

The Recovery of St. Thomas

A SERMON PREACHED IN ST. PAUL'S CATHEDRAL
ON THE SECOND SUNDAY AFTER EASTER

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WITH A PREFATORY NOTE ON THE LATE MR. DARWIN

BY

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PREFATORY NOTE.

THE reference to Mr. Darwin contained in the following Sermon has attracted an amount of notice which it ill deserved. Mr. Darwin's death had occurred three days before the Sermon was preached; and, for more reasons than one, such an event naturally invited some allusion in the pulpit. But the allusion actually made was the result of so little premeditation, and, as will be seen, was also of so incidental a character, that it was ill adapted to do duty for "a statement of the religious aspects of Darwinianism." Thus, if the Sermon is to be published at all, a few words are necessary by way of preface, which under other circumstances might savour of impertinence.

And, first of all, it is right to make an observation for the sake of those persons who may not have read Mr. Darwin for themselves, namely, that his books show him to have been a believer in Almighty God. To go no further than "The Descent of Man"—the work which has perhaps on the whole occasioned the largest amount

of anxiety and misgiving—he there twice speaks of belief in God, as “ennobling.”¹ No serious writer would so speak of any belief, much less of the tremendous “belief in the existence of an Omnipotent God,”² unless he himself held it to be a true belief. No superstition ever did or could “ennoble” the man who held it; and when Mr. Darwin says that the question, “whether there exists a Creator and Ruler of the universe,” has “been answered in the affirmative by the highest intellects that have ever lived,”³ he at least implies that he does not dissent from their judgment.

That Mr. Darwin’s doctrine of the origin of species by natural selection is not of itself opposed to faith in God’s relation to the material universe as its Maker and ever-present Upholder and Ruler, need not be insisted on. Mr. Darwin has taught many readers how to think of God working in nature during long periods of time, not how to think of nature as excluding God. On this subject Dr. Pusey has written, with the high authority which always belongs to him:—

“The question as to ‘species,’ of what variations the animal world is capable, whether the species be more or

¹ “Descent of Man,” vol. i. pp. 65, 106.

² Ibid., p. 106.

³ Ibid., p. 65.

fewer, whether accidental variations may become hereditary, whether the 'struggle for existence' may have occasioned animals which once existed to disappear, whether, e.g. the animals ranged under the tribe of *felis* or *canis* were each originally variations of some common progenitor, and the like, naturally fall under the province of science. In all these questions Mr. Darwin's careful observations gained for him a deserved approbation and confidence. These questions have no bearing whatever upon Theology." ⁴

And he quotes, with approbation, Professor Reusch, of Bonn, as saying:—

"A relationship of race between more nearly related types of the animal and vegetable kingdom, even when one extends this relationship very far, has theologically nothing about it which we need apprehend."⁵

It must, however, be admitted that in his work on the "Descent of Man," Mr. Darwin does something towards inviting a modification of this judgment by such a passage as the following:—

"If I have erred in giving to Natural Selection great power, which I am very far from admitting, or in having exaggerated its power, which is in itself probable, I have at least, as I hope, done good service in aiding to overthrow the dogma of separate creations."⁶

Dr. Pusey here asks the very natural question, "What are we, that we should object to any

⁴ "Unscience, not Science, adverse to Faith," by the Rev. E. B. Pusey, D.D., 1878, 2nd ed., p. 52, notes.

⁵ "Bibel und Natur," p. 373, qu. by Dr. Pusey, *ubi sup.*, p. 52.

⁶ "Descent of Man," qu. by Dr. Pusey, "Unscience, &c.," p. 54, 2nd ed.

mode of creation, as unbefitting our Creator?"⁷ While, from an entirely opposite point of view, a German writer repudiates the idea that anything is gained by assuming a First Cause, and then denying His subsequent interference with His handiwork:—

"A personal act of creation is still required for Darwin's first organic being, and if it is requisite once, then it appears to us an utter matter of indifference, whether the first act of creation occupied itself with one or with two or with a hundred thousand species."⁸

The truth would seem to be that while Mr. Darwin's general theory of the natural world led him to deprecate what he calls "separate creations," he also entertained what we must deem an impoverished idea of God, which he had probably derived, whether directly or unconsciously, from the older Deism. He sometimes writes as if natural laws, although enacted by God, had an independent existence apart from Him, and were not merely, as they are, observed forms of the Divine activity. Thus:—

"To my mind it accords better with what we know of the *laws impressed on matter* by the Creator, that the production and extinction of the past and present inhabitants of the world should have been due to *secondary causes*, like those determining the birth and death of the individual."⁹

⁷ "Unscience, &c.," by Dr. Pusey, p. 54, 2nd ed.

