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FROM  
**Christian Pulpit**  
TO  
**Secular Platform**

BY  
**JOHN LLOYD**

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CHRISTIAN PULPIT  
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SECULAR PLATFORM

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### I.—INTRODUCTORY.

IT is a stupendous leap from the high and lonely prison of the preacher to the low, wide, and free rostrum of the Atheist, and such are the risks connected with it that no one should ever take it except in obedience to the stern voice of duty. Recently, it fell to my lot to be solemnly called upon to take such a perilous jump, and to turn such a bewildering somersault; and I am now obliged to testify that the event formed the most serious and unforgettable crisis of my life. I can honestly state that it was my supreme crisis, and that I feel it to be my duty, as well as privilege, to furnish the reader with a minute description of the various circumstances which combined to render it absolutely inevitable. I think I would be justified in characterising it, further, as a typical experience, through which hosts of others, ere long, will be necessitated to pass. Be it known, therefore, that for upwards of twenty years I occupied the Christian pulpit, and won a moderate amount of notoriety in it. I was what is called "a popular preacher," a fact which was both pleasing and inspiring to me. I trust I shall not lay myself open to the charge of egotism when I affirm that, during the last fifteen years of my professional career, the churches in which I officiated were too small to accommodate the eager crowds. Of course, it often happens that popularity is no proof of superior excellence. The most notorious person in Great Britain at

the present moment is Samuel Herbert Dougal, the brutal murderer and clever forger. Let a man leave the ruts in which the wheels of society have been accustomed to run, and become eccentric in his ways, and he will soon become an object of public curiosity. Everybody will be anxious to catch a glimpse of him, and, if possible, to hear him speak. In my own case, I am afraid that the chief element which contributed to my popularity was a lurking suspicion, on the part of the people, that I was not quite sound in the faith. To myself, however, the most painfully conscious fact was the knowledge that the faith was not sufficiently sound in me. I was theologically eccentric.

I must emphasise this point. It has always been my devoutest wish to hold the Christian faith unhesitatingly, firmly, and in its orthodox completeness; but, unfortunately for my peace of mind, the wish never blossomed into serene fulfilment. It had been carefully handed down to me, as a sacred legacy, through a long line of ancestors, and I had been trained to believe that to doubt it, or to cherish it languidly and falteringly, would have been a heinous sin against God. During childhood and youth, and for at least one year of my ministerial career, I did hold it with tightest grip, and was prepared to defend it against all opponents. I must here explain that, in the school of theology in which I was brought up, the Christian Faith was synonymous with Calvinism, and that the only enemies of it, with whom I was familiar, were Socinians or Arminians. To me, Calvinism was the only true faith, and all who denied it were outside the pale of the Church of God, and would be damned for ever. I shuddered as I thought of the awful doom that awaited benighted Wesleyans and Unitarians in the next world. I placed John Calvin on the same level as the apostle Paul, and pitied all who had the audacity to differ from these two giants. Of *atheistical* teachers, who rejected even Christianity and the Bible, I at first knew nothing. Arminians were bad-enough, in all conscience, and their chance of entering heaven at death was infinitesimally

small; but infidels and Atheists were too-deep sunk in moral filth even to be mentioned in respectable society. They were black emissaries from the Bottomless Pit, whom the Devil had succeeded in making as desperately wicked as himself. With my up-bringing, I would rather have faced a thousand deaths than ventured to peruse the diabolical writings of such reprobates as Voltaire and Tom Paine! But soon after my ordination, my intellectual grasp of Calvinistic theology slackened, and ere long gave way altogether. My precious inheritance crumbled into white dust about my feet, and was blown to the four winds before my very eyes; and I discovered, to my unutterable horror, that I was doomed to be an unbeliever. In my awful misery I went into retirement, there to examine the very roots of the old beliefs. Had I been wise, or wisely advised, I would have there and then abandoned the Christian ministry, and qualified for some other profession. But I fought my doubts, and in some measure overcame them. Then, unfortunately, I resumed my former work, but necessarily without the former intellectual assurance. I persuaded myself to believe that there were still two sovereign truths to which I could passionately cling—namely, the Fatherhood of God at one extreme, and, at the other, the Brotherhood of Man. During the remainder of my professional career, I proclaimed these two doctrines with considerable fervor, and as vehemently denounced Calvinism, my first love. *Intellectually*, I could not demonstrate and fully justify the Divine Fatherhood, but *emotionally* it was a source of incalculable satisfaction to me. Whenever difficult questions arose (such as, If God be a Father, all-wise and all-good, how is it that the world is the habitation of so much cruelty, injustice, and suffering? If God is infinite, or the Absolute, how can He be a person? and, if He is not a person, how can He be our Father?), I intellectually ignored, while emotionally triumphing over them. In calm, meditative moments, I was often inexpressibly distressed by the puzzling problems that crowded upon me; but my feelings always came to my rescue, enabling

me to sail pleasantly on the ocean of maudlin sentiment. This was a state of things that could not possibly continue. No man can be, for any length of time, intellectually a thorough Agnostic, and emotionally an ardent believer. As I now look back upon it all, it is an insoluble mystery to me how I managed to occupy so anomalous a position for so long a time. In part, the explanation is, that I honestly and strenuously endeavored to believe that the *spiritual* faculty in man is infinitely superior to the *intellectual*. But the attempt turned out a miserable failure. At last, the intellect won a glorious victory over mere emotionalism, and, in consequence, my sentimental adherence to, and enjoyment of, Christianity and the Bible began gradually to diminish. Then I was necessarily obliged to abandon my profession, and to adopt Secularism, based on Atheism, as my only possible creed.

Another explanation is to be found in a circumstance which, to some extent at any rate, extenuates my mistake. You are doubtless aware that not even a conscious hypocrite can be serenely and uniformly happy. He lives a double life, and is in constant dread lest people should perceive that he is wearing a mask, and playing a part. But, surely, inconceivably greater is the misery of a simple, honest man who is striving to act honorably in a totally impossible position. He is perpetually running up and bruising his knuckles against a dead wall, in entire ignorance of the fact that there is a way of preventing so useless and disastrous a performance. That is an accurate description of my experience for many years. I had been most assiduously trained, from earliest childhood, in the narrowest of creeds, and dogmatically taught to look upon it as the only true creed; my parents had been similarly trained and taught in their childhood; for many generations before my birth, my ancestors had successively occupied high and prominent positions in the ecclesiastical life of their country; and, as an inevitable consequence, even the idea of renouncing for ever, not merely the old orthodox Calvinism, but also Christianity itself, was intolerably



repugnant to me. Indeed, during the earlier years, such an idea never once suggested itself to my imagination. I was, rather, dominated by the depressing conviction that the intellectual collapse of my faith was the outcome of some unknown but serious spiritual defect or fault, or, perhaps, the penalty of some hidden but most real sin against God. Hence, I multiplied and intensified my devotions, and knocked persistently at heaven's door, passionately pleading for pardon and the restoration of my vanished treasure. The laws of heredity and environment rendered it impossible for me to contemplate a life of Atheism except with indescribable aversion and horror.

The object of the following articles will be to explain, on the one hand, how I was literally forced into the Christian ministry, and, on the other, how I was, with equal literalness, forcibly, though gradually, driven out of it.

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## II.—CHILD-LIFE IN A PURITAN HOME.

SURELY no man in his senses would ever dream of pronouncing an unqualified and extravagant eulogium on Puritanism. That it possessed several wholly admirable and fascinating qualities cannot be denied; but it is equally clear that, as a scheme and philosophy of human life, it was deplorably one-sided and utterly misleading. Thinking only of its courageous insistence on, and inflexible adherence to, Righteousness, Carlyle and Ruskin deeply loved and loudly praised it, declaring with mournful pride that they were the last surviving exponents of it in England; but, thinking chiefly of its unlovely and repellent attributes, I am tempted to denounce it in the bitterest and most vehement terms at my command. My blood boils and rushes furiously through my veins, as I look back upon my childhood and youth, and realise how sadly and completely they were darkened and blighted by the grim, black shadow and cruel tyranny of Puritanism. I thankfully admit, that in my parents' were abundantly exemplified the brighter and nobler features of the darksome system. My father and mother were living incarnations of honor, honesty, truth, and righteousness, and their love for their children knew no bounds. In my references to them, I hope I shall not employ a single disrespectful or disloyal word. I am convinced that their affection for me never wavered, and that, to secure what they believed to be my highest good, they would have cheerfully made all necessary sacrifices. But, while fully admitting the integrity and sublimity of their character, as well as the purity and nobleness of their motives, I cannot close my eyes to the mournful fact, that they were the means of

utterly spoiling my child-life, and of wofully handicapping my whole future. Their conception of life and character was fundamentally mistaken. They looked upon the world through colored spectacles, and never saw it in its true light and beauty.

The first formative heresy instilled into my impressionable mind was, that life on earth is a series of disciplinary experiences, the sole object of which is to prepare us for the perfect life in heaven. Heaven was an ineffably happy realm, in which the inhabitants incessantly sang psalms and hymns, to the accompaniment of golden harps, while earth was the abode of griefs and groans, with interludes of heart-breaking and spirit-crushing dirges and threnodies. All amusement was said to be of the devil, and should be forcibly suppressed. All music had to be severely in the minor key. Laughter deserved hottest denunciation, while, on Sunday, not even a smile could be tolerated. Pleasure of all kinds was ruthlessly excluded. Once I laughed out over some humorous passage in the Bible, for which I received such an emphatic castigation from my father, that I have not been able to forget it to this day. At this moment, I can still see the old man's grandly wrathful face, and hear his stern rebuke: "Your stupid levity over God's own Book, my boy, is rank blasphemy against the Holy Ghost, for which the Great Judge may, any minute, strike you down dead." I trembled with fear, and repressed my merriment, but failed to understand *why* it was wrong for a little boy to laugh at ludicrous things. People of the world could eat and drink and be merry, singing bright, joyous songs; but they were on the high road to hell, in which they would have to weep and gnash their teeth to all eternity. And yet, I remember that whenever I passed an inn or tavern, and heard light-hearted, merry singing, I would stand still, strangely thrilled and attracted: there was something in me which, in spite of all my training and strong convictions, irresistibly responded to the stirring strains. But I was quickly brought to my senses by the reflection, that my enjoyment of such things was another

proof of the existence of original sin in my soul, and of the fact that as yet I had not been born again.

