susannah, a young lady of eighteen, writing to him at school in his boyhood, after some remarks on abstinence during Lent, said "As soon as we kill our hog I intend to take a part thereof with the Family, for I'm informed by a learned Divine that Hog's Flesh is Fish, and has been so ever since the Devil entered into them and ran into the Sea." Bright, witty Susannah! She died unmarried, and became, as Darwin says, the "very pattern of an old lady, so nice looking, so gentle, so kind, and passionately fond of flowers."

Erasmus Darwin's scepticism was of an early growth. At the age of twenty-three, in a letter to Dr. Okes, after announcing his father's death he professes a firm belief in "a superior *Ens Entium*," but rejects the notion of a special providence, and says that "general laws seem sufficient"; and while humbly hoping that God will "re-create us" after death, he plainly asserts that "the light of Nature affords us not a single argument for a future state." He has frequently been called an Atheist, but this is a mistake; he was a Deist, believing in God, but rejecting Revelation. Even Unitarianism was too orthodox for him, and he wittily called it "a feather-bed to catch a falling Christian."

His death occurred on April 10, 1802. He expired in his arm-chair "without pain or emotion of any kind." He had always hoped his end might be painless, and it proved to be so. Otherwise he was not disturbed by the thought of death. "When I think of dying,"

he wrote to his friend Edgeworth, "It is always without pain or fear."

Such a brief account of this extraordinary man would be inadequate to any other purpose, but it suffices to show that Darwin was himself a striking illustration of the law of heredity. Scientific boldness and religious scepticism ran in the blood of his race.

#### DARWIN'S FATHER.

Darwin's father, Robert Waring Darwin, the third son of Erasmus Darwin, settled down as a doctor at Shrewsbury. He had a very large practice, and was a very remarkable man. He stood six-feet two and was broad in proportion. His shrewdness, rectitude and benevolence gained him universal love and esteem. He was revered by his great son, who always spoke of him as "the wisest man I ever knew." His wife was a daughter of Josiah Wedgwood, and her sweet, gentle, sympathetic nature was inherited by her famous son. She died in 1817, thirty-two years before her husband, who died on November 13, 1848.

There is little, if anything, to be gleaned from any published documents as to the *opinions* of Darwin's father. Upon this point Mr. Francis Darwin has been too zealously discreet. Happily I have been furnished with a few particulars by the Rev. Edward Myers, minister of the Unitarian chapel at Shrewsbury.

Mrs. Darwin was herself a Unitarian, and she attended with her family the Unitarian chapel in High Street, Shrewsbury, of which the Rev. George Case was then minister. The daughters were all baptised

by Mr. Case and their names entered in the chapel register; but the sons were for some reason baptised in the parish church of St. Chad. Charles Darwin attended Mr. Case's school, and was by him prepared for the Shrewsbury Grammar School. Up to 1825, when he went to the University of Edinburgh, he, with the Darwin family, regularly attended the Unitarian place of worship. But in 1832, after the erection of St. George's Church, Frankwell, they left the chapel and went to church.

"Dr. Darwin," says Mr. Myers, who succeeded Mr. Case, "was never a regular attendant at the Unitarian chapel, but he went occasionally. Indeed, he never regularly attended any place of worship, and his extreme views on theological and religious matters were so well known that he used to be commonly spoken of as 'Dr. Darwin the unbeliever,' and 'Dr Darwin the infidel.'"

The question naturally arises, how could Dr. Darwin have seriously intended his son to become a clergyman? Mr. Myers offers, as I think, a sufficient explanation. The Church at that time was looked upon as simply a professional avenue, like the law or medicine; and, as Mr. Gladstone remarks in his *Chapter of Autobiography*, "the richer benefices were very commonly regarded as a suitable provision for such members of the higher families as were least fit to push their way in any other profession requiring thought and labor." But, the reader will exclaim, how was it possible to include Charles Darwin in this category of incapables? The answer is simple. Darwin was not brilliant in his youth. His great

faculties required time to ripen. He failed as a medical student because he had an unconquerable antipathy to the sight of blood, and was so afflicted by witnessing a bad operation on a child that he actually ran away. He was always regarded as "a very ordinary boy," to use his own words; and his father once said to him, "You care for nothing but shooting, dogs, and rat-catching, and you will be a disgrace to yourself and your family."<sup>3</sup> It was a singularly infelicitous prophecy, but it shows Dr. Darwin's mean opinion of his son's intellect, and enables us to understand how "Dr. Darwin the infidel" devoted his unpromising cub to the great refuge of incapacity.

#### DARWIN'S EARLY PIETY.

Either the Rev. George Case belonged to the more orthodox wing of Unitarianism, or the teaching at the Shrewsbury Grammar School must have effaced any sceptical impressions he made on the mind of Charles Darwin, whose early piety is evident both from his Autobiography and from several of his letters. And this fact is of the highest importance, since it follows that his disbelief in later years was the result of independent thought and the gradual pressure of scientific truth.

"I well remember," he says, "in the early part of my school life that I often had to run very quickly to be in time, and from being a fleet runner was generally successful; but when in doubt I prayed earnestly to

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<sup>3</sup> *Life and Letters of Charles Darwin*. Edited by his son, Francis Darwin. Vol. I., p. 32.

God to help me, and I well remember that I attributed my success to the prayers and not to my quick running, and marvelled how generally I was aided."<sup>4</sup>

Speaking of himself at the age of twenty or twenty-one, he says, "I did not then doubt the strict and literal truth of every word in the Bible."<sup>5</sup> When a little later he went on board the "Beagle," to take that famous voyage which he has narrated so charmingly, and which determined his subsequent career, he was still "quite orthodox." "I remember," he says, "being laughed at by several of the officers (though themselves orthodox) for quoting the Bible as an unanswerable authority on some point of morality."<sup>6</sup> Darwin charitably supposes "it was the novelty of the argument which amused them." But why was the argument novel? Simply because the Bible is a kind of fetish, to be worshipped and sworn by, anything but read and followed. As Mill remarked, it furnishes texts to fling at the heads of unbelievers; but when the Christian is expected to act upon it, he is found to conform to other standards, including his own convenience. There can be little doubt that the laughter of his shipmates produced a powerful and lasting effect on Darwin's mind. His character was translucent and invincibly sincere; and the laughter of orthodox persons at their own doctrines was calculated to set him thinking about their truth.

#### ALMOST A CLERGYMAN.

Being a failure as a medical student, Darwin received

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<sup>4</sup> *Life and Letters*, vol. i., p. 31.

<sup>5</sup> Vol. I., p. 45.

<sup>6</sup> Vol. I., p. 308

a proposal from his father to become a clergyman, and he rather liked the idea of settling down as a country parson. Fancy Darwin in a pulpit! The finest scientific head since Newton distilling bucolic sermons! What a tragi-comedy it would have been!

Darwin carefully read "Pearson on the Creed," and other books on divinity. "I soon persuaded myself," he says, "that our Creed must be accepted." He went up to Cambridge and studied hard.

"In order to pass the B.A. examination, it was also necessary to get up Paley's *Evidences of Christianity* and his *Moral Philosophy*. This was done in a thorough manner, and I am convinced that I could have written out the whole of the 'Evidences' with perfect correctness, but not of course in the clear language of Paley. The logic of this book, and, as I may add, of his *Natural Theology*, gave me as much delight as did Euclid. The careful study of these works, without attempting to learn any part by rote, was the only part of the academical course which, as I then felt and as I still believe, was of the least use to me in the education of my mind. I did not at that time trouble myself about Paley's premises; and taking these on trust, I was charmed and convinced by the long line of argumentation."

Darwin probably owed most to the *Natural Theology* of Paley. Writing to Sir John Lubbock nearly thirty years later, he said: "I do not think I hardly ever admired a book more." Perhaps it was less the logic of the great Archdeacon than his limpid style and interesting treatment of physical science which charmed the young mind of Darwin. He had a constitutional love of clearness, and his genius was then turning towards the studies which occupied his life.

Scruples gradually entered Darwin's mind. He began to find the creed not so credible. One of his



friends gives an interesting reminiscence of this period. "We had an earnest conversation," says Mr. Herbert, "about going into Holy Orders; and I remember his asking me, with reference to the question put by the Bishop in the ordination service, 'Do you trust that you are inwardly moved by the Holy Spirit, etc.,' whether I could answer in the affirmative, and on my saying I could not, he said, 'Neither can I, and therefore I cannot take holy orders.'" Still he did not abandon the idea altogether; he drifted away from it little by little until it fell out of sight. Fourteen or fifteen years later, writing to Sir Charles Lyell, he had gone so far as to speak of "that Corporate Animal, the Clergy."

Looking back over these experiences, only a few years before his death, Darwin was able to regard them with equanimity and amusement. There is a sly twinkle of humor in the following passage.

"Considering how fiercely I have been attacked by the orthodox, it seems ludicrous that I once intended to be a clergyman. Nor was this intention and my father's wish ever formally given up, but died a natural death when, on leaving Cambridge, I joined the 'Beagle' as naturalist. If the phrenologists are to be trusted, I was well fitted in one respect to be a clergyman. A few years ago the secretary of a German psychological society asked me earnestly by letter for a photograph of myself; and some time afterwards I received the proceedings of one of the meetings, in which it seemed that the shape of my head had been the subject of a public discussion, and one of the speakers declared that I had the bump of reverence developed enough for ten priests."

The Rev. Joseph Cook, of Boston, accounts for

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<sup>7</sup> Vol. I., p. 45.

Matthew Arnold's scepticism by the flatness of the top of his head. Mr. Arnold lacked the bump which points to God. But how does Mr. Cook account for the scepticism of Darwin, whose head was piously adorned with such a prodigious bump of veneration?

