

The Lancaster Intelligencer.

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AL. ROSENSTEIN'S,

No. 37 NORTH QUEEN STREET.

A TIMELY ADDRESS.

"COMMON SENSE IN SCIENCE."

Extracts From The Alumni Address of Rev. Dr. Geo. H. Russell, D.D., President of Palatine College, at F. & M. Commencement.

I dare not deny a fact in science coming to me well authenticated. One established it challenges my most implicit confidence. In so far as science leads in this clear light, I am bound to follow, and to follow freely; but no further, at my peril. Whenever scientists, reasoning from a known fact, or a class of well known facts, undertake to speculate on the unknown and thereby inferentially construct theories, systems and 'ologies, I am still left free to accept these or reject them. No mere inductive argument in science can claim to be absolutely true. Scientific truth must be verified by actual test. Until that condition is at hand I am neither scientific nor irrational, if I see fit to hold opinions differing from the materialistic philosopher.

For a true instance: The astronomers years ago, by investigation finding certain unknown disturbing influences affecting their planetary calculations, prophesied the existence of some other heavenly body hitherto undiscovered. Seemingly well settled laws indicated the same; but this alone was not positive proof that there were actually such a planetary body. But, when the heavens were more thoroughly explored with a view to the discovery of the disturbing cause, and thereupon a newly found planet, is revealed to science—then the argument becomes conclusive.

Inductive inferences, therefore, in regard to other phenomena in nature; as about the atmosphere, and water, and heat, and physical existence on the planets, or fixed stars, we may speculate as possible and even correct hypotheses. But if we see fit to reject all such speculations about their clouds and canals until they are demonstrated truths, I am not unphilosophical. Because I can conceive that the laws relating to what we call atmosphere, water and heat, as existing for our use, may not be infinitely universal. I do science no wrong. Existences may hold under vastly different analogies and relations in other beings than man, and in other worlds than ours. And what is not known, I do not think it philosophical to assume.

All those teachings about the fixed stars, as other suns similar to ours, being themselves sun centres of other planetary systems; and then all these revolving around a common central sun, in like manner as our planets revolve around our sun centre; and then, an indefinite number of such central suns, with their groups of other suns revolving around some great grandfather sun, which is a still more remote centre of these central suns; and all this forming only the outskirts of the solar creations running on an orbit, is possibly scientific—if true. But I claim that my high regard for science does not require me to travel beyond the astronomical realms of the record. The inductive argument of scientists is very good, as far as it is known to be true.

The analytic method is less liable to lead astray than the synthetic in the service of induction. It is far easier to tear a rose to pieces, than for man by a new centre of his own to construct a more glorious flower. Empirical examination does not always give us the whole truth. In chemical analysis, science can often lead us safely—till there is an explosion. If that does not conclude the argument we are not bound to follow further.

Much has been made about the solid facts of geology and the records of the rocks. Here science may be said to come down to hard facts—at least, after we leave the melted mass and get into the cooled crust of the earth. It is indeed, something grand to grasp the conception of the geologic ages. If the world, especially the earth's crust as far down as it has been explored, were always under the conditions similar to the nature of what we know of certain strata, covered by means of air, water, forests, frost, heat and general chemical laws; it may be very philosophical to conclude, that it required such ages, extending into many thousands and even millions of years to bring about the conditions of the strata as they now exist. According to the inductive reasoning of geologists, that is a very beautiful theory running its system through the indefinite, if not illimitable ages of formation. Nebulae first became solids; and some solids were melted by igneous action and afterwards cooled into unstratified rocks; other solids took the stratified form, enclosing vegetable and animal remains in fossil condition to register the age, the signature of the periods in which they occurred.

Geology, as far as its facts are authenticated, does not contradict the truths of divine revelation as to the creation of the world. Neither does this make it necessary for us to invade the mysterious secrets of the Creator's wisdom, nor limit his almighty power. It may be regarded therefore as a stretch of scientific prerogative to bind the Almighty to these geological theories. To harness the creative will to the car of scientists' imaginative conceptions is a stupendous presumption. Dogmatic assertions as to the work of creation, are often made, declaring that the order was actually just thus and so; and therefore that the Bible account can not be true. Because, what is found in the rocks indicates such possibilities as seem to be in conflict with divine revelation, cannot by that fact claim our undoubting assent, on pain of condemnation, as being unscientific. If intelligent men prefer to believe that the process of the creative work of God was in fact something essentially different from what geologists assert must have been the only possible way for the world to have been created, they may not be charged with being in hostile relation to science. Admitting a distinct act of creation for each indefinite geologic age, there is no more science, and surely no act of faith, in believing that God made the world substantially as we find it, its strata and its living orders, without the geologic necessity of countless ages intervening between his several creative acts.

Science can never admit anything outside of the known laws now operative in nature. According to this, the wisest men of science will tell you: It is not possible that the sun ever apparently stood still in the heavens for about the period of a whole day, so that it went not down while Joshua was moving on the works of the five kings of the Amorites, near Gibeon. By a parity of scientific reasoning, it is just as plain that Adam and Eve, or some other pair, each had a natural father and mother; yet the same wisdom is quite sure that these ancestry of our first parents developed themselves from some other animal order, which was itself the result of untold ages traveling up from the primitive protoplasm. They are so sure of this, that they hold it to be unscientific to even question their theory. According to the same wisdom, it is superstitious to believe in a distinct creation by the "Almighty maker of heaven and earth."