Because of the same misconception of the nature and meaning of human life, play, even in its mildest forms, was regarded as being of the world worldly, in which only the unregenerate indulged. Even little children played marbles and span tops under severe parental protest. Sometimes a lot of us would steal away into a distant field, in order to have a clandestine turn at football; but one of our number had to act as sentinel, that no one might come upon us unawares. During my childhood, I never saw an adult taking part in any sport whatever. Even as recently as twenty years ago, the Principal of a College, who was an ordained minister, was solemnly reprimanded by his Presbytery for giving encouragement to the sinful sporting spirit of the age, by allowing himself to be elected President of the College Cricket Club; and had some of the pious brethren had their way, he would have been deposed from the ministry. I shall never forget the funereal tones in which children were exhorted, at class-meetings, to abstain from all irreverence and frivolity, and give themselves to prayer and Bible-reading. Our parents, too, kept dinning the same lesson in our ears: "Remember, children," they used to say, "that you are always in the presence of holy God, and that in his sight seriousness is the most becoming grace."

And this brings me to the sole cause and root of the whole matter, namely, *the Puritanical conception of God*, which can only be characterised as *pagan, cruel, monstrous*. The Puritan's Deity was a heartless tyrant, who would not permit little children to give free and full vent to the very nature which he himself had bestowed upon them. How persistently I was reminded that God was watching me, and that every lie I told, and every wrong I did, were recorded in his Books, and would be read out against me at the Day of Judgment. To please him, it was necessary to think about him all the time, read the Bible with diligence, pray without ceasing, and go to church three or four times on Sunday, and ever so

many times during the week. God's eye was ever upon me, so that there was no possibility of saying or doing anything without his knowing about it.

On one occasion, I joined a number of boys in a nutting expedition, thereby flatly disobeying my mother. O how sweet was that stolen pleasure, while it lasted, and how my whole being was thrilled, to its core, with delight; but it was a short-lived bliss, for on my return I had administered to me a never-to-be-forgotten punishment. Moreover, within a few hours after this motherly chastisement, a fierce thunderstorm burst upon the community, which was construed into a visible token of heaven's displeasure at my sinful behavior; and after almost every vivid flash, I was thus comforted: "What a mercy it did not strike you, my boy; how good God is thus to spare you."

God's tyranny cast its black and all-withering shadow upon everything. I deliberately affirm that life was not worth living; but, then, it was infinitely better to live sadly and mournfully for a few years on earth, and after death be endlessly happy in heaven, than to enjoy a sinful life on earth, and afterwards grill and burn forever and forever in hell. Consequently, the better a man became the more miserable he was. Lugubriousness was a sign of superior saintliness. It was openly stated that a well-known and pre-eminent man of God, who was a brilliant scholar, being able to speak with fluency seven different languages, a profound theologian, and an authoritative interpreter of the eternal decrees, had never been known to laugh. He was one of the holiest men that ever lived, being so like him of whom it is recorded that he wept bitterly on several occasions, but not that he laughed even once; and children, especially, were advised to aim at a similarly exalted type of piety.

This unrelieved lugubriousness of temper was always in strong evidence at the public services of the church. At such times everybody looked tremendously solemn, as if the final universal conflagration were about to begin, and every two or three minutes all the best people

vigorously sighed, moaned, grunted, groaned, or cried "Amen." I can see them now, those elders and deacons of enviable holiness, with their hair brushed down their foreheads, arrayed in badly-fitted garments of home-made cloth, seated in the Big Pew immediately in front of the Pulpit, and staring with fixed eyes upon the preacher, who was vehemently shouting out God's gracious message in Christ. O what eloquent croakers those superior men of God were, and how some of the children wondered whether they would ever be old and pious enough to be allowed a like high privilege!

In those days, to be a member of the Church was identical with being saved. Every church member held a certificate for heaven. Hence, to be cut off from church membership was the most awful calamity that could befall a person. Outside was the big world, lying under the wrath of the Great Judge because of its sins, and doomed to spend all eternity in the flames of hell; and to be flung back into such a wretched world was the greatest curse conceivable. Within my recollection, a young woman was so thrust out for allowing a man of the world to fall in love with, and be married to, her. In excommunicating her, the officiating minister brutally assured her that, were she to die before she repented and was readmitted to membership, she would undoubtedly be committed to the unquenchable flames of Gehenna. Poor soul, she was frightened almost out of her wits; and yet her only crime consisted in marrying a thoroughly honest, upright, and good man, who did not happen to be within the pale of the Church.

Children's meetings were frequently held, at which the youngsters were drilled in Bible history and the catechisms. In all such gatherings, the dominant note was that God sat on his throne, night and day, watching the behavior of children on earth, and that, unless their conduct was in harmony with the teaching of the Church and their parents, he would most certainly cast them into the outer darkness, where they would wail and shudder in infinite torment for ever.

Such was the training of a child in a Puritan home

thirty or forty years ago, and naturally the consequences were most disastrous. During all my childhood days I never knew what it was to be spontaneously happy, or genuinely and unreservedly young. I always had an old head, filled with fears and forebodings, on my young shoulders. Of necessity, therefore, my nature was warped, and my character became woefully one-sided. There was a whole realm of delightful and educative experiences to which I was a total stranger, and to this day I have suffered infinite loss in consequence. A friend, similarly trained in childhood, told me the other day that he never knew what it was to be young until he was fifty years of age.

When will parents learn that childhood should be a period of natural, spontaneous, and ebullient happiness, and that any training that robs it of that desirable quality, however well-intentioned, is in the highest degree iniquitous? At the bar of justice and common sense Puritanism stands utterly, absolutely, and eternally condemned.

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## III.—LOOKING TOWARDS THE PULPIT.

NOTHING was more natural than that a boy, carefully brought up in a strictly Puritan home, should be resolutely ambitious to enter the ministry of the gospel. Consider, for a moment, the theological atmosphere in which the training would naturally be conducted. Many of my readers are fully aware that the philosophy of the plan of salvation, as expounded on the hearth-stone, from the pulpit, and at most of the ordinary meetings of the church, would be arrestingly realistic. By eating the forbidden apple, Adam incurred the righteous wrath of heaven, and in consequence of that one sinful act all his descendants were involved in the same inexorable doom. We have all inherited original sin; or, in other words, we are all held and accounted guilty of a sin we have never committed, or, more accurately, of a sin we *have* committed in him as our divinely appointed head. God hates the whole human race, and has created a lake of fire and brimstone in which to consume it for ever. Every one of us is justly doomed to eternal shame and suffering. Such is the immutable decree of heaven, and there is absolutely no escape from it. Ours is a doomed world, and there is not a single ray of hope for it. In this stern, dark dogma I was most scrupulously indoctrinated. But, fortunately, there are three persons in the blessed Trinity, and we were assured that one of them has always had a tender, compassionate heart. Although the Father is, and always was, in himself utterly implacable, and violently determined to inflict an all-crushing punishment upon the objects of his well-deserved indignation, the Son cherished feelings



of yearning pity and forgiving sympathy towards them, and passionately besought the Fatherly heart to graciously spare them. The Supreme Ruler of the Universe, however, showed himself relentlessly unpropitious, and emphatically disinclined either to withdraw or to modify the high claims of his justice. Said the Son: "My heart bleeds with compassion for the condemned sinners of the earth, and I am prepared to do all within my power to deliver them from thy fierce wrath. Wilt thou not punish me, and acquit them? Wilt thou not empty the vials of thine anger into my soul, and bestow upon them thy free and full forgiveness?" In response to so moving an appeal, the Father entered into a solemn covenant with his Son, known in theology as the Covenant of Grace, according to which the Son was to be accepted as a substitute for a chosen number of mankind, and to endure, in his own innocent person, the awful punishment due to them on account of their sins. Hence, in order to secure the complete deliverance of the Elect, the second person in the blessed Trinity came down to earth, was born as a man, lived, toiled, suffered, died on the Cross, rose from the dead, and returned to heaven as the perfect Redeemer of his people.

I know how utterly absurd all this will appear to all who were not brought up to believe it, and even to me now its most prominent feature is its absolute unbelievability. But the most extraordinary and incredible teaching of theology is yet to be described. We were told that the three persons in the glorious Trinity had each his own peculiar share in the grand work of redemption. The work of the Son consisted in offering himself up as an infinite atonement for the sins of the Elect, which he did on the Cross of Calvary, and the Father's work was, partly, to accept the offered atonement as all-sufficient, and, partly, to arrange for the actual administration of the Covenant of Grace. Now, this administration of the Covenant was entrusted to the Holy Ghost, the third member of the Trinity, as his special share of the sublime work. He was there-

fore commissioned to descend into the world in order to discharge his administrative duties.

But as the Holy Ghost did not become incarnate, he was obliged to work through mediums and agents. As a pure ghost he had to enter into chosen vessels, and fill them to overflowing, before anything could be accomplished. The chosen vessels were the apostles and their duly ordained successors, who are usually known now as clergymen, ministers of the gospel, or men in Holy Orders, whom I was instructed to regard as the representatives of the Holy Ghost, commissioned by him to explain the Covenant of Grace to their fellow-beings, and to urge all to believe the gospel. Of course, the non-elect had no chance whatever of being saved; but, as no one knew who the elect were, it was necessary to preach the gospel to all without distinction. In every congregation some of heaven's chosen ones would surely be found, and on hearing the word of life they would savingly receive it, and be snatched as brands from the burning. Thus the extending of the offer of salvation to all alike was only a trick to get at the elect, and gather them into the gospel net.

Such was the creed on which I was nourished in my childhood, and having inherited from my ancestors an ardent temperament, and being from a child abnormally sensitive and sympathetic, I was naturally most powerfully affected by it. My heart melted into tears of pity for the miserable sinners round about me. I burned with the desire to make known to them what God, for Christ's sake, had agreed to do for them. Of course, there was the possibility that I did not happen to be one of the elect myself, although I had fervently swallowed the whole creed, and accepted Christ as my Redeemer. Indeed, nobody could be absolutely sure of his election. Even the brightest and most confident faith had a background of fear and trembling. But I passionately yearned to tell all within my reach that Christ had offered himself up as an all-meritorious sacrifice for the sins of his sheep, whom God, for his sake, was prepared to forgive, justify, and sanctify, that at death they might

ascend and occupy splendid mansions in the sky. And thus I resolved to become a minister.

