

A Doubter's Doubts About Science and Religion

by Robert Anderson

The sermon argues that evolution cannot explain the origin of life and that the concept of abiogenesis is unsupported by evidence, leading to a dilemma between credulity and recognition of God.

Scripture: Matthew 5:17

Topics: "Faith And Science", "Biblical Authority"

Description

Robert Anderson preaches about the importance of critically examining the claims of Christianity, emphasizing the need to distinguish between true revelation and false mysticism. He challenges the credibility of sacerdotalism and questions the legitimacy of claims made by certain religious leaders. Anderson highlights the significance of the Bible as the foundation of Christianity, pointing out the inseparable connection between Christianity and Judaism, and the reliance of Jesus on the Hebrew Scriptures to establish His Messiahship.

Transcript

PREFACE

SOME of the following chapters we printed in a volume a few years ago. It may be thought perhaps that the criticisms they contain are out of date, now that Spencer-ism is dead and Darwinism discredited. But though biological theories which reigned supreme a few years ago have been abandoned or modified by "men of light and leading," their influence still prevails with the general public; and in response to appeals from several quarters I have reproduced the chapters in question.

The fact that A Doubter's Doubts was published anonymously may indicate how little its author thought of it. But among many signal proofs that it was appreciated by others, the most important was Mr. Gladstone's notice of it. And the circumstances in which the following letter was written lend to it a peculiar interest. The extracts from his diary, given in Mr. Morley's Life of Mr. Gladstone, record that December 18, 1889, was the occasion of Parnell's historic visit to Hawarden, and that the day was devoted to reviewing and reconsidering the whole Irish question, and discussing it with the Irish leader. And yet on that very day Mr. Gladstone found leisure to read my book, and to write to me about it. I should add that I had not sent it to him, nor was I aware that he possessed it.

HAWARDEN,

December 18, 1889.

DEAR SIR,

I do not know whom I have the honour of addressing, but I wish to thank you for your *Doubter's Doubts*, and to say that I have read it with a great deal of sympathy and concurrence in the main argument.

It implies no abatement of this declaration if I take upon me to offer a particular criticism. You strongly censure sacerdotalism, and so do I, in the sense in which I understand it; for it takes the reins of government out of the hands of those whom God has made free and responsible for their freedom, and gives them to another, under the system which is called direction. But I question whether you have stated with your usual precision the constituent portions of it which you select for special condemnation. I apprehend that the best Roman Catholic Divines would not place the consecration of the elements in the Holy Eucharist within the category of miracles; and neither Roman nor Anglican doctrine claims for the clergy the exclusive power of valid Baptism. That power was more restricted in the views of the Puritans, and of foreign Protestants, than of their opponents.

I presume to hope that you will follow up the subjects of your volume with the same care, force, and exactitude which in it you have bestowed especially upon the treatment of the main argument, and

I remain, dear Sir,

Your faithful and obedient,

W. E. GLADSTONE.

The Author of *A Doubter's Doubts*.

In my reply I acknowledged my error respecting baptism- an error which has now been corrected; but I urged that for the purpose of my argument I was entitled to insist that the change of the elements in transubstantiation was in the strictest sense a miracle. This brought me a further letter from Hawarden, from which the following is an extract -

"I agree with you about dilapidation in some quarters, and danger in more. I think that to counterwork the process, and try to build up his fellow- creatures in the faith, is the highest way a man has of serving them. I opine that you are not very far from this sentiment ; and I heartily hope your book may be useful, and that you will pursue the paths of knowledge congenial to it."

So much for the earlier chapters of this volume. As a whole it is addressed to men of the world, and from the standpoint of scepticism- the true scepticism which tests every-thing, not the sham sort which credulously accepts anything that tends to discredit the Bible. In an age that has seen not only a revival of some venerable superstitions but the rise of many new fangled superstitions of various kinds, genuine scepticism is an ally to faith. And, writing from this standpoint, destructive criticism is in the main my method. To some the book will seem unsatisfactory on this account, and yet they must recognize the importance of thus refuting the claims which infidelity makes to superior enlightenment. Others may think that in these pages the difficulties which perplex the Bible student are dismissed too lightly. Here I must either accept the criticism, or risk a charge of egotism if I appeal to my other books in proof that I neither

ignore difficulties nor attempt to minimize them.

CHAPTER ONE

HOW DID LIFE BEGIN?

THERE is one fact which not even the dreamiest of egoists can doubt, and that is, his own existence. Here at least knowledge is absolute. That I exist is certain; but how did I come to exist? I live; but how did life begin? The question is one to which every man is bound to find a reasonable answer. To say I am descended through generations numbered or innumerable from a first man, is merely to put the difficulty back. Where did the first man come from? Religion answers in one word- Creation.

But this is to cut the knot, as it were, without even an attempt to untie it. It must not be taken for granted that man is incapable of reasoning out the problem of his own existence. Between the higher organisms and the lowest there is a gulf which might well be regarded as impassable. But closer observation and fuller knowledge will disclose the fact that between these extremes there are unnumbered gradations of development, and that the distance between the several steps in the series is such as, in theory at least, might be passed by the operation of known laws.

The problem, therefore, which religion would solve by the one word " creation," science answers by the one word "evolution." And science claims priority of audience. But here let us take the place of sceptics. There are no sceptics in the old scholastic sense. The most ardent Pyrrhonist, if robbed of his purse, or struck over the head by a burglar, promptly forgets his theories, and gives proof of his belief in the certainty of objective knowledge. Philosophic scepticism, so called, is merely a conceit of sham philosophers; it never invades the sphere in which a man's interests require that he should believe and know.

And, as Kant has aptly said, it is "not a permanent resting-place for human reason." But scepticism is not necessarily Pyrrhonism. Pyrrho did not invent the word; he only perverted and degraded it. He considers, reflects, hesitates, doubts. An admirable habit, surely, if kept within due limits, but proof of moral deterioration if abnormally developed. Let us not forget then, as we proceed, to reflect, hesitate, doubt; and, above all, let us cast away prejudice. Let us take the place of free thinkers and real sceptics, not shams.

Many people reserve their scepticism for the sphere in which religion is the teacher, while in the presence of science they are as innocent and simple in their receptivity as the infant class in a Sunday-school. We shall only deceive ourselves if we begin by over-stating the evidence on which the doctrine of evolution rests. It must be conceded that its foundation largely depends on the researches of the Paleontologist. And here and some direct proof that the fossil remains belong to the same economy or system as the living organisms we compare them with.

