

GOD AND THE WORLD PHYSICAL.

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I N closing an article printed in the September number of this periodical, I mentioned that the differentiation of the Ideal Supreme Deity from this universe of matter was a pressing necessity in the course of our endeavor to build up a proper concept of a spiritual God, but before we advance to such an undertaking, we had better consider a little more closely what each of the two things may be which we desire to put into antithesis. And, as implied or said above, we should not allow any fatuous and effeminate hesitation in the way of morbid sensibilities to check our progress, throwing us into a state of incipient mental cataleptic inanimation at the mere introduction of such a theme, for it is one which should long ago have been a subject taught at all our infant school-desks.

At least we should not balk this point, but advance upon the principle that the commonest of all structural mechanical facts should not be blinked, for ignorance cannot much longer continue to be the source of undeviating satisfaction. We have then nature's universe on the one side (with mathematics) and on the other our Supreme Ideal Faith-God with His cognate ideal system.

These then are our theme for analytical discrimination. What then is this our mechanic world—all which we should meet with line and plummet, compass and lens, theodolite, etc.?—that is to say, if we are to examine it with anything approaching to sincerity. For, first of all, it seems actually to be necessary to mention such an item as that such a physical world as ours is not "infinite." One would have thought that most people who believe that there is anything physical anywhere were convinced that it could be limited at least as regards dimensions. For the physical universe, in the name of "measure," is generally supposed to be at least in space, while its place there is a more serious problem. Space is in itself, as we generally understand it, simple unoccupied "nothing" for objects

to stand or move in, which objects in their relative distance from one another, or approximation to each other, alone fix its limits, those of space. In these spacial particulars it, the universe, is therefore, like most other things in a conceivable material world-system, not at all mysterious, any more so than a pebble or a microbe. It is simply, as said, an object rolling in nothing, not imaginably related by measure to others similarly situated, and no more unlimited than any architectural structure. The mental universe we might add,—so, imperfectly, to speak of it for a moment without too much precision,—may, on the other hand, and in one sense of it, be indeed said to be not “bounded” as to space, for, as in the case of number, the mind can never stop; it goes on irrecoverably beyond to a figure still more remote, after having already reached what seemed at first to be things unimaginable,—so, as to space, the mind goes ever out beyond an almost ultimate conception of nothing, ever on to a still further emptiness.

The material All-world, however, while neat-cut as a diamond as to “space,” must yet be, as a whole, entirely unmeasured and immeasurable as regards “time”; though its particularly teeming life in its everlasting change-motion is of course all that makes up “time” itself. Causal thought demands seeming fresh origination every instant for each such myriad-phase of passing matter-form, but common sight soon shows us that the substance itself of the particles, of which the almost immeasurable minute and multitudinous passing facts are the fleeting shapes, cannot itself be moved;—the atomic electron-particles simply change position; see above and below. Not fire, flood, nor earthquake diminish its weight by a kilogram; do ashes, smoke and gas weigh heavier than the ignited wood, consumed coal, or spirit? See the oxygen and hydrogen separated by electricity in our experimenting machines,—they combine again to equal weight. Let me not be misunderstood: I block no causes nor beginnings; beginnings there are, as said, and by the myriad at every instant. “All is flow” with Hegel’s originals, as with himself; and precious are all things just in proportion as that flow is strong and rapid.

