

THE MATERIAL UNIVERSE.

The
Material
Universe

The material universe as such occupies a considerable place in revelation, which establishes a few cardinal principles of great importance to theology. Matter is declared to have been created by God, though no name is given to it; fashioned into the orderly arrangement of systems, it is the Kosmos; these are the result of successive creations, which are indicated by the term worlds. We are taught that the universe of matter was ordained to be the scene of life, passing through its several stages up to life spiritual; but the inhabitation of other worlds, and their relations to redemption, are questions which have little light thrown upon them in the Word of God. Lastly, as the revelation of Scripture concerns only that part of the universe which belongs to man, we cannot draw any certain conclusion as to the final destiny of the universe of matter from the testimony of prophecy concerning the end of our heaven and earth: we are left to the inferences of analogy. These general principles may be usefully applied to many current theories and cosmical speculations.

MATTER.

Matter

Matter, or $\nu\lambda\eta$, has no name in Scripture: it is indicated there generally as having been at first without form and void, diffused, unorganised, and lifeless. Science is left free to discover and give its own names to the primary elements. The atoms of the universe and their molecular arrangements are never once alluded to: they are left to man's discovery. But the same God Who is the Father of spirits was the Creator of pure matter. He impressed their unchangeable properties upon all the particles of the universe, created, in their number and potentialities, like the angels, at once. Before this truth Materialism, ancient and modern, in its variety of forms as a theory, vanishes. In ancient

Idealism
and
Realism.

philosophy it was the *anima mundi*, or soul of the world, or *natura naturans* that took the place of God. Modern Materialism, through all its phases down to Positivism, makes everything, including the phenomena of mind, physical ; and, while acknowledging that it is as yet far from being able to account for the facts, and that the molecular laws of mind, feeling, and will are perhaps undiscoverable, it nevertheless asserts that they are the results of changes in matter and governed by invariable laws, directed by something inscrutable and unknowable behind. Materialism has been the same in every age : modern science has not advanced one step beyond ancient philosophy ; except in this, that it gives up that vestige of instinct towards God that Pantheism exhibited. The ancient theorists thought of a plastic soul in things : pan-Theism. The modern theorists think only of matter as the vehicle of energy : pan-Materialism. One of its tendencies is to resolve matter into a congregation of forces ; by which it unconsciously argues itself in a circle back to God. Scripture, which asserts that the beginning of the living creature was a new Divine act, vindicates the reality of matter from the philosophy which would resolve it into nothing. Idealism and Realism preside over the whole range of speculation on this subject respectively. The former as represented by Berkeley denies the existence, or the possibility of proving the existence, of any substance behind the phenomena which affect our senses : these senses being ordained to see either in God Himself, or according to some unknown laws, what seems to be matter. But, however that notion may be qualified, it falls before the early testimony which tells us that the material universe was formed before there were any creatures to receive its impressions. So all the more recent theories of force which would annihilate objective substance as the vehicle of energy must yield to the evidence of a creation which preceded all life. This hypothesis seems to breathe into the inorganic universe a kind of life, called force, which preceded its organic forms ; but it has no support. It would seem, like Berkeley's theory, to be a useful ally of the theologian, in as far as it saves us from the necessity of believing in a creation apart from God ; but the testimony of Genesis confirms the universal realistic instinct of man, that there is a substance behind the phenomena of matter. As it regards the scientific

theories of the persistence of force, the conservation of energy, and the correlation of its physical manifestations, they do not in the slightest degree affect theology, until they penetrate the region of life. When it is affirmed that physical and vital forces are correlated and convertible—in other words, that all the phenomena of thought, and feeling, and will, are only transformed forces of matter—sound reasoning is violated as well as Scripture. It may be said that the material basis of animal and vegetable life is something in the molecular arrangement of its particles; and this may be called protoplasm. But it cannot be shown that anything but living matter communicates or feeds life. Spontaneous generation is a figment that Materialists have made their as yet unknown God. The true God giveth *life, and breath, and all things*. But, as man's body was created for the instant inhabitation of his living soul, so the matter of the universe was intended to be the instant abode of life. That life was breathed into it by the Spirit Who brooded over our chaos: He is the Lord and Giver of life in every manifestation of it, from the most elementary protoplasm up to that which beholds the face of God.

Acts xvii
26.

OTHER WORLDS.

Other
Worlds.

The testimony of Revelation to the universe of other worlds than ours is limited. But what we have is consistent with every discovery and every rational hypothesis of modern science. The heavens have their host: to us an ambiguous word, which refers either to the worlds or to the inhabitants of those worlds, but is in the Scripture limited to the physical universe. As ordered in systems the universe is a *κόσμος*, as in our Lord's words, *before the foundation of the world*: the ancient use of the term to signify the ordered whole of the heavenly bodies is retained in the New Testament, though the common use limits it to man's world. Hence it is *τὸ πᾶν*, the universe; which, however, is never a unity in the Bible, heaven and earth being sundered. Viewed in the orderly succession of its creations the universe is made up of the *αἰῶνες*. By Whom also He made the worlds, that is, the worlds which fill the ages of so-called past eternity. One of the first exercises of faith is said to embrace the fact that these worlds were framed, *κατηρτίσθαι*, as the phenomenal, or in their present

John xvii.
24.
Eph. i. 4.

Heb. i. 2.

Heb. xi. 3