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THE ORTHODOX SURRENDER.

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THE ORTHODOX SURRENDER.

MY attention has recently been called to a remarkable article in the *Church Quarterly Review*. The article in question appeared in the number for October 1875—the opening number of the *Review*—and a notice of it at this time may seem to come somewhat late. All that I can say to this is, that it is a pity it has not been taken in hand before now, and that, too, by some more competent writer than myself, in the pages of this series. Failing this, I do not consider that it can ever be too late to expose such reasoning as I shall immediately refer to. I hear further that several influential publications (amongst them, the *Saturday Review*) have contained eulogistic notices of the article. But what has principally induced me to take up my pen is the circumstance, above alluded to, that my attention has been called to the essay by a letter from a friend, a man of talent and reasoning powers, and an orthodox Christian, not perhaps without some twinges of doubt. It would almost seem that a perusal of it has relieved his doubts, and furnished him with an infallible recipe for holding certain scientific discoveries in company with the doctrine of plenary Biblical inspiration. Doubtless many others, similarly circumstanced, have taken the same rosy view. To me, on the other hand, it appears to be absolutely suicidal, to contain the most complete *reductio ad absurdum* of orthodox belief that I have met with for many years. The reader will directly have an opportunity of judging.

First, one word as to this *Church Quarterly Review*, a serial which contains some very able papers. It is a publication evidently, and, it is to be presumed, avowedly inspired by the Anglican or High Church party in the Establishment. On all points in dispute between High and Low, we should, of course, not be entitled to accept its utterances as likely to represent the sentiments of any other section than that with which it is identified. But the case is obviously different where doctrines held in common by High and Low are defended against a common adversary. In all controversies directly affecting the undivided Christian faith, we should accept the High Churchman as a champion of orthodoxy. Indeed, considering that all the learning in the Church has gravitated towards that portion of it, we should accept him as the best and most efficient champion to be found. I may take it, then, that the tone of the article to which I am referring commends itself to the orthodox generally; while, as indeed we have evidence to show, the particular views advocated are sympathetic to, are held, if not in the exact form there exhibited, yet in some kindred form by, a number of persons—Evangelical, High Church, Ritualistic, or even Roman Catholic. And it is a matter of some significance that they have been put forth in the opening number of the new *Review*. No time is lost in attacking the stronghold of the infidel, and the train laid for the purpose of blowing him up is one to which any kind of Christian may, if he thinks fit, set his hand.

The article in question, the second in the number, is entitled "On Some Aspects of Science in Relation to Religion." The first part of it may be roughly described as an argument to the effect that Evolution, if shown to be true, is by no means inconsistent with the idea of a personal God. In this position I for my part heartily concur, and it is not necessary to dwell on what does not form the subject of my contention with the writer. Yet I can't help saying, by the bye, that it is

a pity he did not end here. "Prove Evolution (which you have not done yet and perhaps never will) and even then you have not disproved a personal Deity. Indeed, in some minds, you will rather have strengthened the belief, or, if you please, the hypothesis." This seems to me common sense. In other words, Evolution is by no means fatal to Theism, as Mr J. S. Mill has admitted. But I suppose it would hardly have suited an orthodox writer to go no further than this. Having taken up the ground that Evolution *may possibly* be true, yet that religion, as he understands the term, has nothing to fear from it, he must proceed to show further that it is not fatal to the plenary inspiration of the Bible.

This he proceeds to do, *more suo*, in the second part of his article, beginning at p. 58. In this he makes the attempt, not to *reconcile*—that, it will be seen directly, would not be the proper word—science with revelation, but to justify the holding of certain scientific views in conjunction with certain Scriptural statements which he himself admits to be at direct variance with them. Evolution (on the supposition of its one day possibly becoming part of the armoury of science) is still the main subject or illustration put forward; but the process recommended by the writer, and indeed he distinctly affirms it, is applicable to every passage of the Bible which stands in opposition, not merely to ingenious hypotheses, but to the teachings of affirmed and established science. It is applicable to the account of the creation of the world generally, to the circumstantial narrative of the Deluge, the stopping of the sun by Joshua, and, we may perhaps add, witchcraft, and the demoniacs of the New Testament.

