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Thomas Chalmers

Excerpt

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PREFACE.

It is an incongruous thing, when there is any want of conformity between the subject matter of an essay, and its title. The object of this explanatory preface is to shew that it is an incongruity into which we have not fallen.

In the first place we were not in fair circumstances for expounding the adaptation of external nature to the mental constitution of man, till we had made manifest in some degree what that constitution is. There is no distinct labourer in that conjunct demonstration of the divine attributes which is now being offered to the world, to whom this essentially preliminary topic had been assigned as the subject of a separate work. It was therefore unavoidable, that, to a certain extent we should undertake it ourselves, else, in proceeding to the construction of our argument, we might have incurred the charge

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of attempting to rear a superstructure, without a foundation to rest upon.

But in the execution of this introductory part of our subject, we could scarcely have refrained from noticing the indications of divine wisdom and goodness in our mental constitution itself, even though our strictly proper, because our assigned task, was to point out these indications in the adaptation of this constitution to external nature. We could not forget that the general purpose of the work was to exhibit with all possible fulness the argument for the character of the Deity, as grounded on the laws and appearances of nature. But we should have left out a very rich and important track of argument, had we forborne all observation on the evidence for the divine perfections, in the structure and processes of the mind itself, and confined ourselves to the evidence afforded by the relations which the mind bore to the external world. In the adaptation of external nature to man's physical constitution, there are many beautiful and decisive indications of a God. But prior to these, there is a multitude of distinct indications, both in the human anatomy, and the human

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physiology, viewed by themselves, and as separate objects of contemplation. And accordingly, in this joint undertaking, there have been specific labourers assigned to each of these departments. But we have not had the advantage of any previous expounder for the anatomy of the mind, or the physiology of the mind; and we felt that to have left unnoticed all the vivid and various inscriptions of a Divinity, which might be collected there, would have been to withhold from view some of the best attestations in the whole range and economy of nature, for the wisdom and benevolence of its great architect.

But to construct a natural theology on any subject, it is not necessary to make of that subject a full scientific exposition. The one is as distinct from the other, as the study of final is from the study of efficient causes—the former often lying patent to observation, while the latter may be still involved in deepest obscurity. It were a manifest injury to our cause, it were to bedim the native lustre of its evidences—did we enter with it among the recondite places of the mental philosophy, and there enwrap it in the am-

biguity of questions yet unresolved, in the mist of controversies yet unsettled. Often, though not always, the argument for a God in some phenomenon of nature depends upon its reality, and not upon its analysis, or the physical mode of its origination—on the undoubted truth that so it is, and not on the undetermined, perhaps indeterminable question of how it is. We should not have shrunk from the obscurer investigation, had it been at all necessary. But that is no reason why time must be consumed on matters which are at once obscure and irrelevant. It is all the more fortunate that we are not too long detained from an entry on our proper task, among the depths or the difficulties of any preliminary disquisition which comes before it—and that the main strength of the argument which our mental constitution, taken by itself, furnishes to the cause of theism, lies not in those subtilities which are apprehended only by few, but in certain broad and palpable generalities which are recognised by all men.

But there is another explanation which we deem it necessary to make, in order fully to reconcile the actual topics of our essay,

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with the designation which has been prefixed to it.

If by external nature be meant all that is external to mind, then the proper subject of our argument is the adaptation of the material to the mental world. But if by external nature be meant all that is external to one individual mind, then would the subject be very greatly extended; for beside the reciprocal influence between that individual mind, and all sensible and material things, we should consider the reciprocal influence between it and all other minds. By this contraction of the idea from the mental world to but one individual member of it; and this proportional extension in the idea of external nature from the material creation to the whole of that living, as well as inanimate creation, by which any single man is surrounded; we are introduced not merely to the action and reaction which obtain between mind and matter; but, which is far more prolific of evidence for a Deity, to the action and reaction which obtain between mind and mind. We thus find access to a much larger territory, which should otherwise be left unexplored—and have the

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opportunity of tracing the marks of a divine intelligence in the mechanism of human society, and in the frame-work of the social and economical systems to which men are conducted, when they adhere to that light, and follow the impulse of those affections which God has bestowed on them.

