

BIBLE MORALITY.

SECULARISTS have no desire to extol the Bible above its merits, nor to depreciate it below its deserts. We gladly admit that it contains some useful precepts; but these, as a rule, are intermixed with so many teachings of an injurious character that their beauty is often overshadowed and their utility annulled. Its coarse language in many places renders it unfit for general perusal, and destroys its value as a standard for every-day life. The true worth of literature should be its moral tone. Novels are appreciated by the intelligent reader in proportion to their being "adorned" with a moral. And dramas fail to gain the approval of the thoughtful public unless virtue is inculcated in a chaste form. So with the Bible: if in its ethical tone it is defective, or if it is questionable in its injunctions or indelicate in its records, it cannot with advantage be accepted as an absolute monitor in human conduct.

All correct codes of morals should be clear in their authority and practical in their application. This is the more necessary when severe penalties—as in the case of Christian ethics—are threatened for non-acceptance and disobedience. Now, the ethics of the Bible are both contradictory and impracticable. The same line of conduct is enjoined in one passage, and just as explicitly prohibited in another. One man is blamed because he is not cruel enough, and will not go on slaying the Lord's enemies; another man's chief glory consists in being a mighty man of war and a great destroyer of men, women, and children; while other passages proclaim, "Thou shalt not kill," and enjoin mercy and "loving-kindness." The most absolute rest is enjoined on the Sabbath, and the fiercest denunciations are hurled at the most vigorous Sabbatarian. Retaliation for wrong is counselled, and forgiveness is enjoined. We are told to "love one another," and we are commanded to hate our

own flesh and blood. Industry is advised and also discouraged; lustful pursuits are condemned and also permitted. Thus Biblical morality is destitute of the first fundamental condition of all just ethics.

Among the general principles taught in the Bible and expounded by orthodoxy in this country is that belief, not conduct, is the foundation of virtue, and that uncharitableness towards opponents is justifiable. One of the first instructions which a parent should enforce upon a child is never to impute bad motives in matters of belief or non-belief. No lesson is more valuable than this, none more calculated to render the child's life happy and unsuspecting, and to make its influence in the world more useful and beneficial. The Bible permits just the opposite. According to Christian teachings, if a man does an act of kindness, we are not to accept it with gratitude simply as an act of kindness, but we are to judge from the motives of his conduct. Did he perform the act from love to God, or did he do it only from respect for his fellow man? If the former, his services will go up as a sweet smelling offering to Deity; if the latter, he merely performed a "splendid vice." The motive, not the act, is the thing to be considered. If men slay, ravish, and destroy for the glory of God, the motive not only condones, but consecrates, the act. Hence, in the early history of Christianity, the practice of lying for the good of the Church was not only allowed, but considered praiseworthy. To require universal belief in one particular faith, and to condemn to eternal perdition those who are unable to comply therewith, is not the most moral doctrine. Truly, a book that teaches that "many are called but few are chosen," or, in other words, that the majority of our fellow creatures are to be cast into a burning lake, cannot assist to promote the happiness and good of mankind. The tendency of such teaching as this cannot have a beneficial effect, inasmuch as it often produces mutual hatred between man and man. Artificial and unjust distinctions of government and of classes have often produced ill-feeling between man and man; but that evil has been increased by the religious distinctions based upon Biblical teaching. The natural law of love is simple and clear. It is a duty to love all men until we have reason to believe that the trust is misplaced or abused. It then becomes necessary to slightly

modify our conduct as an act of self-defence ; hence the enactment of laws for the repression of crime and the curtailment of injury. If a man's belief teaches him that he can persecute, we have a right to be upon our guard, for we know from bitter experience that such belief has frequently shaped itself into conduct. But whatever man believes about matters that do not affect his conduct should produce in us neither love nor hatred towards him. His belief may be ever so curious, absurd, unreal, and fantastic, ever so ridiculous and self-contradictory, and in proportion of its partaking of those qualities it may excite and amuse us ; but it ought not to make us respect or dislike him one whit more. With the Bible it is quite different : its defect consists in its teaching us to love and respect certain people who believe certain things which have no direct beneficial bearing on their conduct ; while we are to avoid those whose lives may be a model of purity and benevolence, but who cannot subscribe to a certain faith.

The great principle of Bible morality is supposed to be contained in the Ten Commandments. The Decalogue, we are assured, enunciates moral lessons, against which no substantial objections can be brought. There are two versions of the Decalogue given in the Old Testament, varying in certain not unimportant particulars. Moses brought down, we are informed, the Ten Commandments from Mount Sinai, where he had been having a *tête-à-tête* with the Lord. They were written on stone, and were copied off for future generations in Exodus xx. They are also given in Deuteronomy v. ; but that was merely from memory, when Moses had become somewhat advanced in age. It is not surprising, therefore, that he should insert certain interpolations in the second giving of the law which are absent from the first. How this incongruity can be reconciled with the doctrine of the Divine inspiration of the Bible may be left for Christians to decide among themselves. The Decalogue is divided into two parts : that which relates to man's duty to God, and that which relates to the mutual duties of man to man. It is worthy of notice that, although the second half contains six commands, and the former half only four, nevertheless the first half is a great deal longer than the second. Most of the commands of the second half are contained in the most condensed form. The second, third,