I have said that "reconciling" is not the proper term to use with regard to this writer's process. Indeed, he expressly repudiates all attempts of the kind. He tells us, over and over again, that certain passages in the

Bible *cannot* be reconciled with science. He intimates that in the present condition of our knowledge, it is scarcely honest to make the attempt. Take the following extracts :—

“It can do nothing! but harm to attempt a compromise by such glosses either of religious or scientific truth as bring them into apparent harmony, only by leaving out of view the real points of difficulty If it is not in our power at once to give a satisfactory solution of the apparent discrepancy, surely the safer, as well as the more honest course, is to admit the fact.” (p. 60).

A little further on, he speaks with apparent approval of “the more certain, but still much disputed point (*i.e.*, doctrine) of the existence of the human race through long ages of pre-historic time” (p. 61).

Further on, he tells us that the result of bygone controversies between science and theology has been “the full acquiescence of theologians in the scientific conclusions arrived at.” And again, “If we now attempt to inquire how this good understanding has been brought about in any particular branch of science—as, for instance, in geology—we shall see cause to refer it, mainly if not entirely, to the conviction of the truth of the scientific position, as established on independent evidence proper to itself, and very little, if at all, to the general acceptance of any interpretations of the sacred writings, which would bring the letter of the Mosaic account into harmony with such theories of geology as will commend themselves to the students of that science (p. 61).

The writer next notices with disapproval such attempts as those made by Dr Newman, Hugh Miller, Dr Pusey, and others, to reconcile the language of Genesis with the teachings of geology, and endorses with regard to them the words used by Mr Pritchard : “Speaking, I trust in a most reverential spirit, and with that caution and humility which the case demands,

I feel bound to say that no interpretation of the Mosaic cosmogony, regarded as a description of the actual order, and actual duration, of the creative steps, has yet been proposed, which is at all satisfactory to those who by study and preparation of mind are most capable of forming a correct opinion." (P. 62.)

Now what does all this amount to? But I prefer to let the writer speak for himself. The italics are my own: "The principle here contended for is that our acceptance of a scientific theory should be made dependent, *not on our estimate of attempts to harmonize such details,*" i.e., scientific conclusions with scriptural statements, "*but on its own proper evidence.*" (P. 62).

Here is a principle against which I have not a word to say, but how about the unfortunate "believer?" What is the course recommended to him? The bible makes one statement, and science makes another statement, and these two (says the writer) cannot by any exercise of ingenuity be brought into harmony. In fact, they are contradictory statements; that of science being such as, we are told, leads to "a conviction of its truth." One would imagine that there is only one possible answer to this question. "Accept the true statement and reject the false one."

The author's method is this—and the reader who has ever so small an acquaintance with the ways of theologians will have perhaps divined it, from the preceding extracts—"Admit the truth of both!" "If it is not in our power,"—I have already quoted part of this, but no matter—"If it is not in our power to give at once a satisfactory solution of the apparent discrepancy, surely the safer as well as the more honest course is to admit the fact, and refer it to its real cause," (namely, that the two statements *are* contradictory? Oh, no!) "the imperfection of our knowledge, and the limited scope of our powers of reasoning!" Again, "We may surely assent to the truth of a scientific statement, when established on as satisfactory a basis as that kind of

knowledge admits of"—by the bye, what kind of knowledge rests on a *more* satisfactory basis?—"without either being able to show the manner of its accordance with the surface meaning of some scriptural statement, or discrediting the latter on this account."

