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REPORT OF PROCEEDINGS

OF THE

SECOND GENERAL COUNCIL

OF THE

PRESBYTERIAN ALLIANCE,

CONVENED AT PHILADELPHIA, SEPTEMBER, 1880.

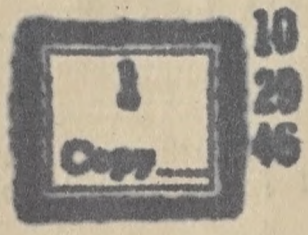
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of nature, and to make ready acknowledgment of the gain to the entire race involved in every fresh discovery concerning the laws of existence and action in the universe. It is the part of the Christian Church in these latter times to render grateful testimony to the exceeding worth of the wide circle of the sciences, because of the knowledge they involve, and the immense service they render in aiding us in the attainment of a fuller and deeper knowledge of the universe, in which moral and spiritual life is the grandest thing discovered.

The REV. PRESIDENT JAMES McCOSH, D. D., LL. D., of Princeton, N. J., read the following paper :

HOW TO DEAL WITH YOUNG MEN TRAINED IN SCIENCE IN THIS AGE OF UNSETTLED OPINION.

In respect of religious opinion, the rising generation of our day may be characterized as *unsettled*. The educated young men cannot be described as adhering very firmly to any fixed belief, and yet they profess to be willing to listen to the claims of religion. They cannot be designated sceptics; they resent it as a calumny when they are called atheists or materialists—though numbers, knowingly or unknowingly, are maintaining principles which, logically followed out, would land them in this issue. They are not satisfied with the past, with its opinions or its defences of them. They do not bow very profoundly before authority, and they have no preference for old creeds and confessions. They are bent on searching into the foundation of every belief, and for this purpose would dig deep down, and do not scruple to stir up all the rubbish and dust that may stand in their way. They will not accept, without sifting, even the truths supposed to be long ago established, such as the existence of God and the immortality of the soul, and the essential distinction between good and evil; and they insist on the arguments in their favor being reviewed, and, if they cannot stand the examination, they are to be rejected. It is therefore an age out of which good or evil, either or both, may come according as it is guided. We may cherish hope regarding it, for it is an inquiring age. We may entertain fears for it, for it is dancing on the edge of a precipice down which it may fall.

The difficulties, real or supposed, in the way of religious belief in our day come chiefly from natural science, in which the great body of our educated young men are instructed to a less or greater extent. Doubts derived from this source have been felt at this point from the very rise of science in modern times. The weak believer was staggered when Copernicus showed that the earth went round the sun, whereas the Scriptures speak of the sun rising and setting, as I may remark even our astronomers still do when they talk with other men, or even with themselves. This does not trouble any one now, as everybody sees that it may be quite as religious to believe that the

earth moves as that the sun moves, provided we make it move by the power of God. In my younger days, the conflict turned round the then rising science of geology. But we have only to take the word "day" as it is used in Genesis, chap. ii., v. 7 ("In the day that the Lord made the earth and the heavens"), and in nearly every book of Scripture, to find the progression in Genesis corresponding in a wonderful way to the progression of geology, and confirmatory of Scripture. In our day (mark that unconsciously I use the word "day" for an epoch) the conflict relates to the religious, or irreligious, bearing of the theory of evolution or development. I may dwell for a little on this point, as illustrating the mode in which I think we should deal with young men.

I. The phrases development and evolution have come to be used in a very vague and uncertain way. They are often so employed as simply to denote that one thing comes out of another. Thus I have lately seen the advertisement of a book entitled, "The Development of Literature," and another, "The Development of Canada." We read constantly of the development of the sciences, of the fine arts, of the mechanical arts, and of particular objects, as steam-engines, or pottery, or vases, or tea-cups. So it is necessary, when any one speaks of development, to insist on his explaining what he means. If we are denying evolution, let us specify what kind of evolution we deny. When we observe this rule ourselves, then we are entitled to require those who defend development to tell us what is the process they are recommending to us.

