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The divine element in evolution

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The Divine Element in Evolution.

The question of our origin is one of the greatest that has ever claimed the attention of the human mind. As knowledge advances and constructive thought becomes more clear and unprejudiced it befits a specialist in any department of investigation to pause and survey calmly the results reached in other departments and the light cast by the combined results of all. To the solution of the problem of our origin are being brought the results of investigation in all departments of human learning. Abstract thought as to what we might rationally infer from the fundamental data of faith and experience has been elaborated by

all that is greater in human intel-
lect. Researches among the con-
crete teachings of the material uni-
verse have been pursued with the untrir-
ing zeal of all that is most patient
and industrious in human de-
votion. With the results of these
has been compared a more intelli-
gent understanding of the inspir-
ed scriptures to discover if possible
some new fragment of knowledge
upon this important theme.

Philosophy has replied to those who
have invoked her decision on
this question that for every effect
we must infer an adequate cause,
that the external universe can
only be understood by denying
its independent existence apart
from that cause and that the
objects with which experience ac-
quaints us are in reality but phor-

of the divine activity expressive of the divine mind. That we have no reason for affirming such an independent existence as matter, is commonly supposed to be, may be seen by attempting to explain interaction and perception on this supposition. If we avoid the extremely mechanical theory of a preestablished harmony the interaction of two bodies can only be explained on the supposition that they are but transmitters of force imported to them by some higher existence which mediates their changes and modifications. But when we study the possibility of perception we find that the external world can only affect us by acting as a force upon the nerves. An external force there is all that we are warranted in affirming. This we must have to explain interaction and having this we do

not need more to explain perception.

Before attempting the solution of any problem, it is usually necessary to understand what the problem is and if many have omitted this prime essential in dealing with the evolution question it is only the easier to understand why the results have always been so unsatisfactory. Whatever science may reveal it will now be seen to be even more immediately the work of the Deum than if it had been established in the most mechanical and literal manner by "the work of his hands" or "the word of his mouth". Nor can the hypostasizing of law in any way remove the Infinite from the ongoing of the world-process. For the laws of the universe came after, and are a result of the facts and not vice versa, and if it were possible to cancel the

fact it would not only be impossible to replace them by the laws but it would be impossible to have any laws apart from the facts.

A brief glance at the results of scientific investigation will reveal the fact that the world is of great age if indeed for purely scientific reasons it can be said to have ever had a beginning. Man too is found to be an old resident although the date of his arrival is unknown. While no definite date is fixed upon however the minimum of time demanded by discoveries in geology and anthropology for his existence on the earth seems extravagant when compared with the old world-view derived from the Bible. But for long millions of years before man's arrival animal life is found to have swarmed upon the earth. Different periods in geological history are represented by different forms

of animal life merging into another in such a way as to suggest the descent of the later from the earlier forms. This suggestion is reinforced by observations of changes in animal life going on at the present time: such facts for instance as the difference between buffalo and domesticated cattle and their cross-breeding when brought together; also the results possible to artificial selection as well as the artificial nature of all classifications. The indications of the geological history of the earth seems to be that there have been at different times types having apparently not so much purpose to serve by their individual existence nor so many specialized faculties as those which preceded and came after them and that from these as culminations of what had gone before new departures in animal forms were made. Manaboshy too, at present so resembles that of some

animals in bone, muscle and nerve as well as in the different functions of the organism as to make it practically certain to scientists that he owns some relation to the animal world. The approximate time for man's existence on earth as estimated from such facts as the finding of human remains entombed with those of animals of the Quaternary period is variously stated by different authorities. Le Conte places it at from 10 to 100 thousand years. The Encyclopaedia Britannica at from 20 to 100 thousand years while Hyle says of the Niagara falls that the process of cutting has required about 36,000 years of which Le Conte says the greater part if not all of this has been in the latest geological epoch and was probably witnessed by man. Taking the lowest approximate estimate, 10-100,000 years and striking a mean we get 55,000 years. These estimates rough as they are and the

facts upon which they are based would undoubtedly have had a larger place in modern thought were it not for the fact that they have been supposed to exclude the divine agency from any part in man's production. This unwelcome and unnecessary supposition has given rise to several objections to the theory of evolution.

