

The Open Court

A MONTHLY MAGAZINE

Devoted to the Science of Religion, the Religion of Science, and the
Extension of the Religious Parliament Idea

Founded by EDWARD C. HEGELER

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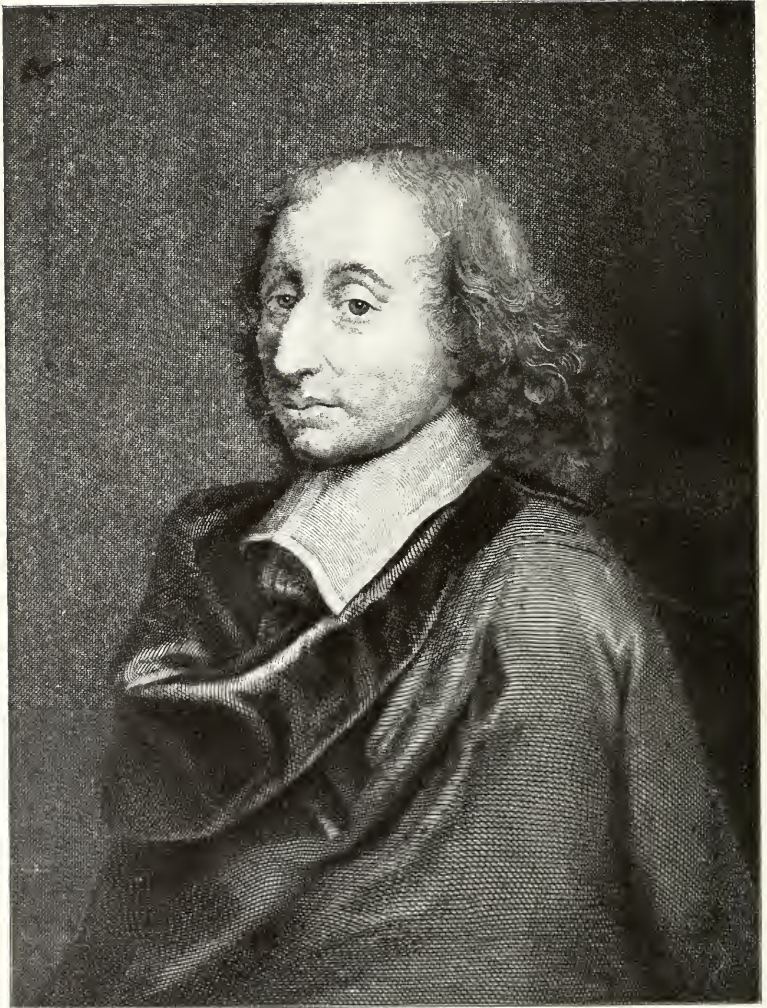
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BLAISE PASCAL

Frontispiece to The Open Court

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SCIENCE AND THE BIBLE

BY T. E. SAVAGE

THERE is a rather widespread impression that the teachings of science tend to destroy faith in God, and that belief in the doctrine of evolution is not compatible with veneration for the Bible, and reverence for religion. Instead of being atheistic, the teachings of science have wonderfully enlarged our conception of God, and they support in so many ways the moral precepts of the Bible that they invest with added authority the scripture message. Instead of being irreligious, the doctrine of evolution has furnished a fuller and more exalted revelation of God, and of his purposes and ways of working in the world than was ever known before.

We are able to properly understand the present only in the light of the past out of which present things have come. Our conception of God, and of the Bible, and of our religion do not furnish an exception to this rule. The evidence is conclusive that not only the ideas of God we hold today, but also our Bible and our religion have all passed through a gradual process of growth or evolution.

In any field of knowledge and experience, the views we hold today are quite different from those we held in our childhood, and from those held by the early workers in the same field. In fact, everything that exists around us, the features of the earth, the forms of its life, our forms of thought, and our ideas of God and His ways of working in the world, are but the last links in the chain of changing events and ideas that extend back a very long distance into the past.

The conception of the relation of the teachings of geology and Genesis has passed through three distinct phases. The earliest view was that the story of Genesis was literal history, and that creation was completed in six days; that the earth and its forms of life were

perfect at the time of creation, and have continued to exist without essential change from that time to the present.

