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I. BABEL AND ITS LESSONS.

“ALL the languages of the earth,” says an eminent authority, “have affinities enough to indicate a common origin; but they have differences enough to show that some great dislocation has occurred in their history.” The Scriptures tell us when and how this dislocation occurred. It was a judgment of God inflicted upon men because of their rebellion against his will.

The descendants of Noah had greatly multiplied since the flood, and the earth was again filling with people. They had spread themselves out over the East until the centre of population seems to have been the plain of Shinar—that fertile region which lies between the Tigris and the Euphrates Rivers. There, under the leadership probably of Nimrod, the Cushite, they devised and undertook the ambitious scheme of building a great city, with a tower whose top, in their hyperbolic speech, should reach unto heaven. Josephus says that their purpose was to secure themselves against destruction from another flood. If such was the animus of the movement it is easy to see why it should have been displeasing to God and deserving of his judgment. He had given his promise that the earth should never again be destroyed by a flood; he had set his bow in the cloud as a pledge of faithfulness to that covenant.

Now if, instead of resting on that divine promise as a sufficient and infallible guarantee of safety, they set themselves to provide a refuge of their own, they plainly betrayed the most

III. SOME RECENT CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION.¹

THERE is a philosophy of religion which is the peculiar province of the specialist. It thrives best in the stillness of the study, or the class-room. Its results are embodied in elaborate treatises and comprehensive systems. Its influence is concentrated upon a select coterie of students, who are freed from the cares of our common life. Of that philosophy it would be presumptuous for me to speak.

There is, however, another philosophy of religion. It is no man's specialty, but the serious concern of every one who would stand for himself in a right mental attitude, and who would help his fellow-men to attain that attitude. Every man who thinks has a philosophy, and if he thinks upon religion, he has a philosophy of religion. The so-called religious difficulties are not altogether due to the hardness of men's hearts. In an appreciable degree these arise out of a false philosophy, and he that watches for men's souls as one that must give account will correct the philosophy while he inculcates the religion. There is need, then, of a philosophy which is both sound and simple, which imbibes as much of the more thorough philosophy as it can apply to the relief of the average man, which can be used not only in the quiet of the study, but in the whirl of an active ministry, and face to face with the practical necessities of perplexed and bewildered men. Of this philosophy I count it no presumption to speak to those who share with me this ministry.

The contributions I have in mind relate to the theory of belief and to its function in religion. I think that the weakest point in our philosophy is just here. We all believe in belief. We urge upon men its importance in their lives, and marshal with great labor the evidence supporting our particular beliefs, and rejoice in

¹ Read before the Presbyterian Ministerial Association of Chicago on November 18, 1895.

the results which these bring about. But do we not touch very lightly upon such questions as the authority of our primary beliefs, the relations which these sustain to our reasoned conclusions, the function of belief in the formation of character, and the point at which Christian belief necessarily diverges from all other forms of religious belief? Yet no apologetic, however vigorous, can overcome the weakness of a philosophy which is weak here. This will explain why, in the midst of results which the world never before has seen equalled, our modern Christianity fails to tell as it ought. It also prepares us to hail with gladness any movement in the world of philosophic thought which even seems to promise well for the theory of belief.

It is perhaps venturesome to claim for any thesis in the philosophy of religion the honorable title of a "contribution," for the claim is certain to be challenged at once. Any one who is at all familiar with that perennial controversy in which we employ the terms "reason and revelation," "the natural and the supernatural," "the sacred and the secular," "liberty and authority," "creed and conduct," will recognize the unsettled condition of opinion with which we are face to face. Yet since men will continue to philosophize, there must be no surcease in our efforts to harmonize into one consistent system the truths whose fragments we seem to have laid hold of, and to approximate that unity which we must believe will ultimately be made clear to our expectant eyes.

The contributions I have in mind are to be found in two books of recent appearance. One is *Social Evolution*, by Mr. Benjamin Kidd, a clerk in the service of the British government, and the other is *The Foundations of Belief*, by the Right Honorable Arthur James Balfour, a member of the present British Cabinet, and a nephew of Lord Salisbury, the premier. Mr. Kidd's book is his first venture; Mr. Balfour is the author of *A Defense of Philosophic Doubt*, published several years ago.