It is certain that there is such a process. He who refuses to allow the existence of development, must be prepared to deny that the oak comes from the acorn; that the boy can grow into the man; that he himself is descended from his father or mother; that the Jewish religion was evolved from the Patriarchal, and the Christian from the Jewish.

It should be noticed that development is in its very nature a complicated process. It is not a simple quality of bodies, like attraction and chemical affinity. It implies a combination and an interaction of bodies, with their varied properties, towards a particular end. In the evolution of the plant from the seed and the animal from the germ, there is a vast number of agencies—mechanical, chemical, electric, magnetic, I believe, also, vital—all conspiring to produce a special end: a plant or animal after its kind; and science, even at the present day, cannot specify all the elements and powers at work in producing the result. Evolution, in fact, is just a particular kind of causation—that is, it is a fixed, I believe an ordained, combination of causes to produce a special end—say a plant from the seed, or the seed from the plant.

Development in a general sense pervades all divine and all human workmanship; that is, one series of things comes out of an antecedent. The Presbyterian Council I am addressing was developed from a meeting in Edinburgh; that from a meeting in London; that from a

side-meeting held on the occasion of the meeting of the Evangelical Alliance in New York ; and that from the Tercentenary of John Knox in Philadelphia. I hope there is nothing irreligious in such an evolution.

But in science the phrase is technically applied to the descent of plants and animals from a parentage. Everybody acknowledges that ordinarily *omne vivum ab ovo*, and that the individual plant and animal come from parents after their kind. But the disputed question in the present day is, Does one species of plant or animal come out of another? Now of this question I remark that the religious man may leave it to the investigations of science. If he is himself a scientific man he may take his part in it, but he is not to identify the side he takes specially with religion. One principle we are bound resolutely to maintain : that because an object—say a rose or a lily or a dog—is gendered by natural causes, it is not therefore less the work of God. Naturalists maintain that dogs have descended from some kind of wolf. This does not make the dog, with its wonderful instincts—say the shepherd dog or the St. Bernard dog—not to be the workmanship of the Creator. Just as little does the hypothesis that our living horse is descended from the *Plihippos*, and this from the *Miohippos*, and this from the *Eohippos* prove that the animal we ride on, so useful and so graceful in its form and movements, is not the creature of Him who made the universe and all things on it, and imparted to them their powers of development. In all this, so far as I can see, there is nothing inconsistent with religion, nothing inconsistent with Scripture ; and zealots who deny this are not fighting the cause of God, though they may imagine that they are so.

Not only is development, when properly understood, not inconsistent with religion ; it will be found that the combination and adaptation implied in it clearly argue design. Sooner or later there will be a work on natural theology after the manner of Paley, showing that as there are plan and purpose in the well-fitted bones and joints of the bodily frame of animals—say the horse—so there is design quite as evident and wonderful in the way in which, by a process running through long ages, the bones and joints and muscles have been adjusted to each other to produce the horse we drive or ride on. There is a manifest and a wise and beneficent end in the joints of our frame, as, for instance, the ball-and-socket joint at the shoulder. But there is quite as palpable a purpose in the way in which these joints have been formed in the geological ages. Ordinary physical law, now acknowledged by all, connects all parts of nature with each other on to the bounds of the knowable universe ; development, as lately unfolded by biological science, shows how the present is the offspring of the past and the parent of the future, and thus connects all parts of time with each other, and makes the past and present a prognostic of the future.

There are some things which development can do ; there are others which it cannot do. The grand work of a philosophic science in our

time is to determine what it can and what it cannot do. Let us consider some of the things which evolution cannot do.

1. It cannot explain the origin of things. It is acknowledged that it cannot create anything. Evolution implies a substance to evolve from; an original matter, which, we may argue, implies a creator.

2. It cannot account for the order and beneficence by which its movement is characterized. I see a plan and a beauty in the oak developing the acorn, and the acorn developing the oak—all by an arrangement not in the matter of which the oak is formed. Mr. Spencer, I think, has been successful in showing that development, as it goes on from age to age, tends toward the increase of happiness. I see wisdom and I see benevolence in the means provided for making all this stretch over a long course of ages.