But there is no such proof, and it is a question whether the presumption be not the other way. Let that pass, however, for a more serious question claims attention. It may be admitted that the development of plants and animals from their simplest to their most complicated forms may be explained by natural causes. But this is only theory. What direct evidence is there that the phenomena have, in fact, been thus produced? The horse may have been developed from a pig-like animal, and man may be "descended from a hairy quadruped furnished with a tail and pointed ears." (Descent of Man) But what direct proof is there that either the horse or the man was, in fact, developed or evolved in this way?

The answer must be, Absolutely none. It is a matter of inference only. (Marvellous results are produced by culture, but they are subject to the seemingly inexorable laws of degeneracy and the sterility of hybrids.) The prisoner in the dock may have committed the murder we are investigating. The theory of his guilt will account for all the facts. Therefore let him be convicted and hanged. This sort of argument would not pass at the Old Bailey. Men are sceptics there, and free thinkers.

Proof that the prisoner may have committed the crime is worthless, unless we go on to prove that it could not have been committed by any one else. But with that further proof the case is clear, and the accused goes to the gallows. And so here. If the facts of biology can in no other way be accounted for, evolution holds the field. But are we not forgetting the nature of the problem to be solved? The first and greatest question relates, not to the phenomena of life, but to its origin.

How did life begin? That was the question we set out with. And here, evolution affords no answer, and must stand aside. Let the existence of life be taken for granted, and evolution may explain the rest. But the sceptic takes nothing for granted. How did life begin? Science answers - - - ! In presence of a question which lies across the threshold of knowledge, science, the very personification of knowledge, turns agnostic and is dumb. "Creation" is the answer religion gives.

The rejoinder which science ought to make is that life first sprang out of death, out of nothing; in a word, abiogenesis. And this is, in fact, the answer which science would formerly have given. But the experiments which at one time seemed to establish the principle of spontaneous generation, have proved worthless when subjected to severer tests. Huxley admits that "the present state of knowledge furnishes us with no link between the living and the not living." With still greater candour, Tyndall declares that "every attempt made in our day to generate life independently of antecedent life has utterly broken down."

Or, if we turn to a teacher, happily still with us, whose dictum will carry still greater weight, Lord Kelvin will tell us that "inanimate matter cannot become living except under the influence of matter already living. This is fact in science which seems to me" he declares, "as well ascertained as the law of gravitation." And he goes on to say, "I am ready to accept as an article of faith in science, valid for all time and in all space that life is produced by life, and only by life." (Brit.

Assoc., Edinburgh, 1871.) Abiogenesis is merely a philosophic theory, unsupported by even the faintest shadow of evidence. But more than this, it is practically incapable of proof, for the problem implies the proof of a negative in circumstances which render the difficulties of such proof overwhelming. To establish the fact of spontaneous generation in a world teeming with life, would be as hopeless as the attempt to prove that the displacement of a table in a dark room crowded with people was caused without interference on their part.

But, we are told, the fact that we know absolutely nothing of the origin of life, and that there is not a shadow of direct evidence that abiogenesis has ever taken place, does not interfere with the conclusion "that at some time or other abiogenesis must have taken place. If the hypothesis of evolution be true, living matter must have arisen from not-living matter." (Professor Huxley, Encyc. Britt, "Biology.") Therefore life did originate thus, and the truth of evolution is established.

Thus argue the professors and scientists. But the man who considers, reflects, hesitates, doubts, will call for the evidence; and, finding there is none, he will reject the conclusion, and also, if necessary, the dependent hypothesis. We set out to solve the mystery of life. Science claimed to possess the clew, and offered to be our guide. And now, having been led back to the identical point from which we started, we

are told we must shut our eyes and take a leap in the dark.

It is a bad case of the "confidence trick." "Besides being absolutely without evidence to give it external support, this hypothesis cannot support itself internally- cannot be framed into a coherent thought. It is one of those illegitimate symbolic conceptions so continually mistaken for legitimate symbolic conceptions, because they remain untested. Immediately an attempt is made to elaborate the idea into anything like a definite shape, it proves to be a pseud-idea, admitting of no definite shape."

It "implies the establishment of a relation in thought between nothing and something - a relation of which one term is absent - an impossible relation". "The case is one of those where men do not really believe, but rather believe they believe. For belief, properly so called, implies a mental representation of the thing believed; and no such mental representation is here possible." (The words are Herbert Spencer's (Principles of Biology, § 112); the application of them is entirely my own.)

Evolution assumes the existence of life; postulates it, as the scientists would say. No more is needed than one solitary germ of living matter. Indeed, to seek for more would be unphilosophical. ("If all living beings have been evolved from pre-existing forms of life, it is enough that a single particle of living protoplasm should have once appeared on the globe, as the result of no matter what agency. In the eyes of a consistent evolutionist any further independent formation of protoplasm would be sheer waste." -Professor Huxley, Encyc.

Brit., "Biology.") But this primeval germ must be taken for granted. The sceptic will refuse to assign to it an origin which contradicts all our experience and surpasses our knowledge. The only hypothesis he can accept is that life has existed without any limitation of time; that the original life-germ was eternal and practically self-existent. And of course nothing could be evolved from it which was not inherent. It must have been pregnant with all the forms and developments of life with which the world is full.

Moreover it is only ignorant conceit to maintain that evolution has reached its limits. If man has sprung from such an origin, we must suppose that, in the far-distant future, beings will be developed as superior to mankind as we ourselves are superior to the insects crawling on the earth. According to this hypothesis the latent capacities of the first life-germ were infinite. " Capacities," remember, not tendencies. Unknowable force may account for tendencies, but it cannot create capacities.

Not that this distinction will save us from the pillory. The philosopher will condemn the statement as unphilosophical-" a shaping of ignorance into the semblance of knowledge" and I know not what besides.' (Principles of Biology, § 144. I have no wish to shelter myself behind Professor Huxley, but I claim his com-panionship and sympathy in the pillory. He says, "Of the causes which have led to the origination of living matter, then, it may be said that we know absolutely nothing.

