

# NATURE AND THE SUPERNATURAL;

OR,

BELIEF AND KNOWLEDGE.

—BY—

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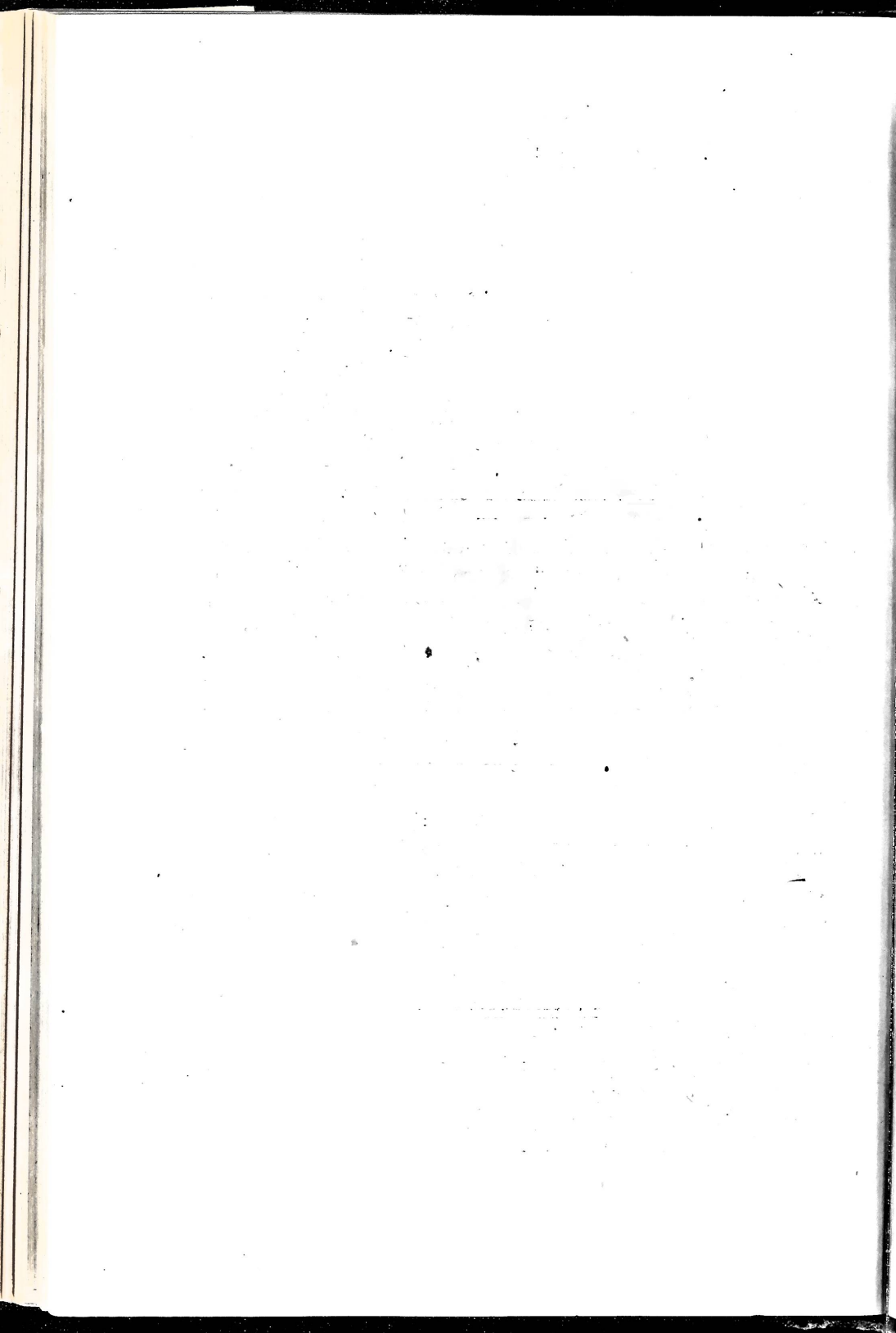
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*What do we know of Nature ?*—What is nature ? Of course most persons know what is meant by nature, in part at all events ; and the only difference in opinion or definition that can arise will be as to its totality. There are a thousand facts lying all around us, and a thousand phenomena of which we are every day eye-witnesses, that all will agree to call nature. The question, however, does not concern these, but others, real or imaginary, which differ somewhat from them, and which are supposed, therefore, to be incapable of being classed under the same head. Those who desire to obtain a clear and accurate idea of nature cannot do better than read carefully Mr. John Stuart Mill's excellent essay on the subject, published after his death. He gives two definitions, or rather two senses, in which we use the word in ordinary, every-day language. The first is that in which we mean the totality of all existence, and the other that in which we use the term as contradistinguished from art—nature improved by man. But it must be borne in mind that this is still nature. Nature improved by man is only one part of nature modified by another ; for man is as much a portion of nature as the earth on which he treads, or the stars which glow in the midnight sky over his head. Nature, therefore, as we understand it, and as Mill defines it in his first sense, is everything that exists, or that can possibly come into existence in the hereafter—that is, all the possibilities of existence, whether past, present or future. If it is asked on what ground we include in this definition that which to-day does not