3. There is need of a combination and a wondrous adaptation of agents to produce these ends; as, for instance, to secure that these plants produce seed after their kind, and that these wild plants can become cultivated plants, and thus provide food for man from age to age. Evolution, I have shown, is not a simple power or property; it is a union of properties acting with each other and effecting a purpose. There is thus evidence of design; I do not say in development taken by itself, but in the way in which it marches on and spreads happiness in its progress.

4. It may be laid down that the powers acting in development cannot give what they have not got. If heredity has a gift, it may transmit it from parent to offspring and from one generation to another, but it cannot furnish the original gift. The common theory is that the universe is composed of atoms which, by their combination, form molecules, which, as they unite, form masses. Another theory is that the universe is made up of centres of force. Take either of these theories and let us inquire whether they can account for all we see existing in the universe. Is there any evidence whatever that these atoms or force-centres had sensation, or sense-perception, or memory, or intelligence, or emotion, or moral qualities, or will; that they could feel and distinguish between right and wrong? If not, how then did these things come in? How did things without sensation come to have sensation? things without instinct to have instinct? creatures without memory to have memory? beings without intelligence to have intelligence? and mere sentient existence to come to know the difference between good and evil? I am sure that when these powers appear there is something not previously in the molecule. All sober thinkers of the present day admit that there is no evidence whatever in experience or in reason to show that matter can produce mind, that mechanical action can gender mental action, that chemical action can manufacture consciousness, that electric action can rise to reason, or organic action come to entertain the idea of the good and the holy. I argue that we must call in a power above the atoms to produce these phenomena. I may admit that a body may come out of other bodies by the operation of the powers with which they are endowed; but I

deny that a sensible, intelligent, moral-discerning soul can proceed from the molecules of matter. New potencies have undoubtedly come when consciousness and feeling and understanding and will begin to act. They may come in according to laws not yet discovered, but they are the laws of the supreme Lawgiver.

The account of the progressive work of creation in Genesis is in accordance with geology. This has been shown satisfactorily by the three men on this continent best entitled to speak on the scientific question—Prof. Dana, of Yale, Prof. Dawson, of Montreal, and Prof. Guyot, of Princeton. It can be shown that it is equally consistent with development as revealed by recent science. I believe that in the *αρχη*, in the beginning or origin, God created the heavens and gave the original constituents their potencies, which began to act by the command of God; and there was light. But neither religion nor reason require me to believe that he gave to these life or sensation, or reason or love. I believe that when these were added, whether by law or without law, it was according to the will and by the power of God. There were days or epochs in the divine procedure, and at the opening of each was a special act of God. The earth was without form and void. When the evolution began there was first the development of light, then the elevation of the expanse of heaven. Thirdly, there was the separation of land and water, and the earth is ready for plants. On the fourth day the sun and moon appeared as distinct bodies, all in accordance with the theory of Laplace. On the fifth day animals appear: the lower creatures, tannim or swarms, then fishes and fowls. On the sixth day the higher animals, and as the crown of the whole, man. Man's creation must have been a special act, and is so represented in Scripture. When man appeared there was something which was not there before, and this God-like after the image of God. In all this, Genesis and geology are in thorough accordance.

There are two accounts of the creation of man. One is in chap. i. There is council and decision: "Let us make man in our image." This applies to his soul or higher nature. The other account is in chap. ii. 7: "And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul." This is man's organic body. We have a supplement to this, Psalm cxxxix. 15, 16: "My substance was not hid from thee, when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Thine eyes did see my substance, being yet unperfect; and in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them." This passage used to be quoted by Agassiz. This is my creed as to man's bodily organism. I so far understand what is said. Man is made of the earth. There is a curious preparatory process hinted at, a process and a progression going on I know not how long; and all is the work of God and written in God's book. I understand this and yet I do not understand it. Socrates said of the philosophy

of Heraclitus that what he understood was so good that he was sure the rest would also be good if he understood it. So I say of this passage. I so far understand it, and get glorious glimpses of a divinely ordained process. And yet I do not understand it, for it carries me into the secret things which belong unto the Lord our God. I affirm with confidence that there is not, in geological or biological science, any truth even apparently inconsistent with his statement.

