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***CAN COSMO-THEISTIC EVOLUTION ACCOUNT
FOR CHRISTIANITY?**

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The object of this lecture is to discuss the question whether the philosophy of cosmo-theistic evolution can account for Christ and Christianity and at the same time reject the traditional or supernatural explanation. It is proposed to give some reasons why this question cannot be answered in the affirmative. I recognize that this is only a piece of negative criticism. It makes no effort to prove the traditional view. But it is hoped that the development of the argument may show some reasons why the supernatural conception is still the most satisfactory explanation of our historic religion.

It is not required in your presence to say that the hypothesis of evolution has been an important and fruitful conception of modern thought. Your familiarity with the subject makes it unnecessary to enter in detail into its various relations to the problem of supernatural religion. It is proper, however, to observe that the application of evolution to theological questions has usually resulted in the denial of the supernatural basis of Christianity; and this makes it important to consider the phases through which this mode of denial has passed, in order to appreciate precisely the form of philosophy, described as cosmo-theistic, with which we have to deal.

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DANTE

BY REV. W. S. BEAN, D. D., CLINTON, S. C.

There are certain writers who appeal to us most strongly in the days of our youth. We read some of the poets and novelists in our boyhood or young manhood, and become enthusiastic over them. There are others whose writings we try to read, but often we are compelled to acknowledge that we find little pleasure in them. The poetry of Sir Walter Scott interests a boy of fifteen much more than Wordsworth's "Sonnets," or his graver poems. "Lucile" may still have more readers than "The Ring and the Book."

We require experience, reflection and a deeper interest in the serious problems of life before we can enter intelligently upon the discussion of the deepest themes. Aristotle says that age is necessary to a philosopher, as philosophy rests largely on experience; while a young man may be a brilliant mathematician, because mathematics rests on pure deduction.

Among the acknowledged masters of poetry, Dante takes the first rank. He is not only a great poet, but one of the few great "world poets" whose fame abides not for one generation but for all time.

Yet how few actually read his poems or try to understand them. Translations of the "Divine Comedy" may be found in libraries, both private and public, but they are likely to repose peacefully on the shelf and to show few marks of use. This may be because many male readers look rather slightly on poetry, as something pertaining to the intellect of women and young people. Even if they admired Scott and Byron in their youth, they lay them aside, and in the rush of busy life fail to make the acquaintance of the few greater poets, who dwell on serious and lofty themes. Dante especially, as a foreign poet, a Catholic, and far removed from our time, is apt to be passed over. Yet, if we take up Dante, in later life, we may learn his secret, become deeply interested in both the man and his

writings, and find that we have come into a new atmosphere of thought and expression. And when once fascinated by the great Tuscan, we can never become indifferent to his charm.

If we look at his period in the history of the world, and set the man in the framework of his age, we see how many movements of thought and of action flow toward him and around him. The assumed date of the tremendous journey described in the "Divine Comedy" is 1300, when the poet was just "midway in this our mortal life," or thirty-five years old.

His native city of Florence, though but a little republic, was a centre of culture, activity and fierce political strife. Pope Boniface VIII celebrated in 1300, the jubilee which drew a vast concourse to Rome and preceded his quarrel with France, his imprisonment and death. In 1305, the papal court was removed to Avignon, where for a number of years it remained, under the control of the French court. The Dominican and Franciscan orders of monks had arisen, and spread through Europe the influence of their preaching. Thomas Aquinas had fixed and formulated the official theology and philosophy of the Church of Rome, while his great opponent, Duns Scotus, had also written and taught, and gained a number of disciples. New universities were coming into being. Roger Bacon was awakening an interest in Science; Aristotle was held in high esteem, so far as known by Latin translations; Chivalry was at its height; France and England were consolidating their power as nations, and preparing for the long hundred years' war, which fills so much of the history of the fourteenth century. The first representative English parliament met in 1265, the year of Dante's birth, and introduced a new principle which was to become so mighty afterwards—the representation of the Commons in the national council. Above all, the contest between the pope and the Holy Roman Empire continued to convulse Europe, and the strife of Guelf and Ghibelline divided Germany and Italy into two bitterly hostile parties. Cimabue had started a new school of painting, and his pupil Giotto was destined to surpass him in fame. It was an active, inquisitive, struggling age into which the poet was born. Nor was he an indifferent spectator of the currents which swept past him, but he flung himself into them, with all the intensity of his

nature. His proud, inquisitive and highly intellectual spirit drank deeply at all the fountains of knowledge accessible to him. He was conscious of his own gifts, this "Messer Dante Alighieri." Who does not know that sad, stern face, with its clear cut features, the firmly set mouth, the scarcely concealed scorn of the eye and lip? The man at sight of whose swarthy features and crisped hair the women whispered he had been in hell, was a marked figure in his day, and was as bitterly hated by his enemies as he was loved by his friends. Yet under that stern expression lay a deeply sensitive nature, a spirit susceptible of love or hate, and a heaven-born genius whose power was not weakened by the weight of learning under which it advanced.