exist, but may come into existence hereafter, we reply : Because that which will be must be, potentially at least, even now. No new entity can come into being ; all that can occur is the commencement of some new form of existence, which has ever had a being potentially anyhow. No new force can appear, some new form of force may. But, then, that, when it comes, will be as much a part of nature as the rest—is indeed even now a part of nature, since it is latent somewhere in the universe. Nature, in a word, is everything, besides which, to us, there is and can be nothing.

We speak of human nature as though it were in some sort of sense superior to nature in general, which in fact it is. One part of nature may be higher than another according to human conception, for all nature is not the same in every particular. We have inorganic nature, that is nature in which only certain forms of force are seen in operation ; then we have vegetable, animal, and the last, the highest of all, human nature, in which forces are displayed not seen in any other part of nature. All these phenomena, however, are natural. The profound thought of Plato, Aristotle and Bacon, or the mighty flights of genius manifested in the productions of Homer, Horace, Virgil, Dante, Milton or Shakespeare, are as natural as the growth of a plant, the rolling of a stone, the descent of the dew, or the evolution of a world.

The question is frequently asked, What do we know of nature ? Our reply is that all we do know is of nature. The attempt, therefore, that is often made to prove man ignorant of nature is really an endeavour to prove him ignorant of everything, inasmuch, as there is nothing else of which he can possibly have any knowledge. That our knowledge of nature is at present small we do not deny, but it is large compared with what it was, and no doubt it will be larger still in the future if we only devote proper time to the manifold lessons which she is always presenting to earnest students. Instead of boasting of our superabundance of knowledge, we rather lament our ignorance, but it is of that which can be known, not of that which is to us un-



knowable, and about which it is useless to enquire and idle to speculate. With us the natural is the field of the knowable and in this field we are content to work. So far as we have gone we are certain of the road that we are travelling, we walk on solid ground, and we have no fear for the future. We may err in our interpretations of some of the facts of the universe, but we feel assured from past experience that further investigations will rectify such errors, and even while they remain they are slight and trivial and such as are common to fallible man. If we leave this road of Nature it can but be to wander in quagmires, surrounded by dense fogs, with no light to guide us except a will-o' the-wisp.

Dr. McCosh has said, "In this world there is a set of objects and agencies which constitute a system or cosmos, which may have relations to regions beyond [beyond what?] but is all the while a self-contained sphere with a space around it. . . . This system we call nature." But this very system constitutes all we know, not possessing faculties that can take us any further. Such a system being nature, the laws in operation in it are natural laws, and the forces by which everything is brought to pass are natural forces. Our knowledge is bounded by these, and from them receives its limitation. To talk, therefore, regarding that which lies beyond—if even it were possible to conceive of a beyond—must be mere speculation, nothing more.