But postulating the existence of living matter endowed with that power of hereditary transmission and with that tendency to vary which is found in all such matter, Mr. Darwin has shown good reasons for believing," &c. (Encyc. Brit., "Biology "). The primordial germ, mark, is "endowed" with a "power" and a "tendency." What had Mr. Spencer to say to this? All that I assert here is the "power" ; to predicate the "tendency" is unnecessary and therefore unphilosophical.) But these bravewords can be tested at once by assuming the contrary to what is here asserted.

Let us take it, then, that the primordial germ had no latent capacities whatever. And yet we are to accept it as the origin of all the amazing forms and phenomena of life in the world. If we may not suppose such an

aptitude naturally possessed by organisms, we must assume an inaptitude; and the question is no longer whether the cause be adequate to the effects, but whether effects are to be ascribed to what is no cause at all. May we not retort that this is indeed "a cause unrepresentable in thought"-one of those illegitimate symbolic conceptions which cannot by any mental process be elaborated into a real conception?

' In the spirit of a true philosopher, Charles Darwin declared that "the birth both of the species and of the individual are equally ' parts of that grand sequence of events which our minds refuse to accept as the result of blind chance." (Descent of Man) By what word, then, shall this " particle of living protoplasm" be called; this great First Cause; this Life-germ, eternal, self-existent, infinite in essential capacities ? There is but one word known to human language adequate to designate it, and that word is GOD.

Evolution - that is, Science - thus leads us to a point at which either we must blindly and with boundless credulity accept as fact something which is not only destitute of proof, but which is positively disproved by every test we are at present able to apply to it; or else we must recognise an existence which, disguise it as we may, means nothing less than God. There is no escape from this dilemma. Our choice lies between these alternatives. The sceptic will at once reject the first ; his acceptance of the second is, therefore, a necessity.

Men whose minds are enslaved by a preconceived determination to refuse belief in God must be content here to stand like fools, owning their impotency to solve the elementary problem of existence, and, as humble disciples in the school of one Topsy, a negro slave-girl, dismissing the matter by the profound and sapient formula "I 'spect I grow'd" ! But the free thinker, unblinded by prejudice, will reject an alternative belief which is sheer credulity, and, unmoved by the sneers of pseudo-scientists and sham-philosophers, will honestly and fearlessly accept the goal to which his reason points, and there set up an altar to an unknown God.

CHAPTER TWO

THE DARWINIAN THEORY

"IT'S lovely to live on a raft. We had the sky up there all speckled with stars, and we used to lay on our backs and look up at them and discuss about whether they were made, or only just happened. Jim he allowed they was made, but I allowed they happened; I judged it would have took too long to make so many. Jim said the moon could 'a laid them; well, that looked kind of reasonable, so I didn't say nothing against it, because I've seen a frog lay most as many, so of course it could be done.

We used to watch the stars that fell, too, and see them struck down. Jim allowed they'd got spoiled and was hove out of the nest." In this charming piece of fooling, Mark Twain states the problem admirably. The question is whether things were made, or "only just happened." But Jim, being a philosopher, suggested evolution as a compromise, and Huck Finn's deism was not intelligent enough or vigorous enough to resist it. "Only just happened " - that supreme folly of nineteenth-century philosophy, is as really a positive creed as the Mosaic cosmogony.

And surely a venerable faith of any sort is preferable to a new-fangled superstition which has no rational sanction and is devoid even of that kind of respectability which antiquity can sometimes impart. In our search after the origin of life reason guides us in a path which leads direct to God. Nor let any one here object that this is but a veiled appeal to revelation. Unless reason points to the existence of a God, the question of a revelation cannot even arise. And if any one should raise the difficulty which robbed

Professor Tyndall of his sleep in childhood, "Who made God?

" the solution is to be found, not in attempting to answer the question, but in exposing its absurdity. "Science" Lord Kelvin declares, "positively affirms creative power. And it is because science leads us back to an existence which never had a beginning that, for want of any other term by which to designate it, we call it God. But here we must turn back upon the ground already traversed. We have been dealing hitherto with evolution, not as an hypothesis to account for the origin of species, but merely as a pretended explanation of the origin of life; and we have found that, thus regarded, it is but a blind lane which leads nowhere.

The inquiry suggests itself, therefore, whether the conception of God be a true one which we have thus reached by escape from a wrong path. The question whether there be a God is no longer open. What concerns us now is merely to decide what kind of God we shall acknowledge. Shall we be content with the mystic Pantheism which a false system of biology would offer us, or shall we adore an intelligent Ruler of the universe? The man who can give no account of his own existence is a fool; and he who denies a God can give no account of his existence.

In the old time men whispered their folly within their own hearts; nowadays they proclaim it on the housetops, or, to translate the Oriental figure into its Western correlative, they publish it in printed books. But philosophy is not folly, and folly has no right to call itself wisdom. There is a God - that is certain: what then can reason tell us of Him? As heathen poets wrote two thousand years ago, "We are also His offspring." It behoves us, therefore, to ascribe to Him the highest qualities which His creatures are endowed with.

To admit, under pressure of facts which we can neither deny nor ignore, the conception of a God, and then to minimise that conception so that it becomes inadequate to account for the facts - this is neither reason nor philosophy, but crass folly. Since reason shuts us up to belief in God, let us have the courage of free thought, and instead of taking refuge in a vague theism, let us acknowledge a real God - not the great primordial germ," but the Creator of the heavens and the earth.

Regarded as a theory to account for life, evolution is the wildest folly; but as an thesis to account for the varied forms of life, it claims a hearing on its merits. And viewed in this light, no one need denounce it as necessarily irreligious. As the apostle of evolution with fairness urges, he who thus denounces it "is bound to show why it is more irreligious to explain the origin of man as a distinct species by descent from some lower form, through the laws of variation and natural selection, than to explain the birth of the individual through laws of ordinary reproduction.

The birth both of the species and of the individual are equal parts of that grand sequence of events which our minds refuse to accept as the result of blind chance . The understanding revolts at such a conclusion." Darwin might, indeed, have stated the matter much more strongly. To call into existence a lowly organised form of life, endowed with latent capacities so wonderful and so exquisitely adjusted that only when a certain stage of development is reached, the moral qualities spring into exercise, immortality is attained, and there arises in the mind "the idea of a universal and beneficent Creator of the universe" - this is a far more amazing act of creative power than the Mosaic account of the genesis of man supposes.