and fourth Commandments are all developments of the first. The first really contains or assumes the three which succeed it. The first, which is, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me," of course involves the second against idolatry, the third against blasphemous swearing, and the fourth enjoining restful remembrance of the creation of the world by God. It is curious, while God in these Commandments had so much to say in giving a complete code of conduct to his creatures, and confining himself as he did within the limits of a certain number of Hebrew characters, written on a stone small enough for a man to carry down the side of a steep mountain, that he should have wasted so much time in telling them how to behave to him, and have left so little space to contain what was far more important—viz., the rules to regulate our conduct to each other. The whole prescribed duty of man to man is contained in seventy-seven words. The second Commandment brings out that particular character of the Christian God which is so conspicuous in other parts of the Bible. We are not to make and bow down to images. Very good advice, we readily admit. But *why* are we not to do so? Is there any appeal to the generous and reverential sentiments of the human heart? Surely a noble and good God would have said something similar to this: "Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them; for I, the Lord thy God, am a great, beneficent, and generous God, with a wide, all-embracing love. Thou shalt not degrade thy soul nor debase thy being by worshipping the gods of the heathen. I am your only father, who made and cares for you, and your place of reverence and trust is in the all-sustaining hollow of my hand." Had the Deity said this, and proved his sincerity by appropriate actions subsequently towards his subjects, it would have done more to have won the affections of his children to him than the whole of his present recorded sayings contained from Genesis to Revelation. But no; we find that a sordid appeal is made partly to the mean fears, and partly to the paternal affections, of the Jews. They are forbidden to worship other gods: "For I, the Lord thy God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me." Fancy a great, Almighty God, creator of the earth, being jealous of the estranged

affection of an unfortunate Jew! But this is in keeping with the general character of the Christian Deity, and most of his particular and immediate acquaintances. The part of the Decalogue which has reference to us, as members of society, is so brief, in comparison to that which has been occupied by theology and the requirements of God, that little room is left for the introduction of rewards and punishments which are to follow the fulfilment or non-fulfilment of so important a behest as "Thou shalt not kill." But the punishment of idolatry, a most cruel, unjust, and revengeful one, is given at full length. The fifth Commandment, "Honour thy father and mother," is certainly, as far as it goes, an excellent one. It comes home to the heart of everyone who has the feelings of love and duty within him. We can take no possible exception to its request. But the reason given for its fulfilment is as selfish as it is untrue. Yielding to no one in the belief that filial affection and reverence are not only duties, but carry with them (as all virtues do to some extent) their own reward in the satisfaction of an approving sense of right, it has yet to be shown that the keeping of the first part of this command will secure the accomplishment of the second. Honouring parents does not invariably carry with it the fulfilment of the promise, "Thy days shall be long in the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee." The best of sons have frequently been called upon to pay the last debt of nature when still in the bloom and vigour of their manhood, while some of the worst of characters live to a comparatively old age, a grief to their parents and a disgrace to themselves. Though, therefore, we would echo the command, "Children, obey your parents," we would also say: Do so, not from any selfish hope of personal gain or long life, but for the love you should have for those who have toiled for and protected you through years of infancy and helplessness. Duty, gratitude, and affection should be the inspiration to obedience, not the grovelling incentive given by the Bible. But may not this be taken as a fair sample of Bible teaching? Whenever we discover a noble thought, a just precept, or a generous sentiment, we generally find it surrounded by much that is impracticable, misleading, and fallacious. The sixth, seventh, and eighth Commandments call for no special remark, save that, when they point out the extremes of

certain vices, and forbid their indulgence, they fail to state how far persons may go in their direction without committing fatal errors ; and this difficulty is all the greater when we reflect that these were the very Commandments which most of God's favourites had the greatest predilection for breaking. The chief object of the ninth Commandment is its limitation. Why should the word "neighbour" be introduced in the prohibition of false swearing? It is equally a wrong to swear falsely against a stranger as against a neighbour. The tenth Commandment is the only one of the second part of the Decalogue which errs by excess of Puritanism. There can be no harm, for instance, in coveting a neighbour's house if sufficient compensation is offered to induce him to give up the lease ; and, if we did not occasionally covet our neighbour's oxen, beefsteaks and surloins would be even more scarce among the working classes than they are at present. Speaking broadly, the one great objection to the Decalogue is the absence of any noble, inspiring principle of conduct. It teaches no real love, no true charity ; it is a penal code, not a rule of life.

