

some Princeton interested
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ATOMISM:

DR. TYNDALL'S
ATOMIC THEORY OF THE UNIVERSE
EXAMINED AND REFUTED.

TO WHICH ARE ADDED,

HUMANITARIANISM ACCEPTS, PROVISIONALLY, TYNDALL'S
IMPERSONAL ATOMIC DEITY;

AND

*A Letter to the Presbytery of Belfast; containing a note from the
Rev. Dr. Hodgk, and a Critique on Dr. Tyndall's recent
Manchester Recantation, together with strictures on the late
Manifesto of the Roman Catholic Hierarchy of Ireland in
reference to the sphere of Science.*

BY

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A L E T T E R

TO

THE PRESBYTERY OF BELFAST;

Containing a note from the Rev. Dr. Hodge, and a Critique on Dr. Tyndall's Manchester Recantation, together with strictures on the recent Manifesto of the Roman Catholic Hierarchy of Ireland in reference to the sphere of Science.

TO THE REV. THE MODERATOR OF THE PRESBYTERY OF BELFAST.

REV. AND DEAR SIR,—Permit me, through you, to tender to the reverend fathers and brethren of the Presbytery over which you have the honour to preside, my best thanks for the very kind notice they have officially taken of my replies to Professors Tyndall and Huxley. As the unwarrantableness of the charge of atheism preferred against these eminent scientists, both by the Presbytery and myself, has been challenged, it may not be uninteresting to know that our verdict has the fullest sanction of the ablest of living theologians. The following letter from the Rev. Dr. Hodge, of Princeton, author of the greatest work on systematic theology which has ever issued from the pen of man, renders any reply to such criticisms unnecessary.

“PRINCETON, Oct. 12, 1874.

“MY DEAR SIR,—I thank you for the copy of your examination of Professor Tyndall's atomic theory and of his opening address. When they arrived, I was engaged on a piece of writing which I was bound to finish without delay. I have therefore not had time to read them until now. The first paper I think admirable—I do not see how it could be better; and the second, considering the time you had at command, is all that could be expected. Both will do you great credit, and the cause of truth great good. Tyndall and Huxley have done nothing but openly avowing what it was plain they really held. The German scientists of the same school, who pride themselves in their atheism, do not hesitate to include their English co-labourers in the same category

with themselves. They ascribe their reticence to fear of the religious public in England. It seems they have at last got courage to speak out. A system which does violence to the intelligence and conscience of men cannot prevail where the Gospel is properly preached. The evil, however, for the time being is tremendous. The young men of this country are to a fearful degree hardened and perverted by the writings of such men as Spencer, Darwin, Huxley, and Tyndall, and our secular papers and magazines are either in the hands of sceptics or are playing into their hands. I rejoice that God has given you ability and the position to appear so effectively on the side of truth.—Very sincerely your friend, •

“CHARLES HODGE.

“Rev. Robert Watts, D.D.”

It would seem, if we are to judge from recent manifestations, that the motive referred to by Dr. Hodge has regained, to some extent, its normal force over one of the atomic chiefs. In a lecture on “Crystalline and Molecular Forces,” delivered lately in Manchester, Professor Tyndall has so far deferred to the religious feelings of the nation as to read what some have regarded as a *quasi* recantation. Referring, as he has already done in his *Fragments of Science*, to the architectural instincts of atoms, and rising from crystallisation to the manifestations of life in the sprouting leaves and flowers of spring, he remarked that he had often asked himself “whether there is no power, being, or thing in the universe whose knowledge of that of which I am so ignorant is greater than mine. I have asked myself, Can it be possible that man’s knowledge is the greatest knowledge—that man’s life is the highest life? *My friends, the profession of that Atheism with which I am sometimes so lightly charged would, in my case, be an impossible answer to this question—only slightly preferable to that fierce and distorted Theism which I have had lately reason to know still reigns rampant in some minds as the survival of a more ferocious age.”

* Here, Dr. Tyndall robed himself, once more, in the “disguise” so ingenuously “abandoned” before the British Association. See page 24.