As geologists studied more thoroughly the record in the rocks, they found there was something wrong with the history inscribed in the rock strata, or with the creation story as told in Genesis. Devout men such as Hitchcock of Amherst, Guyot of Princeton, and Dawson of Montreal, studied the scriptures and the strata in an earnest effort to reconcile the records that each disclosed. The conclusion was reached that the days of Genesis were geological eons, or very long periods of time. This effort of reconciliation of geology and Genesis marks the second phase of Bible interpretation.

As the sequence of the earth's strata, and of their fossils, became more perfectly known, it became evident that the order of appearance of life on the earth as revealed by geology could not be harmonized with the creation story of the Bible. As men began to despair of reconciliation, help came from an unexpected source: from the more thorough study of the Bible itself. Bible students like Professor Bacon of Yale Theological Seminary, Moore of Andover Seminary, the late President Harper of the University of Chicago, and many others have shown that the early books of our present Bible were compiled and edited from two main records, the older of which had been made by Prophetic writers, and the later one by the Priests. These records contained a mingling of history and folk tales or traditions written by men who held quite different view points. When a later editor brought together these two records, he did not rewrite the history as our modern historians would have done, but extracted portions bodily from one or the other of these records without changing them, and thus was preserved all of the peculiarities of words and expressions of each of the original writers. The compiler also occasionally inserted editorial additions of his own. This dual character of the main early Bible sources explains why the narrative of the same events in the Bible so often appears twice, the two stories not always being in agreement, like the stories of creation in the first and second chapters of Genesis.

In the excavations of ancient cities of Babylonia, there have been recovered tablets that contain legends or folk tales of the creation and the flood, similar in the main to these stories given in Genesis except that several Gods were thought to have taken part in creation. These Chaldean stories antedate the Bible narrative by more than 1,000 years. George Smith has described some of these tablets and

their translation in his book, *The Chaldean Account of Genesis*. Abraham's early home was in Ur of Chaldea. When he went out from there to found a new nation, he took with him a large store of traditions and folk tales of this kind. These he handed down to his children, and they became the common heritage of the early Jewish people.

When very much later the Prophetic and Priestly writers prepared a history of the Jewish people, they incorporated these old stories of creation as an explanation of the way the earth and living beings came into existence. However, the Jews were an intensely religious people. They developed the idea of one God, as contrasted with the polytheistic beliefs of the neighboring peoples, and so the writers of Genesis modified the creation stories in such a way as to make them consistent with their monotheistic God conception.

At the present time, the Bible scholars agree that the creation and flood stories of Genesis are not intended to teach either history or geology, but were modifications of existing legends to teach the great lessons of one God as the creator of all things and that this God rewards righteousness and punishes sin. This is the third and present view of the relation of the teaching of geology and Genesis.

Since Genesis was not meant to teach geology, we are no longer disturbed that the stories of creation as told in Genesis do not agree with each other, or that neither of them agrees with the order in which geology finds the succession of life to have appeared on the earth.

The writers of Genesis had no conception of the largeness of the world, and their story of the universal flood reflects the limitations of the world conception they held. Geology can give competent testimony on the matter of a universal flood, for bodies of water on the land leave positive records in the form of sedimentary deposits, beaches, wave-cut cliffs and terraces. Such features are not present as they would have been if water had covered the lands at a time so recent as since man's appearance on the earth.

The study of the present geographic distribution of animals with reference to the regions in which the evolution of the various classes of animals occurred also has a direct bearing on the question of a universal flood. The fauna of Australia is peculiar in the abundance and variety of its marsupials and the absence of placental mammals. The vertebrate fossils found in Australia indicate that marsupials had developed and flourished there throughout Cenozoic

time, and none of the higher placental mammals were there when the island was discovered.

Even if Australia had been known to Noah, he could scarcely have brought the marsupial species of that island to Asia, and returned them again to Australia without any mixture with the higher mammals, or the addition of other migrants to the island. Such restricted distribution as that of the Sloths and other peculiar inhabitants of South America, and of such islands as the Galapagos and Madagascar offer a similar fatal objection. The details of the present distribution of animals when studied in connection with their distribution during Pleistocene and Pliocene time makes the story of a universal flood impossible, even if Noah and his contemporaries had known of the existence of all the different continents, and if they had had boats sufficiently large to cross the oceans to reach them, and means of capturing the animals when they found them, and if the natural enemies could have been induced to drown their animosities for the period of the journey. The discovery of America would not have been delayed until many centuries later if such voyages and such collections of animals had been made from all the lands of the earth.