### ON BOARD THE "BEAGLE."

While at Cambridge, studying for the Church, Darwin made the acquaintance of Professor Henslow and Dr. Whewell. He read Humboldt "with care and profound interest," and Herschel's *Introduction to the Study of Natural Philosophy*. These writers excited in him "a burning zeal to add even the most humble contribution to the noble structure of Natural Science." Humboldt's description of the glories of Teneriffe made him desire to visit that region. He even "got an introduction to a merchant in London to inquire about ships." Soon afterwards he became acquainted with Professor Sedgwick, and his attention was turned to geology. On returning from a geological tour in North Wales with Sedgwick he found a letter from Henslow offering him a share of Captain Fitzroy's cabin on board the "Beagle," if he cared to go without pay as naturalist. The offer was accepted, Dr. Darwin behaved handsomely, and the young man sailed away with a first-rate equipment and a pecuniary provision for his five years' voyage round the world. This voyage, says Darwin, "has been by far the most important event in my life, and has determined my whole career."

Readers of Darwin's fascinating *A Naturalist's*

*Voyage*<sup>8</sup> know that his great powers were matured on board the "Beagle." "That my mind became developed through my pursuits during the voyage," he himself says, "is rendered probable by a remark made by my father, who was the most acute observer whom I ever saw, of a sceptical disposition, and far from being a believer in phrenology; for on first seeing me after the voyage, he turned round to my sisters and exclaimed, 'Why, the shape of his head is quite altered.'"

During the voyage Darwin was brought into close and frequent contact with "that scandal to Christian nations—Slavery."<sup>9</sup> This was a matter on which he felt keenly. His just and compassionate nature was stirred to the depths by the oppression and sufferings of the American negroes. The infamous scenes he witnessed haunted his imagination. Nearly thirty years afterwards, writing to Dr. Asa Gray, he wished, "though at the loss of millions of lives, that the North would proclaim a crusade against slavery." His impressions at the earlier date were recorded in his book, and it is best to quote the passage in full:

"On the 19th of August we finally left the shores of Brazil. I thank God, I shall never again visit a slave-country. To this day, if I hear a distant scream, it recalls with painful vividness my feelings, when passing a house near Pernambuco, I heard the most pitiable moans, and could not but suspect that some poor slave was being tortured, yet knew that I was

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<sup>8</sup> *A Naturalist's Voyage. Journal of Researches into the Natural History and Geology of the Countries visited during the Voyage of H. M. S. "Beagle" round the World. By Charles Darwin.*

<sup>9</sup> *Life and Letters*, vol. i., p. 237.

as powerless as a child even to remonstrate. I suspected that these moans were from a tortured slave, for I was told that this was the case in another instance. Near Rio de Janeiro I lived opposite to an old lady, who kept screws to crush the fingers of her female slaves. I have stayed in a house where a young household mulatto, daily and hourly, was reviled, beaten, and persecuted, enough to break the spirit of the lowest animal. I have seen a little boy, six or seven years old, struck thrice with a horse-whip (before I could interfere) on his naked head for having handed me a glass of water not quite clean; I saw his father tremble at a mere glance from his master's eye. These latter cruelties were witnessed by me in a Spanish colony, in which it has always been said, that slaves are better treated than by the Portuguese, English, or other European nations. I have seen at Rio Janeiro a powerful negro afraid to ward off a blow directed, as he thought, at his face. I was present when a kind-hearted man was on the point of separating for ever the men, women, and little children of a large number of families who had longed lived together. I will not even allude to the many heart-sickening atrocities which I authentically heard of;—nor would I have mentioned the above revolting details, had I not met with several people, so blinded by the constitutional gaiety of the negro, as to speak of slavery as a tolerable evil. Such people have generally visited at the houses of the upper classes, where the domestic slaves are usually well treated; and they have not, like myself, lived amongst the lower classes. Such inquirers will ask slaves about their condition; they forget that the slave must indeed be dull who does not calculate on the chance of his answer reaching his master's ears.

It is argued that self-interest will prevent excessive cruelty; as if self-interest protected our domestic animals, which are far less likely than degraded slaves, to stir up the rage of their savage masters. It is an argument long since protested against with noble feeling, and strikingly exemplified, by the ever illustrious Humboldt. It is often attempted to palliate slavery by comparing the state of slaves with our

poorer countrymen; if the misery of our poor be caused not by the laws of nature, but by our institutions, great is our sin; but how this bears on slavery, I cannot see; as well might the use of the thumb-screw be defended in one land, by showing that men in another land suffered from some dreadful disease. Those who look tenderly at the slave-owner, and with a cold heart at the slave, never seem to put themselves into the position of the latter;—what a cheerless prospect, with not even a hope of change! Picture to yourself the chance, ever hanging over you, of your wife and your little children—those objects which nature urges even the slave to call his own—being torn from you and sold like beasts to the first bidder! And these deeds are done and palliated by men who profess to love their neighbors as themselves, who believe in God, and pray that his Will be done on earth!"<sup>1</sup>

The sting of this passage is in its tail. Darwin must have felt that there was something hypocritical and sinister in the pretensions of Christianity. He must have asked himself what was the practical value of a creed which permitted such horrors.

#### SETTLING AT DOWN.

Darwin married on January 29, 1839. His wife was singularly helpful, making his home happy, and subordinating herself to the great ends of his life. Children grew up around them, and their home was one of the brightest and best in the world. Here is a pretty touch in Darwin's letter to his friend Fox, dated from Upper Gower Street, London, July 1840: "He, (*i.e.*, the baby) is so charming that I cannot pretend to any modesty. I defy anybody to flatter us on our baby, for I defy anyone to say anything in its praise of

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<sup>1</sup> Pp. 499—500.

which we are not fully conscious . . . I had not the smallest conception there was so much in a five-month baby." Cunning nature! twining baby fingers about the big man's heart. Still the proud father studied the cherub as a scientist; he watched its mental growth with the greatest assiduity, and thus began those observations which he ultimately published in the *Expression of the Emotions*.

In September 1842 he went to live at Down, where he continued to reside until his death. He helped to found a Friendly Club there, and served as its treasurer for thirty years. He was also treasurer of a Coal Club. The Rev. Brodie Innes says "His conduct towards me and my family was one of unvarying kindness." Darwin was a liberal contributor to the local charities, and "he held that where there was really no important objection, his assistance should be given to the clergyman, who ought to know the circumstances best, and was chiefly responsible."

He did not, however, go through the mockery of attending church. I was informed by the late head constable of Devonport, who was himself an open Atheist, that he had once been on duty for a considerable time at Down. He had often seen Darwin escort his family to church, and enjoyed many a conversation with the great man, who used to enjoy a walk through the country lanes while the devotions were in progress.

#### DEATH AND BURIAL.

Darwin's life henceforth was that of a country gentleman and a secluded scientist. His great works,

more revolutionary than all the political and social turmoil of his age, were planned and written in the quiet study of an old house in a Kentish village. He suffered terribly from ill health, but he labored on gallantly to the end, and died in harness. "For nearly forty years," writes Mr. Francis Darwin, "he never knew one day of the health of ordinary men, and thus his life was one long struggle against the weariness and strain of sickness." But no whimperings escaped him, or petulant reproaches on those around him. Always gentle, loving and beloved, he looked on the universe with unswerving serenity. A nobler mixture of sweetness and strength never adorned the earth.

In 1876 he wrote some Recollections for his children, with no thought of publication. "I have attempted," he said, "to write the following account of myself, as if I were a dead man in another world looking back at my own life. Nor have I found this difficult, for life is nearly over with me."

He was ready for Death, but they did not meet for six years. During February and March, 1882, he was obviously breaking. The rest must be told by his son.

"No especial change occurred during the beginning of April, but on Saturday 15th he was seized with giddiness while sitting at dinner in the evening, and fainted in an attempt to reach his sofa. On the 17th he was again better, and in my temporary absence recorded for me the progress of an experiment in which I was engaged. During the night of April 18th, about a quarter to twelve, he had a severe attack and passed into a faint, from which he was brought back to consciousness with great difficulty. He seemed to recognise the approach of death, and said, 'I am not the least afraid to die.' All the next morning he suffered from terrible nausea, and hardly

rallied before the end came. He died at about four o'clock on Wednesday, April 19th, 1882"<sup>2</sup>

Thus the great scientist and sceptic went to his everlasting rest. He had no belief in God, no expectation of a future life. But he had done his duty; he had filled the world with new truth; he had lived a life of heroism, compared with which the hectic courage of battle-fields is vulgar and insignificant; and he died in soft tranquillity, surrounded by the beings he loved. His last conscious words were *I am not the least afraid to die*. No one who knew him, or his life and work, could for a moment suspect him capable of fear. Nevertheless it is well to have the words on record from the lips of those who saw him die. The carrion priests who batten on the reputation of dead Free-thinkers will find no repast in this death-chamber. One sentence frees him from the contamination of their approach.

Darwin's family desired that he should be buried at Down. But the fashion of burying great men in Westminster Abbey, even though unbelievers, had been set by Dean Stanley, whom Carlyle irreverently called "the body-snatcher." Stanley's successor, Dean Bradley, readily consented to the great heretic's interment in his House of God, where it is to be presumed the Church of England burial service was duly read over the "remains." Men like Professor Huxley, Sir John Lubbock, and Sir Joseph Hooker should not have assisted at such a blasphemous farce. It was enough to make Darwin groan in his coffin. Well, the Church has Darwin's corpse, but that is all

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<sup>2</sup> *Life and Letters*, vol. iii., p. 358.



she can boast; and as she paid the heavy price of telling lies at his funeral, it may not in the long run prove a profitable transaction. She has not buried Darwin's ideas. They are still at work, sapping and undermining her very foundations.