Orthodox believers are continually proclaiming that love is the foundation of Biblical ethics ; the fact is, however, that, if human actions were regulated by some teachings of the Bible, there would be but few manifestations of love. To kill the inhabitants of a conquered city, and to save none alive (Deut. xx. 10-16), is a peculiar mode of exhibiting love to our fellow men. The conduct of Christ was not calculated to inspire us with a superabundance of love when he said : "Whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my father which is in heaven" (Matt. x. 33) ; or when he stated : "But those mine enemies which would not that I should reign over them, bring them hither and slay them before me" (Luke xix. 27). Here we have an indication of that unforgiving and revengeful spirit which destroys true affection. If there be any truth in the popular notions of sin and forgiveness, it was not moral for Christ to act as he did when speaking in a parable to his disciples. They, not being able to understand him, asked him for an explanation of what he then said. His reply was : "Unto you is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God ; but, unto them that are without, all these things are done in parables ; that seeing, they may see and not perceive,

and hearing, they may hear and not understand, lest at any time they should be converted, and their sins be forgiven them" (Mark iv.). This is not only partial and unjust, but a planned determination to teach so mysteriously that people should not learn the truth, in case they should thereby be saved. Such a mode of advocacy would be deemed injurious, indeed, in these days, and is only equalled by the following "inspired" information to certain persons: "And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie; that they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness" (2 Thess. ii. 11, 12). We are advised to be holy, even as God is holy; but what is holiness according to Bible morality? If a "Divine" sanction to a thing constitutes it holy, then deceit, murder, lying, and the deepest kind of cruelty are allied with Scriptural holiness. In 2 Kings x. God is represented as rewarding the following crimes, and thereby giving the Bible sanction to the worst kind of immorality. Jehu, having become King of Israel, commences his reign with a series of murders. Having resolved upon the destruction of the house of Ahab, Jehu commences his task in a manner possible only to those who fight with the "zeal of the Lord." Killing all who were likely to obstruct him in the carrying out of his base object, he arrived at Samaria, his purpose being to slay all the worshippers of Baal. In order, therefore, that he might entrap them all into one slaughter house, he announced that he was a great worshipper of Baal, and that he had come to offer a mighty sacrifice to this idol. By this craft he succeeded in drawing all the worshippers of Baal together. When the unfortunate victims were assembled, tendering their sacrifices, Jehu ordered his captains to go in and slay them, allowing none to escape. Accordingly, they were all sacrificed to the treachery of this "servant of the Lord." And this conduct is approved by God; for in verse 30 is recorded: "And the Lord said unto Jehu, Because thou hast done well in executing that which is right in mine eyes, and hast done unto the house of Ahab according to all that was in mine heart, thy children of the fourth generation shall sit on the throne of Israel." Bible morality is further illustrated in the case of Samuel (1 Samuel xvi. 1-4). This prophet is commanded by God to go on a certain mission under false

pretences, and with a direct falsehood upon his lips. Now, is it moral to deceive and murder? If not, why did God command and encourage such vices? And why should men be invited to imitate the example of one who practised such immoralities? Biblical ethics are alleged to be based upon the "holiness of God." In order to ascertain what that "holiness" really is, it is only necessary to read Genesis xxx. and xxxi., where immorality, ingratitude, deceit, and theft are found to be ascribed to Jacob, who was encouraged and beloved by God; Exodus ix. 13-16, where people are seen to have been raised up by God for the very purpose of being "cut off from the earth;" Exodus xxxii., for an account of the anger, injustice, and cruelty of Moses, culminating in the slaughter of thousands of human beings at the command of God; Joshua vi., viii., and x., for a record of his reckless murder of thousands of human beings, among whom were men, women, and children, at the special command of God; 2 Samuel xii. 11-31, for adultery and cruelty in connection with David; and then peruse Psalms xxxviii. and cix. for a confession of a life of deceit, lying, and licentiousness. Yet we are told that David "was a man after God's own heart," and that he "kept God's commandments, and did that only which was right in his eyes" (1 Kings iv. 8). Such may be Biblical morality; but it is certainly opposed to Secular ideas of ethical philosophy.

The teachings of the Bible in reference to slavery are barbarously unjust. According to its permit, men and women can be bought and sold like cattle, the weak being compelled to serve the strong. In Exodus xxi. 2-6 we have a most cruel law for regulating this "Bible institution," the cruelty and injustice of which law are two-fold. First, if the slave when he is bought be single, and if, during his seven years of slavery, he marries and becomes a father, then, at the expiration of his time, his wife and children are his master's, and the slave goes out free. Is this moral? What becomes of the poor man's paternal affections? Is the love for his wife nothing? Is he to be separated from that he holds dear, and to see the object of his affections given to the man who for seven years had robbed him of his independence and his manhood? If, however, the poor victim's love for his wife and children be stronger than his desire for liberty, what is his fate? He is to be brought

to the door, have his ear bored with an awl, and doomed to serve his master *forever*. Thus Bible morality makes perpetual slavery and physical pain the punishments of the exercise of the purest and best feelings of human nature. Where is the moral lesson in the statement: "And thou shalt bestow that money for whatsoever thy soul lusteth after; for oxen or for sheep, or for wine or for strong drink, or for whatsoever thy soul desireth; and thou shalt eat there before the Lord thy God, and thou shalt rejoice, thou and thine household"? If this is not giving a license to the worst of passions, words have no meaning. But Bible morality strikes at the manhood and happiness of man. It stifles our tenderest affections, and urges the exercise of the cruellest passions by teaching that a man may kill the wife of his bosom if she dare to entice him secretly from his God (Deut. xiii. 6-9). Where is the man who will so far belie his nature as to accept such morality as this? Unfortunately, Bible teachings have frequently caused a complete severance and breaking up of the ties of affection in families. The Bible commands its believers to leave father, mother, sister, and brother to follow Christ. According to its teachings, it is justifiable to break up a certain and a human bond that we may get a problematical chance of a problematical blessedness in a problematical future. There are few, doubtless, who have not learned in their own sad experience how the family tie has been often disunited by Christian teachings. Brothers and sisters have been separated for years from the home of their childhood because they dared to emancipate themselves from the shackles of the prevailing faith.