It is sometimes objected against the position here affirmed, that upon the principle that nature is everything and that whatever is done must be accomplished by natural powers and forces, no law of nature can be broken, for that would imply that nature can act against herself. Now the error of this objection is in supposing that because the totality of all things is nature therefore there can be no conflict in the various parts. Nature as a whole cannot of course be altered, but one portion may and does come into conflict with another. A man may use his physical powers, which are of course natural, to do that which produces injury on his bodily organisation, which is also quite natural, and we say he has broken a law of nature. We do not,

however, mean that he has done anything which nature did not give him the power to do, but that he has used his power to a disadvantage to himself, and it may be to others. The expression, therefore, is relative not absolute.

It is further objected that as there are certain acts which we are in the habit of speaking of as being unnatural, how can anything be unnatural if nature includes everything? For instance, we say of a man who treats those of his own kith and kin cruelly, that he acts unnaturally, and we designate certain crimes as unnatural offences. But we do not mean by such phraseology that these acts are *super* natural but *infra* natural, that is, they are not higher, but lower than nature. Further, a moment's reflection will show that by the use of these terms we do not intend to convey the idea, that anything has been done outside of nature as a whole, for the very powers employed are natural and the acts are no less so. What is meant is that a person who so acts has pursued a course of conduct which is not in harmony with our exalted conception of the sphere in nature to which he belongs. Measured by ordinary standards one part of nature is higher than another. Man's sphere is the highest of all that we are acquainted with, he has intellect in a far superior degree than any other animal, and he has evolved a moral law by which he is supposed to regulate his conduct. Now, if instead of conforming to the laws of his own being he descends to a lower platform and acts in a way that is utterly out of harmony with his exalted functions, we say that he is unnatural, meaning thereby that he is descending to a lower sphere in nature than that which we have a right to expect him to occupy. The act that we call unnatural in him would probably be natural enough in a lower animal, and therefore cannot be outside nature, but is only out of accord with the requirements of that part of nature in which he plays his part. There is evidently a legitimate function for every passion and desire of which man finds himself possessed, and the proper use of these, according to the purpose of nature, we call natural; while to divert them from their proper object or end we say is unnatural. A man

has an appetite for food which is natural, but he can starve himself to death, which, in a sense, is natural too, and yet in another sense we should say it was unnatural, because it was a violation of an instinct common to us all. Suppose a starving man to be destitute of food, and his own child, who has plenty, refuses that aid to his parent that would save life, we should regard such a son as an unnatural monster, not meaning thereby that he had done anything that nature did not furnish the means of doing, but that he had not acted according to the higher laws of his nature which appertain to all beings moving in his sphere. All, therefore, that can be done, said, or thought, is and must be natural in the widest sense of that term. Man's beginnings were in nature; his every act is natural, his thoughts are natural, and in the end the great universe will fold him in her embrace, close his eyes in death, and furnish in her own bosom his last and final resting-place. Beyond her he cannot go. She was his cradle, and will be his grave; while between the two she furnishes the stage on which he plays his every part. And more, she has made him, the actor, to play the part. Nature is one and indivisible. She had no beginning, and can have no end. She is the All-in-all. Combined in her are the One and the Many which so perplexed the philosophers of ancient times.

*The Grandeur and Potency of Nature.*—The grandeur of Nature must be obvious to all who reflect on its many beauties. The massive rocks, the golden sunset, the glowing stars, the rolling waves, the rippling brook, the grassy mead, the trees with their luxuriant foliage, and the flowers of every variety of hue, which have entranced and charmed mankind during all ages, are but the grand treasures and sights of Nature. The poet who has revelled in these natural gems, painting them in words which have stirred the emotions to their lowest and made the objects themselves stand out in clear outline conspicuous to the reader, fascinating and enrapturing his mental vision, is the poet of Nature, who finds in the external universe food for his highest powers. Where is there a topic



