

# THE MOVEMENT

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"Maximise morals, minimise religion."—BENTHAM.

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### "VESTIGES OF THE NATURAL HISTORY OF CREATION."

#### *Theory of Regular Gradation.*

SOME short time since I asked the favour of your publishing a few remarks of mine upon the above subject; and I then thought I should not have occasion again to draw upon your kindness. Neither would I now occupy your very valuable space, but that I conceive the matter of general, in fact, of vital importance to the cause of materialism.

Little did I think when Southwell and myself first debated the propriety of the Theory of Gradation forming one of the articles in the *Oracle*, that so brief a period would elapse before the main features of the hypothesis we endeavoured to establish would be admitted as correct by one of the first serials of the orthodox party. Little did either of us imagine that a work would be published supporting, nay advocating, our views, of which the editor of a popular and erudite journal should say that it contains "So many great results of knowledge and reflection, that we cannot too earnestly recommend it to the attention of thoughtful men." It is as true as strange, that Fonblanque, the editor of the *Examiner*, so expresses himself in reference to a volume that has lately appeared, having for its object the development of an opinion identical with Southwell's and mine, namely, that vegetable and animal forms have resulted from purely natural causes.

Every day proves the truth of Byron's remark, as respects the majority of mankind, that

Truth is strange—stranger than fiction.

The complication of organs in animal forms—the seeming adaptation of every part for the particular functions it has to perform, has ever been considered an unanswerable argument to the scepticism of the Atheist. But this, the *only* remaining ground left to the theologian, is sliding from beneath his feet, and all that will shortly be left the class will be to cry *peccavi*, and seek by more honest means to gain their "daily bread."

One portion of the religious world (the Puseyites) are endeavouring to regain the Vol. II.

ground which has been lost through the advancement of knowledge, and seek to re-establish the christian religion upon its old foundations—the Mosaic cosmogony and the fall of man. Whilst another portion (of whom Dr. Buckland, Dr. Pye Smith, Professor Sedgwick, etc., might be considered members) are labouring to dovetail in with revelation the facts of modern science. Neither class will permanently succeed.

Several years ago I contended that the religious world were not so clever as they thought themselves—that their wisest course would be to argue that the deity originally gave certain properties to matter, and that all natural productions were the result of those properties. This view of the subject is precisely that taken by the author of the work of which I have spoken, and, I am inclined to think, will be the transition state at which the religious world will presently arrive. Then will follow Pantheism, or god everything and everything god—from which by "an easy mutation," men will glide into atheism, or god nothing and nothing god.

I have so many extracts to make, that I shall be obliged to confine myself to very brief remarks, and only where absolutely necessary. And so I proceed. After the extract quoted the *Examiner* proceeds: "It is the first attempt that has been made to connect the natural sciences into a history of creation." This may be true as respects "a history of creation," but not so as respects the history of the phenomena which certain men assume to have been created. He thus continues, "An attempt which presupposes learning, extensive and various; but not the large and liberal wisdom, the profound philosophical suggestion, the lofty spirit of beneficence, and the exquisite grace of manner, which make up the charm of this extraordinary book." This high opinion of the book is valuable, and I quote it on that account.

I have not yet seen the work, and am necessarily confined to the extracts given by the *Examiner*. The author is reported to say, "We advance from law to the cause of law, and ask, What is that? Whence come all these beautiful regulations? *Here Science laures us.*" True; but the author contends i

is "only to conclude, from other grounds, that there is a First Cause to which all others are secondary and ministrative,"—and here we leave the author, it not being to my purpose to discuss this point with him now.

The *Examiner* states that the book "opens with a chapter on the arrangement of the bodies of space, and on the wonderful relationships that exist between the constituents of our system. The result of the reasoning in this chapter would seem to be, that the formation of bodies in space is *still and at present in progress.*" The course pursued in the Theory articles in the *Oracle*. The description of the book is still proceeded with: "The formation of the earth is described in its various eras. We have the era of the primary rocks, and the commencement of organic life. The era of the old red sandstone and of the secondary rocks. We have the formation of land and the commencement of land plants; the new red sandstone era, and the commencement of land animals; the oolite era, and commencement of mammalia; and we have the various incidents which belong to the cretaceous, tertiary, and superficial formations. The Geological revelations of the earth's wondrous history are thus laid succinctly before us: their narrative closing suddenly as man is about to enter on the scene." Thus far the reviewer, and the author states that the earliest living creatures on earth were "the unpretending forms of various Zoophytes and Polypes, together with a few single and double-valved shell-fish (mollusks), all of them creatures of the sea," and he thus continues: "The fact of the economical arrangements being an effect of natural law, is a powerful argument for the organic arrangement being so likewise—[so Southwell and myself thought, and hence the "Theory" articles]—for how can we suppose that the august being who brought all these countless worlds into form by the simple establishment of a natural principle flowing from his mind, was to interfere personally and specifically on every occasion when a new shell-fish or reptile was to be ushered into existence on one of these worlds?" The author, it is evident, saw clearly the puerility, the childishness of the popular dogma, and has here succinctly stated that which has been urged over and over again by the atheist, to be answered only by anathemas and reviliings. The editor of the *Examiner*, however, in reference to this last quotation, clinches the nail which the author has so well driven home; he says, "But it is not a matter of general likelihood *simply*; science supplies facts which bring the assumption more nearly home to nature." We are going on swim-

mingly when such *dangerous* truths are so fearlessly announced in the organs of orthodoxy.

