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## THE CONFLICT BETWEEN RELIGION AND SCIENCE.

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For many years past a conflict has been raging between the Christian religion and the theories which have sprung into being in consequence of modern discoveries in physical science. As Mr Allen has told us in his essay on *The Continuity of Religious Thought*, this conflict would in all probability never have taken place, had not the Western conceptions of God as a Ruler, and even a despot, crushed out the Greek conception of Him as an all pervading Power—a great immaterial principle which lies at the root of all being. But the conflict exists, and is likely to continue for some time to exist. For as the sea continues to heave unquietly after the storm-winds have died away, so mankind at large are wont to be disturbed by controversies even when the leaders of thought on each side have begun to see their way to a reconciliation.

An English writer has lately essayed to point out the agreement of science, not with the early Greek theologians, but with the original Hebrew records, so long unreasonably decried as unscientific and incorrect in their language. Taking Mr Herbert Spencer's *Synthetic Philosophy* as a basis, since it appears to be the only attempt which has at present been made at the presentation of a coherent philosophy of physical science, the writer in question has undertaken to shew that the cosmogony in Genesis, properly understood and properly interpreted, is in the closest accordance with Mr Spencer's system. The book in question is called *The Conflict of Truth*. It is written by Mr F. H. Capron. It appeared in 1902, and has gone through a good many editions already. I take it for granted that it is at present unknown on the Continent, and that, when once known, it will be found useful, there as here. I propose therefore to give a brief account of it. No doubt many of the arguments in relation to details may be open to objection as overstrained or fanciful. But enough remains to

be worthy of the notice of every reasonable man. An outburst of negative criticism seems for the moment to have overwhelmed the Scriptures, especially those of the Old Testament. But the perusal of a book like this will suffice to shew that the triumph of the modern critic is by no means so secure as he imagines.

Mr Capron commences by laying down the *dictum* of Mr Herbert Spencer that "it is an incredible hypothesis that there are two orders of truth, in absolute and everlasting opposition". "Upon this point," Mr Capron continues (p. 5), "there appears to be a universal *consensus* of opinion that we have to choose between the Bible and the synthetic philosophy, for that we cannot retain both." "Against this all but universal opinion," he adds, "I venture to raise my opinion in solitary protest." He is a sincere admirer of Mr Spencer, but declares that, as he read Mr Spencer's book, he became more and more convinced that it presented "but another aspect of a well-known landscape, seen somewhere else before" (p. 10).

It was in the Bible that Mr Capron had seen it. He recognized that in that volume Mr Spencer's philosophy was to be found; "not only the facts and theories of science—Mr Spencer's premises—but also his own grand generalizations—the conclusions deduced from those premises" (*ibid.*). Mr Spencer and the Bible both start (p. 12) with "the recognition of our Ultimate Mystery". Here, it appears to me, Mr Capron fails for a moment to grasp the strength of his own position. Mr Spencer declares that "the Power which the Universe manifests" is *utterly* inscrutable (the italics are mine). Had he said *ultimately* inscrutable, the Bible and he would have been in entire accord, for both regard the Being Who is not only within but outside phenomena as beyond the limits of man's intelligence. But that He is not "utterly inscrutable", Mr Spencer's treatise itself proves. For Nature, of whose laws Mr Spencer treats, *is itself a Revelation of Him*. Mr Capron might therefore have safely gone further than "seeking to show" that "there are between Science and Religion points of contact which are also points of coincidence". He might boldly have declared that Natural Science is itself an admission that we at least know something of Mr Spencer's "Unknowable". Genesis commences with the assertion that the earth was "formless and waste" (*tohu vabohu*).

Mr Capron points out caustically the position in which one of the fiercest scientific assailants of the Bible, Professor Huxley, has placed himself by scornfully rejecting this statement when he finds it in the Bible, and cordially accepting it when he finds it in the pages of Kant. A good many scientific onslaughts on the Bible are of this character. They have more sound than substance. The whole of the scientific evidence at our disposal tells us that in visible phenomena form was evolved out of chaos, and evolved before life, whether vegetable or animal, had yet appeared.