more grand and ennobling? Even that higher development of the poetic genius, which deals, as Shakespeare did, with the thoughts, feelings and passions of men, does but depict another phase of Nature, profounder and more sublime, but Nature still Milton, too, who was the poet of the supernatural so called, has but transferred the passions and impulses of men into another sphere, imaginary, it is true, but copied from the world of fact. For Imagination herself cannot escape beyond the bounds of the natural. It is said that the poet "gives to airy nothings a local habitation and a name;" but his airy nothings are simply copies of real things, and the location he assigns to them is always a natural one. Shakespeare's supernatural characters are but men—men, it may be, with some more exalted powers and some higher attributes than men possess in the world of fact; but they are no less men for that, and the exaltation of their powers is always in the direction of Nature. The philosopher whose profound thought shall live while humanity remains on the earth, making him who gave birth to such lofty ideas what is called immortal, never goes beyond Nature in his deepest penetration into the secret springs of the universe and of man.

Nature extends beyond all we can conceive of. Her glory is the glory of the great Whole, her power the potency of the Infinite. The highest attributes which we can imagine are hers, for from her we borrowed our ideas of what she is, or what her possibilities are. Our thoughts are in Nature and of Nature. Our ideas are pictures of her revelations to the mind of man, our sublimest conceptions are but reproductions in mental visions of her doings before our eyes. She is the great mother of us all; on her breast we repose during life, and in her arms we are enfolded in death.

Now, what is our chief business in relation to the universe of things? It is to learn all we can in regard to the great laws and mighty forces operating around us and in us. There must ever remain a field for the exercise of our faculties in such inquiries, for Nature is unlimited in her resources, as she is in her potency and extent.

“No man, however keen his eye,  
Can into Nature's deepest secrets pry.”

So said an old poet, and no doubt he was right. Nature's deepest secrets defy all investigation, for they extend to the depths and heights of the Infinite. But that does not alter the fact that our sole business here is to learn all we can. Nature's secrets are not always easily obtained. They are not to be had for the mere asking, as Christian mercies are said to come. Energetic research alone can draw them from her bosom—research often accompanied with toil, pain and sorrow.

The scientific discoveries of this age show what can be done in the way of obtaining knowledge of the powers and forces of the universe. Those who will cast their thoughts back to the commencement of the present century, and then reflect what has been accomplished since that time, cannot help being startled at the contrast between things as they then were and as they now exist. It is not necessary to enter into detail here regarding the tremendous onward movement that discovery and investigation have made within that period. In these days of cheap popular literature almost every person is acquainted with the facts. The wonder to us is, how our fathers progressed at all in the absence of discoveries which we deem essential to every-day life. Railways, gas, the telegraph, the telephone, photography, and many other such advantages, have all come into use during the present century. Had any man a hundred years ago predicted the state of things existing to-day, he would have been considered a fit subject for a lunatic asylum. Had such results been imagined they would have been deemed supernatural. Nature has thus far disclosed the great events which for ages had lain hidden in her arcana. This she has done in obedience to patient and persistent investigation on the part of a noble and hard-working band of men—the devotees of science.

The discoveries already made are an indication of what is yet to come. From what has been we may judge of what may be. Earnest men are still pursuing their patient investigations into Nature. They study her laws, they question her phenomena,



they interrogate her doings, and they never go unrewarded for their toil and their pains. Almost every day something new is brought to view which shall tend to lighten the load of human woe and sorrow, and bring about harmony among mankind.

The laws of Nature are our guide in life, and the grandeur of Nature is our inspiration. The forces of the universe we know only in their manifestations; but that is sufficient—more we need not. It was a wise saying of the great German philosopher, Goethe: "Man is not born to solve the problems of existence; but he must nevertheless attempt it in order that he may know how to keep within the bounds of the knowable." We should aim, therefore, to be consistent students of Nature in all her marvellous manifestations. We are, as Bacon says, ministers and interpreters of Nature; farther than that we have no desire to go. In trees and stars and suns and flowers, in the solid earth and the expansive sea, in the growing plants and moving animals, and, above all, in the great mind of man, we find our sole delight, our simple care, and the basis of all our hopes for the world and all it contains.