### PURPOSE OF THIS PAMPHLET.

My object is to show the general reader what were Darwin's views on religion, and, as far as possible, to trace the growth of those views in his mind. I desire to point out, in particular, how he thought the leading ideas of theology were affected by the doctrine of evolution. Further, I wish to prove that there is no essential difference between his Agnosticism and what has always been taught as Atheism. Finally, I mean to give my own notions on evolution and theism. In doing so, I shall be obliged to consider some points raised by anti-materialists, especially by Dr. A. R. Wallace in his recent volume on *Darwinism*.

### SOME OBJECTIONS.

Let me first, however, answer certain objections. It is contended by those who would minimise the importance of Darwin's scepticism that he was a scientist and not a theologian. When it is replied that this objection is based upon a negation of private judgment, and logically involves the handing over of society to the tender mercies of interested specialists, the objectors fall back upon the mitigated statement that

Darwin was too much occupied with science to give adequate attention to the problems of religion. Now, in the first place, this is not really true. He certainly disclaimed any special fitness to give an opinion on such matters, but that was owing to his exceptional modesty; and to take advantage of it by accepting it as equivalent to a confession of unfitness, is simply indecent on the part of those who never tire of holding up the testimony of Newton, Herschel, and Faraday to the truth of their creed. Darwin gave sufficient attention to religion to satisfy himself. He began to abandon Christianity at the age of thirty. Writing of the period between October, 1836 and January, 1839, he says "During those two years I was led to think much about religion."<sup>3</sup> That the subject occupied his mind at other times is evident from his works and letters. He had clearly weighed every argument in favor of Theism and Immortality, and his brief, precise way of stating the objections to them shows that they were perfectly familiar. True, he says "I have never systematically thought much on religion in relation to science," but this was in answer to a request that he should write something for publication. In the same sentence he says that he had not systematically thought much on "morals in relation to society." But he had thought enough to write that wonderful fourth chapter in the first part of the *Descent of Man*, which was published in that very year. Darwin was so modest, so cautious, and so thorough, that "systematic thought" meant with him an infinitely greater stress

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<sup>3</sup> *Life and Letters*, vol. i., p. 307.

of mind than is devoted to religious problems by one theologian in a million.

The next objection is more subtle, not to say fantastic. In his youth Darwin was fond of music. He had no technical knowledge of it, nor even a good ear, but it filled him with delight, and sometimes sent a shiver down his backbone. He was also fond of poetry, reading Shakespeare, Coleridge, Byron, and Scott, and carrying about a pocket copy of Milton. But in later life he lost all interest in such things, and trying to read Shakespeare again after 1870 he found it "so intolerably dull" that it "nauseated" him. His intense pre-occupation with science had led to a partial atrophy of his æsthetic faculties. It was a loss to him, but the world gained by the sacrifice.

Now upon this fact is based the objection I am dealing with. In the days of Sir Isaac Newton or Bishop Butler, when belief was supposed to rest on evidence, the objection would have seemed preposterous; but it is gravely urged at present, when religion is fast becoming a matter of candles, music, and ornament, seasoned with cheap sentimentality. Darwin's absorption in intellectual pursuits, and the consequent neglect of the artistic elements in his nature, is actually held as a sufficient explanation of his scepticism. His highly-developed and constantly-sustained moral nature is regarded as having no relation to the problem. Religion, it seems, is neither morality nor logic; it is spirituality. And what is spirituality? Why, a yearning after the vague, the unutterable; a consciousness of the sinfulness of sin; a perpetual study of one's blessed self; a debauch of

egotistic emotion and chaotic fancy ; in short, a highly-refined development of the feelings of a cow in a thunderstorm, and the practices of a savage before his inscrutable fetish.

Spirituality is an emotional offshoot of religion ; but religion itself grows out of belief ; and belief, even among the lowest savages, is grounded on evidence. The Church has always had the sense to begin with doctrines ; it enjoins upon its children to say first of all " I believe." Let the doctrines go, and the sentiments will go also. It is only a question of time. Darwin tested the doctrines. Miracles, special providence, the fall, the incarnation, the resurrection, the existence of an all-wise and all-good God ; all seemed to him statements which should be proved. He therefore put them into the crucible of reason, and they turned out to be nothing but dross. According to the " spiritual " critics this was a mistake, religion being a matter of imagination. Quite so ; here Darwin is in agreement with them ; and thus again the proverb is verified that " extremes meet."

The last objection is almost too peurile to notice. It has been asserted that Darwin was an unconscious believer, after all ; and this astonishing remark is supported by exclamations from his letters. He frequently wrote " God knows," " would to God," and so forth. But he sometimes wrote " By Jove," from which it follows that he believed in Jupiter ! On one occasion he informed Dr. Hooker that he had recovered from an illness, and could " eat like a hearty Christian," from which it follows that he believed in the connection of Christianity and voracity !

Mr. F. W. H. Myers is too subtle a critic to raise this objection in its natural crudity. He affects to regard Darwin's tranquillity under the loss of religious belief as a puzzle. He asks why Darwin kept free from the pessimism which "in one form or other has paralysed or saddened so many of the best lives of our time." What "kept the melancholy infection at bay?"

"Here, surely, is the solution of the problem. The faculties of observing and reasoning were stimulated to the utmost; the domestic affections were kept keen and strong; but the atrophy of the religious instinct, of which we have already spoken, extended yet farther—over the whole range of æsthetic emotion, and mystic sentiment—over all in us which 'looks before and after, and pines for what is not.'"<sup>4</sup>

This is pretty writing, but under the form of insinuation it begs the question at issue. Religious instinct and mystic sentiment are fine phrases, but they prove nothing; on the contrary, they are devices for dispensing with that logical investigation which religion ever shuns as the Devil is said to shun holy water.

#### DARWIN ABANDONS CHRISTIANITY.

Dr. Büchner, the German materialist, who was in London in September, 1881, went to Down and spent some hours with Darwin. He was accompanied by Dr. E. B. Aveling, who has written an account of their conversation in Darwin's study.<sup>5</sup> This pamphlet is

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<sup>4</sup> *Charles Darwin and Agnosticism*. By F. W. H. Myers, "Fortnightly Review," January, 1888, p. 106.

<sup>5</sup> *The Religious Views of Charles Darwin*. By Dr. E. B. Aveling. Freethought Publishing Co.

referred to in a footnote by Mr. Francis Darwin, who says that "Dr. Aveling gives quite fairly his impression of my father's views."<sup>6</sup> He does not contradict any of Dr. Aveling's statements, and they may therefore be regarded as substantially correct.

Darwin said to his guests, "I never gave up Christianity until I was forty years of age." He had given attention to the matter, and had investigated the claims of Christianity. Being asked *why* he abandoned it, he replied, "It is not supported by evidence."

This reminds one of a story about George Eliot. A gentleman held forth to her at great length on the beauty of Christianity. Like Mr. Myers, he was great at "aesthetic emotion" and "mystic sentiment." The great woman listened to him with philosophic patience, and at length she struck in herself. "Well, you know," she said, "I have only one objection to Christianity." "And what is that?" her guest enquired. "Why," she replied, "it isn't true."

Dr. Aveling's statement is corroborated by a long and interesting passage in Darwin's chapter of Autobiography, which the reader shall have in full.

"I had gradually come by this time, that is, 1836 to 1839, to see that the Old Testament was no more to be trusted than the sacred books of the Hindoos. The question then continually rose before my mind and would not be banished,—Is it credible that if God were now to make a revelation to the Hindoos, he would permit it to be connected with the belief in Vishnu, Siva, etc., as Christianity is connected with the Old Testament? This appeared to me utterly incredible.

"By further reflecting that the clearest evidence would be requisite to make any sane man believe in the miracles by

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<sup>6</sup> Vol. I., p. 317.

which Christianity is supported,—and that the more we know of the fixed laws of nature the more incredible do miracles become,—that the men at that time were ignorant and credulous to a degree almost incomprehensible by us,—that the Gospels cannot be proved to have been written simultaneously with the events,—that they differ in many important details, far too important, as it seemed to me, to be admitted as the usual inaccuracies of eye-witnesses;—by such reflections as these, which I give not as having the least novelty or value, but as they influenced me, I gradually came to disbelieve in Christianity as a divine revelation. The fact that many false religions have spread over large portions of the earth like wild-fire had some weight with me.

“But I was very unwilling to give up my belief; I feel sure of this, for I can well remember often and often inventing day-dreams of old letters between distinguished Romans, and manuscripts being discovered at Pompeii or elsewhere, which confirmed in the most striking manner all that was written in the Gospels. But I found it more and more difficult, with free scope given to my imagination, to invent evidence which would suffice to convince me. Thus disbelief crept over me at a very slow rate, but was at last complete. The rate was so slow that I felt no distress.”<sup>7</sup>

Three features should be noted in this striking passage. First, the order in which the evidences of Christianity were tried and found wanting; second, the complete mastery of every important point; third, the absence of all distress of mind in the process. Darwin's mind was, in fact, going through a new development, and the old creed was got rid of as easily as an old skin when a new one is taking its place.

For nearly forty years Darwin was a disbeliever in Christianity. He rejected it utterly. It passed out of his mind and heart. The fact was not proclaimed

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<sup>7</sup> Vol. I., pp. 308-309.

from the house-tops, but it was patent to every intelligent reader of his works. He paid no attention to the clerical dogs that barked at his heels, but wisely kept his mind free from such distractions, and went on his way, as Professor Tyndall says, with the steady and irresistible movement of an avalanche.