The poet himself becomes to us a character of absorbing interest. In that tenderest of love stories, the "Vita Nuova" he relates the history of his early love for Beatrice, and traces the influence of that love upon his character. The love was idealized and made the symbol of his intellectual and spiritual advance. Then his love of country, his entanglement in the stormy politics of the age, his banishment and exile, his longing for the fair city which had cast him out, his ceaseless labor on the "poem sacred, which for so many years had made him lean," and reveal the intensity of the man's nature and his mastery of a rare gift of expression.

His voice would have been notable if for nothing else, than that it broke the silence of centuries. There had been other poets before him. Provencal and Italian writers, and German minnesingers. But Dante towered high above them all, and undertook a mightier task than songs of love and chivalry. His early poems were love poems, and his "Convivio" was a prose commentary on his odes, in which treatise he heaped up a mass of the miscellaneous learning which he had imbibed. But not yet had he reached the height of his power. His "Divina Commedia" was to be his crowning work, in which he journeyed through the "three regions" of hell, purgatory and paradise, and found the mysteries of life solved or silenced in the transcendent light of divine truth.

The great poem treats of the soul, tormented by remorse and sin, guided by Reason (Virgil), purified by penitence and suf-

fering, and finally lifted by Divine Truth (Beatrice), from star to star, until at last in the empyrean it sees the host of the redeemed, "in fashion as a snowy rose," unfolding its beauty in rank upon rank of just souls and true. Above it and around it, like celestial bees, hover the ministering angels, ever and anon drawing near to the petals of the wondrous flower, on errands of peace and love.

The "Inferno" contains the most dramatic and striking passages of mere human interest. Here is the story of Francesca di Rimini told with such inimitable pathos; the conversation with Farinata degli Uberti, raising himself from his burning tomb and looking around as if "he had great scorn of hell"; the terrible episode of Ugolino, starving to insanity and death, with his sons and grandson in the awful "Tower of Famine." Ulysses from the midst of the flames which enshroud him, relates the strange story of his last voyage over the unknown seas below the equator, until at last ruin overtook him and "O'er his head the booming billow closed." And among the other sinners is seen the pope Nicholas III, head downward, in the burning pit and reserving beside him a place for his brother pope, Boniface VIII, who was to descend after him. All that hate and scorn can express, in words as direct and sharp as a sword-thrust, is found in the characterization of the sinners among whom the poets, Dante and Virgil, pass. Deeper and deeper, amid these scenes and sounds of woe, the two go down, into the narrowing circles, meeting the famous transgressors of classic and Bible history and mingling with the contemporaries of Dante.

Finally, in the very centre and heart of hell, in the frozen circle reserved for the worst betrayers and traitors, Satan is found, his feet fast bound in the awful ice, congealed from all the tears which have trickled down from the miseries of earth, fanning with his huge, bat-like wings and thus increasing the cold. But there is no escape for the poets now, save by clambering down his shaggy sides and passing the centre of the earth, until, after a long and painful struggle, they emerge, blackened by the smoke of the pit, upon the lake which bathes the foot of the Mount of Purgatory. Here the poet rejoices in a purer air, and beholds from afar "the trembling of the

sea." Hell itself is an inverted cone, formed by the flight of the central portion of the earth in terror before the fall of Satan. The matter thus taken away is disposed in a lofty hill, the antipodes of Jerusalem, on the summit of which stands the earthly Paradise, removed after the fall above the realms of human pollution. Here, after washing away the grime of the pit, the poets begin the ascent of the mount, passing first the Angel of Penitence, who guards the gate. Around the mountain, like a terraced spiral, winds the path by which the ascent is made, each circle corresponding to one of the sins which is here expiated. As Dante leaves each one, one of the seven "Ps" (peccata) on his forehead is erased by the stroke of the angel's wing, and he hears the Beatitude pronounced on the opposed virtue.

There is much ethical discussion in the "Purgatorio," as the varying classes of sinners are met, suffering indeed, but bearing patiently the pain which is to purify them. Dante asks questions about destiny and free-will, worldly goods, love in its different forms, and these are gravely answered, either by Virgil himself or by some spirit who is called upon to solve the difficulties of the man who walks in his earthly form among them. Near the summit is the ring of flame, through which the passage lies to the earthly Paradise. Here the purification of the poet is completed. Virgil can no longer be his teacher and guide, and so the ancient poet, the type of human reason, bids farewell to Dante in the noble words, "Free, upright and whole is thy will and 'twere a fault not to act according to its promptings. Wherefore, I do crown and mitre thee over thyself."