*The Supernatural.*—There has been a large number of books written on this subject, some of them by men of eminence in their respective departments of thought; and yet the matter is still left in a state of obscurity. It has, of course, been dealt with from very different standpoints, and therefore exceedingly conflicting arguments have been brought to bear upon it. Two able American writers, Dr. Bushnell and Dr. McCosh, have discussed it with considerable learning and some thought, in books which are widely read and often appealed to both in the pulpit and through the press; but one has always to put down these volumes with a great degree of dissatisfaction, since nothing like clear definition is to be found in their pages. In England the subject has been made the theme of several large works, of hundreds of magazine articles, and of thousands of pulpit discourses; and by this time, therefore, some clear idea ought to be obtained as to the differentiation between these two spheres, if there are

two ; but the whole subject is still enveloped in the densest darkness. There must be some cause for this, and the cause, probably, is not far to seek. The natural we know ; but the supernatural, what is that ? Of course, as its name implies, it is something higher than nature—something above nature. But, if there is a sphere higher than nature, and yet often breaking through nature, nature itself must be limited by something, and the question that at once arises is, By what is such limitation fixed, and what is the boundary line which marks it off and separates it from the supernatural ? And this is just what no two writers seem to be agreed upon. But, further, supposing such a line to be discovered and to be well known, so that no difficulty could arise in pointing it out, a still more difficult problem presents itself for solution—namely, how man, who is a part of nature, and able only to come into contact with nature, can push his knowledge into that other sphere which, being non-natural, cannot be at all accessible to a natural being ? If the supernatural region be synonymous with the unknowable, it clearly cannot concern us, simply because we have no faculties with which to cognise it, and no powers capable of penetrating into its profound depths. In this case, as far as we are concerned, there is practically no supernatural, for none can operate on that sphere in which man lives and moves and displays his varied and in some respects very marvellous powers. Professor Huxley thinks that every new discovery in science pushes the supernatural further away from us by enlarging the boundary of human knowledge of nature.

According to many writers, the spiritual is the supernatural, because it is not under the control of natural law. But why ? If man be partly a spiritual being, why should not natural law extend into the sphere of his spiritual nature ? Indeed, an able writer on the Christian side, whose work has been enthusiastically received by all religious denominations—Professor Drummond—has maintained this position, the very title of his book stating the whole case : “ Natural Law in the Spiritual World.” The great German philosopher, Kant, calls nature the realm of sensible phenomena, conditioned by space, and speaks of an-

other sphere as a world above space, depleted of sense, and free from natural law, and therefore supersensible and supernatural. But this is to make the supernatural spaceless and timeless—in fact, a mere negation of everything, and therefore nothing. Now, the only light in which we can look at this subject, with a view to obtain anything like clear and correct views, is that of modern science. By her the boundary of our knowledge has been greatly enlarged, and through her discoveries we have been enabled to obtain more sound information regarding the laws of the universe than it was possible for our fathers, with the limited means at their disposal, to possess. Looking at the universe by which we are surrounded, and of which we ourselves form a part, we see law in operation everywhere, and this law we call natural law.

If there be a sphere where the supernatural plays a part and exercises any control, it must clearly be in some remote region, of which we have, and can have, no positive knowledge ; and the forces in operation must be other than those with which we are conversant upon this earth. Science cannot recognise the supernatural, because she has no instruments which she can bring to bear upon, and no means at her disposal for, its investigation. She leaves to the theologian all useless speculations regarding such a region, contenting herself with reminding him that he is, in all such discussions, travelling outside the domain of facts into a province which should be left to poets and dreamers, and which belongs solely to the imagination. All law is and must be natural law, from a scientific standpoint, because we can have access to nature, and to nature only. It is impossible to get beyond her domain, even in imagination.