Life is firmer, for it is the flow that makes it; see the pulse or rather feel it. Yes, there are changes, as beginnings rushing on at every fraction of a second, but the everlasting substance in which the change takes place is itself in its elements unalterable. How can a change take place without something which changes, and which only changes so far as the changes noted are concerned? If there were no solid basis, the motion could not exist, nor be maintained—

the elemental substratum is—inadequately—like the deep sea, “motionless.” Change, which is its manifestation, is the splendid surge. The water particles rest still, or move but vertically;—it is the wave-form that rushes on the sea or wheat-field. So also thought-form itself, the life-spark of sentient nature;—it cannot stop. Mind-organism on organism reaches mature status and cerebral action at once inevitably sets in. It is the mere motion of thought faculties; thought-particles;—the thought-muscles alone rest in sleep, if then. The brain cerebrates, whether normally or not, at advancing stages. Take our common human puberty as a sample,—a seed-thought time it is for most of us. See it at the soul’s awaking;—“conversion,” we used to call it,—blessed crisis that it was. We then broke forth into reason’s consciousness,—we were veritably “born again.” Right was our deity; the strident will seemed fiercely free, to have it out with our highest yearnings,—this, passionately. Negation seemed cowardice; to do some noble thing, or many, was our point. We took our lives lightly in our hands; we gripped to do or die; we would even violently force idlers to take part. But what were we here again, but the fine poise of nature’s sentient forces, her better ones? Injustice seemed the kernel of all woe (all hell) to us,—its center;—but behold truth was everywhere, half-consciously.

If the bird be fragile, she can yet rise on wing and be in a moment safe; if the farm laborer bends to toil, he still smells the sweet earth and breathes the life-giving air; if the tigress is long starving, she yet enjoys her fierce spring the more, and the satisfaction of a fuller meal; if the inventor wrestles with hell’s influences in the frightful fights of jealousy, he has yet at times the thrill of victory; if Dives is his life-long assailed by a million demons tugging for his all, he has still at moments the satisfaction of his wishes. There is (imperfect) balance everywhere,—the essence of what we so fondly try to call the “truth.” Equity means evenness (see gravitation, which is analogous to stability, compactness). It is however never perfect, but attempted everywhere—sometimes in terrific forms. Two monsters meet in duel;—the horn of one snaps like a pipe-stem;—each battles, so he thinks, and thinks rightly, for some vital interest. Two stags struggle on a precipice;—antlers are interlocked;—the does look on. The youth knows that he feels conscience, as much as this;—nay more. And so of that active right-form, the affections, with their obedience;—he, our youth, longs on principle, as on passion, to follow them,—but the very doves do too, dying if parted, of their sorrow. See the wild-fowl’s mother-

hood;—she will draw the gunner off, feigning herself wounded, drooping her bedraggled wings, on ever further from her nest, saving her half-hatched brood. Look at the common poultry of the barn-door;—they even attracted the attention of our Lord. See too a keen bitch with her litter; she shows her sharp teeth at once;—devotion is a part of nature;—“attraction as the square of the distance”;¹ see above.

And what is order² but a something akin to chemical distribution; like crystallization; see above. The chief bull leads the herd;—look at the ants again. Order is everywhere (attempted), and so is genius. The very mould of the world seems to out-fold itself of itself;—see the chrysalis;—the butterfly’s cast is there. Look at the physical perfection of a new-born human being;—every little nail is in its place. In fact all sentient and all non-sentient being is there in motion toward an ideal, infernal or sublime. Even in the fused condition this was so;—change-phenomenon lived on in the electron in spite of flames;—forms predestined and pre-existing, appeared everywhere, as globe on globe grew cool. All the poles first chilled slowly,—then half-way down they grew more temperate till at last the equators themselves became possible, just as the globes themselves contracted from their still prior fire-mists,—and everywhere, as of dire necessity, as the heat went off, life swarmed, and with it consciousness, terrific or benign. So our self-life; all was struggling right, love, order and motion everywhere, with intermittent defeat or victory through murder, sneak, etc. But where did it all come from?—this all-creative motion—for none of us who have left our cradles interpose a preternatural creative interference precisely here;—we, all of us, insert that miracle at a long distance, indefinitely further back. All is as yet “sequence,” with us, in the common causal-chain; it is shape-form, ever changing in the everlasting unchanging substance—substratum. But suddenly, in these our well-fed meanderings on facts so patent, a keen thought shoots through us like a pang;—why in such an hypothetically conceived-of *almost* perfect physical system, balanced so symmetrically,—why do we need any quasi-natural creative interference ever, anywhere, or at all? “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” is an absolute mystery which we must accept in childlike ignorance and faith. We have no right at all to exercise our intellectual faculties upon it, but we have likewise no right to stop our mental existence for this or any other cause. God has given us our sanity,

¹ Vohumanah. See “God and His Immortals.” *The Open Court*, Jan., 1906.