My father was the senior deacon of the church, and the most prominent member of society in the community, in consequence of which fact I enjoyed several high privileges that did not fall to the lot of ordinary children. For example, most of the itinerant preachers who visited our little Bethel were my father's guests during their stay. Ah, how well I remember those holy men of God. What an infinite honor it was to entertain them, and with what deep, rich joy my parents waited on them, and offered them the choicest fare that love could procure! With what tremulous reverence I used to regard them, and with what grateful avidity I treasured up all their precious sayings! They were not made of common clay. They were the mouthpieces of Jehovah, and their sermons came down to them as sacred gifts from heaven. As I thought of them my soul was on fire with envy, and O how fervently I prayed God to appoint me to the same exalted vocation. Sometimes one of these semi-divine beings would condescend to speak to me, and at once my whole being quivered with proud delight. "What would you like to be when you grow up, my boy?" he would ask, and tremblingly I would answer, "A preacher, sir." "That is a good boy," he would add, gently stroking my hair; "I hope God has called you, for without his special call no one has a right to enter the pulpit." I felt the truth of his words, and gave myself more than ever to prayer, assuring the Supreme Being that if he permitted me to become a preacher, I would do my best to be an honor to him. At times, I almost fancied I could hear his welcome voice distinctly calling me to the sacred profession. But when, at fifteen, failing to restrain myself any longer, I appealed to the church for permission to exercise my preaching gifts, my request was firmly refused, the church being evidently sceptical as to my possessing such gifts to exercise. Still, the fire burned in my bones, and preach I must, at whatever cost. used to go up to the mountain top, and deliver eloquent

and all-convincing discourses to a congregation of sheep, lambs, and lapwings. The sheep were somewhat dense, and responded but slowly to my passionate appeals, but the lapwings rewarded me with inspiring applause. I little thought, at the time, that the lovely birds were only trying to decoy me away from the vicinity of their much-cherished nests. Eventually, however, the church accepted me as an accredited candidate for the sacred profession, and started me on the preparatory course. I was then the proudest and happiest young man in all the land. For weeks I walked on air and partook of angels' food. To keep down my pride a messenger of Satan occasionally came to buffet me with this hateful insinuation: "What if thou art not one of God's elect, after all? What if thou art thyself, by heaven's decree, a miserable castaway?" But to prevent my sinking into utter despair, a messenger of God would breathe into me the consolation that arose from the fact that the church had chosen me, and that it was through the church God was accustomed to reveal his will.

O blind, misguided, and superstition-ridden fool that I was, and knew it not.

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## IV.—AT THE DIVINITY HALL.

SOON after my enrolment as a ministerial candidate I entered the University, at which I was privileged to spend four laborious years. At the conclusion of this purely academic course, I was admitted to the Divinity Hall, wherein three interesting and revealing years were passed. A Divinity Hall, or Theological Seminary, is one of the most wonderful and unique institutions on earth. The curriculum includes the Hebrew Language, Biblical Exegesis, Homiletics, Ecclesiastical History, and Systematic Theology. In my youthful estimation, the Professors were demi-gods. How delightfully omniscient and authoritative they were! They knew everything, could answer every question, solve every problem, penetrate every mystery, and annihilate every difficulty. They talked about God with as much familiarity as if they had stood behind his back and peeped over his shoulders while he was framing his Eternal Decrees. They could supply us with all sorts of exact information about Election, the Incarnation, and the Unseen World. They were all more or less rigid Calvinists, and each lecture they delivered stated a doctrine, presented irrefutable proofs of its truth, and triumphantly demolished all objections to it. All who held different views from those expressed by them were denounced as dangerous heresiarchs. Indeed, our Professors were to be regarded, not as vendors of mere views or opinions, but as divinely-appointed proclaimers of sovereign truths revealed in the Bible. Arminians were hopelessly, if not judicially, blind, because they deliberately refused to use their spiritual eyes. All "isms," other than Augustinism or Calvinism, were of the Devil, and destined to pass away. Charles Hodge, of Princeton, America, one of the most illustrious champions of the Old School Calvinism, was said to have refused to shake hands with

William Ellery Channing, the renowned Unitarian, because he verily believed that Unitarianism had not a single Scriptural leg on which to stand, and that Unitarians could not be recognised as genuine members of the household of God.

At our Hall, a cold and narrow literalism reigned with sublime dignity. The fable of the Fall in Genesis, with its Adam and Eve, garden, apple, and serpent, was treated as a unique historical fact. The doctrine of the Trinity was explained in the most painfully mechanical style. The Professor of Dogmatic Theology assured us, with calm confidence, that it was the simplest, as well as the most important, doctrine contained in the Word of God. He told us what distinctions and resemblances there were between the three persons, in what exact relations they stood to one another, and what distinctive work each of them did. The fact of the incarnation of God in Christ, according to him, involved the Immaculate and Miraculous Conception. He explained to us that it was just as easy for Omnipotence to create the body and soul of Christ in Mary's womb as it had been to form the first man out of the dust of the ground, and the first woman out of a male rib. Christ was Humiliated Deity—Deity punishing himself for the sins of man. The Incarnation was, therefore, the Supreme Miracle. I smile as I think of it all now; but then I solemnly believed it. To-day I regard it as a puerile superstition; but then it impressed me as a truth revealed to us by the Holy Spirit. All other dogmas were dealt with in precisely the same way; but space does not allow me to give any further examples.

Occasionally the Professors were targets at which thoughtful and sceptically-inclined young men fired awkward and staggering questions; but not one of the shots ever proved fatal. The theological skin was so thick and hard that nothing could have penetrated it. Here are a few samples of the type of question asked, and answer given:—

STUDENT: Professor, what real sin was there in Adam's act of eating the forbidden fruit?

PROFESSOR: No sin at all, except in the sense that it was a violation of a Divine commandment. The commandment was a positive, not a moral, one; and surely the Supreme Being has a perfect right to impose what commandments he pleases on the creatures of his hand.

STUDENT: Was it right of God to elect some to eternal life, and leave all others to their doom?

PROFESSOR: Yes, certainly; because the exercise of mercy is purely optional with the Deity. It was an act of stupendous condescension, on his part, to choose a certain number to be saved through the atoning death of his only begotten Son. Justice demanded that the whole human family should be consigned to endless torment in hell-fire. The damned are only inheriting what they richly deserve, and cannot fairly blame the Judge. But salvation is of grace alone.

STUDENT: Is it right to punish a person for ever after death for a limited number of sins committed during a limited number of years on earth?

PROFESSOR: Yes; because every sin, however small it may appear, is yet infinite, and deserves infinite and endless punishment.

STUDENT: How do we know that Christ rose from the grave on the third day, and ultimately ascended to heaven?

PROFESSOR: Simply because the Bible says so. Whatever the Bible says is of necessity true, because it is the utterance of God himself. One miracle demands another. You must always bear in mind that the miraculous birth necessitated the miraculous uprising from the tomb.

I cannot tell whether the young men who asked such questions were satisfied with the dogmatic answers given or not; but I can give my word of honor that I was more than satisfied. To me the appeal to Holy Writ was absolutely conclusive, and to question it would have been a sign of incorrigible depravity. Of course, etiquette did not permit students to argue with their Professors, who were more infallible than the Pope of Rome. My conviction was that the Bible was the final court of appeal, the verdict of which should settle all

disputes. Some people stumbled at miracles, for example, and irreverently asked: "In the name of common sense, how can you believe that the whale swallowed Jonah, and flung him out again unharmed?" Vehemently I answered: "Common sense has nothing whatever to do with the matter. Had the Bible affirmed that Jonah swallowed the whale, I would have believed it quite as readily." To me, then, the Bible was the Word of the living God, and could not err. The doctrines of the Christian Religion, as interpreted by our Professors, was clearly revealed in the Scriptures, and he was doubly blind and an unmitigated fool who was impertinent enough, either to doubt them, or to accept the Arminian interpretation of them.

That was the way in which I was trained and equipped for my profession. My ancestors, my child-life at home, the church in which I was brought up, and the Professors at the Seminary, all contributed to the development within me of an astonishingly firm adhesion to what was called genuine orthodoxy. I left the hall a gigantic believer. The supernatural was far more real to me than the natural. Everything between the two covers of the Old Book was God's revealed truth. If people told me that miracles were violations of natural laws, I frankly admitted it, well knowing that in order to facilitate the fulfilment of the noble purposes of heaven, a higher law had a perfect right to make inroads upon and subjugate a lower. If some weak-minded friends experienced great difficulty in believing in a special Divine Revelation, I could astonish them with the bold assertion that my only difficulty would have been not to believe in it. My appetite for believing knew no bounds, and was never entirely satisfied. And this infinite appetite and capacity for blindly believing constituted my stock-in-trade when I stood on the threshold of the active ministry. Ah me, the pity and the misery of it all! It lies on my memory like a horrid nightmare.

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## V.—THE FIRST YEAR OF PROFESSIONAL LIFE.

THE day of my ordination to the ministry of the glorious Gospel of the blessed God was the greatest, grandest, and gladdest in my whole history. At last, the harvest of my ambition was fully ripe, and about to be gathered into the barn of enjoyment. My wildest dreams and brightest hopes were on the eve of veritable fulfilment. Unanimously invited to the pastorate of a large city church, possessing the entire confidence of a congregation that had had experience of me as a preacher for several months prior to the tendering of the invitation, and having just listened to extravagant encomiums pronounced upon me by famous ministers who took part in the ordination service, I was elated with joy unspeakable and full of glory. I scarcely knew whether I was in heaven or on earth. I felt as if I were automatically floating on an ocean of holy peace. As I looked back upon the past, I was confident that exceptionally high and fruitful privileges had been lavishly showered upon me in childhood and youth. While comparing notes with my chums at the Divinity Hall I discovered that, even at sixteen years of age, not one of them knew the meaning of the word "theology," while I was a distinguished champion of the faith at ten. I had drunk theology with my mother's milk, and had been, during all my teens, systematically drilled in the art of controversy. Had I no excuse for cherishing a little pride and self-complacency? And as I looked forward to the future, bright stars of hope shone upon and illuminated the far-stretching pathway.

There never had been such a preacher as I was fully determined to become. The Celtic fire, sanctified by the grace of God, blazed away in all my veins. I was deeply sensible of the reason why the majority of churches were empty, and entertained no doubt that

mine would soon be full. My sermons would aim at converting two predominant classes of people, namely, the open, reckless sinners who were rushing on to hell at express speed, and those characterised by St. Paul as *natural* or *psychical* men, who neither cared for nor believed in the higher and nobler realities. In the faces of shameless sinners I would vigorously shake hell, painted in the most lurid colors, and I would drive the natural man out of every stronghold in his possession, and force him to surrender, openly confessing that his case was utterly hopeless. Certainly, my part of the city would be completely transformed within a few months. I would frighten sinners and argue naturalists right into the kingdom of God. Such was my program. I little dreamed that the Fates were all the time laughing in their sleeves at my ineffable stupidity.