(1) It is said that evolution has not been proved; that no extensive modifications of animal forms can be shown to have taken place and that for purely scientific reasons the theory of several special and outright creations is preferable. In reply we would say that there is no scientific "proof" for creation. (We consider the theological argument later.) The account in Genesis being set aside as authority, the origin of things becomes an entirely open question to be decided by the strongest practical indi-

ations and if evolution can not be "proved" much less can creation. Nor does it help the matter to affirm several creations of types of which all else are modifications, for the "proof" that is insufficient to establish one creation is certainly not more potent in establishing a half a dozen. The only thing that is proved in this attempt is the modifications and this is so much directly for evolution and nothing directly for creation. (2) It is still said that it can not be demonstrated that man is much older than six thousand years. The latest discoveries in Assyriology and Egyptology would warrant us in passing this objection by as irrelevant. It is forever possible for one to take a stand just beyond the latest demonstration of a progressive science and in the face of the strongest practical inferences say that it is impossible to go farther. A very strong suggestion

of man's great antiquity may be found in the fact that of representations of people of different nationalities made in Egypt about 4000 years ago, the features are essentially the same as those of representations of those nations to-day. Now if those national characteristics were acquired at the same rate that they have changed since the representations were made - and our critics tell us that we have no right to assume that modifications ever took place more rapidly than at present - it will be seen that the 4000 years since they were made is but the smallest fragment of the period of man's existence. (3) It is said that the question is foreclosed by a higher authority than man's wisdom. Even since the old world-view derived from Genesis has had to be given up the Hebrew language of Genesis has been tortured to make it express

the ideas of modern science. A common trick of sticklers for "revelation" has been to affirm that the Hebrew word for day in the account of creation means an indefinite period of time. We are then left to wonder why people speaking the Hebrew as their mother tongue never so understood it; we have never been able to see the benefit of a "revelation" which no one could understand until the facts were discovered independently. Moreover all the reasons that can be given to sustain this interpretation would apply equally well to the English word day and we see no reason why they should impose upon honest people by referring to the "original Hebrew".

Others accepting the nebular hypothesis, while admitting the literal meaning of the word day, have asserted that the account in Genesis allows any

age for the world while it teaches
only the recent origin of man.
It is said that by rendering the verb
Gen. 1:2 literally "had become", the ac-
count not only allows this sense
but also strongly intimates it. Refer-
ring to Resenius' Hebrew grammar on
this point we find it stated (§143, 1. b.)
that waw with the nominal sentence
is sometimes used "to express a state
or circumstance" and in such cases
may be translated by "while". A reference
is here made to §144. A. 3. b. where Gen. 1:2
is cited as such a sentence describ-
ing "not a new accurrence but a
state which exists during the con-
tinuation of the event" (previously
described by a verbal sentence). Reading
accordingly we have "In the beginning
God created the heavens and the earth
while the earth was void and
emptiness". This is far enough from the

meaning "and the earth had become?" But if it be asked how it could be said that the earth was at or before the time of its creation we refer to the bold and conception of a preexisting chaos out of which the earth was brought also to the context in Genesis where the process of creation is described. But the weakness of the above attempted "harmonizing" is only equalled by its self-satisfaction for after all the eloquence that has been expended on the phrase "in the beginning", to say nothing of the context we have only to turn to Ex. 20:11 to read "In six days God created the heaven and the earth, the sea and all that is therein &c". There doesn't seem to be a very strong intimation here even "in the original Hebrew" of the intervention of a period of ~~two~~ three hundred thousand years, or such a matter, between the creation of the world and that of man.

We consider now the bearing of

the Bible upon the question of evolution.
It will seem necessary at this point to get
some terrible conception of the first
chapters of Genesis. The following ques-
tions naturally arise: (1) By whom was
it written? The book claims no one
for its author. (2) When was it written?
It bears no date. (3) From whence was
the subject-matter derived? The book
gives us no information on this point.
Still the answer to this question at first
suggested by discoveries in science is
now no less demanded by the ac-
count itself. The absence of unity, the
discrepancy as to the order of creation
between the first and second chapters,
the similarity of the names of the
different families, together with the
discovery of similar traditions among
almost all ancient peoples, especially the
Chaldees, the ancestors of the Hebrews,
have come to be as strong proof against

the old view of direct revelation as its historic and scientific incorrectness.