Much capital has been made by Christians who are thankful for small mercies out of the fact that Darwin subscribed to the South American Missionary Society. The Archbishop of Canterbury, at the annual meeting on April 21, 1885, said the Society "drew the attention of Charles Darwin, and made him, in his pursuit of the wonders of the kingdom of nature, realise that there was another kingdom just as wonderful and more lasting." Such language is simply fraudulent. The fact is, Darwin thought the Fuegians a set of hopeless savages, and he was so agreeably undeceived by the reports of their improvement that he sent a subscription of £5 through his old shipmate Admiral Sir James Sullivan. This gentleman gives three or four extracts from Darwin's letters,<sup>8</sup> from which it appears that he was solely interested in the secular improvement of the Fuegians, without the smallest concern for their progress in religion.

Darwin subscribed to send missionaries to a people he regarded as "the very lowest of the human race." Surely this is not an extravagant compliment to Christianity. He never subscribed towards its promotion in any civilised country. Those who parade his "support" invite the sarcasm that he thought their religion fit for savages.

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<sup>8</sup> Vol. III., pp. 127-128.



## DEISM.

Having abandoned Christianity, Darwin remained for many years a Deist. The *Naturalist's Voyage* was first published in 1845, and the following passage occurs in the final chapter :

“ Among the scenes which are deeply impressed on my mind, none exceed in sublimity the primeval forests undefaced by the hand of man ; whether those of Brazil, where the powers of Life are predominant, or those of Tierra del Fuego, where Death and Decay prevail. Both are temples filled with the varied products of the God of Nature :—no one can stand in these solitudes unmoved, and not feel that there is more in man than the mere breath of his body.”<sup>9</sup>

This is the language of emotion, and no one will be surprised at Darwin's saying subsequently “ I did not think much about the existence of a personal God until a considerably later period of my life.”<sup>1</sup> How great a change the thinking wrought is seen, from a reference to this very incident in the *Autobiography*, written in 1876, a few years before his death.

“ At the present day the most usual argument for the existence of an intelligent God is drawn from the deep inward conviction and feelings which are experienced by most persons. Formerly I was led by such feelings as those just referred to (although I do not think that the religious sentiment was ever strongly developed in me), to the firm conviction of the existence of God, and of the immortality of the soul. In my *Journal* I wrote that whilst standing in the midst of the grandeur of a Brazilian forest, ‘ it is not possible to give an adequate idea of the higher feelings of wonder, admiration, and devotion, which fill and elevate the mind.’ I well remember my conviction that there is more in man than the mere breath of his body.

<sup>9</sup> P. 503.

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Letters*, vol. i., p. 309.

But now the grandest scenes would not cause any such conviction and feelings to rise in my mind."<sup>2</sup>

Darwin's belief in a personal God had not perceptibly weakened in 1859, when he published the *Origin of Species*. He could still speak of "the Creator" and use the ordinary language of Deism. In a letter to Mr. C. Ridley, dated November 28, 1878, upon a sermon of Dr. Pusey's, he said, "When I was collecting facts for the 'Origin' my belief in what is called a personal God was as firm as that of Dr. Pusey himself."<sup>3</sup>

It is therefore obvious that Darwin doubted Christianity at the age of thirty, abandoned it before the age of forty, and remained a Deist until the age of fifty. The publication of the *Origin of Species* may be taken as marking the commencement of his third and last mental epoch. The philosophy of Evolution took possession of his mind, and gradually expelled both the belief in God and the belief in immortality.

His development was too gradual for any wrench. People upon whom his biological theories came as lightning-swift surprises often fancied that he must be deeply distressed by such painful truths. Sometimes, indeed, this suspicion was carried to a comical extreme. "Lyell once told me," says Professor Judd, "that he had frequently been asked if Darwin was not one of the most unhappy of men, it being suggested that his outrage upon public opinion should have filled him with remorse."<sup>4</sup> How it would have astonished these simple creatures to see Darwin in his

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<sup>2</sup> Vol. I., p. 311.

<sup>3</sup> Vol. III., p. 236.

<sup>4</sup> Vol. III., p. 62.

happy home, reclining on the sofa after a hard day's work, while his devoted wife or daughter read a novel aloud or played some music; or perhaps smoking an occasional cigarette, one of his few concessions to the weakness of the flesh.

### CREATION.

Evolution and Creation are antagonistic ideas, nor can they be reconciled by the cheap device of assuming their coöperation "in the beginning." When the theologians spoke of Creation, in the pre-Darwinian days, they meant exactly the same as ordinary people who employed the term; namely, that everything in nature was brought into existence by an express fiat of the will of God. The epithet "special" only hides the fate of Creation from the short-sighted. To say that the Deity produced the raw material of the universe, with all its properties, and then let it evolve into what we see, is simply to abandon the real idea of Creation and to take refuge in a metaphysical dogma.

Creation is only a pompous equivalent for "God did it." Before the nebular hypothesis explained the origin, growth, and decay of the celestial bodies, the theologian used to inquire "Who made the world?" When that conundrum was solved he asked a fresh question, "Who made the plants and animals?" When that conundrum was solved he asked another question, "Who made man?" Now that conundrum is solved he asks "Who created life?" And when the Evolutionists reply "Wait a little; we shall see," he puts his final poser, "Who made matter?"

All along the line he has been saying "God did it" to everything not understood; that is, he has turned ignorance into a dogma. Every explanation compels him to beat a retreat; nay more, it shows that "making" is inapplicable. Nature's method is growth. Making is a term of art, and when applied to nature it is sheer anthropomorphism. The baby who prattles to her doll, and the theologian who prates of Creation, have a common philosophy.

When the *Origin of Species* was published, we have seen that Darwin firmly believed in a personal God. Unfortunately he allowed himself, in the last chapter, to use language, not unnatural in a Deist, but still equivocal and misleading. He spoke, for instance, of "the laws impressed on matter by the Creator." This is perhaps excusable, but there was a more unhappy sentence in which he spoke of life "having been originally breathed by the Creator into a few forms or into one." A flavor of *Genesis* is in these words, and the clergy, with their usual unscrupulousness, have made the most of it; taking care not to read it, or let their hearers read it, in the light of Darwin's later writings.

In a letter to Sir J. D. Hooker, dated March 13, 1863, Darwin writes, "I had a most kind and delightfully candid letter from Lyell, who says he spoke out as far as he believes. I have no doubt his belief failed him as he wrote, for I feel sure that at times he *no more believed in Creation than you or I.*"<sup>5</sup> Writing again to Hooker, in the same month, he said: "I have

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<sup>5</sup> Vol. III., p. 15. The italics are mine.

long regretted that I truckled to public opinion, and used the Pentateuchal term of creation, by which I really meant 'appeared' by some wholly unknown process."<sup>6</sup>

"Truckling" is a strong word. I fancy Darwin was too severe in his self-reproach. I prefer to regard the unhappy sentences about Creation as the slipshod expressions of a man who was still a Deist, and who, possessing little literary tact, failed to guard himself against a misuse of popular language. The greatest misfortune was that the book was before the public, and the expressions could hardly be withdrawn or altered without a full explanation; from which I dare say he shrank, as out of place in a scientific treatise.

#### ORIGIN OF LIFE.

"Spontaneous generation" is a paradoxical phrase, and it has excited a great deal of unprofitable discussion. However the controversy rests between Bastian and Tyndall, the problem of the origin of life is entirely unaffected. Nor need we entertain Sir William Thomson's fanciful conjecture that life may have been brought to this planet on a meteoric fragment, for this only puts the radical question upon the shelf. We may likewise dismiss the theory of Dr. Wallace, who holds that "complexity of chemical compounds" could "certainly not have produced *living* protoplasm."<sup>7</sup> "Could not," in the existing state of knowledge, is simply dogmatism. Dr. Wallace has a spiritual hypothesis to maintain, and like the

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<sup>6</sup> Vol. III, p. 18.

<sup>7</sup> *Darwinism*, p. 474.

crudest theologian, though in a superior style, he introduces his little theory, with a polite bow, to account for what is at present inexplicable. The thorough-going Evolutionist is perfectly satisfied to wait for information. So much has been explained already that it is folly to be impatient. The presumption, meanwhile, is in favor of continuity.

Argument without facts is a waste of time and temper. "It is mere rubbish," Darwin said, "thinking at present of the origin of life; one might as well think of the origin of matter."<sup>8</sup> This was written in 1863, in a letter to Hooker. Darwin could not help seeing, however, that the conditions favorable to the origination of life might only exist once in the history of a planet. A very suggestive passage is printed by Mr. Francis Darwin as written by his father in 1871.

"It is often said that all the conditions for the first production of a living organism are now present which could ever have been present. But if (and oh! what a big if!) we could conceive in some warm little pond, with all sorts of ammonia and phosphoric salts, light, heat, electricity, etc., present, that a proteine compound was chemically formed ready to undergo still more complex changes, at the present day such matter would be instantly devoured or absorbed, which would not have been the case before living creatures were formed."<sup>9</sup>

Darwin appears to have felt that life *must* have originated *naturally*. The interposition of an imaginary supernatural cause does not solve the problem. It cuts the Gordian knot, perhaps, but does not untie it. Nature is full of illustrations of the truth that "properties" exist in complex compounds which do

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<sup>8</sup> Vol. III., p. 18.

<sup>9</sup> Vol. III., p. 18, footnote.

not appear in the separate ingredients. Huxley rightly inquires what justification there is for "the assumption of the existence in the living matter of a something which has no representative, or correlative, in the not living matter which gave rise to it."<sup>1</sup> There is no more mystery in the origin of life than in the formation of water by an electric spark which traverses a mixture of oxygen and hydrogen. Dr. Wallace appears to see this, and consequently he ascribes electricity, with gravitation, cohesion, and chemical force, to the "spiritual world!"<sup>2</sup>

#### ORIGIN OF MAN.

Darwin's masterpiece, in the opinion of scientists, is the *Origin of Species*. But the *Descent of Man* is more important to the general public. As applied to other forms of life, Evolution is a profoundly interesting theory; as applied to man, it revolutionises philosophy, religion, and morals.