⁸ Bronn, p. 516, qu. by Reusch, p. 351. Dr. Pusey, "Unscience, &c.," p. 56.

⁹ "Origin of Species," p. 428. The italics are mine.

For a consistent Theist there are no "secondary causes," and no laws so "impressed on matter" as to be beyond God's power of suspending them at pleasure; nay, rather, no independent laws of nature, properly speaking, exist at all, but only observed sequences of God's working in "nature." Mr. Darwin partially corrects himself:—

"I have often personified the word Nature; for I have found it difficult to avoid this ambiguity; but I mean by Nature only the aggregate and product of many natural laws, and by laws only the ascertained sequence of events."¹

We may wish that he had added, "as determined by God," although this is what he would have meant. "The ascertained sequence of events" is a phrase which leaves ample room for the action of God in His own world. It would also appear that Mr. Darwin's objection to "separate creations" is determined not by any anti-theological motive, but by a too exclusive devotion to a particular scientific object:—

"On the ordinary view of each species having been independently created, we gain no scientific explanation of any one of these facts. We can only say that it has so pleased the Creator to command that the past and present inhabitants of the world should appear in a certain order and in certain areas; that He has impressed on them the most extraordinary resemblances, and has classed them in groups subordinate to

¹ "The Variation of Animals and Plants under Domestication," vol. i. Introd. p. 7.

groups. But by such statements we gain no new knowledge ; we do not connect together facts and laws ; we explain nothing.”²

Here we see how Mr. Darwin, without rejecting the religious view of the world, is governed by that which recommends itself to him as a working naturalist. And this preoccupation has led him to write, from time to time, as if God had really created once for all the machine of the universe, and then had left it to work by itself.

We note a similarly timid Theism in such passages as the following :—

“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 words in any ordinary sense, that certain fragments of rock should assume certain shapes, so that the builder might erect his edifice ? ”³

Why not ? Why should an Infinite Mind have foreseen “every consequence which results from the laws imposed by Him,” and yet not have foreseen the purposes to which some of these “consequences” would be applied by agents whom He Himself had endowed with freedom ?⁴ Nothing can well be more arbitrary than to

² “Variation of Animals and Plants,” vol. i. Introd. p. 9.

³ *Ibid.*, vol. ii. p. 427.

⁴ Cf. Pearson, “De Deo et attributis,” Lect. xvii., “De Scientiâ Dei.” *Minor Theological Works*, i. p. 176. Klee, “Dogmatik,” p. 276 seqq.

trace, at this point, an imaginary frontier of the range of the Divine Intelligence; but it is by such passages as these that Mr. Darwin exposes himself to the danger of being made responsible for conclusions which, we have reason to believe, he would have disavowed. Certainly an injustice is done to Mr. Darwin if his mind is interpreted by the crude and consistent Atheism of Haeckel or other writers, who make the very assumptions which Mr. Darwin's belief in God led him to reject.⁵ It is impossible not to wish that he had vigorously repudiated an unbelief which claimed to understand him better than he understood himself.

At the same time there is apparently an element of justice in Haeckel's words:—

“The gist of Darwin's theory, properly so called, is this simple idea: that the struggle for existence in nature evolves new species *without design*; just as the will of man produces new varieties in cultivation *with design*.”⁶

In other words, Mr. Darwin's representation of the natural world is too mechanical to be consistently “Theistic.” Not that divines are the only persons to object to it on this score. Nobody will charge Schopenhauer's successor, E. von Hartmann, with theological prejudice; yet his

⁵ Haeckel, “History of Creation,” Eng. tr., vol. i. pp. 9, 20, 34; vol. ii. 335, &c.

⁶ “Haeckel, “Evolution of Man,” Eng. tr., vol. i. p. 95.

most considerable work⁷ is instinct with a conception of the natural world which traverses the Darwinian theory in its most salient features. Hartmann traces everywhere the action of "the Unconscious"—a Presence and a Power which cannot be reduced to matter or force, or any other mechanical conception: and his right as a physicist to discuss the subject is admitted by authors who are least able to agree with him.⁸

The present writer cannot of course express any opinion whatever as to the scientific value of Mr. Darwin's application of his general theory to the "Descent" of man.⁹ He may observe, however, that it is much contested by high authorities,¹ and that it apparently postulates suppositions which do not admit of being verified. But sup-

⁷ "Philosophie des Unbewussten," von Eduard von Hartmann, Berlin, 1878, achte Auflage; cf. *bd.* i. 65—82, 222, 273; *bd.* ii. 123, &c. Cf. his "Wahrheit und Irrthum in Darwinismus," Berlin, 1875.

