

Written for THE CANADA PRESBYTERIAN.

## The Readjustment of Faith.

BY W. C. JORDAN, D.D.



HEREVER the Christian religion comes its brings not only its simple message of sin and salvation, of man's wandering and God's seeking, but also a quickened intellectual movement. The moral teaching of our Lord and His apostles is given, not in the form of direct definite rules, but as living principles which call for prayerful study and thoughtful application. This is distressing to those who think that religious teaching should always be the same thing in exactly the same words, and that worship should forever consist of exactly the same ceremonies. Even the most intelligent people need a deep rooted faith, if they are to adjust their religious beliefs, in a healthful fashion, to the intellectual changes which are inevitable in civilized Christian society.

In a recent essay on the question, "Is There Another Life?" Professor Goldwin Smith lays stress upon two strong influences which have entered into modern thought, from the realm of natural science. These influences he seems to think tend to make it more difficult for men to cherish a child-like faith in a personal God and a confident hope concerning the Future Life.

It was indeed a great change when men first grasped the fact that the sun is the centre of our solar system, and instead of the sun moving round the earth as it seemed to do, the earth revolved round the sun, as well as round its own axis. When this is mentioned now we feel inclined to say what has this to do with religion or with our faith in God? This is acknowledged as scientific fact and is taught to our young people in the schools as part of the ordinary instruction which does not require special comment. True, but if we go back a little while, historically speaking, we find that even this was a burning theological question in the life of Europe. No doubt some opposed the new scientific teaching because they believed that it was false or at least that it was not demonstrated; but many denounced it because they were convinced that it contradicted the Scriptures and led to infidelity. We, to-day, who stand upon the shoulders of our forefathers and take a wider view of things, are astonished at the ignorance and narrowness displayed by the then leaders of society, though in similar circumstances our conduct would no doubt have been the same. Galileo, the great astronomer, was seized by the Roman Inquisition and compelled to retract his troublesome doctrine. They could not hinder him from thinking that the earth moved, but he must not say so unless he wanted to be a martyr for science. Many Protestants were equally strong and bitter against the new doctrine. When the truth prevailed in spite of intolerance, and good men began to see that in putting forth their hands rashly to defend the ark of God they had been both cowardly and irreverent, then men's thoughts of the world were enlarged. Ships crossed the Atlantic, a new continent was discovered, adventurous men circled the globe, in one direction knowledge of the round earth was increased, while in another direction men studied the order of the celestial spheres. Improvements in telescopes and microscopes went on and men learned that the wonders of the universe were inexhaustible, both in the infinitely great and the infinitely small. The very greatness of the universe came as a surprise and a shock to many. There were those who said, "Seeing that the world is so great, if there is a God He must be so great that we can know very little about Him and He is probably so great that He does not care anything about us." Even here we meet the usual diversity of human thought and learn that the way in which the outside world affects us depends very largely upon our spiritual condition. One says, "An undevout astronomer is mad," the grandeur of the universe and the laws of the planets are so wonderful that he who, perceiving this, does not bow in awe and worship before God, is not sane, while a man of different spirit utters the foolish saying, that "the heavens disclose no glory but the glory of Newton and Kepler," as if these great men were the creators of the laws they had discovered. They would indeed have been the last to make such a foolish claim.

This question does not disturb the Church now as it did in the days when the great Chalmers preached his astronomical sermons to show that the greatness of the world does not destroy but rather increases the glory of the gospel. The intellectual life of Christian men after much strife and innumerable "harmonies" has adjusted itself to this great change, we feel that these discoveries have not abolished or banished God but enlarged our thoughts of Him, and made us realize more fully the saying of Paul, that "in Him we live and move and have our being

and He is not far from anyone of us." We can still say with Lord Bacon, "I had rather believe all the Fables in the Legend, the Talmud, and the Alcoran than that this universal frame is without a mind" and that "a little philosophy inclineth man's mind to atheism, but depths in philosophy bringeth man's mind about to religion."

When we look up into the starry sky our thoughts may be different from those of Abraham, who, listening to God's promise, stood under the Syrian blue so many centuries ago, but we may have a faith as firm and as child-like. It is much to be feared that our sloth, our pride, and our greed of earthly things play a greater part in our unbelief than any speculative difficulties about the greatness of the world. Our confession would then be more appropriately made in the language of one of Wordsworth's most beautiful sonnets:

"The world is too much with us - late and soon,  
Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers:  
Little we see in Nature that is ours;  
We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon!  
This Sea that bares her bosom to the moon;  
The winds that will be howling at all hours,  
And are up-gathered now like sleeping flowers;  
For this, for everything, we are out of tune,  
It moves us not. Great God! I'd rather be  
A Pagan suckled in a creed outworn,  
So might I, standing on this pleasant lea,  
Have glimpses that would make me less forlorn;  
Have sight of Proteus rising from the Sea,  
Or hear old Triton blow his wreathed horn."