But, on the other hand, this very admission suggests a question the importance of which none but the superficial and the ignorant will doubt, Is not the Mosaic account, for that very reason, the more philosophical hypothesis? It is obvious that if we acknowledge " a beneficent Creator of the universe," the

existence of man is explained by the necessary admission that he is a creature; and no theory of development from a lower form of life would be tenable for a moment, were it not for reasons which lie hidden, and do not appear upon the surface.

Of that very character, however, are the grounds upon which the hypothesis of evolution rests. These may be summarised in a single sentence, as "the close similarity between man and the lower animals in embryonic development, as well as in innumerable points of structure and constitution, both of high and of the most trifling importance - the rudiments which he retains, and the abnormal reversions to which he is occasionally liable." But these facts, indisputable and striking though they be, may one and all be accounted for by an hypothesis of an exactly opposite character. Instead of assuming that the protoplasmic organism was of the humblest form but endowed with capacities of development, why should we not suppose that man himself was the primordial creature and that he came from the creator's hand stamped with the characteristics "in innumerable points of structure and constitution," to warn him that he was made liable to a law degeneration and decay and that the neglect or perversion of his noble powers would degrade him indefinitely in the scale of life?

It is certain that this hypothesis is more in accordance with the traditional beliefs of the heathen world than that of evolution, and it would be easy to maintain that it is more philosophical.' We shall gain nothing by misrepresenting facts, and no fair person will pretend that experience warrants the hypothesis that any race of men, that any individual even, ever advanced in the scale of life save under the constant pressure of favouring circumstances. But while culture alone will, so far as our experience teaches us, account for an advance, the tendency to degenerate seems universal.

"In the Australian bush," for example, "and in the backwoods of America, the Anglo-Saxon race, in which civilisation has developed the higher feelings to a considerable degree, rapidly lapses into comparative barbarism, adopting the moral code, and sometimes the habits, of savages." And evolution, while, in theory at least, accounting for the physical facts it appeals to, makes no reasonable attempt to explain the moral phenomena which claim our attention, though these are far more significant and important.

We know what it is to meet with people over whose origin or career some mystery evidently hangs. A bar sinister has crossed their pedigree, or their life is darkened by some strange secret. And is there not something akin to this in the history of our race? Can any intelligent observer look back upon the history of the world, or honestly face the dismal facts of life around us - "the turbid ebb and flow of human misery" - and fail to find traces of some mysterious disaster in primeval times, which still disturbs the moral sphere?

According to the evolutionist, man is but an upstart, a biological parvenu, ever in danger of betraying his humble origin, and occasionally showing a tendency to revert to his former state. But surely it is only a base materialism which would assign to the phenomena on which this theory rests the same importance as that which we ascribe to the mysteries of man's inner being. The presence in embryo of organs properly belonging to a brute, or such "reversions" as "the occasional appearance of canine teeth" - what are these in comparison with the fact that life from the cradle to the grave is marked by baffled aspirations after an unattainable ideal, and unsatisfied cravings for the infinite?

Are we to believe that these cravings and aspirations are derived from the "hairy quadruped with a tail and pointed ears"? "As soon as man grew distinct from the animal he became religious." A sense of humour would have saved Renan from offering a suggestion so grotesque as this. We might admit for the sake of argument that the descendant of an ape might become philosophical and mathematical and

musical; but how and why should he become religious? "To call the spiritual nature of man a 'by-product' is a jest too big for this little world."

"Man, the evolutionist declares, "still bears in his bodily frame the indelible stamp of his lowly origin." His inner being, we may with greater truth reply, gives unmistakable proof that his origin was a high and noble one. Evolution, remember, is not fact, but only theory. The facts are the pearls; evolution is but the string on which we are asked to hang them. And we shall seek in vain for a single shred of direct evidence in support of it. It is significant that naturalists who suppose new species to be originated by evolution "habitually suppose the origination to occur in some region remote from human observation."

These results are supposed to have been produced during "those immeasurable epochs," "untold millions of years" before "beings endowed with capacity for wide thought" existed on the earth." To which the sceptic will make answer: First, that there is no proof that this earth has so long existed in a habitable state; it is a mere inference based upon a certain geological theory which is wholly unproved and by no means universally accepted. And, secondly, that as neither the course of nature within known periods, nor the skill of man, has ever produced a species, we may be merely stultifying our minds by dismissing the difficulty to a mythical past about which we may conjecture and romance, but concerning which we know absolutely nothing.

But let us for a moment assume these "untold millions of years," these "immeasurable epochs" of an "abysmal past," during which the evolutionary process has been developing. Further, let us concede that the supposed process is so slow that no appreciable change may be looked for within the period of historic time. In fact, let us, for the sake of argument, admit everything assumed by the evolutionist, excepting only the hypothesis of evolution itself, and we can at once subject that hypothesis to a practical test of the simplest kind, which will either establish its truth or demonstrate its falseness.

Suppose our world were visited by a being of intelligence, able to converse with men, but wholly ignorant of an existence like ours, marked by development and decay. Brought face to face with puling infancy, vigorous manhood, and the senile decrepitude of extreme old age, such a being might express incredulous wonder on hearing that these were successive stages in human life. And he might answer fairly and with shrewdness, "If such a statement be true, then there must be individuals in the world of every possible age, from a minute to a hundred years, and manifesting every imaginable degree of growth and decline."

To which the unequivocal reply we should of course be able to offer would put an end to his scepticism. But suppose we were to make some such answer as this: "True it is that never a moment passes but that some new life enters the world, and some blighted or withered life disappears from it; the processes of generation and growth and decay are all unceasing and constant; but yet we cannot satisfy the test you put to us. We can show you large children and small adults, smooth-faced boys and full-bearded men, types of failing manhood and of hale old age, but there are 'missing links' which we cannot supply.

Of some of these we have 'archeological evidence,' there are fossil specimens in our museums; and the learned tell us that others no doubt exist and will yet be found; but of living specimens there are none, though all the resources of nature and of science have been appealed to in the effort to produce them." With such an answer our ephemeral visitor might well return to his celestial home perplexed with grave misgivings respecting our honesty or our intelligence. And so here.

The cases are entirely parallel.' If the processes of evolution have been in operation during infinite eons of time and be still at work, "missing links" are out of the question. The naturalist will, of course, be able to point to types of every imaginable stage; of development, from the simplest and humblest to the most exquisitely complex and perfect. But the naturalist can do no such thing. There are almost innumerable gaps in the chain which could only be accounted for by the supposition that evolution has again and again been interrupted during intervals so prolonged, that in comparison with them the entire period of historic time is but as a tick of the clock.

