

THE BIBLE AND EVOLUTION.

By REV. PROF. SCRIMGER, D.D.

V.—ORIGIN OF RELIGION.

As represented especially in the Hibbert Lectures, the new Science of Religion which seeks to classify the faiths of the world according to their leading features, to trace the origin and growth of religious ideas, and to discover the laws that govern their development, has, like all the other sciences, come under the spell of the evolution theory. Admitting that monotheism is the highest form of religion and the only one that can be entirely true, it is held that monotheism is the latest development of religious thought with man, that it was preceded by henotheism, or the worship of one god to the exclusion of others, who were still, however, supposed to exist. Henotheism in turn grew out of an antecedent polytheism, which replaced the still earlier animism or fetishism, now found only among the lowest and most barbarous tribes. Even this was not the earliest form of all, but must have been preceded by some cruder religion still, though the authorities on the subject are by no means agreed what it was. The origin of religion altogether, which is not necessarily contemporaneous with the origin of the race, is variously explained as arising from dreams or imaginary ghosts, or the reverence for departed ancestors. Max Müller would attribute it to the sense-perception of the infinite, the meaning of which, if it has any, need not detain us now. Thus from a religious point of view man started at a stage lower down than the lowest savage anywhere found to-day, and has gradually worked his way up, step by step, to the pure and lofty monotheism represented in Christianity—just as all vegetable and animal life are supposed to have risen step by step from the lowest forms to the highest now existing.

It need not be said that the Bible account of man's religious history is considerably different from this.