

Drummond's "Natural Law in the Spiritual World."

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The object of this paper is not to introduce a book which is understood to have already a circulation of at least 30,000 copies in a comparatively brief space, but to point out its character, as accounting for popularity so marked. It is written with force and clearness, with liveliness and geniality, rising to eloquence when the occasion calls for it; and there is a fair presentation of fundamental truth, such as new birth and the atonement, with wholesome and clever exposure of the one-sidedness of revivalism (indeed, one may say of the evangelical system), as well as of sacramentalism.

Yet it is not, in my judgment, the good points of the book but the bad, and, from a christian stand, its unworthy and dangerously corrupting peculiarities, which have made it so palatable, at a moment when men crave the exciting food which it supplies, conceiving that they stand well abreast of the science of the age.

Mr. D. is a Christian. But his enthusiasm evidently goes in the direction of natural science; and so blinding is its influence that he seems completely under the spell of the fashionable evolutionist reveries of the day. His ardent effort throughout is to conciliate his argument and illustration as much as possible with the principles and even language of Mr. Herbert Spencer, the acknowledged chief of British Agnosticism! The assumption of modern infidelity, in a small knot of bold materialists who have got the public ear, is so overbearing, that those who value their good opinion, or dread their contempt and that of their followers, fail to see that this vaunted theory, if logically carried out, is incompatible with Scripture, denies creation in any genuine and full sense, and threatens to end, like Pyrrhonism of old, in the destruction even of science itself. For evolution is supposed in time to efface those fixed laws by which objects animate and inanimate are governed, the ascertainment of which constitutes science. At best evolution attempts to account hypothetically for the origin of things; natural science is based on observed and permanent facts since creation.

But let us hear our author's own narrative (pp. 6-7) of what he fondly regards as his discovery, and what we cannot but mourn over as a delusion, by which no believer ought to have been taken in.

"It has been my privilege for some years to address regularly two very audiences on two very different themes. On weekdays I have lectured to a class of students on the Natural Sciences, and on Sundays to an audience consisting for the most part of working men on subjects of a moral and religious character. I cannot say that this collocation ever appeared as a difficulty to myself, but to certain of my friends it was more than a problem. It was solved to me, however, at first, by what then seemed the necessities of the case I must keep the two departments entirely by themselves. They lay at opposite poles of thought; and for a time I succeeded in keeping the Science and the Religion shut off from one another in two separate compartments of my mind. But gradually the wall of partition showed symptoms of giving way. The two fountains of knowledge also slowly began to overflow and finally the waters met and mingled. The great change was in the compartment which held the Religion (!). It was not that the well there was dried; still less that the fermenting waters were washed away by the flood of Science. The actual contents remained the same. But the crystals of former doctrine were dissolved (!); and as they precipitated themselves once more into definite forms, I observed that the Crystalline system was changed. New channels also for outward expression opened, and some of the old closed up; and I found the truth running out to my audience on the Sundays by the weekday outlets.

In other words the, subject-matter Religion had taken on the method of expression of Science, and I discovered myself enunciating Spiritual Law in the exact terms of Biology and Physics.

"Now this was not exactly a scientific colouring given to Religion, the mere freshening of the theological air with natural facts and illustrations. It was an entire re-casting of truth (!). And when I came seriously to consider what it involved, I saw, or seemed to see, that it meant essentially the introduction of Natural Law into the Spiritual World. It was not, I repeat, the new and detailed analogies of *Phenomena* rose into view — although material for Parable lies unnoticed and unused on the field of recent science in inexhaustible profusion. But Law has a still grander function to discharge towards Religion than Parable (!). There is a deeper analogy between the two kingdoms than the analogy of their Phenomena — a unity which the poet's vision, more quick than the theologian's (!), has already dimly seen."

Of this vision Mr. D. assumes to be the Seer; and by his own acknowledgement, when his mind had for some time being paying weekday homage to Science, Sunday homage to Religion, he found the wall that parted them giving way, but "*the great change was in the compartment which held*" not the Science, shifting and at best but growing as it is, but — "*the Religion!*" How came a child of God and a minister of His revealed truth to write such a sentence without shame? For what is Religion but the answer in heart and mind and walk to "Jesus Christ the same yesterday and to day and for ever"? Of course it is admitted that "the actual contents remained the same." "But," he affirms, "the crystals of former doctrine were dissolved." God be thanked! it is not so with any servant of Christ loyal to his Master or the truth.

In early days a similar effort was made by the enemy, and not by forms of Science so beneath and remote from the grace and truth that came by Jesus Christ as Biology and Physics. Men then bearing the Lord's name sought to enunciate Spiritual Law in the exact terms "of ancient metaphysics." But the apostle resented the insult to God's word and Spirit, which alone and perfectly, make Christ known, as leaving the saint a prey "through philosophy and vain deceit," as he calls the falsely so named knowledge or speculation. On the other hand he insisted on holding fast the form or pattern of sound words, which [words] Timothy as others had heard from him, in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. Hence the duty of keeping the good deposit that was entrusted to us through the Holy Spirit that dwells in us: for as the pretension to the Spirit without the word breeds fanaticism, so is rationalism the result of using the word without the Spirit working in us to Christ's glory. Natural Science is the idol of Mr. D. Nor is it that he means to exclude Christ, any more than Aaron when he made the golden calf to please the people. But the fact is the deep dishonour of this book to divine revelation. Alas! the worship of the weekdays did dissolve that of Sunday. "*The Crystalline system was changed.*" "*It was an entire re-casting of the truth!*" Truly we find ourselves in the difficult times of the last days, when one who yet owns Christ and the written word can dare so to think and write and print to the grief and shame of every thoughtful christian. And what pleasure (not without ridicule) to Messrs. Huxley and Tyndall and their companions, when they see the professing crowd carried away from the truth in their direction by this novel wind of doctrine! None can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one and love the other; or he will hold to the one and despise the other. Scripture repudiates Science not only as a co-ordinate but even as a subordinate authority in spiritual things. The process of ruin may seem slow, but is sure. To faith divine truth must be paramount; for the word of the Lord abides for ever. They cannot mingle their waters save to the loss of the well undefiled.