For a time I did, undoubtedly, occasion not a little sensation in my own immediate neighborhood. My outspoken denunciation of everything I believed to be sin soon attracted attention. Crowds flocked to hear me preach. I had invincible energy and boundless enthusiasm; and I spared nobody. A text from which I frequently discoursed was this: "*Ye serpents, ye offspring of vipers, how shall ye escape the damnation of hell?*" The sufferings of the damned were never more vividly and realistically portrayed than in those crude addresses of my early ministry. I could not have depicted them better had I actually seen and experienced them for a thousand years. I remember once taking a Sunday afternoon service at a neighboring church, and speaking on this my then favorite theme. At the close the minister intervened, and said: "I thank God for this afternoon's message. It is so refreshing and reassuring to hear God's own truths so boldly and uncompromisingly proclaimed. Alas, not all ministers in this city (with an obvious reference to a popular preacher who did not believe in endless punishment) preach the Gospel on this awful subject. But woe be to us if we withhold this revealed truth from our people." In the extra-orthodox churches I was immensely popular. People admired my

courage in putting so much fire and brimstone into my sermons. Not one of my discourses was a sugar-coated pill. But I was not nearly so successful with St. Paul's *natural* man. I soon perceived that he had a mind of his own, and was astonishingly difficult to move. I brought out my heavy artillery, and vigorously bombarded the castle of his naturalism, but failed to make the least impression upon it. I had fondly hoped that he would have quickly surrendered, readily acknowledging the superior cogency of my arguments; but instead of that coveted result, I found my own armor sadly riddled with his shot, while he remained untouched in his strongly fortified position. My signal failure with him gave me a painful sense of disappointment, but I comforted myself with the soothing reflection that, had it not been for his intellectual stupidity and spiritual obstinacy, I would have gained a magnificent victory over him.

On the whole, however, my first year of professional life was fairly satisfactory. My faith in the Divine Verities continued unflinching and undimmed for many months. My acceptance of the Bible was complete, without even a shadow of reservation; and I was joyously loyal to all the doctrinal standards. I was a firm believer in the efficacy of prayer; and, when the late Professor Tyndall issued his famous Prayer-Test, I was horrified at the blasphemous audacity of his proposal. I pitied the poor scientist as an unregenerate natural man. Bye-and-bye, however, dark, ominous clouds began to gather in my hitherto clear ecclesiastical sky. In the middle of each week a well-attended Prayer-meeting was held in a large hall adjoining the church. It was my custom to deliver a short address on some religious topic, and then to call upon several people to engage in prayer. Among those who usually responded were two of the office-bearers. They were both exceedingly fluent, and people always liked to hear them. They were well-read, intelligent, and devout men; but, unfortunately, it was softly whispered that their unctuous rectitude was only a thin coat of veneer,

covering and hiding a character that was radically putrid. The one was said to be living continually in grossest immorality, and the other to be the biggest scoundrel out of prison. By degrees, the half-smothered whisper grew into a loud rumor, behind which it was evident there was too much truth. It was an insoluble mystery to me how these men could offer up such fervent, heart-stirring prayers, while pursuing such iniquitous and God-defying practices. Thus two of my right-hand men were consummate hypocrites. Was it possible that they really believed in a holy, truthful, and loving God, or were they simply playing at religion? I was staggered and bewildered, and knew not what to think. In course of time, I came to the mournful conviction that, in the world, Christians were generally looked upon with suspicion, that in business circles they were not always trusted, and that many of them were openly denounced as cunning and heartless swindlers. I found out that because of their commercial crookedness and social insincerity the members of a particular sect were universally loathed, and the more I mingled with men the more deeply convinced I became that such aspersions were only too well founded. People who professed to be better were really worse than their neighbors, and shielded themselves under the cloak of religion. To-day I am bound sorrowfully to admit that the tendency of adhesion to the popular type of religion is to make people hypocritical and immoral. Their professed peace with God, the fact of their regeneration, their dream of eternal blessedness in heaven, and their comforting conviction that they shall never see hell except at a safe distance, are dependent, not in any sense or degree on their character, but on their faith in Christ, for whose sake and in whose merits alone they are accepted in the Divine sight. Their faith is reckoned or imputed to them for righteousness, and their religious exercises—their praying, hymn-singing, church-going, Bible-reading, alms-giving—are substituted for upright living. Christ fulfilled the moral law in their stead, and the moment they believed in him they were released from all moral obligation. I

remember a dear, deluded old saint saying, with grateful tears in her eyes: "I deserve to go to hell, and therein to burn for ever; but, blessed be his name, my beloved Redeemer deserves that I should go to heaven and sing his praises without end, and I am sure God cannot say Nay to his only begotten Son." If there were a God of truth and love, such a belief would be rank blasphemy; and in any case, he who lives up to such a faith is guilty of high treason against his own nature. I have no hesitation whatever, therefore, in laying to the charge of all so-called Evangelical Churches the stupendous crime of being direct and fruitful sources and encouragers of commercial dishonesty, social hypocrisy, and moral stupor. In illustration of the truth of this charge, John Ruskin tells us, with burning indignation, of a wicked merchant in the City of London who was a prominent and active member in a suburban church. In the City he was a man that required special watching, and one day he was guilty of a specially tricky and fraudulent transaction. On the following Sunday, one who knew of this dishonest bargain, happened to attend that suburban church, and therein saw the self-same merchant engaged in a most solemn act of worship. At the close of the service, he went up to him, and, with a significant look in his eye and withering scorn in his voice, said: "YOU HERE?" The great man felt most uncomfortable, but after a moment's pause, answered: "Here, you know, we all assume the attitude of the poor publican, in the parable, who smote upon his breast and tremblingly prayed, '*God be merciful to me a sinner.*'"

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## VI.—THE INTELLECT IN REVOLT.

WHY was I such an ardent and militant believer in the Calvinistic Version of the Christian Religion? Was it because it commended itself to my reason as essentially and eternally true? Was it because I could prove its divinity by a long and elaborate train of irrefragable reasoning? Or was it simply because I had been diligently taught from the cradle to believe and cherish it? The fact is, that I was a Christian solely because I accepted the Bible as the inspired and infallible Word of God, and that I accepted the Bible as the only authoritative revelation from above, because, primarily, my parents, and all the other people I knew, so regarded, and trained me so to regard, it, and, secondarily, because such was the doctrine of the Church into which I had been born. Had I been born and bred in a Mohammedan country, I would have been a Mohammedan on precisely the same ground. My belief in the Bible and Christianity came down to me as an inheritance from my ancestors: it ran in the blood, and I was not consulted as to whether I would take it or not. It was a purely mechanical, traditional, and superstitious belief, endowed with no inherent vitality with which to fight for its own existence. But such is the force of the law of heredity, and of the influence of early training, that this dead faith remained with me to the close of the first year of my clerical career. When anybody asked me why I believed such-and-such a dogma, the only answer I could make was, "Because I find it in the Bible." When pressed further for the ground of my faith in the Bible, I could only cite the teaching of the great doctors of the Church. For the faith that was in me this was a flimsy, fragile, and worthless reason; but it was the only one I had to offer.

Just at that time a most remarkable theological book

fell into my hands, entitled *The Limits of Religious Thought*, by the late Dean Mansel. That well-known dignitary of the Anglican Church was an exceptionally keen and subtle metaphysician of the school of Kant and Sir William Hamilton. One of the distinctive tenets of this school crystallised into the apt phrase, *The Relativity of Human Knowledge*, which figured so largely in the Lectures of Sir William Hamilton. This is the tenet that underlies Mr. Herbert Spencer's Synthetic Philosophy, and of which he makes such splendid applications in his *First Principles*. Mansel adopted this doctrine in its entirety, and applied it to theology. His main contention is that we cannot know the Infinite and Eternal, all knowledge being confined to visible, tangible, and finite objects. Hence, to our purely intellectual faculties, the Christian Creed is at once unbelievable and unthinkable. God is of necessity unknown and unknowable, uncomprehended and incomprehensible. We believe in him alone on the testimony of Scripture. Our reason, acting within its own legitimate limits, pronounces all our theological dogmas absurd and self-contradictory. As Christians, we are not thinkers or reasoners, but blind believers. It was under the influence of this monstrous teaching that Tennyson sang, in his *In Memoriam*,

We have but faith : we cannot know ;  
For knowledge is of things we see.

*The Limits of Religious Thought* is now a dead book ; but it was marked by much logical ingenuity and intellectual force, and a careful perusal of it compelled me to pause and think. I had been instructed to regard Calvinism as in the highest degree reasonable, although in its nature and origin immeasurably above reason. Times without number, as I imagined, I had successfully championed it along purely intellectual lines. But now I perceived, for the first time, that I had been laboring under a fatal delusion. In reality my reason had never had the opportunity of critically examining the Christian Faith, and of ascertaining whether it was in itself believable or not. I had begun life firmly

believing it, and I had taken for granted that my reason gave it full support. But Dean Mansel's book opened my mind's eyes, and for the first time in my life I began to think for myself. But no sooner did I begin to think for myself, than the foundations of my faith commenced to tremble and crumble beneath my feet, and I realised how completely I had been the slave of superstition and traditionalism. The house of my faith tumbled into awful ruin, and I was flung headlong into an unfathomable pit of pain and misery. I walked about in the dark dungeon as one demented, weepingly bemoaning my infinite loss. The discovery that the so-called truths of the Bible were, not only above, but also in utter contravention of reason brought with it a most disagreeable sense of deprivation and impoverishment. To be actually without God and without hope in the world was a calamity too dreadful to contemplate. So deep and poignant was my grief that I sank into utter despair. I grew so tired of my life that I was strongly tempted to put a violent end to it. At last a voice cried out of the central deeps of my being, "Thou coward!" and thereupon I determined to fight my battle through to the bitter end. But the end was not reached for several years. Fierce in the extreme was the soul-wrestling with Giant Doubt. What sunless days and starless nights I wept my way through! How incessantly and confidently I prayed for guidance to a deaf, unheeding Deity! In my eagerness I consulted innumerable standard books on the Evidences, wended my weary way through ponderous Bodies of Divinity, and gave whole nights as well as days to a prayerful study of the Bible, yearning unspeakably all the while for the return of my faith.

In this crisis books of science were conscientiously eschewed as positively dangerous, because in the circles in which I turned science was violently denounced as irreligious and atheistical. Although I had lost my faith in God, and Christ, and the spiritual world, I still regarded Darwin and Tyndall as enemies of mankind. I had not read a line of their works; but it was my



strong conviction that Evolution was a hellish theory. When Dr. Charles Hodge, the renowned orthodox divine, published his little volume against it, I was transported with delight, and contributed an impassioned eulogy of the production to a religious magazine. It never occurred to me to suggest that the learned divine did not understand what the word "Darwinism" meant, and was not competent to pronounce judgment against it with such dogmatic assurance. But while thus rashly taking sides with the theologian against the naturalist, I was myself in an entirely atheistical frame of mind. I was afraid of science, because I knew it could not help me back to faith. Nor could I take any of my friends into my confidence, for they were all such orthodox believers that they had no patience with doubt and doubters. Thus, in a loneliness that lacerated the very soul, I had to wage ceaseless war, singlehanded, against my cruel foe. How much I suffered neither tongue nor pen can ever tell.

