

of natural religion—that which recognizes God in physical nature, that which believes in the continued and glorified existence of the holy dead, that which recognizes our own kinship to God and capacities of intercourse with Him, revelation recognizes, but at the same time opposes that superstitious degeneracy of these ideas which leads to actual deification of natural objects, of ancestry and heroes, or of ourselves and our works.

How wonderfully does the first chapter of Genesis dispose of all the raw material of ancient idolatry! The heavenly bodies are pointed out as the work of God, and their obedience to definite law is indicated in connection with that important purpose which they serve to us as the great clock of nature. They are “for signs and for seasons and for days and for years,” servants of ours, like our household timekeeper, not gods to be worshipped. The capricious atmosphere and its waters, its storms and its thunders, fall into the same categories of creation and fixed law. The dry land and the sea, with all the living things, plant or animal, on or in them take their places in the same great procession. So it is with early human history. We now know that Eden, the tree of life, those mysterious cherubim, whether natural or spiritual, that guarded the paradise of God, formed part of the materials of the myths and worships of the heathen world. In Genesis they appear as included in God’s dealings with men. Learned archaeologists may vehemently dispute as to whether natural objects or deceased heroes and ancestors furnished the early material of religion. Genesis quietly includes both, and ranges as ordinary men in primitive human history all ancestral gods and demi-gods of the old mythologies, from Eve to Nimrod; for Eve was evidently the original of Ishtar and all the other mother-goddesses of antiquity; while Nimrod is now known to be Merodach, the great tutelar divinity of ancient Babylon. Thus the Bible, if we only will receive its simple statements of positive fact, has already settled all these vexed cosmological and mythological questions, and this in a way which seems consonant with common sense and with all that we can glean from the relics of primeval man. The deification of humanity itself, whether in the general or the individual, and that of man’s works, seems to have been of later growth, but on this the Bible everywhere pours contempt, reminding man of his inferiority, imperfection, and mortality, and ridiculing the attempt on his part to make a portion of a log of wood into a god, while he burns the remainder.

If now we turn from the Bible to consider those views of nature and religion which have arisen independently in the minds of men destitute of direct revelation from God, or who have rejected that revelation, we shall find that whether in ancient myths or modern science they have some features in common, and are characterized by conclusions and results of the most partial and imperfect kinds. In both the creature is regarded to the exclusion of the Creator. Both consequently fall short of a first cause, and whether a man worships the sun or fire or a deceased hero, or limits his view to physical energies and to the dicta of great authorities,