The supernatural, if it exists, must reveal itself through nature, for in no other way can it reach us so as to produce any impression upon the human mind. But, if it come through nature, then how can it be distinguished from the phenomena of nature ? It will be quite impossible to differentiate between them. We are quite precluded from saying, Nature could not do this, and is unable to do that. No man can fix a limit to the possibilities of



power in nature. She has already done a thousand things which our forefathers would have declared impossible, and she will doubtless in the future, under further discoveries and advances in science, do much more which will look impossible to us. Whatever, therefore, comes through nature must be natural, for the very reason that it comes to us in that way. And the business of science is to interpret it in the light of natural law. Even if she should prove herself incompetent to the task, it would only show that some phenomena had been witnessed which had for a time baffled explanations, not that anything supernatural had occurred. And the business of science would be to at once direct itself to the new class of facts, with a view to finding the key with which to open the lock and disclose the secret of the power by which they were produced.

*What is the Supernatural?*—According to Dr. Bushnell, "That is supernatural, whatever it be, that is not in the chain of natural cause and effect, or which acts on the chain of cause and effect in nature without the chain." But, it may fairly be asked, is there any such cause, and if so, where? Is not every link in the chain that we see or can conceive of natural? Moreover, were there any other link or chain, how could we recognise it or distinguish it from nature? True, Dr. Bushnell attempts to explain his meaning, and in so doing he practically gets rid of the supernatural altogether. He says: "If the processes, combinations, and results of our system of nature are interrupted or varied by the action of God, or angels, or men, so as to bring to pass that which would not come to pass by its own internal action under the mere law of cause and effect, such variations are in like manner supernatural." Now this reasoning is based upon the supposition that things are brought about by some power higher than the ordinary law of cause and effect. If this be meant to be taken absolutely, then we most emphatically deny it. But if, as it would seem, Dr. Bushnell simply means cause and effect in external nature apart from intelligent beings, that is to take far too limited a view of

the law. For man himself is as much a creature of law as a tree or a star, and all he does is accomplished by, not outside the law of cause and effect. But were it otherwise, as this writer appears to suppose, then man's actions are all supernatural, which is virtually giving up the supernatural altogether, in the sense in which it is usually understood. Definitions of the supernatural are given by the Duke of Argyle and Dr. McCosh that do not differ greatly from that offered by Dr. Bushnell. Dr. McCosh speaks of even miracles as not being against nature in any other sense than that in which one natural agent may be used against another, as water may be employed to counteract fire, which is, in fact, to bring the supernatural into nature, and to obliterate all distinction between them.

It is said that there are exceptional cases in which the supernatural has broken through the natural, and thus become objects of sense in the same way as the rising and setting of the sun, the ebb and flow of the tides, or any other natural phenomena, and that these must be judged of by the ordinary laws of evidence. The reply to this, however, is that the alleged supernatural, if it shows itself in its manifestations to man, must either come through nature or in some other way. But there is no other way known to us, for man cannot get on the outside of nature even in thought. The most extravagant flights of imagination that we find, either in poetry or in the products of religious ecstasy, are always shapen in natural moulds, either as a whole or, what is more general, in their parts. No image formed in the human mind can possibly be other than natural, if not in its entirety, at least in the component parts of which it is made up. We can conceive of a centaur, though no such thing ever existed, or of a mermaid, though no person has ever seen one, these being creatures purely of the imagination. They are compound things, each part of which has been seen a hundred times, and are formed by blending a portion of one animal with a part of another, thus making an image which on the whole is unnatural, but the parts of which are taken from nature. Men speak of angels, but either they have no idea at all in their minds