These books illustrate the distinction between the two philosophies of religion which I pointed out at the beginning. They are written from standpoints quite far apart. Mr. Kidd is an evolutionist, eager to apply his philosophy to society as the highest

form of life. He passes heedlessly over the metaphysical problems which he touches, and sorely exasperates those who see nothing beyond these problems. Mr. Balfour is a critic. His book is a keen analysis of naturalism, and a provisional unification of those truths which naturalism has so intolerably perverted. I am not all sure that either of these authors would relish the conjunction of their names and their books, but I hope to show that they are so far at one that they throw the same fresh light upon some of the problems which are perplexing the men of to-day.

Mr. Kidd believes that evolution is the law of life, and finds fault with his brother-evolutionists because they have not applied that law to society, which ought to be the highest department of biology. He criticises severely their avoidance of social problems, and the obscurantism which withholds them from confronting these problems. Human progress, he says, is the result of rivalry; it involves strain and stress; it proceeds according to the law of selection, which implies rejection, and necessitates competition. This rivalry is the keenest among the progressive peoples of the earth, and whenever it is suspended the process of degeneration sets in. This is the law of human progress and of biology applied at its highest point. This progress is made at a sacrifice, however. The interests of any individual or of any generation would best be served by the suspension of that rivalry and an equal division, or, at least, an equal share for all. Socialism is not unreasonable when it asks that competition cease and combination take its place, and that men who are born equal have a more nearly equal share. Temperately stated, the programme of socialism commends itself to common sense, in that it seeks to enable men to make for themselves the most out of the present time, rather than deny themselves for the sake of generations yet unborn. Yet, reasonable as this suspension appears, it has never taken, and it will never take place. Socialism is reasonable, but it is unattainable, and, if it were to be attained, human progress would instantly cease. The fact is, that man continues to subject himself to strenuous conditions which he might suspend. His progress increases the rivalry of life, and intensifies his competitions. This is the meaning of the abolition of slavery, of the

gradual enfranchisement of the masses, of the remedial measures for the laboring classes, and of the growing respect for the rights of minorities. The power-holding classes have acted continually against their own interests, which are the dictates of reason or of common sense, and have given to others what they might, with a good show of reason, have continued to hold for themselves. What is that strange power which has carried the race onward along this path of individual self-sacrifice for the sake of peoples who have no claim upon them, and of generations yet unborn? Evidently, it is a power which has sanctions strong enough to overcome innate selfishness, and to induce to certain actions against which reason, in the ordinary acceptation of that term, protests vigorously. That power Mr. Kidd finds in religion. The course of modern progress has been religious and ethical, not rational and individual, and its results are seen, not in an increasing intellectual grasp, but in the deepening and sweetening of human character.

Modern progress, according to Mr. Kidd, dates from a period which began eighteen centuries ago, when the Christian doctrines of immediate salvation and human brotherhood were first preached. The violent opposition which these doctrines encountered arose rather from those who were wedded to existing social conditions than from those of contrary theological opinions. The ethical influence of these doctrines was sufficiently strong to bring about the gradual weakening of the military conception of life which prevailed in the Roman empire, and to bring men into the struggle for existence on terms more and more nearly equal. That ethical influence, however, was gradually lost sight of, and Christianity became occupied in perpetuating and enforcing, through all departments of mediæval life, its supernatural sanctions, until, at the time of the Reformation, the ethical was completely obscured by the supernatural. Reason was extinguished, and the right of private judgment was lost, in an all-prevailing ecclesiastical authority. The Reformation was the release of those ethical or altruistic forces which for sixteen centuries had been denied their play, and which are the source of our modern progress, political, social, and industrial. That progress is marked by the

steady retreat of the power-holding classes from their vested rights, and by the gradual elevation, by these classes, of the people as a whole to privileges which the people never before enjoyed. The supernatural sanctions which are found in Christianity of the evangelical type are the source of modern progress, in that they alone have been strong enough to induce men to forego their own interests and to bring their fellow-men into the struggle for existence upon terms of equality with themselves; and these sanctions bind many who are unconscious of their source, and some who openly repudiate the religion from which they spring. The future of social progress will be along the lines of its past, and consistent with it. The nations which lack these supernatural sanctions in their religious life will disappear beneath the surface in the struggle for existence, while those nations in which these sanctions have the freest and fullest development will be in the future, as they now are, the dominant nations of the world.

