

MYSTERY IN SCIENCE AND RELIGION

A STUDY OF THE FINITE AND INFINITE

By DR. G. W. B. MARSH, B.A., F.R. HIST. S.

Dr. Marsh, on the evening of March 29, addressed a meeting of the Medical Guild of St. Luke, held at Archbishop's House, London, on 'Mystery in Science and Religion.' He said that the openly expressed opinion of thousands at the present day was that there should be no mystery in religion. 'Away with mystery in religion,' they said. 'We do not believe in it nowadays. We are living in the twentieth century, not in the Middle Ages. No more priestcraft for us! Like a dense fog dissipated by the rays of the sun, mystery and mystery-mongers are being scared away by the full blaze of science!'

Such was the sham philosophy and teaching contained in books and reviews; such the thought uttered from the platform, and discussed in the workshop and in the family circle. In a word, religion, according to such views, must be stripped of all that could not be perfectly understood, because, forsooth, that which the mind could not grasp was a delusion and a snare, was unworthy of the human intellect, and was debasing to the dignity of man. With one breath those shallow thinkers and ignorant teachers

Magnified Science and Belittled Religion.

utterly unconscious of the contradictions to which they gave expression. A little reflection and the use of common-sense would make such vaporings impossible and the cause of them to appear what they were, unscientific and ridiculous, continued Dr. Marsh. Would that they were really so! Unfortunately they were pernicious sophistries which deluded the unthinking multitude. They lived in an age of science, real and false, and it was the latter which was working ruin in the minds of its votaries. True science was noble, to be revered and accepted. It was the handmaid of religion, and in no sense hostile thereto. It elevated men's thoughts, enlarged their minds, and filled them with a lively appreciation of the majesty of the first great cause.

In no better manner could they approach the consideration of mystery than in company with science. It was conceivable that in the universe there were some things which, however long the human race might exist, it would never be able to understand. They might discover how matter acted upon mind; how, for instance, the vibrations of the atmosphere, acting upon the drum of the ear, then on the tiny nerve-ending inside, and finally upon certain cells of the brain, resulted in a sensation called 'sound,' which was apprehended by the immaterial mind, or soul. There were many secrets, many mysteries that Nature held and gave up very reluctantly. Daily and yearly they were wrenching some of them from her grasp; but there were countless thousands that still remained, and it would seem as though the unveiling of one mystery only led them to the discovery of another, greater still. Dr. Marsh instanced

The Mysteries of Various Products of Nature.

They knew some of the uses of electricity, but did they know what it was? As yet it was a mystery; but still they believed without understanding it. The lecturer proceeded to deal at length with another mystery of Nature, as seen in the life-history of the frog, and detailed the various stages in the process of evolution, from the jelly-like substance that was deposited in the stagnant pond to the frog. What a labyrinth of mystery! What a sea of marvels! Why all that elaborate preparation? Did they understand it all even with the help of evolution? Was it not a puzzle that the frog should give birth to a spawn so utterly unlike itself? Some kind of evolution was certainly at work before their eyes, but it was all a profound mystery. And the poor tadpole had an arch-enemy in the pond—the larva of the *Dytiscus Marginalis*, a species of carnivorous beetle. The *Dytiscus* laid its egg in a hole which it pierced in a weed. There it developed until one day an elongated six-footed being with powerful jaws emerged and plunged into the pond. It had a pair of sickle-shaped mandibles, with which it seized its victim, and it never left it until it had sucked out all the life juices, and even the substance of the body. To do that it had to plunge its weapons into the junction of the tail with the body of the tadpole.

Who taught that larva to aim at the junction of the tail with the body when it seized the tadpole? Certainly not its mother, for she deserted the egg. Was the knowledge in the egg? If so, where and how? Was it suddenly implanted in the larva as it entered the pond? Did heredity hand it down, and, if so, what was heredity? In what organs did it reside? And how came it there? And at what stage did it appear? If there be an animal soul present in the ovum, how and in what way was that information imparted?

