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The Unity of Worlds and of Nature

Baden Powell (1796–1860) was a mathematician who held the Savilian Chair of Geometry at Oxford, and was also a priest in the Church of England. He was a defender of the claims of new scientific discoveries in the face of Christian orthodoxy well before Darwin published the theory of evolution, and drew a clear distinction in his thinking and writing between moral and physical phenomena, as being independent of each other and the fields of completely different study. Darwin himself wrote, in the ‘Historical Sketch’ at the beginning of the third edition of *On the Origin of Species*, “The ‘Philosophy of Creation’ has been treated in a masterly manner by the Rev. Baden Powell, in his *Essays on the Unity of Worlds*, 1855. Nothing can be more striking than the manner in which he shows that the introduction of new species is “a regular, not a casual phenomenon.” The second, enlarged and revised edition of 1856 is reissued here.

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The Unity of Worlds and of Nature

*Three Essays on the Spirit of Inductive
Philosophy; the Plurality of Worlds; and the
Philosophy of Creation*

BADEN POWELL



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THE
UNITY OF WORLDS
AND OF
NATURE:

THREE ESSAYS

ON

THE SPIRIT OF THE INDUCTIVE PHILOSOPHY;
THE PLURALITY OF WORLDS;
AND THE PHILOSOPHY OF CREATION.

BY

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SECOND EDITION,

REVISED AND ENLARGED.

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P R E F A C E

T O

T H E S E C O N D E D I T I O N .

A SECOND edition having been called for, I have endeavoured to render the present volume less unworthy of the public attention by a careful revision and correction of the text, and especially by availing myself of the valuable suggestions of several friends, as well as of those criticisms in periodicals which, from bearing any evidence of honesty, fairness, or ability, seemed deserving of notice. I have thus been led to make many additions, besides numerous lesser alterations; — but, to no modification of the essential argument, which it is hoped those changes will only render more clear and forcible.

My Third Essay more especially, having been publicly adverted to by Mr. W. J. Hamilton, P.G.S.

in his anniversary address to the Geological Society, 1856, I have felt it necessary to revise carefully the points in which he has criticised my argument, (though in no instance impugning my facts,) while he has given a flattering general commendation of the object and tenor of my work.

At the same time, I cannot help remarking as curious, how eagerly eminent geologists seem to single out, for the display of their controversial zeal, the obnoxious topic of the Development hypothesis, which, after all, I do *not* maintain.

With regard to some points more properly of a theological kind, I could have wished to add further elucidations of them, especially as in some quarters my meaning has been considered ambiguous, and perhaps some misapprehensions entertained with respect to it; but finding it impossible within the necessary limits to discuss such points as they deserve, I have contented myself for the present with a few verbal corrections to render the meaning clearer, in the hope, at a future time, of going into such discussion in another series of essays.

In the original Appendix (No. I.), I had annexed some elucidations of the logical principles of the argu-

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THE SECOND EDITION.

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ment especially as bearing on the theory of Induction.
In this edition, I have added some further remarks
in order to point out the connexion between the views
here adopted and those of Kant and some other
metaphysicians.

One or two other additional illustrations of different
parts of the argument are also annexed.

P R E F A C E

TO

THE FIRST EDITION.

THE three following essays, though somewhat connected in subject, are yet each distinct and complete in themselves, having been originally composed at different times and with separate objects. Hence there will probably be found in some parts *repetitions* : but on the whole it appeared preferable to allow these to remain, rather than by omissions and alterations to render less complete and continuous the argument of each essay in itself. And the few topics which belong to them in common will, in most cases, be found treated under somewhat different aspects, according as the particular argument in each instance required.