I must pass over some interesting chapters on the interdependence of Science and Religion, just expressing a regret that Mr Capron accepts Mr Spencer's "Non-relative or Absolute" as "the Unknown Cause which lies beyond all phenomena". I must not stop to prove that there is no such thing as a "Non-relative or Absolute", and that if there be, the God of the Bible is not He—or it. I have proved this elsewhere<sup>1</sup>). I must pass on to the second and best part of Mr Capron's volume, on "the Physical". There is, he tells us, a close similarity between Science and Religion, displayed in the fact that each recognizes the Material, and that in each "the Material comes first, the Immaterial last". It must be remembered that Mr Capron is dealing only with Mr Spencer's Philosophy of Science. All the blunders men of science in general have made in their attacks upon religion have been made because, unlike Mr Spencer, they have ventured to disregard all that is not material. Mr Spencer dismisses the Immaterial as inscrutable, but he affirms its real existence. In chapter IX Mr Capron points out that the one fundamental principle of Mr Spencer's Philosophy is the "Persistence of Force". This is precisely the fundamental principle of the cosmogony of Genesis. Elohim, we are told in Gen. I, created the world. And the word Elohim means *Force*. But Elohim is likewise Jehovah<sup>2</sup>). And Jehovah is the I AM, I Who am ever existing, i. e., the Eternal and Indestructible. I may venture to congratulate Mr Capron on this discovery, in that I have independently come to the same conclusion<sup>3</sup>). But Mr Capron goes yet further in

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<sup>1</sup>) In a paper read before the Victoria Institute in London, in 1883.

<sup>2</sup>) See Gen. II.

<sup>3</sup>) *The Nicene Creed*, chap. II, p. 49. Published in 1897.

his reconciliation of Scripture and science. The Heavens and the Earth, he adds, which God created, represent space and matter. The verb *bara*, translated *create*, means to “produce something out of nothing”. The verb *’asah*, to *make*, means “to construct out of some pre-existing material”—the “dust of the earth”—i. e. material particles. The Spirit or Breath of God, too, “*moved* on the face of the waters”. This, according to Mr Capron, represents Mr Spencer’s change from “a diffused, imperceptible state to a concentrated, perceptible state” and *vice versa*. In other words “Matter and Motion” are “the primary manifestations of Persistent Force”. (*Conflict of Truth*, p. 135.) *Tohu vabohu*, again (Gen. I, 1), is a description which answers to Mr Spencer’s “indefinite, incoherent homogeneity”. *Rachaph*, which in Gen. I, 1, is translated “moved”, means a brooding, fluttering, oscillatory motion, that, in fact which organized primordial matter into forms, while *sheretz* and *ramas* indicate the motions of animate creation in fluids and on the ground. Mr Capron then goes on to shew that the narrative in Genesis is not only not irreconcilable with the nebular hypothesis, but almost presupposes it. I cannot agree with his somewhat off-hand dismissal of the theory that by the “six days” of Gen. I indefinite periods of time are meant. Nor can I clearly understand what explanation he proposes to substitute for it. But he successfully grapples with Professor Driver’s objections in his Commentary on Genesis to the Mosaic account of Creation. On the first and third “days” of Creation, says Mr Capron, God is merely recorded as having *spoken*. He is not said to have “done” anything. On the second and fourth, He not only *says* something, but He *does* something. The latter must not be taken to imply that the fiat failed of its effect, but as declaring that what God had ordained came to pass as He had ordained it. The “firmament”, he further contends, should be translated “expanse”. Thus we have matter, space, and an “expanse” which apparently refers either to the portion of illimitable space which comes within our ken, or to the atmosphere of the earth<sup>1</sup>). The fact that the existence of light preceded that of luminaries is involved in the nebular hypothesis, now sup-

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<sup>1</sup>) Mr Capron regards it, however, as “the result of an expansion”. For his meaning I must refer my readers to his ingenious chapter on The Inorganic.

posed to be established. Thus our longstanding objection to the idea that light existed before the sun has been disposed of by scientific research itself. The division between the waters below and the waters above the expanse is scientifically correct, and indicates the distinction between seas, rivers and lakes, and water in the condition of clouds or mists.

We proceed to the account of the appearance of organic life. It is impossible in the space allowed me to do more than indicate some of the points Mr Capron makes. In p. 260 he shews that while in Gen. I, 24, 25, which contains the description of the creation of the animal kingdom on dry land "there is nothing to suggest the idea of over-population", in verses 20—22, dealing with life in the water, the word *sheretz* is used, which means, as we have seen, to *swarm*, and the word *malé*, which means to *fill* the ocean with teeming life. "In the eyes of the scientist," he continues, "all land-animal life is simply the result of the overflowing of water-animal life." In p. 280 he refers to the use of the word *yatzar*, to "form", "fashion", or "mould", as a statuary does a model, when mention is made of the formation of man out of the "dust of the earth", i. e. from material particles, and he quotes Professor Huxley as saying, of the evolution of form in a *fœtus*, that the "plastic matter undergoes changes so rapid and so steady and purpose-like in their succession, that one can only compare them to those operated by a skilled modeller upon a formless lump of clay<sup>1)</sup>". The narrative in Genesis, then, whether coming from the Priestly or the Prophetic writer (for Gen. II, 7, in which *yatzar* occurs, is attributed to the latter), is always in accordance with the facts of nature. It appears to me, I confess, infinitely more probable that the whole narrative of man's creation and adaptation to his environment is the work of one master-hand, the hand of one who had pondered very deeply on the problems of nature, and had received special aid from above in the task of interpreting them, than that they were lumped together from two different narratives by a "redactor" who, though sometimes preternaturally acute, was, as the researches of the critics unanimously prove, usually inconceivably clumsy and careless. And it is remarkable that in the "second"