Tracing the development of animal organisms from the ascidian, Darwin passes along the line of fish, amphibians, reptiles, birds, marsupials, mammals, and finally to the simians. "The Simiadæ then branched off," he says, "into two great stems, the New World and the Old World monkeys; and from the latter, at a remote period, Man, the wonder and glory of the Universe, proceeded."<sup>3</sup>

Notwithstanding that some specimens of the "wonder and glory of the universe" cannot count

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<sup>1</sup> *Lay Sermons*, p. 137.

<sup>2</sup> *Darwinism*, p. 476.

<sup>3</sup> *Descent of Man*, p. 165.

above the number of the fingers of one hand, while some of them live in a shocking state of bestiality, Darwin's deliverance on the origin of man was greeted with a storm of execration. "Fancy," it was exclaimed, "fancy recognising the monkey as our first cousin, and the lower animals as our distant relations! Pshaw!" The protesters forgot that there is no harm in "coming from monkeys" if you have come far enough. Some of them, perhaps, had a shrewd suspicion that they had *not* come far enough; and, like *parvenus*, they were ashamed to own their poor relations.

Anticipating the distastefulness of his conclusions, Darwin pointed out that, at any rate, we were descended from barbarians; and why, he inquired, should we shrink from owning a still lower relationship?

"He who has seen a savage in his native land will not feel much shame, if forced to acknowledge that the blood of some more humble creature flows in his veins. For my own part I would as soon be descended from that heroic little monkey, who braved his dreaded enemy to save the life of his keeper, or from that old baboon, who descending from the mountains, carried away in triumph his young comrade from a crowd of astonished dogs—as from a savage who delights to torture his enemies, offers up bloody sacrifices, practises infanticide without remorse, treats his wives like slaves, knows no decency, and is haunted by the grossest superstitions."<sup>4</sup>

Eighteen years have passed since then, and Darwin's views have triumphed. The clergy still "hum" and "ha" and shake their heads, but the scientific world has accepted Darwinism with practical

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<sup>4</sup> *Descent of Man*, p. 619.



unanimity. Even Dr. Wallace, who at first hesitated, is now convinced. "I fully accept Mr. Darwin's conclusions," he says, "as to the essential identity of man's bodily structure with that of the higher mammalia, and his descent from some ancestral form common to man and the anthropoid apes. The evidence of such descent appears to me to be overwhelming and conclusive."<sup>5</sup>

Now if Darwin's theory of the origin of man is accepted we may bid good-bye to Christianity at once. But that is not all. The continuity of development implies a common nature, from the lowest form of life to the highest. There is no break from the ascidian to man, just as there is no break from the ovum to the child; and neither in the history of the race nor in the history of the individual is there any point at which natural causes cease to be adequate, and supernatural causes are necessary to account for the phenomena. The tendency of Darwinism, says Dr. Wallace, is to "the conclusion that man's entire nature and all his faculties, whether moral, intellectual, or spiritual, have been derived from their rudiments in the lower animals, in the same manner and by the action of the same general laws as his physical structure has been derived."<sup>6</sup>

Dr. Wallace sees that this is sheer materialism, and casts about for something to support his spiritualistic philosophy. He assumes three stages at which "the spirit world" intervened. First, when life appeared; second, when consciousness began; third, when man became possessed of "a

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<sup>5</sup> *Darwinism*, p. 461.

<sup>6</sup> P. 461.

number of his most characteristic and noblest faculties." All this is very ingenious, but Dr. Wallace forgets two things; first, that the "stages" he refers to are purely arbitrary, each point being approached and receded from by insensible gradations; and second, that his "spirit world" is not a *vera causa*. It is, indeed, a pure assumption; unlike such a cause as Natural Selection, which is seen to operate, and which Darwin only extended over the whole range of organic existence.

With respect to his third "stage," Dr. Wallace contends that Natural Selection does not account for the mathematical, musical, and artistic faculties. Were this true, they might still be regarded, in Weismann's phrase, as "a bye-product" of the human mind, which is so highly developed in all directions. But its truth is rather assumed than proved. Taking the mathematical faculty, for instance, Dr. Wallace makes the most of its recent developments, and the least of its early manifestations; which is a fallacy of exaggeration or false emphasis. He also under-rates the mathematical faculty displayed even in the rudest warfare. There is a certain calculation of number and space in every instance. It is smaller in the savage chief than in Napoleon, but the difference is in degree and not in kind; and as the human race has always lived in a more or less militant state, the mathematical faculty *would* give its possessors an advantage in the struggle for existence; while, in more modern times, and in a state of complex civilisation, its possessors would profit by what may be called Social Selection.

Dr. Wallace has discovered a mare's nest. He may rely upon it that the basis of beauty is utility; in the mind of man as well as in architecture, or the plumage of birds, or the coloration of flowers. And we may well ask him these pertinent questions; first, why did "the spirit world" plant the mathematical, musical, and artistic faculties in man so ineffectually that, even, now, they are decidedly developed in less than one per cent. of the population; and, second, why are we to suppose a divine origin for those faculties when the moral faculties, which are quite as imperial, may be found in many species of lower animals?

#### ANIMISM.

Dr. Tylor is not a biologist, but he is one of the greatest evolutionists of our age. His work on *Primitive Culture*<sup>7</sup> is a monument of genius and research. Employing the Darwinian method, he has traced the origin and development of the belief in the existence of soul or spirit, from the mistaken interpretation of the phenomena of dreams among savages, who afford us the nearest analogue of primitive man, up to the most elaborate cultus of Brahmanism, Buddhism, or Christianity. And as Animism is the basis of all religion, two conclusions are forced upon us; first, that the supernatural in being traced back to its primal germ of error, is not only explained but exploded; and, second, that religion is a direct legacy from our savage progenitors. Religious progress consists in mitigating the intellectual and moral crudi-

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<sup>7</sup> *Primitive Culture*. By Edward B. Tylor LL.D. 2 vols.

ties of primitive Animism ; and religion itself, therefore, is like a soap-bubble, ever becoming more and more attenuated, until at length it disappears.

Darwin had written the *Descent of Man* before reading the great work of Dr. Tylor, and his letter to the author of the real Natural History of Religion is worth extracting. It is dated September 24, 1871.

“I hope you will allow me to have the pleasure of telling you how greatly I have been interested by your *Primitive Culture* now that I have finished it. It seems to me a most profound work, which will be certain to have permanent value, and to be referred to for years to come. It is wonderful how you trace Animism from the lower races up to the religious belief of the highest races. It will make me for the future look at religion—a belief in the soul, etc—from a new point of view.”<sup>8</sup>

“A new point of view” is a pregnant phrase in regard to a subject of such importance. What can it mean, except that Darwin saw at last that religion began with the belief in soul, and that the belief in soul originated in the blunder of primitive men as to the “duality” of their nature?

Darwin has a very interesting footnote on this subject in his *Descent of Man*. After referring to Tylor and Lubbock, he continues—

“Mr. Herbert Spencer accounts for the earliest forms of religious belief throughout the world by man being led through dreams, shadows, and other causes, to look at himself as a double essence, corporeal and spiritual. As the spiritual being is supposed to exist after death, and to be powerful, it is propitiated by various gifts and ceremonies, and its aid invoked. He then further shows that names or nicknames given from some animal or other object, to the early progenitors or founders

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<sup>8</sup> *Life and Letters*, vol. III., p.

of a tribe, are supposed after a long interval to represent the real progenitor of the tribe; and such animal or object is then naturally believed still to exist as a spirit, is held sacred, and worshipped as a god. Nevertheless I cannot but suspect that there is a still earlier and ruder stage, when anything which manifests power or movement is thought to be endowed with some form of life, and with mental faculties analogous to our own."<sup>9</sup>

This is tracing religion to the primitive source assigned to it by David Hume—"the universal tendency among mankind to conceive all beings like themselves, and to transfer to every object those qualities with which they are familiarly acquainted, and of which they are intimately conscious."<sup>1</sup> In other words, Darwin begins a stage lower than Animism, in the confusion of subjective and objective such as we see in a very young child; although, of course, the worship of gods could not have obtained in that stage, since man is incapable of ascribing to nature any qualities but those he is conscious of possessing, and it is therefore impossible for him to people the external world with spirits until he has formed the notion of a spirit within himself.

Darwin was not attracted by that experiential Animism which has such a fascination for Dr. Wallace. In 1870 he attended a *séance* at the house of his brother Erasmus in Chelsea, under the auspices of a well-known medium. His account of the performance is not very flattering to Spiritualism.

"We had great fun one afternoon; for George hired a medium who made the chairs, a flute, a bell, and candlestick, and fiery

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*Descent of Man*, p. 94.

<sup>1</sup> Hume, "Natural History of Religion," section III.

points jump about in my brother's dining-room, in a manner that astounded every one, and took away all their breaths. It was in the dark, but George and Hensleigh Wedgwood held the medium's hands and feet on both sides all the time. I found it so hot and tiring that I went away before all these astounding miracles, or jugglery took place. How the man could possibly do what was done passes my understanding."<sup>2</sup>

The more Darwin thought over what he saw the more convinced he was that it was "all imposture." "The Lord have mercy on us all," he exclaimed, "if we have to believe in such rubbish."

Darwin has not left us any emphatic utterance as to his own belief about soul. "What Darwin thought," says Mr. Grant Allen, "I only suspect; but if we make the plain and obvious inference from all the facts and tendencies of his theories we shall be constrained to admit that modern biology lends little sanction to the popular notion of a life after death."<sup>3</sup>

Writing briefly to an importunate German student, in 1879, he said "As for a future life, every man must judge for himself between conflicting vague probabilities."<sup>4</sup> This reminds one of Hamlet's "shadow of a shade." First, you have no certainty, nor even a probability, but several probabilities; these are vague to begin with, and alas! they conflict with each other. Surely such language could only come from a practical unbeliever.

