

OUTSPOKEN ESSAYS

(SECOND SERIES)

BY

WILLIAM RALPH INGE, C.V.O., D.D., F.B.A.

DEAN OF ST. PAUL'S

THIRD IMPRESSION

LONGMANS, GREEN AND CO.

55 FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK

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BOMBAY, CALCUTTA AND MADRAS

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PREFACE

It is always difficult to choose a title for a book of essays, and it seemed most convenient to repeat the name of the little volume which was published three years ago. Those essays were in part a challenge to certain idols of the market-place and theatre, and I thought it legitimate to mark the purpose or tendency of the book on the title-page. But I have no wish to pose as a prophet crying in the wilderness. The events of the last few years have, it is to be hoped, taught something both to my critics and to myself; they have perhaps even brought us nearer together. In any case, the present volume contains nothing very daring or unconventional, and if it had stood alone I should have chosen a less provocative title.

The greater part of the book consists of hitherto unpublished matter. *Confessio Fidei* is an attempt to put in order what I actually believe, and to explain why I believe it. I shall be classified, I suppose, as belonging to the right wing of theological liberalism. But I prefer to call myself a Christian Platonist, and to claim a humble place in the long chain of Christian thinkers whose philosophy is based on the Platonic tradition. That chain has been unbroken from the first century to our own day, and in English theology it has had a very honourable record. It should, I think, be recognised as a third school of thought in the Church, not less legitimate, nor less productive of good fruits, than the Catholic and Protestant parties, which in ecclesiastical politics are so much more active and prominent.

The *Hibbert Lectures* were delivered at Oxford in 1920; the subject was suggested to me by my friend Dr. Jacks.

The five lectures are a sketch of the interaction of political and religious ideas in history, with special reference to present problems. The subject is interesting and important; but the treatment is necessarily cursory and superficial, mainly from lack of space, but also, as regards the medieval period, from insufficient knowledge. I hope, however, that as a summary of the attempts that have been made in various ages to place human institutions under the sanction of absolute authority, the lectures may not be without interest.

The Romanes and Rede Lectures were given in 1920 and 1922 respectively. These two annual lectureships have been held by such a series of distinguished men that it is a great honour to be asked to deliver them, and I valued the compliment from my two universities very highly. Both lectures have been published and widely read; but some who already know them may be glad to have them in book form.

The next two essays, which I am allowed to reprint by the courtesy of the *Quarterly* and the *Edinburgh Review* respectively, deal with closely connected subjects. The unending rivalry between Europe and Asia—a rivalry not only of peoples but of ideas and types of civilisation—has not been definitely settled in favour of the West. Under new forms, Asiatic competition may be a very serious matter for industrialised Europe, and it no longer seems likely that the whole world will pass under the political tutelage of the white peoples. The other essay, *The Dilemma of Civilisation*, raises the great question whether the over-mechanisation of life has not impaired the intrinsic qualities of the human race, so that what we usually call progress may have to be paid for by racial retrogression.

It is possible that here and there these two essays may bear marks of the very anxious years in which they were written. It then seemed uncertain whether civilisation would survive the terrible strain which the Great War had put upon it. Our social order has many enemies, who have not yet abandoned the hope of wrecking it. But it seems to me to have more strength than either

its friends or its enemies gave it credit for ; and Western Europe at least shows signs of convalescence. The competition of the Far East is perhaps a question for the next generation more than for our own, though we must be prepared to deal with it ; and *The Dilemma of Civilisation* is a problem for the Earth-Spirit, whom George Meredith, in rather cryptic lines, represents as contemplating ' her great venture, Man.'

Meanwhile on him, her chief
Expression, her great word of life, looks she ;
Twi-minded of him, as the waxing tree
Or dated leaf.

' Earth,' the poet thinks, is not yet certain that her great venture has been a success. But humanity is still young.

The last essay, on *Eugenics*, urges the necessity of counteracting, by rational selection, the racial deterioration which must overtake any nation in which natural selection is no longer operative. It has appeared in the *Edinburgh Review* for July 1922.