But the long night came to an end, the welcome light began to dawn upon my desolate heart, and slowly two great truths, like twin suns, appeared on the horizon, and offered me their kindly service. As I have already stated, these truths were the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man, and to them I tendered the full homage of my being. Of course, my acceptance of the Divine Fatherhood necessitated the reconstruction of Christ. The deposition of the Despot and the enthronement of the Father involved the overthrow of the Calvinistic conception of the Savior. In my search for a consistent interpretation of Jesus and his work I fell on a most ingenious and suggestive book, entitled *Vicarious Sacrifice*, by the late Horace Bushnell, a very profound but shockingly heterodox theologian. In this luminous volume, the great man maintained that we are to regard Christ as the last and absolutely perfect revelation of God, and that his work consisted, not in conciliating or propitiating a vindictive Tyrant, but in making known the all-holy, all-merciful, and all-redeeming Father. This was a new evangel towards

which my hungry heart leaped with boundless gratitude. Surely this was a genuine return to the simple teaching of the Apostolic Church. And with this new-found gospel, I returned to the pulpit, aglow with zeal, jubilantly triumphant, and resolutely bent on scathingly denouncing the very theology on which I had been brought up, and which I had previously preached with such confidence. On the Calvinism that was once so dear and precious in my sight I now poured scalding streams of scorn. The exhibition of such iconoclastic vehemence filled the church to overflowing with interested hearers, the great majority of whom enthusiastically approved and applauded my deliverances. A few of the older and narrower thinkers frowned, and raved, and threatened, and denounced, it is true; but the bulk of the people rejoiced, and wished me God-speed in the fulfilment of what they styled my beneficent mission.

This was my second theological house, and O with what ardor I thanked God for having inspired me to erect it! It was such a lovely structure, and in it I hoped to spend the remainder of my life. Alas, little did I then think that this house also was built upon the sand, and that, like the foolish man of the parable, I should soon find it tumbling disastrously about my ears.

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## VII.—THE INTELLECT IN BONDS.

DOGMAIC theology no longer wielded its bewildering fascination over me, but was scornfully trampled under my feet. With those who regarded precision and definiteness of thought in religion as of supreme importance I was completely out of touch. Like Dr. Bushnell, I was firmly of the opinion that an adequate dogmatic theology cannot exist, because spiritual facts can only be expressed in approximative and poetical language. This was also the contention so cleverly defended by Matthew Arnold in his epoch-making book entitled *Literature and Dogma*. His central proposition is that Bible terms, like *grace, new birth, justification*, are not to be "taken in a fixed and rigid manner, as if they were symbols with as definite and fully-grasped a meaning as the names *line* or *angle*, but in a fluid and passing way, as men use terms in common discourse, or in eloquence and poetry, to describe approximately, but only approximately, what they have present before their mind, but do not profess that their mind does, or can, grasp exactly or adequately." Such teaching suited my mood to perfection, and with riotous joy I revelled in the two sparkling gems, *Literature and Dogma* and *St. Paul and Protestantism*. In these books Matthew Arnold goes so far as to formally reject the Supernatural and the Miraculous. "God," he says, "is used in most cases as by no means a term of science or exact knowledge, but a term of poetry and eloquence—a term *thrown out*, so to speak, at a not fully-grasped object of the speaker's consciousness; a literary term, in short; and mankind mean different things by it as their consciousness differs." This idea was a key that opened most of the locks of the

Bible, and I used it continually with great profit. But I had not the courage to mention Arnold's name, or even Bushnell's, in any of my public pronouncements, because in deeply-religious circles both were highly suspected and execrated names.

In this way it became fashionable to decry the intellect as an inferior faculty, a calculating machine, a logic-grinder, which deals only with mundane and temporal realities, but cannot even touch the higher things of the spirit. It is doubtless extremely useful to the scientist, or the low-grade philosopher; but to the preacher it has no real value. Of course, this position was tenable only to those who believed in the existence and possible activity, within the human soul, of a superior faculty, "a subjective faculty," as Max Müller calls it, "for the apprehension of the infinite." In his *Hibbert Lectures* the same scholar describes it more fully as "a mental faculty which, independent of, nay in spite of, sense and reason, enables man to apprehend the infinite under different names and under varying disguises." This faculty is intuitive, inborn, and belongs to all alike, at least potentially. It is the gift of insight, vision, and realisation. Now, my contention was that by the exercise of this spiritual organ we could clearly see God and Christ, realise the spiritual world and immortality, and become blessedly assured of our salvation through the risen and ascended Lord. Vision, it seemed to me, was infinitely nobler and more ennobling than ordinary knowledge. Many of my comrades in the new school used to wax irresistibly eloquent in praise and commendation of this inward eye. To the intellect God was unknowable and inconceivable; but through the soul's eye and to the heart's need he was most gloriously and savingly visible.

At this time I had the unspeakable privilege of an introduction to six luminous and illuminating poets, namely, Dante, Shakespeare, Milton, Wordsworth, Browning, and Tennyson, all of whom confirmed and advanced my theological liberalism. It was to Browning, perhaps, that I was most deeply indebted, and I habi-

tually quoted him in my sermons. How shocked I was when I discovered that Mrs. Sutherland Orr and others were impertinent enough to claim him as an Agnostic. Among prose-writers my chief instructors were Emerson, Carlyle, and Ruskin. Of theologians, the most inspiring by far was Dr. George Matheson, the poet-preacher of Scotland, whose able book, *Can the Old Faith live with the New?* gave me a firmer grip of what people call the fundamental verities of the Gospel than all other books put together. He made a magnificent use of the intellect in the vilification of itself. The maligned faculty glowed and sparkled, in the most charming manner, as it sang the praises of its rival and so-called supplanter.

What makes me dwell so long on this point is the knowledge that there are thousands of clergymen among us at present, who loudly glory in their alleged possession and enjoyment of the spiritual faculty. They say: "We cannot prove the existence of God on merely intellectual lines; but we know that he is because our inward eye sees him." "We cannot prove the Divinity of Jesus Christ in any outward, formal way; but to us his Divinity is an irresistible inference from what we have seen and experienced of his saving grace." Not long ago, the Rev. R. J. Campbell, the oracle of the City Temple, stated that he had no fear of the Higher Critics. "Even if they were to succeed in destroying the authority of the Bible from Genesis to Revelation," he said, "yet my own experience of its gracious efficacy would enable me to cling to Christianity as confidently and tenaciously as ever." On another occasion he said: "Our faith in Christianity is dependent, not on the inspiration and infallibility of the Bible, but on our direct vision and knowledge of Christ." I am not at all surprised at his making such an assertion, because I often made it myself; but it is an impotent attitude, and dates no further back than the date of the Higher Criticism. Fifty years ago it was well-nigh the universal teaching of the Pulpit that no one could be a Christian without believing in the full inspiration of the Scriptures; and even at present there are a few, such as Dr. Robertson

Nicoll, who declare that if the Bible were discredited on critical grounds, Christianity would have to be given up. The truth, undoubtedly, is that the advanced theologians of the present day are standing on the brink of the chasm of scepticism, because, in the absence of an infallible Book, which claims to be a direct revelation from God, Supernatural Religion must speedily collapse. In his *Literature and Dogma*, Matthew Arnold's main object was to make it possible for educated people who rejected the miraculous still to believe in the Bible and Christianity. What he said, in effect, was this: "Miracles do not happen, the belief in the personality of God is groundless, and the hope of immortality is illusive; but, on the whole, the Bible's chief concern is with conduct, which is three-fourths of human life, and, on this account, the Bible should be retained, and we can still call ourselves Christians." But, for once, one of the finest of literary critics was utterly mistaken. Divest Christianity of its miraculous element, and what will there be left that is not common to all great religions? Banish the Supernatural from the Bible, and what will it contain worth preserving? Indeed, I am convinced that Arnold's argument inevitably leads to Atheism, not to the recovery of faith. I am prepared to go one step further and affirm that, at heart, the great apostle of culture was himself a genuine Atheist. The God in whom he believed was only a projection or externalisation of himself. In proof of this assertion I need give only the following characteristic quotation: "Bishop Wilson says, 'Look up to God (by which he means just this, consult your conscience) at all times, and you will, as in a glass, discover what is fit to be done.'" To a certainty we know that Bishop Wilson meant just exactly what he said; but to Matthew Arnold God and conscience, or God and himself, were convertible terms.

It took me many years, however, to perceive how utterly unsound and illogical the position I occupied really was, and how inevitable would be the alternative between a return to the simple, blind, unreasoning, but strong faith of my childhood, and an advance to open

and unadulterated Atheism. There is no safe and permanent half-way house between emphatic, unequivocal, and old-fashioned Supernaturalism and plain, unadorned Secularism. Mr. Campbell, though by no means an orator, is yet a most magnetic speaker, and will always have a large following of non-thinkers; but I am certain that his theological attitude and style of reasoning, if reasoning it can be called, are calculated, in the long run, to make more infidels than believers. Without one definite seat of authority, to which to refer all debateable points, religion cannot survive. During the Middle Ages it was the Church that settled all disputes. All its official findings were infallible and universally binding. The Reformation shifted the seat of authority from the Church to the Bible; and for many generations Protestants worshipped the Book with as complete a homage as Catholics did the Pope. The Protestant Reformation did nothing more than exchange one seat of authority for another. But in our day the only authoritative voice, acknowledged by the leaders of British Free Churchism, is that of individual experience; and the people who decline to listen to, and follow, it, are declared to be destitute of the spiritual organ. Every preacher is now an infallible pope in his own society. The result is that we have a million popes instead of one; and it is a very significant fact that no two of them agree on a single subject. Each has a different kind of spiritual faculty from all the others; and the consequence is that all of them deliver different and conflicting spiritual judgments. The intellect is in bonds, but this very multiplicity of contradictory voices is a sure sign that the day of its glorious emancipation is hastening on. The Church is slowly committing suicide at the instigation of its own rulers, and the time is not far off when its tomb will be adorned with green grass and lovely flowers. This is a prophecy which is already in the process of fulfilment, as every careful student of the signs of the times is bound to admit.

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## VIII.—THE REIGN OF EMOTIONALISM.

