

**ARTICLE IV.—EVOLUTIONISM IN NATURAL HISTORY
AS RELATED TO CHRISTIANITY.***

THE question of Evolutionism in Natural History (for of Evolutionism as a general system of philosophy we shall not speak) is essentially a question of the Origin of Species.

Now there is no man who can tell with complete precision what the term *species* means. A species is merely a product of the classifying faculties of the mind; and yet it must be faithfully conformed to the facts of nature. Again, it is generally agreed that whenever the common offspring of two sorts of individuals constantly exhibits a partial or entire barrenness, such a fact is sufficient ground for regarding those two sorts as distinct species; and yet this test cannot be universally applicable, because the peculiar mode of propagation among some of the lowest animals and plants makes it in their case unmeaning. Moreover, even with regard to the organisms whose propagation is more or less bisexual, our knowledge of the facts is so defective that out of the whole number of acknowledged species it is only a small percentage whose limits are actually determined by the phenomena of hybridism; but the classification has to be guided almost wholly by structure and the more obvious functions. And still further, in many cases where there is no dispute as to what the known facts are, there is a wide difference of opinion as to the true boundaries of the species.

But it should not be thought because such obscurities and disagreements exist concerning the definition of species, that the question of their origin is too ill defined to be worth discussing. With regard to the boundaries of most of them, all naturalists are now of one mind, and let us leave out of account all cases but these. Then the question will be, Is it a general law that the individuals of what we all agree to call one spe-

* The present Article does not pretend to do more than point out briefly a just method of inquiry, with some of its chief results.

cies, are descended from the same ancestors as the individuals of what is acknowledged now to be a different species? To answer Yes, is to be an Evolutionist; to answer No, is to reject Evolutionism.

Now it is not the purpose of this Article to prove either that the Evolutionists are right, or that they are wrong; and therefore the writer may be excused from describing the divers forms which their theory takes in the hands of Spencer, Darwin, Wallace, Mivart, and others. It is proposed only to say a few words concerning two questions:—(I.) Whether Evolutionism necessarily contradicts Christianity, and if so, in what points; and (II.) If it is found to be inconsistent with Christianity, what course of argument will it then be proper to follow?

I. Does Evolutionism necessarily contradict Christianity? Our polemics should have paid more attention to this question before they attacked the naturalists so fiercely with theological arguments. The contrary course was quite natural, to be sure, when we saw the whole tribe of shallow and blatant opposers of Christianity flocking over to the new theory, as they always do, for reasons quite other than scientific. But it is unfair to confound with them the truly philosophic minds which have in no small numbers advocated Evolutionism.

The popular idea that Evolutionism in any direct manner destroys the proof of the existence or attributes of God, seems to be a mistaken one.

The chief arguments which are now supposed to afford satisfactory proof of God's existence are of four kinds:—

In the first place, it is said that since each event is *caused* by something, and that by something else, and so on, the tracing back of any series of events in the line of their causation will bring us ultimately to a first cause, which is God. Now this argument depends not at all on the belief that we have heretofore been accustomed to ascribe the true cause to any event, but only on the general truth that all events are caused,—which Evolution does not pretend to deny. Yet we frequently hear a deprecating cry that the new theories will push God further back in the line of causes,—as if that would in the least weaken the argument for his existence. Why, the argument itself affirms that he is the *First Cause*, not a recent one;

and if now we insert more means between the extreme terms of the series, what difference will that make with the first extreme?

Again, men argue that the order and adaptations which we see in nature, show *design*, that design implies a designer, and that the designer of the universe is God. All this (so far as natural history can affect it) depends upon our discerning adaptation and order in the realm of nature; which things Evolutionism emphatically affirms: so that the worst that it can do in this matter is to make obsolete certain popular illustrations of adaptation,—a thing that has been done a hundred times already without shaking any man's faith in a God.

Again, some prefer to put the argument in this form:—That the existence of God is the *hypothesis* which best explains the facts of the universe. This will remain so if Evolutionism should prove to be true. Indeed, if blind matter, following out its own nature, so uniformly works towards internal harmony and beneficence, then (unless it was all by the barest chance, and so inexplicable on any theory) what intelligence was required to plan the original nature of matter so well!

Again, there are others who say that the human mind is necessitated, or that it is commanded, by its *essential constitution* to believe in God. If so, then it will be as impossible for Evolutionism to do away the regulative authority of our natural constitution as it has been for metaphysical speculations to do the same. In attempting it they break the ice under their own feet, and fall into a sea without bottom.

Neither will Evolutionism directly affect the doctrine of the *attributes* of God. His self-existence and conscious intelligence are deduced by theologians from the arguments we have just considered; and these two of the so-called "natural" attributes being given, all the rest of them will follow. And it is from these, taken in connection with God's works, that his moral character and government are proved. The works which are taken into account for this purpose are the facts that we find existing now and during the time of authentic history; and Evolutionism meddles with none of these, unless it denies the existence of a soul.

The objections customarily urged against God's moral character are, (1st) the existence of evil in the world; in regard to

which Evolutionism does nothing to affect the old arguments, except to show that what we have been wont to call physical evil is on the whole a physical good: and (2dly) it is urged that the righteous and the wicked are not rewarded according to their deserts; against which Christians reply that there is a future life where that matter will be set right: and it is yet to be seen what the theory of the naturalists will say to that.

It appears then that it is only in a very indirect way—viz: by first disturbing the Christian belief about the nature and destinies of the human soul—that Evolutionism can be dangerous to the doctrine of God,—a fact which cannot be emphasized too much, since it so commonly escapes attention. Of this now more particularly.

