

Church is that the law of progress be allowed to hold true in theology as well as in other departments of thought. It is one of the main qualities of our condition that knowledge is growing, and growing very rapidly. There is no department of human inquiry of which that is not true. The literatures of the past are ransacked. Languages are studied on more thorough and critical methods. The primitive forms of society, early civilization, and uncivilization, manners and the want of manners, customs that are barbarous and customs that are venerable, are all brought to the surface and keenly studied, with a view to find out whether human society follows any law of growth, and if so what the law is. The idea is abroad that language and society are living things and that there is a reason why for all their changes. Of course the same is true—still more emphatically true—of outward nature. Our knowledge of natural science is expanding every day. Chemistry, geology, botany, the theories of heat, of electricity, of magnetism, are passing constantly into new forms. Those of us who have reached middle life have had to unlearn and learn again a great deal of the physical science that we studied in our college days. Are you sorry for that? Is it not well that mind should be kept in movement? And is it not one of the sublimest prerogatives of the mind of man that it makes every fragment of new knowledge an instrument of further progress?

" . . . . . on, said God,  
Unto the soul, as to the earth, forever,  
on it goes,  
Rejoicing, native of the infinite,  
As is the bird of air, the sun of heaven."

The capacity of indefinite progress is among the sweet pledges of a life beyond the grave. It is the stirring of rudimentary wings in the embryo bird before it has yet broken the shell and emerged into its proper life. I thank God for the changes of human thought and the additions to human knowledge. Of course there is false progress as well as true. Foolish men think they are getting forward when they are only gyrating about in mere childish restlessness. It is part of the Divine plan, that we grow into truth through the experience of error, and finally settle in the right when we have felt the emptiness and misery of all forays of the wrong. But the cure for false progress is not stagnation, it is true progress. Macaulay said that the cure for the evils of liberty is more liberty. In like manner the cure for the evils of thought is more thought, and the cure for the mistakes of investigation is closer investigation. Brethren, we have not faith enough in the power of the Gospel to meet every trial and to stand every test. I am sure it will "rise superior to detraction and draw lustre from reproach." Christ is so good and pure, his love is so transcendent and complete, the Gospel is so consonant with all our noblest thoughts of God and all the deepest needs of men that the wildest tempests may beat upon the temple of the faith and it will remain unshaken. "The rain descended and the floods came and they beat upon that house and it fell not for it was founded on a rock." O, blessed Rock of Ages, cleft for sinful men, the thoughts of man may come and go, knowledge may grow clear or vanish away,—the peering eyes of science may scrutinize Thee, the hand of simple faith may cling to Thee, the beating waves of opposition may dash against Thee, the weary, storm-tossed voyager may cast anchor behind the shelter of thy protecting might, for Thou abidest forever. We, poor foolish men, are alarmed if some new discovery so changes the aspects of existing knowledge as to throw them into new relations. We fancy that the foundations of the world are shaken and that the cross of Christ, or even the throne of God, will lose its power. It is as though a fly, whirled about in a tempest, were to tremble lest the law of gravitation should fail. No, never. "Lord, Thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations. Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever Thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting Thou art God. A thousand years are in thy sight but as yesterday when it is past or as a watch in the night. Let thy work appear unto thy servants and thy glory unto thy children, and let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us."

You will see then that I do not fear the advancing knowledge of the time in its relation to the Gospel. I want, on the other hand, to advance with it. But it may be asked whether theology is itself capable of progress. Can that, if it be a true theology, undergo change? At first it would perhaps appear not. But a second thought may lead us to doubt. Other true sciences are subject to change. Even mathematics, the most fixed of them all, has been wonderfully developed in our own day. The eternal truths of space and number seem to disclose new properties. How stands it with theology?

To get at an answer to our inquiry we must take a distinction—not new but most important. We must distinguish between theology and the subjects of theology. The subjects of theology are, speaking broadly, God, Christ, and the Bible. Theology itself is our thoughts of God, our beliefs concerning Christ, our knowledge of the Bible. It is clear enough that God does not change, nor the Gospel of His love, nor even the record in which that Gospel is enshrined. The grand old simple Gospel, as it lies in the thought of God and the revelation of Christ, is the same yesterday and to-day and forever. But I am not so sure that no development can be brought about in our views of these things. Are we infallible, then? Are we quite sure that we know so much about the infinite as that no more is to be known? And is the Gospel, according to the schools, so very simple a matter? For my own part I should like to simplify it a good deal more. In other branches of knowledge it is the

last and ultimate thought, and not the earlier stages, that reaches a noble and all-embracing simplicity, and I fancy it may be so as to the Gospel of Christ.