² Khshathra. See *ibid.*

and we must use it. We proceed to trace the facts and check a quasi-creationism.

Caloric does not imperatively call for it. All nature's things once flamed, so far as we can dream of it,—once, at least, so on this our sidereal ball,—with its planet-mates. It surely once passed through fire, as now all clearly see. All was included in that mass of burnt nature which once was this rolling sphere. Out of these seething substances, once vapor, then fluid, then fiery sands and stones and metals, came all things here terrestrial,—as few now doubt,—for all were already there without exception. The evolving and revolving masses became slowly dense; vapor thickened to liquid, liquid to solid, till the well-formed continents appeared between the oceans, with hot rivers rushing in their own midsts themselves. And out of this all came the great souls of earth as well as the villains, counterfeits and knaves;—and with them the now forever forgotten millions upon millions of other sentient beings who have emerged from the same elements, came also to their apex, some of them, and perished, having vibrated to some partial measure at least, all of them, with the same yearnings, emotions, fears and hopes in the long æons of a past formative eternity; and this in endless iterations, catenations. Oh, no! we raise no voice to deny that thing “beginning”—far from it; God forbid;—see everywhere above. Beginnings rushed on, are rushing now, and will forever fly at more than electric speed;—it is only the affixed particle to the great word with which we quarrel. “Beginnings” there are, as we cannot too frequently accede, and by the million,—myriads at every instant pressing on,—so ever throughout all,—but they are but the rushings-on of *eternal form-change*—not one single one of the vast finitude was ever for a moment *absolute as an ultimate*, or primal, original in any sense at all,—not for an instant. Like the chants to God in the Gãthic faith they “had no first”;—all was fleeting “form-change” of an abiding substratum, eternal in its sequence, forth and back. So only or, rather, so really,—for there is nothing greater than a form-change, we must not snub it,—substance's eternally proceeding externals it is—mighty indeed. So they are with crashing cataclysms in smiles of beauty, or frowns of horror. Differences there are in them, somewhat great;—slime and a solar system are not so close alike;—see a fetish and a Phidias. The ever furious fresh form-changes glide, or crash, on with standing speed (sic), and in that motion all sentient life-forces have their being,—but from the first ever imagined slightest jar, not to say “recorded,” to those awful motions now passing at this present instant, not one

solitary one has been without conditions, so not one ever for an instant absolute or preternatural;—incessant is the change. No, elemental absolute beginning is not thinkable. For how, as said, can a thing begin out of nothing? *Beginning phenomenal* has of itself reference to time, *beginning absolute* belongs to eternity, and not to nature-motion, nor to its measure;—least of all could a sidereal member of our solar group begin—in nature; that is to say, not absolutely. It is not dreamable; that is, not without miracle; and miracle is not our subject here: see on below. Creation-miracle would indeed be *beginning elemental*,—but it would be, like accident, *out of nature*; a break in the unbreakable chain-circle of all phenomena, while a missing link is here fatuity. Intellection deals alone with nature in its unbroken chain;—miracle, creation, accident lie in an entirely different category,—in the same ideal system with the Ideal God, not in nature, but in supernature, and there they are quite as possible, ideally, as He is. They are faith-objects, but our languages can ill express the idea here, for language is objective. These then are the two things to differentiate, if we wish to render an account for the use of our supposed full sanity. Conscience here should interpose one twinge at least for an honest “plumb” for once, and it is a very bad sacrilege indeed for us to fatuate our faculties. The nature-universe is simply permanent (Herakleitos):—things are and always were,—and after every effort to bring a thing to nothing, we find that we can only change its phase.

