

SCIENCE SUPERIOR TO MYSTICISM.

BY T. T. BLAISE.

THE fall of Eden, Paradise Lost, the sunken Atlantis, the legend of the submerged Venetta sung as *Die schöne alte Wunderstadt*, these and countless other myths and tales of enchanted Utopias, coming like faint echoes from the dim ages of human existence, have ever exerted a peculiar fascinating power over the investigating mind of man.

They are so akin to memories of real and actual truths and events of the past that we often unconsciously cherish them as we do the memory of a distant ancestor. They enter more or less as formative factors into our mental concepts of the real world.

Cause preceding its effect in time, bids us look into the past for the solution of unaccounted phenomena. The law of heredity accounts for many of our personal characteristics. The hanging together of events teaches that the past is the mother of the present, indeed the merging and mutability of the world's concatenations surprise and startle us at every new invention so that we involuntarily turn back to learn how it happened.

Thus in our eagerness to grasp the meaning of events, we are ever prone to look for the ultimate and the absolute in the past, and above all, commit the unpardonable error of ascribing to the past a sort of superiority, chiefly on account of its priority, nay, even attributing to that past that absolute perfection, (omnipotence) out of which the future of *imperfection* evolves. Thus pitiful as it is, we ascribe to a few ancient patriarchs the only true power of communicating with God, while we are in hopeless confusion as to what really was communicated to them. This queer notion of pseudo-evolution prevails to an astonishing extent among a class of scholarly men. It is in this manner, it would seem, that men like Mr. Kassel¹ burst into eloquence over the "triumphs over science of ancient

¹"Ancient Mysticism and Recent Science." *The Open Court*, July, 1907, p. 385.

notions," and exclaim that "science now stands abashed and swordless in its age-long battle against the psychics"!

Much of the charge against science being in battle and at warfare "against psychics," spiritualists, telepathists, or any other cults and occults is not a just charge. True science battles against nothing in particular, but verifies or rejects. Rejecting, e. g., telepathy as a proved and demonstrated fact is not battling against the advocates of spiritualism or spiritism. It would be difficult to find a text-book on chemistry and physics that bluntly asserts that the atom is indivisible, (space forbids quoting) but perhaps all state that it is to be "assumed" or "believed" that the atom is indivisible, or that the "infinite divisibility of matter" is a "hypothesis"² and the student is left free to choose between the two.

Likewise, to say the least, is it decidedly premature if not bold to assert that the electron theory is incompatible with the theory of conservation of matter and energy. Divisibility of the atom means not destructibility of the atom. Our ability to create in the laboratory a new element, *de novo*, as it were, or transmute a known element into an heretofore unknown one, proves not that matter is indestructible or can be created. The corpuscular theory to the contrary notwithstanding, nature still abhors a vacuum, and two electrons cannot be conceived to occupy the same place at the same time.

It is true that legends and myths like the sunken Atlantis contain their elements of truth. They have historic value, inasmuch as they reflect the thoughts and sentiments of those who inspired them. The study of ethnics consists largely of the rational investigation of myths and sagas. But let us not commit the error that legends necessarily must come from a prior civilization of higher type. True, the birth and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth might have been prophesied, but the crude idea of a material resurrection, body and raiment, smacks much more of a source rather inferior in type than higher. Such aspirations are common with primitive peoples, who, like we, obey the law of self-preservation and hope to extend life beyond the grave.

Nor must it be overlooked that primitive peoples have often a most prodigious imagination. Note, e. g., the myth-folk. To what astounding heights did not their fancy leap? Endowed with all shades of omnipotence and miraculous prescience these mortals made the universe their stage. They conjured into existence what their hearts desired. Clouds, with the touch of the rod were transformed

² *An Introduction to the Study of Chemistry*, by Prof. Ira Remsen of Johns Hopkins University, p. 81.

into sailing crafts and stars and meteors were their projectiles in cosmic conflicts. The thunderbolt was their spear and the hurricane served them at their beck. Neptune beat his herculean fists against the crags and shattered them, while Vulcan forged in subterranean depths the mountain rib and bastion.—In brief, what did they not conjure! To assume that these myth-folk must have received these beautiful visions from some prehistoric, higher civilization seems like a dream of unusual chimerical translucency. Suffice to say that legends evolve and grow in all ages under the same law but different conditions, and can not well be conceived to fall on the outside of the pale of the law of phyletic psychogeny.