W. R. INGE.

ST. PAUL'S,
August 1922.

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OUTSPOKEN ESSAYS

‘CONFESSIO FIDEI’

THE object of studying philosophy is to know one's own mind, not other people's. Philosophy means thinking things out for oneself. Ultimately, there can be only one true philosophy, since reason is one and we all live in the same world. But we are all limited, both in intellectual capacity, and in the experience upon which our beliefs are built. We can only try to co-ordinate and reconcile the knowledge which has come to us from many quarters, resolving contradictions and separating genuine convictions from spectral half-beliefs, conventional acceptances, and the mere will to believe. We cannot make a religion for others, and we ought not to let others make a religion for us. Our own religion is what life has taught us. If we can clarify this body of experience, which comes to us so turbid and impure, we shall have done what is best worth doing for ourselves, and we shall have to offer to others the best that was in us to give, however small its value may be.

I begin this essay on the terrace in front of an hotel at Mürren. A lonely holiday, almost without books, among the grandest scenes of nature, is a favourable opportunity for setting one's ideas in order. Solitude and freedom from interruptions give a chance of continuous thinking. The absence of books compels thought to take the form of self-examination. A Swiss alp, five thousand feet above the sea, and in full view of a majestic range of snow

peaks and glaciers, opens avenues of communication with the *magnalia Dei* which are less easy to maintain amid the dark and grimy surroundings of my London home. And so I will employ myself here in trying to formulate my articles of belief, primarily for my own sake, but also in the hope that what I write may fall into the hands of some like-minded or sympathetic readers.

God is the beginning of religion and the end of philosophy, and the beginning and the end are one. Alike in religion and philosophy the important question is not whether God exists, but what we mean when we speak of God. We all, I suppose, tend to make a God in our own likeness, or in the likeness of such an one as we should be if we could be what we would. Our dominant interests warp our conceptions of the Deity. The philosopher contemplates an eternal thinker; the moralist a magnified schoolmaster or judge; the priest reveres the head of the clerical profession; the scientist personifies the vital law of the phenomenal universe; the patriot invokes the protector and champion of his nation. The average man, hemmed in by pitiless circumstance, appeals to a kindly governor of the world, who will forgive the mistakes to which nature is so relentless, and give compensation for all unmerited suffering. The many who have failed to bring their own lives under any ruling principle, see no moral or rational principle in their environment. Their universe is godless, as their own lives are anarchical. 'Such as men themselves are, such will God appear to them to be.'

The second half of the nineteenth century was taken up with a long 'conflict between religion and science,' as it was usually called; more accurately, it was a conflict between naturalism and supernaturalism. The great German idealists had passed under a cloud; interest was concentrated on the unparalleled progress of the natural sciences, which seemed for a time to have solved the Riddle of the Universe.' Natural science depended on one dogma, which was often wrongly called the law of causality, but was really the law of unbroken continuity. It was therefore obliged to wage war on the theory of

supernatural interventions, with which traditional religion was bound up. If the Creator was in the habit of suspending His own laws, no science of nature was possible. If, for example, an outbreak of cholera might be caused either by an infected water-supply or by the blasphemies of an infidel mayor, medical research would be in confusion. But we can now see how much bad philosophy was mixed up with this just claim of science to be undisturbed in its own field. Kant had done a poor service to idealism by his separation between the theoretical and the practical reason. He conceded objective certitude only to the truths of science, basing our moral and religious beliefs on subjective faith. Religion under these conditions was condemned to fight a losing battle. Our spiritual life was banished from the sphere of objective reality; and we find natural philosophers like Herbert Spencer suggesting a delimitation of territory, by which the knowable should be assigned to themselves, the unknowable to religion. It was only a step further when Leslie Stephen called the two spheres realities and dreams. The nineteenth-century scientists did not mean to be materialists, and most of them repudiated the name; but all their effective thinking was done in terms of mechanical physics, and mind or consciousness was relegated to the position of a passive spectator among machinery which worked independently of it.