Accepting the term "moral" as expressing whatever is calculated to promote general progress and happiness, what morality is contained in the following passages from the Bible: "Take no thought for your life;" "Resist not evil;" "Blessed be ye poor;" "Labour not for the bread which perisheth;" "Servants, be subject to your masters with all fear, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the forward;" "Let every man abide in the same calling wherein he was called;" "Submit yourself to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake;" "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers, for there is no power but of God..... Whosoever, therefore, resisteth the power, resisteth the

ordinance of God, and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation"? Were these injunctions obeyed, health, independence of character, and political progress would be ignored. For the reforms we have hitherto secured we are indebted to men and women who practically disregarded the Bible, and based their conduct upon the principle of utility. To teach, as the Bible does, that wives are to be subject to their husbands in everything (Eph. v.); to "set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth" (Colos. iii.); to "love not the world, neither the things that are in the world" (1 John ii.); to "lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth" (Matt. vi.), is not to inculcate the principle of equality, or to inspire man with a desire to take an interest in "the things of time." Whatever service the Bible may render in gratifying the tastes of the superstitious, it cannot, to men of thought and energy, be of any great moral worth.

To persecute for non-belief of any teaching, but more particularly of speculative questions, is not in accordance with ethical justice. Is it true that the Bible encourages persecution for the non-belief in, or the rejection of, its teachings? If yes, so far at least is its moral worth lessened. For belief in the truth of a doctrine, or the wisdom of a precept, is, to the honest inquirer, the result of the recognition on his part of sufficient evidence in their favour. Whenever that evidence is absent, disbelief will be found, except among the indifferent or the hypocritical. Now, in the Bible there are many things that the sincere thinker is compelled, through lack of evidence, to reject. What does the New Testament inculcate towards such persons? When Christ sent his disciples upon a preaching expedition he said (Matt. x.): "Whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear your words, when ye depart out of that house or city shake off the dust of your feet." This, we are informed by Oriental writers, was a mode in the East of showing hatred towards those against whom the dust was shaken. The punishment threatened those who refused the administrations of the disciples is most severe, for "it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for that city." In St. John xv. we read: "If a man abideth not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned." This accords with the gloomy

announcement (2 Thess. i.) : "The Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven, with his mighty angels in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power, when he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe." Again (Mark xvi.) : "He that believeth not shall be damned." St. Paul exclaims (Gal. i.) : "If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed." He also says (1 Tim. vi. 3-5) : "If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to the wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christhe is proud, knowing nothing.....From such withdraw thyself." "Of whom is Hymenæus and Alexander ; whom I have delivered unto Satan, that they may learn not to blaspheme" (1 Tim. i. 20). In these passages persecution and punishment are clearly taught for disbelief. And that such teaching has had an immoral tendency the excommunications, the imprisonments, and sacrifice of the lives of heretics in connection with the history of Christianity abundantly prove.

Orthodox Christians contend that the Bible is a necessary factor in the educational system of all nations. While admitting the necessity of instruction in the affairs of daily life, they allege that a question of far greater importance is the preparation for existence "beyond the grave." They profess to be impressed with the notion that there is a city of refuge in store for them when they arrive at the end of life's journey ; and, having to encounter many storms and difficulties ere they reach this supposed haven of rest, they feel assured that the Bible is a sufficient guide to carry them safely over the sea of time, and land them securely in the harbour of eternity. They therefore rely on this book as if it were unerring in its directions and infallible in its commands.

Now, there is ample reason to doubt the capability of this Christian guide. Its inability, however, as an instructor and guide does not arise from any lack of variety of contents. The Bible contains a history of the cosmogony of the earth, and the story of man's fall from what is termed his first estate of perfection and happiness. Then we have the

history of God's chosen people, from their uprising to their national extinction, with a record of the Jewish laws, specifying those acts most calculated to propitiate the favour and secure the reward of heaven, and those which are condemned, with their appropriate and stipulated punishments. We have also glimpses of the histories of other nations, the causes of their fall, and the account of their national sins, which drew down upon them that wrath of heaven which extinguished or sorely punished them. Following this, there is the story of Job—the lessons to be derived from the sudden collapse of his worldly greatness, and his soliloquies upon the mysteries of nature and of providence. Next come the Psalms—a copious manual of praise, prayer, cursing, and penitence, followed by the woes, lamentations, and misfortunes of a host of prophets—some practical, some mystical, and some evangelical—together with the four different versions of the life, actions, and death of Christ; a short account of the early doings of the Church, recorded in several epistles written by sundry apostles, culminating in the strange and extraordinary nightmare of St. John the Divine. Now, any man who fails to discover in so large a field materials by which to regulate his life must do so, not from the scarcity, but the valuelessness, of the article supplied.