As will be seen from this outline, Mr. Kidd's argument invites criticism from every side. The anti-Christian regards it as "the recrudescence of supernaturalism"; the champion of human reason is astounded at this daring assault upon the prerogatives of his ideal; the metaphysician is annoyed by the conspicuous neglect of his favorite problems; the socialist is not satisfied by Mr. Kidd's concession to the rationality of his programme, because that programme is said to be practically unattainable in that it follows intellectual rather than ethical lines; and ritualistic Christianity is indignant at the assertion that it is a chief obstacle in the path of human progress. Yet, in spite of this formidable body of critics, and this formidable mass of criticism, there are some principles in Mr. Kidd's philosophy which are worthy of our very hearty approval.

Mr. Balfour disclaims any right to speak on theological questions, and restricts himself to the philosophical presuppositions which are involved in any adequate theology. On the threshold of religion he encounters naturalism, which is apparently fatal to religion. It assumes a scientific garb, and in its thrusts at religion creates the impression that it speaks for science; but, as a fact,

naturalism is not science, but only one interpretation of scientific facts, and a mood or temper in which a very respectable class of men has approached the study of scientific problems. It sometimes calls itself agnosticism, sometimes empiricism, and sometimes positivism. These are alike in that they teach that all we know is phenomena—things which appear—and the laws by which these things are connected. The only world we know, says naturalism, is that revealed to us through perception, and this is the subject-matter of the natural sciences. It is here only that we may exercise our reason and gather the fruits of wisdom. Pleasure and pain, appetite and disgust, courage and heroism, are all upon one plane—sensations produced by experience. Life is a petty episode in the history of the world. Of living things but a small proportion has feeling, and a still smaller proportion of things that have feeling are endowed with moral feelings. If these were destroyed, man, indeed, would be the loser, but there would be no sensible diminution in the sum of realities and no change in the organic world.

“If naturalism be true, or rather if it be the whole truth, then is morality but a bare catalogue of utilitarian precepts; beauty but the chance occasion of a passing pleasure; reason but the dim passage from one state of unthinking habits to another. All that gives dignity to life, all that gives value to effort, shrinks and fades under the pitiless glare of a creed like this.”

Mr. Balfour criticises our ordinary apologetic because it has made no serious inquiry into the principles of naturalism, or into the adequacy of that positive knowledge on which naturalism prides itself; but has been content with insisting upon the insufficiency of that positive knowledge and its need of some theological supplement. In his inquiry into this so-called positive knowledge, Mr. Balfour shows that science conceives of a world of objects which are ordered and related, independent of the presence or absence of the observer, and which are governed in their behavior by rigid laws. Whence comes this conception of the world? The professed premise of naturalism is experience, which includes observation and experiment. These are the raw material of hypothesis and inference, and are based upon the evidence of the senses. Are these sufficient to give us positive knowledge of

a world outside of ourselves? When we observe an object, as a tree, we experience a certain sensation. If knowledge be limited to experience, we, of course, know only our sensations and feelings, and know nothing of a world or even of an object outside of the observing self. This is the inevitable result of empiricism; and yet scientific men speak of material things as real. They claim a definite and positive knowledge of them. They do not hesitate to make the leap from their own sensations to a real external world. How is this leap to be justified if positive knowledge be limited by personal experience? How can we squeeze a trustworthy knowledge of a permanent and independent material universe out of sensations which are but transient, evanescent effects? If we begin to argue, we at once go beyond the limits of naturalism. The conviction that sensations and feelings must have a cause, that the hypothesis of a material world suggests a cause agreeable to our natural beliefs, and that as a hypothesis it enables us to anticipate the order and the character of our perceptions, carries us beyond the range of experience into those fundamental principles which Hume and the naturalistic school deny. The principle of causation cannot be extracted out of a succession of individual experiences of sensations and feelings. The world described by science is not congruous with our natural beliefs, and on naturalistic principles we cannot legitimately reason from effect to cause. Naturalism, therefore, like every other philosophy, rests upon our primary beliefs; and, like supernaturalism, is an inference from them, and not the irresistible conclusion of ultimate scientific facts.