The other disturbing influence to which Mr. Goldwin Smith referred comes from what is called the doctrine of "evolution." The word evolution means to unroll or to roll out, and it now represents the belief that the world which we see around us came to its present form through the slow movement of countless ages, and was not suddenly called out of nothing 6,000 years ago. There were anticipations of this doctrine in earlier times, but it is in the present century that it has played its great part. It was set forth by Mr. C. Darwin with masterly skill of argument and vast wealth of illustration. It is not possible in a short article to attempt any explanation of the various forms that this theory has assumed, or to present even in briefest outline the discussion that it has caused among scientists and theologians. As a theory it seems to have a high measure of probability and is now accepted in some form by the great majority of scientific men and by many religious teachers. When this theory that all the varieties of life upon the earth have come down by unbroken descent from a few simple forms was first elaborately presented it caused great excitement and controversy. The controversy is perfectly justifiable; no new revolutionary doctrine should be received without careful examination and severe criticism. The excitement also can be accounted for when we remember that to many people the new teaching seemed to be subversive of all that they had formerly believed concerning God and man. The foolish jokes about the relationship between men and monkeys which did the duty of arguments on many platforms were simply vulgar, unworthy of the dignity and solemnity of the subject. This heated discussion has fallen very largely within our own generation. The influence of it is still at work in every sphere of investigation, and it is still too early to gather up the final results, or measure its reaction on philosophy and theology. It has caused bewilderment and perplexity to many, and has staggered the faith of some. The triumphant optimism of Professor Drummond's prose-poem on the "Ascent of Man" is a thing which by many of us is not easily attained. Still it would be quite easy to fill the pages of this journal with the names of men who, with considerable knowledge both of science and theology, have come to the conclusion that the doctrine of evolution in any form in which it can be acceptable to fair-minded, intelligent men does not, and cannot, touch the realities of faith. The discussion still goes on, and the scientific camp is divided into "pure Darwinians," "ultra-Darwinians, Lamarckions, Neo-Lamarckions," followers of Weismann, and so forth. Some, like the late H. W. Beecher, have preached this doctrine from the pulpit, others regard it as probable, though not sufficiently proved for purposes of preaching, while others still condemn it as a dangerous error. The whole subject will be made clearer by-and-by, but in the meantime we are prepared to maintain that it does not necessarily weaken faith in God or in the Future Life. Those who can ignore the whole movement have no doubt a happiness of their own, those of us who feel that such things cannot be ignored have had our moments of intellectual struggle and strain, but there is now general and competent testimony that the fierceness of the shock has passed away and that the present century in its closing years witnesses a reaction from materialism and a return to more idealistic and spiritualistic modes of thought. Some traditions of the elders have passed away, and it has been made more clear that the Scriptures were not given to teach Natural Science but to reveal God, and show the way through the Christ to righteousness and eternal life. The great saving truths of the

Gospel are as fresh and living as ever. As to the future life, in this connection, we may remark that if God has spent so long in bringing the life of man to its present form He is not likely to cast it ruthlessly away.

The two great changes in the intellectual standpoint of many men in modern times are only specimens of changes that have been taking place in human life ever since men learned to think great thoughts of God and the world. Ignorant, superstitious men think that ever, great change will destroy religion and the Church. The Greeks decreed for Socrates the fatal hemlock on the charge of being an atheist and leading young men to despise the gods, when, indeed, he was a man of larger intelligence, deeper religion, and nobler morality than those who judged and condemned him. The Jews crucified our Lord on the charge of blasphemy and seeking to destroy the temple, but we can now see clearly that He brought life and immortality to light and freed the highest religion from the narrow bounds of a bigoted nation. We must face this unceasing change and conflict of thought because man is small and God is great. There are truths which cannot come down to us: we must grow up to them through much toil and travail. It "signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that have been made, that those things which are not shaken may remain."

"Make knowledge circle with the winds;  
But let her herald, Reverence, fly  
Before her to whatever sky  
Bear seed of men and growth of minds"

In this connection brief reference may be made to a life which has attracted much attention. Much has been said recently about the late Mr. G. J. Romanes because the intellectual struggle in his case was typical. We know more about the battle in this instance, but it could not have had so much interest for us if we did not know that many minds have had to face precisely the same difficulties; a new conception of the world honestly entertained has completely absorbed the mind and paralyzed old beliefs. Then has come the struggle between mind and heart, between knowledge and faith. Here was a man who for many years laboured under the pressure of intellectual doubts and difficulties, who could not rest in careless indifference, and could not be content with a "religion of science." At the time when he drifted farthest from the Christian faith, and when, according to his own confession, there was in him most of the arrogance of scepticism, his negative conclusion yielded only sadness and disappointment. He did not rest in agnosticism but kept at the problem until he was in some measure led through the clouds and could say, "I have come now to see that faith is intellectually justifiable, it is Christianity or nothing." That faith is intellectually justifiable does not depend upon the testimony of any particular individual, but we know that the same battle has been fought by many who have desired to be fearless and open in their treatment of new truth and at the same time faithful to the old, everlasting principles of the Gospel.

Tennyson's prayer expressed in the following well known lines is the prayer of a poet who reads aright the signs of the times. We are almost afraid to quote them, they are so familiar; but is not the secret of this familiarity in the fact that they express the aspirations of every devout soul in a time of transition:

"Let knowledge grow from more to more,  
But more of reverence in us dwell;  
That mind and soul, according well,  
May make one music as before,  
But vaster."

"Wherefore, receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us have grace whereby we may offer service well-pleasing to God with reverence and awe; for our God is a consuming fire."

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## The Late Rev. George Smellie, D.D.

BY REV. ROBERT TORRANCE, D.D.



ON Saturday, the 14th ult., in St. Andrew's Manse, Toronto, the Rev. Dr. George Smellie, somewhat suddenly, closed a long and influential life as a minister of the Presbyterian Church in Canada, having attained the 86th year of his age, and the 60th of his ministry. He was a native of Orkney, and a son of the manse. His father was the minister of the parish, and had been spared to a good old age, and gave half a century of successful service in connection with the Established Church of Scotland. Not unfrequently Dr. Smellie referred to this, and to the fact that he was brought up and educated in the manse, till the time came for his entering the university.

At the early age of sixteen he was found qualified to be enrolled in the classes of Edinburgh University, and to proceed, apparently without interruption, to the completion of the prescribed