Those who regard this deliverance as a recantation cannot be much accustomed to weigh the import of language. The question asked is both equivocal and inadequate. It is equivocal, inasmuch as it designates the unknown something after whose existence it inquires, by alternative terms, and these the vaguest furnished by the English language—the terms “power,” “being,” and “thing.” Whatever may be said of the former, it is manifest that knowledge cannot be ascribed to the latter without doing violence to language. Let Professor Tyndall substitute the word person for these vague terms, and the public will be put in a position to judge of the force of his questioning.

The inadequacy of the question, even were it rendered unequivocal in the way suggested, is obvious. He does not ask, “Can it be that there is no One to whose wisdom and power these things are to be ascribed?” but simply, “is there no one who knows more about them than Professor Tyndall?” So long as knowing is different from creating, search after one who knows, must be regarded as a different thing from search after one who has created. As the order of existence of which Professor Tyndall is in search belongs to the former category, he must excuse those who refuse to regard the raising of such an inquiry as proving that he is not amenable to the charge of Atheism.

Equally unsatisfactory is Dr. Tyndall’s answer to this vague question. He simply asks his audience to infer from the fact that he often put such questions to himself, that the imputation to him of Atheism was gratuitous and groundless. This inference, it would seem, his audience drew; but there is a wide difference between the applause of a popular assembly, such as that convened in the Free Trade Hall, Manchester, and a legitimate logical deduction. Neither the question put nor the profession of profound thought with which it was introduced, warranted the conclusion that Dr. Tyndall repudiates the Atheism wherewith he has been charged. The Atheism charged against him is simply this—that he denies the existence of an extramundane, antemundane, personal intelligence, the Creator and Governor of the universe; and the ground on which this charge is based is, that by ascribing to matter the attributes of mind, he leaves no room for any such outside intelligence, and by teaching, as he does, even in his Manchester

vindication, that the power, or being, or thing, about whose existence he often questions himself, is resident in nature, he strips this hypothetical deity of the essential attributes of personality. Our God is a personal intelligence, antecedent to matter and independent of it; whilst Dr. Tyndall's god is an impersonal something, resident in matter, and incapable of existing in a state of separation from it. Holding such views (and his *Fragments of Science*, his inaugural address, and his *Manchester vindication*, prove that he holds them), it was neither a manly nor a righteous procedure, to claim exculpation from the charge of Atheism on the ground that his bosom is sometimes stirred by that irrepressible "questioning impulse," whose catechism he has reduced to the one inquiry, "Can it be that there is no power, being, or thing, in nature that knows more about these things than he does himself?" Let Professor Tyndall candidly and explicitly say, that his god is a personal intelligence, independent of matter and the creator and governor of it, and his accusers will at once acquit him of the charge of Atheism. Until he does this, he must be regarded, for the reasons already stated, as lawfully and righteously arraigned.

Nor is it unworthy of notice, that the ground on which Prof. Tyndall asked the good people of Manchester to acquit him of the charge preferred against him by the people of Belfast, was not the ground on which the people of Belfast based their charge. He did not tell his audience in the Ulster Hall what he told his audience in Manchester, about the profound thoughts by which he is sometimes moved in presence of the marvellous phenomena of matter. On the contrary, he told us that by prolonging his vision backward he could "discern in matter the promise and potency of all forms of life," and held out to us the enchanting prospect of an ultimate retrogressive absorption "into the infinite azure of the past." With these avowals before us, we thought we were warranted in regarding the man who made them, an Atheist.

The principle on which this appeal from Ulster to Lancashire is based, is, therefore, unfair. It is simply this—that a man's opinions are not to be judged of from his present avowal of them, backed by all previous avowals, but by an avowal, in equivocal terms, to be made in another place and at another time, of which his present judges have no intimation. Or, to put the case in the

concrete, the people of Belfast who heard Professor Tyndall lecture in the Ulster Hall on the 19th of August, are to be condemned for not basing their estimate of his lecture upon certain apologetic remarks, made in the course of another lecture delivered by him in the Free Trade Hall, Manchester, on the 28th of October, following. This remark has reference simply to the principle of this recent attempt at vindication, and is not to be understood as implying that the knowledge of the exercises of Professor Tyndall's mind, detailed in the preface of his inaugural, and afterwards avowed in Manchester, would warrant any modification of the charge of Atheism of which he complains. As already stated, an impersonal something, which has no subsistence or being apart from matter, cannot be regarded as the author of this universe, or the lord of the human conscience; and those who applauded such utterances as amounting to a genuine repudiation of Atheism, must be very easily satisfied in the matter of evidence.

