

MR. GLADSTONE ON THE BIBLE AND SCIENCE.

Dr. Reville, professor in the College of France, in his "Prolegomena to the History of Religions," 1884, questioned the correctness of what Mr. Gladstone had said some time before in support of "a primitive revelation in the testimony of the Holy Scriptures." Dr. Reville disputed the accuracy of the account of the creation and of the beginning of religious worship. In the *Nineteenth Century* of November last, Mr. Gladstone defends his position with signal ability, and completely demolishes his critic in regard to the dawn of worship. The article is entitled "Dawn of Creation and of Worship," and concludes with these sentences:

"But none of these circumstances discredit or impair the proof that in the book, of which Genesis is the opening section, there is conveyed special knowledge to meet the special need everywhere so palpable in the state and history of our race. Far, indeed, am I from asserting that this precious gift, or that any process known to me, disposes of all the problems, either insoluble or unsolved, by which we are surrounded; of

'The burden and the mystery
Of all this unintelligible world.'

"But I own my surprise, not only at the fact, but at the manner in which in this day, writers, whose name is legion, unimpeached in character and abounding in talent, put away from them, cast into shadow, or into the very gulf of negation itself, the conception of a Deity, an acting and a ruling Deity. Of this belief, which has satisfied the doubts, and wiped away the tears and found guidance for the footsteps of so many a weary wanderer on earth; which among the best and greatest of our race has been so cherished by those who had it, and so longed and sought for by those who had it not, we might suppose that if, at length, we had discovered that it was in the light of truth untenable, that the accumulated testimony of man was worthless, and that his wisdom was but folly, yet, at least, the decencies of mourning would be vouchsafed to this irreparable loss. Instead of this, it is with a joy and exultation that might almost recall the frantic orgies of the Commune, that this, at least at first sight, terrific and overwhelming calamity is accepted, and recorded as a gain.

"Evolution, that is, physical evolution, which alone is in view, may be true (like the solar theory), may be delightful and wonderful in its right place; but are we really to understand that varieties of animals brought about through domestication, the wasting of organs (for instance, the tails of men) by disuse, that natural selection and the survival of the fittest, all in the physical order, exhibit to us the great *arcanum* of creation, the sum and centre of life, so that mind and spirit are dethroned from their old supremacy, are no longer sovereign by right, but may find somewhere by charity a place assigned them, as appendages, perhaps only as excrescences of the material creation?

"I contend that evolution in its highest form has not been a thing heretofore unknown to history, to philosophy, or to theology. I contend that it was before the mind of Paul when he taught that in the fulness of time God sent forth his Son, and of Eusebius when he wrote the 'Preparation for the Gospel,' and of Augustine when he composed the 'City of God;' and, beautiful and splendid as are the lessons taught by natural objects, they are, for Christendom at least, infinitely beneath the sublime unfolding of the great drama of human action, in which, through long ages, Greece was making ready a language and an intellectual type, and Rome a framework of order and an idea of law, such that in them were to be shaped and fashioned the destinies of a regenerated world.

"For those who believe that the old foundations are unshaken still, and that the fabric built upon them will

look down for ages upon the floating wreck of many a modern and boastful theory, it is difficult to see anything but infatuation in the destructive temperament which leads to the notion that to substitute a blind mechanism for the hand of God in the affairs of life is to enlarge the scope of remedial agency; that to dismiss the highest of all inspirations is to **[R1331 : page 143]** elevate the strain of human thought and life; and that each of us is to rejoice that our several units are to be disintegrated at death into 'countless millions of organisms;' for such, it seems, is the latest 'revelation' delivered from the fragile tripod of a modern Delphi. Assuredly, on the minds of those who believe, or else on the minds of those who after this fashion disbelieve, there lies some deep judicial darkness, a darkness that may be felt. While disbelief in the eyes of faith is a sore calamity, this kind of disbelief, which renounces and repudiates with more than satisfaction what is brightest and best in the inheritance of man, is astounding, and might be deemed incredible."