This argument Mr. Balfour applies to ethics, to æsthetic, and to reason. His essay follows a clear line, which leads him to hold—

First, That any system which, with our present knowledge, we are able to construct must suffer from obscurities, from defects of proof, and from incoherences. This is true, even if it be narrowed down to bare science.

Second, No unification of belief of the slightest theoretic value can take place on the basis of inductions from particular experiences, whether external or internal.

Third, No philosophy can be satisfactory which does not find

room for the fact that, so far as empirical science can tell us anything about the matter, most of the proximate causes of belief, and all of its ultimate causes, are non-rational in their character.

Fourth, No unification of belief is practically adequate which fails to include ethical as well as scientific beliefs, or which excludes from ethical beliefs those which contain our moral sentiments, ideals, and aspirations, and which satisfy our ethical needs. The spirit of man can rest in no permanent habitation which fails to provide satisfaction for these needs.

I may now indicate the particular contributions to our philosophy of religion which are made by these two authors.

I. THE SPHERE OF REASON.

This is large or small, according to the sense in which we take the word. The double sense is justly chargeable with much of the confusion which surrounds the question, and which is very apparent in much of the criticism called out by these books. In the broader sense, of course, reason includes all that distinguishes man from the brute, as when we speak of man as a rational animal, and all that links him to the eternal or essential reason. In the latter sense it is narrowed down to the faculty of reasoning, or to those intellectual processes, the product of which is represented in the conclusions of our arguments and the results of our examination of evidence. It is easy to identify the fruit of our reasonings with the eternal and essential reason, and to imagine that the one is the necessary product of the other; but in doing this we commit a grave philosophical fault and open the way for hopeless confusion. This fault is accountable for the popular notion that the ideal of humanity is intellectual, and the truth lies like a pot of gold just under the rainbow of our reasonings; that the rational proof of our opinions is the plain duty of thinking men, and that ultimately we will be able to reach and act upon conclusions by the judicial investigation of and decision between the various reasons which are on one side and the other. This notion has infected even our Christian teachers, and has led them into various devices to commend to men the truth we hold on

rational grounds, and to prove it by argument and by evidence.

We are indebted to Mr. Balfour for his emphasis on both senses of this term. He maintains the essential rationality of the universe, and views the eternal reason as the ground of all existence; and he characterizes the common notion that the difficult and perplexing work connected with the maintenance of life is performed by intellect as a great delusion. He holds that the management of the humblest organ would be infinitely beyond our mental capacities, and that, as a matter of fact, it is only in the simplest "jobs" that discursive reason is permitted to have a hand at all, and that our tendency to take a different view is one arising out of our self-importance, which is like that of a child who, because he is allowed to stamp the letters, imagines that he conducts the correspondence. The notion that reason, and reason alone, can be safely permitted to mould the convictions of mankind is not only erroneous, but scientifically absurd. What would be the chance in the struggle for existence of a community in which each member set himself to the task of throwing off all prejudices due to education, and of examining critically the grounds on which rest every positive enactment and every moral precept? Such a community could never begin to be; and if it once began, it would immediately be resolved into its constituent elements.

Mr. Kidd points out that in intellectual power the world has made no progress in over eighteen hundred years, and that the brain capacity of the ancient Greeks was larger than that of the Anglo-Saxon of to-day. He shows that the intellectual classes, as such, have always stood athwart the line of modern progress, and that this progress has been made despite their most furious opposition and their most relentless persecution. Intellectual processes, as these are represented in what we call common sense, teach each man to make for himself the most of life, they develop the self-regarding instincts and cultivate a narrow individualism. The altruistic feelings out of which progress springs are not only beyond intellectual demonstration, but are in conflict with what men call rational conclusions. The ideal of a rational religion, that is, a religion which begins in and justifies itself to our intellectual

processes, may be attained as an ideal of rationality; but in proportion as it grows in rationality, it loses in that force which is essential in all religion.