But in the progress of our argument, we come at length to be engaged with the adaptations of external nature, even in the most strict and limited sense of the term. In the origin and rights of property, as well as in the various economic interests of society, we behold the purest exemplification of that adjustment which obtains between the material system of things and man's moral nature—and when we proceed to treat of his intellectual constitution, it will be found that the harmonies between the material and the mental worlds are still more numerous, and more palpably indicative of that wisdom which originated both, and conformed them with exquisite and profound skill to each other.

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INTRODUCTORY CHAPTER.

GENERAL AND PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS.

1. **EXTERNAL** nature, when spoken of in contradistinction to mind, suggests chiefly, if not solely, the idea of the material universe. Even though restricted to this limited and proper sense of the term, we should still behold the proofs of beneficent design in the fitnesses of the one to the other ; but far more abundantly and decisively, it must be confessed, in the adaptation of external nature to the physical, than in its adaptation to the moral and intellectual constitution of man. For fully developing our peculiar argument, an enlargement of the meaning commonly affixed to external nature seems indispensable,—an enlargement that we should not have ventured on, if in so doing we crossed the legitimate boundaries of our assigned subject ; and that, for the mere purpose of multiplying our topics, or possessing ourselves of a wider field of authorship. But the truth is, that did we confine our notice to the relations which obtain between the world of mind and the world of matter, we should be

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doing injustice to our own theme, by spoiling it of greatly more than half its richness,—beside leaving unoccupied certain fertile tracts of evidence, which, if not entered upon in our division of the general work, must, as is obvious from the nature of the respective tasks, be altogether omitted in the conjunct demonstration that is now being offered to the public, of the Goodness and Wisdom of the Deity.

2. It is true that, with even but one solitary human mind in midst of the material creation, certain relations could be traced between them that would indicate both skill and a benevolent purpose on the part of Him who constructed the frame-work of nature, and placed this single occupier within its confines. And, notwithstanding this limitation, there would still be preserved to us certain striking adaptations in the external system of things to the intellectual, and some too, though fewer and less noticeable, to the moral constitution of man. But, born as man obviously is for the companionship of his fellows, it must be evident that the main tendencies and aptitudes of his moral constitution should be looked for in connection with his social relationships, with the action and reaction which take place between man and the brethren of his species. We therefore understand external nature to comprehend in it, not merely all that is external to mind, but all that is external to the individual possessor of a

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human mind,—who is surrounded not only by an economy of complex and extended materialism, but who is surrounded by other men and other minds than his own. Without this generalized view of external nature, we should be left in possession of but scanty materials for evincing its adaptation to the moral constitution of man, though an ample field of observation would still lie open to us, in unfolding the aptitude of the human understanding, with its various instincts and powers, for the business of physical investigation. For the purpose then of enhancing our argument, or rather of doing but justice to it, we propose to consider not merely those relations between mind and matter, but those relations between mind and mind, the establishment of which attests a wise and beneficent contrivance. We shall thus be enabled to enter on a department of observation distinct from that of all the other labourers in this joint enterprize,—and while their provinces respectively are to trace the hand of a great and good Designer in the mechanism of the heavens, or the mechanism of the terrestrial physics, or the mechanism of various organic structures in the animal and vegetable kingdoms ; it will be part of ours, more especially, to point out the evidences of a forming and presiding, and withal benevolent intelligence in the mechanism of human society.

3. We conceive of external nature then that it

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comprehends more than the mute and unconscious materialism, and the objective truth—it comprehends also the living society by which the possessor of a moral and intellectual constitution is surrounded. Did we exclude the latter from our regards, we should be keeping out of view a number of as wise, and certainly, in the degree that mind is of higher consideration than body, of far more beneficial and important adaptations than any which are presented to our notice in the mechanical, or chemical, or physiological departments of creation. Both in the reciprocities of domestic life, and in those wider relations, which bind large assemblages of men into political and economical systems, we shall discern the incontestable marks of a divine wisdom and care; principles or laws of human nature in virtue of which the social economy moves rightly and prosperously onward, and apart from which all would go into derangement; affinities between man and his fellows, that harmonize the individual with the general interests, and are obviously designed as provisions for the well-being both of families and nations.

4. It might help to guard us against a possible misconception, if now, at the outset of our argument, we shall distinguish between the moral constitution of man, and that moral system of doctrine which embodies in it the outer truths or principles of ethical science. The two are as