In estimating the real value of the Bible as a moral guide it must be taken as a whole, by which is meant those books of the Old and New Testaments which are bound together and commonly called the Word of God. And here a question arises that, if the knowledge of the whole Bible be necessary to our future happiness, which according to St. John it is, why is it that so many of the books that originally constituted the Bible are lost? If the testimony of the book itself can be accepted, we have only a portion of what at one time composed the Bible. In Numbers a quotation is given from a book called "The Book of the Wars of the Lord;" in Judges and Samuel we read of "The Book of Jasher;" in Kings mention is made of "The Book of the Acts of Solomon;" and in Chronicles of "The Account of the Chronicles of King David." We further read of "The Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Judah" and "The Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Israel." Allusion is also made to "The Book of Nathan the Prophet" and to

"The Book of Gad the Seer." Notwithstanding the loss of these books, Christians exclaim, How wonderfully their book has been preserved! Even the portions that are retained are so full of mistakes, errors, and corruptions that its intelligent supporters are compelled to give the greater part of it up as incapable of defence, while those who still contend for its "divinity" hesitate to come forward and support it in public debate.

Another question suggests itself: Are we to consider the Old Testament as the Word of God? If so, upon the Christian hypothesis, its teachings are equally as deserving of our respect as are those of the New Testament. If, on the other hand, the Old Testament is not intended for our acceptance, why is it preached and enforced as God's Word? True, it is sometimes stated that the Hebrew writings are useful for instruction, although they are not of the same authority with Christians as the New Testament. But here it is overlooked that the New Testament is founded upon the Old, and often appeals to it to corroborate its statements. Furthermore, the New Testament distinctly says that the Old was written by good and holy men for our instruction, etc. Besides, does not Christ emphatically state that he did not come to destroy its authority? "Think not," says he, "that I am come to destroy the law or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in nowise pass from the law till all be fulfilled. Whosoever, therefore, shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven; but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven." Here is a command not to break even one of the least of the commandments. Again, Christ says: "The Scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat; whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do." Among a collection of Christian stories occurs the following anecdote:—A person once asked a poor, illiterate old woman what she deemed to be the difference between the Old and New Testaments, to which she replied: "The Old Testament is the New Testament concealed, and the New Testament is the Old Testament revealed." This has been triumphantly quoted by Christian writers to show the harmony existing between the

two books. But it is absurd and contradicts facts. The assumption is, that the Old Testament is the partial statement of a body of truths, from which the New Testament differs not in kind, but only in degree. It is supposed that nothing in the New Testament contradicts what is stated in the Old, but only reveals and amplifies with a clearer light what had already been stated partially and under allegorical semblance in the Old. Now, so far is this from being correct that it would be difficult to find any two alleged bodies of sacred truths which differ from and contradict each other more than the divine revelation made through Moses and the prophets, and the revelation made through Christ and his Apostles. For instance, Moses taught that retaliation was a duty, while Christ strictly prohibits it. With Moses persecutors were put to the edge of the sword; with Christ, however, they were to be blessed. Under the old system, good works and a virtuous life were the conditions of Divine favour and reward, and bad works and a vicious life were to incur Divine disfavour and punishment. Under the new system, faith is the all-in-all, the essential condition of salvation.

A proof of the inadequacy of the Bible as a guide and instructor is furnished by what are termed the "liberal Christians." Here we have men of the best intentions and of high intellectual acquirements refusing to accept the Bible as an absolute guide, or as an infallible instructor. With such persons the Bible has no value as "infallible revelation." If, however, the Bible is not an infallible record, it is simply a human production, and has no more claim upon us, except what its merits inspire, than any other book. Is it not rather inconsistent to contend, as these liberal Christians do, that certain portions of the Bible are "divine," while the other parts are simply human? If every Christian sect put forward similar contentions, there would be but few parts of the "Holy Scriptures" that would not be divine and human at the same time, according to the respective opinions of different classes of believers. But how are we to decide what is "divine" and what is human? To what standard shall we appeal? What criterion have we by which to test its genuineness? Shall we accept the authority of the Protestant or the Catholic Church? Shall we judge from the standpoint of the Trinitarians or the Unitarians?

For the Bible to be trustworthy as a guide it should be

reliable in its statements and harmonious in its doctrines. That it is not so will be evident from the following reference to its pages. The Bible teaches that God is omniscient and omnipresent; yet in Gen. xi. 5 we read that the Lord came down to see the city and the tower which the children of men builded; and in Gen. xviii. 20, 21: "And the Lord said, Because the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grievous, I will go down now, and see whether they have done altogether according to the cry of it, which is come unto me; and, if not, I will know." It teaches that God is immutable; yet, on several occasions, we find him changing his mind, repenting, and sometimes turning back from his repentance; as in the great instance (Gen. vi. 6): "And it repented the Lord that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at the heart" (also 1 Sam. xv. 10, 11). God told Balaam to go with the men (Num. xxii., 20), and was angry with him because he went (Num. xxii. 21, 22). It teaches that God is invisible, yet we read (Gen. xxxii. 30): "And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel; for I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved;" and (Ex. xxiv. 9, 10): "Then up went Moses, and Aaron, and Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel; and they saw the God of Israel;" and, again (Ex. xxxiii. 11, 23): "And the Lord spake unto Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend.....And I will take away mine hand, and thou shalt see my back parts; but my face shall not be seen;" and, finally (Gen. xviii.), we have the remarkable though perplexed account of the Lord paying a visit to Abraham in the plains of Mamre, and eating with him of cakes, butter, milk, and veal. It teaches that God is all good; yet we read (Isa. xlv. 7): "I form the light and create darkness: I make peace and create evil: I the Lord do all these things;" and (Lam. iii. 38): "Out of the mouth of the Most High proceedeth not evil and good?" and (Ezekiel xx. 25): "Wherefore I gave them also statutes that were not good, and judgments whereby they should not live." It teaches that God is no respecter of persons; yet we read (Gen. iv. 4, 5): "And the Lord had respect unto Abel and to his offering; but unto Cain and his offering he had no respect;" and (Ex. ii. 25): "And God looked upon the children of Israel, and God had respect unto them;" and (Rom. ix. 11-13): "For the children being not yet