The First Essay consists mainly of an amplification of a few paragraphs in my paper “on Necessary

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and Contingent Truth” in the Oxford Ashmolean Memoirs, 1849, in reference to which I felt it desirable to explain and illustrate more fully some points there but imperfectly treated; as well as some other topics related to them, and which have of late years been the subject of considerable discussion: some of which were also considered in my work on “the Connexion of Natural and Divine Truth,” 1838. More precisely, the subjects of the primary grounds of inductive reasoning, and the theory of Causation, have long since appeared to me to be commonly involved in much confusion of thought, which has, as I think, been rather increased than diminished by some recent discussions from which we might have hoped for greater enlightenment; — and which appears to me to be the source of many unhappy difficulties and objections connected with the so-called doctrine of “final causes,” and the evidences of natural theology generally.

To the object of clearing up some of these difficulties, and inculcating better views, some parts of my former work last referred to were devoted: And to the argument there pursued (so far as I am aware) no substantial objections have been alleged. Yet the

frequent reproduction of the same original confusion of language and thought, in otherwise able and valuable writings at the present day, renders it not useless to recall attention to some of those considerations by which, I believe, the whole subject is put on a more satisfactory and unobjectionable basis.

Many of these topics, it will be evident at first sight, are coextensive with those so elaborately and profoundly treated in Dr. Whewell's *Philosophy of the Inductive Sciences* and in Mr. Mill's *Logic*. If I have made very few specific references to either of those treatises, it has arisen from no want of respect or consideration for either of the distinguished authors; but rather from an opposite feeling of high general esteem for the ability with which they have treated the subject, I entertained an unwillingness to appear to enter into direct controversy, in some material questions on which I have been constrained to hold opinions somewhat differing from those of both writers, though, in general, more nearly coinciding with the latter.

If the grounds on which I maintain my views shall be found sufficiently indicated and explained, I trust the candid reader will be as well prepared to come to

an unbiassed opinion on the points in question as if they were urged with a greater degree of critical detail; and the opinions which I controvert will be equally marked out, without more minute reference to the particular authors.

The Second Essay was called forth by a perusal of the two able and interesting works on the question of the Plurality of Worlds, which have of late attracted such an unexpected degree of public attention; an interest which, even up to the moment of bringing out this volume, does not appear to have abated, if we may judge from the numerous other publications since announced on the same question.

With respect to the author of the “*Essay on the Plurality of Worlds*,” while it would be absurd to pretend ignorance of his real eminence, I have throughout felt it would at the same time be improper to refer to his opinions, otherwise than as those sustained by the masked character under which, doubtless, for the greater freedom of such discussion, he has thought fit to veil academical dignity.

The controversy itself, as to the question of inhabited worlds, appears to me of comparatively little moment: it is rather for the sake of more general

considerations involved, that I have been led to enter into the discussion, and, in some measure, to hold the balance between the two disputants. Those broader principles are closely connected with the subject of the First Essay.

The collateral questions introduced into the Second Essay have also an immediate bearing on the subject of the Third. The inquiry into the *present* condition of planetary worlds is closely connected with that of their *past* state and probable origin; and this with the general question of the history of *creation*, so far as it can be traced on physical grounds. But this subject again, is one which has of late years extensively occupied the public attention; especially from the extraordinary popularity attained by the “Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation,” and the controversies to which that work has given rise. In those controversial discussions, it cannot but be matter of regret that so acrimonious a tone, little suited to eliciting the truth, should have been adopted by some of the writers. Hence it seemed to me that a more calm and philosophical analysis of the whole question was much needed; and in some measure to supply such a review of the general principles and grounds

xii PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION.

on which all speculations of the kind should be conducted, as well as to examine dispassionately into the alleged religious bearings of any theories by which some part of the steps and processes of creation might be explained, has been the aim of the Third Essay.

It should perhaps be observed that if, in those passages where I have spoken of the evidences of natural theology, I have professedly restricted my remarks to the *physical* portion of the argument,—it is not from at all disparaging or overlooking the *moral* and *metaphysical* portions, that I have not adverted to them, but solely because they are not immediately connected with the more direct object of these Essays.

A similar remark ought, also, to be made with respect to the very brief and inadequate mention made of some other points of deeper import to the belief in revelation; to which I could willingly have devoted a more extended discussion than it was possible within my present limits to give them.

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