II. It is in some such way as this that we are to remove the difficulties of our young men. But it is more to my present purpose to sketch the *spirit* in which we are to address intelligent youth.

1. We are to deal tenderly with them, as our Lord did with Thomas when he doubted. It has often been remarked that he dealt more kindly with the unbelieving Sadducees than with the self-righteous Pharisees. An honest and not an affected doubt proceeding from a truth-loving spirit, in a world where there are so many sphinx-like enigmas, is to be respected and not denounced. Every thinking young man has to find his way in a country to him unknown till he traverses it. Alleged scientific discoveries are being made every year, and our youth have on their own responsibility to decide what to accept, what to doubt, and what to reject. Their independence, not to speak of their pride, will not tolerate dogmatism, and their teachers and pastors had better not assume airs which youths will not be much disposed to revere. We must hold the truth before them boldly, but we have also to enter sympathizingly into their difficulties.

2. Let us guard ourselves against the temptation to deny any scientific truth established by the sure methods of inductive science. The God who has made these wonderful works and given us these high faculties means that we should search into them as for treasure; and when gold is dug for us so laboriously by scientific men it may be as well to enrich ourselves with it. Let teachers beware of speaking to their pupils authoritatively on difficult subjects which they have not studied; if they do so their pupils will be sure to find them out, and some of them may find a malicious pleasure in exposing them to ridicule and contempt. Some years ago an excellent professor in a theological seminary wrote me saying that he had to prepare a paper on development, of which he acknowledged that he knew nothing, and invoking me to explain the whole subject in a few pages. I advised him to read Darwin and Spencer, and Huxley and Dana, and St. George Mivart and Dr. Dawson, and certain articles in the *Princeton Review*, and then write his paper, which I believe has not yet appeared. Let religious men realize that there may be sin involved, not just in being ignorant of, but in denying, what has been proven. An Egyptian king once rebuked a Hebrew patriarch, because he equivocated concerning his wife. There may be divines liable to a like reproof from savans when they do not own what should be to them a valued partner to be loved and cherished. I have sometimes feared that if infidels are produced in any of our colleges, it may be in those in which Spencer and Huxley are denounced by teachers who have

never studied the questions discussed. Our first inquiry, when an asserted discovery in science is announced, should be, not is it consistent with Scripture, but is it true? If it be true, all who have an implicit faith in the Bible are sure that it cannot be unfavorable to religion. Some of the scientific truths, which were at first viewed with suspicion by religious people, have turned out to be favorable to religion, not only by widening our view of the works of God, but by positively confirming the Bible: as the theory of Laplace did by showing us that the earth was older than the sun, and that the earth existed for several epochs before the sun and moon were condensed into their separate form; as geology did when it showed us that there had been a progression in God's workmanship.

3. Pains should be taken to secure in every high-class educational institution that mental and moral science be taught along with natural science. One of the main causes of the materialistic tendencies of the age is to be found in the circumstance that in many of our scientific schools every science is taught except the science of the human mind, and that in some of our colleges so many elections of studies are allowed that philosophy is altogether avoided by a considerable body of the students. The consequence is that there is an exclusiveness and a onesidedness in the formation of the mind and character of our youth. It is supposed that there is thereby imparted a very comprehensive and advanced style of education; but, after all, they are training only half the mind, and this not the highest. Our youths hear only of forces and motion, of nerves and brain, and never of mind, of its thoughts and feelings and its aspirations, moral and spiritual. Nor is this tendency to be counteracted in those institutions, increasing in number, in which mental science is taught as a mere branch of physiology, and our ideas, beliefs and moral convictions explained by heredity and by cerebral and nervous action.