born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God, according to election, might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth; it was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger. As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated." And, in fact, nearly the whole Bible story is that of a chosen people, preferred above all other nations, surely for no superior goodness on their part! It teaches (Ex. xx. 5) that God is a jealous God, "visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the third and fourth generation of them that hate me;" yet we read (Ezekiel xviii. 20): "The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son." It teaches that Christ is God (John i. 1, 14; Heb. i. 8); yet we read (John viii. 40): "But now ye seek to kill me, a man that has told you the truth, which I have heard of God;" also (1 Tim. ii. 5): "One mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus." It teaches (John x. 30) that Christ and his father are one; yet we read (John xiv. 28): "For my father is greater than I." It teaches (John xvi. 30; Col. ii. 3) that Jesus knew all things; yet we read (Mark xi. 13): "And seeing a fig-tree afar off having leaves, he came, if haply he might find anything thereon; and, when he came to it, he found nothing but leaves; for the time of figs was not yet;" and, far more significant (Mark xiii. 32): "But of that day and that hour knoweth no man; no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father." It teaches of Jesus (John viii. 14): "Though I bear record of myself, yet my record is true; for I know whence I came, and whither I go;" yet we read (John v. 31): "If I bear witness of myself, my witness is not true." It teaches further (1 Tim. ii. 6) that he gave himself a ransom for all; yet we read (Matt. xv. 24): "I am not sent but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel;" and (Mark vii. 26, 27): "The woman was a Greek, a Syrophenician by nation; and she besought him that he would cast forth the devil out of her daughter. But Jesus said unto her, Let the children first be filled; for it is not meet to take the children's bread and cast it unto the dogs." It teaches that miracles are proofs of a divine mission (Matt. ix. 6; John v. 36; Heb. ii. 4); yet (Deut. xiii. 1-3; Matt. xxiv. 24; 2 Thess. ii. 9) warns against false prophets and anti-Christ, who shall show great signs and wonders. It teaches in many passages of the New

Testament that the end of the world is at hand, as in Matt. xxiv., 1 Cor. xv. 51, 52; 1 Thess. iv. 15; 1 Peter iv. 7; yet we read (2 Thess. ii. 2, 3): "That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand. Let no man deceive you by any means." Further, on this subject, we read (Matt. x. 23), in which Jesus is addressing the Apostles he sent forth: "Ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel till the Son of Man be come;" yet we read (Matt. xxiv. 14): "And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come;" and, similarly (Mark xiii. 10): "And the gospel must first be published among all nations." It teaches (Luke i. 33; Heb. i. 8) that the kingdom of Christ shall endure forever; yet we read, in one of the most remarkable passages of the New Testament (1 Cor. xv. 24, 25, 28): "Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign till he hath put all enemies under his feet. . . . And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all-in-all." It teaches that the Holy Ghost is God (Acts v. 3, 4); yet we read (John xv. 26): "But when the Comforter is come, whom shall I send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father;" and, again (John xiv. 16): "I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter;" and, again (Acts x. 38); "God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power." Finally, it teaches that "all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable" (2 Tim. iii. 16); yet we read (1 Cor. vii. 6, 12): "But I speak this by permission, and not of commandment. . . . But to the rest speak I, not the Lord;" and similarly (2 Cor. xi. 17): "That which I speak, I speak it not after the Lord, but as it were foolishly, in this confidence of boasting."

The foregoing are but a few of "apparent discrepancies," or, as we call them, direct self-contradictions; and, be it remembered, they concern the essentials of Christianity—the three persons of the God, the inspiration of the Holy Scriptures, and the end of the world. The Bibliolater may

be encouraged in the endeavour to reconcile them by the assurance that an indefinite further number, just as perplexing, await solution.

Those Christians who are too enlightened to accept the Bible, as it has chanced to come down to us, as in every word the very Word of God, and too free-minded to submit to the authority of a tradition which has varied with all climes and ages, or a Church whose history is a record of blunders, compromises, falsifications, self-contradictions, probably unequalled in the annals of any merely secular institution whatever, manage to remain, in their own estimation, Christians, by believing that God's saving revelation to mankind is made in the Bible, and that everyone may read it for himself if he studies the volume in a reverent and prayerful spirit. They admit many errors of copyists, reject many passages, and even books, as decidedly spurious, and regard many others as doubtful; yet maintain that, all deductions made, there is left a clear and sufficient Divine message, whose essential character is untouched by any of the errors or defects, and unchanged by any of the various readings.

