

IN NUBIBUS.

THE COGITATIONS OF A SMOKING PHILOSOPHER.

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PIPE II.

I had a long talk with my old friend Professor Molecule this morning. "Professor," said I, "I have been cogitating over the old questions, "What am I? Whence came I? Whither go I?" "Then," said he, "you have been wasting your time, for those questions are settled. What are you? Why, like every other entity, a compound of matter and motion, of various atoms gathered from the four winds and operated by Force and Energy; and some of these days you will be decomposed, and the various atoms and powers will go to form other entities. Possibly the lime in your body may help, centuries hence, to form some huge rock against which may dash some vessel bearing, it may be, your remote progeny; the carbon, oxygen, and hydrogen may become sugar to fatten, or alcohol to craze, your children's children; while the brain-power you have been expending in puzzling over these questions may yet re-appear in an electric flash to carry the messages, or blast the homes, of some of your descendants."

Now, all this may be very interesting, but, oh, how horrible! How rapid, empty, foolish the whole business of life seems to be, if that is all! If my personality is like a pattern seen in a kaleidoscope for a moment, composed of little bits of glass which with a turn of the instrument are re-distributed to form other "entities," I would like to know if life is worth living! I think with Tennyson (*In Memoriam*, canto 55) that in such a case man is—

"A monster, then, a dream,

A discord. Dragons of the prime

That tare each other in their slime
Were mellow music matched with him."

But I will take a wider range. Supposing I am only a transitory combination of certain particles belonging to the world at large,—what *is* the world at large? or indeed the whole universe? How came it into being? When little Topsy, in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, was asked who made her, she answered: "Nobody made me; 'spects I growed." Wonder if the little nigger lass was right after all,—if she was an "advanced thinker"? We should call this materialist philosophy Topsyism: for when asked who made the universe (or, according to the old formula, "heaven and earth") it replies: "Nobody made it; 'spects it growed." On the other hand, the "orthodox" reply: "In the beginning God created the Heavens and the Earth." How grand, after all, is that opening sentence of the Book of Genesis; how majestic in its severe simplicity!

Of course, we accept the findings of science: the world no doubt "grew," so to speak, to its present condition. Even the huge rocks which our forefathers thought primitive or eternal we now know took untold time to form and were the outcome of numberless agencies. But what then? Does excessive age, or slow production, or immensity of result, lessen the necessity of an original designer? Are we not as much impressed with the genius and power of the framers of the Pyramids, as of the designer of the last new cuff-button? Does not the argument from design gather force, instead of weakening, as the thought of the immensity of the universe and its limitless age grows upon us? I believe with Darwin (see the closing words of *The Origin of Species*) that the Evolutionary Theory gives one a grander idea of the Creator—if there be one—than what I may call the mechanical theory of the creation which was held formerly. Professor Molecule says that the teleological argument breaks down, and makes fun specially of Paley's *Natural Theology*. To be sure, the details of that argument are now out of date; just as the Chemistry, Physiology, Biology of a hundred years ago are out of date now: but the main thesis seems to me to grow only stronger with the enlargement of our ideas of "Heaven and Earth." Paley opens his case thus: "In crossing a heath, suppose I pitched my foot against a stone, and were asked how the stone came to be there, I might probably answer that for all I know to the contrary it had lain there for ever." I admit, of course, that no well-informed person would make such an answer nowadays. But the Archdeacon proceeds: "Suppose I had found a *watch* upon the ground and it should be inquired how it happened to be in that

place, I should hardly think of the answer I had given before." No, certainly not. However, a marvellous advance has been made since Paley's days, both in science and in practical mechanics. In his time there was no knowledge of the ages required to form one of the stratified rocks, while the watch was then constructed by hand at immense expenditure of time and care by the maker. Nowadays watches are made by machinery in short time, while we know the stone was the result of a much more intricate and lengthened process. I can fancy my friend Molecule and myself walking together and such a contingency happening to us. He stubs his toe against a stone; I pick up a watch. "Look here, Professor," I cry, "see this wonderful piece of mechanism! Surely, that evinces design and must have had a maker!"—"Pooh, my dear fellow," he would exclaim, "there is nothing wonderful in that watch, there are thousands like it; it was all made by machinery, by fixed rules; and once you master the details you will see nothing to wonder at. But look at this stone: your watch was made in a few hours; this stone probably took ten thousand years to make. And observe: it has some remarkable fossils in it: here is a Trilobite with a twist in his tail, and there is a very peculiar Lingula. I shall take this stone home with me and write an elaborate monograph on it, and render myself immortal: I mean I shall acquire posthumous fame."