⁸ So Weismann, "Studies in the Theory of Descent," tr. by Meldola, with Preface by C. Darwin, London, 1882, vol. ii. p. 645. This writer, although advocating the mechanical conception of Nature, holds that "behind that mechanism of the universe, which is alone comprehensible to us, there still lies an incomprehensible Teleological Universal Cause," *Ibid.* p. 712. For these references I am indebted to the Duke of Argyll.

⁹ For a survey of the question, see, however, Baumstark, "Christliche Apologetik auf anthropologischer Grundlage," *bd.* i. pp. 39—80.

¹ E.g. Prof. Virchow, the late F. Buckland, and the Duke of Argyll.

posing it to be hereafter accepted, as the Copernican system is accepted, would it place Holy Scripture and Science at hopeless variance? Mr. Darwin's conclusion is stated as follows:—

“ Man is descended from a hairy quadruped, furnished with a tail and pointed ears, probably arboreal in its habits, and an inhabitant of the Old World. This creature, if its whole structure had been examined by a naturalist, would have been classed among the Quadrumana, as surely as would the common and still more ancient progenitor of the Old and New World monkeys. The Quadrumana and all the higher mammals are *probably* derived from an ancient marsupial animal, and this through a long line of diversified forms, either from some reptile-like or some amphibian-like creature, and this again from some fish-like animal. In the dim obscurity of the past we can see that the early progenitor of all the Vertebrata must have been an aquatic animal provided with branchiæ, with the two sexes united in the same individual, and with the most important organs of the body (such as the brain and the heart) imperfectly developed. This animal *seems* to have been more like the larvæ of our existing marine Oxidians than any other known form.”²

In reading these words we must endeavour to clear our minds of a prejudice which may be due to misguided self-love rather than to any purely Christian concern for the true dignity of man. The objection to a theory of descent from “a hairy quadruped” is not a wholly religious objection; it may spring from a feeling which is the counterpart in the race to the pride of birth in its individual families. After all, our birth as indi-

² “Descent of Man,” vol. ii. pp. 389, 390.

viduals is due, under God, to physical causes which differ in no respect from those which determine the birth of the lower animals around us; and the only serious question is the question of fact. Man's true dignity depends not upon the history of his physical frame, but upon the nature of the immaterial principle within him, and above all upon the unspeakable honour conferred upon both parts of his being when they were united to the Eternal Person of God the Son, in the Divine Incarnation.

But Holy Scripture tells us that "the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul."³

If the Church should hereafter teach that this "formation" was not a momentary act, but a process of development continued through a long series of ages, she would not vary the traditional interpretation so seriously as was done in the case of passages which appeared to condemn in terms the teaching of Galileo.⁴ Nor would the earlier description of the creation of man⁵ in the Sacred Record present any greater difficulty. It is very

³ Gen. ii. 7. On this passage see Delitzsch, *System der Biblischen Psychologie*, p. 52 seqq.

⁴ "The Pontifical Decrees against the Motion of the Earth, etc.," London, Burns and Oates, 1870, p. 49.

⁵ Gen. i. 26, 27.

far from clear that the Darwinian hypothesis has so established itself as to make such a modified interpretation necessary; only let it be considered that here, as elsewhere, the language of the Bible is wider than to be necessarily tied down to the terms of a particular account of man's natural history.

If it should ever become certain that the first man had for his mother an anthropomorphous ape, the Church's faith as to man's true place among the creatures of God would remain untouched. A "separate creation" must have invested this Adam before his birth with that living soul in whose faculties lay his likeness to the Almighty Creator. No evolution can have led up to this great gift. As Mr. Darwin says, "No one supposes that one of the lower animals reflects whence he comes or whither he goes,—what is death, or what is life."⁶ This first man, whatever the circumstances of his birth, was robed in supernatural grace:⁷ he had

⁶ "Descent of Man," vol. i. p. 62. O si sic omnia! The passages in this work which are most to be regretted are those on man's mental powers, his moral sense, and the origin of religion. On these subjects, however, Mr. Darwin is going beyond the province in which he is a master; and he not seldom follows the guidance of teachers, whose authority is very far indeed from commanding general acquiescence in their views.