The idealists were too ready to accept this demarcation. Some of them fell back upon the irrationalism of Pascal—‘the heart has its reasons which the intellect knows not of’; or like Tennyson, made the heart stand up like a man in wrath against the freezing reason’s colder part. Others, down to our own day, make religion a homage to ideals which are not facts, and virtually assign the spiritual life to the province of the aesthetic imagination. The assumption is that science gives us facts without values, and religion values without facts. Science tells us what is true; philosophy and religion spread over the cheerless scene the light that never was on sea or land.

This intolerable dualism was most ineffectively bridged by the superstition of automatic progress, an unscientific

dream-picture in which nevertheless science and religion could meet on common ground. Ideals could recover some actuality by being regarded as future facts. The world is an unsatisfactory place now, but it is on its way to perfection. Man as we know him is a poor creature; but he is half-way between an ape and a god, and he is travelling in the right direction. *Finis coronat opus.* God at present (according to these apologists) seems to make a poor job of governing the world; we can only say of Him, with Dr. McTaggart, that He is 'on the whole good rather than bad'—a restricted testimonial which would hardly procure an engagement for a housemaid except under post-war conditions; but He is gradually improving, and we must give Him time to 'realise himself.'

This expedient is neither scientific nor Christian. There is not, and cannot be, any progress in the universe as a whole, and there is no probability that the human race will either reach perfection or find the laws of nature much more conformable to its desires than they are now. Any philosophy which postulates either any kind of progress in the universe as a whole, or unending progress in any part of it, is demonstrably moonshine and not worth discussing. The whole cannot change; and all growth has its natural limit. A planet has a history; the macrocosm has none. Our species has probably half a million years in which to try every possible and impossible experiment in social and economic reform. That ought to satisfy our millenarians. But as when we look at a grave we say 'Beneath that mound lies what I, as a creature of time, shall be in a few years,' so when we look at the moon we may say with tolerable assurance, 'That is what our home will look like at no incalculably distant date.'

To throw our ideals into the future is the death of all sane philosophy and science. As I write these lines I have before me a row of mountain summits of incomparable glory and majesty, but entirely remote from all human interests. They were in existence before even our sub-human ancestors hunted the mammoth and disputed their caverns with the cave-bear. They will stand where they now are when the next ice-age has depopulated this

part of Europe and perhaps brought about the extinction of what are now the most advanced races of mankind. And yet the mountains themselves are not everlasting.

The hills are shadows, and they flow
 From form to form, and nothing stands ;
 They melt like mist, the solid lands,
 Like clouds they shape themselves and go.

The period of organic evolution is but a moment when compared with the tremendous duration of inorganic evolution. Ten thousand million years may have been required to reduce a star from the temperature of Alnilam to that of Arcturus or our sun. A thousand million years may elapse before the extinction of the light and heat which pour from our elderly luminary, and which make life and consciousness possible, for a little while, on one or two of the planets which revolve round it. And then who can measure the duration of the sleep of dead worlds, in cold and darkness, till a new cycle begins for them ?

The home of religion, we are told, is the ideal. But ideals which have no counterpart in reality, and are created either by the rebel will, which however angrily it may declaim against freezing reason cannot make things other than they are, or by the poetic fancy which can only weave a world of dreams into which we may flee from the facts of life—such ideals are frivolous and can bring us no deep or lasting satisfaction. Nor have we the power to levy unlimited drafts upon the future. War-finance has no place in philosophy. Instead of running up loans which the future will not honour, we must direct our critical attention to the primary assumption of naturalism, that the phenomenal world, or what naturalism mistakes for such, is objectively real, and our valuations, whether moral or aesthetic, of no more than subjective validity.