Further on the reviewer states that the author "believes the whole train of animated beings to be a *series of advances of the principle of development*"—(the italics are his own)—and says it was "a system foreshadowed by Plato," and he might have added, elaborated by Lamark, White, and others, but denounced as visionary and blasphemous by all true god believers, and condemned as unphilosophical and inconsistent with facts by Lyell and Sedgwick. The author has applied the "step by step" system of Professor Sedgwick to organic as well as inorganic phenomena, and has arrived at a totally opposite conclusion to the learned gentleman.

The author next proceeds to describe the stages of organic life. An insect, standing at the head of the articulated animals, is, in the larva state, a true annelid, or worm, the annelida being the lowest in the same class. The embryo of a crab resembles the perfect animal of the inferior order myriapoda, and passes through all the forms of transition which characterise all the immediate tribes of crustacea. The frog, for some time after its birth, is a fish with external gills, and other organs fitting it for an aquatic life, all of which are changed as it advances to maturity, and becomes a land animal. *Nor is man himself exempt from this law.* His first form is that which is permanent in the animalcule. His organization gradually passes through conditions generally resembling a fish, a reptile, a bird, and the lower mammalia, before it attains its specific maturity. At one of the last stages of the fetal career he exhibits an intermaxillary bone which is characteristic of the perfect ape; this is suppressed, and he may then be said to take leave of the simial (apish) type, and becomes a true human creature. Even, as we shall see, the varieties of his race are represented in the progressive development of an individual of the highest, before we see an adult Caucasian, the highest point yet attained in the animal scale."

There is nothing new in all this; all that the author states has been known to physiologists for many years—but the conclusions which he has drawn from these facts are new to the world at large, and will startle many a pedant from his slumbers, and awaken many a youthful mind to a sense of the bigotry and folly attempted to be crammed into the minds of the rising generation. The editor of the *Examiner* in allusion to the foregoing, says, "of these truths of physiology, strange as they may seem, there is no doubt."

The strangeness appears to me to consist in the possibility of men doubting *the truths* of physiology, geology or any other branch of science.

The author next proceeds to combat the objection that there has been no change in the organization of man since his first appearance upon the earth, and says: "But the historical era is, as we know, only a small portion of the entire age of our globe. *We do not know what may have happened during the ages which preceded its commencement, as we do not know what may happen in ages yet in the distant future.* \* \* Is our race but the initial of the grand crowning type? *Are there yet to be species superior to us in organization, purer in feeling, more powerful in device and act, and who shall take a rule over us! There is in this nothing improbable on other grounds.* The present race, rude and impulsive as it is, is perhaps the best adapted to the present state of things in the world; but the external world goes through slow and gradual changes, which may leave it in time a much sereener field of existence. There may then be occasion for a nobler type of humanity, which shall complete the zoological circle on this planet, and realise some of the dreams of the purest spirits of the present race."

The book of Genesis says that man was made in the image of his creator—the author of the "Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation," thinks it probable the time might arrive when that "image" will be improved upon. Query, for theologians—*Will the creator share in the improvement of the creature?* if he do not, the creature will be superior, in form at least, to his creator; and if he does, how will he reconcile his consistency, after his positive assertion that he is "without change or shadow (even) of turning," and that, as he "was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be?" Verily, philosophers are sad plagues to divinity!

The reviewer says, "The writer seems but little cognizant of the notions of the Greek philosophers, and it is the more strange to what an unconscious and large extent he corroborates many of their most striking views. *This idea of a higher race was held by Pythagoras, who connected it with that view of more consummate worlds in space, inhabited in their turn by beings more perfect and beautiful than those of earth, which we have, in an earlier part of this notice, seen to be in some sort sanctioned by the results of astronomical inquiry.*"

Wonder produces wonder! The editor of the *Examiner*, not content with peopling the earth by natural causes, is also for doing the

same thing for the innumerable other spheres which exist in the universe. And yet, there is not a word in "the book of books" to warrant such an hypothesis—on the contrary, it is stated in Genesis that the sun, moon and stars were created to give light to this earth. Neither is there aught in the New Testament to warrant the conclusion that the "Son of God" went from hence to other worlds to expiate the sins of their inhabitants. Perhaps in accordance with the view of Pythagoras, they are so good as not to require such a sacrifice. Should this be the case, I envy them their good fortune, for they will be spared a world of controversy and ill-feeling, besides much misery and bloodshed.

Having now finished my extracts, I will briefly conclude this article.