WHEN a man of an ardent temperament discovers that the position he occupies is intellectually weak and indefensible, he is almost sure to fall back on emotionalism. That was the temptation that came to me, and to which I readily yielded. With what infinite relish I kept repeating to myself Matthew Arnold's famous saying: "The true meaning of religion is, not simply *morality*, but *morality touched by emotion*." During this second period of my religious history, my theology assumed a purely sentimental form, and pretended to deal with *facts* as distinguished from *theories*. Dogmas no longer appealed to me as true, although I had not the temerity to reject them as false; but the great facts which the dogmas endeavored to imprison within the stone walls of scientific definitions appeared more vital and precious than ever to me, and I hugged them with kindling affection. There were doctrines which it was my delight to hold up to ridicule and scorn; but there were others on which I was silent, because I did not understand them. Among these was the doctrine of the Trinity. It was wholly inexplicable to me that three infinite persons constituted but one God. Indeed, there was something positively repulsive in the idea, calmly held and seriously championed by many learned doctors, that the second infinite person was eternally born of the first, and that the third eternally proceeded, without either birth or creation, from the other two. Face-to-face with such inscrutable mysteries, I emotionally clung to the sweet Bible-verse, "*God is love*." I was equally incapable of comprehending the Immaculate Conception and Virgin Birth of Christ, or the mystical union of the Divine and Human Natures in the constitution of his theanthropic person, which was no longer merely the second person in the Trinity, but a kind of new person miraculously brought into existence



through the Incarnation. No theologian on earth ever pretended to understand that strange doctrine; and yet it found a place in every standard work on theology. Not one of the twenty different theories of the Atonement commended itself to my reason, although some of them were more acceptable than others; and so I contented myself with proclaiming the living fact that lay behind them all. To me Christ was the visible image of the living God, and his only mission in the world was to reveal the Divine love.

Towards miracles, as such, I maintained a sceptical attitude. With Huxley, I fully admitted their possibility, but was not clearly convinced that a single genuine miracle had ever happened; nor could I appreciate the ground on which Christian apologists rejected all miracles except those recorded in the Bible. Consequently, I never preached on the subject, nor did anxious inquirers privately press me to give an opinion on it. I knew what evidential value the majority of theologians attached to the miraculous, and what emphasis was laid on the assertion that the proof from miracles was the only proof on which we could absolutely rely in the refutation of the arguments of unbelief. Archbishop Whately was confident that all Catholic miracles would turn out to be impostures, or capable of a natural explanation, "but that Bible-miracles would stand sifting by a London special jury, or by a committee of scientific men." Dean Mansel argued that "if the reality of miracles as facts is denied, the whole system of Christian belief with its evidences, all Christianity, in short, so far as it has any title to that name, so far as it has any special relation to the person or the teaching of Christ, is overthrown at the same time." Mozley, Westcott, and Farrar expressed themselves to the same effect. But while fully aware of the theological contention that "miracles and the supernatural contents of Christianity must stand or fall together," still I somehow felt that it was a fallacy and could not stand. But what was I to do with the Resurrection of Christ, which was universally regarded as the corner stone of the Christian Religion? If I

denied the miraculous, how could I believe that Christ rose from the dead? Must I not exclaim, in the poet's mournful words,—

Far hence he lies  
In the lorn Syrian town,  
And on his grave, with shining eyes,  
The Syrian stars look down?

But if I denied that Christ rose again, how could I, for a moment longer, be a Christian minister? Well, I must confess that I took refuge in a mean and cowardly subterfuge. I contended, with a few others, that Christ's Resurrection was to be understood poetically and spiritually, not literally and mechanically. I deluded myself into believing that the Apostle Paul, also, accepted and interpreted the doctrine in precisely the same way. I think it was Clough, in his exquisite poem, in two parts, entitled *Easter Day*, who first suggested the subterfuge to me. What a spiritual resurrection signified, it would have been most difficult to explain; but the belief in it was emotional, and consequently did not require to have its contents too minutely described. I was satisfied with merely *feeling* that somehow and somewhere Christ still lived. It was a degrading, soul-killing subterfuge, though I knew it not at the time; but it enabled me to imagine and feel that I was a believer when in reality I was not.

To the more thoughtful and intelligent people such preaching lacked precision, definiteness, and clearness, and the preacher was severely censured by them. But with the people as a whole I never lost touch. I was capable of rising to such an exceptionally high pitch of fervor that I never failed to secure the sympathy and support of the crowd. Besides, the presence of a crowd had such a magical and transforming effect upon me that my natural enthusiasm more than doubled its power. The dormant fire in my constitution was fanned into white and furious heat; and if ever I spoke with convincing effect it was because I so deeply *felt* what I said. Argumentatively I may have been deplorably weak and vulnerable; but emotionally I was gloriously

strong and unassailable. And it is incontrovertible that a miscellaneous, popular assembly responds much more quickly and heartily to sentiment or feeling than to logic. Earnestness, accompanied by kindling eloquence, is infinitely more convincing to a multitude than the most perfect and lucid argument ever framed.

Towards the close of the period under consideration, I was, to all intents and purposes, nothing but an emotional and superficial expounder of the Christian Religion. To my intellect, Christianity was almost painfully false, but to my heart, it was irresistibly true. On week days I was frequently a rampant Agnostic or Atheist, but on Sundays and in the pulpit always a red-hot believer. It was a pitiable condition, in the extreme, to be in; but there was then absolutely no help for it. I did my utmost to keep under and silence the intellect, in which endeavor I occasionally succeeded; and I did it in the name and for the sake of what I verily believed to be a higher and nobler faculty. Words can never tell what soul-agonies I endured, what cruel crises I passed through, and to what self-loathing I more than once subjected myself. What kept me going was the conviction that somehow the highest and best in my nature still witnessed to the blessed reality of Revealed Religion; and on Sundays, as I stood face-to-face with crowded congregations, this conviction completely swayed my whole being.

But the worst has yet to come, and must have a whole chapter to itself. Arnoldism will never work, except disastrously. The public has never been able to appreciate the fine distinction between literature and dogma. On the contrary, the public is perpetually reducing poetry to prose, and treating literature itself as if it were dogma. A follower of Arnold in the pulpit cannot fail sooner or later to commit suicide. He puts one meaning into a word, a literary and poetical one, and his hearers, another; and he cannot but be aware of the fact. The consequence is that he degenerates into a miserable play-actor, a process I shall describe in the next chapter,

## IX.—PLAY-ACTING IN THE PULPIT.

In theory, Arnoldism is exquisitely beautiful and irresistibly fascinating; but, in practice, it proves wofully complicating and confusing. It leads to all sorts of insincerities and hypocrisies. A long time ago a famous actor, on being asked by a clergyman, "Why is play-acting so much more successful than preaching?" answered, "Because we treat fiction as if it were truth, and you present truth as if it were fiction." It was a witty, apt, and, if both preacher and actor believed the Bible to be the Word of God, eminently true answer. In numerous instances, it must be confessed, the pulpit is such a signal failure because the fire of enthusiasm does not burn in it, or because so many preachers are empty-headed and empty-hearted triflers. They do not doubt, because they are too lazy to think. To them, the ministry is solely a "living," an easy and respectable "billet," and they would forsake it to-morrow did it not allow them to spend their days in luxurious indolence. But there are other ministers to whom laziness is not a besetting sin, and who cannot complain of non-success in their work. The chief source of their weakness is that they proclaim fiction as if it were truth, thoroughly believing it, for the time being, to be truth. We are assured that, while on the stage, first-rate actors verily feel as if they were the characters they represent, which, for the time, they doubtless are. Judging by my own experience, and by observation of other cases, pulpit play-acting reveals itself in various ways.

In the first place, no sooner had I adopted Arnoldism, and commenced to treat the Bible as literature, than I discovered that I dared not preach all I knew. In course of time, I came into possession of a large body of esoteric truths, which were of too dangerous a character

to be communicated to a mixed congregation. I was positively certain that the Pentateuch was not written, even the earlier and simpler portions of it, for many centuries after Moses' time. I knew well enough that the Mosaic Economy was a late and gradual development, and that from the time it began to assume a definite shape the prophets and the priests became sworn enemies, proofs of which fact abound in the prophetic writings themselves. It was as clear as noonday to me that Genesis is a collection of interesting legends, traditions, and myths; that Adam, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are by no means historical, but purely fabulous, symbolical, or eponymous characters, and that the stories of Creation, the Fall, and the Flood are fables, borrowed from Babylonian and other sources. It was not hidden from my eyes that the Historical Books were extremely crude and imperfect, full of contradictions and discrepancies; that the two Chronicles, in particular, were written with the object of representing the priesthood of the later Jewish Church as an institution that had existed continuously, and in its entirety, from the time of Moses, and that of history in the modern sense they contained none. Dr. Torrey boldly asserts that there are no mistakes of any kind in the Bible—an assertion that makes one wonder whether the popular evangelist can be even an honest man. From the time I began to treat the Bible as literature, I have not been able to shut my eyes to the fact that it contains innumerable mistakes—historical, chronological, numerical, and moral. But although I had full knowledge of all these things, I had to be silent about them in the pulpit, because of the danger that any public reference to them might disturb the people's simple faith in the inspiration of the Book. If I ever mentioned the Higher Criticism at all, it was merely for the purpose of emphasising the fact that if the Bible is inspired no criticism, however hostile in spirit and aim, can inflict any permanent injury upon it. It was also undeniable that as yet the Critics themselves were

not quite sure of their ground, inasmuch as they hotly disagreed with, and contradicted, one another. Nor could it be forgotten that some of the most advanced and iconoclastic among them were yet firm advocates of the moral and spiritual supremacy of the Volume, and stood in the front rank of evangelical preachers. On these grounds, as far as I possibly could, I kept my congregation in the dark as to what was being done by Biblical scholars, and continued to treat the Bible as the supreme seat of authority in religion. Its history might be glaringly inaccurate; its geology, hopelessly chaotic, and its astronomy, ludicrously antiquated; but then it was not written to teach these lower, earthly sciences, but to be an infallible guide in all matters affecting the destiny of the soul. Such was the attitude taken up by theologians as soon as they realised the impossibility of retaining the exploded theory of verbal inspiration and inerrancy; and we preachers feebly followed their example. But, after all, preachers have no moral right to withhold important knowledge from their congregation, nor can they do it without seriously weakening their position and doing themselves irreparable harm.

In the second place, I found that, having adopted the literary and poetical method of interpreting Scripture, I attached other and, as I fondly fancied, larger and worthier meanings to the great theological terms than those which they popularly bore. This was an excessively risky game to play, but it was played in the sincere hope that genuine good might be the result. For instance, the generality of the people believed God to be an infinite and eternal person, clothed with so many natural and moral attributes of absolute perfection, with whom, through the merits of Christ, they professed to be in intimate and soul-making communion. They told him all their troubles, confessed to him all their sins, implored him to pardon and release them, and besought him to grant them sundry little favors. To me, on the other hand, God was the name loosely given to the sum-total

of ideal virtues and moral excellencies, communion with whom signified active admiration for and an ardent desire and effort to possess and exhibit, such noble qualities. I spoke of him as if he were a person; but I did so in a loose, poetical, or literary sense. I addressed him as Father, Friend, Savior, meaning just this: that at the core or heart of things is constructive, healing, saving Love. In maintaining this attitude I was enormously helped and comforted by Henry Drummond's exquisitely beautiful book, entitled *The Ascent of Man*. Its teaching was nebulous, vague, poetical, almost fantastical; but to me, at that time, irresistible. The law of the Universe was Love, and only that which opposed the glorious purposes of love could be called sinful. There were numerous other terms, such as *atonement, regeneration, justification, immortality*, which I treated in the same ambiguous and passing way. The object I had in view was the gradual conversion of the people to my way of looking at things.