⁷ Cf. Bp. Bull, "On the State of Man before the Fall." "Works," vol. ii. p. 52 seqq.

a full power of understanding good and evil, and of choosing between them; the choice was placed before him; he chose to disobey; and with this fatal choice he forfeited the grace with which he had been invested, and transmitted to his descendants a nature fatally impoverished and tainted. These truths do not belong to the fringe of Christian belief; they are of its essence; they are the counterpart in man's spiritual history of the Redemption which was achieved by the Incarnation and Death of the Eternal Son of God. One man only, too, there must have been to whom the gift of a soul, with free will and self-consciousness, was thus originally given, and from whom all other men are since descended. The great antithesis of the First and the Second Adam⁸ would disappear from our faith if we could suppose that mankind were derived from more than one natural parent.⁹

No Christian who believes in the essential

⁸ Rom. v. 12—21; 1 Cor. xv. 45.

⁹ "Descent of Man," i. 233. "When naturalists observe a close agreement in numerous small details of habits, tastes, and dispositions between two or more domestic races, or between nearly allied natural forms, they use this fact as an argument that all are descended from a common progenitor who was thus endowed; and consequently that all should be classed under the same species. The same argument may be applied with much force to the races of man." Cf. Acts xvii. 26.

harmony of all truth will be other than anxious to reconcile the statements of men of science with the truths of Divine Revelation, so far as our present knowledge enables him to do so. But God's word in Revelation will never pass away; while theories respecting God's working in nature are, as we know, changing almost from year to year. Mr. Darwin's great title to our respect is his life-long diligence as a reverent observer and student of the works of God. Of his own hypotheses, Mr. Darwin himself writes:—

“Many of the views which have been advanced are highly speculative, and some no doubt will prove erroneous; . . . but false views, if supported by some evidence, do little harm, as every one takes a salutary pleasure in proving their falseness; and when this is done one path towards error is closed, and the road to truth is at the same time opened.”¹

3, Amen Court.

Eastertide, 1882.

¹ “Descent of Man,” vol. ii. p. 385.

THE
RECOVERY OF ST. THOMAS.

“Reach hither thy finger, and behold My Hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into My Side: and be not faithless, but believing.”—ST. JOHN xx. 27.

EASTER is soon gone; and as we look around we must feel with regret that it has been possible to gather up only a few of its many lessons. But we may profitably revert to the second lesson for last Sunday afternoon, and to the scene in the upper chamber at Jerusalem on the eighth day after the Resurrection. It will be in your recollection that when, on the day of His rising from the dead, our Lord first appeared to the assembled disciples, St. Thomas was absent. The disciples informed Thomas, on meeting him, that they had seen their Master; and he answered them in terms which would not have been unbecoming in an advanced disciple of the modern philosophy of experience. “Except I shall see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into His side, I will not believe.” A week

passed; the disciples were again assembled, and now Thomas was with them. "Then came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, Peace be unto you. Then saith He to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold My Hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into My Side: and be not faithless, but believing."

I.

A first object of our Lord's words was to place the truth of His Resurrection from the dead beyond a doubt in the mind of St. Thomas.

Probably St. Thomas would not have denied that something had taken place; whatever it might be, or whatever its explanation. We need not suppose him to imply the bad faith of the other disciples. In his apprehension they were not deceivers, but somehow or other deceived; the perfectly honest victims of an inexplicable illusion. Some form or phantom, so he may have conjectured, had passed before them; and they, in the excited state of mind which was natural after recent occurrences, could not distinguish between the real and the apparent, between an impression, produced by whatever agency on their minds, and an object, altogether independent of them. He, for his part, was not going to yield to anything less imperative than the report of his

senses. "Except I shall see in His Hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into His Side, I will not believe."

Now it would not have been inconsistent with our Lord's customary dealing with human minds if He had declined to satisfy such a demand as this. For it was an unreasonable demand. The other disciples were not likely to have been simultaneously deceived as to a matter about which they were, one and all, so deeply interested in ascertaining the exact truth; and their united testimony ought, in reason, to have satisfied St. Thomas. Most of the truths which we hold and act upon come to us on the authority of other men; and the common judgment of mankind pronounces the testimony of those whose good faith or general capacity there is no reason for doubting to be a sufficient attestation of a fact which may itself contradict previous or general experience. But our Lord sees in St. Thomas the typical representative of a class of minds that would be found among men to the end of time; and for whose case He, in His charity and condescension, is willing to make provision. It was more important to St. Thomas that he should be convinced of the truth of the Resurrection, than that he should first learn the unreasonableness of his motive for hesitating to believe it; and therefore our Lord meets him on his own terms. As He bade the

disciples, "Handle Me and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see Me have;"¹ as He "took of a piece of a broiled fish, and of a honey-comb, and did eat it before them;"² so now, He deigns to go all lengths with the demand of Thomas;—"Reach hither thy finger, and behold My Hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into My Side: and be not faithless, but believing."