Or was it instinct—that happy word which, like 'Mesopotamia,' explained all difficulties, solved all mysteries, and brought untold stores of knowledge and comfort to the human mind? The

Vital Difference Between Instinct and Intelligence

was so important that it could not be passed over lightly. To 'the man in the street,' as, indeed, to every thinking

being, it was on the surface of things self-apparent that from the point of view of intelligence there was a vast difference between what they called the animal world and human beings. Was that one of degree or of kind? Many scientists maintained that it was of the former nature; or, in other words, that the human nature was only a higher development, an evolution of that of the animal.

Lately two eminent writers, scientists and philosophers at the same time, had written on that difficult subject, and their opinions were as follow—

Father Wassmann, S.J., speaking of instinct, defined it as 'a sensitive impulse which induced a being to perform certain actions, the suitability of which is beyond the perception of the agent that performs them.'

Father Muckermann, S.J., defined instinct as consisting in 'the sensuous cognition and appetency of the agent, which enables it to perform purposeful actions without becoming conscious of the purpose of such.'

Those definitions were practically identical, said Dr. Marsh. They were the results of many years' careful study of animal life. Now let them turn to 'intelligence,' or, if they would, 'reason.' Father Wassmann defined it as 'the power of perceiving the relations of concepts to one another, and of drawing conclusions therefrom.' Father Muckermann said: 'What is the true criterion between instinct and intelligence? A brief exposition of

The Nature of an Intelligent Act

will furnish an answer to this question. We may define intelligent, in opposition to instinctive, activity, as one that is performed with perfect consciousness of its tendency, and is consequently guided by a purely spiritual faculty of cognition and appetite.'

Yet there were puzzles awaiting them in those regions of instinct and intelligence. Had they ever seen ants on the warpath, marshalled by their leaders, overcoming difficulties in the line of march, apparently consulting as to the mode of attack, stationing their outposts and storming the enemy's nest? Or heard of monkeys bridging over a chasm between their position and the position they would attain, by forming a living bridge, after a chattering between the leaders? Yet did they ever hear of a stone shedding blood, of a vegetable being grateful, a dog writing a novel, or of an elephant studying astronomy? One was the life of the vegetable, another that of the animal, and yet another that of a man. It was the only rational conclusion. They were justified in concluding

That Instinct was Fraught with Mystery.

Father Gerard, S.J., had drawn attention to an egg in which, even with the aid of a microscope, neither muscle, nerve, nor bone could be found; yet they were all duly evolved in the lapse of time, when the chicken was formed. The evolution of the human body, from the first cell differentiation to the fully-developed foetus, was surely another profound mystery. At what moment was the rational soul infused into the organism? Were the marvellous changes that took place intended to teach them that their bodies in that early stage were reproducing for them the ancient life history of many forms of animal life through which they originally passed before becoming the possession of man? In other words, was the theory of the evolution of the human body really suggested by the history of the development of a foetus? Had their bodies once a tail? If not, what was the meaning of the rudimentary structure at the end of the spinal column? To what did the vermiform appendix point? Was it another rudimentary structure, and, if so, of what? And what was the use of the original organ? What was the meaning of the pineal gland in the human brain? Was there once a time when it performed functions that to-day had ceased? Was it the remains of a third eye?

Passing from the infinitesimally small to the incomprehensibly great—from the microscopic to the astronomical telescope—what new revelations met the eye! Mystery upon mystery was unfolded before their gaze. They could not understand, yet they believed. The mind was staggered, yet reason bade them cry out, 'Credo!'

They Knew What God Was,

but they did not fully know Him—nay, their comprehension of Him was like a speck in the universe. If Nature was full of mystery to them, what must the Author of Nature be? The first great cause of all that was and all that might be was quite beyond the adequate comprehension of man, or of any created intelligence. The creature would be the equal of the creator, were that possible. They must therefore find much in God and in His actions which was quite beyond their understanding. If God revealed to His creatures that in the Unity of the Godhead there was a Trinity of Persons, He placed before them a mystery. They could not understand, but it would be unreasonable if they refused to believe, provided always that they had a real guarantee that it was really the Infinite Wisdom that had made the revelation. Just as in the mysteries of Nature there was nothing that was opposed to logic, reason, or common-sense, so in those of the supernatural there was and could be no such opposition.

The man who said he would have no mystery in religion—would accept nothing therein that he could not understand—was a shallow thinker, and in no true sense scientific. He had failed to learn the first and simplest lesson that Nature was ever teaching him.

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