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<sup>1)</sup> Lay Sermons, p. 227. Ed. 1891.



Isaiah, ch. XLVII—a chapter written before the supposed “redaction” took place—we find the three words *bara*, *’asah* and *yatzar* repeatedly used of the work of creation.

But this by the way. Mr Capron goes on to discuss the expression that “man’s vitality was ‘breathed into his nostrils’” (Gen. II, 7). And he sums up his argument as follows (p. 283), “There is scientific propriety in Religion’s fourfold account of the origin of man . . . She is right in saying that man’s material body is the product of the process which we call *yatzar*. She is right, both physically and mechanically, in her description of the process which she calls *naphach*. She is right, from the evolutionist’s point of view, in asserting that man possesses a part which is the product neither of *yatzar*, nor of *naphach*, nor of *bara*, but of *asah*. And she is right, so far as Science can test the accuracy of the assertion, in stating that man possesses a part which was the product neither of *yatzar*, nor of *naphach*, nor of *asah*, but of *bara*.” If Mr Capron’s reasoning is sound, it is an absolute miracle that this scientific accuracy of conception is found, half in the Priestly, and half in the Prophetic writer, and that the “redactor” in one of his preternaturally acute moments, brought them all four together in his generally clumsily contrived compilation.

I cannot pass over altogether Mr Capron’s contention that the words “Thou shalt surely die” (Gen. II, 17) are not to be interpreted of physical death. He argues with great cogency that the death to which this passage refers “affected, not man’s body, not his vitality, not his consciousness, but—his spirit” (p. 322). His “Recapitulation and Final Statement” clearly sums up the conclusions at which he has arrived on this review of the physical universe and of man’s place in it. He does not, however, it ought to be stated, deny that the writer or writers in Genesis were “ignorant of facts”. He only contends that we have no right to assume that they were illogical or self-inconsistent. I regret that I have no space to enter into his analysis of the spiritual. We in England have good reason to remember a book by the late Professor Drummond entitled *Natural Law in the Spiritual world*, in which he enters into the various analogies between the laws of visible and spiritual phenomena. I see no reason to withdraw the complaint which I made of that work when it appeared, that it most unfortu-

nately inverted the true order of the facts. It is Spiritual Law in the Natural World for which the genuine believer has sought and which he may reasonably claim to have found. M<sup>r</sup> Capron is not open to the same complaint. His reasoning may be condemned as fanciful. But to my mind the last portion of his volume, in which he enters into an inquiry which might indefinitely be extended, is the converse of the argument of our great Bishop Butler, who is, I fear, little known on the Continent, but of whom we in England have very good reason to be proud. Bishop Butler's masterly treatise illustrates in detail a profound remark of Origen, that if the Christian religion come from the God of Nature, it might be expected to contain the same difficulties as we find in Nature, and he shews that whatever objections may be brought against the religion of Christ may be urged with equal or even greater force against the constitution and course of Nature. M<sup>r</sup> Capron may not be held to have proved his case, but he certainly illustrates with great force, originality, and point, the converse fact that the principles at work in the spiritual world, as exemplified in revealed religion, are identical with those which Science has shown to be at work in the visible world, and that therefore there is the strongest ground for believing that they both come from the same Hand. "If," he concludes, he has interpreted the phenomena aright, "then the Spiritual World becomes, not merely a reality, but the greatest of all realities; Spiritual Life and Spiritual Sight become then, not merely things to be struggled for, but the only things worth struggling for at all. For in them lies the key to the riddle of the Universe."

Here, then, I must take my leave of this clear, cultured, well-informed, and most suggestive work. M<sup>r</sup> Capron's style is lucidity itself. One fault which Continental critics may find with it is unfortunately shared by author and reviewer alike. We are insufficiently acquainted with opinion on the Continent on these points. We owe all the more thanks to the Editor of the *International Theological Review* for extending to us the hospitality of his pages, and enabling us, on this, as on other points, to exchange sentiments with our brethren in other lands.

J. J. LIAS.