Before going further I should like to try this remarkable method by applying it to some simple and familiar examples. Vague talk of the above description is often most easily dispersed by bringing the matter to a crucial test. Let us take what is commonly called the creation of the world. The bible tells us that it was created in six days, days specially indicated as containing a morning and an evening a-piece. Science informs us that it was the work of many ages. "How," asks the enquirer, "am I to assimilate these two seemingly opposite statements, except on the supposition that a day means a long period, and morning and evening the beginning and close of each such period, or by accepting some other hypothesis which will bring them into accord." "You *can't* assimilate them," replies the author. "All attempts at representing the days as so many periods of great duration are unsatisfactory and indeed disingenuous. And every other hypothesis is equally valueless. Your way out of the difficulty is much simpler. The scientific statement we admit to be true. On the other hand, *as we know that the bible is divinely inspired, and consequently infallible in every part*, so the biblical statement must be true. They must, therefore, be capable of being reconciled in some way that we cannot dream of. In the meanwhile, your duty is to believe both!" "How on earth am I to do that?" asks the enquirer. "Consider the imperfection of your knowledge," retorts the writer. "But the two statements flatly contradict each other. How can they both be true?" "Oh, but bear in mind your limited powers of apprehension!" Again, the second chapter of Genesis tells us that the order of creation was (1) man; (2) beasts and fowls; (3) woman. Science informs

us that this is not true. Believe both ! or rather, as the first chapter gives a different account, believe all three ! The bible informs us that death came into the world as a punishment for human sin. Science acquaints us with the fact that death was in the world ages before there could have been human sin. Believe both : that is to say, believe that it was a punishment for sin, and not a punishment for sin. The bible relates in the most explicit terms that the deluge covered the whole earth. Science informs us that there are portions of the earth which have never been thus submerged. Believe both : believe that the whole of the earth was covered by water, and that only a part of it was covered. Of course the same system will make short work of all internal contradictions in the bible itself. If in one place the Deity is spoken of as all-powerful, and in another is represented as being unable to drive out the inhabitants of the valley, because they had chariots of iron—believe both ! Believe that he is all-powerful, and that he is not all-powerful. It is all very well to ride off on such convenient expressions as “surface meanings,” “apparent discrepancies,” and the like : but this is what the matter comes to, when fairly looked at.

Of course the method we are considering has one advantage : it is thorough. It places every statement in the bible under cover of any assault or criticism from whatever quarter. “I will grant you that $2 + 2 = 4$,” says the believer, “but if I find in my bible that $2 + 2 = 5$, I shall believe that too. There must be some way of reconciling the two additions that I don't know of.” This is evidently no exaggeration. Either there was a universal deluge or there was not. Either the sun was in being before the earth or it was not. Either death came into the world by sin, or it came in in some other way. If science has established one alternative of any of these propositions, then, the other is as absurd as that $2 + 2 = 5$. *Credo quia impossibile*: happy believer ! From this point of view the writer is

quite right in asserting that the doctrine of Evolution, if ever proved to be true, need not frighten the orthodox—though his way of putting it sounds strange to profane ears. “It is worth while to point out that if the literal phraseology of the bible is inconsistent with some of the evolutionary theories, it is so in a much more formal way with the geological antiquity of the earth, a point now generally conceded.” “Yet” he adds further on in the usual strain, “*We have come to be agreed in admitting the truth of both!*” i.e., we have had worse difficulties than this of Evolution to swallow, and have got over the process satisfactorily to ourselves. But it will be desirable to enquire briefly at what cost this immunity from attack of the sacred volume has been purchased.

Evidently, at the cost of the total surrender of human reason: that faculty which, as Bishop Butler has remarked, is the only thing whereby we can judge of the truth of revelation itself. Here, however, it is not the truth of revelation, as I understand the term, which is in question, but the theory of the inspiration, that is to say, the infallibility, of every verse in the bible. The function of reason is perfectly clear in this matter. Whenever the progress of knowledge has established a proposition plainly contradicting some biblical statement, we are bound to conclude that that particular statement is not divinely inspired by the God of Truth, inasmuch as it is opposed to the truth as he has permitted it to reach us from another quarter not open to doubt. This, I say, is the only *reasonable* conclusion to be arrived at by one who, like the writer, admits the contradiction, and admits that it is not to be saved over by any process possible to human reason.