Like other men who were nursed in the delusion of personal immortality, Darwin had his occasional fits

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Vol. III., p. 187.

<sup>2</sup> *The Gospel According to Darwin*. By Grant Allen, "Pall Mall Gazette," January, 1888.

<sup>4</sup> Vol. I., p. 307.

of dissatisfaction with the inevitable—witness the following passage from his *Autobiography*.

“With respect to immortality, nothing shows me so clearly how strong and almost instinctive a belief it is, as the consideration of the view now held by most physicists, namely, that the sun with all the planets will in time grow too cold for life, unless indeed some great body dashes into the sun and thus gives it fresh life. Believing as I do that man in the distant future will be a far more perfect creature than he now is, it is an intolerable thought that he and all other sentient beings are doomed to complete annihilation after such long continued slow progress. To those who fully admit the immortality of the human soul, the destruction of our world will not appear so dreadful.”<sup>5</sup>

Had Darwin been challenged on this passage, I think he would have admitted its ineptitude, for he was modest enough for anything. The thought that *every* man must die is no more intolerable than the thought that *any* man must die, nor is the thought that there *will be* a universe without the human race any more intolerable than the thought that there *was* a universe without the human race. On the other hand, Darwin did not allow for the fact that immortality is not synonymous with everlasting felicity. According to most theologies, indeed, the lot of the majority in the next life is not one of happiness, but one of misery; and, on any rational estimate, the annihilation of all is better than the bliss of the few and the torture of the many. Nor is it true that everyone would cheerfully accept the gift of immortality, even without the prospect of future suffering. Every Buddhist—that is, four hundred millions of the

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<sup>5</sup> Vol. I., p. 312.

human race—looks forward to “Nirvana,” the extinction of the individual life, which is thus released from the evil of existence. Even a Western philosopher, like John Stuart Mill, understood this yearning as appears from the following passage :

“It appears to me not only possible but probable, that in a higher, and, above all, a happier condition of human life, not annihilation but immortality may be the burdensome idea ; and that human nature, though pleased with the present, and by no means impatient to quit it, would find comfort and not sadness in the thought that it is not chained to a conscious existence which it cannot be insured that it will always wish to preserve.”<sup>6</sup>

Mr. Winwood Reade, on the other hand, indulged in the rapturous prophecy that man will some day grow perfect, migrate into space, master nature, and invent immortality.<sup>7</sup> It is all a matter of taste and temperament. Both wailings and rejoicings are outside the scope of philosophy, and belong to the province of light literature.

### A PERSONAL GOD.

We have already seen that Darwin remained a Deist after rejecting Christianity. Not only in the letter on Dr. Pusey's sermon, but in his *Autobiography*, Darwin discloses the fact that his belief in a personal God melted away after the publication of his masterpiece. Speaking of “a First Cause having an intelligent mind in some degree analogous to that of man,” he says, “This conclusion was strong in my mind about the

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<sup>6</sup> *Three Essays on Religion* By J. S. Mill, p. 122.

<sup>7</sup> *Martrydom of Man.* By Winwood Reade, pp, 514, 515.



time, as far as I can remember, when I wrote the *Origin of Species*; and it is since that time that it has very gradually, with many fluctuations, become weaker."<sup>8</sup> By the time he published the *Descent of Man*, in 1871, the change was conspicuous. He was then able to treat religion as a naturalist; that is, as one who stands outside it and regards it with a feeling of scientific curiosity. Not only did he trace religion back to the lowest fetishism, he also analysed the sentiment of worship in a manner which must have been highly displeasing to the orthodox.

"The feeling of religious devotion is a highly complex one, consisting of love, complete submission to an exalted and mysterious superior, a strong sense of dependence, fear, reverence, gratitude, hope for the future, and perhaps other elements. No being could experience so complex an emotion until advanced in his intellectual and moral faculties to at least a moderately high level. Nevertheless, we see some distant approach to this state of mind in the deep love of a dog for his master, associated with complete submission, some fear, and perhaps other feelings. The behavior of a dog when returning to his master after an absence, and, as I may add, of a monkey to his beloved keeper, is widely different from that towards their fellows. In the latter case the transports of joy appear to be somewhat less and the sense of equality is shewn in every action. Professor Braubach goes so far as to maintain that a dog looks on his master as a god."<sup>9</sup>

This is not very flattering, for the dog's attachment to his master is quite independent of morality; whether the dog belongs to Bill Sikes or John Howard, he displays the same devotion.

Darwin quoted with approval the statement of Sir John Lubbock that "it is not too much to say that

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<sup>8</sup> Vol. I., p. 313.

<sup>9</sup> *Descent of Man*, pp. 95, 96.

the horrible dread of unknown evil hangs like a thick cloud over savage life, and embitters every pleasure."<sup>1</sup> He also referred to witchcraft, bloody sacrifices, and the ordeals of poison and fire, cautiously observing that "it is well occasionally to reflect on these superstitions, for they show us what an infinite debt of gratitude we owe to the improvement of our reason, to science, and to our accumulated knowledge"<sup>2</sup>—in short, to the slow and painful civilisation of religion.

That the universal belief in God proves his existence Darwin was unable to admit. "There is ample evidence," he says, "derived not from hasty travellers, but from men who have long resided with savages, that numerous races have existed, and still exist, who have no idea of one or more gods, and who have no words in their language to express such an idea."<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, as he remarks in the same work—

"I am aware that the assumed instinctive belief in God has been used by many persons as an argument for his existence. But this is a rash argument, as we should thus be compelled to believe in the existence of many cruel and malignant spirits, only a little more powerful than man; for the belief in them is far more general than in a beneficent Deity."<sup>4</sup>

Attention should here be called to a silent correction in the second edition of the *Descent of Man*. Referring to the question "whether there exists a Creator and Ruler of the universe," he said, "this has been answered in the affirmative by the highest intellects that have ever existed." This was altered into "*some*

<sup>1</sup> *Prehistoric Times*. By Sir John Lubbock, p. 571.

<sup>2</sup> *Descent of Man*, p. 96.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, p. 93.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, p. 612.

of the highest intellects." Darwin had discovered the inaccuracy of his first statement, and learnt that some of the highest intellects have been Atheists.

Two important passages must be extracted from his Autobiography. After remarking that the grandest scenes had no longer the power to make him feel that God exists, he answers the objection that he is "like a man who has become color-blind," which is a favorite one with conceited religionists.

"This argument would be a valid one if all men of all races had the same inward conviction of the existence of one God; but we know that this is very far from being the case. Therefore I cannot see that such inward convictions and feelings are of any weight as evidence of what really exists. The state of mind which grand scenes formerly excited in me, and which was intimately connected with a belief in God, did not essentially differ from that which is often called the sense of sublimity; and however difficult it may be to explain the genesis of this sense, it can hardly be advanced as an argument for the existence of God, any more than the powerful though vague and similar feelings excited by music."<sup>5</sup>

Further on in the same piece of writing he deals with a second and very common argument of Theism.

"Another source of conviction in the existence of God, connected with the reason, and not with the feelings, impresses me as having much more weight. This follows from the extreme difficulty, or rather utter impossibility of conceiving this immense and wonderful universe, including man with his capacity of looking far backwards and far into futurity, as the result of blind chance or necessity. When thus reflecting I feel compelled to look to a First Cause having an intelligent mind in some degree analogous to that of man. This conclusion was strong in my mind about the time, as far as I can remember, when I wrote the *Origin of Species*; and it is since

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<sup>5</sup> Vol I., p. 312.

that time that it has very gradually, with many fluctuations, become weaker. But then arises the doubt, can the mind of man, which has, as I fully believe, been developed from a mind as low as that possessed by the lowest animals, be trusted when it draws such grand conclusions?"<sup>6</sup>

This handling of the matter may be somewhat consoling to Theists. One can hear them saying, "Ah, Darwin was not utterly lost." But let them see how he handles the matter in a letter to a Dutch student (April 2, 1873).

"I may say that the impossibility of conceiving that this grand and wondrous universe, with our conscious selves, arose through chance, seems to me the chief argument for the existence of God; but whether this is an argument of real value I have never been able to decide. I am aware that if we admit a first cause, the mind still craves to know whence it came, and how it arose. Nor can I overlook the difficulty from the immense amount of suffering through the world. I am also induced to defer to a certain extent to the judgment of the many able men who have fully believed in God; but here again I see how poor an argument this is. The safest conclusion seems to me that the whole subject is beyond the scope of man's intellect; but man can do his duty."<sup>7</sup>

"Man can do his duty"—a characteristic touch! The man who said this did *his* duty. His scientific achievements were precious, but they were matched by his lofty and benevolent character.

#### DESIGN.

Darwinism has killed the Design argument, by explaining adaptation as a result without assuming design as a cause. The argument, indeed, like all

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<sup>6</sup> Vol. I., pp. 312, 313.

<sup>7</sup> Vol. I., pp. 306, 307.

“proofs” of God’s existence, was based upon ignorance. It was acutely remarked by Spinoza, in his great majestic manner, that man knows that he wills, but knows not the causes which determine his will. Out of this ignorance the theologians manufactured their chaotic doctrine of free-will. Similarly, out of our ignorance of the *causæ* of the obvious adaptations in nature, they manufactured their plausible Design argument. The “fitness of things” was indisputable, and as it could not be explained scientifically, the theologians trotted out their usual dogma of “God did it.”

