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NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

# G O D .

Being also a Brief Statement of Arguments  
Against Agnosticism.

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BY

“HUMANITAS.”

*Author of “Christ’s Temptation”, “Jacob the Wrestler”, “Jonah and the Whale”,  
“Is God the First Cause?”, “Follies of the Lord’s Prayer”, “Thoughts on  
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Commons Treated Charles Bradlaugh, M.P.”, “Charles Bradlaugh and the Irish  
Nation”, “Socialism a Curse”, “Against Socialism”, etc.*

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[William Platt Ball]

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# G O D .

BEING ALSO A BRIEF STATEMENT OF ARGUMENTS  
AGAINST AGNOSTICISM

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THE following observations were suggested to me by a remark—or rather, by a question put to me in the shape of an argument—by an intimate and, I believe, a true friend, under rather peculiar circumstances. He is not only a Christian—and I will do him the justice of believing him to be a sincere one—but a “minister of the Gospel”, having qualified himself in what should have been his hours of rest from daily toil, under the auspices of Mr. Spurgeon.

We chanced to be inside a very important Catholic church in the City of Dublin. It was upon a Saturday evening, a favorite time for going to confession amongst the poorer Catholics. The interior of the place presented the appearance usual upon such occasions, being only partially and dimly lit up; making the small red lamp burning in front of the high altar [indicating the presence of the “Host”—*i.e.*, a small piece of God’s “very flesh” in the form of the “wafer”, which is made of flour and water] more remarkable and mysterious. Groups of penitents kneeled and prayed, beads in hand, in front of one or other of the numerous altars, either waiting their turn to disappear into one of the many confessionals, or saying a few prayers—perhaps a portion of their penance—after coming out from them. Occasionally a priest would glide quickly and silently past in that well-known conventional and professional manner peculiar to them and their calling; bowing to the very ground in solemn fashion as he passed the “Adorable Host”. Pictures of the “Stations of the

Cross"; highly colored and decorated statues of "Our Saviour", the "Blessed Virgin", "St. Joseph", and various other saints; stained glass windows, looking strangely and weirdly indistinct in the dim light, and helping the generally mysterious glamor which prevailed; people in various stations of life, but chiefly the poor, sprinkling themselves with holy water, blessing themselves and making the sign of the Cross as they passed, or almost crept, in and out; the curious odor so dear to the olfactory nerves of the faithful, caused by the burning of incense, and which never seems to leave the building: these, together with many other features peculiar to the Catholic Church, seen by my friend for perhaps the first time, inspired him with much curiosity, but withal much contempt. I think it likely that he experienced some such feelings, as did the simple honest Scotchman when he, for the first time in his life, got a glimpse of a bishop in the full blaze of his glory and paraphernalia, officiating in a Catholic Church upon the occasion of its being opened for public worship, and exclaimed: "Ah! mon, but it's the deil!". However that may have been, he is, as I say, a Christian minister, and of course fervently believes in the existence of God. In fact, he went so far as to declare—and I believe in all sincerity—that he did not believe one single human being existed who thought for a single moment there was no God. This being so, and whilst we stood opposite the high altar, he appeared to be suddenly struck with an idea: he thought he saw a favorable opportunity of driving home an argument, and thereby eventually saving my soul from the awful doom which he felt sorrowfully confident was hanging over it. For, turning to me, with much solicitude, he asked the question to which I have alluded, viz., "Does not that fine piece of work"—pointing to the high altar—"show design? Does it not bespeak thought, intelligence: in short, does it not show *mind* on the part of the maker?" Of course I at once saw at what my friend was driving; and there, in the centre of mystery and mummery, with the Faithful, and, as we both thought, foolish devotees, bowing and scraping, and blessing and mumbling and crawling about us, we two, a Baptist minister and an avowed Atheist, held an argument as to whether there existed a God or not. Of course it was held in undertones; but more than once we were

suspiciously glanced at; and, wonderful to relate, the walls did not fall in upon us, nor did the floor open and swallow us up! I believe, Atheist as I am, and holding the Church of Rome—with its host, its mutterings, its tinsel and trappings, its celibate (?) priesthood, and its large and lucrative trade done in departed souls—to be all delusion and pretence, that my friend's disgust at what was passing around us, was greater than mine. Yet he, in turn, finds no difficulty in subscribing to such things as the "Trinity", the "Fall", and the "Atonement" (embracing as the latter does, the pre-ordained tragedy of the murder of God No. 2); the doctrine of eternal torment, and the usual orthodox miracles ascribed to Christ, etc., etc.

With these few observations as to the origin of the present paper, I will at once proceed with my task.

In dealing with my subject, I shall hold that "God" means, not only the "Sovereign Lord", the "Supreme Being", the "Maker of heaven and earth", etc., which terms all convey pretty much the same meaning or idea; but that it must necessarily mean the beginning of all things; in fact, the *First Cause*. I take this to be the primary meaning of the term; and to be the centre of nearly all the definitions put forward. [I shall, in concluding this paper, make some remarks upon the question as to whether an *Atheist* can reasonably hold that the term *God* conveys no meaning to him. "Creator", "Maker", "First Cause", etc., seem to me to be fairly definite, and to convey the idea that the person who uses them, or the term (God) for which they stand, holds that he exists.] Christians generally certainly hold God to be the beginning of all things. They all, with perhaps slight variation, teach what is conveyed in: "Before all things were, God was". And the Theist, pure and simple, holds that he in some fashion or other made, or caused the universe. I shall, as a matter of course, endeavor to show that this is erroneous.

My friend's contention, as will have been observed, amounts to nothing more nor less than our old familiar friend the design argument: that because an altar, a building, or a piece of machinery, indicates mind on the part of the constructor, therefore the universe must have had a constructor who possessed that attribute. I do not,

however, think that either he or they who hold the same opinion are sufficiently logical to admit that, inasmuch as the universe, like the objects referred to, shows great imperfections, therefore its maker, like theirs, must necessarily have had only an imperfect mind. To make this logical confession would defeat the object of the comparison and inference drawn.

My first objection to the theory that the universe was constructed or made is that it pre-supposes a period when a universal *nothing* prevailed; that there was a time when this world, with its sun and its planets, and the other millions of worlds, compared with which this is quite insignificant, did not exist; and when matter in any form was not. The thing is simply unthinkable. It is pure assumption. It used to be assumed and enforced—by death if necessary—before the shape, dimensions, laws, etc., which govern this world (not to mention the others) were known, that the very matter of which it is composed was *made*—called into existence by this intelligent God, about 6,000 years ago. But science having rendered that position untenable, a compromise is made: what was inspiration then is not inspiration now; and it is therefore held that the raw material only existed previous to that period, and that *creating* simply means fashioning, or working into shape, which again was not accomplished in the good old-fashioned six days—upon one of which we are enjoined to rest from our labor—but perhaps (and mark the perhaps) took six incalculable lapses of time. But this latter-day shift does not touch upon the question of the previous making of the matter. It leaves it exactly where it was: impossible to suppose, and a most unnecessary assumption.

But it is further contended that the world was not only made, but that its maker must have possessed intelligence, must have had a mind. It ought not to be necessary to point out that intelligence, or mind, is the result of brain power. It is impossible to conceive or think of mind except in conjunction with organism. And God is claimed by those who insist upon his existence to be a pure spirit without either body or parts. What can be really known of a pure spirit? And how can you couple mind with it? Mind is a faculty of, and belonging to, certain animal organisations, having its seat in the brain; and intelli-



gence is the result of the greater or lesser supply, quality, or exercise of that essentially animal organ. How then can a pure spirit, which cannot be conceived as having any functional power or conditions whatever, be said to possess mind? As well might you speak of God's mouth, or God's any other part, as speak of his mind. Indeed, the folly to which I point is actually reached in such phrases as "his all-seeing eye", "the finger of God", etc., which are the common cant of Christians. I suppose I shall be told these are but figures of speech; but I see no more reason for making them such than for doing a like thing with God's intelligence, which is the pivot upon which the argument for design turns.

There are many Theists who do not venture upon a description of God, simply contending that he does in some fashion exist. Well, that is certainly much safer ground, but of course it does not find favor with those who, whilst holding him to be pure spirit, yet contend for his personality. No less a person than Archdeacon Farrar<sup>1</sup> is just now triumphantly asking by way of a death blow to Atheism, where motion and life came from "save the finger tips of omnipotence?" It might be remarked, by the way, that when the venerable Archdeacon is asked, Whence came omnipotence? it becomes his turn to take his own advice, and, giving the "Rabbi's answer", say "I do not know". But the cream of the joke is, the Archdeacon thinks he has solved the problem. It is doubtless very pretty and off-handed, to talk about the world coming from God's finger tips: but why did he not say from his toe ends? For my own part, I do not think it matters much which limb or end of omnipotence you make use of, either as matter of fact, or figure of speech. Omnipotence could, when he had the world, or worlds, rolled up into round lumps, as easily have tipped them off with his foot, as with his hand. I am curious to know upon what he rested the rough lumps when at work upon them. Did he climb all over them, or rest them in his lap? Can God who is without form, body, or parts, have a lap? Get behind,

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<sup>1</sup> See the *National Reformer* of August 5th, 1888, containing his seven questions, and Mr. Bradlaugh's replies. Also Ernest Ferrol's reply in *Secular Review* of August 25th, 1888, and "Julian's" scathing remarks in same journal of a week later.

ye of little faith!—or go to Archdeacon Farrar, and he will tell you that God, being God, can have many laps, and no lap, at one and the same time. What does the Archdeacon say to this? He speaks of the finger tips of omnipotence: then why not of the nether end? One were as foolish as the other: and yet he deemed those who do not come to the same conclusion as himself, to be talking “stupendous nonsense”.

I believe that the idea of God working upon the worlds cobbler-fashion is not, however, the orthodox one: a much more sublime view is taken. God is made more of a necromancer, or wizard: he did his work by his word:—“Heigh presto!” and it was done. “Let there be light”, etc. “And it was so”, notwithstanding that there had already been three mornings and evenings, and, shall I be profane if I conclude, also nights? How *very* omnipotent this God—formless, yet fingered and eyed—must have been! And it will not avail to argue that those terms really are figures of speech, because having reference to the particular attribute—mind—which we are mainly considering; it is implicitly believed that he is not only possessed of intelligence, but is the fountain-head of all wisdom. And there is logically no more reason why eyes and fingers, or any other functional condition or term, should be held to be figurative, than intelligence. Seeing is certainly as much the result of function as intelligence, and intelligence is not less the result of function than seeing. No doubt this *figurative* idea is extremely useful. The inspired Scriptures are held to be both figurative and literal, as occasion and the needs of this and that particular doctrine or dogma may require. Of course it goes for nothing that those who thus ring the changes, do so to prove each other wrong,—both, too, being under God’s Divine Providence!

Now, looking the argument fully in the face, that because work done by man shows him to be possessed of a mind, therefore the universe shows it must also have been produced by a personal power—or even power other than personal—possessing that quality; I reply that nothing of the kind necessarily follows, especially when it is contended that the power or person so acting is pure spirit, producing its work out of *nothing*. I think no one will be guilty of holding cause and effect to be contained in such a pre-

posterous contention. And the case is even worse when it is further contended that its work demonstrates supreme power as well as supreme intelligence.

It does not follow that, because a piece of music or a steam engine is the result of brains, therefore the universe is also the result of brains: much less of brains dwelling in what could not possibly be a dwelling-place for them. Because in order to produce your power, your brains, your mind, or your intelligence, you have to travel out of nature into something indefinable, something in which neither one nor the other could exist—in reality into nothing. Talking of “omnipotence” does not explain anything; neither does accounting for nature by supernature. Many shallow Christians besides Archdeacon Farrar have made merry over what it is pretended the Atheist believes as regards chance; while they themselves maintain that law and order were produced by miracle, which is a negation of all law, and that nature, which is an endless chain of cause and effect, was caused by an uncaused cause! This is less logical than chance. If a cannon ball *chanced* to come into contact with a man’s head it would speedily produce an effect. But your uncaused cause is simply a contradiction of terms, or a logically impossible arrangement of terms, and kills itself. Those who so argue resemble the poor man who, thinking he had no further use for his brains, got a friend to knock them out for him; or the little boy who, having opened all his cockles by means of each other, was at a loss how to proceed on coming to the last one, and so smashed it.

As a matter of fact the materialist is the last to subscribe to a belief in “chance”. He must necessarily hold to law and order; it is the corner stone of his position. He cannot even indulge in the luxury of a temporary reversion or cessation of law, either through the instrumentality of prayer or otherwise.

Perhaps the main difference upon this point between, say, an advanced scientific Christian Theist and an Atheist is that the former, arguing that the fact of the existence of the world is insufficient, will insist upon going behind it to find a cause. But he will then stultify himself and cut the throat of his own argument by asserting the said cause to have been itself uncaused: thus of a verity straining at the gnat, and swallowing the camel.

The Atheist and Materialist, on the other hand, at once admits that he knows nothing, and can know nothing, beyond the universe. He takes it as he finds it. And one of his highest aims is to become acquainted with it: to understand the laws which govern and pervade it. But he cannot suppose a time when it did not exist, nor a time when it will cease to exist. Change it may, but it will be in obedience to laws inherent in itself. Nature perpetually changes, but it does not cease. And there is no more reason to suppose that it began to be, than that it will cease to be. Let anyone seriously try to think a period in which there existed nothing—not even the atmosphere; that all the millions of orbs, suns, or systems—for we cannot confine ourselves to our own comparatively small system—did not exist, were not *made*; and that somewhere out in space there did exist, and always had existed, an incomprehensible something, formless, brainless, and without substance, and yet possessing the intelligence and power to produce all these millions of worlds out of nothing, as if by magic. Let him attempt to think it, and he will not only be lost in the folly of the effort, but also in that of the reasoning it implies.

If the fact be candidly recognised that the world bears down in its depths, and upon its surface, unmistakable proofs of its incalculable age; and if it also be admitted that there cannot be gathered one single scrap of evidence that it once did not exist—that, as I have pointed out, a time when it and all nature, of which it is but part, was not, is unthinkable—the logical conclusion which affirms the eternity of nature and her laws—by which I mean all that happens in nature, and that is necessary for the happening—will have to be conceded: thus shutting out, or allowing no room for God. Nature therefore being all-sufficient and eternal, necessarily could not have had a supernatural beginning, nor indeed any beginning.

If I am told the world bears evidence of having had an intelligent maker, I reply that such is not the case. It bears evidence of vast and perpetual change; of lapse after lapse of time so great as to almost annul our sense of what time means; but nowhere does it point to an intelligent maker, and therefore a beginning. Nor does it give evidence of an ending. In fact it gives evidence of its own eternity. And least of all does it give evidence of



having had a beginning in a something which of a necessity must have been foreign to the laws and principles which are part and parcel of itself. Of the intelligence of the alleged maker, as evidenced by his work, I will speak presently.