But my success in the realisation of that object was most discouragingly small. It is cocksure dogmatism that always moves the multitude; and even I, in my most Arnoldian mood, was supposed to be speaking dogmatically. There were but few who took me in my own sense, and those few soon lost all interest in the popular religion and ceased to attend its various meetings. I was all the time on the high road to Secularism, though at that time I had not the least suspicion of it. Some of those who joined me in the strange pilgrimage soon outstripped me in speed, and arrived at the inevitable destination years before I did. One of these was a man of exceptional intellectual brilliancy, dowered with a fine, lively imagination, and privileged, above most, to live close to Nature's heart. What deep joy was mine when I had succeeded in winning him to my side; but his stay with me was wonderfully brief. He perceived, almost at once, that the position I occupied was illogical, irrational, and impossible, and his sense of perspective drove him at a furious pace straight on to Naturalism or Monism, in which he found intellectual peace and heart-

rest. We are both together again now, sharing each other's joy, as well as responsibility.

When will ministers learn that theological liberalism is only a stage in the journey either to Rome or to Atheism? Many of us remember how Newman, in a book of startling novelty, assigned that fact as the chief reason why he was obliged to become a Catholic—to bow in lowliest reverence to a corporate authority—in order to preserve his faith in religion. At one time he and his younger brother, Francis William, stood on practically the same platform; but one day they parted company, John Henry going down to Rome and becoming a Cardinal, while Francis William climbed towards, and almost reached, the domain of pure Naturalism. Theology cannot be liberal, and live. Based on an infallible revelation from heaven, it must remain stationary for ever, or die. No progress is possible, except the progress out of it. Newman was philosopher enough to perceive this; and he made his escape in time.

The next chapter will explain how my deliverance came.

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## X.—THE EMANCIPATION OF THE INTELLECT.

EVERYBODY knows that play-acting is a species of hypocrisy, this Greek word being the term originally employed to describe the theatrical profession; and it would be equally a truism to say that play-acting, however acceptable and successful on the stage, always destroys the legitimate power of the pulpit. Above everything else the preacher needs sincerity. At all costs he must say what he means, and, to the deepest roots of his being, mean what he says. If he speaks hesitatingly, falteringly, apologetically, or with numerous reservations, explanations, and comments, he thereby robs himself of more than half his natural power, and completely cripples the influence of his ministry. He occupies a lower platform than Samson did when he made sport for the people. Besides, although the intellect may not be the strongest and noblest of our mental faculties, it is anything but safe and wise to permanently ignore and snub it. Sooner or later the day of its revenge will come, which to the play-acting preacher will be a dreadful day of swift judgment. In my case the terrible day arrived much later than it would have done had I been of a cooler, calmer, and more reflective temperament.

Let me now set down in order some of the causes that led up to my emancipation, or indicate a few of the stages in my journey from Supernaturalism to Secularism. They are these:—

1. Loss of faith in the infallibility and Divine authority of the Bible.
2. The consequent relegation of Religion to the sphere of faith, feeling, and individual experience.

3. Realisation of the forced nature of all devotional exercises, in the cultivation of which the Closet and the Church are but forcing-pits.

1. In connection with the passing of the Bible it is a highly significant fact that the most effective agents in the process have been professional theologians, trained exegetes, accredited representatives of the Church. The Bible has been mortally wounded in the house of its nominal friends. The Faith has been stabbed to the heart by its own official champions. Prominent among these, at the present time, are Canons Driver and Cheyne, of the Established Church of England, and Professor George Adam Smith, of the United Free Church of Scotland. I utterly fail to see how any honest, unbiassed person can carefully study and understand Canon Driver's famous *Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament*, and his lucid *Commentaries* on several Old Testament Books; Canon Cheyne's *Introduction to the Book of Isaiah*, together with his numerous *Commentaries*, critical articles in theological and expository magazines, and the great and scholastic *Encyclopædia Biblica*, of which he is chief editor; and, in particular, Professor George Adam Smith's startling book entitled *Modern Criticism and the Preaching of the Old Testament*, without being unavoidably driven to the conclusion that the Bible is not, in any superior or special sense, the word of God, and must be subjected to the same canons of criticism as all other books. At any rate, that was the inevitable effect the study of such works had upon me.

2. But how can Supernaturalism stand without the support of a specially inspired and infallible Book? There are still a few simple-minded and honest-hearted people who, in spite of all the discoveries of modern criticism, dogmatically maintain that, if the Bible is fallible and bristles with blunders, there can be no escape from the hateful inference that Christianity is overthrown. Such people are the only consistent Christians extant. But the bulk of present-day apologists refer for authority, not to the Bible, but to the experience of living believers. They eloquently exclaim: "Religion does not live in a

book, but in the hearts and lives of its devotees. As plants and flowers are grandly independent of the very best Botanical text-books, so is Christianity of the Bible."

The first great divine that formulated this argument in England was the late Dr. Dale, of Birmingham, in a book of immense interest, entitled *The Living Christ and the Four Gospels*. He firmly believed in the authenticity and inspiration of these documents; but his argument was that as Christianity came into healthy and vigorous existence before a single line of the Four Gospels was written, so it could likewise survive their utter destruction. According to this argument, in its latest development, the Christian Religion, in its present sublimated and etherealised form, is not vitally associated with the miraculous birth, benevolent life, peerless teaching, redemptive work, sacrificial death, and triumphant resurrection of a historical Christ, but roots itself, rather, in the personal experience of every genuine Christian, and refers to the same source for its supreme and final evidence. Consequently, Christ is not so much a historical *person* as a spiritual *force* in the souls of believers;—that is to say, he is an unseen and omnipotent Being, who in some mystic, inexplicable sense really dwells, as a seed or germ, in every human soul; in that of the Mohammedan, the Confucian, or the Buddhist no less than in that of the professing believer in Christendom. Now, if this universally indwelling spiritual Christ gets fair play, whether the gospel be heard and accepted or not, he will certainly grow and develop into the ideal stature. In those who make a spontaneous surrender to him, he soon comes to conscious life; and they worship him with glowing devotion. They enjoy full communion with him, *as if* he still actually existed somewhere, or *as if* he were a person with a unique history lying behind him. And yet, in spite of all this, they coolly assure us that "Christianity is not a system of intellectual truths, but a practical and vital experience of the heart," and that "Christ is not a fiction of the theologians, not a prophet of Galilee, but an indwelling power whereby we are evolved upward to the perfect spiritual stature of

man." Quite recently, I heard the Rev. R. J. Campbell, at the City Temple when he affirmed, with his own peculiarly quiet and infectious fervor, that this spiritual Christ is now germinally present in the lowest and worst character on earth. To those who venture to cast suspicion on such an assertion, these modern apologists say:—"You are blind, and there are whole regions of spiritual apprehension of which you know nothing. *Intellectually* you may, perhaps, be our equals or superiors; but *spiritually* we are immeasurably above you, and possess a faculty which enables and entitles us to judge you, although you cannot judge us. We have allowed the allwelling spiritual Christ to have his way with us to such an extent that we already know all things." They affect a sublime indifference to all historical, critical, and theological problems, saying: "You may smash up the historical and intellectual setting to smithereens; but when you have done that, you have not yet touched real Christianity." What, then, in the name of all the wonders, *is* real Christianity? Is it only the creation of the sanctified imagination of a few duly ordained clergymen? And is the same thing true of Christ himself? The late Professor Bruce, who wielded such an enormous influence in his day, regarded the *historicity* of the Four Gospels as absolutely essential. All the Epistles might utterly disappear, without our suffering any radical loss, for at best they were but human interpretations and commentaries; but the moment we abandoned the Gospels, Christianity would be entirely undermined. And is it not true that Professor Bruce was literally and profoundly right? If it is or can be proved that Christ never lived at all, or never lived as reported in the documents, does not his spiritual existence in the souls of believers become an empty dream? Surely a non-historic Jesus cannot be in any sense a real person, nor can a religion founded on an imaginary being possess any objective reality, whatever the experience of its devotees may say. The moment we give up our faith in the inspiration and inerrancy of the Bible, the moment we admit that miracles do not happen, and have not

happened, that same moment we strip Christianity of all its distinctive features as a Revealed Religion, and bring it down to the level of all the great ethnic religions.

With this discovery came my emancipation from all superstitious slavery, and the full redemption of my soul. A necessity was laid upon me to renounce the Supernatural, and to find all I needed within the limits of the natural. I substituted conscience for God, reason for faith, common sense for prayer; and for the first time in my life I found mental rest and joy.

3. But there was a third element that contributed to my deliverance, namely, the conviction that all religious exercises are *artificially forced*. Let us take prayer as an example. As a child, I was systematically taught to regard praying as an imperative duty, which everyone should piously endeavor to discharge. I was also continually reminded of the sorrowful fact that, ever since the Fall in Eden, mankind had been sinfully disinclined to bend their knees before the God of Heaven. Hence, even to those who were born again through faith in Christ, prayer did not come naturally. There was an old man within them still who violently rebelled against it; so that, in order to become proficient and find enjoyment in it, a necessity was laid upon them to crucify the indwelling villain, and extend to his rightful successor, created within them by the Holy Ghost, a firmer and more welcome lodgment. But, in spite of all my desperate efforts to bring about the death and ejection of the ancient Adam, in spite of all my passionate appeals to God to come to my assistance in the matter, prayer was never a joyous and strengthening exercise to me. It continued to the end to be a hard, difficult, and unilluminated duty, which only my sense of loyalty to Christ enabled me to perform at all. This constitutional disinclination to pray I then attributed to a fundamental lack of spirituality, to some incompleteness of surrender to God in Christ, or to some abnormal activity of the persistent old scamp in my heart; and I tried to pray all the more. After a while, I noticed that there was nothing extraordinary or peculiar about my experience, but that

the experience of all other children and adults was practically the same. Of course, as long as I believed in the Edenic Catastrophe, and the consequent imputation of guilt and transmission of depravity to the whole race, it was easy enough to account for the innate disinclination to pray: it was a sign, proof, and direct consequence of that hideous and hell-creating event. But as soon as it became imperative to repudiate that damnable dogma, because it flatly contradicted both reason and history, there was no possibility of avoiding the atheistic conclusion that religion, in the form of belief in and communion with an infinite and eternal Person, is unnatural, irrational, and injurious, and that for Christ, with the whole paraphernalia of Atonement, Sacrifice, and Salvation from hell, there is absolutely no need. This is why adults are never religious unless they have had religion forced down their throats in their youth. This is why ministers and their assistants have to be so busy attending to the religious education of the children; and it is to this incontrovertible fact that we owe Sunday-Schools, Bands of Hope, Societies of Christian Endeavor, and even the regular services of the Churches. The idea that underlies all ecclesiastical institutions, consciously or unconsciously, is that man is not by nature a religious being, and that all religious convictions, beliefs, and practices must be drilled into him by a long and most laborious course of teaching. All religion originates in superstition; and it is a statement capable of amplest verification that in proportion as superstition loses its hold upon the common people, religion becomes a dead letter. If the churches were to suspend operations from next Sunday, in less than a hundred years Christianity would be a thing of the past. We know that during the last fifty or sixty years theology has been steadily abandoning, one by one, positions that used to be regarded as vitally essential. The renaissance of physical science in the nineteenth century was accompanied by a corresponding decadence of religion. The acceptance of Evolution meant the consequent rejection of the Bible and Christianity.