There are three ways in which, as it seems to me, we may make progress in theology. We shall not lose or change any truth we have attained, of course—but we may add to the clearness and fullness of our views. We may do so, first, by discriminating more closely between the province of theology and the province of natural science; secondly, by receiving the light reflected from other departments of human inquiry; and, thirdly, by a more impartial and truly inductive study of the Bible.

We may, first, see more clearly what belongs to natural science and what to theology. There has been a great deal of unnecessary debate for want of a clear idea of what natural science had to do. Theology has been anxious to have all the field to herself. She is of royal birth and blood, apt therefore to be a little queenly and even imperious. Let us acknowledge that she had a great deal of right to be so. There is no grander intellectual structure in the whole history of thought than the magnificent edifice of Christian Theology. It deals with the profoundest problems that can engage the mind of man and applies to them the most searching and comprehensive examination. We may think parts of it open to criticism, nay, we may doubt whether the structure itself is not too perfectly systematic to be trustworthy, believing that a strictly logical system which claims to render account of all the dealings of God from eternity to eternity carries suspicion on its very countenance, but there can be no contempt for it except the contempt of ignorance. Augustine and Chrysostom, Origen and Tertullian, Luther and Calvin, were not fools but great men, and he who fails to recognize that fact is himself guilty of insensate and preposterous folly. It is the very grandeur of theology that has rendered her tyrannical. She has claimed to dominate every department of human thought. She has ruled politics and literature and given law to art and science. The claim was exclusive and it has produced a reaction. We are feeling now that the things of science belong to science, and that faith must be content to deal with the things of faith. And if I am asked to define the spheres of science and of religion, I do it in the words of a great modern philosopher, "Science discloses the method of the world but not its cause; Religion, its cause but not its method." Everything that belongs to the development of the universe, the order of its phenomena, the laws of their recurrence, the age, formation, structure of the earth on which we live, as well as all the facts and products of animal and vegetable life, including the life of man, so far as man is an animal, is the appropriate field of science, and theologians as such have no business with it. The sooner we admit that frankly the better for us. It is only by such an admission that we can save our own territory. For the men of science are just now paying us back in our own coin. If we have done their work, and done it badly, as we were sure to do, they are doing ours now, and making a still more wretched mess of it. You will not get much science out of a Hebrew grammar or a Greek lexicon, but you will get less reason and common sense on the great problems of religion by chipping the rocks with a geological hammer or making explosions and vile smells in a chemical laboratory. Mr. Huxley on the problem of God, or on the destiny of man, is to the full as out of place as Edward Irving, or Canon Lyddon on the *hippocampus major*. For Mr. Huxley's views on the flapper of a whale I have every possible respect, but I do not care for his opinion on the theology of St. Paul or the authenticity of the Revelation. But we had better take notice that we can only keep these men off our ground by rigidly keeping ourselves away from them. If we have the right to put up a notice on the sacred fences of theology—no trespass here—our scientific friends are equally justified in warning us away from the wide domain which belongs to them. We must respect the good old motto, *suum cuique*, his own to each, and if we claim to be teachers in religion we must be willing to be taught in science.

Another advantage of distinguishing clearly between natural science and theology is that we shall have no more need of laboured reconciliations between the Bible and the theories of scientific teachers. In my view, and I say so frankly, it is a mistake to expect scientific accuracy in the Scriptures. They were not meant to teach science at all, and I see no proof that the writers spoke anything on scientific subjects but the current ideas of their time. They knew nothing of astronomy, or chemistry, or physiology, in the modern sense of these words, and they did not need to know. They had to do with God, the soul, righteousness, the evil of sin, the blessing of goodness, not with plants, or acids, or the theory of digestion. They were not bound to do for us what we can do for ourselves, and what if they could not possible have done without using language unintelligible or incredible to every generation before the present. We talk of scientific difficulties in the Bible now, but who in the ancient world would or could have believed the sacred book if it had stated the correct theory of astronomy? Remember they had no telescope—no scientific instruments or calculations—and the theory would have contradicted the plain evidence of their senses all the time. They could not have believed it. Difficulties! our difficulties are as nothing to these! A book, to be believed, must be understood, and accurate science prematurely written would be unintelligible gibberish or incredible paradox. A very little thought will show us that a book intended for all the ages cannot possibly anticipate scientific discovery. Had the Bible done that it would never have been read believably till the history of the human race was complete and the millennium fully come.