Still, I do not see that the argument for an original designer is weakened by all this. To me it seems intensified in proportion to the immensity of the thing designed. I might put it as a "Rule of Three" sum, thus: *As* a watch, which took a few hours to put together, *is to* a stone, which took ages to put together, *so is* the designer of the watch *to* the designer of the stone, or of the process by which the stone was put together. And from the designer of this process we argue on to the designer of all the processes of the universe.

And then again: formerly a watch made by hand called forth admiration of the maker's skill and delicate manipulation, much of which is now supplanted by mechanical contrivances. Well, suppose men of genius go on inventing such mechanical appliances, until at last a machine is constructed which turns out watches entire. All one has to do is to put so much gold, silver, steel, etc., into a hopper at one end, and at the other out comes a full-blown watch,—or a bushel of them, for that matter. I can fancy Professor Molecule and myself watching the operation. "Don't you see, my dear fellow," he would say, "that it is all a matter of mechanical laws, and watches must needs come out in obedience to those

laws? Now, if the materials you put in at one end were, just for once, to come out a stew-pan instead of a watch, then indeed I should be astonished at the 'miracle,' and attribute it to some higher power."

Now, my answer to that would certainly be: "My dear sir, that's all very true, but—*who invented that machine?* I see it unerringly grinds out watches in blind obedience to fixed laws, but I repeat: Who made that machine? Let me know him that I may express my admiration of his skill and power, and 'worship' him—to use the word in its old-fashioned sense."

Now, to apply this argument to the world we live in. I see a marvellous fitness of things—a grand inter-relation of laws—matter—power—a certain *uniqueness* of the whole Universe. In short, I trace design in all—even in the stone, which in Paley's day would have excited no emotion. It is not only the mechanical adaptedness of the human eye or hand that fills me with astonishment, but also every clod of earth, every atom around me. Professor Molecule says it is all evolution. The Universe is one vast machine. Well, let it be granted. But—who made that machine?

My pipe is nearly out; the last wreaths of smoke are ascending; my 'worship' is well-nigh over. Professor Molecule may call this fetishism; Mr. Fred. Harrison may smile at my travestie of his religion. But I cannot help it. I don't know if there be a God or not. Nevertheless—with all due reverence and solemnity—I offer up my incense to—The Maker of the Machine.

PIPE III.

I met Professor Molecule again this morning and discussed my machine theory with him. I thought I would pose him with the question: "Who made the machine?" But not a bit of it. "Most likely," said he, "the machine, as you call it, made itself."—"But, Professor," I said, "that can't be, on the line of your own teaching. How can nothing produce something? Which was prior, the 'machine,' or what you call 'itself'?" How could the machine, when it was non-existent, make itself? How can non-entity make an entity? That seems to me harder to believe than any dogma of theology. That "God created the Universe" is at least thinkable, but that non-entity created all entities is to me unthinkable." He replied: "Well, what I mean is this: the various component parts of matter and power (which we must postulate to be eternal) ranged themselves into the machine. The various atoms operated by Force and Energy, and obeying chemical and

dynamical laws, in the course of innumerable ages, produced all this vast machine, this complex universe, of which you and I are infinitesimal, fleeting phenomena. What is the use of seeking further? Suppose you found out the maker of the machine,—then you must find out who made the maker of the machine, and so on *ad infinitum*.” And with that he left me. Now, is he right, I wonder? Matter and Power making the machine without a controlling mind. And then “Laws”—*why* laws, and *whose* laws? Force, and Atoms, and Laws,—Laws, and Atoms, and Force. After all that is an explanation that don't explain. It is like putting the world on an elephant, and the elephant on a tortoise, and the tortoise on no one knows what. How came those Laws, so called? Wonder did the Atoms meet in Convention and pass resolutions which became like the decrees of the Medes and Persians? Wonder if they decreed, for instance, that when so many atoms of *H* meet so many atoms of *O* under such and such conditions, they should coalesce and form a new entity called Water? Perhaps they said, Let there be water,—and there was water. By the way, what lots of resolutions they must have passed. Wonder if there was any opposition? Wonder if, when Atoms moved a resolution, Force did not sometimes move an amendment? And then, how about the different kinds of atoms or elements of which chemistry at present counts sixty or seventy? Wonder if each element was represented at the original Convention by one Atom or a billion Atoms? Now, Philosophy and Science make it their special province to search out the causes of things. Behold certain phenomena: forth steps science and tells us the causes of these phenomena. But when common sense demands, “Will you tell me the cause of those causes?” science replies, “That is not my business!”