4. Let the teaching in our schools and colleges be sanctified by the word of God and by prayer. It is not enough to teach religion in some sort of general way—say to give elaborate defences of it. Our religion is the Bible, and we should imbue the minds of our students with the living word, of which some of them have lost a great part of the knowledge they had acquired at the Sunday-school. Every one knows that young men are apt to be swayed more by the spirit of the college than even by the instructions they receive from their teachers. Let us labor and pray that our religion pervade our colleges as a spirit; and this will save us from infidelity more than all lectures and discussions. They should not expect to rise to a full comprehension of all the truths which have been so far revealed to us. "We know." Yes, we know; but we know in part only. We who dwell in a world "where day and night alternate;" we who go everywhere accompanied by our own shadow—a shadow produced by our dark body, but produced because there is light—cannot expect to be absolutely delivered from the darkness. Man's faculties, exquisitely adapted to the sphere in which he moves, were never intended to enable him to

comprehend all truth. The mind is in this respect like the eye. The eye is so constituted as to perceive the things within a certain range; but as objects are removed farther and farther from us they become more indistinct, and at length are lost sight of altogether. It is the same with the human mind. It can understand certain subjects and to a certain distance; but as they reach away farther they look more and more confused, and at length they disappear from the view. And if the human spirit attempts to mount higher than its proper elevation it will find all its flight fruitless. The dove, to use an illustration of Kant's, may mount to a certain elevation in the heavens; but as she rises the air becomes lighter, and at length she finds that she can no longer float upon its bosom; and should she attempt to soar higher, her pinions flutter in emptiness and she falters and falls. So it is with the spirit of man. It can wing its way a certain distance into the expanse above it, but there is a limit beyond which, if it endeavors to pass, it will find all its conceptions void and its ratiocinations unconnected.

Placed as we are in the centre of boundless space and in the middle of eternal ages, we can see only a few objects immediately around us, and all others fade in outline as they are removed from us by distance, till at length they be altogether beyond our vision. And this remark holds true not only of the more ignorant of those whose eye can penetrate the least distance; it is true also of the learned. It is perhaps true of all created beings that there is a bounding sphere of darkness surrounding the space rendered clear by the torch of science. Nay, it almost looks as if the wider the boundaries of science are pushed, and the greater the space illuminated by it, the greater in proportion the bounding sphere into which no rays penetrate; just as (to use a very old comparison) when we strike up a light in the midst of darkness, in proportion as the light becomes stronger, so does also that surface, black and dark, which is rendered visible.

The Council may, I hope, allow me to close with a brief reference, such as I seldom make in public, to my personal history as bearing on the method and spirit I have been recommending. In my past life I have had glorious opportunities of doing good among young men. I had them for sixteen years in the ministry of the gospel, in which, along with a respected colleague, I had at one time a congregation of upwards of 1,400 communicants, and had classes for young men and women varying from 100 to 180 in number. I was other sixteen years teaching philosophy in a young college where everything, including students' opinions, had to be formed. For now twelve years I have been in a college in this country where my means of usefulness have been limited only by my powers of body and mind. With many weaknesses and errors, of which no one is half so conscious as I am myself, I have been working according to the principles laid down in this paper among some of the youth of this country likely to rise to positions of influence, and have commonly had from 160 to 200 pupils under me receiving instructions in philosophy. In the Irish college I knew of only one young man who went away an avowed unbeliever;