## XI.—THE INDESTRUCTIBLE REMAINDER.

Now that we have eliminated the Bible as a specially inspired and authoritative book, and Christianity as a miraculously revealed religion, both from our minds and from our lives, is there anything that remains and cannot be swept away? Yes, ALL THAT HAS EVER HAD ANY REAL AND VERIFIABLE EXISTENCE. We have merely rid ourselves of unnatural and morbid developments, of troublesome and hurtful incumbrances, or, in other words, we have only lopped off a few injurious excrescences. We ourselves, and Nature, of which we are an important part, still endure. I can find no more in external objects than is already, either active or dormant, in myself. Man is an epitome of the Universe. Nothing transcends the soul, because it is the sum-total of all things in miniature. Hence, neither poet nor philosopher ever uttered a thought that did not awaken echoes in all minds. That which is in itself true appeals more or less forcibly to all alike, because it is germinally present and regnant in all natural souls. I know how customary it is, in certain quarters, to accuse Atheists of contradicting, in the most wilful manner, the testimony of their own nature, and to call them liars and hypocrites. "At heart," we are confidently assured, "no man is or can be an Atheist." The obvious retort is that, at heart, no man either is or can be anything else. Even according to the teaching of orthodox theology, ever since the Fall in Eden Atheism has been the natural fruit of unregenerate hearts. Now that science has disproved the Story of the Fall it is undeniable that, by nature, all men are Atheists. Everybody knows now how the belief in Supernatural Beings first arose, and how it was gradually evolved into its present forms. As

I have already said, we are not naturally religious. Even to-day children have to be diligently and painfully trained and coaxed, often very much against their wills, into religious beliefs and exercises, and many of them, as soon as they arrive at years of discretion and independence, shake them off again. We do not take to religion as naturally as we do to our food. Furthermore, unbelievers are frequently taunted with their inability to supply the world with a worthy substitute for the Christian Religion. "What have you to offer us in place of Christianity?" they are excitedly asked. "You must not rob us of our religion until you can provide us with another and better one." We cheerfully accept the challenge; and our answer to it is, that the world would be immensely better off without its Supernatural Religions, because they are more or less artificial and of a bedwarfing tendency.

As illustrations of the truth of this contention let us consider a few of the great, central words of the Bible, such as *God*, *Christ*, *Sin*, and *Immortality*. Is not the merest tyro in theology fully aware that no two divines are in entire agreement as to the meaning of a single one of these terms? It may be alleged that all theologians speak of God as an infinite, eternal, invisible, and absolute Being; and yet hosts of them admit, on metaphysical grounds, that an infinite and absolute Being is unthinkable. "But," some simple-minded person will say, "I *must* believe in God because he is revealed in the Bible." But several different and conflicting gods are revealed in the Bible—in which of them do you believe; the god who commanded human sacrifice, or the one who forbade it: the god of war or the god of peace: the god of vengeance or the god of love? These are all in the Book, and you must make your choice between them. "My God," another exclaims, "is the embodiment of all high and noble qualities, and whenever I worship him it is really to such attributes that I am paying homage." Then your God cannot be an infinite and self-conscious person, but merely an idealisation, a poetic fancy, a product of your



own imagination. The only sound advice to such a believer is this: By all means, retain and adore the qualities, in so far as they are high and noble, but, for all sakes, drop the fanciful person. The term *Christ*, also, is open to the same objection. As to who or what Christ is there is an endless diversity of opinion. To one disciple, he is the Son of the living God, the only begotten; to another, the completest revelation of the Highest; to another, the all-sufficient expiatory sacrifice for sin; to another, a teacher of remarkable originality and power; and to another still, man at his highest and best, the supreme miracle of history. These typical disciples represent different and contradictory schools of Christology, which have always stood at daggers drawn in relation to one another. In the Middle Ages the Church sanctioned the Christology of the Augustinian school, and tried to stamp out the other schools by imprisoning, torturing, and burning their representatives. But at no time was the Church competent to exercise absolute authority in matters of doctrine, because it has been repeatedly proved that she put men to death for holding and teaching opinions which riper knowledge has established as incontestably true. Her character as an infallible teacher has been completely and irretrievably shattered. Convicted, in open court, as a false witness on many important points, the validity of her evidence on all other subjects has been hopelessly destroyed. If therefore we listen to our own reason, unterrorised by any superstition, we shall have to let the theological Christ go, with all the theories concerning him, or put him in the same category as Buddha, and Confucius, and Zoroaster.

The same remarks apply to the words *Sin* and *Immortality*. What is sin? No two people agree. According to some there are sins specially against God, transgressions against positive commands, similar to the Edenic one about the forbidden apple, and so far as one can make out these are exclusively sins of omission. We sin against God when we neglect to pray, to read the Bible, to attend church, or to contribute towards the

due maintenance of the priesthood. Then there are sins against ourselves and sins against our neighbor, which are variously defined according to the theological standpoint. Again, according to the ripest and most reliable Biblical scholars, immortality is not taught in the Old Testament at all, so that in reality the Jewish Church concerned itself solely with the affairs of the life that now is. Dr. George Adam Smith informs us, further, that there are excellent Christians in present-day Churches to whom the doctrine of a future life does not appeal, and who have accepted Christianity merely on the ground of the unique exaltation and purity of its ethical teaching. But is it not indisputable that if we eliminate the Supernatural, with its heaven and hell, from the Christian Religion, nothing of distinctive value, nothing that is not common to all great Religions, remains? All that is peculiar to it is purely mythical, while all that is of real value in it is common property.

Now, face-to-face with such significant facts, my argument is that we do not need a substitute for Christianity, but would be much better off, in every respect, with no Supernatural Religion whatever. But what remains to us after we have discarded God, Christ, and Immortality, with all the absurd dogmas concerning them? Nature, in all the plenitude of her glory and power. She is our kind, loving, all-sustaining mother, in whom we live, and move, and have our being. She answers all our anxious questions and solves all our vexing problems. We never appeal to her in vain. How speedily she responds to our varying moods, comforting us in sorrow, cheering us in despondency, inspiring us in weakness, weeping with us when we are sad, and laughing with us when we are merry. Our one business in life is to observe her laws, and to be in perfect tune with her sweet harmonies; and the only sin possible to us is to be in a state of rebellion against her wise orderings. There is only one thing we should dread, not the wrath and punishment of a Supernatural Being, supposed to be seated on a glittering throne no one knows where, but the ominous

frown of our mother when we have wilfully disregarded her beneficent injunctions. No, my friends, we do not need another Supernatural Religion, but we do need to return to the worship of reason, the adoration of Nature, and the practical fulfilment of the laws of truth, and honor, and honesty, and pity, and service. This is the the divinest religion on earth, and yet the one most culpably neglected. Christians are too busy preparing for heaven to pay the slightest attention to the social duties of earth. "But," someone cries, "I cannot give up my hope of heaven, and you have no right to try to rob me of it." Well, cherish it to your heart's content, so far as I am concerned; but will you be good enough to consider, with due seriousness, the following practical questions?—

"Is it well that while we range with Science, glorying in the  
Time,  
City children soak and blacken soul and sense in city slime?"

Is it well that—

"There among the glooming alleys Progress halts on palsied  
feet,  
Crime and hunger cast our maidens by the thousand on the  
street?"

Is it well that—

"There the smouldering fire of fever creeps across the rotted  
floor,  
And the crowded couch of incest in the warrens of the poor?"

Is it well, is it right, is it just that these and a thousand other anomalies, sufferings, and cruelties should be permitted to continue in countries which call themselves Christian? Is it well, is it consistent that you, a professed follower of Christ, should be rapidly amassing a colossal fortune, and faring sumptuously every day, at the expense of the poverty and misery of your work-people? If that is what your hope of heaven enables or allows or leads you to do, the sooner you part with it the better it will be for all concerned. In your sane moments, do you not agree? It is most lamentable to think how Christian churches seek to win and retain the rich by wheedling flatteries and infamous cajoleries, and

then dole out a little charity to the poor, accompanied by the assurance that though poor on earth they shall be rich in heaven. In their hearts the poor scorn charity, and cry bitterly for justice, fair-play, and the recognition of their humanity. If the churches were true to Christ, whom they call their Head, they would tell the rich that they cannot possibly enter the Kingdom of Heaven until they learn, not to bequeath their riches to good causes when they die, or devote them to ecclesiastical purposes while they live, and be made famous, but so to conduct their business affairs from day to day as to preclude the possibility of ever becoming rich. Instead of that, they are doing their utmost to perpetuate and accentuate the terrible injustices, inequalities, and artificial distinctions that now obtain in Society. Our reason tells us how iniquitous the present condition of things is, and our reason, guided by our heart, dictates the only true remedy; and if we only had the courage to apply the remedy all would soon be well. Christianity has been in the world for nineteen hundred years, but has ignominiously failed to set it right. Indeed, it has often succeeded in setting it quite wrong. The reason is that it is pre-eminently the religion of the world to come, and, consequently, concerns itself but little with the affairs of this. When we have detached ourselves from it we shall have time to fulfil the common duties of the common day, and, as a result, to restore our relations to ourselves and to one another to their normal and healthy condition.

My story is told, and I am at rest, and can face the future without dread. I know whence I came and whither I am going, and I greet the unseen, whatever it may be, with a cheer. I take my stand with Ernst Haeckel in the tabernacle of wonder and admiration, and I join the great Goethe in the sanctuary of sorrow and sympathy, reconsecrating myself to the service of the huge army of the wronged and sinned against, the suffering and the sad. Great and honorable is the work that lies before us, and I call upon the reader and myself

to awake from sloth and begin with glowing hearts to do it. Let us unite in a grandly altruistic mission to rid the world of debasing superstitions, to dethrone all existing evils, to establish right relations between man and man, to promote good will and genuine brotherhood all round, and to fill the days and hours of this earthly life, the only life of which we are sure, with merry laughter and songful joy. Such is the beneficent ministry of the only true gospel.

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