The writers of Genesis also had no conception of the great number of kinds or species of living things on the earth. The measurements of the ark into which two individuals of each kind were to be collected are given—300 cubits in length, 50 cubits in width and 30 cubits in height. Imagine a boat with three floors, each 550 by 90 feet in size accommodating two individuals of each species of living things (more than a million) with room for provisions for a 150-day voyage. Such a boat would not even accommodate a fair-sized menagerie.

Chaldean tablets have been found that contain the story of the flood essentially like the stories recorded in Genesis, and which doubtless were their source. However, the writers of the Bible used these stories to teach the moral lesson of how God punished evil doers and rewarded the righteous.

The Hebrew sages were wonderful students of life and morals. All along the Bible history they grasped great truths from the events and experiences of their times. Their religious instincts explained every uncommon circumstance, blessing or disaster, as due to the direct intervention of God. Each writer interpreted God, his motives and manner of action, in the light of the knowledge of nature and

the conception of God that prevailed at the time in which he lived. The early conception was that of a national God; "jealous of his rights and authority, as were all the rulers of that ancient time. He was intensely interested in the national life and supremacy of the Jews, but quite oblivious of the rights of other nations." Since this is true, it is not strange that we find in the writings of the Bible, a record of the development of the Jewish people from earlier crude ideas, to later, more noble conceptions of God. In Genesis, God is in places conceived as a man. He is represented as appearing to men in bodily form, and as talking and eating with men, as a man. He changes His mind and His plans as a man. Like man He harbors hate, jealousy and revenge, just as the Gods of other early peoples.

Traces of a lingering of polytheistic belief were left in the creation story of the Bible in the statements: "And God said, 'Let us make man in our own image'." It is shown in such expressions as, "He is to be feared above all Gods"; "God standeth in the congregation and He judgeth among the Gods"; Before the Gods will I sing praise unto Thee." These ideas are similar to the beliefs of Babylonia and other polytheistic peoples who recognized many Gods, but usually gave to *one* the chief place of authority and power. From these conceptions it is a great advance to the idea of one God, and that one a universal spirit.

The progressive moral standards recorded in the Bible show an equally great development. The early books of the Bible represent standards of an ignorant and cruel age. The idea of the story of Jehovah commanding Abraham to slay his son was not far removed from the practice of human sacrifice. The story of God demanding the innocent family of Achan to be stoned; or destroying thousands of innocent people as a punishment for David's sin while the real offender goes free; or of Samuel hewing King Agag in pieces before the Lord, are not consistent with later conceptions of a God that loveth mercy. Such actions are not in accord with the spirit and teachings of the later prophets, and with the new commandment of Christ.

The imprecatory psalms and prayers for vengeance on their enemies are not in agreement with the command to love your enemies. The early Jewish law of the avenger of blood is very different from that of overcoming evil with good. An enlightened civilization would not sanction the ancient practices of polygamy and slavery;

nor would it countenance the missionary methods of the Israelites when they attempted to free the land of Canaan from heathen practices.

The personal relation of the individual with God shows just as great an evolution. At first, Jehovah, like the God of other primitive peoples, was God of the nation rather than of the individual, the God of battles, or the God of the host of Israel. Very slowly His more intimate relation became recognized, and He came to be addressed as "Our Father."

The earliest writers of the Bible conceived of God as localized. Only at Sinai or Horeb or some other particularly sacred place would God meet with man. It was a long step from this conception to the idea that each person is a living temple in which God abides. Then, too, the early Hebrews like other ancient peoples regarded their God as restricted in His realm; the God of Israel only. Not until the time of the second Isaiah do we find him recognized as a God whose justice and mercy extend to all people. Not till much later still is the truth stated that in every nation he that feareth God and worketh righteousness is accepted of Him.