The writer's method is simply this: “First surrender your reason to the dogma of the infallibility of the Bible, and then consent to label every misstatement in it as a mystery.” My answer is that I shall not surrender that faculty, “the lamp which God has lit within

me," to any book or man or body of men whatever. I believe that to do so would be to sin grievously in the eyes of my Maker. And what is this particular dogma to which you call on me thus to surrender it? Can you produce any authoritative declaration on the part of God himself to the effect that every line in the Bible is infallibly true? Have you even any plausible argument to offer on the subject, from the Protestant point of view? None whatever, that I have been able to discover, except a tradition or superstition (not in the least sanctioned by the Bible itself), with nothing to be alleged in its favour, except that it has been held for centuries by certain priest-governed bodies called churches (*not by your own, by the bye, as has been established, on the strength of your own articles, by the tribunals you are bound to acknowledge*)—a superstition assailable on many other grounds, and directly negatived by these very passages. Consider your own position for a moment. You admit that these passages are not to be reconciled to our reason. You are too honest to make the attempt. "But I *can't possibly* give up my dogma of verbal inspiration," you cry, "Bother reason!" And when we attempt to argue with you on this very dogma, you have nothing to offer. It is "bother reason!" again. And this is the triumphant answer of theology to scepticism in the year eighteen hundred and seventy-five!

Surely those who can be induced to yield up their minds to this authoritative method are victims to a superstition in no degree more respectable than some of the most abject superstitions of the lowest savages. They worship a fetish in the shape of so many rags converted into the leaves of a book, instead of being dressed up as a doll. Popery in its worst form is only another and hardly a more mischievous instance of this prostitution of the faculties to an idol. The object is different, the process is the same. "Bother reason!" And talking of superstitions, this remarkable "method"

would be good for bolstering up more than one of them. Thus, a reasonable objection to some of the Eastern religions lies in the absurd cosmogonies contained in their sacred books. In the *Shastras*, the world is represented as having been produced by Brahm out of an egg. Why should not the Hindoo continue to believe in Brahm's egg, as well as in the teachings of science, consigning the discrepancy between the two statements to that convenient limbo, "the imperfection of our faculties?"

As a specimen of the author's mode of illustrating and enforcing his method, the following may suffice:— He has before him, as we have seen, the difficult task of coaxing the reader into assenting provisionally to two such propositions as these. "The sun was made before the world," "The sun was made after the world." This, he says, does not seem such a wonderful feat "when we consider the difficulty of reconciling the results of different lines of scientific enquiry." Here certainly "results" must mean, or ought to mean, "established scientific conclusions;" it cannot include unverified hypotheses, because in that case there would be no necessity imposed on us of reconciling two of these that should contradict each other, inasmuch as not only one, but both might be false. Now, here is the author's instance, given in a foot-note. "The immense length of time, for instance, required for the process of Evolution, in the view of some of its propounders, which would exceed the limits of the possible age of the sun, as estimated by Sir Wm. Thompson, on physical grounds." (Page 60.) *I.e.*, some scientific men have a theory which requires (on the part of only a section of these) x^2 years for the age of the world. Some other scientific men see reasons for supposing the world to have lasted only x years. To make this illustration worth anything, the possibility ought to be indicated of our being one day called upon to hold that the world has lasted only x years, and also that it has

lasted x^2 years. Whereas, who does not see that if neither of these be established as results, we simply have to suspend our judgments: as I have just said, there is no case for reconciling (in the sense of reconciling what we know to be true with what in the light of reason is untrue.) And who does not further see that no such case for "reconciling" can ever arise? For if one of the two statements be established, the other is *ipso facto* refuted.* Unless indeed (which has not yet been the case), one scientific conclusion be found to contradict another as distinctly and unmistakeably as some of these conclusions have contradicted the text of scripture. Then, indeed, the author's illustration will apply, and we shall find ourselves involved in the same difficulties as beset the adopters of his method. But perhaps it would be better to wait, before deciding on our course, till the occasion shall arise.