Therefore it is that at every step the naturalist has to appeal to the Paleontologist. As Huxley will tell us, "The only perfectly safe foundation for the doctrine of evolution lies in the historical, or rather archeological evidence, that particular organisms have arisen by the gradual modification of their predecessors, which is furnished by fossil remains." The evolutionist professes to account for the origin of species, but, finding as he proceeds that, under his hypothesis, the problem remains inexplicable, he strives to conceal its real character.

Whence the distinctions which he thus classifies? How can he account for species itself? He struggles to escape from the difficulty by representing all such distinctions as being purely arbitrary. But such a piece of "special pleading" only betrays the weakness of his position. The lines which separate one species from another are clearly marked, as is evidenced by the undoubted fact that the effects of both culture and neglect are strictly limited by them. The reality of the difficulty, moreover, the evolutionist himself acknowledges by the recognition of missing links, and by his appeal to the fossils to supply them.

The necessity for the admission and the appeal are a conclusive proof that his hypothesis is untenable. Let us then keep clearly in view, first, that evolution is merely a philosophic theory, second, that it is unproved, third, that it is inadequate and fourth, that (as will appear more plainly in the sequel) it is unnecessary except of course with those scientists who cling to any plank that will save them from having to acknowledge God. And, it may be added, there is a fashion in science as well as in dress, and the fashion changes almost as rapidly in the one sphere as in the other.

And so, as Karl von Hartmann wrote: "In the sixties of the past century the opposition of the older group of savants to the Darwinian hypothesis was still supreme. In the seventies the new idea began to gain ground rapidly in all cultured countries. In the eighties Darwin's influence was at its height, and exercised an almost absolute control over technical research. In the nineties, for the first time, a few timid expressions of doubt and opposition were heard; and these gradually swelled into a great chorus of voices, aiming at the overthrow of the Darwinian theory. In the first decade of the twentieth century it has become apparent that the days of Darwinism are numbered." (Taken from a translation given in *The Pall Mall Magazine* for September, 1904.)

As a commentary upon it I may add the following extract from an article entitled "The Riddle of Evolution," which appeared in *The Times Literary Supplement* of June 9, 1905: "No one possessed of a sense of humour can contemplate without amusement the battle of evolution, encrimsoned (dialectically speaking) with the gore of innumerable combatants, encumbered with the corpses of the (dialectically) slain, and resounding with the cries of the living, [as they hustle together in the fray. [Here follows a lengthy list of the various schools and sects of Evolutionists.] Never was seen such a mêlée. The humour of it is that they all claim to represent 'Science,' the serene, the majestic, the absolutely sure, the undivided and immutable, the one and only vicegerent of Truth, her other self. Not theirs the weakness of the theologians or the metaphysicians, who stumble about in uncertainty, obscurity, and ignorance, with their baseless

assumptions, flimsy hypotheses, logical fallacies, interminable dissensions, and all the other marks of inferiority on which the votaries of Science pour ceaseless scorn. Yet it would puzzle them to point to a theological battlefield exhibiting more uncertainty, obscurity, dissension, assumption, and fallacy than their own. For the plain truth is that, though some agree in this or that, there is not a single point in which all agree; battling for evolution they have torn it to pieces; nothing is left, nothing at all on their own showing, save a few fragments strewn about the arena. . .

CHAPTER III

HERBERT SPENCER'S SCHEME

THE hypothesis of degeneration has been here suggested as a rival to that of evolution. It equally accounts for the facts, and is less beset with difficulties. Are we then to accept it? By no means. Both alike are mere theories, wholly unsupported by direct evidence; and therefore the sceptic will reject both, unless they be alternatives, and he is thus compelled to make choice between them. But they are not alternatives. The facts submitted to our notice by the naturalist would be still more fully accounted for by the assumption that every kind of creature sprang from the same Creator's hand.

And this is, in fact, the only alternative which the evolutionist admits. "We have to choose between two hypotheses," he tells us - "the hypothesis of special creations, and the hypothesis of evolution." The necessity for this admission, be it observed, is by implication a conclusive proof that evolution is unproved. Let us, then, consider the suggested alternative. Herbert Spencer will tell us that, "however regarded, the hypothesis of special creations turns out to be worthless - worthless by its derivation ; worthless in its intrinsic incoherence; worthless as absolutely without evidence; worthless as not supplying an intellectual need; worthless as not satisfying a moral want.

We must, therefore," he concludes, "consider it as counting for nothing in opposition to any other hypothesis respecting the origin of organic beings." Upon the legal mind the effect of this sort of onslaught is merely to excite suspicion that some weak point in the case requires to be concealed. Such dogmatism of assertion must only serve to encourage us in our investigation of the argument. First, then, we are told that the notion of a creation is a primitive one, and "early ideas are not usually true ideas."

But this is a very transparent device; for unless we assume that evolution is true, which is precisely what has to be proved, the statement is of no force whatever. Herbert Spencer proceeds to urge that a belief in creation is discredited by "association with a special class of mistaken beliefs." Now this, of course, is a reference to the Mosaic account of the creation, and it is sufficiently answered by the fact that that account is accepted by many men of competent attainments and of the highest intellectual capacity.

Again, we are told that not only is this hypothesis " not countenanced by a single fact," but further, that it "cannot be framed into a coherent thought," and is "merely a formula for our ignorance." "No one ever saw a special creation." True; but a similar objection may be made to the hypothesis of evolution; and it has, in fact, been urged in these pages in the very words here used by Herbert Spencer. It is admitted that no new species has ever been evolved within human experience, and the supposed origination is referred to "an abysmal past," which may, for aught we know, be purely fabulous.

The objection, if of force at all, is equally valid against both hypotheses. For let us keep clearly in view what our author studiously conceals, that at this point the real question is not the origin of species, but the origin of life. Until he can give us some reasonable account of the existence of life, we shall continue to

believe in "a beneficent Creator of the universe"; and though Herbert Spencer will deplore our "ignorance" and despise our "pseud-ideas," we shall console ourselves by the companionship of a long line of illustrious men, whose names perchance will be increasingly venerated in the world of philosophy and letters when some new generation of scientists shall have arisen to regard with patronising pity the popular theories of to-day.