The Theist, in his anxiety to find a beginning for what it is impossible to conceive as having had one, travels out of the universe, beyond the real and knowable into the regions of fairyland; and seems to have invented—and the Christians, with various additions and modifications to have adopted—a kind of fabulous monster combining all the good and bad qualities of his predecessors rolled into one; with the difference that while as a rule the Gods which he replaced, or who went before him, took, and were worshipped in, some particular shape or form, the Jew-Christian God is said to be entirely without form; but is at the same time capable of assuming all shapes and forms, and also of assuming no shape or form whatever, as time and occasion may require. He is accredited with other peculiarities, perhaps not common to his more savage and less manipulated precursors and contemporaries: such as being a pure spirit without parts, but nevertheless able to see, walk, talk, and sit; and possessing memory, will, and understanding.

According to Dr. Cross, an enlightened and Christian member of the Liverpool City Council,<sup>1</sup> God actually has a “snout” capable of receiving a “slap” “with the back of the” municipal “hand”. Which statement another even more Christian councillor, not relishing the profanity of his civic brother, indignantly interpreted as “giving the Almighty a bloody nose”! But the most amusing part of this incident was that the latter gentleman had to withdraw, whilst the former statement was allowed to stand unchallenged. So that by the decision of these experts in Christian and Deistic niceties, it is fair enough to speak of giving the Almighty a “back-hander” on the “snout”; but the line must be drawn at bloodying his nose. These are not my vulgarities, bear in mind, but are those of Christian gentlemen who would not desecrate the Sabbath by giving their sanction to the means of educating working people upon that awful day.

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<sup>1</sup> See “Summary of News” in *National Reformer*, August 12th, 1888.

Having regard to the traits and characteristics which go to make up the Christian Deity, one cannot help thinking that he would form a most interesting and unique addition to the God Department of the Exhibition of Religions newly opened at Paris. The only difficulty I see would be as to shape. A pillar of fire or a cloud of smoke would not be quite so tangible, and perhaps God-like, as some of their divine majesties already placed. The form of man is, I venture to think, too commonplace; and to give him his great characteristic, no form at all, is of course quite out of the question. Hence the difficulty in representation. It is possible that, if appealed to, he might deign to signify to the promoters of the Exhibition in what particular guise he would wish to appear amongst his rival high-and-mighties.

In speaking of the shape or *image* of God, it is curious to note that the portion of man which he is said to have made in his own image and likeness is that particular portion—*i.e.*, his mind—which is imageless, and which he possesses, though in a larger degree, in common with all creatures whose systems include brains. Therefore it would be quite as true to say that he made cats and dogs in his own image as to say it of man; or, in other words, one statement is equally as foolish as the other.

It might not be out of place here to remark what I have more than once pointed out—*viz.*, the extreme reluctance displayed nowadays by defenders of Christianity to discuss or to touch upon the God of the Bible, and his doings as therein related. They either evade or refuse point blank to deal with the subject, pretending that it has nothing to do with Christianity, etc., etc. Well, if not altogether logical, it is yet good. It is well they are ashamed of the *root* of their tree, and it gives hope that they will eventually entertain a similar feeling with regard to the fruit thereof. But I ask seriously and pointedly how Christians—and I allude especially to Trinitarians—can hold Christ the Son—who is co-equal with God the Father, being not a separate God, but the second person of the God-head, practically one and the same—to be innocent, or in any way not responsible for all the acts said and done, as related in the Old Testament? The weak attempt at evasion anent the New Dispensation, etc., does not suffice; and cannot make bloodshed, deceit and lying,

obscenity, and profligate barbarity, other than they are.

Whilst admitting that Judaism taken alone is not Christianity, I urge that it is the foundation upon which it is built, and that a Christian, whilst accepting the superstructure, may not reasonably eschew the foundation. Man in building up a civilisation may reasonably subscribe to the present-day result, whilst at the same time admitting that many of the events which went before were not, as now viewed, right or moral, man can but use his brains, and he necessarily and often blunders. Frequently he knowingly commits crime, which must be condemned, although future generations are influenced and compelled to shape their course by reason of it. Indeed the blunders and crimes, as well as the great achievements and virtues in the direction of truth and acknowledged right, of those who go before, shape the course of those who follow.

But a *God* building up a religion—giving to man the actual standard of right—is altogether another question. He is not at liberty to blunder and commit crime, otherwise he is not God. Man cannot conceive (I admit some men can) a God leading his people through bloodshed, pillage, and rapine to a righteous goal. Man cannot conceive a God doing and saying such things, and establishing for centuries foolish fables regarding natural facts, as not only to constrain his "enemies", but his very disciples, either to denounce or evade him. But such is the case, for it would seem now that God has in part changed his skin, and that number two portion is much whiter than number one. Bible Theism is not now deemed sufficiently respectable to go hand in hand with New Testament Theism. The Son is ashamed of the Father, and I look forward to a time when the enlightened will be ashamed of both; by which I mean, ashamed of being—or rather of pretending to be—bound down and ruled by such books of fable as both the Old and New Testaments admittedly are.

Going back again to the folly of hunting for a God, it really is interesting to note how, in obedience to what he believes to be a logical necessity, your believer in his existence, after he has left the land of science and fact, entered that of imagination and myth, and secured, as he thinks, his origin for the land he has left, will, without



scruple, disregard what he conceived to be the logical necessity which sent him there. He opines that there must have been a beginning to all things, falls down before the indescribable creation of his own brain, damns his brother if he does not do likewise, proclaims that he has found the *beginning*, and thus ignores the very principle which sent him in search of it. All things must have a beginning, except, forsooth, his God. That were a child's method of solving the difficulty. It is also a child's method of shirking it.

It may be contended, in fact it was so put by my friend, that it is enough if the necessity for a maker of the world is demonstrated, without going behind that maker: that it is enough for man to know there is a creator, without pushing the enquiry as to how *he* came about. I reply that it is not enough. First, because that would be a good argument against his existence, and for the all-sufficiency of nature. But I reply further, and principally, that the argument which insists upon the necessity of a God, when carried to its fair and legitimate end, simply annihilates him. If you insist that the universe—all nature—must have had a cause (of course an intelligent one) equal to the effect, you must in common sense admit that your cause is the effect of an antecedent cause also equal to the effect. And so on, *ad infinitum*. Where then is your first cause? I say that, according to your own showing, your God is not a respectable half-way house to the first cause. His very existence, as created by man, logically kills him. The truth is, he does not, and so far as we are able to reason, could not exist.

It may be argued that it were as reasonable to hold that God always was, and therefore had no beginning, as to hold the same thing of the universe and of nature. But I reply again: first, that the God theory, whilst being in no way a solution of the real difficulty, merely aggravates it. It is a large and a gratuitous addition, and simply piles difficulty upon difficulty. It assumes as a basis of its existence, what the need for its existence says is impossible; and so either evades or strangles the principle it evokes. And I reply secondly: that man cannot travel beyond nature. If ever he finds a first cause it must be a natural one. To him super-nature is *nil*, he can know nothing of it; and, therefore, to endeavor to account for nature upon

what must necessarily be not only pure assumption, but the assumption of something to which you have no means of applying a test, is simply nonsense. Let us suppose that it is admitted that the beginning of nature is an impenetrable mystery. Do we gain anything by creating another and a more impenetrable mystery? We know the universe exists, but we do not know how it came to exist; and in our simplicity we create a *how*, which must be logically beset with the same impenetrable mystery and necessity for an origin as that for which it is made to account. Thus, whilst going very cunningly round the smaller pit, we fall headlong into the larger one, complacently belauding ourselves the while for our great sagacity.<sup>1</sup>

When a person argues that, inasmuch as the world could not have made itself, it must therefore have had a maker; but that the said maker—let it or him be whatsoever you please—is free from such necessity, he does but shift from what he considers one insurmountable barrier to another and a more insurmountable one. It is like saying ten must be composed of a sufficient number of units, or their equivalent, but that twenty need not. But such a method of reasoning brings you no nearer the *beginning*: You are no nearer the First Cause.

This method of arguing back to God, and then killing your argument, is very like that contained in the following dialogue:—

“Mother, who or what made that little gooseberry?”

“That big one, my child.”

“But mother, who made the big one?”

“My dear child” (this rather severely), “the big one never was made; it always existed.”

“But mother, how could a big gooseberry exist without having been made, any more than a little one?”

“Hush! child” (this time quite sternly); “that is a foolish and a wicked question.”

But why is it foolish? Why does the Theist strain at

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<sup>1</sup> If those who believe in the mystery called God, did nothing worse than pat themselves on the back, there would be very little harm done. But they have ostracised and even burned alive their brother, for but saying or doing something which pointed in a contrary direction.

the smaller difficulty and swallow the larger one? Why endeavor to account for a seeming impossibility by accepting, without question, a greater?

Materialists see in this universe an endless chain of cause and effect; and are not only willing but anxious to investigate these changes and conditions, down to the remotest and most minute data. To them there is no dread of encountering some awful nightmare in scientific study, which will possibly shatter the fabric upon which they build their theory. That such fear does exist amongst Christians is evidenced by such statements as the following: "How can we expect men of science, who do not necessarily believe in God, to be impressed by us, if we, who do profess to believe in a spiritual creator, recoil from much they tell us about the creative methods *as if it would undermine our faith?*"<sup>1</sup> (Italics mine). And, "why does the scientific dread of first causes alarm us, if we heartily believe?" etc.

Why, indeed! The non-supernaturalist—who does not "believe in a spiritual creator"—can have no fear or alarm in unveiling nature; it is his interest and desire to study her laws, and to become familiar with them, and, when proven, to admit them as facts, preconceived doctrines and revealed religion notwithstanding. But he is not prepared to travel out of nature in order to find a supernatural origin for her existence. There is indeed no reason for such a proceeding, nor necessity for it. Mother nature is sufficient, is all in all. You cannot go beyond her, nor get outside her influence. Super-nature is not. And this fact is painfully evident in the efforts made by men to dabble in the supernatural. Their gods, who may always be regarded as the personification of their particular myth, are generally disfigured with the passions, loves, and hates which sway themselves. They are, physiologically—if I may so misapply the word—made up of the legs and wings of the animal world, after the manner of your approved nondescript, which, whilst being unlike anything in "the heavens above" or in "the earth beneath", must necessarily be built of such limbs and parts—no matter how uncouthly thrown together—as are familiar to man.

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<sup>1</sup> See J. R. Hutton's address upon "Atheism" at the Church Congress, held at Manchester, October 3rd, 1888.



The Gods always reflect the physiological and intellectual condition of the people, for the time being, who set them up; but must necessarily change as man's condition and surroundings change. They are at once the idols of the age which gives them birth, and the laughing stock of succeeding ages. Being ever made by man, they ever bear man's impress. The Christian God is no exception to the rule. He is perhaps the biggest oddity of them all, and before being Christianised simply revelled in blood. Indeed, the Christian Church has done some bloody and revolting work in his name. But he is now less ferocious, and is satisfied with much milder holocausts than of old. This change is, however, due to the fact that "heretics" and "Atheists" have, either in conformity with his will or in defiance of it, curtailed the power of his priests. They may not now do what, under God, was as holy as it was horrible and infamous.

I have elsewhere dealt more fully with God's characteristics—his composition, his tripleness, his mother, his father (poor Joseph), etc., etc. I have also said that it would be more correct to say man made God than to say God made man. I will now supplement that statement by another, made by the some-time Rev. Parker Pillsbury, who said: "An honest God is the noblest work of man". But I would further add that man has not yet produced him. Gods indeed he has produced in abundance and variety; but as far as I know an honest one has yet to appear. All Gods are jugglers; or perhaps it would be more correct to say all priests juggle in the name of their Gods, which is practically the same thing. It would appear to me that man's failure in the art and craft of God-making necessarily arises from two causes. First, his own imperfections and his natural and inevitable tendency to endow his creation with them; and, secondly, the materials upon which he has to work—taken, of course, as showing the character of the God he is manipulating. The world as we find it does not bespeak an honest God; the folly lies in the attempt to manufacture one. If any Christian Theist objects to this, I ask him if it was honest to fore-knowingly curse the human race with corrupt souls, or, if he prefers, with corrupt natures, and then to damn it for eternity because it either will not or cannot accept the proffered salvation by reason of its corruption? And I

ask the ordinary Theist, who may or may not believe in the existence of hell—mostly, I think, they do not, although I believe nearly all hold to a belief in some sort of future existence—whether it is just or honest to curse millions of living bodies with horrible diseases and imperfections, inherited or not?

As regards the making of Gods, doubtless our friends the Christians think they have succeeded in producing the genuine article, forgetting that they are under the necessity of supplementing him with the devil, and of counterbalancing his wondrous home of superlative bliss with the dismal abode of unutterable woe in which the devil is, by way of contrast, located. This, although I will give them the credit of not knowing it, is the only possible outcome of the conditions under which they must labor. Black and white, sunshine and storm, joy and misery, peace and love, hatred, war, and revenge, fair justice and benign mercy, crushed innocence, and unmerited suffering, etc., accounted for upon the God theory, naturally give birth to twins, one fair and the other foul, one good and the other its antithesis—in a word, God and the Devil, or their equivalents.

The great difficulty from the Christian point of view, consists in God having to share his sceptre with his black and discredited brother; having to wield one end, as it were, leaving the other to the devil—who, indeed, frequently annuls his co-partner's God-ship most completely by wielding both ends. God is not God all round. It is at best a case of turn about between himself and the devil. God is God to-day, but the devil is God to-morrow—and very often the day after. God makes the world to-day, declaring it to be good; and the devil damns it the next. God later on sends a Savior (one-third of himself! don't smile) to repair the mischief; but the devil so contrives matters<sup>1</sup> that, after the lapse of nearly 2,000 years, a mere handful have heard his name; and the bulk of those who have heard it, either fail to accept him, or to be influenced for good by him. And so on to

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<sup>1</sup> You may hold that God does this—which, indeed, to be consistent you ought to do—and so make him do the devil's work if you please. In which case, make your exit, Mr. Devil; God can do his own dirty work without your assistance.



the end of the piece. God, the creator of heaven and earth, and of all things, the Sovereign Lord, etc. etc., is so limited, thwarted, and hopelessly circumvented by a power which he either purposely created, or which exists without having been created, and in spite of him, that he can in no sense be held to be God: the very term becomes a misnomer.