Here is another of the author's illustrations, which is as bad as—it cannot be worse than—the preceding. He instances the omnipotence of God and the free will of man. "We may well be content to admit the truth of each of these tenets, without being able to see how their results fit into each other." Admitting the omnipotence of God and also the free-will of man, I would respectfully ask, How do these dogmas *contradict* each other? For this is the point. Would there be any contradiction between (suppose) a scientific discovery of the existence and omnipotence of God, and a biblical statement of free-will, or *vice versa*, between a scientific discovery of the freedom of the will and a bible declaration of the omnipotence of God? I apprehend that the supporters of biblical infallibility would reply, with perfect justice, that there was no contradiction whatever. For that man being free, his freedom had been conceded to him by the omnipotence of God. Of course an

* And, of course, everything that depends upon it; *e.g.*, If Evolution *requires* x^2 years, proof that the world has only existed x years, puts an end to Evolution.

omnipotent Deity *could* break in upon this freedom at any moment that he chose, but for wise reasons of his own he does not appear so to choose.

I cannot help here briefly noticing how this writer's method might be worked on behalf of the Roman Catholic Church. The ground taken up by Protestantism at its origin was that certain doctrines and practices of Roman Catholicism were not to be found in Scripture (which does not, I think, amount to much)—and also (which is the point here), that they and others were *repugnant* to scripture. But there are no passages in the bible so plainly contradictory of any Roman Catholic doctrine or practice, as there are scientific conclusions flatly opposed to certain passages in the bible. Indeed, the two former may be reconciled—every dispassionate person admits that—but now we are told that the two latter *cannot*. If then the two latter can be held in conjunction, why not the two former? May not Roman Catholicism be right even where it is in “seeming contradiction” (contradiction, I say, of a comparatively trifling kind), with some “surface statement” of the bible? May there not be a way of reconciling the two even although we cannot discover a solution satisfactory to ourselves at the moment? May it not be our duty to “believe both?” I have not time or space to dwell further on this point, which I invite the reader to ponder on. But it certainly seems to me that this doctrine of certain things being perfectly reconcilable with “surface meanings” in the bible, which seem to say the exact contrary, is fatal to the Protestant position.

To conclude these cursory remarks, this article seems to me a significant “sign of the end.” It is like an army laying down its arms

“Jam jam efficaci do manus scientiæ,”

with a despairing cry to a “Deus ex machina” to help them out of their difficulties. It was, I think, Professor

Agassiz who said that scientific discoveries usually underwent three phases: Firstly, it was said they were false; secondly, that they were opposed to the bible; thirdly, when they had won their way to acceptance over the carcasses of slaughtered prejudices, that they were quite true and quite in accordance with the text of the bible. But there is yet another phase into which they have entered in the minds of some, viz., that they are true and *not* to be reconciled with the text of the bible. This position, hitherto held by sceptics only, we now see to be frankly admitted in the "Church Quarterly Review." The admission seems to me a fatal one. Religious beliefs, out of reach of verification, may be held as long as the world lasts. Beliefs founded on statements, which unfortunately for themselves have lain in the way of advancing knowledge and been worsted, may remain as long as a compromise is admitted to be possible. But when their supporters are obliged to come forward and acknowledge in all honesty that no compromise is possible to our faculties between their beliefs and established truths, and that reason is to be discarded in favour of a baseless myth upheld by mere sentiment, the victory is won: the world will end by accepting the facts, and discarding, not reason, but the hazy beliefs and myths which have crumbled under the facts. Hitherto the theologians, to use the first Napoleon's expression with regard to British troops, have never seemed to know when they are beaten. After reading this article, I cannot but judge that some of them have an uneasy suspicion that they *are* beaten. Surely to withdraw from the light of reason into cloudland is to leave the enemy master of the field. And this appears to me the latest "Aspect of Science in relation to Religion."