There is also shown in the writings of the Bible a progressive development of the idea of God as a God of love rather than as a God who executes judgment on evil doers; as a being whose anger must be appeased by sacrifices and whose favor must be gained by gifts.

The inspiration from the Bible does not come from its being an infallible book sent down complete, God made, from heaven, and containing nothing but perfect standards of moral and religious thought. Its value lies in the record of how the Hebrew people grew up from habits of cruelty, injustice and revenge into an appreciation and practice of righteousness, mercy and love; that, beginning in polytheism, idol worship, and human and animal sacrifices they grew up to the worship of God as a heavenly father. Each step of this progress was carved out of the experiences through which they passed. Each better moral standard was long practiced as an unwritten rule of conduct and life, and found to be good for men, before it was written down as a law of God. Each nobler conception of truth, and of God, was acquired in the same way that knowledge of any other truth has been attained; as a result of search and study and effort; and was gained by minds strengthened by their striving for larger knowledge.

This does not mean that all through the ages God's part of revelation was not universal. God is no respecter of persons, or of peoples. He is in no way a partial God, choosing one nation above another to which he revealed His will, and leaving all other peoples with no way of finding Him. It means, rather, that man's recognition of God, or God's revelation to man, became ever more perfect the more men sought to find Him in the world and in their lives, as the Jewish writers did, and the farther they advanced from ignorance and superstition into knowledge. As the poet says:

"God sends His teachers into every age;
 To every clime and every race of men;
 With revelation fitted to their growth
 And shape of mind. Nor gives the realm of truth
 Into the selfish rule of one sole race.
 Therefore, each form of worship that hath swayed
 The life of man, and given it to grasp
 The master key of knowledge—reverence
 Infolds some germs of goodness and of right."

The attitude of science teaches us to look upon all the Bibles of the world as God's word, as far as they contain elements or partial conceptions of the truth. It recognizes all religions as divine, as far as they enable their adherents to overcome their fears, to know their God as a friend, and to have peace of mind and confidence in His help. It assures us that nowhere has God left Himself without a witness to minds that earnestly seek for Him. It finds in the crude and imperfect religious message of any age but the measure of the ignorance that darkened the mind of the inspired teachers. It discovers more of deep identity in the yearning after God, in the sense of sin or separateness from God, and the longing for His favor, present in all religions, than of difference in the forms of religious expression, or of the methods of approach to God. Of course, the character of the God-conception, the religious ideas and ideals, and the standards of right and wrong differ widely in different people, for these change in each individual and in every people with increasing knowledge.

Not only is the God-ward striving universal but the highest moral conceptions and ideals reached in all of the great religions are also surprisingly similar. The teaching of Zoroaster—"Righteousness is the best good," is much like that of Confucius—"Do not

do to others what you would not have done to you by others"; and like Plato's ideal—"Virtue is the great aim of life, and that without thought of reward"; or like the ethics of Buddha: "Commit no evil but do good and let thy heart be pure"; and all of these are consistent with the reputed statement of the old Babylonian King Marduk, "The great God has made me king that I should protect the weak, and destroy evil and procure justice to all."

These may be pagan ideas and ideals, but even the pagan saints and sages proclaim our God. Truth is truth, and righteousness is righteousness, and love is love wherever found; and these are everywhere and always the cornerstones of the kingdom of God. Did the followers of these so-called pagan teachers sadly pervert the doctrines their masters taught? So did the followers of Christ, and the pages of Christian history are reddened with the blood of martyrs and of holy wars, and with the crimes of witchcraft and the inquisition.

Science finds not in all Gods dealing with men any exclusiveness that would for ages leave all but one nation without hope and without God in the world. One people has acquired a rich experience of righteousness and of God through their constant effort to realize God and righteousness in their lives. Another nation has sought God in nature, and in their ideals of beauty; and they have enriched the world with their art, and literature, and intellectual culture. Another has striven to realize God in legal enactments, and so has educated the world in law and organization and government. The particular temperament and bent of mind of each people has largely shaped the ideal towards which it has striven. Seek and ye shall, by the seeking, be made stronger to find what ye seek after. "To him that hath shall more be given." This is the law of life.