1st. If the Evolutionists deny that there was a time during the progress of organisms when *the soul, as an entity*, and not merely as a mode of action, began to exist, they do come into irreconcilable conflict with Christianity. It may be that the soul began in some lower animal than man, from which it went on developing till it became human; and it may be either that the soul was directly created; or that it was generated out of matter (if they can tell how that could be);—these points are not essential: but if Evolutionism is forced by real consistency with itself (and not merely by some fallacy of its advocates) to deny the objective existence of the soul, then either that doctrine or Christianity is false.

2dly. If Evolutionism by logical necessity denies any attribute of the human soul which is indispensable to a *moral nature in man*, there is no reconciling that theory with Christianity. It may deny the freedom of the will, if it can still accept moral responsibility; it may show that “the right” and “the useful” have been developed by natural selection from one common idea, if it will admit that these are now distinct ideas; it may hold that the rules of objective morality have come by natural selection, if it will still allow that there is independently a quality of rightness in love and of wrongness in hate: but if it destroys morality, it destroys Christianity.

3dly. If evolution denies that at some time during the development of the substance called soul—no matter when, no matter how—a capacity for *immortality* was bestowed upon it, or

will be bestowed; there can be no peace between such doctrine and Christianity.

Does Evolutionism deny these things? To this the answer is,—

1st. That Evolutionism, as a doctrine of natural history, can have nothing to say about immortality except by denying that the soul has an existence even in this world.

2dly. Evolutionism must respect facts; and sin is a fact as well known as the existence of fossils. Our knowledge of it does not depend on natural history so much as our knowledge of fossils depends on psychology. Now a theory belonging to inductive science is not called upon to make or unmake facts, but to explain them if it can. E. g., if the naturalist holds that men are descended from apes, he must not from that infer that men have hands on their lower limbs, for the fact is otherwise. So too, the Evolutionist must not use his theory to prove that men, like apes, have no moral nature, or are not sinners; for the fact is known to be otherwise. He must either not touch this fact, or else explain it. But his science does not require him to touch it at all; or perhaps he will be able to explain it. So then Evolutionism can be held in such a form as not to contradict Christianity on this point—at least, if it will let us believe in a soul.

3dly. We come to the point upon which all our difficulties have been concentrating. *Is there a soul?* Does Evolution necessarily say there is none? Plainly not, we think. The existence of the soul is a fact coördinate with the existence of matter, and known by the same kind of knowledge, namely, by the simplest consciousness. Now if men will deny the trustworthiness of this sort of knowledge, let them do it, and they deny matter as well as soul, natural history as well as psychology, science as well as religion. But Evolution confesses what we call matter, confesses therefore the mode of knowledge by which we know of matter, confesses therefore the mode by which we know of soul. The utmost that Evolutionism can do is to acknowledge itself unable to explain how there comes to be a soul. But there is an unmeasurable gulf between that and proving that there is no soul.

Therefore the doctrine that there is but one substance—call it matter, soul, or what you will—existing in the universe, though many Evolutionists hold it, is not essential to Evolutionism. It would be consistent to hold that the body of man is descended from a shell-fish if they like, and even to explain some things about the soul itself by evolution, and yet to leave us a substantial soul, with morality and immortality; and having these we can show that there is a divine revelation, and an inspiration of the Scriptures; for our argument for the supernatural remains unchanged till they deny the soul. And after inspiration follows the whole train of doctrines essential to Christianity. To be sure, Evolutionism, if adopted, may modify the old belief in non-essentials, such as the interpretation of certain books or passages of the Bible: but Geology has already done as much without weakening Christianity at all; while on the other hand, it has added corroboration to certain passages, as Evolution also will. And Evolutionism may yet do great service to religion by breaking up a chronic skepticism among the orthodox, which deprecates any increasing our knowledge of the internal completeness of the mechanism of the universe, lest forsooth Divine Providence should prove incompetent to manage a machine so vast.

II. We have now answered the first inquiry, Whether Evolutionism necessarily contradicts Christianity. This question properly comes first; and it has been by too often neglecting such inquiries, and taking it for granted that every new and startling scientific theory is dangerous, that theologians have gained their reputation for meddling where they ought not, and for being defeated. If Evolutionism is not hostile to Christianity, then it is purely a matter of natural science, to be settled by the principles of natural science, and all theological arguments against it are impertinent. But when Evolutionism is shown to be irreconcilable with Christianity—and this is exactly what some of its friends pretend to show—then the claim of its advocates to be let alone by theologians will be no less impertinent. When there are two systems radically at variance, the contest between them can not be settled by first establishing one upon grounds which would be sufficient provided the other had never been heard of, and then taking this system as an

unquestionable basis from which to destroy the opposing one. That method cuts as fairly one way as it does the other, and never can come at the truth. If we would have an everlasting wrangle without progress towards right thinking, let it first be admitted that Evolutionism is essentially hostile to Christianity, and then let naturalists refuse to consider any theological arguments concerning Evolutionism, and theologians refuse all scientific arguments about Theology. No, but if the two systems of belief are indeed foes without possible reconciliation, this is the question that comes before us,—Whether the whole mass of reasons which support the one system is of greater weight than the whole mass of those which support the other. All sorts of arguments, then, from every source, for and against either theory, are in order. Each party must listen in patience and make answer as best it may; and thus, by a gradual elimination of fallacies from both sides, the kindred atoms of verity scattered through the confused mass will seek each other, till, where chaos was, there will stand a crystal;—on which side of the old contested line, who should care?—since it will be the truth. That is an evolution deeply to be desired.