But I understand there is a new theory now among the scientists. These scientists, by the way, ought to take out a Patent Right for manufacturing theories. None but they may theorise—or dogmatise either. This new theory is that all these sixty or seventy elements may yet be reduced to three or four, and possibly at last to one. Professor Molecule thinks that some day all our so-called elements will be resolvable into Hydrogen, and so that will be found to be the great mother-element. If that should be the case, we would then get at the great original “Indefinite, incoherent Homogeneity” of Mr. Herbert Spencer. Then, surely, science would give us a creed:—“I believe in Hydrogen.” Then I suppose we will all worship Hydrogen. We could formulate an article of religion similar to the first of the famous Thirty-nine Articles. Let

us try how the wording of it, *mutatis mutandis*, would suit our new "faith":

"There is but one living and true *Hydrogen*, everlasting, without body, parts or passions, of infinite power, wisdom and goodness, the maker and preserver of all things, both visible and invisible."

Now, let us take this up, clause by clause, as they say in Committees, and see what amendments are needed. We shall have to change the tense of the first clause as we are speaking of the beginning of things, and perhaps leave out the word "living." We will read it thus: "There was but one everlasting and true Hydrogen." That will do; first clause carried as amended.

"Without body, parts, or passions." Yes; second clause carried. "Of infinite Power." Certainly; all things were made by it; we can set no limit to its power, "potential" at first and then "kinetic." "Wisdom"—how about that? If it knew what it was doing, if it had an end in view in all its permutations and combinations, then it had "Wisdom;" but if it had no more sense than the hydrogen we fill balloons with,—then it had not, and its evolutions came out by chance, and that sounds unscientific. However, we must leave that out for the present as "not proven."—"Of infinite Goodness." Of course, if it had no "wisdom," it had no "goodness." But even if it had "wisdom," the "goodness" would be a question like "the goodness of nature," which we often hear of, but which depends altogether upon the point of view. The healthy, prosperous man will think nature very good, while the sufferer in mind, body, and estate will view it in an opposite light. The little insect, fluttering joyously among the flowers, can no doubt thank nature for its goodness; but when it gets caught in the spider's web I dare say it fails to see where the goodness comes in. No, like "wisdom," "goodness" must be left out of our Confession of Faith for the present. The last clause, "the Maker and Preserver of all things," etc., may stand, unless the word "Preserver" is objected to. But as the Indestructibility of Matter and the Conservation of Energy are established scientific facts, we may let it stay, and carry the whole clause. So our "Creed," as amended so far, would read thus: "There was but one everlasting and true Hydrogen without body, parts, or passions, of infinite power, the maker and preserver of all things, both visible and invisible."

Here at last I have an object of worship.

Now, I wonder what Hydrogen—supposing it has wisdom—thinks of the work of its hands? Wonder if it has itself absorbed some of the intelligence it has created or evolved? Wonder if it

will go on creating or evolving, until at last it produces a God, such as men have conceived of; or if—scared at its own success, at the Frankenstein it has produced—it will recall all its own constructions into itself, and resolve all things again, as at the first, into an eternal Nirvâna of Hydrogen!¹

It comes to this, it seems to me: Everybody must have some “Creed,” or belief. The scientific agnostic says he don’t know; but he can’t help framing theories, adopting hypotheses, as to the origin of things. His “working hypothesis,” until it is verified, is a “creed.” Again, all parties, theists and atheists, can agree (since the universe had confessedly some beginning) in saying: I believe in a maker of heaven and earth; whether that maker be that very vague and indefinite expression, “Nature,” or that definite entity, Hydrogen, or the old-fashioned term, God.

But the materialists must believe in a blind, unconscious maker, a haphazard maker, and yet a Creator; for mindless itself, it created Mind; without Intelligence, it created Intellect. It is more easy for me to believe in the priority of mind, rather than that Matter *plus* Energy evolved Mind.

There must be something Eternal, either Mind or Matter—or perhaps both. Since I must believe in some originator, I will take the most credible theory, the best “working hypothesis,” of the three. I shall say with the Theist:—

I believe in God, Maker of Heaven and Earth.

¹ See Clodd’s *Story of Creation*, Part I., Chapter I., and also the summary at the close of the book. This work is an admirable epitome of the results of modern scientific research.