Whilst it is gratifying to witness the unity of Christian sentiment evoked by these recent Atheistic utterances, it is painful to observe the position taken by the Roman Catholic hierarchy of Ireland in their answer to Professors Tyndall and Huxley, regarding the sphere of science. As stated in the papers, their position is this—"It is the duty and right of physical science to observe the phenomena and laws of the material world; but the physicist, as such, will never ask himself by what influence, external to the universe, the universe is sustained, simply because he is a physicist. The question is *extra artem*. It is simply unscientific to speak of the theories of the universe as part of the domain of physical science, and so called in the constitution of the Catholic Church, which sets forth the entire conception of the just position of science in the words of truth."

This deliverance is in conflict both with Scripture and science, and leads, logically, to the secularisation of the physical sciences. It is in conflict with Scripture; for the Word of God condemns the heathen for not tracing the phenomena of the universe to God as their author; whilst this deliverance would terminate the inquiry within the domain of law. If the heavens, as the Word of God teaches, declare the glory of God, is the astronomer to be shut out from beholding that glory? If the earth showeth forth His

handiwork, is the geologist to be restrained from tracing the evidences of His workmanship? If these bodies of ours are so fearfully and wonderfully made, as the Psalmist informs us, is the physiologist to shut his eyes lest he might see in the organism, evidence of an organiser? If the Word of God enjoins it upon men as a duty to infer the invisible things of the Creator from the things that are made, have not the Roman Catholic hierarchy of Ireland taken up an attitude of antagonism to that Word, by prohibiting scientists, as such, from rising above the law to the infinitely wise, Almighty Lawgiver?

The position taken is as unscientific as it is unscriptural. Science cannot rest in mere law. The principle of causality forbids the human mind from taking up its abode in any such resting-place. If, as all admit, science seeks to ascertain the cause of phenomena, it must go beyond law, for a law is not a cause. The law of gravitation is not the cause of gravitation. The immediate or proximate cause, is to be found in the qualities of matter. As these qualities are essential to the stability, and orderly and beneficent arrangements of the universe, they point beyond themselves to an Author infinite in wisdom, omnipotent, and good. Can the investigator who enters upon the inquiry under the impelling power of the "questioning impulse," directed by the principle that every effect must have an adequate cause, be regarded as having finished his task as a scientist until he has traced these palpable products of mind to an adequate intelligence? The impulse and principle by which the scientist is carried beyond the veil of phenomena into the unseen realm of law, must, if not repressed by the icy hand of Atheism, urge him onward and upward, to the inevitable conclusion of a personal God; and, on the other hand, the principle that would restrain him within the domain of law must, if carried into full operation, doom him, absolutely and exclusively, to the sphere of the phenomenal, and place all his questionings under the ban of an utter repression.

It is scarcely necessary to add that the limitation of science prescribed in this manifesto of the bishops and archbishops of the Roman Catholic Church in Ireland, involves the severance of science from religion. If the physicist, as such, is going *extra artem*, stepping out of his sphere, when he raises the question,

who or what sustains these phenomena, and gives them their laws, it must be manifest that his class-room, for the time being, is godless, and that it is rendered such by no fault of his, but by the specified limits of his subject. There may be some minds acute enough to distinguish between this position and that taken up by Professors Tyndall and Huxley, but they must possess powers of discrimination beyond the most of men. Between the position of the men who deny that science reveals a personal intelligence, and that of the men who deny that science entitles the scientist to raise the question, 'Who or what sustains this universe?' the difference is too infinitesimal to justify further discussion.

Again thanking the fathers and brethren for their kind reference to my humble contribution to the defence of truth, I remain, Rev. and Dear Sir, yours truly,

ROBERT WATTS.