To glance again for a moment at what is called creation—and I think I am justified in making these occasional digressions, because they bear upon most important matters, said to have been done by God, or at least by what may be termed the nowadays most important personification of the idea. It is the common belief and tradition of the Christian Churches that this particular planet was called into existence by God, to be a kind of nursery ground for a large quantity of angels whom he required to fill up the gaps in the heavenly ranks, caused by the rebellion and consequent expulsion of Satan and his confederates. (Note the idea of coming to grief *even in heaven.*) But Satan,<sup>1</sup> although hurled into the bottomless pit, found

<sup>1</sup> It might be worth remarking that the Bible, in its account of *the creation* does not say one single word to lead you to suppose that the devil took hand or part in the apple-tree fable. It speaks of "the tree of knowledge of good and evil", and says (Genesis iii, 1): "Now the serpent was more subtle than any of the beasts of the earth which God had made", etc., and is actually headed "The Serpent's Craft", and further states (verse 4) that God curses the serpent "because thou"—the serpent—"hast done this thing". If the unfortunate serpent was in Satan's hands, where the necessity of his superior cunning? And why curse it for being made use of? Is it held that the serpent, being a reptile, was yet morally responsible for the part the devil made it play, or that he himself played through its instrumentality? It would appear to me that in this case the devil was the monkey, the serpent the cat, Adam and Eve the chestnuts, and the Garden of Eden the fire. And bear in mind, if you take away the Christian gloss, and rely upon the "unvarnished tale" as given in the text, the case is no better. You are bound to conclude that the *serpent* as such, took an active intelligent part in the business, even to the extent of making use of its powers of speech, etc., for which God held it morally responsible, and for which he deliberately cursed it. What villanous trash it assuredly is, take it which way you will! I am here deliberately ignoring the idea which seems to be held by some of my critics (see *Watts's Literary Guide*, May, 1888), viz., that one should read the Scriptures, disregarding the common meaning of language, and fishing, as it were, for renderings which might perhaps completely metamorphose the entire text or story. Or as they put it, one ought to take note of the different aspect which these "miraculous

occasion by means of the first couple of intended angel-progenitors, to convert the world into a regular market-garden of devils; a huge cradle for blasted souls! So that God—otherwise he is not God—is, by the instrumentality of the devil, filling up the ranks in hell, rather than in heaven! Passing by the singular notion of putting pure souls through this worldly ordeal, with a foreknowledge of its fatal consequences, I cannot but think that God, every time he places these pure souls into his now vile and be-devilled bodies, must feel sadly humbled and disappointed at the continued success of the cast-out rebel, and at his own impotency. That he will finally assert himself and be revenged, battering the devil and his victims down for ever in an eternal stew-pan, is, whilst being a melancholy outcome of omnipotence, one of the most ferocious and relentless intentions that any sane set of people could dream of imputing even to a God. Besides which, if God be God, it is but another way of saying that it was ever his will and intention that this dire conflict between good and evil should drag its sad and awful length through ages upon ages, with the shocking consummation of eternal and unmixed woe for nine-tenths of the creatures created. (I am here referring exclusively to man.)

So far we have almost entirely dealt with that part of the question which has reference to the supposed necessity of a world maker. We have principally confined ourselves to the consideration as to whether a God can logically be held by man to exist; and have endeavored to show that he cannot.

Now, leaving that portion of the case, and surveying the world as it exists, what kind of a maker should we have to judge him by the evidence of his work? All powerful, all wise and good—or even just? Most certainly

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legends bear, when considered as indications of religious and mental evolution, and as crude and imperfect endeavors of the pious heart”, etc. The Scriptures are not put forward as “miraculous legends”, nor as “imperfect endeavors of the pious heart”, etc., but as God’s direct word to man. I conceive it to be right and best to fight the Bible as being what it is put forward to be. If it were placed in the same category as other books of fable and legend, there would be no need of fighting it. It is because it is not so, but is held to be *God’s truth*, permitting of no doubt, that the necessity of opposing it arises. And to fight Christianity by means of a rendering of the Scriptures which Christians do not hold, appears to me to be the height of folly.

not. The world as we find it and know it teems with misery, wrong, pain, suffering and death. Nay, further: it is full of unmerited and unpreventable suffering; and this applies to all living creatures. It often applies with more force to what is called the brute creation than to man. Life, throughout nearly all classes of the animal world, is an endless chain of destruction and consequent suffering. Life for one creature means death to many others; each in turn falling a victim to the general slaughter, or ending its existence in the painful throes of a prolonged death from disease or starvation. Out in the atmosphere, on the surface of the earth, down in its depths, and in the seas and oceans, the work of destruction goes unceasingly on. Talon, tooth, claw, and poisoned fang are ever doing their deadly work; and, in addition, each creature is tormented with a parasite peculiar to its kind. Is this the work of a perfect being? I do not mind whether he can sit without the wherewithal to sit upon, walk without legs, or see without eyes. Neither do I mind whether he tipped them off with his fingers or kicked them off with his foot. I am entitled to ask why, if he be perfect, he did not at least make the helpless brutes free from the suffering they endure. Countless thousands of birds annually die of starvation alone, because the almighty designer has covered the food upon which he designed them to subsist with frost and snow—bound it up hard and fast with an atmosphere by the inclemency of which they must perish, even should they escape the starvation which it heralds. Does this show intelligence of design? Would it do so on the part of man? How then can it do so on the part of a God? Must man annihilate his own sense of justice and mercy as well as his intelligence, to discover them in a deity? Every stroke of the spade, every plunge of the plough, means mutilation and death to numberless insects. And if you do not kill the insects, the snails, slugs, and lice, they will disfigure and kill your plants and your crops. In fact, to kill is a necessary condition of life.

I would fain dwell upon the unpreventable, and what may be called *natural* sufferings which the lower order of creatures must endure, because they are not considered responsible creatures, nor to be so suffering by reason of fault committed: but space will not permit. They are



precisely creatures of nature; nothing else. I am not now alluding to those which have been brought under the sway of man; their sufferings are simply unspeakable; which fact, though degrading to man in the highest degree, does not help God's case as the designer of the whole. My remarks have reference to the animal kingdom at large. They are, in the language of the deist, exactly what God made them; and, as such, stamp him as being, if Almighty, most heartless and ferocious.

Do I hear some miserable apologist repeating the wretched question-begging cant, that it is necessary, and that he does all for the best? Does he? Does he set two creatures which he has already made savage, to deadly combat, sometimes by reason of their passions—as in the rutting and breeding season—and sometimes by reason of their prolonged hunger, all for the best? Does he set fire to vast tracts of land and burn all before him, scorching and flaying alive all living creatures who cannot escape the sea of fire as it is swept irresistibly onward by the wind, *all for the best*? This point could be persisted in to an almost unlimited extent, but I think enough has been said to show that, even in the matter of the animal world, God either would not or could not avoid the misery which prevails.<sup>1</sup>

Turning to the elements and to the surface of the globe, where do we find evidence of this wonderful combination of power, wisdom, and love? Does the world and its surroundings display the perfect work of a perfect mind? Do storm, hurricane, landslip, or deluge—devastating large sections of country; destroying homes and lives by the hundred; and dealing out want, sickness, and numberless consequent horrors wholesale; smiting the infant and the old and helpless, the good and brave, as well as the undeserving—evidence a good and mighty creator? Are the recent blizzards which perished and shrivelled up the people as they plied their daily toil, marks of perfect design? Were the many hundreds of people's heads

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<sup>1</sup> It may be remarked by the way, that in either case it is difficult to see how he comes up to the God standard; and the same remark applies to the sin and misery existing all over the world. And bear in mind, I have but touched the subject, as it were, with my pen's point. The full measure of what I am but pointing to, must remain for ever untold.

which have been recently crushed in various parts of the world by the weight of the hail-stones falling upon them, designed to be so crushed? And in any case, how does it show the love and wisdom of the designer? Did the lightning which awoke the poor little affrighted child, as she lay sleeping upon the sofa, and injuring her so much that she died from the effects a few moments after in her sorrowing father's arms, show the exquisite perfection of design which is urged?

I am not giving day and date for these things; indeed it is not necessary; they are the daily record of what has not unfitly been called, *the war of the elements*. But here is a brief and graphic account, taken from a newspaper,<sup>1</sup> of some of the horrors of the recent volcanic eruptions in Japan, which comes to my hand altogether unsought, and which I will give in full, as showing how truly awful are some of the results of this *design*, which is said to denote perfect power and wisdom. It runs as follows:

“Advices received yesterday from Japan, *via* Honolulu and San Francisco, bring additional particulars regarding the recent volcanic eruptions in Japan, which resulted in the loss of several hundred lives. The villages of Kishizarve, Arkinolo, and Hosno, in Hinok-Hara, Mura, were covered with sand and ashes, and the sites on which they stood thrown into a mountain, the inhabitants, numbering 400, being buried alive, none escaping. At Mina, forty-five residences were destroyed, and twelve persons were killed. At Shibuza, seventeen residences were destroyed, and twelve persons were killed. At Nagazaka, twenty-five residences were destroyed, and ninety-eight persons killed. And at Horekel, thirty-seven residences were destroyed, but no one was killed. The people fled.”

This, I think, needs no comment. But worse follows. The account goes on:

“The *Daily News* Yokohama Correspondent telegraphs: Further details have now reached here of the eruption of Bandal Sau. The place where the disaster occurred has been and is greatly changing, mountains having arisen where there were none before, and large lakes appearing where once there were only rich corn-fields. Landmarks are obliterated. The condition of the wounded is terrible: some have fractured skulls, the majority broken limbs, while others are fearfully burned. The state of the bodies recovered resembles the appearance of

<sup>1</sup> *Evening Mail*.

victims of a large boiler explosion. Many of them are cut to pieces, and others are par-boiled, so that it is difficult to distinguish sex. But the most ghastly sights which met the eye of the helpers were bodies dangling on the branches of blackened and charred trees, thrown into the air by the awful violence of the eruption. Their descent had in many cases been arrested by the trees, and there the victims hung, their bodies exposed to the cruel and well-nigh ceaseless rain of hot cinders and burning ashes. From appearances, death speedily relieved them from their agony; yet, short as the time was, their sufferings must have been past belief. In other places the flesh hangs from the branches of the trees, as paper from telegraph wires. In one case a woman fled from the eruption with her child upon her back, and while flying, a red-hot stone fell upon the infant's head, killing the little one and deluging the mother in her child's blood. She escaped, and reached Wakamutsu, where she fell exhausted, with the mangled remains of her child still tied to her back."

This graphic and most appalling account may be truly said to be written in letters of blood. And yet it must be claimed by the design advocate as showing the *fitness* of his design.

It would perhaps appear superfluous to comment upon the above awful refutation of the fitness of things as displayed by the universe, upon which the design argument is mainly built. But awful and calamitous as it assuredly is, it is a very small affair compared with very many events of a similar nature which have preceded it. I only mention it here because it comes to my hand as I write. It is indeed a bit of touching up and remodelling of the old "design" with a vengeance. One would think that if the almighty architect desired lakes and mountains to appear where stood cornfields, gardens, meadows, and homesteads, he would have removed—or at least have mercifully killed by painless process—those whom his own providence had placed in his way. But he did not. He saw fit to burn, scald, suffocate, and mutilate them in the shocking manner stated. Oh! the perfection of design here displayed is most exquisite! Yet would I ask if the burning stone which crashed into the head of the little creature, covering its wretched mother with its life blood as it clung to her back, was designedly hurled? Had the "finger tips of omnipotence" anything to do with it? Or did the unhappy mother's run for life carry her little

one beyond providence? If you say that the mother had a providential escape you must also admit that the child met a providential death. Those who believe in Providence cannot get outside of it; neither can they find room in it for accidents. God accidentally knocking the brains out of a child cannot be thought of. Therefore it must be admitted by those who believe in his providence that he not only providentially shattered the head of this particular little creature, but that he equally providentially burned, boiled and mangled the life out of the other victims.

These questions and considerations are part and parcel of the God question; and need much answering.

I am tempted to ask if Mr. Balfour had some of these horrors in his mind, when at Manchester, in his new character of semi-cleric he said: "There is no human being so insignificant as not to be of infinite worth to the maker of the heavens", etc. Did the "infinite worth" of these particular human beings consist of their fitness for decorating charred trees with their livid and literally living flesh? What grim and hideous satires these pious inanities become when contrasted with actual occurrences! Drop the orthodox snuffle, and the thing said becomes meaningless. Atheists are twitted by Theists, and especially Christian Theists, with holding a belief in "blind chance"; but here we have something worse than "blind chance": we have blind brutality, especially and designedly so; and yet of a most indiscriminating kind. We have pain and suffering inflicted without reference to age, sex, innocence, or guilt.

I make the inventors and patentees of "Blind Chance" a present of this, and all other calamities, as work especially and designedly done by their God to whom they childishly pray: "deliver us from all evil".

The Rev. Dr. A. W. Momerie, speaking at the Church Congress upon the subject of Pessimism, contended that pain is necessary both for "men and animals"; and this notwithstanding God's superiority to law, and his admission that pain is the result of law which God made. He also gave some reasons (?) why it is necessary, one being that "if pain had not been attached to injurious habits, animals and men would long ago have passed out of existence". This, if true, is only another way of saying that God made



the necessity for pain, which is the very kernel of the complaint. He further says: "If fire did not hurt, we might easily be burnt to death before we knew we were in any danger"! Does he forget, or ignore, the fact that we *are* frequently burnt to death before we know we are in danger, notwithstanding that fire hurts? Does he mean that we should be more easily burnt to death only for this wise precaution of God's in making fire hurt? If that be his meaning, I make free to tell him, it is but a poor crutch for himself and God to hobble upon; for, as I have pointed out, it frequently does hurt us to death; and therefore, at best, the warning but partially succeeds. But will he drive his argument fairly home, and affirm that the pain by fire and boiling water to which I have been referring, was necessary? Or does he mean that *some* pain existing by necessity, these dire results of *excessive* pain could not be avoided? And if so, what sort of an *almighty* God does he believe in? Is it necessary that the human race must not only taste small pain in order to avoid greater, but must also perish frequently in maddening and unendurable pain?

Does this rev. philosopher mean that it is necessary for "men and animals" to actually pass out of existence in most intense pain as a preventive, by means of small pain, to their passing out of existence? Because this, viewed in the light of what does occur, is about what his contention comes to. To give him the greatest possible latitude of which his contention will admit, he can but claim that it is by means of what I am calling smaller pain—which frequently outgrows itself—that the animal world (including man) is enabled to exist, and eventually perish in greater or lesser pain as the case may be. Well, that is poor enough, but poor as it is it leaves all pain caused by sudden and unexpected convulsions of nature completely out of the question. Take lightning for instance, which often does such sudden and fearful injury that no forethought—not even aided by the knowledge that it *hurts*—could possibly prevent. From the doctor's mode of reasoning it would seem that it is necessary for the electric fluid when disturbed to blast and shrivel up "men and animals" instantaneously, so that they may know it will blast and shrivel them up, before they know they are in danger. May I ask this rev. and learned doctor to



show how the pain, which is meant not only to the victims but to those who hold them dear, in the premature death of one half the people born, before they reach the age of seventeen years, is necessary? Is it to prevent them from passing out of existence? "To form character"? Or to teach them that fire burns? This arguing for the necessity of pain is only another form of arguing for the necessity of evil, and therefore—from the parson point of view—of the devil. But does the Rev. Dr. Momerie forget or ignore the *creation* and *fall*<sup>1</sup> as told in the opening chapters of his Bible? Or does he agree with me in regarding them as amusing fables? And if he does, has he taken his flock into his confidence? For my own part, I am curious to know how God considered pain necessary to keep "men and animals" from destruction, and from passing out of existence when he bade them to be fruitful and to multiply before pain came into the world. If he thought pain necessary why did he tell Adam and Eve not to do the thing which brought it about? And why were the poor serpent's legs conjured off for doing what was necessary?