as to what they are speaking of, and merely use a meaningless word, or else they think of a human being with the addition of wings or some other abnormal appendage. It is a noteworthy fact that those much-talked-of angelic appearances recorded in the Bible are really descriptions of men. Its God is pictured in a human form, and the Holy Ghost assumes the shape of a dove. Christianity itself is represented as being a supernatural revelation, yet every one of its doctrines came through a natural medium. The writers who penned the various books of the Bible were men, and we have but their bare assertions that what they taught had any other than a natural origin. Even if their honesty be proved unimpeachable, there still arises the question as to whether they might not have been deceived. At all events, there is no manifestation of the supernatural. All the revelations coming through nature. And in that very transmission they must have become so much blended with the purely natural that it would be impossible to distinguish the one from the other. All this shows that we have no faculties by which the supposed supernatural can be as much as imagined in our minds. The moment that we fancy we think of it, we borrow our ideas from Nature. so that even in imagination we cannot and do not transcend her boundaries. The fact is, man cannot travel beyond the natural, he having no experience of anything outside or apart from its domain. To assert that the so-called supernatural is the cause of the natural is to allege that which is the very reverse of what we know to be fact. If we trace what is termed the supernatural to its origin, we shall find it end in nature. This may appear paradoxical, but it is nevertheless true.

Mr. Moncure D. Conway very aptly says in his "Lessons for the Day :—" "Supernature is a disjointed dream of nature as seen by science. It is the morning vision of Art; the artist realises that more ideal world with which nature is in labour. Knowledge, Art, Poetry, enter the ideal kingdom by the door; Superstition tries to scramble over the walls, and gets maimed in the attempt. The supernaturalist believes that one day an iron axe swam on the river Jordan; but at the command of knowledge millions of tons of iron are swimming to-day on many waters.

He says certain jars of water flushed to wine ; but by culture the rains of heaven falling on a thousand hills are turned to wine. We want no supernature. That is mere calumny on nature, and caricature of the best in it. What we need is harmony with nature,—harmony with its laws that we may have health : sympathy with its beauty that we may be pure ; obedience to its conditions, that we may command its forces and inspire them with human purpose. In nature is the constancy which is our dependence and our development ; in it the potentiality Reason, which is our only source of Wisdom ; in it the Love which attends the loving from the cradle to the grave. Ignorance can see it only as chaos in one age, accursed in another ; superstition can find but terror in its laws, and hope only in their fancied overthrow by arbitrary thaumaturgy of omnipotence ; but wherever the mind of man flowers, nature flowers in response, filling every sense with beauty, giving mind and heart their deeper satisfaction, steadily incarnating every pure ideal."

"It is often said that mankind are fond of the marvellous ; but it is equally true that all men reverence the laws of nature. Man's faith in nature has always accompanied his faith in supernature. They even whom nature daily slays still trust in her. Their supernaturalism is never anti-natural. Miracles may have been invented which outrage nature ; but they have not taken high place in human credence. I believe it would be found, on investigation, that in all the miracles which have been accepted as evidences of religion, certainly all that have been cherished by any race, there is a mixture of the natural and supernatural. Elijah restores the child to life by stretching his body upon it ; room was thereby left to the popular imagination to conceive of some natural force generated by such contact. When Christ cures a man's blind eyes, or Vespasian heals a wounded arm, both were said to have done it by means of spittle ; so leave was given the mind to imagine some unexplained medicinal virtue in that application. The means used are sometimes absurdly inadequate ; effects the most astounding are attributed to a tone of voice, a form of words, a touch. But these were believed to be part natural forces."

*Belief and Knowledge.*—There is a marked distinction to be observed between belief and knowledge. We may, and do, have faith in that of which we have no real or actual knowledge, for we are compelled to exercise such faith in everyday life upon numerous topics. The point to be remembered is that, if we are judicial or rational, we shall be careful that our belief is not opposed to knowledge. We may, and do, believe in countries which we have never seen; in the existence of persons with whom we have never come into contact, and of countless things of which we have had no actual experience; but if we are wise we shall always be on our guard against taking for granted that which is highly improbable, to say nothing of the impossible. If a man asserted that one thing was in two places at the same time, we should not stop to ask for the evidence that he had to produce, because no amount of evidence could serve to substantiate as a truth that which we knew by the very nature of things to be impossible. Testimony is highly valuable of course, but there are many subjects which no amount of evidence could prove, simply because the matter is of such a nature as not to admit of proof. Suppose, for instance, someone had said that he had visited a country where two and two made five, we should at once draw the inference that either the man stated what was not true, or else that he attached a different meaning to the words employed than that which we are in the habit of giving to them. A man tells us that he has seen a miracle, and that, therefore, he knows from experience that the Supernatural does exist, and he brings a dozen persons to verify his statement. What are we to do in such a case? A moment's reflection may show that the testimony is unimpeachable, while the conclusion is perfectly erroneous. The event which he describes may have happened, but how is it to be proved to be a miracle? The forces in operation in its production may be to him unknown, he may never have seen them in operation before, indeed they may be new to all mankind, but still his evidence could simply vouch for the fact; and the cause must be a matter for enquiry. The thing no doubt happened in nature, for no experience can extend beyond that, and the