It was indeed of the first moment that the literal truth of the Resurrection of Christ should be thus placed beyond the reach of doubt. For already tendencies were in the air, which afterwards became Docetism;—the disposition to question the reality, not only of Christ's risen Body, but of the Body which He wore before His crucifixion and on the cross. As men possessed themselves more and more with a true and adequate idea of His eternal Person, they found it difficult to believe in a condescension which had really robed It in a Body of flesh and blood: such contact with gross matter seemed unworthy of Him who is essentially Spirit. Accordingly, they endeavoured to persuade themselves that His bodily form was not substantial; that It was only a deceptive appearance, or, as they said, a phantasm. Might not such a persuasion have seemed to gain some countenance from what was reported of Christ's Resurrection Body; of

¹ St. Luke xxiv. 39.

² St. Luke xxiv. 42.

Its appearance at different places, without any traceable intermediate movement; of Its passing through closed doors, as into the upper chamber; of Its sudden vanishing from sight, as from the two disciples at Emmaus? It was, no doubt, as St. Paul says, a spiritual Body; It had acquired properties of which we have no experience in this life. But what was the import, what were the limits of these new properties? how far did they impair the identity of the risen Body with the Body that was crucified? how far was the risen Body real, or only apparent? These, I say, were vital questions, in view of the nascent tendencies of the time, which have been just referred to; they were vital, moreover, because they were merely different forms of the great question of all, whether the Resurrection was a literal fact or not. And on this, as has been said to you often before, all else depended; the redemptive virtue of the Passion; the certainty of Christ's disclosures about the eternal world; the verification of His claim to have come from heaven, and to be the Son of God manifest in the flesh. And therefore Thomas, though unreasonable, should be gratified; he should know by sensible pressure of his hand and finger that he had before him no unsubstantial phantom form, but the very Body that was crucified, answering, in each open Wound, to the touch of sense,—whatever new properties might also have attached to It. “Reach hither thy

finger, and behold My Hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into My Side: and be not faithless, but believing.”

II.

A second lesson to be learned from these words of our Lord is the true value of the bodily senses in investigating truth.

We have seen that St. Thomas made the satisfaction of two senses a preliminary condition to his believing that our Lord had really risen. The sense of sight was to be satisfied as to the existence of our Lord's Wounds, which, as he may have thought, the other disciples, in their joy and bewilderment, might have neglected to observe with sufficient particularity. But Thomas does not altogether trust his eyesight; it might be imposed upon by appearances; what looked like a laceration in the Hand or in the Side might be only a blood-stain on the surface after all. Therefore Thomas will have the verdict of the eyesight verified and corroborated by that of a grosser sense—the sense of touch. His finger must be put into the print of the nails; his hand must be thrust into the riven Side, before he will surrender himself to faith in the Resurrection. Here is a request for what we may term an extreme form of experimental or sensible satisfaction. As the hearing is the most spiritual of the five senses, so the touch is the

grossest and most material; yet our Lord does not shrink from the rude test which is proposed; in His abounding tenderness, He concedes all that His Apostle asks:—"Reach hither thy finger, and behold My Hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into My Side: and be not faithless, but believing."

This, let us observe, is not what an ordinary religious teacher would have been likely to do under similar circumstances. When an average teacher of religion is confronted by a demand for a sensible test or proof of some truth relating to religion, his instinct is to say that such a demand involves a mistake as to the nature of religion, and as to the sort of proofs which are to be had in connexion with it. Nay, our Lord's own teaching had seemingly tended in an opposite direction to that of this concession to Thomas. Does He not seem to be constantly warning men against laying undue stress on that which falls under the cognisance of the bodily senses; against the Jewish craving for visible signs; against the Jewish trust in outward forms; against the disposition, rooted in all human nature, but especially developed in Jewish and Pharisaic nature, so to cling to the external as to forget or depreciate that which lies within or beyond it?

The fact is, our Lord's reply to St. Thomas is a recognition of the rights and duties of the senses.

There are certain truths which they, and they only, can ascertain, and in verifying which they may and must be trusted. It is a false spiritualism which would cast discredit on the senses, acting within their own province; it is false to the constitution of nature, and to the interests of truth. For if the bodily senses are untrustworthy, how can we assume the trustworthiness of the spiritual senses? if hearing and eyesight and smell and taste and touch make no true reports of external objects, how shall we be certain that the moral perceptions do not report a series of sublime illusions? To cast doubt upon the trustworthiness of a bodily sense, is at first sight to enhance the preciousness of the supersensuous and of our methods of reaching it. But it is this, only at first sight. Religion does touch the material world at certain points, and the reality of its contact is to be decided, like other material facts, by the experiment of sense. Whether our Lord really rose with His wounded Body from the grave, or not, was a question to be settled by the bodily senses; and our Lord therefore submitted Himself to the exacting terms which St. Thomas laid down as conditions of faith.