These limitations of the sphere of reason have provoked very loud protests, but the protests are of small avail. Reason—that is, our reasonings—has its place, but it is not the place which some of its champions have claimed for it. That place, although indispensable, is subordinate. Its function is to state the contents of our primary beliefs, which are so far reasonable that they yield to intelligent statement, and are subject to confirmation by evidence; but these reasonings do not give to our primary beliefs their authority, nor can they retain for those beliefs that authority after it is once lost.

II. THE AUTHORITY OF PRIMARY BELIEFS.

Religious beliefs differ in no essential way from other primary beliefs, and all beliefs ought to be considered, not in arbitrary divisions, but in their unity. As such, these deep-seated instincts or spiritual intuitions have, according to Mr. Kidd, a truer basis than scientific investigation. They are the complement of reason in its narrow sense. The fond hope cherished by many who called themselves rational, that these beliefs will some day be displaced by reason, is doomed, as it always has been, to a bitter disappointment. Arguments may vary and the grounds on which each individual and each generation rests his belief may change, but the beliefs abide unchanged, surviving the changes in the rational statement or proof of them. These beliefs, with their supernatural sanctions, lie at the foundation of all religion. The so-called religions which repudiate the supernatural are not in any real sense religions, because they have never laid hold of mankind with any ethical power; and the strength even of Mohammedanism, Buddhism, and the religions of the Greeks and the Romans, as well as those religions which are more conspicuously supernatural, lies in the appeal which they make to influences which are beyond rational demonstration.

Mr. Balfour, as I have shown above, points out that naturalism as well as supernaturalism invokes these primary beliefs, in that it

appeals to the doctrine of causation and to the principle of the uniformity of nature, neither of which is a matter of experience or the product of reasoning, and yet without which naturalism would be perfectly helpless in its efforts to infer an external world from sensation and feeling. He points out that faith, by which he means a conviction apart from and in excess of rational demonstration, is the ground of our axioms of daily life as well as of our loftiest ends and our most far-reaching discoveries. Certitude is not the product of reason, but of these beliefs; and if we are less perplexed about beliefs on which we act every hour than we are about others, it is only because we are the less inclined to ask questions about them.

These views give new light upon rationalism. This, according to its disciples, is the unprejudiced examination of every question in the dry light of emancipated reason; specifically, it is a reaction against dogmatic theology which arose at the Renaissance. Doubtless it achieved much good, but, like other good things, it was carried entirely too far, when it was made a test of truth. If a belief squared with the view of the universe which was based upon the prevalent mode of interpreting sense-perception, it was rational. If it clashed, it was superstition. With amazing assurance Mr. Balfour coolly describes rationalists not as philosophers, but as "men of the world who are reluctant to criticise methods which succeed, or to admit that other methods are needed." And naturalism is only the application of rationalizing methods to the whole circuit of belief, and involves the surrender of religion, virtue and beauty. These primary beliefs, which in authority are independent of our reasonings, impel us, amid many difficulties, to infer a rational being, who made the world intelligible, and at the same time made us to understand it. If our confidence in these primary beliefs is to be justified, there must be a God, and if this confidence cannot be justified we are the victims of a skepticism which cannot be sure even of itself. From this fundamental position the arguments for an intelligent Creator, for divine inspiration, in at least the broad sense, and for the incarnation, proceed by easy stages.

III. THE INFLUENCE OF RELIGIOUS BELIEF UPON CONDUCT.

Conduct is the product not so much of our reasoned conclusions as of our beliefs, and specially of our religious beliefs. These have a motive power which is lacking in our rational conclusions. Mr. Kidd shows the enormous influence of religious belief throughout the whole world, not only in churches and temples, but in customs, laws and institutions. He wonders that science, which is so eager for facts, should overlook the outstanding facts of religion. He holds that religious belief, by which is meant the belief in persons and influences beyond the reach of rational proof, is not only powerful in the individual life, but is the source of all social progress. It has furnished the motive power which has induced men to submit to the onerous conditions of progress and to sacrifice self for the good of others. If progress were intellectual, the men of to-day would show a retrogression, for the Greek intellect of eighteen centuries ago was as much superior to the Anglo-Saxon of to-day as the Anglo-Saxon is to the African intellect of to-day. That there has been progress in the face of a decreasing intellectuality shows that progress is not intellectual, but ethical in character; that is, it arises out of religious or ultra-rational rather than out of rational sources. This is true even of those who repudiate religion and religious influences. Fortunately for themselves they cannot escape "the psychological climate" in which they live, even though they inhabit that climate as "spiritual parasites."