It has become at the present time a vital necessity to defend all cherished opinions upon subjects of prominent religious importance, and with the utmost regard to truth and reason. To assert a great spiritual principle and then to refuse altogether to discuss it, is no longer to be regarded as being either safe or honest. I have myself lately endeavored to advance here upon these better lines, and with little hesitation, for I have even applied scrutiny to the very doctrine of creation itself. The miraculous element in this representation as recorded in the first chapter of Genesis is sentimentally dear to every one of us, but the only way to preserve it is to face its difficulties without recoil. And, first of all, it is obviously vital to separate the ideal of creation as a miracle from the never ceasing activities of nature in its continuous chain of cause and effect.

My explanation is that the creation of the world, in perhaps a certain rhetorical sense of it, is now still progressing and at every divisible moment of time. As the course of history is the “day of judgment,” so that course is its hours of divine origination. My inconsistency is of course obvious. It was once thought by earnest

men that a natural creation in the ordinary sense of the word was needed in the light of pure reason. How could the physical world, it was asked, have originated of itself, and devout men simply welcomed the first chapter of Genesis, and that almost as a scientific explanation.

It was a miraculous act of creation of the world out of nothing, so they thought. Or, granted an eternity of the raw matter, it was at least the miraculous interference of an artificer (there wasn't much difference)—to this of course I adhere, so far as we must accept a supernatural world-maker. Of course there was fallacy in the truism of the supposed pious rationalist, when he asserted that something could not come out of nothing,—a fact which no one ever denied. Indeed in the light of mere logic he was right, for God Himself is as much an entity, or a "thing" as any other object, if He be an object. How then did He Himself arise, was only a fair question, to which the pious disputant of course answered that He did not arise at all. To this the sceptic might have rejoined, "If you say that God did not arise at all, why could you not also say that nature had no arising, either as regards its matter or its laws?" There would be nothing whatsoever profane in such a remark, for it merely concerns time. It is not profane to say that nature now exists; why should it be wrong to say that it existed for untold millions of ages gone by, as all now agree? Why then should it not have existed forever, and where is the blasphemy? Obviously this would rob God of the glory of a mechanical achievement,—but would that be so gross a deprivation? To say that the physical world, not the universe, is the production of God's natural creative function might in some lights of it be hardly regarded as a *compliment*. See on the Zoroastrian Dualism. At all events I venture to propose as above, that God is in the world, physically, supernaturally, as eternally and miraculously active in it at every instant, and this is and was the "creation." But why, asks the worshiper, was it so written in Genesis I, if there were really no beginning? The answer is obvious. Such a statement is misleading. There was ever so much of a beginning, that is to say, as regards our human race. The ideal God, in His omniscient wisdom, foresaw all the future as He remembered all the past; or rather, at every moment He was conscious of both. If "not a sparrow falls to the ground without Him," surely the incipience of the human race, however degraded it was destined to be and to continue, was no matter of indifference to Him, for it (the human race) has its good points as well as its evil ones. So that the "creation" of Genesis I was in-

deed an epoch in God's eternity, but it had simply reference *to us*. See above. Otherwise it was but a mere dot in His unlimited experience.

My only explanation of my suggestion that God is now creating the world is that this is all "ideal"; but as to what "ideal" really means, I am not at present prepared to say. See Kant's doctrine of the ideas. Certainly ideas are actually things, as much so as the mountain ranges, but I will not now discriminate. I only say that to be serious we must separate all natural process from all miracle, and above all from creative miracle, which indeed the doctrine of miracle demands of itself. I do not think it can do harm to dwell on this for a moment. The course of the physical world must be traced back to eternity, if that be possible, just as it must be traced back to the last fifty years or anticipated for the next future half-century, and to say the contrary is either fatuity or fraud.