Is it because I have been so long used to investigate the validity of the god question by an examination of natural phenomena, that I attach so much importance to arguments drawn from such source? Has the love of my hobby blinded me to the superior value of other modes of discussion? Are the arguments for the non-existence of deity evolved from nature of no more value or service than a metaphysical reason to the same effect? I think not. I think that a disproof of god, drawn from the only tangible evidences of his existence, must at all times be superior to any abstract and abstruse reasons. It will certainly most readily address itself to the uninformed mind—and the tutored intellect can amuse itself in finding other objections in the nature of things if it so pleases. In fact, it is universally admitted, that the proof of god from god's works is the only foundation upon which reason can rest. If this mode be unsatisfactory, there is no help but *faith*. Here the theist has the atheist at an advantage—for the atheist cannot have *faith* in the non-existence of a god or of anything else. If a reply to that effect would satisfy the theist, it would not satisfy the atheist. Faith is an affirmative belief and not a negative one.

So long as men could be led to believe a god existed, and that all they saw was the work of his hands, simply upon the assertion of other men supposed to possess superior knowledge upon the subject—so long were priests content to look no further for proof of the truth of their dogma. But, in after ages, when daring men arose, who, unable to reconcile the incongruities by which they were surrounded, and who did not hesitate to avow their doubts, and declare their difficulties—then were the priests

driven to the alternative of showing a *reason* from nature and natural objects "for the *faith* which was within them." If the atheist can contend to advantage with the theist upon *this* ground, we are quite certain he can defeat him upon the ground of blind belief. Atheists, I am afraid, have given themselves too much to the consideration of the metaphysical points of the question in dispute, from the circumstance of this mode of argument depending upon certain arbitrary propositions and generally admitted principles, which would be affirmed or denied without reference to objects, and not requiring the slow and cautious process inseparable from an investigation of the subject through the medium of scientific discoveries. The metaphysical mode whilst the most easy is the least satisfactory—the scientific or natural mode though necessarily slow is commensurately sure. A man may evade a syllogism but he cannot be blind to a fact—he may cut a metaphysical puzzle, but science will cut him. Let me earnestly recommend to Atheists a consideration of the physical arguments in their favour.

The author of the "Vestiges" says the *Examiner*, "Doubts the *reception* of his labours, and intimates that, for reasons connected with them, his *name* will in all probability never be generally known." Verily, the man is wise in his generation.

Through the kindness of my very respected friend W. J. B., I expect to have the book in a few days, when it is probable I shall return to the subject.

W. C.

#### DREW ON THE IMMATERIALITY OF THE SOUL.

A friend has desired a notice of Drew's "Essay on the Human Soul." Mr. Drew was a man strong in piety and coarse in prejudice, one who stigmatized an Atheist as "a solitary meteor, wandering through a century, exciting mixed emotions of astonishment and contempt." But this shall not prevent a fair estimate of his performance in these pages.

Mr. Drew was a Methodist preacher, and of sober abilities as a reasoner, which, had his powers been cultivated, would have raised him to distinction.

The "Essay" commences by assuming the existence of matter and spirit. On the existence of matter it refers to Beattie's Essay on Truth, and is perfectly satisfactory.

"That matter or body has a real, separate, independent existence; that there is a real

sun above us, a real air around us, and a real earth under our feet, has been the belief of all men who were not mad, ever since the creation. This is believed, not because it is or can be proved by argument, but because the constitution of our nature is such that we must believe it. It is absurd, nay, it is impossible, to believe the contrary. I could as easily believe that I do not exist, that two and two are equal to ten, that whatever is, is not; as that I have neither hands, nor feet, nor head, nor clothes, nor house, nor country, nor acquaintance; that the sun, moon, and stars, and ocean, and tempest, thunder and lightning, &c., have no existence but as ideas or thoughts in my mind, and independent of me and my faculties, do not exist at all, and could not exist if I were to be annihilated; &c. I affirm, that it is not in the power, either of wit or of madness, to contrive any conceit more absurd, or more nonsensical, than this, That the material world has no existence but in my mind."

But of the separate existence of a spirit, nothing clear is anywhere advanced. An omission unpardonable in such a work, and fatal to its efficiency. Mr. Drew argues very well that spirit *may be*, "though too remote for the human intellect to grasp." But the writer we want is he who will enable intellect to grasp, as it ought to do, whatever intellect pretends to believe in. The edition of Drew's Essay, under consideration, has very candid notes by Mr. J. R. Miles, who frequently points out serious defects in Drew's reasoning. For instance, (p. 35) Mr. Miles tells us that "Mr. Drew contradicts what he has before admitted. He has assumed Will as one of the principal powers of the mind, and shortly after asserts it to have no certain existence." This is often true of the Essay in essential chains of reasoning. Sometimes Mr. Drew sins against all logic, and sometimes against himself. Mr. Miles warns the reader in one place, that Mr. Drew "evidently draws a conclusion, fixing a limitation to God's power, and wholly inconsistent with the principles that ought to characterise a Christian philosopher,"—and in another place we are told that Mr. Drew "has assumed the very point which he ought to have established by a vigorous train of demonstration." But these candid admissions, for which the commentator deserves credit, should not deter from the careful weighing of what Mr. Drew is supposed to have left sound, did we not find Mr. Drew so little acquainted with what has been advanced, with greater ability, on the immateriality of thought by