This does not mean that all Bibles or all religions rank equal in their influence upon mankind. We believe that the Christian religion contains nobler conceptions of God; higher standards of morals, and leads to the development of better living than any other religion that has influenced humanity. It is also more fruitful in its power of adaptation to increasing knowledge. We should expect this to be true because of the fact that it is among the latest products of religious evolution, and also on account of the cosmopolitan influences that have contributed to its ideals. The Christian religion has inherited from the Hebrews the idea of one God and that "This God demands righteousness of His people." In the development of

this idea the Jews became benefactors of the human race. It has received from the Greeks the intellectual interpretation of God and of life; the emphasis that God is immanent in nature and in men. For, as one of the Greek poets has said, "Ye also are His offspring." Rome has contributed the conception of an imperial God sitting outside of the earth and ruling the world by arbitrary laws which must be implicitly obeyed. Occasionally, he interfered with normal processes of the earth for the purpose of punishing evil doers, or rewarding the righteous. Such a ruler could only be approached through a mediator. It is this conception that gave rise to the idea of sin as the transgression of an arbitrary law, that regarded forgiveness as a personal pardon of a personal offense, and that made satisfaction for violated law demand a propitiation or atoning sacrifice to satisfy divine justice and appease divine wrath. It is no wonder that the reconciliation of divine justice and infinite mercy has for centuries taxed the ingenuity of the church. Christianity may also be indebted to eastern mysticism for the idea that man can gain a direct revelation of religious truth through dreams, visions, trances, or states of ecstasy, and for the idea of losing one's identity or self in God.

In these later days, science has greatly changed the world-thoughts, and God-conceptions of men. It has shown us how God has not only been educating man since his advent in the world, but in a similar way He has been educating sentient life through its interactions with the orderly processes of nature since its first appearance on the earth.

The Bible conception of God and His relation to the world, so vividly portrayed in Milton's immortal poem, was found impossible when geologists discovered the structure and constitution of the earth, and astronomers gave us the modern conception of the universe. We are introduced upon the earth while it is yet in an unfinished condition. Each new day is a creative day. Each day's creation is, and has always been, accomplished by the forces of nature acting in their uniform and orderly ways. Some call the process evolution, and others call it God. By whatever name it is called, evolution is the method God chose to create the world and man its highest product. The forces of nature would seem to be the agency through which God has worked, and still works, in the creative process.

The verdict of science as well as the Bible is that God is in the world: that His presence permeates all the beauty and order and majesty of nature. God is the intelligence that constitutes the intelligence of nature. Out of the interaction of living beings with the intelligence and order of nature there was developed intelligent mind and reason in man. If nature's laws had not been always constant, so that every cause was linked with its appropriate effect, intelligence and reason would probably never have appeared upon the earth. Out of the reaction between reasoning men and reasonable nature have emerged the conceptions of God and of man's relation to Him which constitutes religion. Both the reason of man and the religion of man would seem to be the reflection of God expressed in the orderliness of the world. This view explains:

"How exquisitely the individual mind
To the external world is fitted.
And how exquisitely, too, the external world
Is fitted to the mind."

This conception makes nature and man alike divine. It makes science the systematic study of God's purposes and modes of action. It makes the forces of nature partake of the spirit of God Himself. It removes the false notions that have set up the natural as distinct from the supernatural, that have divided the secular from the religious, and that have kept man apart from God.

In the past men have looked for God too much in signs and wonders. They have lived in His very presence, but their eyes were holden so they did not see Him. In Him they have lived and moved and had their being, and at the same time imagined God was far from them.

If God's presence permeates nature in such an intimate way, we should expect to find nature's laws teaching the same moral lessons as the Bible, and working along lines parallel with it in bringing about righteousness in the earth. In a very large way this is true. The Bible says, "Prove all things, and hold fast to that which is good." Science has accepted this rule as one of its fundamental principles. The Bible says, "The wages of sin is death." Science repeats the same warning and shows us how nature works to bring about this result. When a man indulges in evil practices and persistently transgresses the laws of health, his physical vigor and power of resistance are lessened thereby, and he falls an early vic-