Of course this is all *figurative*. I will do the learned doctor the justice of believing him to so regard it; but then he ought not to be a Church of England parson. I

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<sup>1</sup> I have frequently marvelled at the tremendous dilemma God would have been placed in had these *first parents* have partaken of the "tree of life" as well as that of "good and evil". Well might he hurry them out of paradise exclaiming "lest perhaps he put forth his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever". It must be admitted that it would have been most unfortunate and awkward for the *almighty* to have had a world on his hands teeming with sin-struck immortals upon whom he had pronounced death (both of body and soul), but who would not, nor could not, die by reason of the *charm* contained in a particular tree which he had planted in their midst. But there is another curious point: if it be a fact that death came into the world by sin there was, previous to the *fall*, practically no use nor need for this particular tree, except perhaps as a kind of temptation, and even that is not made quite clear, as Adam and Eve do not appear to have been forbidden to eat of it. The people were already immortal, and would, bar accidents, "go up" without tasting death. And when the occasion for its use might be fairly thought to have arrived, by reason of their having incurred the penalty of death, they were, as we have seen, hurried out of its presence.

And what about the animals? Did Eve's sin bring pain and death upon them, or were they to die in any case? And would they have

admit I have not read his book upon the "Origin of Evil", in which it is possible he may clear these matters up. In the meantime I would fain tell him that, if God be the origin of all things, evil must come in with the rest, and certainly be put down to his account. The fact that pain and evil do exist is indisputable, and, whilst fully admitting this fact will not increase it; the tortuous efforts to reconcile its existence with that of a good and Almighty God will not remove nor lessen it. Neither will dubbing those "Pessimist" who cannot shut their eyes to it. The so-called Pessimist does not point out the existence of pain and evil, with a view—as I take it—of sitting down and crying; but rather, with the view of removing or lessening their power and scope. In this he is certainly more logical than he who, whilst admitting them to be deplorable, not only insists upon their necessity, but caps all by affirming that an all-powerful creator could not order it otherwise.

I will, before proceeding with my main contention, trouble my readers with another very short, but shocking account of what I will call—if not intended—a serious and awful hitch in the divine machinery. It is taken from a daily paper of about the same date as

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both lived and died free of pain? And if so, what about the carnivora and their victims? Were they originally to be all herb-eating creatures (this would also apply to man), but completely metamorphosed into what they now are by God at the time he chopped off the serpent's legs? Perhaps there were no carnivora at that period. In truth nothing whatever is known as to what time it is said to have occurred. Modern believers in the fable are willing to place it in any period, varying by millions of years, to which infidel or scientist may drive them. Take again the case of whales; are we to suppose they were not originally intended to feed upon small fish? What of sharks, and, indeed, of fish generally? Are we to suppose they were not, till after the fall, intended to prey upon each other? The same may also be asked of birds preying upon insects, not to mention those which prey upon their own species. Was this all to be so, or are these creatures an afterthought, and so "made" by God to suit the altered circumstances in which he found himself? Taken altogether it certainly does form a most curious instance of the "crude and imperfect endeavors of the pious heart to express its sense of the tragedy and solemnity of human experience". Fables and legends indeed these things are, but they are not put forward as such; they are forced into children's minds as *truths*, and kept there by fear of hell. Hence, I say, it becomes necessary to completely break down such pernicious nonsense.

the others from which I have quoted upon similar catastrophes :

“ Mail advices have now been received from Cuba, giving particulars of the recent cyclone in the island. It appears that it raged on the 4th and 5th, over the whole length of the province of Santa Clara, causing damage amounting to millions of dollars. At Sogna, scarcely twenty houses escaped injury. The desolation and ruin was complete. The rivers overflowed their banks, and vessels foundered or stranded, while in some cases they were driven into the streets of the town. Fatalities are reported everywhere. A hundred persons perished at Cardenas, and seventy at Caibarien; the total number of deaths in the island being estimated at one thousand.”

Now I ask: did these poor people, their homesteads, their ships and commerce, and industries, mar the general design? Or, did they become part and parcel of it against the intention and desire of the almighty architect, and was it therefore that he thus cruelly wiped them out? And in any case, do this and the other calamitous results of the workings of nature—to which I have but pointed—demonstrate the fitness-of-all-things which is said to pervade the universe? Do they not rather demonstrate the unfitness of all things? Bear in mind, they are no mere theorisings: nor are they isolated cases: they could be multiplied without end. They are the daily lessons, bloody and awful, which nature reads out to her children without cessation. The world, every journey round the sun, produces and chronicles in awful manner its yearly record of calamities over which man has no control, but of which he is the helpless victim: and which if held to be the work of an almighty designer, would stamp him as being a fiend.

The elements, under certain conditions, smite furiously and indiscriminately all things which lie in their course. They will blast the innocent lamb, or scorch up the poor cow, as readily as they will topple over a church steeple, or shrivel up a little child. They are but the blind forces of nature, and could do no other than they do.

The Christian Theist is at liberty to hold these blind forces of nature to be directed by an “All-seeing eye”; in which case I am at liberty to ask: To what kind of monster does this *all-seeing* eye belong? The sea, if lashed



into fury by wind or storm, will as readily engulf the little boat of heroes as they nobly face death in order to rescue their fellow creatures, as it will the blood-stained pirate craft which preys upon the helpless and the unwary. The ill-fated emigrant ship—with its cargo of entire families; its wives and children going to join the father who waits with tender longing for their coming to the home he has with love and industrious labor prepared for them; its sons and daughters going to seek on foreign shores the sustenance and comfort for parents and younger children, which they fail to obtain at home—is as mercilessly wrecked and submerged, as is the infamous slaver, with or without its living freight of wailing and outraged humanity.<sup>1</sup> But I fail to see in what way this demonstrates perfection of design—design as emanating from one who is all-good and all-mighty.

Do you suppose, reader, that you could procure a patent for your design after showing that it produced such untoward and disastrous results as are produced by the elements? And if you did obtain your patent, do you think after twelve months experience of its work, you could sell it for much money? Of course it must always be remembered that man is in no sense perfect; consequently his works must at most be but efforts in the direction of perfection: the highest and best only excelling those which they succeed. But this reasoning cannot be applied to God. He deliberately, with all power and all knowledge—present and to come—made things as they are; and is therefore responsible for the world as it exists at this

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<sup>1</sup> When I reflect upon the awful sufferings of every conceivable kind which all living creatures must, by the nature and conditions of their existence endure, and try to understand what it means, I become appalled: my efforts to express myself fail me; and I am overwhelmed. Let therefore no self-satisfied quibbler, holding a cut-and-dried road to *Heaven*—whether upon the degrading plan of the agony and death of an enthusiast, or upon the farce of a mangled and crucified third portion of a God—point the finger of scorn at me. My reason and my better feelings, which at times well-nigh unman me, will not suffer me to worship anything so ignoble as their butcher-God, whom they themselves have set up. And I deliberately avow that I cast my measure of scorn, although utterly inadequate—well, I will not say upon those who hold it; but certainly upon the brutal and degrading idea that the same God, or indeed any God, will, after this world and its woes are ended, doom the vast bulk, or even one of the creatures he has created, to *eternal torture*!

instant: either this, or the word God loses its meaning. A curtailed and changing immutable and omniscient omnipotence is simply an impossibility, and ought to be too ridiculous even for Christians to pin their faith to. The idea of inventing an almighty God, and then killing him, or annulling his almightiness by another, and calling that other devil, is, to my thinking, excessively foolish. Almighty God must, under pain of damnation, be held to be good and just, even though we invent a devil to stand sponsor for what we know to be evil and unjust. Nay, further: our invention of the devil involves the idea that God himself produced him as a kind of scape-goat, as a something upon which to charge the existence of that evil which he, although omnipotent, either could not or would not avert. This is the reasoning involved—but I digress somewhat.

It appears to me that, wherever you look, you are confronted with a mixture of good and evil; or they exist side by side. I think the former is more generally correct, although it is often difficult to determine which really preponderates.

Take, for instance, the sun, which is the vastest and most wonderful body of all those that go to make up our special system, and whose rays are full of life-giving heat. Yet there are some portions of the globe which are never touched by them, whilst other portions are literally scorched up. In some of the deserts, by reason of the heat, and the absence of water, the suffering of man and beast is extreme.

So with water. In some parts of the earth it is abundant, and in others so scarce as to render life almost insupportable. At some seasons of the year, rivers are dried up; and at others they rise and overflow their banks, inundating the surrounding country, and doing much injury to life and property, perhaps sweeping away entire communities. Some portions of the globe—especially at particular seasons, are a perpetual swamp, and are the source of constant malaria, fever, ague, and death.

Can all this be held as evidence of perfect wisdom and power on the part of a maker? Bear in mind, I am not speaking of nature and its wondrous revelations in a mocking or disparaging sense. I am simply pointing out its imperfections, and trying to combat the puny idea that it had its origin in a ghost.

As another practical illustration of the complete failure of the design argument, as evidenced by what actually occurs, I will give, in full, the following from a daily paper, the *Freeman's Journal*, of September 1st, 1888 :

“What is one poor country's meat, is another poor country's poison. While we are threatened with ruin by rain here, and are praying for dry weather, they are face to face with famine in Egypt by reason of the drought, and they are praying for the Nile to inundate the lands. ‘Yesterday,’ says the Correspondent of the *Standard*, ‘I had an opportunity of conversing with two large landed proprietors, whose opinions may be quoted as authoritative. One of these is a Bey, owning immense fields, of which the yearly land-tax amounts to a small fortune. He had come to Cairo in order to complain to Riaz Pasha of the scarcity of water. His fields had now, he said, been dry for sixty days, and under these circumstances it was, he affirmed, quite impossible to pay the taxes. The other proprietor, a well-known Pasha, whose land-tax amounts to about two thousand pounds a year, declared that unless the Nile should rise two metres within the next ten days, the whole maize crop of Lower Egypt would be lost. There are out of every six hundred acres, no less than one hundred and fifty under maize, and the failure of this crop would mean financial ruin and starvation for the fellaheen population, with whom maize is the staple food. As to cotton, my informant stated that he had in one field a hundred men picking off the worms. For some time past there had been no water, and unless there was a speedy improvement, he, too, did not see any way of paying the taxes.’”

Come nearer home. Take a glance at agriculture amongst ourselves, and what do we find? We find the farmer's life one long struggle with the elements and against the disasters resulting from them. True, he manages to live, but often very badly. The weather is generally so unpropitious as to cause him, in a fit of despair—and always as a last resource—to join with his Church, and take part in offering up set petitions and special pleadings that God will, for the sake of poor humanity in general, and himself in particular, avert the calamitous results which would follow a continuation or a fulfilment of what would appear to be God's present intentions.

It is quite clear that the majority of those who express belief in “him who rules all things”, and who talk much of his providence—including his own ordained ministers—do not always agree with him as to the wisdom and



humanity of the course he happens to be pursuing. Indeed, bearing in mind their daily beggings and prayings, it would be more correct to say they never agree. Practically they have much more faith in the seasonable and desirable weather which they know will facilitate the growth of their crops or ripen them into maturity than they have in the deity whom they inconsistently believe is providentially blighting them. Practically, I say, they prefer to have a big finger in their own providential pie. They pretend that God is all-wise, but go on their bended knees to the end that he may drop his all-wisdom, which means ruin to them, and adopt theirs. That their petitions are not heeded is quite certain. Nature sweeps right on. She always prevails, the mutterings to an imaginary "throne on high" notwithstanding. The marvel to me is that intellectual people should engage in such childish forms.<sup>1</sup>

It might not be altogether amiss in speaking of prayer to note that one of the bishops (him of Wakefield) at the late Manchester Congress, whilst professing very frequently that he had no fear of law, was yet very much staggered at its immutability. The tenor and aim of his entire speech was to tone down what he called the "splendid paper read by Mr. Momerie"; because it contained "certain words" which struck him "very forcibly", and made him "feel a certain amount of doubt with regard to them". The "doubt", or fear, as I think it should be called, is fully explained in the following passage which comes immediately after: "What I felt at the moment was this—may not some of those who form this audience go away from here and say: 'Why, then, should I pray? Why should I ask God to restore a friend from a bed of sickness? Why should I ever join in the church's prayers for a blessing on the harvest and the like?'" Common sense echoes: Why indeed!

The Bishop, in his further remarks, whilst still depreciating the immutability of law, admits we cannot "alter" the laws by which the universe is governed; but hastens to point out that we can "interfere" with them. He illustrates his meaning by asserting that we *interfere* with the law of gravitation every time we pick up a stone and

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<sup>1</sup> See "The Follies of the Lord's Prayer Exposed". Freethought Publishing Company.

throw it into the air, or catch it as it falls. This is of course to keep law from barring the way to miracle and the utility of prayer. But it is wide of the mark; because if it means that miracles *can* happen, there can be neither sense nor utility in showing that one law may counteract another. And if it does not mean that miracles may happen, it means (from the Bishop's point of view) nothing. What the statement, taken as a whole, actually does mean—whether his lordship intended it so or not, is another matter—is that, inasmuch as that law, as applied to nature, is unalterable, but can be *interfered* (!) with; therefore man, by means of prayer, can induce immutable God to interfere with what he has decreed to be unalterable! Poor Bishop of Wakefield. But it is only another and a very weak edition of the Rev. Octavious Walton's "Swallowed Miracle"; wherein that philosophic divine childishly contends that because there are other laws, which, under given circumstances counterbalance that of gravitation; therefore miracles are occurring every moment of time! The law of gravitation seems quite a favorite sugar-stick to suck, with these clerical nincompoops. Albeit, they do their sucking prayerfully; but they are sure to suck it at the wrong end.