The gradually increasing evidence of the great antiquity of error, together with the different forms in which the tradition is actually found also make it extremely improbable that it was handed down without change from the first man to the final writer. One fact well known is that it was not so transmitted for the characters are named for some peculiarities in person or circumstances and these are expressed in the Hebrew idiom which existed for only a few centuries before our era.

The only position that seems tenable in the light of these facts is that from the mass of prehistoric tradition which they had inherited some person or persons undertook to construct an account of the origin of things that should be in harmony with a

monothestic belief and a theory of man's
free-moral agency; and that this was done
with as slight-modifications as pos-
sible so as to preserve the authority of
ancient tradition. The misdo about
the matter is not so much that the
subject-matter should be given but that
having the subject-matter any one
could be enlightened enough to put such
a construction upon it. A careful study
of the account in the light of caution
paraneous rather than of New Testament
-thought will still reveal the fact that
-many of the doctrines that are sup-
posed to be taught by it are not so
much deduced from it as held along
with it or believed in spite of it. If
this explanation of Genesis is correct
it is plain that it can no longer speak
with any authority as the origin of
things and the primitive condi-
tion of man. Special philosophy

ical and religious excellencies over
all her traditions the account may have
such eg. as the teaching that man is the best
work of creation and that his ideal state
is freedom from sin and others that would
be likely to be imported to it by a pious
disposition and an enlightened under-
standing. But these can no longer depend
their historic settings, such as the real
personality of Adam and his high spirit-
ual and moral condition, against the
strong indications of man's great au-
tignity and gradual development.

An objection to this explanation will
no doubt be found in Paul's refer-
ences to the "fall". But Paul lived in
a time when anything written
in old Hebrew carried as much
authority as the primal data of
consciousness. It is very probable
therefore that he should be mistaken
as to historical facts. Moreover the

silence of all other Bible writers on the point of our condition as a result of Adam's sin is a significant fact that ought not to be overlooked. Especially the absence of any reference to the fall by religious teachers of the Old Testament by whom the nature and value of Genesis must have been understood, must not be forgotten.

After reading Romans are not acquainted with the Bible might turn to the Old Testament expecting to find on every page the fall and its effects deplored. And yet except in the original account and ~~in~~ genealogy - in 1. Chron. 1:1 written at the very close of Old Testament times, Adam's name is not mentioned in the Old Testament if we read with the American Committee "men" in Job 31:33. That the subject-matter of Genesis in some form or another existed during some part of the period

cannot be doubted. But can it be supposed that they looked upon it as real history when kings and prophets, whose one cry was ever "Righteousness to Jehovah," lamented human corruption and cried out against their own and their nation's sins, using such expressions as "The whole head is sick and the whole heart is faint," "I was shapen in iniquity and in sin did my mother conceive me" and others and the cause and extent of depravity without allude in any way intimating that it was due to a fall? But not only is any reference to a fall conspicuously absent in the prophets but also in Genesis there is no hint whatever that Abel began life under any difficulties moral or spiritual as a result of Adam's sin. We also look in vain among Christ's teachings for the comparisons which Paul makes. Paul's references there cannot make

the account more authentic than
it originally was and the high spiritual
and moral sanction of formative man,
directly contradictory of his develop-
ment must be admitted to rest on
the weaker authority. But it must
be remembered here again that this
necessitates a change only in our
conception of the moments of man's
origin and not of its cause and the loss
is only for the imagination and not for
reflective thought. For the procreation
of life is as much, if not the same mys-
tery as we try to escape by affirming
a Creation. In fact the more perfectly
the universe becomes understood and
the more complete its laws and form-
ulas for each event the more neces-
sary is it found that there should be
an intelligent active power behind those
laws and while philosophy and sci-
ence strongly suggest that the action

of the Divine upon his works has been con-
tinuous and from within outward,
Genesis not only has nothing to offer
against such a view, but also, if our
explanation ~~of it~~ is correct, furnishes
another illustration of it; and this we
believe might be shown to be true
of religious thought generally. If philo-
sophy leads us to expect that since
first the divine decree went forth
to ~~create~~ a world his relation to it
^{should be} ~~has been~~ the same; if science furnishes
so strong testimony that such has
really been the case, that the power
that operated when the first life was
introduced is still active, critical
Bible study reveals no less clearly the
fact that since first a heightened though
sincere human consciousness
began to enquire of God, their un-
derstanding has been essentially
of the same.

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