and he had been induced by a friend not to attend my upper class lest he should fall under my influence. I have watched the career of the thousand young men who studied under me there, most of them wielding influence in their own country, some of them in high positions in India, and a few of them in this country, and I have not heard of one of them openly joining the ranks of the infidel. In this country four out of the twelve hundred students who, trained under able Christian instructors, have graduated in Princeton since I became connected with it, have left its walls believing in nothing. Let me give you their subsequent career. With the first, an able student, I talked and prayed when he went away. Two years after I heard of him conducting prayer-meetings; a year after he was elected by the college to deliver the master's oration, and he came back to give a noble defence of Christianity in the place where his fellow-students had known him as doubting of everything, and he is now a minister of the gospel. The second was a good student in English literature, and I sent for him after graduation, talked with him and asked him to pray with me. He replied that I might pray if I chose, but as for himself, he did not believe in a God to pray to. I simply remarked that he had a pious mother who was praying for him, and that I should not wonder if, in answer to her prayers, I found him coming back and asking me to pray with him. I gave him a letter which helped to procure him a position in a public office. Two years or so passed away and I heard nothing of him; but one day I was in a hotel hundreds of miles away when a gentleman came up to me and asked me if I was President of Princeton College. Upon my allowing that I was he said, "But what makes you rear infidels?" I assured him that we did not. He then told me that he had been obliged to listen day after day in his boarding-house to the most rabid scoffing he had ever listened to. I named the young man at once, and told him he had not got his infidelity from us. Feeling that he had teased me enough, the gentleman now said, "I may as well tell you the issue. That young man went down to his mother's house to convert her to infidelity and *she floored him*, and he is now addressing young men's Christian associations, and is thinking of the ministry." Some time after he called on me, and, sitting in the same part of my study in which he had refused to pray with me, he asked me to guide his devotions. He is now a minister of the word. A third was led astray by the book on the "Supernatural." I have had little opportunity of meeting with him, but I have heard of him within the last few months as taking part in a Sunday-school and opening it with prayer. The fourth was known in college as having given up all faith. I sent for him after his graduation and asked him what profession he meant to follow. He replied somewhat sorrowfully that he absolutely did not know what to turn himself to. "A lawyer?" I asked; but he said he had no taste for it. He would like to be a journalist, he went on to say, but he was afraid of the temptations to which he would thereby be exposed. I then asked if he would like to be a minister of the

gospel. He sprang from his seat and declared that there was nothing he would like so much, but that he had no faith in anything. He made only one request—that I would allow him to come back another year and study under me as a post-graduate. We parted after we had prayed. He came back the following year to study higher science and philosophy. He is now an advanced student in a theological seminary.

I have hesitated as to whether I should tell these things in public ; but I have a testimony to bear, and I may not have many other opportunities of bearing it. I have to testify to all men of the faithfulness of God in blessing means used with so many infirmities. In one respect I have been somewhat disappointed. I have not been disappointed in the circulation of my works, nor in the number of my students, nor in their attention to the instructions I have given them, nor in the effects produced in staying their minds ; but the literary men of the day have not been inclined to appreciate my sober philosophy, which I claim to be the genuine philosophy of Scotland and America. They condescend to talk of it as well meant, but not sufficiently high or deep, and this because I have not mounted into the clouds and lost myself, or gone down with materialists into mire and dirt. I do run some risk of being crushed between the two prevailing philosophies—the transcendentalism of Germany and the materialism of England—yes, of beloved England ; but I have kept my position as obstinately as ever a Scotchman did, and I mean to keep it, and I hope sacredly to carry out the wishes of the great missionary, Alexander Duff, in a message sent me from his dying bed. And I will leave to posterity the means of knowing what I held, and I leave the issue to Him to whom the issues belong, bearing this testimony, if need be, with my dying breath—that God has been faithful and owned me in a way I never expected, and blessed ten times more than I deserved any small efforts I have made to spread what I believe to be the truth.

The following discussion next ensued on

THE DISTINCTIVE PRINCIPLES OF PRESBYTERIANISM.

The REV. J. T. SMITH, D. D., of Baltimore.—It seems to me that the difficulty as to the theory of the Eldership springs from a misunderstanding of terms. In the minds of very many the term “representative” is taken as equivalent to delegate. They hold the power is in the body of the people, and the officers are simply their delegates, executive officers—that, and nothing more. There is another theory, and, as I suppose, the true one, which recognizes the fact that all power is primarily or inherently in the Lord Jesus ; that that is intrusted by him to certain officers ; and that those officers are directly the representatives