It would appear, so far, from this right rev. gentleman's utterances, that he holds *law* to be good all the while you hold that it can be annulled by God, at the will or whim of his creatures. He fears that if its immutability be but once admitted, the efficacy of prayer is done for. He would seem to recommend just enough law; but not too much. Judging, however, by another passage in his speech, he would appear to go even farther still, and throw law entirely to the dogs; for he says: "I am not content to accept that view of answers to prayer which tells us that God may move the spirit of man to act upon outward things by which he is surrounded; I say I want something more direct." If man is not going to act upon the things by which he is surrounded, what is he going to act upon? It is evident that nothing less than the total cessation or reversion of law will satisfy his lordship. But he is a curious and quite an amusing description of Bishop. He concludes his remarks by saying he believes that "he"—God—"governs and directs his own laws, and that the whole world everywhere is bound with gold chains about



his feet". By governing and controlling his own laws, I presume he means that God decrees when fire shall burn—or, as one of his colleagues puts it—"hurt," and when it shall not; and when water shall be wet, and when it shall not; and also when man shall have too much of one, or both; or not enough of either, as God may see fit—always subject of course to the superior wisdom and control of man, as exemplified by prayer.

I think there was an error of about 300 years made in the date of this particular Bishop's birth. He is living in the wrong age.

With regard to the "world everywhere" being chained with *gold* chain about God's feet: should I spoil the great sublimity of the metaphor if I suggested brass or nickel silver as being good material for the chain? and that a whole string of worlds chained about his neck would not look amiss as a necklace, and that perhaps two fine large planets would come in very well as droppers to his earrings? I can appreciate a truly sublime or beautiful metaphor, thought, or figure of speech, as such, even though it embody an idea to which I demur; but to talk of binding the world *everywhere* with *gold* chain to the feet of a footless ghost, with a view, as I take it, of teaching that natural law may be effaced or reversed by means of man's supplications—for that is the Bishop's great contention—is not to be sublime, but ridiculous. Clerical inanity is a better term for such nonsense.

Speaking of prayer, and as an example of the mode in which it is made use of, and, principally as an example of its always non-success, I will for a moment direct attention to an incident of the kind which has, whilst I write, been forced upon my notice. When I say the *always* non-success of prayer, I mean that the happenings would have occurred whether the petitions were offered up or not; and that whether they seem to be propitious or otherwise, they have no reference whatever to the prayer. But beyond that, it is really remarkable how the hopes of the prayerful, who of course hold their hopes to be founded upon the direct promises of him to whom they pray, are continually falsified by daily events. I like to place these every-day facts before the notice of my readers, because, being indisputable, they most effectually answer and expose the sacerdotal pretence which I hold to be so abominable and

so transparent. The wild Indian, who, whilst offering incantations to the *Great Spirit*, patiently shooting arrow after arrow into the clouds, till one floats and bursts over his village, is not more foolish nor arrogant, and I might add cunning, in claiming the result as being due to the strength of his *medicine*, than is the mitred and tinselled prelate, who offers up his incantations and mutterings, and claims the ordinary and inevitable happenings of nature as the result of his particular action. Indeed I find it difficult to believe that thinking and intelligent men *do* believe that there is a power of any kind waiting to fashion his, or its, actions upon the supplications and cravings of this, that, or the other people, or sect, or clan: the desires being mostly in contradiction and at variance one with another. I scout such an idea as being too absurd for serious argument. But to go to the case mentioned; and in which case, for the complete failure of the prayers, I will not ask belief in my own words, but will give evidence out of the mouths of Christians themselves. The paper I shall principally quote is in no sense favorable to unorthodox views, but is the recognised political organ of the Catholic Church in the country (Ireland) in which it is published.

During the latter portion of the summer of 1888, and far into the autumn, the weather had been extremely wet and cold; continuous rain, with frequent very heavy downfalls, had prevailed. We were getting cold soaking rain instead of genial sunshine. Great complaints and murmurings were heard on all sides, and general fears were entertained that we should have a bad harvest with all its dire results. In a word, and from a Christian Theist's point of view, God, notwithstanding his *all-wisdom*, and the perfection of his design, was going wrong: he was rotting with excess of cold moisture, what his humble subjects presumed to think he should have been browning and ripening with heat. In this extremity my Lord Bishop of Dublin, the Most Rev. Dr. Walsh, in the interests of his faithful flock, came to the rescue,<sup>1</sup> and ordered special

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<sup>1</sup> He came to their rescue upon a more important occasion—that of their effort to obtain self-government, but completely changed front, directly his master, the Pope, spoke. What was *political* at once became *non-political* in the Doctor's mouth. Only some two or three dared openly allude to this; the majority, including the National Press—notably the *Freeman*—belauded him for the shuffle.

prayers for fine weather to be said throughout his diocese. The prayers, as a matter of course, were of the usual orthodox type. The petitioners were made to crawl into the presence of their supposed offended tormentor by admitting, as I think in grave satire, their complete unworthiness; and then craving as a favor that he might see fit to change his mind by removing the kind of weather he was putting upon them, and replacing it with the kind they required; and finally telling him not to mind what they were asking, but to do as he thought best. What he *did* think best, shall be told by the daily papers.

There are always three cardinal points which must be existent in your orthodox petitioner; his total degradation and unworthiness, his strong sense of what he considers essential to his well-being, and his desire to obtain it; and his total lack of the sense of the ludicrous, as displayed in his telling God not to do as he is asked, but as he chooses. What God really chose to do upon this particular occasion, although quite usual, forms a very amusing and instructive comment upon the petition itself, and upon special prayers in general.

The announcement of the order for saying these special prayers, I take from the *Freeman's Journal* of August 11th, 1888, as follows:

“HIS GRACE THE ARCHBISHOP AND THE WEATHER.—In consequence of the continued unsettled state of the weather, and the precarious condition of the crops, his Grace the Archbishop of Dublin has issued directions to the clergy of his diocese for the saying of special prayers in the Mass for a favorable change. The prayers to be said from and after to-morrow, till further notice.”

The weather upon that particular Sunday, and for hours after the offering up of the special prayers, was perhaps the worst we had yet experienced. Possibly it took some little time to duly receive and consider the humble petition. However that may have been, there was no improvement, “no favorable change”; indeed matters became very much worse. But the papers evidently held on as long as they could in the hope that they would be able to score a victory for the Archbishop. At length the editorial patience of one, the *Evening Telegraph* of August 20th, gave way; the following item of news being the cause:

“YESTERDAY'S RAIN AND STORM.—A heavy rainfall took



place in many parts of Ireland yesterday. In West Cork much damage is reported to have been caused to the grain and potato crops. The potatoes are in places affected with the blight."

It would have been more correct to have said that it had scarcely ceased to rain since the offering up of the prayers; but it is perhaps near enough. The same paper of four days later, in referring to further storms said:

"Great damage (says a telegram this afternoon) has been caused in the lower Shannon valley by the heavy rains of Tuesday. Hundreds of tons of hay have been carried into the river, and turf has been carried long distances. The corn crop is lost. The potato crop is injured, and many roads are torn up."

The prayers were being answered very tardily; or were being answered in a reverse direction to that prayed for.

The *Freeman's Journal* of August 28th, under the heading of "The Rain and the Crops", gave a list of woes resulting from the former, which came in from nearly all quarters, and from which I will give a few quotations:

"KILRUSH, MONDAY.—Such a destructive deluge of rain has not been witnessed in West Clare for a quarter of a century, as that experienced last night. All the rivers have inundated the country around, and large quantities of hay in meadow cocks have been carried seaward. In low lying districts the houses have been flooded, and many were in danger of falling. The oat and wheat crops have been laid in vast tracts. The amount of damage caused by last night's continued downpour is incalculable in the country, as testified by various reports to-day."

Surely there could not have been one single grain of faith amongst the hundreds of thousands of petitioners—including the Archbishop himself—or their prayers would not have produced such lamentable results. But the accounts from all parts are the same.

"NAVAN, Monday.—The prospects of a good or middling harvest are again darkened by the incessant rains. All work has been retarded."

"CASTLEWHELAN, Monday.—The severe weather of the past week has exercised a most dispiriting effect on the harvesting prospects in the large districts of the County Down, of which this town is the centre. Great fears are entertained for the potato crops. The tubers, which are in abundance, remain still very soft; and now reports from all sides signify that the spots



which so surely indicate the approach of disease to the germ have made their appearance," etc. Sorrow is then expressed for the partial failure of the oat, wheat, and flax crops.

"FERMOY, Monday.—The hopes which were entertained here some time ago of a bountiful harvest are now almost completely blasted in consequence of the late incessant rains which have fallen with the most destructive results to almost every description of growing crops." [This is certainly a trifle *unco* after the Archbishop's special prayers for their safety.] "The mischief done since last Sunday is incalculable, and should there be a continuance of the present unsettled state of the weather the consequences will be disastrous to the farmers of the district," etc.

After giving a similar dismal account from Newry and Banbridge, the list for that day closes with the following :

"LONGFORD.—There can no longer be a doubt on the subject that the crops in this county are a complete failure owing to the recent rains. *Every day for the last month* [italics mine] there have fallen heavy showers completely paralysing the farmer's efforts to save his crops. Turf, hay, and oats are all bad. The potatoes, too, are failing rapidly. Nothing could be much worse looking than the existing prospect."

In reference to the above, it may be remarked that the "showers" must have been "heavy" indeed to have completely paralysed the farmers' efforts for a whole month. But be it noted that "the past month" spoken of comprises at least three weeks which had elapsed since His Grace's special prayers were muttered; and yet he actually had the audacity to claim that his prayers were answered!

This list of woes collected together for me by Christian and God-fearing journalists (?) may be taken as a kind of supplement to my own remarks upon the work of the elements, as illustrating the general unfitness of things.

Now, it will not be wondered at, after the above lengthened spell of disastrous work done by the weather, that it did eventually and in natural course change for the better. But what did this astute Archbishop do? Did he admit that he had ordered his special prayers just one month too soon for an immediate response? Not at all. Did he candidly admit that from beginning to end they were a total failure? Nothing of the kind. Then what did he do? Why he actually insulted his God, and the intellects (if they possessed any) of his flock, by ordering

fresh prayers—this time—of thanks to God for having lent a favorable ear to their former ones, and so vouchsafing them fine weather! Thus imposing upon the ignorance and stupid credulity of his people, by making clerical capital out of the ordinary workings of nature, which if they, from his own stand-point, meant anything, meant a complete failure. He asked that the rain might cease, and the sun shine, in order that the crops might be saved. The rain did not cease, the sun did not shine, and the crops were not saved. Upon the showing of his own people the destruction was general. Whereupon he orders these same people—I should dearly like to call them geese—to thank God for *not* destroying these very crops! This of course is priest-like. These are the tricks and trade devices of the priest's calling; they are what he lives by. But what can be said—how infantile, nay, imbecile—or, to be orthodox, truly child-like—must those be who kneel and pray and smite their breasts, making offerings and crying “Amen” to such transparent chicanery.

I was, previous to giving the foregoing Christian evidence against Christian Theism, dwelling upon the frequent unfitness of the weather for the work it is insisted it was designed to perform; and will now in continuation of that idea offer some further remarks, taking it up at the point at which I broke off.

Now, it frequently happens that in spite of the prayers (of the efficacy of which we have just had an example) and all the care and precaution a farmer can bestow upon his lands, his crops are blighted by unseasonable weather, by cold winds, storms, droughts, hail and frost; and thus a whole year's toil, expenditure, and anxiety is sacrificed. At times, the failure of crops—often a particular crop which forms the main subsistence of a people, or section of a people—is so complete as to leave them without food; and gaunt famine with its hideous train of horrors stalks through the land. In what way, I must continue to ask, does all this show perfect order and design? Why the best kept garden you meet with may become a mass of blight and pest, the attention bestowed upon it notwithstanding. You will see a rose tree grow and bud forth almost into flower, and wake up some morning to find it blighted by the atmosphere, or covered with vermin; or,

perhaps the centres of the yet unopened blooms become cradles for destructive insects. ("The worm i' the bud", taken in the wide sense, is no mere poetic figure, as those who cultivate and live by the land know to their dear cost.) The same can be said of perhaps every plant that grows. Your cabbages will be literally riddled and eaten to the bare stalks immediately the larvæ deposited by the butterflies assume the caterpillar form. What nature, aided by science and labor does to-day, she undoes to-morrow. Entire orchards of fruit, gardens of hops, fields of corn, potatoes, hay, etc., are yearly sacrificed to the elements. And yet all this means perfect and exquisite design on the part of a maker! What it really *does* mean is simply that nature is as we find her, and that there is no maker in the case. All-wisdom and all-power, could not result in failure, nor in disaster sometimes so hideous as to curdle the blood as the tale is told.

Turning to man himself, can he, taken for all in all, be considered to show evidence of having had a perfect maker<sup>1</sup>? Is he in any sense the work of perfection?

For his own physical perfection, let the hospitals, asylums, and houses for incurables all over the world speak. For his mental and moral perfection, his doings as recorded in history must answer. The penal settlements and gaols of to-day must also give their evidence.

It is held that God made man in his own image, and, curiously enough, it is man's mind, or *spirit*, as it is termed—which is imageless—which is held to be so made. But that by the way. It follows that, either God himself was a depraved pattern, or he blasted man after the making. Indeed the latter is claimed to be the true solution. If I might be allowed to judge of "God the Father" by applying to him one of the standards claimed as emanating from "God the Son", anent judging the tree by its fruit—more especially if man be the depraved wretch Christian theists contend he is—I should have to come to the conclusion that the tree in question was a most corrupt and imperfect one.

I suppose there is not one single human being, sound

<sup>1</sup> When I speak of man as having had a maker, I do so in the sense generally accepted by Christians, and therefore the statement itself, and any observations made upon it do not necessarily apply to those Theists who believe otherwise.



in body and mind, brought into the world in a century, though there are many millions of defective ones. Take for example—and they are but a small item in the general failure—the deaf mutes, the blind, and the idiotic from birth. I suppose it would fill a fair-sized volume simply to enumerate all the diseases peculiar to man. Those peculiar to children alone are something appalling.