It is certainly an immense gain to our philosophy if we can clearly see that character is not a mere by-product in an intellectual process, but the index of all real progress; that awe and reverence are not obstacles in the path of human development, but ethical forces, the value of which is beyond that of intellectual facility or scientific research; that moral impotency is chargeable, not to religious beliefs, but to that rationalism which ever assails those beliefs; that even the poorest religious belief, held amid much obscurity and many superstitions, is a more effective force in human life than the most brilliant intellectual product which has within it no link to bind it to the unseen and eternal. The extravasation of the supernatural is a hopeless ideal. Our

fundamental beliefs will be influencing human life and conduct long after every intellectual refutation of them has been forgotten. In these days of modernized empiricism, thinly veiled under theological phrases, we do well to give heed to this fundamental teaching of a sound philosophy.

IV.—THE ETHICAL POWER OF CHRISTIANITY.

Christian belief diverges from other forms of religious belief at the point of its efficiency to produce results in character and in civilization which indicate progress. It embodies an ethical force, which, so far as it is distinctive, arises out of its distinctive beliefs. Western civilization, according to Mr. Kidd, is limited to no one race, but marks all of those races which accepted Christianity at a time when the religion of Rome had lost what supernatural authority it possessed. It sprang into being, unnoticed and even scorned by the intellectual classes, yet endowed with a stern, aggressive, undisciplined enthusiasm which was unlike any other. The controversies it started only covered its vigor as a social movement. The Reformation had its chief significance, not in its theological, but in its social aspect. It preserved the supernatural sanctions, which were expressed in a present salvation and a human brotherhood, and at the same time it liberated that immense fund of altruistic sentiment which for centuries had been accumulating. The selfishness of modern life, which is the product of rational individualism, is counterbalanced by the humanitarianism of modern life, which is essentially super-rational. The abolition of slavery; the relief of the aged poor, of the orphan and of the epileptic; the advance of popular education; the reforms in the industrial world which affect child-labor, sweat-shops, and the hours of work, are all the product of that altruistic sentiment which is generated by Christianity.

The future will follow the lines of the past. The upheaval of society, so sorely dreaded, is already in progress, but the strata which have been upturned assure us that those which are yet to be upturned will bring not disaster, but indefinite improvement. Political enfranchisement will be followed by the relief of social conditions, until all are brought into the struggle for existence on

terms of equality, and the fittest will survive. The course of empire is indicated by the course of a living Christianity. Nations held under the spell of a formal Christianity are in decay, and the hope of such nations is in the dominance of peoples who are not only distinctively religious, not only distinctively Christian, but who are Christians in the Reformed, as distinguished from the Roman sense, and Evangelical, as distinguished both from Ritualistic and Humanitarian.

I need not pause even to hint the significance of this last contribution to the philosophy of religion. It would be a great pity if in any dogmatic or sectarian spirit the students of modern progress should close their eyes to the facts developed by a careful study of the history of western civilization. It would be a boon if in our day men could see for themselves, that now, as in the past, civilization is the product of religion, and that the irreligious tendencies of large sections of modern civilization are fraught with the greatest danger. It would be a still greater boon, if from their crude philosophies men could escape far enough to see that social progress springs not only from religion, but from those religions which are marked by supernatural sanction, and that the effort to tamper with those sanctions is portentous of evil for mankind. But the greatest boon which a sound philosophy can confer is to lead men from those various types of Christianity, whether Rationalistic or Ritualistic, which have the form of godliness, but deny the power thereof, to that Spiritual or Evangelical Christianity, which, as the seat of ethical energy, is the source of all modern progress.

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