Here we may see how to answer the question whether, at the Holy Communion, the bread and wine remain *bonâ fide* bread and wine after the Consecration. That is a question which must be decided by the senses of sight and taste and touch. If these senses report that the bread is

still bread, and the wine is still wine, that question is settled. True, our Lord has said of either element, "This is My Body; This is My Blood;" and serious Christians will not take liberties with His language, by resolving it into metaphor and rejecting its strictly literal force. But then how are we to reconcile the two; the report of the senses on the one hand, and the plain meaning of the words of Christ on the other? We answer that we do not know, just as we do not know how to reconcile the experienced fact of our free-will with the revealed fact of the Divine Sovereignty; we cannot get nearer the truth than by saying that these elements, remaining in their natural substances, are yet, in some way to us unknown, veils of the Sacred Presence which is plainly identified with them in a pregnant sense by the words of Christ. But it will not do, in order to give what we may think a fuller effect to His words, to say that the bodily senses are deceived; that the bread is no longer bread, though it seems to be so. For to say this is to sap one of the bases of our hold on truth; since the same senses which report to us the continued existence of bread in the consecrated element, reported the reality of the wounded Hands and Side of the Risen Jesus. If the one report is illusory, so may be the other; and nothing is gained in the long run for religion, by anything which casts doubt on the true functions of sense.

I say on the true functions of sense. For the senses cannot test the reality of anything which lies properly beyond their ken, and in view of which "we walk by faith and not by sight." They have to do with matter: they cannot touch spirit; and if any inference is drawn from their very limited capacity as against the reality of that vast world of spiritual existences which is confessedly out of their reach, it is, beyond all question, a worthless inference. Here is the great mistake of Materialism. Materialism is on strong ground, from which it cannot be dislodged, so long as it insists that the senses, so far as they reach, are trustworthy reporters of truth. Its mistake lies in saying that they are the only reporters of truth, and that nothing is to be held for truth which they cannot verify; that the whole world of mental and spiritual facts, with which the senses have no relation whatever, is therefore an imaginary and non-existent world; that, in short, matter, in whatever shape, is alone real. But this gigantic and fatal error is not to be met by discrediting the senses in their own province. To do so is to invite the ravages of a scepticism which is even wilder than that of the Materialists; since it denies the reality of matter as well as that of spirit, while it is clearly opposed to that high sanction which our Lord gave to the evidence of sense when He bade Thomas,—“Reach hither thy finger, and behold My Hands; and reach hither

thy hand, and thrust it into My Side: and be not faithless, but believing.”

These reflections may naturally lead us to think of the eminent man, whose death during the past week is an event of European importance; since he has been the author of nothing less than a revolution in the modern way of treating a large district of thought, while his works have shed high distinction upon English science. It may be admitted that when the well-known books on the “Origin of Species,” and on the “Descent of Man” first appeared, they were largely regarded by religious men as containing a theory necessarily hostile to the fundamental truths of religion. A closer study has generally modified any such impression. If the theory of “natural selection” has given a powerful impulse to the general doctrine of evolution, it is seen that whether the creative activity of God is manifested through catastrophes, so to call them, or by way of a progressive evolution, it is still His creative activity, and that the really great questions beyond remain untouched. The evolutionary process, supposing it to exist, must have had a beginning: who began it? It must have had material to work with: who furnished this material? It is or it obeys a law or a system of laws: who enacted them? Even supposing that the theory represents an absolute truth, and is not merely a provisional way of looking at things incidental to the present

stage of knowledge, these great questions are just as little to be decided by physical science now as they were when Moses wrote. And there are apparently three important gaps in the evolutionary sequence, which it is well to bear in mind. There is the great gap between the highest animal instinct, and the reflective, self-measuring, self-analyzing mind of man. There is the greater gap between life, and the most highly organized matter. There is the greatest gap of all between matter and nothing. At these three points, so far as we can see, the Creative Will must have intervened otherwise than by way of evolution out of existing material,—to create mind,—to create life,—to create matter.

Beyond all question, brethren, it is our business to respect in physical science, as in other things, every clearly ascertained report of the senses. For every such report represents a fact; and a fact is sacred as having its place in the temple of universal Truth. Mr. Darwin's greatness is not least conspicuous in the patience and care with which he observed and registered minute single facts, while engaged in arranging groups of facts. Who that has read his book on Earth Worms can forget the experiments by which he set himself to discover whether a worm possesses the faculty of hearing?³

³ A great authority on questions of Natural History is reported to have said that Mr. Darwin was to this subject what Copernicus had been to Astronomy. If this be the case, is not Natural History still awaiting its Newton?