Take the average duration of life as a test of the design argument. It is estimated that of all who are born, one-fifth die within a year after birth, and one-third before the completion of the fifth year; whilst one half do not reach seventeen years; and only six per cent reach seventy-five years. So that, whilst one-fifth go to the grave before they can be said to be well into the world, *one half never reach the age of maturity*, and only *five* in every *hundred* reach what has been foolishly called “man’s allotted time”! I think comment upon these crushing figures is superfluous. I will but add that these premature deaths are brought about, for the most part, by painful, lingering, and dreary process; and sometimes by such shocking mutilations as we have previously glanced at. And if you take the Christian theory, in addition to his natural woes, every human being that ever came into the world, or ever will come into it—save the first pair, who were themselves so defective as to succumb at the first test—is literally damned with a soul whose natural (*i.e.*, unnatural) corruption is, upon the same authority, certain to carry the vast majority into eternal suffering.<sup>1</sup>

Man, like all other portions of the universe, is a mixture of good and evil. He has noble parts and degrading passions, high aims and selfish fears, hates and jealousies. He is capable of the highest deeds of known right and self-sacrifice, and of the lowest deeds of cunning and cowardice. He is capable of experiencing the highest pleasure and the deepest woe. Man was not put upon the earth cut and dried. His progress from savagery to civilisation has been long and painful. And his further progression onward and upward must needs partake of

<sup>1</sup> It is explained by the Roman Church, that the soul is originally pure, but becomes corrupted the moment it *fuses* with the body. I claim that, whether the body blasts the soul, or the soul the body, the *result* is still the same.



the same tedious nature. The evolution of man, from the lowest to the highest type—without going further down in the scale than man himself—does not argue for a perfect maker. Man's existence is one long struggle to free himself from his grosser nature; and to develop into a higher state. If it is contended that he had an Almighty maker, in the sense in which the phrase is commonly applied, then I am justified in asking why he should have been made of such base material, and beset with such untoward conditions. His maker, being Almighty, could have made man upon any other plan, or with any set of conditions, that he saw fit. Indeed, it is contended that God *did* make man upon such conditions as he saw fit; and behold the result!

I hold that man's weaknesses, his infirmities, his passions and sufferings—sometimes caused by himself, sometimes by others, and sometimes inherited in spite of himself—do not point to an intelligent, a just, and an almighty maker. A child born blind, or lame, or covered with some loathsome disease, would show the maker either to be impotent or a monster. A perfect creator would not blast what he had created with imperfections most shocking. And I will push my contention to man's passions; because God must be held responsible for the results of his own work: especially when he is accredited with having been cognisant of those results when he began it.

Man is bound to hold man responsible to man, for his right doing: hence the existence of courts of law and justice throughout the civilised world. But if you are to hold to the doctrine of a personal all-powerful maker and superintendent—especially the latter—of the world, you are bound to lay to his charge the sorrow and suffering of all living creatures, including man. And with regard to him, I will add, sin likewise. As I have said, God must be held responsible for his own work. He is, from the Theistic point of view, the primary mover, maker, and first cause; or he is nothing. He either could not, or would not, order it otherwise; and in either case it is difficult to recognise the God-ship.

It is—and that most assuredly from what I will call the God-maker's point of view—somewhat idle to talk of man bringing all the misery upon himself; that he knows right from wrong, etc. That contention certainly cannot

apply to those who are born into the world with bodies unfit for life, and in such manner and conditions as must necessarily render their lives a grievous burden. Nor will it apply to the innocent victims of those who do wrong. Indeed it is inapplicable to four-fifths of the wrong and misery endured by man—not to mention again that endured by the lower order of animals. In fact, if the all-ruling argument be brought in, it cannot apply at all; else, where the *all-ruling*?

It must also be borne in mind that man does not always know right from wrong. He frequently does the most criminal things under the impression that he is doing right. The conscience standard, or test of right and wrong, which is generally put forward by Christian apologists is not necessarily a true one. In a vast number of cases it is no test at all. Conscience can only be a test of right, in the sense that it is right to do what one believes to be so; but it is no test as to whether the thing done *is* right or wrong. The truth or falsity of positions, theories, and acts, must rest upon evidence, upon facts and considerations in connexion with themselves; and not upon what a number of persons—or, rather, each individual person, three parts of whom may be quite uninformed—might conscientiously think or believe about them. One man's conscience will acquit him of doing things at which another's revolts. In Africa, a man's conscience will acquit him of sacrificing his brother man to the *Fetish*. In the middle ages the highest consciences in the Christian world sanctioned the burning alive of those whose consciences forced them to differ from their executioners. Till recently, the Christian conscience, even in Great Britain, sanctioned upon Bible authority the burning of unhappy enthusiasts or half-witted creatures as witches.<sup>1</sup> And to-day, the Christian will sanction the outlawry of the Atheist—right or wrong—as per conscience. Conscience, to a far greater extent than is usually admitted by those who urge it as a

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<sup>1</sup> At the present time, as a rule, the Christian advocate's conscience will not permit him to include the Bible as part of his creed. "Bible smashers" have doubtless had much to do in shaping the modern Christian conscience. It is now a matter of history that Christian legislators have, under the guidance of the "Infidel Advocate", conscientiously passed into law what they but yesterday conscientiously affirmed would insult their maker and bring ruin to their country.

standard, is only another name for intelligence, and must always depend upon circumstances : upon creed, birth, and surroundings.<sup>1</sup> God must not, therefore, under the plea of conscience, be freed from the consequences (which he fore-knew) of what he has created ; and which from their very nature proclaim that he is not good and omnipotent.

Some such ideas and considerations have doubtless been in the minds of peoples at all times. The human race have at all periods recognised the fact of the existence, in many shapes, of good and evil ; hence their many Gods, some good and some bad. The Christian has dethroned and banished all the Gods but one, which he holds to be the *true God*. But he has balanced the case by inventing the devil, who is a kind of concentrated essence of all the old and bad Gods squeezed into one ; and is made to do duty for what I will call the black side of "Creation". All the shortcomings, slips, and can't-help-its of the good or white God are saddled upon the black one—whose presumed existence is thought to make that of his rival more feasible.

The existence or non-existence of the devil may be thought to be somewhat outside the question ; but I venture to introduce his sable majesty entirely upon the authority of his friends—indeed I might say his patentees—who have, I believe, not intentionally made him co-equal, and frequently more than co-equal, with his white brother in the management of the world. By far the largest number, in fact by nearly all Theists, he (the devil), or something equal to him, is held to be a necessary antithesis to God proper. You see God is greatly hampered : all over the world, at all times, he has been heavily weighted, either by devils or devil, in some shape or guise, which indeed is not to be wondered at ; for, taking a Bible and a Christian view, and, I think I would be justified in saying, a Theistic view generally, he has only himself to thank, because if he is the beginning, the author and creator of all things, he is the author and creator of the evils these devils and devil-Gods personify. Indeed

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<sup>1</sup> I think a better definition for conscience than the usually accepted one, would be : The sense of approval or sanction which we accord or withhold to our actions.



the existence of evil is so patent to all as to have become proverbial, and amongst us finds expression in such sayings as: "There is never a good without an evil"; and *vice versa*. Why God does not see fit to uncreate the source of evil—if he can do so without uncreating himself—is of course beyond our ken.

Before finally quitting the design argument I will for a moment or two longer dwell upon this personification of evil, or rather, upon some of his doings as chronicled in God's book. I feel justified in doing so, because the remarks I am about to make have direct reference to what Christian and Jew alike assert God to have performed and suffered, whilst working out what (under God) for many centuries was held to be the very beginning of the work of *creation*, but which is now held by Christians (of course still under God) to be any period or stage of the work which Science and Infidelity may ascribe to it. And I would here submit that those who hold to a belief in the doctrine of eternal punishment, ought to be the last to dabble in the design idea.

According, then, to the opening chapters of the Bible, the Almighty began his work in what may be termed the Garden-of-Eden fashion, but finished it—well, very much otherwise. Heaven will answer as denoting the beginning, but Hell is the word which applies to the ending. God had no sooner completed his work and blessed it, and pronounced all things to be good, when, by the superior cunning of a reptile—made by his own hands—he found his design working so badly that he had at once to blast everything he had made, and to introduce pain, labor, thorns, thistles, disease, and death—not only for man, but for beasts likewise. Thus Omniscience and Immutability succumbed at the first bite of the apple. The serpent obliterated Paradise, and deprived Omnipotence of its meaning. And bear in mind the weak argument as to free will does not affect the question—except in a detrimental sense—of an Omniscient designer. If there be any truth in the theory, you are bound to believe that the serpent was designed to beguile the woman and so damn mankind, and this, whilst adding nothing in the shape of perfection to the general muddle, simply converts your God into worse than a devil.

According to the prevailing Christian belief—certainly



the Roman Catholic belief—God created the world as a means of replacing those angels who were expelled from heaven for disobedience and rebellion; and the result, according to the same authority, is simply becoming an overflowing hell. God thought by means of this world to recruit his celestial army, but the devil stole his recruits before they were yet ripe, and made fuel of them to feed his eternal stew-pan. Talk of design: it is really a worse case than that of the painter who was not sure till he had finished his picture whether it would turn out to be a “cow in the meadow” or a “ship in a storm”! If I am asked for a justification for these remarks, I refer my interrogator to the Bible account of the transaction, in which he will see how the serpent, getting his own way in the matter of Eve and the forbidden fruit, put God to another and most disastrous shift—i.e., damning creation, followed, if you will, by a confessedly futile scheme of salvation.

If it were not so far away from my immediate subject, I should like to go into the question as to where the Serpent's great wisdom came from; and whether he had already stolen a few apples upon his own account? However that may have been, God took summary vengeance upon him, and at once either conjured or chopped off his legs, and made him go upon his belly—although I presume he was under the necessity of supplying him with a new set of muscles to enable him to get along in his new and strange method of locomotion. Or, has he—the serpent—to some extent proved the truth of *evolution* by acquiring for himself these organs since his fall? But what a childish fable for grown people to hold as God's truth.

Of course these observations are not founded upon anything better than the teachings and dogmas of men who hold in various ways the position I am attacking. But in such an enquiry as this, the things said for God, and of God, by those who maintain his existence, are fair matters for comment. And this applies to many other comments in this pamphlet.

I have before me a scrap of what I take to be a portion of a sermon upon the canonisation of St. Alphonsus Rodriguez, in which the following passage appears. My excuse for giving it is that it applies to God, inasmuch as

it shows God's method, or one of his methods, of utilising defunct saints :

“They” (saints in general) “were a shield of protection not only for those who invoked them, but also, through the super-abounding mercy of God, even to those who were ignorant of their very names. Just as a range of mountains in the distance frequently breaks the violence of the elements, so do the accumulated merits of the saints act as a barrier against the fury of God's vengeance, shielding even the unworthy from his wrath”, etc.

Now this, divested of its oratorical and sacerdotal coloring, means that one of God's occupations is to providentially raise up barriers in the shape of departed saints, against his own wrath, so as to prevent himself from taking as much vengeance as he otherwise would upon the beings he has providentially created. What a dreadful character he most assuredly would be if he were let alone—or rather, if he let himself alone! Just imagine mountains of buffers against the “fury of God's vengeance” in the shape of defunct saints! Under the circumstances mentioned, one can scarcely help wondering how heaven can really be heaven to them. Think of the picture here presented. Shoals of departed saints dwelling in perfect bliss, but nevertheless perpetually on the watch, both in heaven and out of it, so as to be ready at any instant to throw themselves between God's fury and his intended victims. I don't think I should care to be a saint under the circumstances. But the saints were ever a queer lot, and it is possible their work in the next world is quite as *unco*' as in this. If we are to believe those who are authorised to speak for them, they are, though dead, still used as a kind of supernatural cement to patch up the *design* which they preached, but which I nevertheless think they marred when in the flesh.

It has just dawned upon me that possibly I have failed to interpret aright the meaning of this highly-colored statement of supernatural-natural nonsense and incredibility; which indeed would be excusable. It is possible that it is not the saints' bodies which we are to understand as acting as barriers and buffers, but their merits. These merits would in that case stand in the same relationship to God's wrath and vengeance as the mountains do to the fury of the elements, and thus *prevent* him, as I before

remarked, from doing such dire and dreadful things as he otherwise would do. He spends the fury of his vengeance upon these mountains of virtues—after the manner of the elements—rather than upon those who (presumably) deserve it!

There is a most curious theological fact—it could only be a fact *theologically*—peeping out from behind this mountain of sacerdotal nonsense, *i.e.*, that God is so mighty, and so wonderful as to be able to suffer his power and his intentions to be broken and scattered as are the elements against mountains which successfully withstand their force, and disperse them; without for an instant lessening his omnipotence or his immutability. What a *very* wonderful God these nineteenth century Christians must have!

The observations I am now about to make, although not perhaps strictly pertinent to the subject, are yet bearing upon it, being still in reference to the God question. I make them with great respect, and with much diffidence: respect for the opinions of those who, from their longer and closer application to the question and better means of studying it, are more capable of forming a correct opinion than myself; and diffidence, because I know the conclusion at which I have arrived is at variance with that opinion. Yet having arrived at it, I must needs express myself. But I do so in the spirit of enquiry, and because what I shall put forward seem to me to be real difficulties. If I should appear dogmatic, or wanting in respect for greater thinkers, it will be by reason of experiencing a difficulty in finding a method of conveying the thoughts I wish to express. And I ask Christians to apply these remarks, in so far as they are able, to what has preceded them (what immediately follows does not touch them<sup>1</sup>); for, if in arguing this subject I have not shown enough respect for their feelings, have spoken harshly or irreverently of their accepted doctrines and dogmas, I desire to say that I have not intended to be wittingly offensive; although I will confess I have not endeavored to hide feelings of contempt for certain beliefs and ideas which appeared to be contemptible as they came before my mind. This I could not avoid; it were false to act otherwise. And I must

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<sup>1</sup> This has reference to the argument which I am about to venture upon, and not to the remarks I am now making.



also admit that I do not feel in any way bound to be extremely tender with the doctrine of Christianity, as a doctrine, and taken as a whole. Some things which have happened, and which show even at this day a dangerous smouldering of the awful Smithfield fires, have made a deep impression upon me. To travel no further than three of the foremost English Freethinkers of to-day: (a) Mrs. Annie Besant was, by process of Christian law, ruthlessly separated from all a woman holds dear, and cast without means upon the world, because she, being a Christian minister's wife, dared to *think*, and was not hypocrite enough to hide her conclusions. (b) Later on Christian legislators actually endeavored to prevent her and her fellow-students, the Misses Bradlaugh, from teaching Science, pure and simple, to their fellow beings. (c) Charles Bradlaugh was persistently treated with insult and contumely, the sanctity of his person was outraged, and he was robbed of his legitimate status as a citizen and duly elected representative of the people, and all but ruined—the struggle continuing for six years—by a Christian House of Parliament, because he was an avowed Atheist.<sup>1</sup>

Mr. G. W. Foote, in company with Mr. W. J. Ramsey, was incarcerated in a felon's gaol, treated as a criminal, and made to suffer all the indignities of a convicted rogue and thief, or perjurer, because he would not belie his sense of right and liberty in matters of freedom of thought.

Christians, now as ever, trample on those who differ from them, and I do confess there is that within me which will not permit me to kiss the hand that smites me; nor lick the foot which spurns and kicks me. Christians profess to do these things; but their practice belies their professions. For my own part, until I am allowed to exist upon equal terms in all respects, I will fight. I will not prostrate my individuality before the Christian Juggernaut, and say: "Trample out my existence, I am only

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<sup>1</sup> I am happy to know that a vast number of Christians have since joined with others in contributing to clear off the debt incurred by above six years' struggle. Nevertheless Christians did the thing I complain of in the name of Christianity. Any other man than Charles Bradlaugh would scarcely have survived to afford the conscience-mongers an opportunity of thus easing their consciences.



an infidel"; but will, if need be, take my "tomahawk", which a not altogether unfriendly critic has put into my hand, and, striking right and left, hope it may never alight upon the head of a friend, nor miss that of an enemy.