No doubt, as Mr. Kassel states, "It would be interesting to pursue in detail the theory of a prehistoric continent, the birth-place of the race and the seat of its forgotten splendor, and to show how many facts familiar to science and philosophy range themselves about the idea." There can be but little doubt as to the existence of prehistoric continents, but a prehistoric civilization of "splendor,"—need we posit an hypothesis so contradictory to present demonstrated truths to account for the similarity and analogy between myth and scientific discovery? Rather should we marvel did scientific discovery *not* figuratively harmonize with the legends of primitive peoples. Nay more, the entire animal kingdom is in itself but a consistent prophecy of present-day achievements. It would be a thousand times more strange had our ancestors *not* been inspired with crude prophetic visions which are analogous to our present-day scientific revelations. The ancients hoped to communicate through space by thought transference or thought projection, "telepathy," but we have really accomplished communication analogously, i. e., by means of vibrating attenuated matter, transferring only the symbols of thought. Our present aspirations are likewise prophecies for the future to realize in a measure. We yearn to communicate with beings on the planets, but our idea of the mode of this communication is perhaps as crude in comparison with the actual future method as is the flight of the fiery chariot of Biblical fame with a modern airship. Thus our dream of to-day is but a prophetic symbol of a probable future triumph.

We might go farther and ask, how could the little birds fore-act our probable mode of reaching the north pole by flight? How could the industrious bee and cunning spider antedate Archimedes in describing geometrical forms and angles? And then there are the weaver bird and countless other creatures whose dexterous feats have at last become achievements of man. Nor should we overlook

the lantern fish and the electric eel who have perhaps for millions of years antedated the great Franklin and demonstrated almost faultlessly the "mystery" of an Edison storage battery.

It would be difficult to explain how the alchemist could have sought else than the ultimate division of matter or dissolution of a worthless metal so that he could transmute it into that form of metal most desired by him. There are a thousand yearnings of mankind to-day that shall come true, but is it not illogical to assume that we must be of a higher type of civilization than that posterity that will ultimately master and realize these yearnings? It seems to me that the sciences known as cosmogony, geogeny and biogeny, and especially that branch of biogeny known as psychogeny will keep us out of the muddle of seeking in myths the explanation for our present-day scientific achievements.

Deep in the soul of man dwells ever an hereditary residue, a vestigial stratum of the soul types of the past. When this mental vestige appears in a very pronounced form it has been called a mental atavism, or recurrent ancestral types. In its normal state it is but the true link that binds us to the past. Minds thus abnormally endowed seek, like their ancestors did, the cause of events in the mysterious. They are the modern star gazer, the genii and oracle. They ever hope to find the ultimate and the absolute in the past phenomena. It is due to this fact that, "Ingrained with us,—wrought into our innermost fibers,—is an abiding love of mystery and marvel."

Many of our modern pulpits are to-day barnacled with no heavier burden than this custom of attempting to explain the achievements of present-day science by past precedents of superior authority and higher perfection, nay, it is even true, it is a pity, that many of the clergy still refuse to accept the truest and most rational scientific revelations, unless they can find its supposed correlative counterpart in scripts of the past. Compared with true logic, this is but an exuberance of gauzy sentimentality, it would seem.

The world is just beginning to place dependence in science, the modern "Star of Bethlehem," yet here and there burst into daylight the sporadic and desultory echoes of a strange ancient mysticism again and again proclaiming the futility and fatality of science and the triumph of an Atlantis over the wonderful present-day civilization. Thus the fascination of man's mind seeking to unravel the world's truths from the mind's own fantastic conjuration.