As long as the attempt to interpret the world by purely mechanical and quantitative categories remained unchallenged, naturalism had the appearance of a coherent principle of explanation under which everything might in time be brought. Man, with his consciousness, reason, and lofty claims, was described as only the most cunningly

devised of nature's clocks. Complete knowledge of the laws of invariable sequence would, it was assumed, reveal him as an automaton. It is no wonder that this philosophy—for it was a metaphysical, not a scientific theory—aroused indignant protests, even before its inherent weakness was fully exposed. Its weakness, however, was not far below the surface. It was easy to prove that the synthesis of naturalism could not survive any thorough investigation of the conditions of knowledge. Not only was the knower reduced by it to an otiose and inexplicable spectator of a scene in which he is obviously an actor; not only does epiphenomenalism (as Plotinus said long ago) 'make soul an affection, or disease, of matter'; but the scientific view of the world itself is by no means reducible to mathematical formulas. It is an intellectual construction based on an abstract view of reality, convenient for the prosecution of those studies with which natural science is concerned. It is already charged with value-judgments, which are the more confusing because they are not recognised as such. It is in serious difficulties about what are called the primary and secondary qualities—an old problem which has perhaps exercised the minds of thinkers too long. The primary qualities, it has often been held, are objectively real; the secondary, such as colour and sound, are subjective effects due to our senses. This practically means that we are to look for truth not in the drama of reality as it unfolds itself to our minds, but in the stage mechanism by which it is exhibited. The naturalist seldom thinks of what the world would be without its secondary qualities—universal darkness and silence, not a world at all. No wonder that Fechner called this the 'night-view' of the universe. To separate the two orders of qualities seems to be impossible; if the secondary qualities are condemned as unreal, the primary must go too. If the secondary, which demonstrably depend on the body and mind of the perceiver for their characters as known, are allowed to belong to reality, the place of mind, as an integral and integrating factor in reality, is conceded. It might even have been better, as I think Professor Laurie suggested, to drop the words primary and

secondary, and substitute quantitative and qualitative. It would then be clear how impossible it is to interpret any concrete object without the help of qualitative categories. Sound and colour have their physical indices in vibrations; but these would never have been discovered but for the qualitative values which sounds and colours have for us.

But the citadel of naturalism was really betrayed from within. Biologists were at first willing to accept the first dogma of scientific orthodoxy, that the world of science is ultimately the sphere of applied mathematics, so that all biological processes must be reducible to mechanical and chemical terms—the dynamics of particles. But this hypothesis was so cramping and so contrary to what seemed to be the laws of life as they present themselves to observation, that a revolt took place against the principle of explaining the organic by the inorganic. ‘Why seek ye the living among the dead?’ was a question asked more insistently every year. Thus a rift was introduced between biology and physics, and the unity of the scientific view of the world was broken up. Whether the new vitalism which has been encouraged by this declaration of independence on the part of biology and psychology has escaped the fallacies of the old vitalism may be doubted. An autonomous life-principle, whether called by old names or by new, is a danger to the reign of continuity. It may be used to hand over the world once more to supernaturalistic dualism, or to miracle-working will. It has been acclaimed as liberating us from the chains of determinism, and opening the gates of the future which nineteenth-century science had shut and locked. So far has this supposed emancipation taken us that some American thinkers are ready to accept an anarchic universe of free and independent spirits, among whom the Deity has less power than the President of the United States, or even to rehabilitate pure chance. The gains of nineteenth-century science are in danger from such doctrines, and theism has nothing to hope from them. The dualism which naturalism had hoped to remove reappears in the war between man and the cosmic process, which Huxley, hardly

knowing what he did, proclaimed in his famous Romanes Lecture. It is a new Zoroastrianism or Manicheism, in which even men of science are, surprisingly, found ready to identify the God of nature with Ahriman, and to invite us to enlist on the right side in a cosmic duel. Or if the good cause is merely a subjective ideal, as seems to follow from the presuppositions of these writers, we are in the painful position of being ordered to love a good God who does not exist, and to resist a Power which exists but is not good.