Even some Christian philosophers, who claim to be scientists first, and then secondarily Christians, seek to reconcile the deductions of science with the idea of a distinct act of the divine creative power. In order to this, they of course allow that this world and all its orders of beings had a beginning; that this was of divine origin; but that the processes by which all things came to be what we now find them, were of indefinite duration; and that the geologic ages have had their history of successive formations, showing that it is philosophically impossible to have been otherwise. If now it requires years for one grain of wheat, according to known laws of growth and increase, to multiply to a sufficiency for feeding a vast multitude; therefore it is superstitious to hold that the same end can be reached by the divine creative word in the instant of necessity. So teaches science.

Dogmatism is roundly denounced by philosophers. But dogmatism in liberal philosophy is most intolerant. Finding, for instance, that the sediment of annual deposit at the mouth of a river averages say half an inch in thickness for several years of observation, science declares as a deduction, that a body found at a given depth in such locality, has lain there for so many thousands of years. It is therefore held to be unscientific to suggest, that possibly some single year by special circumstances of flood, tide or other peculiar conditions may have deposited ten feet of sediment—and thereby shortened the process of filling up to a given depth, many thousands of years. Or, if a tree grows by annual deposits of woody fibre, it is only necessary to count the rings to tell its age; but when a man knows that in twenty-five years in the warm southwest trees planted by man's own hand are known to have increased these woody layers to more than two hundred, the fact is admitted as science. No need if God did create the world, as may be hypothetically admitted, says scientific induction, then He must have required so many millions of years to be able to bring about the results. So many myriads were necessarily required before strata became legible; and then so many more at least from the devonian, through, say, the carboniferous, and onward to the period of the mammals. Some explain that the Almighty Creator did not want to limit Himself—and so had to allow for the long, long period of years.

While it may be regarded, therefore, as quite scientific to dogmatize as to the necessity for the intervention of ages of untold duration that were the least possible for nature to create and fashion itself, it does not follow that it required the same for the Lord to accomplish His creative work. It may be quite as reverent, to say the least, to allow that by an act of the omnipotent creative energy, the coal seams, the strata of the mesozoic formations or the metallic rocks could have been made just as we find them, without the necessary lapse of ages.

So the present existence of historic man may scientifically require manifold developments through geologic ages, before he could be set free, by some happy fortuity as the survival of the fittest in this historic period. The old time faith and solid common sense might seem to be unphilosophical when it claims that God made man on a definite day of creation, framing him then a material body and breathing into his nostrils the breath of life—thus man became at once under God's hands a living soul. The facts of science know nothing of this work and therefore it is thought to be unscientific to try to bind the divine Creator to a slower work of many ages, in the necessity of developing man from a protoplasm through the animal life of nature traced back to some remote point, or particle or molecule of common dirt.

Biology is a prolific source of speculative study. Led only by its own dim light, the materialistic philosopher has been challenging some of nature's hidden mysteries. But creation which cannot thus be forced into open gaze by irreverent if not profane exposure. Neither the telescope can draw into man's field of vision all the mysteries of creation; nor can the microscope open up the minute folds of covering which envelop the most sacred, and therefore the most secret operations of nature. All beginnings of life are hidden away beyond the ken of inquisitive man. Because man resolves for the sake of mere rational curiosity to look into the secrets of the universe, he is forced to shut out the light of the sun, and therefore the angel having a flaming sword is set to guard with special care and protect the springing birth of vitality from being dragged forth to public view. Even vegetable life, in its germinating functions, is shrouded in impenetrable darkness. By instinct, too, birds hide their nests; and some animals secrete their young for a season. The more sacred fountain of human life is imperceptibly hidden about, so that prying biologists are left at last to a vague guess, only as to whether its protoplasm is material development, or a result of spontaneous generation of life-power from what just before was not life. The holy of holies is not intended to be profaned.

Four thousand years ago the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind and said: "Who is this that darkeneth counsel by words without knowledge? Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? Who laid the measure thereof, declare if thou knowest? Or who hath stretched the line upon it? Whereupon are the foundations thereof fastened? Or who laid the corner-stone thereof; when the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy? Or who shut up the sea with doors, when it brake forth, as if it had issued out of the womb? When I made the cloud the garment thereof and thick darkness a swaddling band for it, and brake up for it my decreed place, and set bars and doors, and said: 'Hitherto shall thou come, but no further; and here shall thy proud waves be stayed?' Hast thou commanded the morning since thy days; and caused the day spring to know his place? Hast thou entered into the springs of the sea? or hast thou walked in the search of the depth? Have the gates of death been opened unto thee? Where is the way where light dwelleth? and as for darkness where is the place thereof that thou shouldst take it to the bound thereof? Hast thou entered into the treasures of the snow? or hast thou seen the treasures of the hail? By what way is the light parted? Hath the rain a father? or who hath gotten the drops of dew?"

He that reveleth God, let him answer it. What is true is not new, and what is new is not true. We still have some old things worthy of respect. Among these venerable elders are the dead languages—some of these would only keep them as they keep fossil specimens, on the shelves. The old methods and the old teachings claim our filial regard. The old philosophies are not those that are least vigorous, both as to metaphysical grasp and moral verbal strength. If there were heroes before Agememnon, it is quite possible that they were rather respectable wisdom before these last days of mental demoralization. The old faith at least remains, though the other foundations be shaken. Conservative common sense may have its place and vocation in the thought and science of the most advanced kind. It has

its work to do in modifying, regulating, clarifying, crystallizing and strengthening the thought and science of to-day. A man is not a fool if he uses his common sense in support of faith, when assaulted by the pretensions of scientific speculations. Old style common sense is a good balance to what has not been well tested. Intuitive judgments, common sense and rational thought must try the speculative inductions and claim our credence. Meanwhile, we stand by revealed truth and admit the facts of science as furnishing a good basis for the highest conceptions of philosophy. The fact of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; and to know Jesus Christ in the power of His resurrection is more than all other science; for to this must all science come.

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Chc., O., Nov. 16, 1881.
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