Having said thus much, because I thought the occasion opportune, I will proceed with the remarks to which I have referred.

In this paper I have said that God is not, nor could he be. And it is upon the wisdom or unwisdom of thus distinctly denying the existence of God, that I wish to make a few observations.

I believe it is *held* by all Atheists—no matter how it is put—that God does *not* exist. And it is true that the whole tone and meaning of this paper is a denial of his existence. And so in reality are all Atheistic writings. But I think I see very marked signs of what may be considered a decay of this robust and thorough Atheism.

Leading Freethinkers, it would appear do not now take up this position, but what is considered the safer and more moderate one of Agnosticism; which would seem to mean that man does not *know* God. I believe it is also taken to mean that, constituted as man is, he cannot know him; and that therefore he should neither affirm nor deny his existence. I am only now putting that portion of Agnosticism which applies directly to God, as contrasted with Atheism, which certainly does deny his existence. Mr. Laing, as I understand him, takes the above view of Agnosticism; for, in his now famous "articles<sup>1</sup> of the Agnostic creed and reasons for them", he holds that, if we cannot prove an affirmative respecting the mystery of a first cause, and a personal God; equally, we cannot prove a negative; and adds: "There may be anything in the Unknowable". But he qualifies this statement by further saying: "Any guess at it which is inconsistent with what we really do know, stands, *ipso facto*, condemned". I would here remark that the qualification—certainly for all practical purposes—goes very near to, if not quite, annulling the statement. But he further holds that if the existence of such places as heaven and hell (using them of

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<sup>1</sup> Those which he drew up at the request of the Right Hon. W. E. Gladstone.

course to illustrate the idea he is expounding) be asserted in a general way, without attempt at definition, the possibility of the correctness of the assertion should be admitted. Well but, if anything and everything is possible in the Unknowable, is it possible that there may exist an uncaused cause of all things? If it, as well as the existence of (I presume) a soul, of heaven, hell, etc.,—which be it remembered, those who believe in them, do so on *faith*, not professing to prove them—is possible, is not three parts of the Christian Theists' position conceded? It would however appear to me, reasoning from Mr. Laing's position, that although anything may be possible in the Unknowable, yet any statement concerning it which is inconsistent with ascertained facts stands condemned, the possibility of the existence of God stands condemned. If anything which is inconsistent with what we really know stands, *ipso facto*, condemned; then the idea of a beginning, the existence of an uncaused cause—*i.e.*, God—stands so condemned. And it follows naturally, that a term which embodies that meaning (*viz.*, that what cannot be is not) is more logical than one which either admits of the possibility of the impossible, or evades the direct issue.

The position created by Agnosticism, as put by Mr. Laing—and it is the generally accepted one<sup>1</sup>—on the face of it, not only appears contradictory but unnecessary. One would seem to have to accept the existence of God—or five thousand Gods for the matter of that—as possible, till tested by the only means we have of testing it, when it is, as a mere matter of course, to be held impossible; the non-possibility actually and practically, and also curiously, forming a part of the Agnostic position. In theory it grants the possibility of the existence of God, in practice it denies it.

Again, if Agnosticism permits one to declare impossible that which, if tested and found to be so by the ordinary methods of reasoning aided by what we really know, then it is, so far Atheism: because the Atheist does but say what is possible or impossible, judged by what is cognis-

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<sup>1</sup> I notice that "D" (of the *National Reformer*) takes exception to the idea of Agnosticism being a *creed*, but I do not think that affects the general view of Agnosticism as in reference to God.

able, by what is really known, he could do no other. Thus Agnosticism would seem superfluous. At best it can but be (as I think) a something to suit the extreme palate of the—I would almost say—over-logical epicure; a kind of luxury for the hair-splitter, the hypercritic who will not, physically speaking, say that what cannot be, is not, but who will, in order to escape the mere suspicion of illogicalness, drop his physical condition to admit the possibility of something about the *Unknowable*; although that admission involves the possibility—the *may-be* of propositions superbly ridiculous.

Agnosticism would seem to me to be Atheism, plus the possibility of what both practically say is impossible.<sup>1</sup>

It would appear to me that what is unknowable is not. Hence the superfluity of Agnosticism. It is possible there may be some points and niceties about it which pass my comprehension, but of this I feel convinced, there are some very serious difficulties in its way. If you hold that all things are possible in what is termed the Unknowable, an individual may—as indeed is done—assert the most extraordinary rubbish imaginable, and knock you down with what I will call the Agnostic Closure: "How can you prove to the contrary?" Of course one could shake one's head, and venture a doubtful smile, and even go to the extreme of saying the thing is very improbable; but the closure will come in again with quite as much force against

<sup>1</sup> R. Lewins, M.D., in a letter to the *Agnostic Journal* of March 30th, remarks: "I cannot see the difference—other than academical, over which we might split hairs for ever—between Atheism and Agnosticism. An Agnostic who doubts of God is certainly Godless, and Atheism is no more."

Whilst holding that Atheism is more definite and goes further than Agnosticism, and therefore disagreeing with Dr. Lewins, I am startled to find the Editor of the *Agnostic Journal* stating, by way of reply, that "'God' is just the one fact of which the Agnostic is assured. 'God', with the Agnostic, is the ontological and cosmic basis and *fons et origo*, just as the ego is with Dr. Lewins."

With great respect, I would remark that it would perhaps be difficult to find a better definition of what God is to the Theist; and if it be a correct one, Agnostics are something very like Theists, God being the basis, fountain, and origin of both cults.

If we go on at this rate, and it be true that Agnosticism is the better and more correct form of Atheism, we shall soon have Atheists who believe in God.



the improbable as it did against the impossible, when used in reference to the Unknowable.

It is doubtless a wise and judicious proceeding to hold a prisoner innocent till he is proven guilty. But surely it ought not to be necessary to hold that anything, no matter how completely idiotic, if only stated in a general way, is possible and might be true, because it is outside the possibility of being tested. Of course I comprehend the difficulty: I may be asked how I know it is foolish or idiotic since I cannot test it: my reply is that the thing spoken of simply *is not*, and hence the folly of holding that it *may be* this, that, or the other. The whole idea seems to be over and above and beyond reality—entirely wide of the mark. It would appear to me that, practically, no theory nor statement can be made or set up which shall be completely outside or free from considerations which are in connexion with the universe, or which are not based upon what we know or is knowable. (Therefore Agnosticism is out of court.) And in coining a word which assumes that you can so speak or set up theories—or, what is much the same thing, that assertions and theories so set up may be true—you are but helping to obscure, rather than to throw more light upon what is already sufficiently difficult.

As far as I can comprehend Agnosticism, and its teachings and bearings, I do not and never did like it. This may look presumptuous on my part, possibly it is presumptuous; but rightly or wrongly I cannot but regard it as a kind of half-way house between Atheism and Theism. I regard it as a reversion into the vicinity of the temples we have deserted, and which (as I thought) we had got to look upon as temples of myths and impossibilities. Of course much depends upon the starting point. The Theist becoming doubtful will possibly evolve into Agnosticism, or the *may-be* stage; tiring of this, he will naturally evolve further into Atheism, which says God is not. On the other hand if the starting point be Atheism, or that the Atheist has evolved from something else into Atheism, which says *no*, and evolves from it into Agnosticism, which says *perhaps*; he will in all probability continue the evolution till he arrives at Theism, which says *yes*.

Agnosticism being, as I have said, a half-way house between the two extremes, there will at all times probably



be a few—possibly many, who will find shelter in it. It will possibly form an asylum for the doubtful of Theism, and the timid or hypercritical of Atheism. It may become a common ground upon which the weary and wavering of faith and the weary and wavering of no faith will for a time find rest. But it is only a transition stage, being neither yes nor no; and will only satisfy those whose minds are not made up either way. It may be regarded as a kind of intellectual landing stage for passengers who are either going forward or returning, as the case may be.

I will endeavor to further explain myself, and to point out why I think an Atheist ought logically to be able to say there is no God.

I was recently much struck by the similarity of Mrs. Besant's definition of Secularism in her debate with the Rev. W. T. Lee, and the definition of Agnosticism quoted from the "New Oxford Dictionary of the English language", by the Rev. H. Wace, D.D., in his paper read at the late Church Congress at Manchester. It would appear to me that this adoption of Agnosticism, and discarding of Atheism, coupled with the hesitation which naturally follows, of saying point blank there is no God, is not only a very weak position, but goes a long way towards justifying the boast made by many, that there is no living person who really believes there is no God. Of course this boast may be a very silly and unfounded one; but when they see an actual avoidance of the direct denial by those whose teachings and professions, if they mean anything, mean that "God" *is not*, they may, I think, be excused to a very great extent in making it. If the case were reversed, and if Christians and Theists generally, whilst holding and teaching that God did exist, yet declined upon some kind of logical (?) ground to plainly say so; we Atheists would, I think, be much inclined to put our finger upon it as a weak spot. We cannot, then, be surprised if they do a similar thing. At the same time, I wish it to be borne in mind that I would not relinquish a position, nor hesitate in taking up a new one, simply because I thought it gave the enemy a *seeming* advantage. I hold that a position should be occupied by reason of its inherent strength and logical soundness, altogether irrespective of side issues, which may contain no principle.

The question then arises which is the most logical

position, that of declaring in direct fashion the ultimate end and meaning of your teaching, or of halting at the last gate by refraining from making such direct declaration?

At the outset I would ask—and I think the main part of the question hinges upon the answer given—why may not an Atheist logically and in set terms declare what his name implies—nay, actually *means*, viz, *one who disbelieves in the existence of God*? The Theist asserts there is a God. Shall not the Atheist controvert that assertion? Must he remain dumb? And if he does controvert it how shall he do so without denying it? And if he denies the proposition or assertion (which the Agnostic formula “we do not and cannot know him”, really, though lamely, does) does he not in reality say “there is no God”? If you venture as far as denying the evidence of his existence, do you not logically and actually deny that he exists, or do you mean that, in spite of the evidence of his non-existence, perhaps after all he does exist? Why is it rash—which the hesitation denotes—to give an unequivocal verdict? It appears to me that it is really a matter of evidence; and I do not quite see why, because it is a question of God, the common and consequent result of investigation should not be put into the usual yes or no, the same as in any other enquiry. If the result of the investigation be that we cannot form a decided opinion either way, and that we must therefore give an open verdict, by all means give an open one; but in that case we should not call ourselves Atheists. But is that really the true position of Atheists of to-day? Is Atheism dead or deserted, and are those who professed it on their road back to Theism? I hold that neither to affirm nor deny the existence of God is, notwithstanding niceties of logic, virtually to admit the possibility of his existence; which, taken in conjunction with the genuine Atheistic contention that there is no room for him in nature, becomes, to say the least, most contradictory. If it be alleged that Agnosticism does not assume the possibility of God’s existence in nature, but only in supernature, *i. e.*, the unknowable, I reply that you cannot assume anything as to supernature. It is not; therefore its God or Gods are not. If this position be not conceded then the most far-fetched ravings as to supernature that ever came from brain of madman must be held as possible.

If you venture one whit further in the shape of denial than the agnostically orthodox *perhaps* or *may be*, the extinguisher is clapped upon you, and you are simply put out, to the great delight of those who have *faith*, and who do not hesitate to give direct form to what they hold to be true.

I have said that the existence or non-existence of God is a matter of evidence, and ought to be treated as such. And that a man ought not to be held to be rash or illogical for giving direct form to his verdict, or result of his investigation. I presume a person who upon the evidence of his purse declared it contained no money, would not be held to be illogical or rash; but if he, adopting the Agnostic principle, doubtfully declared he saw no evidence that it contained money, but would not venture upon saying outright that it did not—thereby inferring that perhaps it did, the evidence notwithstanding—he would go very near being considered both rash and illogical.<sup>1</sup> And bear in mind that if this collateral inference is not to be drawn, and if the statement is to be taken as shutting out all possibility of it, I am entitled to ask in what consists the wisdom of discarding the direct statement, and substituting an equivocal, or less direct one? Where the use in dropping one term and picking up another, which, whilst being less direct, finally means the same thing? If it does not mean the same thing, then it can only mean one other thing: the possibility of the existence of God, which, as I understand it, is a direct contradiction and denial of Atheism.

Some years ago, Dr. E. B. Aveling advocated—or I think I should be more correct in saying, he stated with approval—that Darwin, in a conversation which he had with him, advocated Agnosticism in preference to Atheism, as being the safer course or term. This struck me at the time, and does so still, as pointing directly to the *perhaps* to which I have drawn attention; or if not, why *safer*? But it is very like saying it is safer to hold the possibility

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<sup>1</sup> It is likely to be urged that nothing of the kind is asserted of a purse, but only of what we can know nothing. But it seems to me that the admission as to the Unknowable, *i.e.*, supernature is an admission which, although most contradictory in its nature, is still an admission that perhaps it (supernature) *is*; to the shutting out of the more reasonable and direct teaching of Atheism.



of what cannot be possible. If not, then it can but mean that it is safer not to deny what may after all be a fact; thus conceding almost the entire position claimed by the Theist. The possibility of super-nature being once conceded, the road is laid open for a belief in Gods, devils, ghosts, goblins, and all the rest of the unreal phantoms with which the regions of supernature are peopled.

I regard Agnosticism as a going out of one's way to admit of a *may-be*, which the whole universe proclaims *may not be*; a leaving-behind of nature to worse than uselessly say "it is safer to hold there may be something beyond it". I think those who deal in myth, especially those calling themselves Christians, will have much to be grateful for if this really becomes the Atheist's position. It is certainly more difficult to argue against a position the possible correctness of which you have already conceded, than against one whose correctness you entirely repudiate.

It would seem to me there is a tremendous contradiction in what appears to be the principle of Agnosticism quite savoring of the old belief in God, which I must repeat is not compatible with the principles of Atheism—and, as I thought, of Secularism. It is all very well to say that Agnosticism is safer because it tells you neither to affirm nor deny in a matter of which you have no possible means of judging. But Atheism, if I read it aright, tells you there can be no possibility of such a thing existing. If that be so, to talk of withholding your judgment becomes nonsense. If the universe says no, why should I say perhaps yes? Do I then doubt, or half believe? What logical nicety could carry me beyond the cognizable into myth? What logical necessity could carry me beyond Nature into supernature? None. I cannot so much as think it, and to admit it would be equal to the non-admission of the existence of nature. Supernature with its Gods, or its millions of Gods, is not.