The doctrine that men are automata was always absurd, and Professor J. A. Thomson has stated the case against it in unanswerable language. 'A self-stoking, self-repairing, self-preservative, self-adjusting, self-increasing, self-reproducing machine is only by an abuse of language called a machine at all.' Such a machine would certainly make the fortune of its inventor; and we must remember that our machine-makers try to do some of these things. A machine is after all the creation of a purposeful mind. There is no contradiction between mechanism and purpose—an obvious truth which has been too often forgotten in the controversy between naturalists and theists. Mechanism is the teleology of the inorganic world. It is, we may believe with confidence, the work of an intelligent designer, which, as we might expect, displays the regularity of any machine which is doing its work. With the brief episode of organic evolution we come to other methods, which depend on the presence of consciousness and reason. But there is no sharp line of demarcation between the two. The development of life out of the inorganic is a fact, though it has not yet been produced experimentally. For even if the rather fantastic theory were established, that the spores of life travel through space from distant orbs, the difficulty would then only be thrown one stage back; somewhere or other life must have been produced from the lifeless.

No theory which separates man from the world of which he is an organic factor ought to satisfy us. The universe is 'all of a piece'; it was not made for us; nor are we 'the roof and crown of things'—at least it may

be hoped that we are not. But the highest to which human nature can attain—all the intellectual, moral and spiritual endowments of the greatest human beings—are just as much part of nature as the primordial element or elements out of which the visible universe is woven. Nor can we explain the higher by the lower. The attempt to do so was the blunder of science in the last century. Wherever values are in question, by their fruits, and not by their roots, we shall know them. Evolutionists have often assumed that evolution means the mechanical unpacking of what was potentially there all the time, just as traditionalists regard progressive revelation as the better understanding of a faith once delivered to the saints. The word ‘potentially’ is a dangerous one in philosophy. It has often been used to disguise or evade the problem of change, which is not an easy one. The dogma of continuity, which seemed to forbid the addition of any new factor by way of creation, made it necessary, in the teeth of evidence, to assert that the final result of any development was implicit in its beginnings. If our ancestors were apes, then we are cultivated apes, or the apes are arrested men. As this was too absurd, science fell back on the admission of real change, but insisted that the changes are slight and very slow. It seems to have been generally forgotten that a small change is as difficult to account for as a great change; the problem is how to explain change at all. There is a story of a girl who apologised for a baby whose existence needed apology on the ground that it was a very small one. The minute modifications imagined by the early Darwinians are equally futile as an explanation of how there came to be any modifications; the ‘mutations’ which have now been observed do not add to the philosophical difficulty. There has been a tendency to revert to Lamarck’s theory that the changes of species are caused by the will of the individuals composing them, a will excited by the environment, which makes modifications of structure necessary in order to preserve life under changing conditions. This is to admit what Bergson calls creative evolution, through the agency of the unconscious striving of living beings. Some-

thing actually new, and not implicit in the racial origins, is brought into being. It may well be supposed that consciousness itself was evoked in this way in response to vital needs.

The question seems to me extraordinarily difficult. For when we postulate the advent of some new factor to account for change in organisms, we must not forget the inexplicable results of chemical combinations. We do not suppose that anything like a new creative act is responsible for the appearance of water when oxygen and hydrogen combine, and yet this is a more startling change than organic evolution has to show. But I think it would not be rash to say that the laws, that is to say the observed behaviour, of inorganic matter do not suffice when we wish to predict the behaviour of living things.¹ And in the same way, biological and psychological laws may not suffice to explain the processes of spiritual life. Without in any way wishing to restore the old dualism of natural and supernatural, we may be justified in repudiating that kind of determinism which rests on the analogy of invariable sequence in inorganic nature.

I have said that what we call mechanism is so far from ruling out the hypothesis of a directing mind, that it strongly supports that hypothesis. But is the directing mind which orders all the events of the universe merely immanent? Modern philosophy for the most part asserts that it is. Our idealists are most of them either frank pantheists, or advocates of the watered-down pantheism which is the creed of the English Neo-Hegelians. For this school, God is exhausted in his universe; His life is realised only in the cosmic process. They consider that not only is man organic to the world, but that the world, including especially man, is organic to God. 'The existence of finite selves,' we are told by Professor Pringle-Pattison, 'constitutes the essence of the absolute life.' 'If God is not active in the process, He is no more than an eternal dreamer.' 'The eternal and the temporal are

¹ It might be better to avoid the question-begging words 'living' and 'inanimate,' for probably everything is 'living' in different degrees; but it is convenient to use 'living' for organisms.