Professor Huxley tells us that physical science has created no fresh difficulties in theology. “Not a solitary problem,” he says, “presents itself to the philosophical Theist, at the present day, which has not existed from the time that philosophers began to think out the logical grounds and theological consequences of Theism.”<sup>8</sup> While in one respect true, the statement is liable to mislead. Adaptation presents no *new* problem—that is undeniable; but the scientific explanation of it cuts away the ground of all teleology. “The teleology,” says Huxley, “which supposes that the eye, such as we see it in man, or one of the higher vertebrata, was made with the precise structure it exhibits, for the purpose of enabling the animal which possesses it to see, has undoubtedly received its death-blow.” Yet he bids us remember that “there is a wider teleology which is not touched by the doctrine of Evolution, but is actually based upon the fundamental

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<sup>8</sup> *Life and Letters*, vol. II., p. 202.

proposition of Evolution. This proposition is that the whole world, living and not living, is the result of the mutual interaction, according to definite laws, of the powers possessed by the molecules of which the primitive nebulosity of the universe was composed."<sup>9</sup>

Theologians in search of a life-buoy in the scientific storm have grasped at this chimerical support, although the wiser heads amongst them may doubt whether Professor Huxley is serious in tendering it. Surely if eyes were not made to see with the Design argument is dead. What is the use of saying that the materialist is still "at the mercy of the teleologist, who can always defy him to disprove that the primordial molecular arrangement was not intended to evolve the phenomena of the universe?" The very word "arrangement" gives the teleologist all he requires, and the implied assumption that we are "at the mercy" of anyone who makes an assertion which is incapable of proof, simply because he "defies" us to disprove it, is a curious ineptitude on the part of such a vigorous thinker.

When, in 1879, Darwin was consulted by a German student, a member of his family replied for him as follows:—"He considers that the theory of Evolution is quite compatible with belief in God; but that you must remember that different persons have different definitions of what they mean by God."<sup>1</sup> Precisely so. You may believe in God if you define him so as not to contradict facts; in other words, you have a right to a Deity if you choose to construct one. This is perfectly harmless, but what connexion has it with the

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<sup>9</sup> Vol. II., p. 201.

<sup>1</sup> Vol. I., p. 307.

“philosophy” of Theism? There is no definition of God which does *not* contradict facts. Why, indeed, is theology full of mystery? Simply because it is full of *impasses*, where dogma and experience are in hopeless collision, and where we are exhorted to abnegate our reason and accept the guidance of faith.

Darwin's attitude towards the Design argument is definite enough for such a cautious thinker. In one of his less popular, but highly important works, the first edition of which appeared in 1868, he went out of his way to deal with it. After using the simile of an architect, who should rear a noble and commodious edifice, without the use of cut stone, by selecting stones of various shape from the fragments at the base of a precipice; he goes on to say that these “fragments of stone, though indispensable to the architect, bear to the edifice built by him the same relation which the fluctuating varieties of organic beings bear to the varied and admirable structures ultimately acquired by their modified descendants.” The shape of the stones is not accidental, for it depends on geological causes, though it may be said to be accidental with regard to the use they are put to.

“Here we are led to face a great difficulty, in alluding to which I am aware that I am travelling beyond my proper province. An omniscient Creator must have foreseen every consequence which results from the laws imposed by Him. But can it be reasonably maintained that the Creator intentionally ordered, if we use the words in any ordinary sense, that certain fragments of rock should assume certain shapes so that the builder might erect his edifice? If the various laws which have determined the shape of each fragment were not predetermined for the builder's sake, can it be maintained with any

greater probability that He specially ordained for the sake of the breeder each of the innumerable variations in our domestic animals and plants ;—many of these variations being of no service to man, and not beneficial, far more often injurious, to the creatures themselves? Did He ordain that the crop and tail-feathers of the pigeon should vary in order that the fancier might make his grotesque pouter and fantail breeds? Did He cause the frame and mental qualities of the dog to vary in order that a breed might be formed of indomitable ferocity, with jaws fitted to pin down the bull for man's brutal sport? But if we give up the principle in one case,—if we do not admit that the variations of the primeval dog were intentionally guided in order that the greyhound, for instance, that perfect image of symmetry and vigour, might be formed,—no shadow of reason can be assigned for the belief that variations, alike in nature and the result of the same general laws, which have been the groundwork through natural selection of the formation of the most perfectly adapted animals in the world, man included, were intentionally and specially guided. However much we may wish it, we can hardly follow Professor Asa Gray in his belief "that variation has been led along certain beneficial lines," like a stream "along definite and useful lines of irrigation." If we assume that each particular variation was from the beginning of all time preordained, then that plasticity of organisation, which leads to many injurious deviations of structure, as well as the redundant power of reproduction which inevitably leads to a struggle for existence, and, as a consequence, to the natural selection or survival of the fittest, must appear to us superfluous laws of nature. On the other hand, an omnipotent end omniscient Creator ordains everything and foresees everything. Thus we are brought face to face with a difficulty as insoluble as that of free will and predestination.<sup>2</sup>

Darwin protested that this had met with no reply. What reply, indeed, is possible? Design covers every-

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<sup>2</sup> *Variation of Animals and Plants under Domestication.* By Charles Darwin. Vol. II., pp. 427, 428.



thing or nothing. If the bulldog was not designed, what reason is there for supposing that man was designed? If there is no design in an idiot, how can there be design in a philosopher?

The *Life and Letters* contains many passages less elaborate but more pointed. Here is one.

“The old argument from Design in nature, as given by Paley, which formerly seemed to me so conclusive, fails, now that the law of natural selection has been discovered. We can no longer argue that, for instance, the beautiful hinge of a bivalve shell must have been made by an intelligent being like the hinge of a door by man. There seems to be no more design in the variability of organic beings, and in the action of natural selection, than in the course which the wind blows.”<sup>3</sup>

The fit survive, the unfit perish; and the theologian is eloquent on the successes, and silent on the failures. He marks the hits and forgets the misses. Were nature liable to human penalties she would have been dished long ago; but she works with infinite time and infinite resources, and therefore cannot become bankrupt.

Here is a passage from a letter to Miss Julia Wedgwood (July 11, 1861) on the occasion of her article in *Macmillan*.

“The mind refuses to look at this universe, being what it is without having been designed; yet, where one would most expect design, namely, in the structure of a sentient being, the more I think the less I can see proof of design.”<sup>4</sup>

This reminds one of a pregnant utterance of another master-mind. Cardinal Newman says he should be an Atheist if it were not for the voice speaking in his conscience, and exclaims—“If I looked into a mirror,

<sup>3</sup> Vol. I., p. 309.

<sup>4</sup> Vol. I., pp. 313, 314.

and did not see my face, I should have the sort of feeling which comes upon me when I look into this living busy world, and see no reflexion of its Creator."<sup>5</sup>

Here is another passage from a letter (July, 1860) to Dr. Asa Gray.

"One word more on 'designed laws' and 'undesigned results.' I see a bird which I want for food, take my gun and kill it. I do this *designedly*. An innocent and good man stands under a tree and is killed by a flash of lightning. Do you believe (and I really should like to hear) that God *designedly* killed this man? Many or most persons do believe this; I can't and don't. If you believe so, do you believe when a swallow snaps up a gnat that God designed that that particular swallow should snap up that particular gnat at that particular instant? I believe that the man and the gnat are in the same predicament. If the death of neither man nor gnat is designed, I see no reason to believe that their *first* birth or production should be necessarily designed."<sup>6</sup>

Twenty years later, writing to Mr. W. Graham, the author of the *Creed of Science*, Darwin says, "There are some points in your book which I cannot digest. The chief one is that the existence of so-called natural laws implies purpose. I cannot see this."<sup>7</sup>

During the last year of his life a very interesting conversation took place between Darwin and the Duke of Argyll. Here is the special part in the Duke's own words.

"In the course of that conversation I said to Mr. Darwin, with reference to some of his own remarkable words on 'Fertilisation of Orchids' and upon 'The Earthworms,' and

<sup>5</sup> *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*, p. 241.

<sup>6</sup> Vol. I., pp. 314, 315.

<sup>7</sup> Vol. I., p. 315.

various other observations he made of the wonderful contrivances for certain purposes in nature—I said it was impossible to look at these without seeing that they were the effect and the expression of mind. He looked at me very hard and said, ‘Well, that often comes over me with overwhelming force; but at other times,’ and he shook his head vaguely, adding, ‘it seems to go away.’<sup>s</sup>

This is a remarkable story, and the point of it is in the words “it seems to go away.” There is nothing extraordinary in the fact that Darwin, who was a Christian till thirty and a Theist till fifty, should sometimes feel a billow of superstition sweep over his mind. The memorable thing is that at other times his free intellect could not harbour the idea of a God of Nature. The indications of mind in the constitution of the universe were not obvious to the one man living who had studied it most profoundly. Belief in the supernatural could not harmonise in Darwin’s mind with the facts and conclusions of science. The truth of Evolution entered it and gradually took possession. Theology was obliged to leave, and although it returned occasionally, and roamed through its old dwelling, it only came as a visitor, and was never more a resident.

#### DIVINE BENEFICENCE.

The problem of how the goodness of God can be reconciled with the existence of evil is at least as old as the Book of Job, and the essence of the problem remains unchanged. Many different solutions have been offered, but the very best is nothing but a

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<sup>s</sup> Vol. I., p. 316.

plausible compromise. Even the Christian theory of a personal Devil, practically almost as potent as the Deity, and infinitely more active, is a miserable makeshift; for, on inquiry, it turns out that the Devil is a part of God's handiwork, exercising only a delegated or permitted power. The usual resort of the theologian when driven to bay is to invoke the aid of "mystery," but this is useless as against the logician, since "mystery" is only a contradiction between the facts and the hypothesis, and the theologian can hardly expect to be saved by what is virtually a plea of "Guilty."