Science in its own "compartment" is or may be all well; but the truth (and "religion" must be this or a fable) refuses the banners which Mr. D. would proclaim between it and Science. One may not any more than the author respect "the theologian's" insight into God's mind in Scripture. For the effort to

make the truth "scientific," common to the theologian in an intellectual way and to Mr. D. in the lower depth of naturalism, is ruinous to the spiritual intelligence of revelation: which is little and powerless indeed, if it carry not divine authority over the conscience, as it reveals Christ in grace and truth to the heart. But think of a Christian gravely bowing to "the poet's vision," even though its comparative dimness be recognised in honour of the great *eureka* What pandering to sentiment, not to say to self!

"The effect of the introduction [not of Christ, as Revealer of God and Mediator between God and man, into a lost world, but] "of Law among the scattered Phenomena of Nature has simply been to transform knowledge into eternal truth! The same crystallising touch is needed in Religion (!). Can it be said that the Phenomena of the Scriptural World are other than scattered (!)?" p. 9. Yes, Mr. D.: God has from the beginning perfectly done in and by Christ, for what you call "the Spiritual World," that which you vainly pretend to do by your book; and He has given the full and unchanging record in His Book. He and He alone has revealed the truth. He that pretends to furnish "eternal truth" at this time of day he that denies that God has united the once scattered "Phenomena of the Spiritual World in His Christ, made known in Scripture by the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven, is no true prophet. It is not "Reign of Law" we need: for we have already grace reigning through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord.

In sober sadness the author has lost himself in this dream of identical Law. The nebula, from which the evolutionists deduce the universe, in the teeth of the calm majesty of Genesis 1, never fails to envelop the minds of all who confound that mythical hypothesis with true science; but of all these evolutionists (for they have their widely differing sects), none logically as well as spiritually less consistent than such as still profess faith in Christ and Scripture.

That this is no exaggeration of Mr. D.'s thought will be apparent yet more from what he says in p. 10 "My Spiritual World before was a chaos of fact; my Theology, a Pythagorean system trying to make the best of Phenomena apart from the idea of Law." It never seems to occur to the devotee of Science any more than to the theologian of the old schools, that not "the idea of Law," but the truth of Christ in Scripture, is by the Spirit's teaching the one centre of order in what is otherwise uncertain as well as chaotic. But *He* is this, and infinitely more, in the spiritual realm, to the exclusion of the vain key which Mr. D. commends.

"I make no charge against Theology in general, I speak of my own" [as if he had not been trained like other young men in the ordinary curriculum]. "And I say that I saw it to be in many essential respects centuries behind every department of science I knew." Christian reader, is not this perplexing language from a professed believer? the speech of Egypt, not of Canaan? If by "Theology" he means the revealed faith of a christian, as it surely ought to be, what means its being centuries behind any department of Science? Is not Scripture a revelation completely out and divinely perfect? Science how different!

Then how absurd and worse to add, "It was the one region still unpossessed by Law"! Our measure of appropriating the truth is our measure of knowing and applying Christ. That region is wholly possessed by, and instinct with — not Law, but — Christ. It is "the great exception," and distrusted by such men of science only and by all others as do not by the Spirit look to Christ and have life in Him. And what will Mr. D.'s book do for such adversaries? It may harden those who make Law their god; it will corrupt every christian who admires and yields to its distinctive system; it is a positive wrong to Christ and Scripture; and the more sorrowful, as the author is, I doubt not, at bottom, a believer.

Even his apology in p. 11 is most objectionable and false "We have Truth in nature as it came

from God." How different the voice of revelation in Rom. 1: 19, 20! There is a real testimony to God's everlasting power and divinity (Theotes, but not Theotes which is only known in and by Christ, Col. 2: 9). One learns justly that God must be; but Who and what He is can be known only through His Son, by and in whom it is eternal life to the believer. He is objectively the truth, as the Holy Spirit is the power by whom alone applying God's word He is made known.

But "Truth in nature" even "as it came from God," which Science ignores (being occupied only with nature fallen as it is), we have not; nor has such language any just sense. For Truth even in its least application means a thing or person made known as it is. Hence Nature could not possibly make known truth, unless a poet's vision be preferred to Scripture. Nor is God Himself ever called truth there, but Christ in one way and the Spirit in another, as revealing God and making known man and all else in the spiritual realm. No! "Truth in Nature" is only another part of the delusion, which Mr. D. shares with remarkably bad company, who begin with claiming "the same reverence" for Nature as for "all other Revelation," and are in danger of ending with the abandonment of Scripture, the only revelation of God for a sinner or a saint.

There are many excellent and true remarks up and down the volume; but less than what is here said would be unfaithfulness in him who writes this notice, whether or not he may examine it beyond the Preface in which its aim is explained.* It is only incidental statements which are at all wholesome. The prime object is here shown to be false and evil. Hence the book is calculated to expose the unwary to that vast and complicated network of error in our day, which prepares the way for the apostacy or "falling away" which is at hand. Even the author would confess that, if his main design is fallacious, the book as a whole must be worse than worthless, as grace can employ anything.

* Another is now examining the book with more detail in the "*Bible Treasury*" for May, etc., of this year. (1885)