"No one ever saw a special creation," and the hypothesis "cannot be framed into a coherent thought." This implies, first, an admission that if we were permitted to see a special creation we could frame the coherent thought; and, secondly, an assertion that our ability to frame ideas is limited by our experience. The admission is fatal, and the assertion is obviously false. Herbert Spencer's remaining objections to special creations are an enumeration of certain theological difficulties, in which those who espouse the hypothesis are supposed to entangle themselves.

These might be dismissed with the remark that a mere ad hominem argument is of no importance here. If valid, it could only serve to discredit theology, without strengthening the author's position. But let us examine it. The objections are briefly these. Theology is supposed to teach that special creations were designed to demonstrate to mankind the power of the Creator: "would it not have been still better demonstrated by the separate creation of each individual?" It is quite unnecessary to discuss this, for there is not a suggestion in the Bible from cover to cover that creation had any such purpose.

What evolution assumes the Bible asserts, namely, that man did not appear in the world until after every other form was already in existence. But the next and final difficulty appears at first sight to be more serious. "Omitting the human race, for whose defects and miseries the current theology professes to account, and limiting ourselves to the lower creation, what must we think of the countless different pain inflicting appliances and instincts with which animals are endowed?"

"Whoever contends that each kind of animal was specially designed, must assert either that there was a deliberate intention on the part of the Creator to produce these results, or that there was an inability to prevent them." This difficulty, moreover, is greatly intensified by the fact that "of the animal kingdom as a whole, more than half the species are parasites, and thus we are brought to the contemplation of innumerable cases in which the suffering inflicted brings no compensating benefit."

Now, in the first place, these objections are applicable as really, though, possibly, not to the same extent, to the hypothesis of creation in general. And that hypothesis is no longer in question; for, as we have seen, "scientific thought is compelled to accept the idea of creative power." And, in the second place, we must remember that these difficulties are purely theological. They have no force save against those of us who believe the Bible. Such people, according to the argument, must abandon either the Biblical account of creation or the Biblical representation of God.

They must assert either that the Creator intended to produce the results here under observation, or that there was an inability to prevent them. In other words, God is deficient either in goodness or in power. This introduces a question which hitherto has been avoided in these pages. Nor shall it here receive more than the briefest notice; for even a conventional acquaintance with the Biblical scheme will enable us to find the solution of Herbert Spencer's difficulties. The validity of his dilemma depends upon ignoring one of the fundamental dogmas of theology.

The teaching of the Bible is unmistakable, that Adam in his fall dragged down with him the entire creation of which he was the federal head; that the suffering under which the creature groans is not the result of

design, but of a tremendous catastrophe which has brought ruin and misery in its train; that not only is the Creator not wanting in power to restore creation to its pristine perfectness, but that He has pledged Himself to accomplish this very result, and that the restoration will be so complete that even the destructive propensities of the brute will cease.

Such is the teaching of the Bible, unfolded not merely in the poetry of the Hebrew prophets, but in the dogmatic prose of the Apostle of the Gentiles. The question here is not whether it be reasonable, whether it be true. All that concerns us is the fact that it forms an essential part of the Biblical scheme, and thus affords a complete refutation of an ad hominem argument which depends for its validity upon misrepresenting or ignoring it. Herbert Spencer's indictment against belief in special creations thus begins and ends by disingenuous attempts to prejudice the issue.

And in asserting that the hypothesis is incapable of being "framed into a coherent thought," he urges an objection which from its very nature admits of no other answer than that which has been already given to it. If we call for a poll upon the question, we shall find on one side a crowd of illustrious men of unquestionable fame, and of the very highest rank as philosophers and thinkers; and on the other, Herbert Spencer and a few more besides, all of whom must await the verdict of posterity before they can be permanently assigned the place which some of their contemporaries claim for them.

An assertion which thus brands the entire bead-roll of philosophers, from Bacon to Charles Darwin, as the dupes of a "pseud-idea," a "formula for ignorance," is worthless save as affording matter for a psychological study of a most interesting kind. The alleged absence of evidence of a special creation has been already met by pointing out that the objection equally applies to the hypothesis of evolution. But perhaps it deserves a fuller notice. "No one ever saw a special creation," we are told.

The author might have added that if the entire Royal Society in council were permitted to "see a special creation," the sceptic would reject their testimony unless there were indirect evidence to confirm it. He would maintain that in the sphere of the miraculous, direct evidence, unless thus confirmed, is of no value at second hand. His language would be, "Produce for our inspection the organism alleged to have been created, and satisfy us, first, that it had no existence prior to the moment assigned for its creation, and, secondly, that it could not have originated in some way known to our experience, and then, indeed, we shall give up our scepticism and accept the testimony offered us."

But Herbert Spencer goes on to aver that "no one ever found proof of an indirect kind that no special creation had taken place." This is a choice example of the nisi prius artifice at which our author is such an adept. The existence of a world teeming with life has been accepted by the greatest and wisest men of every age as a conclusive proof that a special creation has taken place. But this is boldly met by sheer weight of unsupported denial. If we approach the subject, not as special pleaders or partisans, but in a philosophic spirit, we shall state the argument thus :-The admitted facts give proof that species originated either by special creations or by evolution.

If either hypothesis can be established by independent evidence, the other is thereby discredited. But, in the one case as in the other, positive proof is wholly wanting. We must, therefore, rely upon general considerations. On the evolution theory, proof is confessedly wanting that the alleged cause is adequate to account for the admitted facts.' Not so on the creation hypothesis, for as we admit that life originated by creation, there can be no difficulty in assigning a similar origin to species.

In a word, as we side with Darwin in believing in "a beneficent Creator of the universe," the evolution hypothesis is unnecessary and therefore unphilosophical. But further, the concealed consequences of the argument under review must not be overlooked. If it be valid for any purpose at all, it disproves not only the fact of a creation, but the existence of a Creator. "No one ever saw a special creation": neither did any one ever see the Deity. If, as alleged, we have no evidence of His handiwork, neither have we proof of His existence.

At a single plunge we have thus reached the level of blank atheism, which is the extreme depth of moral and intellectual degradation. "The birth both of the species and the individual " must equally be ascribed to "blind chance," " coercion" being appealed to, I suppose, to quell the inevitable " revolt of the understanding." And the strange religious propensities common to the race, whether civilised or savage, must also be suppressed; or, at all events, our Penates must be strictly limited to an effigy of our hairy quadrumanous ancestor with pointed ears, supplemented possibly by some "symbolic conception" of the primordial life-germ. wrapped in cloud, and a copy of Herbert Spencer's System of Philosophy to guide and regulate the cult.