Now, this theory is certainly the most illogical which a Christian can hold; for that of the thorough Bibliolater is consistent in its blind submission of reason to faith; and the Roman and Church views are equally consistent in their blind submission to faith and tradition and ecclesiastical authority; while this new theory seeks and pretends to conciliate things which are essentially irreconcilable—reason and faith, freethought and revelation, liberty and servitude, the natural and the supernatural. But, as it is the theory of some of the best and ablest of our religious fellow-citizens, and of those who are most heartily with us in much sound Secular work, it practically claims a fuller consideration here than it intrinsically merits.

In the first place, it is evidently open to the fatal objection that it makes man the measure and standard of his God, setting up certain Scriptures as supernatural and Divine, then subjecting them to the arbitrament of human nature, the reason and conscience of the creature. Each of those who hold it says in effect: "Here are books purporting to contain the Word of God, and I believe they do contain it, but mixed with many vain words of men;

therefore, what suits me I shall consider Divine, and what does not suit me I shall reject." Numerous clever attempts have been made to smooth away this sharp self-contradiction ; but, so far as we are aware, and as was to be expected, not one that can be deemed even plausible by any candid outsider. There is but one mode of getting rid of it—a mode swift and effectual, obvious, and facile in theory ; but, as long experience proves, very hard to put into practice—and this is to surrender the initial claim of Divine inspiration of the books, when, of course, it would be quite natural and consistent to sit in judgment on them, as on any other human writing, welcoming what in them we find good and true, rejecting what we find bad and false.

It is indeed alleged that the special grace of the Holy Spirit always illumines and guides every one who studies these books in the proper frame of mind ; but, as we find, in fact, that no two serious students read quite alike—each reading in accordance with his peculiar temperament, intellect, training, and circumstances, precisely as he would read were there no Holy Spirit in question—the said special grace, having no perceptible effect, may be safely left out of the calculation. Innumerable sectaries, all alike devout and sincere, all alike drawing their inspiration from the Bible, have differed widely on the very fundamental doctrines of Christianity ; and we never heard of the Holy Spirit doing anything towards bringing these brethren into unity. A Christian eclectic submits the Bible to the test of his own reason and conscience, which have been educated and purified, not by the book itself, nor by any supernatural grace, but by the results of a long and gradual progress in secular enlightenment and civilisation ; which progress has been at nearly every step opposed on the authority of the book, and in the name of the religion founded on it. Doctrines that now revolt the common conscience did not in former centuries revolt the consciences of men who were taught by the book and purified by the Holy Spirit. It is not by special grace, nor revelation of the Holy Scriptures, but by critical scholarship, that men have come now to decide as to the genuineness and authenticity, the date and authority, of the various portions. Until free learning was revived at the classical or heathenish Renaissance, the Holy Spirit was content to leave all the most pious Biblical

students in very deep darkness as to nearly all the points on which our eclectic Christians are now so clearly enlightened.

The family ideal set forth in the Bible is certainly not one of a high ethical nature. The domestic relationship of Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David, and Solomon could not be emulated to-day without practising gross injustice, and submitting to utter moral degradation. The Indo-European race has developed in morals as in knowledge, and two thousand years ago, when Germanicus led the Roman legions, he beheld with wonder the respect with which the ignorant, rude, and warlike Germans treated their wives and daughters. It is an insult to civilised women for any one to commend the family ideal of those who made woman a slave. Even Christ is represented as treating women as if they were necessarily inferior to men ; while his conduct to his mother, his commendation and personal practice of celibacy, and his encouraging others to renounce their own obligations to their families, are not calculated to shed a halo of peace and happiness within the home circle. Moreover, St. Paul's doctrine of the absolute submission of wives to their husbands can hardly be offered us to admire as an ideal.

The Secularist family ideal is far superior to that of the Bible, inasmuch as it is on a level with the ethics of our societarian development. It teaches that marriage should be the result of mutual affection, and that such a union creates the responsibility of undivided allegiance, mutual fidelity, and mutual consideration. It affirms that in the domestic circle there should be no one-sided, absolute authority ; that husband and wife should be partners in deed, not only in theory, animated alike by the desire to promote each other's happiness.

The basis of Bible morality, being God's will, is very delusive, for the simple reason that, if such a will has been recorded, it is not known to us ; and the conjectured representations of it given to us by theologians of all ages are impracticable and conflicting. In the Bible there is not to be found only one will ascribed to its Deity, but many ; and those are as contradictory as they are various. For instance, murder, adultery, theft, deceit, and other crimes can be proved from the Bible to be opposed to the expressed desire of God, as given in the Scriptures ; while upon the

same authority these crimes can be shown to accord with God's will. The result is, it is impossible to regulate human conduct upon the sanctions of either the "inspired" records. It is this peculiar nature of Bible teachings which was, probably, the cause of the early Christians lying for the glory of the Church (see Mosheim's "Ecclesiastical History"), and of Christians at a more modern period robbing and murdering those whom they termed heretics. In doing what they did in this persecuting business, the Bible believers, no doubt, thought that they were acting in accordance with "God's will," as set forth in the "Divine revelation." The founders and promoters of those body-and-mind-destroying institutions, the Inquisition and the Star Chamber, were in all probability sincere, and many of them in the affairs of every-day life, apart from theology, good men. In religious matters, however, they were cruel and inhuman in the extreme. Why was this? Because, no doubt, in punishing even to death those who opposed the true faith, they thought they were following the Bible as a guide (see Deuteronomy xiii. 6-9).