But a fact is one thing; while theories, hypotheses, doctrines,—like that of evolution itself,—framed by men of genius so as to include or account for facts, are another. These theories, even if they are brilliant and imposing, may or may not be true; they may for a generation or for a century carry everything before them in the world of thought; but science knows no finality, and while theories pass and are forgotten, facts—like God's revelation of Himself in Christ—remain. The bodily senses report facts; of theories about facts they know nothing; it was on their report of a fact that our Lord set His seal when He bade Thomas thrust hand and finger into His sacred Wounds, and be not faithless, but believing.

III.

Once more, we learn from our Lord's words how to deal with doubts of the truth of religion, whether in ourselves or in other people.

We live, it is needless to say, in what is to a large extent an age of doubt. In private intercourse, in general society, in clubs and in workshops, among men of letters, and among artisans, truths are freely called in question which were received unhesitatingly by our fathers, and for which they would have shed their blood. Certainly doubt is not the only characteristic of our age;

side by side with doubt there is faith,—strong, penetrating, intelligent, definite,—and in its growth and strength lies the best hope of the future. The current does not flow all one way; and yet the widespread existence of doubt in many who have been brought up as Christians, is unhappily notorious.

Nay, what is more serious, this spread of doubt in religious truth is looked upon in some quarters as a positive advantage. Doubt, it is said, is the parent of inquiry; it is the foe of mental stagnation; it explodes superstitions; it means movement, energy, progress. This may be true as regards many subjects of human interest, our information respecting which involves a mixture of truth and error; in these doubt has its province and function; it is a stimulating, purifying, corrective influence. But every sensible man would agree that to doubt necessary truth, such as the axioms of mathematics, could lead to no mental advantage whatever; and for Christians who believe that God has spoken, the Christian Revelation is necessary truth. No man who holds this Revelation to be true can regard doubt about it as other than one of the greatest of possible misfortunes; to take any other view of such doubt is to be already committed to its principle. When the poet says that "There lives more faith in honest doubt, believe me, than in half the creeds," he must be contrasting those

who are hesitating to profess a creed which they have never held, with those who have held it as a profession, without knowing its power. Otherwise, his words are a false paradox; it is false to say that the man who doubts the truth of religion is better off in any way than the man who accepts it with his whole mind and heart.

Let us distinguish here between two different things that are often confounded, namely, doubt as a habit of mind, and inquiry. Inquiry into religious questions is often, and for many Christians, not merely legitimate, but a serious duty; we cannot obey the Apostolic precept of being "ready to give a reason of the hope that is in us" without inquiry, often anxious and perplexing, into the grounds of that hope. But doubt as a state of mind; doubt as a permanent attitude of the soul towards religious truth, is, I make bold to say, a calamity of the first order, if only because it is fatal ultimately to moral vigour. There are some here who know that I am not describing any imaginary case. It is in a man's best moments, it is when he is making his best efforts, that the haunting spirit of doubt deals its most fatal blows. You would turn for half an hour from the pettinesses, the vexations, the degradations of life, to the pages of the New Testament, to hold communion with Him Whom we meet in the Gospels: and forthwith the spirit of doubt suggests some apparent discrepancy between this narrative and

that, and presently whispers, "May it not all be a beautiful legend?" Or, you remember some promise such as "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee," and you bethink yourself of prayer; the living God, you say, is here to help you. But as you begin to pour out your heart, the spirit of doubt suggests that perhaps He to Whom you are speaking is after all only a creation of human thought, whom our highest science has banished from its conception of the universe. Or, recollecting the happiness of a good Communion in years gone by, you again present yourself at the Altar, and for awhile it seems as if the old associations which gather round those moments, so tender and so awful, might victoriously assert themselves within your soul; when lo! the spirit of doubt breathes into your ear, with a dreadful cynicism, the deadly questions, "Is there any real Blessing here? What is the good of this antiquated rite?" And forthwith heaven's sunshine disappears from your soul, and all again is darkness. Now it is a matter of common sense, that doubt cannot thus utterly destroy the value of the Gospels, of prayer, of Holy Communion, without moral loss. Aye, it shatters the very springs of moral effort; it makes barren and unfruitful those rare moments of life in which moral energy should find its refreshment and recover its force. Why need I insist on a truism which will find an echo in too many a weary heart? To talk of

doubt as an advantage is the language either of ignorance or of insincerity: doubt is above all things, in a majority of cases, moral paralysis; it is the loss of the motives which make life happy by making it useful.