CHAPTER FOUR

HAVE WE A REVELATION?

SCEPTICISM is "not a permanent resting-place for human reason." The knowledge that there is bad money in circulation does not make us fling our purse into the gutter, or refuse to replenish it when empty. The sceptic tries a coin before accepting it, but when once he puts it in his pocket, his appreciation of it is, for that very reason, all the more intelligent and full. A convinced doubter makes the best believer. As Lord Kelvin declares, "Scientific thought is compelled to accept the idea of creative power."

With an open mind, therefore, and unwavering confidence the true sceptic acknowledges "the beneficent Creator of the universe." And in no grudging spirit, but honestly and fully, he will own the obligations and relationships which this involves. Religion is implied in the acknowledgment of God. And further, this acknowledgment removes every a priori objection to the idea of a revelation. It creates indeed a positive presumption in its favour. For if we are the offspring of a "beneficent Creator," it is improbable that, in a world so darkened by sorrow and doubt, He would leave us without guidance, and without light as to our destiny.

At all events, our belief in God makes it incumbent on us to examine any alleged revelation which is presented to us with reasonable credentials. If some one brings me what purports to be a message or letter from my brother, I may dispose of the matter by answering, " I have no brother"; but if I possess an unknown lost brother, I cannot refuse to receive the communication and to test its claims on my attention. But here we must keep our heads. There is no sphere in which the functions of the constable are more needed.

The existence of a lost brother is no reason for sheltering impostors. Our belief in God is no reason for abandoning ourselves to superstition, or submitting to be duped by foolish or designing men. Yet another caution is needed here. We have now reached ground where the judgment of men of science is of no special value whatever. So long as it is a question of investigating and describing the facts and phenomena of nature, we sit at their feet with unfeigned admiration of their genius and industry; but when it becomes a question of adjudicating upon the evidence with which they furnish us, they must give way to those whose training and habits of mind make them better fitted for the task.

We place the very highest value upon their testimony as experts in all matters within their own province, but we cannot consent to their passing from the witness-box to the judicial bench ; least of all can we consent to their occupying such a position where the subject-matter is one of which they have no special cognizance.' In such a case a dozen city merchants, with a trained lawyer to guide their deliberations, would make a better tribunal than the Royal Society could supply.

The extreme point to which reason leads us is the recognition of an unknown God. What now concerns us is the inquiry whether He has revealed Himself to men. Have we a revelation? A discussion of this question on a priori lines would have many advantages. But, on the whole, the practical view of it is the best. And it would be mere pedantry to ignore the peculiar claims which Christianity has upon our notice. In fact, the question narrows itself at once to this plain issue, Is Christianity a Divine revelation?

If this question be answered in the negative, it is really useless to discuss the merits of Islam; and as for Buddha, his popularity in certain quarters in England as a rival to Christ is proof only of the depth of Saxon silliness. There is a sense, of course, in which all enthusiasm is inspiration, but for our present purpose this is a mere fencing with words. The question is perfectly definite and clear to every one who wishes to understand it, Is Christianity a revelation from God?

Let us examine the witnesses. If we ask in what form this alleged revelation comes to us, all Christians are agreed in placing in our hands a Book; in a word, they point us to the Bible. But here, at the very threshold, their unanimity ceases. While some would insist that this is the only revelation, the majority of Christendom would point us also to a certain class of men so supernaturally gifted and accredited that they are themselves a revelation. This system, which is popularly associated with Rome, deserves priority of consideration because of the prestige it enjoys by reason of the antiquity of its origin, and the influence and number of its disciples.

Moreover, if its claims be accepted, the truth of Christianity is established; and if on examination they be rejected, the ground is cleared for the consideration of the main question on its merits. The founders of Christianity, we are told, in addition to their ability to work miracles such as the senses could take notice of, possessed also supernatural powers of a mystic kind. By certain mystic rites, for instance, they were able to work such a transformation in common bread and ordinary wine, that, although no available test could detect the change, the bread really became flesh, and the wine blood.

Further still, we are assured that these powers have been transmitted from generation to generation, and are now possessed by the successors of the men who first received them direct from Heaven. And more than this, we are asked to believe that these miracles are actually performed in our own day, not in isolated and remote places far removed from observation, but in our midst and everywhere; and that, too, in the most public and open manner. If this be true, it is obvious that not only the miracles which are thus wrought in our presence, but the very men themselves who cause them, are a Divine revelation.

We are no longer left to reach out toward the Supreme Being by the light of reason; we are thus brought face to face with God. Indifference is impossible in the presence of such demands on our faith. If these men in fact possess such powers, it is difficult to set a limit to the respect and veneration due to them. But if their pretensions be false, it is monstrous that they should be permitted to trade upon the credulity of mankind. Suppose we admit for the sake of argument that the apostles possessed these powers, the question remains, Are these same powers in fact possessed by the men who now claim to exercise them ?

It is not easy to decide what amount of evidence ought to be deemed sufficient in such a case. But is there any evidence at all? These powers are not supposed to be conferred immediately from Heaven, but mediately through other men, who in turn had received them from their predecessors, and so on in an unbroken line extending back to the days of the Apostles. No man who is satisfied with the evidence upon which evolution rests can fairly dispute the proofs of an apostolic succession.

Let us, therefore, go so far in our admissions as even to accept this also; and that, too, without stopping to investigate the lives of those through whom the "succession" flowed. Some of them were famous for their piety, others were infamous for their crimes. But passing all this by, let us get face to face with the living men who make these amazing demands upon our faith. Some of these men were our playmates in childhood, and our class-fellows and companions in school and college days.

We recall their friendly rivalry in our studies and our sports, and their share in many a debauch that now we no longer speak of when we meet. Some of them are the firm and valued friends of our manhood. We respect them for their learning, and still more for their piety and their self-denying efforts for the good of their fellow-men. Others, again, have fallen from our acquaintance. Although, *ex hypothesi*, equally endowed with supernatural gifts which should make us value their presence at our deathbed, they are exceptionally addicted to natural vices which lead us to shun them in our lifetime.

And this disposes of one ground on which possibly a *prima facie* case might be set up. If all those who are supposed to possess these extraordinary powers were distinguished from their fellow-men by high and noble qualities, their pretensions would at least deserve our respect. But we fail to find any special marks of character or conduct, which even the most partial judge could point to for such a purpose. On what other ground, then, can these claims be maintained? It is idle to beat about the bush.