The acceptance of the Bible as a standard of morality involves also the recognition of teachings and doctrines that are conflicting and impracticable. In one place we are told that faith alone will save us (Romans iii. 27, 28); while in another portion of this same "authority" we are assured that works are necessary to secure salvation (James ii. 24). In St. John we read, "No man cometh unto the Father but by me" [Christ] (xiv. 6); and in the same gospel it is recorded, "No man can come to me [Christ] except the Father draw him" (vi. 44). This makes salvation depend, not upon man, but upon God. In John it is written, "For there are three that bear record in Heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost; and these three are one;" while Timothy states distinctly that "there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus." The New Testament teaches that Christ brought glad tidings for all men; yet we are assured that he came but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel—that many are called, but few are chosen. In one chapter we learn that all sin can be forgiven, while in another part of the same book it is said that the sin against the Holy Ghost is never to be forgiven. In Timothy we read: "For this is good and accept-

able in the sight of God our Saviour, who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth." But this cannot be if it is true that "for this cause God shall send them strong delusions, that they should believe a lie." If the delusions are sent by God, and if in consequence mankind believe a lie, and get punished hereafter for such belief, it is only fair to suppose that God's will was that they should not come to a knowledge of the truth; which contradicts what is stated in Timothy. John assures us that "whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer; and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him." This is very consoling when we read the following: "If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters—yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple." To be a disciple of Christ you must hate your brother; you are thus a murderer, and "no murderer hath eternal life." If you wish, therefore, to have eternal life, you must not become a disciple of Christ. Martyrdom by death may not always be the best way to advance a principle, inasmuch as more good can generally be done by living for a cause than by dying for it. But Christians say the martyrdom of the early Christians proves the truth of their doctrines, and in support of their contention they quote the words of Jesus: "And I [Jesus] say unto you, My friends, be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do." These words, it is thought, prove that Jesus taught and held life cheaply, in order to advance more readily his doctrines. It appears, however, from John that Christ did what many of his followers now do—taught one thing and practised another; for on one occasion John says, "Jesus walked in Galilee; for he would not walk in Jewry, because the Jews sought to kill him." What are we to do in this case—follow Christ's teaching, or his example? To follow both is impossible. Some persons condemn all war upon the ground that it is anti-Scriptural, and in their justification they quote Matthew, where he says: "Then said Jesus unto them, Put up again thy sword into its place; for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword." The soldier, on the other hand, tells the peace man that we ought to possess swords; for in Luke it is said: "He that hath no sword let him sell his garments and buy one."

Both would be equally justified, and both would be equally condemned, by the New Testament—a very perplexing position to be in. But the man fond of fighting would keep his sword, believing that the more Christianity became spread the more use there would be for the sword, as Christ declared: "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law." If Christ had succeeded in his object—and he has partially—the advocate of the sword would have had good grounds for justification.

St. Paul considers charity the highest of virtues, without which all other acquirements are as nothing. But then he immediately destroys the efficacy of such teaching by the following command: "As we said before, so say I now again, if any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed." We are told that "wisdom is the principal thing, therefore get wisdom." But we are also assured that in much wisdom there is much grief, and that he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow. It is folly to guide man to wisdom, telling him that it is better than riches, while he is taught that "the wisdom of the world is foolishness with God." Where is the incentive for a youth to acquire knowledge when St. Paul says, "It is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent"?

From these samples of the incoherent nature of Bible statements and teachings, it will be seen how impossible it is to rely implicitly on such a book as a guide in human conduct. True, Christians may urge that there is no contradiction in the cases cited; that the Bible is God's Word, and must therefore be all true. It is in vain that the student points out that this revelation abounds with impossibilities and absurdities, for he is reminded that with God all things are possible, therefore let "God be true, and every man a liar." It is further urged that the mistakes occur through our lack of comprehension; that the Scriptures would be plain enough if we could only "see our way clear" to accept them as gospel; and that the depravity of our nature prevents us viewing revealed truth in a spiritual

light. These are the sentiments of many who profess to accept the Bible as a guide. Truly, we must become as little children if we endorse the doctrine of Scriptural infallibility.

The conduct of those who, in the face of such inconsistency, contend for Bible infallibility is something more than foolish ; it is criminal. To shelter all that the Bible contains under the halo of "divinity" is to pay homage to the worst of human weaknesses. If a man is to pursue an intellectual career ; if he is to foster a manly independence ; if he is to live a life of integrity, he must not be bound either by ancient folly or modern orthodoxy ; but, unfettered, he should learn the lessons afforded by a knowledge of the facts of nature, and from the discoveries of science acquire those rules which through life will be a surer counsellor than the Bible, and a safer guide than theology.