In that lovely and verdant earthly Paradise, Dante, forsaken by Virgil, is to meet again his loved and lost Beatrice; no more a simple Florentine girl, but a woman of stately beauty, the type of Christian theology. In language as musical and beautiful as the music and the beauty which it describes, the peace and charm of this fair abode are portrayed. The poet is sternly rebuked by his old love for his past sinful life, and finally, after breaking down in utter shame, he is drawn through the river of Lethe, which takes away the memory of sin, and again through that of Eunœ, which restores the memory of that which was good in the earthly life.

From the earthly Paradise the poet, with Beatrice as his guide, takes his upward flight from sphere to sphere, passing through the seven spheres of the five planets, the sun and moon, then into the sphere of the fixed stars, the crystalline sphere, and last, into the Empyrean. The "Paradiso" contains the theology of the poet. He is duly examined as to his knowledge and faith by "Barons" Peter, James, John and Paul. When Peter denounces the corruption of his successors in the See of Rome, he glows with such indignation that all Paradise is crimsoned by the reflection. The beauty of Beatrice grows ever more resplendent as they ascend, and into her eyes Dante looks with increasing wonder and rapture. Here we find scholastic definitions mingled with others from Aristotle, "the master of those who know." In the final vision, the glory of the Holy Trinity is revealed to the poet, but earthly language is inadequate to utter a mystery so transcendent. Here the poet is no longer moved by his own "firm and upright will," but, like the celestial spheres, by that "love which doth move the sun and the other stars."

To gain any satisfactory understanding of the great poem, time, study and thought are required. The "Divina Commedia" forms the starting point for investigating the philosophy of Aristotle, the Ptolemaic astronomy, the scholastic theology, the geography and cosmology of the Middle Ages, the strife of Guelf and Ghibelline, the dawn of a new age of poetry and painting, the flowering of Gothic architecture, the rise of the preaching friars, the final ebb of the crusading spirit. In every direction the mind is led to question, to investigate, to gain increasing light upon a period full of historical interest, but which we usually pass over as of slight account. Our interest in the poem grows with our increasing knowledge on all the above topics. Not only so, but all kinds of symbolism are suggested, in the mystic use of numbers, the strict conformity to the general scheme of three main divisions, with one hundred cantos; each of the main divisions closing with the same word, "stelle" (the stars), expressing thus the constant aspiration of the soul.

Dante, although a Roman Catholic, was a stern critic of the papacy, an opponent of its claim to temporal power, and almost a fanatic in his devotion to an ideal "Holy Roman Empire," out of which he seemed to expect the coming of a political Messiah, who should correct the evils of the world. Hence, while he reverences the papal See itself, he does not hesitate to consign to hell "priests, popes and cardinals," along with the worst of sinners. He wrote a Latin treatise, "De Monarchia," in which he set forth his views of the function of the empire, and claims for it a divine authority, co-ordinate with that of the papacy in spiritual things. Another Latin treatise, "De Vulgari Eloquentia," treats of the use of Italian instead of Latin as a medium of literature.

One would naturally suppose that the Italian of Dante would be farther removed from the modern Tuscan than is the English of Chaucer from that of to-day. But Dante almost created Italian as a literary language, and any ordinary Italian dictionary can supply his vocabulary, except a few words which he seems to have fashioned for himself. It is not difficult for one who has a good knowledge of Latin to learn enough Italian to appreciate, at least, the musical quality of Dante's poetry. It is related that, after the publication of Macaulay's essay on Dante, the great divine, Robert Hall, was found sprawling on the floor of his study, endeavoring, with the aid of an Italian dictionary and grammar, to verify for himself the eulogies of the essayist. Surely he would have welcomed the beautiful little "Temple Classic" edition of Dante, which gives the Italian text, with a literal prose version on the opposite page, and a sufficient apparatus of notes and introductions to give at least a beginning in the study of the poet. There are also volumes of the "Covivio," the "Vita Nuova" and the Latin treatises in the same attractive edition, together with a "Dante Primer," which is a useful little handbook. Any one can be purchased separately, and the student who breaks down in the "Inferno" need never advance farther, unless he wishes to do so. Longfellow's translation is probably the most readable for those who care only for the translated poem.

The number of books written on Dante and his works grows steadily in volume from year to year; there are Dante Societies

in almost every civilized country, and publications devoted to their papers and proceedings. If one cares to keep company with the Immortals, he cannot afford to neglect some knowledge of Dante. Nor will anything give him a more distinct consciousness of a new mental possession than contact with so great a mind and sympathy with so tried a man. While, as has been said, Dante is not usually attractive to younger readers, it is one of the compensations of the coming on of later years that they "bring the philosophic mind." No longer merely the wild beauty of Nature attracts us, nor its harmonies possess our hearing. Our ears are opened to the "still, sad music of humanity," and a knowledge of life brings with it a deeper sympathy with the great poet who had learned how "to abandon everything loved most dearly and to make trial of how salt doth taste another's bread, how hard the path to descend and mount upon another's stair."