Like every educated and thoughtful man, Darwin was brought face to face with this problem, and he was too honest to twist the facts, and too much a lover of truth and clarity to submerge them in the mysterious. He preferred to speak plainly as far as his intellect carried him, and when it stopped to frankly confess his ignorance.

Writing to Dr. Asa Gray (May 22, 1860), Darwin puts a strong objection to Theism very pointedly.

"I own that I cannot see as plainly as others do, and as I should wish to do, evidence of design and beneficence on all sides of us. There seems to me too much misery in the world. I cannot persuade myself that a beneficent and omnipotent God would have designedly created the *ichneumonidæ* with the express intention of their feeding within the living bodies of caterpillars, or that a cat should play with mice. Not believing this, I see no necessity in the belief that the eye was expressly designed. On the other hand, I cannot anyhow be contented to view this wonderful universe, and especially the nature of man, and to conclude that everything is the result of brute force. I am inclined to look at everything as resulting from designed laws, with the details, whether good or bad, left

to the working out of what we may call chance. Not that this notion *at all* satisfies me. I feel most deeply that the whole subject is too profound for the human intellect."<sup>9</sup>

The latter part of this extract about "designed laws" is modified by a subsequent letter, already quoted, to the same correspondent. The first part is the one to be dwelt upon in the present connexion.

Dealing with the same subject sixteen years later in his *Autobiography*, Darwin gives his opinion that happiness, on the whole, predominates over misery, although he admits that this "would be very difficult to prove." He then faces the Theistic aspect of the question.

"That there is much suffering in the world no one disputes. Some have attempted to explain this with reference to man by imagining that it serves for his moral improvement. But the number of men in the world is as nothing compared with that of all other sentient beings, and they often suffer greatly without any moral improvement. This very old argument from the existence of suffering against the existence of an intelligent First Cause seems to me a strong one."<sup>11</sup>

Darwin is perfectly conscious that he is advancing no new argument against Theism. An age of microscopical science was, indeed, necessary before the internal parasites of caterpillars could be instanced; not to mention the thirty species of parasites that prey on the human organism. But such larger parasites as fleas and lice have always been obvious, and the theologians have been constantly asked why Almighty Goodness prompted Almighty Wisdom to provide humanity with such a sumptuous stock of these nuisances. It may also be observed that while

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<sup>9</sup> Vol. II., p. 312.

<sup>11</sup> Vol. I., p. 311.

cholera, fever, and other germs, are modern discoveries, such things as tumours, cancers, and leprosy, have always attracted attention, and they are more telling instances of malignant "design" than the ichneumonidæ in caterpillars, as they immediately affect the gentlemen who carry on the discussion.

Darwinism does, however, present the problem of evil in a new light. It shows us that evil is not on the surface of things, but is part of their very texture. Those who complacently dwell on the survival of the fittest, and the forward march to perfection, conveniently forget that the survival of the fittest is the *result*. Natural Selection is the *process*. And if we look at this more closely we discover that natural selection and the survival of the fittest are the same thing; the *real process* being the *elimination of the unfit*. Those who survive would have lived in any case; what has happened is that all the rest have been crushed out of existence. Suppose, for instance (to take a case of artificial selection), a farmer castrates nineteen bulls and breeds from the twentieth; it makes a great difference to the *result*, but clearly the whole of the *process* is the elimination of the nineteen. Similarly, in natural selection, all organic variations are alike spawned forth by Nature; the fit are produced and perpetuated, while the unfit are produced and exterminated. And *how* exterminated? Not by the swift hand of a skilful executioner, but by countless varieties of torture, some of which display an infernal ingenuity that might abash the deftest Inquisitor. Every disease known to us is simply one of Nature's devices for eliminating her unsuitable offspring, and a cat's playing

with a mouse is nothing to the prolonged sport of Nature in killing the victims of her own infinite lust of procreation. Place a Deity behind this process, and you create a greater and viler Devil than any theology of the past was capable of inventing. Accept it as the work of blind forces, and you may become a Pessimist if you are disgusted with the entire business; or an Optimist if you are healthy, prosperous and callous; or a Meliorist if you think evolution tends to progress, and that your own efforts may brighten the lot of your fellows.

Darwin put the case too mildly in his first great work.

"When we reflect on this struggle, we may console ourselves with the full belief, that no fear is felt, that death is generally prompt, and that the vigorous, the healthy, and the happy survive and multiply."<sup>2</sup>

Professor Huxley, in his vigorous and uncompromising fashion, has put the case with greater force and accuracy

"From the point of view of the moralist the animal world is on about the same level as a gladiator's show. The creatures are fairly well treated, and set to fight—whereby the strongest, the swiftest and cunningest live to fight another day. The spectator has no need to turn his thumbs down, as no quarter is given. He must admit that the skill and training displayed are wonderful. But he must shut his eyes if he would not see that more or less enduring suffering is the meed of both vanquished and victor."<sup>3</sup>

Dr. Wallace, on the other hand, argues that the "torments" and "miserics" of the lower animals are imaginary, and that "the amount of actual suffering

<sup>2</sup> *Origin of Species*, p. 61.

<sup>3</sup> *The Struggle for Existence*, "Nineteenth Century," February, 1888, p. 163.

caused by the struggle for existence among animals is altogether insignificant." They live merrily, have no apprehensions, and die violent deaths which are "painless and easy." Really the picture is idyllic! But Dr. Wallace's optimism is far from exhausted. He tells us that "their actual flight from an enemy" is an "enjoyable exercise" of their powers. This reminds one of the old fox-hunter who, on being taxed with enjoying a cruel sport, replied: "Why the men like it, the horses like it, the dogs like it, and, demme, the fox likes it too."

#### RELIGION AND MORALITY.

Darwin was, of course, a naturalist in ethics, holding that morality is founded on sympathy and the social instincts. There is no more solid and satisfactory account of the genesis and development of conscience than is to be found in the chapter on "The Moral Sense" in the *Descent of Man*. I do not think, however, that he had given much attention to the relations between morality and religion, but what he says is of course entitled to respect.

"With the more civilised races," he declares, "the conviction of the existence of an all-seeing Deity has had a potent influence on the advance of morality."<sup>4</sup> He speaks of "the ennobling belief in the existence of an Omnipotent God,"<sup>5</sup> and again of "the grand idea of a God hating sin and loving righteousness."<sup>6</sup> These are casual opinions, never in any case elaborated, so that we cannot tell on what grounds Darwin held

<sup>4</sup> *Descent of Man*, p. 612.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, p. 93.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, p. 144.



them. One would have liked to hear his opinion as to how many people were habitually swayed by this "grand idea" of God.

### AGNOSTICISM AND ATHEISM.

"My views are not at all necessarily atheistical," wrote Darwin in 1860 to Dr. Asa Gray.<sup>7</sup> In the same strain he wrote to Mr. Fordyce in 1879:

"What my own views may be is a question of no consequence to anyone but myself. But, as you ask, I may state that my judgment often fluctuates. . . . In my most extreme fluctuations I have never been an Atheist in the sense of denying the existence of a God. I think that generally (and more and more as I grow older), but not always, that an Agnostic would be the more correct description of my state of mind."<sup>8</sup>

Similarly, he closes a lengthy passage of his Autobiography—"The mystery of the beginning of all things is insoluble by us; and I for one must be content to remain an Agnostic."<sup>9</sup>

Let us here recur to the conversation between Darwin and Dr. Büchner, reported by Dr. Aveling. Darwin "held the opinion that the Atheist was a denier of God," and this is borne out by the extract just given from his letter to Mr. Fordyce. His two guests explained to him that the Greek prefix *a* was privative not negative, and that an Atheist was simply a person without God. Darwin agreed with them on every point, and said finally, "I am with you in thought, but I should prefer the word Agnostic to the word Atheist." They suggested that Agnostic was Atheist "writ respectable," and Atheist was Agnostic "writ

<sup>7</sup> Vol. II., p. 312.

<sup>8</sup> Vol. I., p. 305.

<sup>9</sup> Vol. I., p. 313.

aggressive." At which he smiled, and asked, "Why should you be so aggressive? Is anything gained by trying to force these new ideas upon the mass of mankind? It is all very well for educated, cultured, thoughtful people; but are the masses yet ripe for it?"<sup>1</sup>

Mr. Francis Darwin does not dispute this report.

"My father's replies implied his preference for the unaggressive attitude of an Agnostic. Dr. Aveling seems to regard the absence of aggressiveness in my father's views as distinguishing them in an unessential manner from his own. But, in my judgment, it is precisely differences of this kind which distinguish him so completely from the class of thinkers to which Dr. Aveling belongs."<sup>2</sup>

This is amusing but not convincing; indeed, it gives up the whole point at issue. Mr. Francis Darwin simply confirms all that Dr. Aveling said. The great naturalist was not aggressive; so he preferred *Agnostic* to *Atheist*; but as both mean exactly the same, essentially, the difference is not one of principle, but one of policy and temperament. Darwin prided himself on having "done some service in aiding to overthrow the dogma of separate creations"<sup>3</sup> Had he gone more into the world, and seen the evil effects of other dogmas, he might have sympathised more with the aggressive attitude of those who challenge Theology *in toto* as the historic enemy of liberty and progress. This at least is certain, that Charles Darwin, the supreme biologist of his age, and the greatest scientific intellect since Newton, was an *Atheist* in the only proper sense of the word; the sense supported by etymology, the sense accepted by those who bear the name.

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<sup>1</sup> Dr. Aveling's pamphlet, p. 5.

<sup>2</sup> *Life and Letters*, vol. i., p. 317.

<sup>3</sup> *Descent of Man*, p. 61.