

EVOLUTION.

A DIALOGUE.

(Written for the CATHOLIC SHIELD.)

II.

Spontaneous generation.—Creation.—Darwin's Theory.

Evolutionist.—You are certainly candid. And spontaneous generation appears absurd to you! Permit me to show you on which side the absurdity lies. Everywhere about us life, real life is apparent. The air we breathe and the water we drink swarm with myriads of infusoria and animalcules. Do we not see decaying animal and vegetable matter continually producing other organic forms? For example if you take some ordinary black pepper, steep it in water, and expose it to the sun for a few days, you will find in the infusion an immense number of microscopic animals, which swim, dart, and whirl about in all directions, as they evade or pursue one another in a desperate struggle for existence.

Scholastic.—That is all very true; but where do they come from?

Ev.—They come of course from the pepper water; and it makes no difference whether you take animal or vegetable matter, if you place it in water and expose it to the sun, the infusion soon will teem with life. Far then from regarding decaying animal or vegetable matter as dead, science declares that it has in reality a dim life about it, which under favorable circumstances will cause it to develop into beings with lives like the organisms of which they once formed a part.

Sc.—Pardon me, but science never made such a declaration. I know that Professor Tyndall said as much, when he told the British Association, assembled at Belfast, that he discerned in matter a promise and a potency of engendering every form of life. This was bold language; and coming from so great a physicist as Tyndall, many regarded it as the teaching of science, and without further inquiry implicitly believed it to be true. Many others however saw that it was false, and knowing that science properly so-called cannot teach but truth, they knew that Tyndall's words were not the teachings of science. The Catholic hierarchy of Ireland vigorously attacked the materialistic doctrine of the learned Professor. Confronted by their superior science, what did he do? Did he like a man conscious of right re-affirm his declaration? No, he retracted it. In his "Apology for the Belfast Address," he confesses that the idea impressed itself upon him in times of weakness and doubt, and that it always disappeared in the presence of more strong and healthy thoughts. Thus, he completely reverses the judgment which he gave when led away by the fancies of his imagination. He has since done more. By a series of brilliant experiments, a detailed account of which he read before the Royal Society of London in 1876, he has conclusively shown that spontaneous generation is absolutely impossible; and that if animal or vegetable infusions exposed to free air soon swarm with life, it is because they have become impregnated with the germs of the exceedingly minute organisms which are constantly present in the atmosphere. To exclude these germs from the substances experimented upon, was a work of the greatest difficulty; but when their exclusion was effected, Tyndall found, as Pasteur and others had done before him, that infusions of any kind may be exposed

to air and light and heat for months without ever manifesting the slightest trace of life. Such, sir, is the teaching of science with respect to spontaneous generation, and the lifelessness of dead or decaying matter.

Ev.—You believe then that life cannot be evolved intrinsically from matter. Be very careful, my friend. Even the testimony of your scholastics upholds this principle of the doctrine of evolution. Do you not remember the words of your famous St. Thomas: *Corruptio unius est generatio alterius*? Supported by his infallible authority, are not they a sufficient rejoinder for you?

Sc.—Well, well! And you would bring in the testimony of St. Thomas in favor of your theory! You must have found his words in the same place in which you found your opinion of the great Scholastics; and you have certainly given them a meaning which they do not express in his works. *Corruptio unius est generatio alterius*, everywhere in the writings of St. Thomas and his followers, means that matter on losing one substantial form acquires another.

Ev.—Oh! I see that your Scholastic expressions are susceptible of almost any interpretation. Now, as you hold that spontaneous generation has been rejected by science as an impossibility, you of course imply that life can be produced from dead matter only by the act of a creative power. Many of our evolutionists believe the same. They hold that a few primary forms were created, and that all others, man included, were gradually evolved from those primary forms. For my own part, I can see no inconsistency in the idea, that a supreme Being could as readily fulfil the intention of his creation by consecutive transmissory processes as by a special individual act; and I would ask you, if we can, with a true sense of humility, look around us and view the heavens and this beautiful earth of ours, subjected to the same laws, in active inter-communication, and say that we stand alone the work of a special creation?

Sc.—Pray do not talk nonsense. Creation is a mystery which natural science may seek to penetrate, when it has explained the common mysteries surrounding us. Even the potency of matter to engender life, if such a potency existed or could exist, offers to use the words of Tyndall, "no solution of the mystery in which we are plunged and of which we form a part." Consider those laws of which you speak. They may be discovered, named and observed; but farther natural science cannot go. When Sir Isaac Newton was asked why an apple fell to the ground by the force of attraction, he answered, "it is beyond the limit of human reason, it is the will of God."

Ev.—But Newton was always intruding religion into the domain of science. Besides, he lived two centuries ago, and things have changed since then.

Sc.—They have changed indeed in this that some modern men of science propagate with the greatest zeal whatever ideas seem most likely to destroy religious faith. But they remain the same as to knowledge of the laws which govern the universe. That shining light of Evolution, Mr. Herbert Spencer, is, I presume, an authority for you on any subject. In his "First Principles," he says—doubtless with a true sense of humility—"It is impossible to form any idea of Force in itself, and it is equally impossible to comprehend either its mode of exercise or its law of variation." Time and space are also unintelligible. Why, then, are you unwilling to admit the idea of a special creation, because you cannot understand it? You have certainly no more reason to deny it, than you have to deny the existence of force, time and space. You admit, you