time to disease. Nature detects even those that appear to be sound, but are rotten at the core. The Bible says, "the iniquities of the fathers are visited upon the children to the third and fourth generations." Science shows clearly the truth of this statement. Where parents are dissolute and victims of sinful habits, the children also possess weakened constitutions as well as sinful tendencies, either as a result of inheritance, or of early environment and neglect. Where for only a few generations parents are persistently vicious the stock grows weakened, idiotic and eventually becomes extinct. Persistent sinfulness is stamped out in a few generations by natural selection acting through heredity. In the language of science the sinner is out of harmony with his environment and if he and his posterity will not or cannot change, natural selection will as surely cut off his race as in the case of any other animal not in adjustment with its environment. This is "the power not of ourselves that makes for righteousness." Happily, in a similar way the higher qualities of character developed by the parents are also impressed upon the children by early education and example. The Bible says, "the righteous shall inherit the earth," and science assures us that righteousness or right living makes for health and length of life.

The sorrow and remorse that we feel for wrongs committed or for duties omitted are nature's warnings that we are out of harmony with her ways. Unrest and dissatisfaction of mind are nature's calls to higher standards of thought and living. Peace is gained through striving to live in harmony with God's will, which means in harmony with the purposes that dominate the world.

Science believes in the positive nature of sin; not sin as the transgression of arbitrary law, but sin as the failure to know and to conform to the physical, moral and spiritual laws according to which the best development of man and of society can be attained.

Science assures us of a ruling Providence in the world; a Providence which would require man to apply the means that God has provided for accomplishing results. "It finds a Providence, or foresight, in the orderly course of nature; not in the occasional interference of nature's activities." It believes that we honor God more by seeking to know His laws, and by following them in their ordinary application to life than by looking for, or trusting in so-called special Providences. The question of whether God's Providences are general or special is a lingering of the early conception of God that assigned to Him human limitations and imperfections.

Science also recognizes the importance of prayer; the kind of a petition that prays, "Thy will not mine be done"; the prayer that leads the petitioner to seek to know ever more perfectly the universal will and to seek to conform his life thereto. This is not the childish conception of prayer which would in any sense think to change the movements of universal order, either by reason of man's impotency, or his much speaking, or that expects God to do for man what he could and should do for himself. "God's plans are not so weak that they may yield to human wishes."

Science also teaches a most holy faith in the environing and all-embracing presence of God; a faith that His ways may be known; a faith that His laws will not fail those who put their trust in them. It enlarges our faith in a humanity striving towards a knowledge of God, and striving to make society realize His great purposes. It inspires a faith that displaces the pernicious notions of luck and chance by a knowledge that "all effects are linked with their appropriate causes"; a faith that finds growth in grace attained by the systematic practice of the graces, just as mental growth is accomplished by the exercise of the mind, and increased physical power results from the proper exercise of the body; a faith that believes the putting down of evil and the enthronement of good in the world will be accomplished by the aggressive, righteous life, and earnest efforts of individuals along the channels by which society is organized; a faith in the future of the race the trend of which has always been "upward and forward to that which is better, to a larger and a fuller and a finer life. Notwithstanding the suffering and diseases of body and the poverty of mind that still exist, the faith of science illuminates the future with the light from the past and assures us with a certainty that almost eliminates faith, that anything else than increasing good would reverse the laws of the ages."

Science also reveals the love of God; a love too deep and true to provide for the development of weaklings through constant ease and unearned pleasures; a love that holds virtue, strength of character, and ennobling progress far above passive enjoyment; a love that deals with men in such ways as to make them strong, and causes them to develop ever increasing powers. It finds this supreme love expressed in unvarying law, so that men may learn His ways, and trust His laws, and plan with them beyond the present hour. It is through a knowledge of and conformity to, these laws that have

come all of the attainments and achievements that make the present age the best the world has ever known.

When men can look out on the world from this viewpoint, they will realize that all is holy ground. They will see in the forces of nature that have developed them, that envelop and sustain their lives and by whose co-operation they perform their common labors, the presence of God Himself. Then they will recognize that life itself is sacred; that "right work rightly performed is worship," and that in the performance of his work man is a co-worker with God. Then will righteousness, reverence and fellowship with God be the reasonable and natural attitude of mind, and then will the Kingdom of nature be seen to be none other than the Kingdom of God.