Our Lord's prescription for dealing with doubt may be summed up in the rule: "Make the most of such truth as you still recognize, and the rest will follow." Thomas did not doubt the report of his senses; let him see what it was that his senses reported. They told him that the crucified Christ was before him and alive; but that was a fact which meant a great deal beyond itself. At any rate, let Thomas be sure that whatever else was doubtful, there was no doubt about the Resurrection: let him recognize that one truth, and make the most of it. A rule like this might be expected to work well, because it would counteract the particular habit of mind which fosters the state of doubt. Doubt flourishes in, nay it is, a mental atmosphere of vagueness. Nothing is quite denied or quite accepted; everything is thought possible, everything uncertain; men lazily suppose that there is as much to be said against any one truth as for it, and no one to strike the balance between conflicting evidence.

Now if any one truth, however limited and elementary, can be really held as true, it will so far arrest the sway of this habit of universal doubt. And there are very few men who do not hold

something for true, even though theirs should be a very stunted creed. If they reject the grace of the Sacraments, they believe in the Atonement; if they deny our Lord's Divinity, they are, as the phrase goes, Christian Theists; if they cannot believe in the Christian Revelation, they have no doubt that there does exist a moral and personal God; if, unhappily, they have misgivings as to this great and awful truth, yet they recognize in themselves the law of right and wrong—recognize it not the less clearly though they cannot be sure what is right and what is wrong. Very well: if they have lost their hold on all besides, let them make the most of this one remaining fragment of truth,—the indelible distinction between right and wrong. Look hard at that distinction, my doubting friend; it is for you what the pierced Hands and riven Side of Christ were for St. Thomas; it bids you thrust hand and finger into it and grasp it, and convince yourself that whatever else is uncertain and unsubstantial, it at least is real. Look hard at it; handle it well; make the most of it; and so far as it is concerned, you are not a doubter; here is something solid, before which you bow. Look hard at it, grasp it, and it will lead you on to truths beyond itself. For this law of right and wrong, whence comes it? If it be a law, and not merely a fortuitous result of social prejudices, it implies a Lawgiver, and a moral Lawgiver too. And when faith in a moral God

has been recovered, we have a second, and an infinitely grander truth, limiting the province and operation of doubt, and inviting the doubter to weigh its immensity and power, that it may lead him on to other certainties which, in their turn, depend on it. You believe in a moral God. But can He be at once Almighty and moral; can He survey this world which His hands have made, and which contradicts so much that is His eternal Nature, and yet have made no sign,—have committed Himself to no interference, to no remedy, to no revelation, in order to alleviate the ruin and the woe? It is impossible. The more you grapple with the fact of the morality of God, the more clearly you must perceive the immense, the overwhelming force of the presumption that such a Being must reveal Himself to man; and in the light of this vast antecedent presumption, the evidence that He has done so in the Christian Revelation will be more than sufficient. So again, if portions of Divine Revelation are received while the rest is questioned, the same rule applies. You have no doubt about the Atonement, but you cannot understand the power of the Sacraments. Very well: make the most of the Atonement; consider what it implies as to the Attributes of God; weigh well the tenor and genius of the statements of Holy Scripture on which it rests; ask yourself whether you would continue to hold it if you applied to it the destructive arguments

which you employ against faith in the efficacy of the Sacraments; and you will see, in time, that it leads you on beyond itself to a recognition of the true character of these gracious and merciful provisions, whereby its own benefits and graces are conveyed to the human soul to the end of time.

The fact is, no one truth is isolated altogether from other truths; there is an interconnexion between truth and truth, which lies in the nature of things, and the sway and guidance of which cannot be resisted by an honest mind; so that when any one truth is grasped as being absolutely true, the soul is in a fair way to recover healthiness of tone, and to put an end to the reign of vagueness and doubt. No sooner was St. Thomas sure that he saw before him the Body of the Risen Jesus, than he confessed, not merely the truth of the Resurrection, but the infinitely higher and vaster truth of Christ's Divinity, which the Resurrection attested: "Thomas answered and said unto Him, My Lord and my God."

Let none, then, who doubt, despair. A clear hold on one single truth may save faith in all. One single truth, the last it may be in the order of surrender, clung to as for life, may be the starting-point of faith's resurrection in the soul. Cling to that truth, as you would live in the true sense of life; cling to it, though there be, to your apprehension, nothing else to which to cling; thrust hand and finger into its very wounds, that you may at least

be certain of its reality ; and be assured that this faithful tenacity will yet stand you in good stead ; that the dawn of a brighter day is not far off, when He, to Whom you cling in clinging to anything that is true, shall bring you forth to the perfect light, and your eyes shall behold His righteousness.