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THIS WORLD'S PLACE IN THE UNIVERSE

Religious emotion was, till recently, at war with science—especially indignant with astronomy for disturbing primitive conceptions as to the way this world was first opened for business. But a bold application of the principle that biblical language need not be taken at the foot of the letter gradually enlarged its interior meaning until the rotundity and annual revolution of the earth were fitted in to the story told in Genesis. Evolution as accounting for the human form then came within sight of a gloomy toleration—if Modernists insisted on it. That, however, which religious emotion has not yet quite realised is the sublime truth that, the more we are enabled to penetrate the deep mysteries of Nature, the more profoundly reverent we become in contemplating the impenetrable infinitudes of that Divine Power which operates alike in guiding the growth of protoplasm and the majestic mechanism of the Solar System. Critics who preferred—when Darwin first shattered the paraphernalia of mediæval theorolgy, like a bull in a china shop—to remain on the side of the Angels, made the immense mistake of supposing that the Angels (regarded as agents of Divinity) would be disestablished if we began to approach an understanding in the way they did their work. A view growing familiar with some students of Nature involves the idea that even natural forces are the expression of conscious will on some exalted levels of spiritual potency; that the so-called "laws" of nature are definite Divine enactments—not merely blind attributes of matter. And we can hardly begin to form a rational conception of the world's development under Divine control without including this idea in our thinking.

The reconciliation of religion and science has been advancing by leaps and bounds of late, and "Seven

Men of Science," all of the foremost rank, recently published a collection of addresses frankly declaring their belief in God, as a fundamental idea underlying scientific study. The record of the old "Conflict" is now ancienty history. But this result is not a conclusion. It is only a beginning. The seven scientific leaders, quite in agreement as regards the main proposition, may be groping in various directions in the search for a definite mental picture of the God in whom they believe. Perhaps all would admit that the reality does not lend itself to the formation of a mental picture. Religion reconstructed on scientific principles must build up a conception of Divinity by working from below upward. The earlier fashion attempted to work from below downward. "In the beginning" certain things happened, we are told—by teachers who, quite reasonably in dealing with young people, ignored the idea that Eternity has no beginning. But now that embryology must be recognised as a method of creation when we talk about the human form, we feel the need of an embryology as applied to planetary creation. And so we come to recognise the subtle, mysterious laws of organic growth not as displacing the Divine creative Will, but as the agency by which it is fulfilled in physical manifestation.

So by degrees, with help available at the present day, for those especially who realise that human consciousness can be reached by other channels of perception besides the five senses , we reach the idea that Divine agency is worked out through an enormously elaborate and magnificent hierarchy of Spiritual beings, beyond whom, in dazzling and (as yet) impenetrable mystery, there exists an incomprehensibly sublime Power, of whom the Sun may be thought of as the physical symbol.

In the mental search of God we may pause at this stage of the effort. Human intelligence is more limited *in its scope than early* philosophers imagined, but is

quite limitless as regards its expectations. It presumes to talk about the Divine power which accounts for the whole universe. Distant stars, though to be counted by millions and mostly gigantic compared with the star, or Sun, to which we belong, must come into the same creative scheme as the sparrows in Kensington Gardens. The Sunday School teacher can be content with nothing less than a God who is responsible for the Milky Way as well as for the milky mothers of the field. And mediæval painters have even presented us with his portrait. In some foreign gallery I have seen him included in a family group—the Father with a long beard is in an armchair with the Third Person of the Trinity as a pigeon perched on the back, and the Son in a chair of somewhat lesser dignity beside him. Enlightened members of the English Church would generally be shocked at this grossly materialistic presentation of the Divine Mystery, forgetful of their own declaration of belief that Christ ascended into Heaven and "sitteth on the right hand of God, the Father Almighty." From *The Fudge Family in Paris* we learn that a certain forcible expression, impossible in English, "doesn't sound half so shocking in French," and on the same principle an idea merely formulated in words that no one stops to invest with a meaning is not half so shocking as the same idea depicted on canvas by means of oil colour.

In the days of the old "Conflict' 'those who dealt with it—Draper and others—dwelt especially on the savage ferocity with which the early Church endeavoured to stifle astronomical discovery. Faith, at that time, might have been correctly described as "the faculty that enables us to believe what we know to be untrue." It was endangered by the astronomical emphasis of the untruthfulness in question, but in the long run, as astronomy held the field, faith fell into line with discovery, and in spite of ecclesiastical opposition 'became

ennobled in character. The God of a Semitic tribe might with an effort of imagination be fitted into an armchair. The God of a Solar System, including a central Sun many thousand times bigger than the Earth —and the orbit of Neptune thousands of million miles in diameter—was in a different order of magnitude. And if we attempt to strain imagination by looking upward in thought at that inconceivable splendour, we may realise the futility of the effort by attempting to gaze directly with open eyes on a fine day at the physical Sun. Human sight will not tolerate the unveiled light. Human understanding will not bring the God-idea, once cleared of blundering theology, to a definite focus.

But astronomical discovery does not come to a standstill, even after measuring the orbit of Neptune and accounting for the canals of Mars, nor after attempting, however unsuccessfully, to set time limits to the radiant energy of the Sun. We are all agreed—though astronomy affords scope for disagreement in some directions —that the whole Solar System—the Sun attended by his family of planets—is moving through space at about the rate of twelve to fourteen miles per second. Whither is it bound? Greenwich authorities would hardly yet venture on a definite reply, but we may if we like indulge, in connection with that question, in the fascinating pursuit known to science as "extrapolation"—the application to regions of thought outside the range of definite observation, of the assumption that laws operative within that range hold good to infinitudes beyond. Almost all the Heavenly bodies—quite all if we merely except meteorites and some comets—move in elliptical orbits more or less closely approximating to the circular form. Plainly, it is much more probable that the Sun's motion is in conformity with this general principle, than *that* it is a blind rush in a straight course, which would *infallibly in the long* run give rise to a cosmic catas-

trophe. If the uniformities of Nature are maintained, the Sun must be revolving in an orbit around some definite sidereal centre. Obviously such an orbit must be so vast that any measureable arc will appear to be a straight line.

And now I must venture to outrun even extrapolation in the explanation I have to give. I have been permitted in the pages of this Review to maintain the position that, in the course of the present "Armageddon," Unseen Powers embodying loftier knowledge than common humanity has yet reached are taking part in the struggle. Some of us in conscious touch with them are sometimes with their help enabled to anticipate future scientific discovery. In that way I was concerned, some dozen years before the discovery of Radium, with anticipations relating to the constitution of matter, ultimately verified by that discovery and subsequent work based upon it. Happily those anticipations were published at the time, so their character as a successful forecast is not open to dispute. In another direction certain future conclusions in connection with astronomy may be anticipated in their turn. The centre around which the Solar System is gravitating will be found to be the star Sirius. Common knowledge gives us an approximate measure of some stellar distances. The figure accepted by astronomers for the moment as the distance of Sirius, taking "light-years" as the unit, is 8·8, or call it eight and three-quarters. A light-year is the distance light crosses in a year, moving at the rate of 186,000 miles per second. So it would be inconvenient to give stellar distances in miles. Moreover, there is a wide margin for possible errors in calculations concerned with the parallax of stars. Perhaps it will be found that Sirius is a bit further off than the currently accepted calculation assumes, but anyhow the real distance is in the same order of magnitude. Estimates of the size and luminosity of Sirius vary very widely—from 300 to 3000