The "New Oxford Dictionary", to which I have alluded, and as quoted by the Rev. Dr. Wace, states that "an Agnostic is one who holds that the existence of anything behind and beyond natural phænomena is unknown, and, as far as can be judged, is unknowable, and especially that a first cause . . . are subjects of which we know nothing". This, taken alone, might be good enough for the Secularistic standpoint, and might be sufficient warrant



for neither affirming nor denying, except that it still allows the possibility of a God, and therefore is not Atheism. Of course if we are going to sink Atheism, well and good; although it would certainly place us in the disadvantageous position of not being logically able to oppose the Theist in a thorough manner. Dr. Wace further points out that the name was claimed by Professor Huxley for those who claimed Atheism, and believed with him in an unknowable God or cause of all things.<sup>1</sup> Quoting again from the late bishop of the diocese in which he was speaking, he said that "the Agnostic neither affirmed nor denied God". He simply put him on one side. Of course a Secularist, nor, indeed, an Agnostic or Atheist, is not bound to take a bishop's rendering of the term, although for my own part I take it as being fairly correct. And it must, I

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<sup>1</sup> Since writing the above I see by "D's." articles in the *National Reformer* that he entirely doubts the accuracy of this statement. The correctness of this doubt would seem to be confirmed if the following quotation, given in the *Agnostic Journal* as Prof. Huxley's definition of the word, be correct: "As the inventor of the word, I am entitled to say authoritatively what is meant by it. Agnosticism is the essence of science whether ancient or modern. It simply means that a man shall not say he knows or believes that which he has no scientific grounds for professing to know or believe." That, so far, certainly is in direct opposition to what Dr. Wace would have us infer Huxley to have meant by the word. If it means anything in reference to God, it means that man has no scientific grounds for believing in the existence of God, and that therefore he ought not to state such belief. So far it is Atheistic; but if it further means that man has no scientific grounds for disbelieving in his existence, and ought not therefore to state his disbelief, then it is not Atheistic. And if meaning both these things, it is equivocal and contradictory. If it means that we have no evidence either way and should be silent, then it drops Atheism and the evidence upon which it is built, and goes half way in support of Theism. Professor Huxley's definition as here given, and taken alone, would seem to mean that a scientist should not state that he knows what he cannot scientifically prove. But Secularists and others seem to have placed upon it a wider meaning (which of course it is contended logically follows), and allege that it also means that he should not deny what he cannot scientifically prove non-existent; and that therefore he ought not to deny the existence of God, but should refuse (conditionally) to discuss him. Whilst thinking Atheism teaches that the non-existence of God is scientifically proved, I would point out that the other view is open to the objection that if the existence of forty thousand Gods, with their accompanying devils, were asserted we should not be in a position to deny. The same being true of any other absurdity, say, for instance, the *Trinity*.

think, be admitted that the statements quoted are compatible with the position now apparently assumed by leading Secularists. I certainly think all these statements taken together, whilst being contradictory in their ultimate meaning, go a very considerable distance in the belief in the existence of a God. If there be wisdom and safety in this, I am bound to think that neither dwells in Atheism. But in my humble opinion such is not the case. To neither deny nor affirm simply shirks the point; it is, at best, withholding your opinion; it is to halt between the two theories; and to my mind it certainly does not demonstrate the folly of an Atheist saying "there is no God". It only demonstrates the folly of an Agnostic doing so.

It would appear to me that Agnosticism is at least illogical, if not altogether untenable, inasmuch as that, while it directly affirms that man can know nothing outside natural phenomena, nor of the first cause—which is the primary meaning of God—it yet admits that he may exist. Thus, by its direct teaching, man ought to act as though he is not; and by its indirect teaching, as though he possibly is. In other words, you must (and this would seem to be getting fashionable) profess Agnosticism and act Atheism.

I am aware that it is held by authorities for whom we are bound to have great respect, that the word God, undefined, has no meaning; and that it would be the work of a fool to reason against a term which conveys no idea, or argue against a nonentity. To the latter, I will remark that, if it were not a nonentity, there would be no reason in arguing against its existence; and if it is a nonentity, where the folly or danger in saying so? But is it quite true that the word God conveys no meaning? It is doubtless defined differently by different creeds. It is said to mean the Creator, the Maker of heaven and earth, the Supreme Being, the Sovereign Lord, the Beginning and the End, and many other things. But the cardinal meaning which pervades all definitions is the supreme cause or maker of the universe. Surely there is meaning in this. I do not quite see how an Atheist, knowing what is broadly meant and held as to God by those who believe in his existence, can quite fairly say the word has no meaning to him—or rather, that it conveys no

meaning to him. Does it not convey the meaning, or can you not take it as conveying the meaning it is intended to convey? <sup>1</sup> Of course I may be asked how a person can know the meaning intended to be conveyed, unless defined. I recognise the difficulty; but reply: Would an Atheist subscribe to a belief in God under any, or all the ordinary—I think I might say—known definitions? If he would not, I think the difficulty is removed, and that there is no inconsistency in denying his existence when spoken of, or asserted in general terms. Words generally have meaning only in conjunction with the ideas they are intended to convey. This word conveys the idea, or is intended to convey the idea, of the existence of a supernatural intelligent and supreme being, whom those who assert his existence believe to have been the creator or cause of the universe. It appears to me that it is not a question as to whether an Atheist could convey any thoughts or theories of his own in the same language; but is rather a question of what the person who uses it intends to convey. As a matter of fact, I, for my own part, do think the meaning is sufficiently clear and understood as to enable an Atheist to say yes or no to such general meaning.

If what I am endeavoring to explain—by which I mean the import of the term God—had not been sufficiently clear, we should not now have in our language, (and I presume in every scientifically arranged language in the world) the terms Theist, and Atheist, and their derivatives. If then, the term does convey an idea, or conclusion arrived at either rightly or wrongly by Christians and Theists generally, that a maker or cause of all nature, and therefore of all natural phænomena, called God, does exist; and thus distinctly—or even indistinctly if you will—put it forward. May not the Atheist who (even allowing room for variations of definition) holds that he does *not* exist say as much without coming under the ban of folly? I venture to think that if he may not give direct form to his words and state what he holds not to exist, is not, then

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<sup>1</sup> I am not here contending against the necessity of having words defined for the proper and expeditious discussion of the ideas they are intended to convey. I am simply contending that this particular word does carry a sufficiently definite meaning—especially as put forward by Christians in general—to justify a thinker in either accepting or rejecting the theory of his existence.



he is in a false position, and a false restraint is put upon him. I presume in any other matter, an Atheist may without doing violence to consistency declare that, what is not, is not. Where then the crime or folly in this particular case? Is it so serious and awful a one that he must not venture upon making the logical and consequent avowal which his disbelief upon one hand, and his convictions upon the other, force upon him? It would appear upon the very face of it, to be the height of reason to affirm the non-existence—or perhaps I had better say, to deny the existence—of a nonentity, especially when its existence is forced upon you with such lamentable results. It appears to me that it is not only logical to do so, but that it becomes an absolute duty, therefore a logical necessity. I say that, if God is, it is right to say so, and if he is not, it is equally right to say so. If a thinker has not formed an opinion either way, or has come to the conclusion that he cannot form an opinion, then I take it, he is not an Atheist and some other term may be found to better interpret his position.

I could understand taking up the position that, because we have not all-knowledge, therefore we cannot say what *might*, or *might not* be, what is absolutely *possible* or impossible: and contenting ourselves with the words, probable and improbable; although I should be strongly tempted to transgress therefrom. There are some things which I should consider beyond the improbable and to be impossible. But this circumscribing should apply all-round and include all questions, and not be confined to that of the existence of a God, or Gods: I do not see the utility or wisdom in drawing the line at him or them. To my thinking it is illogical as well as giving color to a pretended lurking fear, or belief put upon Atheists. The God concept is, I presume, like any other, a matter of evidence. I think an Atheist should find no more difficulty in giving expression to his conviction that God is not, than in giving expression to his conviction that a moon made of green cheese is not. An Atheist is one who is set down as being "one who disbelieves in the existence of a God, or supreme intelligent being". Atheism is, shortly, this stated disbelief, and is put in opposition to Theism. It will thus be observed that Atheism goes altogether beyond "neither affirming nor denying": it is the embodiment of denial



and disbelief. Of course one may retreat from it into another position; but in the meantime, I must again say that it does seem unreasonable upon the very face of it that an Atheist may not logically and in set terms declare the non-existence of the thing in whose existence he disbelieves, such disbelief being signified by his very name, and it must be borne in mind that, whether he so states it or not, his life, if he be consistent, and his writings and teachings practically proclaim it, and are, so far, in opposition—at least to a great extent—to what I consider the weak avowal he makes when he says “the Atheist does not say there is no God”. The Atheistic school—if I may so term it—is actually founded upon reasoned-out conclusions based upon facts affirmed and attested by science. It stands upon a plan and theory which does not admit of God; there is no room for him in it; or, in other words, he cannot be. If it were otherwise based, it would not be Atheism. Yet strangely enough, Atheists now hesitate to say he is not: and adopt a term which may with much reason be regarded as a loop-hole.

But the curious point to me is, are we to continue to thus practically preach and teach Atheism, proclaiming in a hundred ways the non-existence of God, and yet evade the open declaration? If we are, and in future are to be, careful to write and state merely that we do not know God—and forgive me if I once more say—thereby inferring that perchance he does exist; we ought, I think, in the name of consistency, to abolish, or allow to become obsolete by disuse, the term Atheist, and all its derivatives; and substitute such Agnostic or other terms as shall better define our position. In that case we ought no longer to call ourselves and our literature Atheistic. If we do, it should at least be stated that the term is not to be taken in the generally, and hitherto accepted sense, but in that of the recently revived Agnostic one.

For my own part, rightly or wrongly, foolishly or otherwise, I have no hesitation in asserting that, so far as I can think, weigh and judge, there is no God. Otherwise, I could not be an Atheist.

Since writing the foregoing, I have read “D.’s” articles in the *National Reformer*, “In Defence of Agnosticism”. They are, as indeed are all his articles, ably and

profoundly written. I do not here profess to reply to them. But I feel bound to state that, so far, they seem to have confirmed me in some of my opinions and objections to Agnosticism. In his concluding article he says that an Atheist—and I now presume a Secularist—may not argue the existence of God, nor anything relating to him when considered as a supernatural being; “any such question” being “mere vanity and vexation of spirit”. But he further says that *some* argument is admissible when he is taken in conjunction with the world; or as he puts it: “Some assertions may be made respecting God, which it is possible *negatively* to verify”, because, as he goes on to explain, such assertions include statements with regard to the order of nature; as, for instance: “We may argue from the existence of evil, the impossibility of the existence of an omnipotent, omnipresent, and omni-beneficent God”. This is doubtless the result of very close reasoning, but to my mind savors a little of hair-splitting, and appears to leave the person awkwardly situated, who does not believe in the existence of God. All the while a Theist puts his God forward as being supernatural only, and as having nothing to do with nature, one must not reply, but be dumb; or limit one’s reply to a refusal to discuss; at most, giving reasons for such refusal. But if it is put forward in conjunction with our phenomenal universe (as indeed when is he not?), and that we are thereby enabled to verify what he is not, we may, so far, discuss him. But suppose it were possible in like manner to verify what he is, or, as “D.” would put it: to verify affirmatively, might it then be discussed? And how shall we know which way it can be verified, or whether it can be verified either way without full discussion? And why should it be permissible to discuss one side and not the other? Are you to assume that God is not, and only discuss such portion of the question as supports that view? And finally, is that Agnosticism?

But apart from this, it appears to me to somewhat evade the manner in which the God idea is usually put forward. For my own part, I do not know that it is ever advanced except in conjunction with nature and in the sense of authorship, either supernaturally or otherwise. God is generally held to be supernatural, and at the same time the cause and author or creator of the universe and of

all things. That, to my thinking, is the position anyone who does not hold it ought to be able to argue, and the enabling position, above all others, I take to be that of Atheism. If an Agnostic held to the first portion of the statement only, discussion upon the question of God would be well-nigh impossible for him; because all Churches and most creeds hold him to be a supernatural being. But the qualification comes in as a kind of saving clause, and permits the Agnostic to discuss the question to a limited extent, thus showing at once the weakness of Agnosticism, and admitting that even by its aid the question cannot be entirely shut out of the arena. God may be discussed in part, but only negatively. Taking the world as your witness, you may say, "a good and almighty God does not exist", but you must not say, "no God exists". You may only say you do not know him. This, to my thinking, is a lame and unsatisfactory state of affairs, and is evasive, as indeed is Agnosticism generally. For instance, and having some of "D.'s" further illustrations in my mind, I cannot but think, when a Christian states that "three times one God are one God"; or "that God was three days and three nights in the bowels of the earth between Friday night and the following Sunday morning", that it would be quite as logical, and certainly more forcible, to say I deny the possibility, as to say the subject matter is beyond the reach of my faculties, and that the assertion conveys no meaning to my mind. These seem to be quite distinct statements, and to convey distinctly impossible ideas; and I urge that it would be no more illogical to give direct form to my verdict—in fact less so—than to weakly profess not to understand what is intended to be conveyed.

I make these remarks with "much fear and trembling", but feel bound to say that I am surprised to be told that an Agnostic, or indeed anyone professing to rely upon common sense and science, "does not, or needs not, deny" the statement that God, *i.e.*, Christ, remained three days and nights in the earth, between Friday evening and the following Sunday morning. "D." himself admits that if the doctrine of the trinity, *viz.*, that three times one are one, "were asserted of apples", he would disbelieve it; but being asserted of Gods he will neither believe nor disbelieve; or, if he does do either, the result must be

hidden under the Agnostic formula of neither affirming nor denying.

The ideas on Agnosticism to which I have endeavored to give form have been in my mind for a considerable period, and I have taken the present opportunity of putting them together, although in rather a hurried and, perhaps, in an insufficiently considered manner. But I put them more in the spirit of inquiry than in any other.

The subject is a vast one, and has engaged the minds of some of the greatest thinkers of all ages. In the small space here at my command I have not been able to much more than touch it. I have made no reference to learned works, and but small reference to learned writers. I do but profess to have given such thoughts and ideas as occurred to myself whilst thinking upon the subject. My observations are possibly better calculated to induce the ordinary individual to think, to ponder these matters, and to look for larger and more complete investigations than they are to do battle with the mighty of intellect and the great of learning.

The universe, the raw material, lies before us all. We can all but deal with it according to our capabilities and our opportunities. I can only hope that my rough method and manner, whilst being accepted only for what they are worth, will yet do a small share in the work of regenerating humanity, and building up a people who shall consider their most sacred duty consists not only in free inquiry, but free and open assertion of the fruits of such inquiry, rather than blind and ignorant submission to churches and creeds, whose interest it is to stifle thought.

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