The fact is clear as light that there is not a shadow of evidence of any description whatsoever to support them. This being so, we must at once recall one of the admissions already made, lest these men should take refuge in an appeal to the New Testament as establishing their position. The enlightened Christianity of the Reformation emphatically denies that even the Apostles themselves possessed such powers, or that the Bible gives any countenance whatever to the assumption of them.

In a word, Christians who are the very elite of Christendom maintain that such pretensions have no Scriptural foundation whatever. If Christianity be true, we need not hesitate to believe that certain men are divinely called and qualified as religious teachers. But this position is separated by an impassable gulf from the mystic pretensions of priestcraft. In truth, sacerdotalism presents extraordinary problems for the consideration of the thoughtful. If it prevailed only among the ignorant and degraded, it would deserve no attention.

But the fact is beyond question that its champions and votaries include men of the highest intellectual eminence and moral worth. The integrity of such men is irreproachable. They are not accomplices in a wilful fraud upon their fellows; they are true and honest in their convictions. How, then, are we to account for the fact that many who hold such high rank as scholars and thinkers are thus the dupes of such a delusion? How is it to be explained that here in England, while we boast of increasing enlightenment, this delusion is regaining its hold upon the religious life of the nation?

The national Church, which half a century ago was comparatively free from the evil, is now hopelessly leavened with it. The more this matter is studied the more inexplicable it seems, unless we are prepared to believe in the existence of spiritual influences of a sinister kind, by which in the religious sphere the minds

even of men of intellect and culture are liable to be warped and blinded.'

Footnote To discuss the legality of such views and practices in the Church of England would be foreign to my argument, and outside the scope of my book; and moreover, having regard to Articles XXVIII. and XXXI., I cannot see that the question is open. Here is one clause of Article XXVIII. "Transubstantiation (or the change of the substance of Bread and Wine) in the Supper of the Lord cannot be proved by holy Writ; but is repugnant to the plain words of Scripture, overthroweth the nature of a Sacrament, and hath given occasion to many superstitions." It may be interesting to notice here that this vetoes the superstitious meaning which almost universally attaches to the word "sacrament." It is the equivalent of the Greek word, which is used by the LXX in Daniel ii. 18, 19, 27, 28, 29, 30, 47, and iv. 9, and is always rendered secret in our English version. This moreover is its ordinary meaning in the New Testament. But the word was even then acquiring the meaning usually given to it in the Greek Fathers, viz., a symbol or secret sign. See, e.g., Rev. 1: 20, and xvii. 5, 7. And this is the significance of the English word "sacrament." It connotes something which represents something else; and so we find that in old writers Noah's rainbow, the brazen serpent, &c., are called "sacraments." And in this sense it is that the bread and wine in the "Eucharist" are a "sacrament" ; they represent the body and blood of Christ. Therefore to hold that they are in fact His body and blood is to "overthrow the nature of a sacrament."

Our practice of kissing the book in taking a judicial oath is in this sense a "sacrament." And there can be no doubt that it was owing to some symbolic act of this kind that the Latin word sacramentum came to mean a soldier's oath.

CHAPTER FIVE

IS CHRISTIANITY DIVINE?

Is Christianity a Divine revelation? This question must not be settled by the result of the preliminary inquiry here proposed. In rejecting sacerdotalism, we merely clear the ground for a discussion of the main question upon its merits. "The Reformation," says Mr. Goldwin Smith, "was a tremendous earthquake " which "shook down the fabric of medieval religion." " But," he goes on to say, "it left the authority of the Bible unshaken, and men might feel that the destructive process had its limit, and that adamant was still beneath their feet."

To the Bible, then, we turn. But how is such an inquiry to be conducted? The unfairness of entrusting the defence of Christianity to any who are themselves the rejecters of Christianity will be palpable to every one. Here the right of audience is only to the Christian. But, in making this concession, the sceptic may fairly insist in maintaining the place of critic, if not of censor. Until convinced, he will continue to consider, reflect, hesitate, doubt. And it is a suspicious circumstance that so many who claim to be leaders of religious thought, and who are professional exponents of the Christian faith, seem eager not only to eliminate from Christianity everything that is distinctive, but also to divorce it from much with which, in its origin, it was inseparably associated.

They are strangely anxious to separate it from the Judaism which it succeeded, and upon which it is so indisputably founded. As a corollary upon this, they struggle to separate the New Testament from the Old, treating the Hebrew Scriptures, and especially the Pentateuch, as persons who have risen in the world are prone to treat the quondam acquaintances of humbler days. As a further step, they betray unmistakable uneasiness when confronted with the miraculous in the Bible; and "the old evangelical doctrine" of inspiration they regard with undisguised dislike, if not contempt.

No well-informed person will dispute that this is a fair statement of the position assumed by a school of religious thought which is in its own sphere both influential and popular. But it needs no more than a conventional knowledge of the New Testament to enable us to assert that the Christianity of Christ and His apostles was not a new religion, but rather an unfolding and fulfilment of the Judaism which preceded it. The Christ of Christendom was a crucified Jew-crucified because He declared Himself to be the Jew's Messiah; and His claims upon our homage and our faith are inseparably connected with that Messiahship.

And what were the credentials of His Messiahship? To some extent the miracles which He wrought, but mainly the Hebrew Scriptures. And in His appeal to those Scriptures He implicitly asserted that they were in the strictest sense inspired. Ten times are those Scriptures quoted in the first four chapters of the New Testament as being the ipsissima verba of the Deity, and three of these quotations are from the Book of Deuteronomy, the very book which these theologians are most decided in rejecting.

The language of the " Sermon on the Mount" is, if possible, more emphatic still. To understand its full significance we must bear in mind what Josephus asserts, that by all Jews the Scriptures "were justly believed to be Divine, so that, rather than speak against them, they were ready to suffer torture or even death." It was to a people saturated with this belief that such words as the following were spoken: "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil.

For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled." "The 'jot' (we are told) is the Greek iota, the Hebrew yod, the smallest of all the letters of the alphabet. The 'tittle' was one of the smallest strokes or twists of other letters." What language, then, could possibly assert more plainly that, so far from coming to set up a new religion, as these Christian teachers would tell us, the Nazar

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