I do not suppose there will be much difficulty as to the general principle of what I now say. But some who admit

the principles make special exceptions. There is a lingering desire, e. g., on the part of many good men to bring about a reconciliation between the early parts of Genesis and modern geology. We have a score of schemes for it, more or less. Days are stretched into millenniums, epochs of untold extent are thrown in between the first verse and the second, and I know not what. But why should we reconcile at all? Why expect accurate geology in the Bible any more than accurate chemistry or accurate anatomy? Why not read the grand panorama with which the Bible opens as a grouping of creation in its successive stages round the throne of eternal power and love without asking whether the stages are accurately marked or the groups scientifically perfect? That God made them all in their harmony and beauty, this is the great lesson. We are first told that He made the whole and then that He made the parts, and they are arranged in majestic steps of ascent as in the strophes of a poem. Take it as an assertion of Divine power and skill as against aimless chance or blind insensate force, and leave all merely scientific questions to the scientists to settle. They can do no harm in their own province, but only good. Let us frankly give them, then, their province, their whole province, and nothing but their province, that we may the better hold ours.

We may make progress in our theology in another way—by receiving readily the light thrown on our own subjects of thought from other departments of human inquiry. All magnified and ennobled views of the universe tend to enhance our perception of the glories of the Author of the universe; all more accurate knowledge of man enlarges our idea of the plan of Providence and the magnificent sweep of redemptive love. When men thought that the vault of heaven was a dome a few hundreds of miles across, and the sun and stars only lamps swinging round the earth every day, their notion of God was proportionally contracted. But how has thought enlarged its view of the "throne and equipage of God's almightiness." The devout wonder of the psalmist when he considered the heavens the work of God's fingers, has a thousand times fuller meaning to-day than when he first wove it into his sacred song. I do not say that any new truth has been discovered; the psalmist itself would rebuke me if I did. It is one of the sublimest expressions in human language of the eternity and infinity of God. But if the truth is the same we find it in new lustre and deeper meaning. Astronomy, which timid men feared, and narrow men denounced, has long since brought her crown of stars and set it on the brow of Christ. Let us learn the lesson. All the other muses will follow Urania. They too will kneel to the gentle and sacred One and call Him Lord. Geology is beginning to do so even already. I read the love of God for man in that record of the unnumbered years during which his home was built and the earth prepared for his coming. When I touch a fragment of limestone rock and think how many centuries it took God to make that, I can believe that He will pour out the treasures of His divine heart through the cross of Christ that He may redeem sinful souls and make them perfect. I can believe too that He will bear with this poor world a little longer. I am delivered from small and fanatical dreams of sudden vengeance and enabled to trust the patience which said of tares and wheat "let both grow together till the harvest." The voice of the husbandman seems to say "spare it this year also," and I think it will be spared. Geology tells me that the plan of God is not a small but a vast one. It lends new meaning to the words, "God is not slack concerning His promise, but one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day." May I say a word even for the much dreaded doctrine of evolution also? Would it not be better to study it before we rave at it? Especially so as if we did study it we might find that it was not necessary to rave at it at all. I am not going to defend the doctrine of evolution now. On the whole I think it likely to be true, at all events with some modifications of detail. But what after all does it amount to? Only to this, that instead of making the universe as it is to-day, God made it in a very elementary form and unfolded it from within instead of shaping it from without. Well, suppose He did, what then? It is only what He does in the case of every living being. Shakespeare or Milton was once a speck of living matter no larger than a drop of dew and grew from that to all the grandeur of genius. Surely that is as full of divine wonder as it would have been to carve a statue full grown and then to warm it into life. A piece of furniture, a book case for instance, is put together in an external way—is it then more wonderful, more divine, than a tree which grows from mystic forces of central life and arrays itself in many forms of changeable beauty. The atheist traces the successive steps by which things grow and then denies divine efficacy. He says, "I know how this was made, therefore God did not make it." I do not see the connection between premise and conclusion. He might as well argue that a house required no architect because it was built by the agency of stone-masons and carpenters. Evolution is unfolding, and nothing can be unfolded but what is there. Nothing can be evolved but what was first involved. If you want to get money out of your purse you must first put it into your purse. Evolution exclude creation? Never. They dwell peacefully side by side. Nay, I should not wonder if some future Paley or Butler should arise who will undertake to demonstrate the divine existence and attributes, taking for his basis the doctrine of development. It would not be the first time that parties have changed places, and that those who were brought to curse the Gospel have ended by blessing it altogether. For the idea of evolution is one of hope. If man has sprung to what he is now through successive races of lower beings, who shall assign limits to his progress? He may one day know with the insight of an archangel and