assertion that the forces producing it were supernatural is a gratuitous one, and not only not supported by the laws of evidence, but utterly opposed to everything that we know. Belief should have a rational basis or it is wild and chimerical. Faith is good in its place, but it must always be confined within the sphere of knowledge. A man can have faith in that which he never saw and perhaps never will see ; to this we do not object, but the thing in which he has faith must be a possible one or his faith is misplaced, and he himself deluded. Now, faith in the Supernatural is an unreasoning faith, pre-supposing a knowledge which we do not and cannot possess, since a knowledge of that which lies beyond nature is an impossibility. The sphere of faith is legitimate enough, but it is not a sphere distinct from that of knowledge, but one which arises out of it and should never go beyond it. We know certain things and believe others, but the latter are always more or less connected with the former, Faith in the order of nature is reasonable, because it is based on experience ; faith in the supernatural is absurd because it is opposed to all possible knowledge, not only to the knowledge that we have, but to all that it is in any way possible for us to have.

Of course there is a region in which speculation may be tolerated, but it must be tolerated as speculation, nothing more. The misfortune is that those, as a rule, who indulge in speculation make their theories do duty as facts. They not only invest their ideas with the importance of legitimate deductions from facts, but give to them the value of the facts themselves. It is against this that we protest. When men talk about matters of which no one can know anything, they may be harmless enough as dreamers, but when they endeavour to bend men of reason and thought to their way of thinking, resorting sometimes even to persecution to promulgate their idle whims, then they are dangerous and can no longer be regarded with impunity. Society has to suffer for their errors ; and it is the duty of every member of that society to lift up his or her voice against either their wilful perversion of truth, or their innocent misapprehension of

facts. Such, as a rule, are the orthodox believers in the supernatural, and the popular advocates of speculative views on religion.

We may ask, and it is a very legitimate question, What effect has it had on the world to substitute reckless belief for knowledge and to indulge in idle speculation regarding the Supernatural? To say the least of it, men's minds have thereby been diverted from the real business of life, their attention has been taken from the things we know, and the study of which would prove serviceable to us, to occupy their mental powers upon matters of which no knowledge is to be attained. To say such a course is a waste of time would be to treat the matter far too lightly. It is much more than that. It has led to incorrect thinking, to loose reasoning, to the drawing of false conclusions, and to the substitution of imagination for reality. Further, the fostering of groundless and fanatical theological beliefs has not only caused almost endless persecutions, but it has proved a prolific cause of insanity. In the *Philadelphia Times and Register* of Sept. 14 of last year (1889), Dr. Joseph Jones, Professor of Clinical Medicine in the Tulane University, wrote thus:—"The contemplation of certain hypotheses and dogmas, held and vehemently urged from the pulpit, by some religious sects, have, without doubt, produced great excitement and alarm in the minds of persons of excitable and unstable nervous organisation. The burning eloquence and moral pictures of the religious enthusiast and fanatic, and the horrible revelations of the melancholy and sinister imagination of Dante, have converted the souls of the unwary and timid into the abodes of terror and alarm. Certain dogmas, often represented and illustrated by this fiery language, and by the subtle power of the painter's brush, as the fires and tortures of a burning hell, a veritable lake of fire, where fiery billows eternally wrap the bodies and souls of the damned, and whose shores forever resound with the piercing, truly hopeless shrieks of those inhabitants of this earth who have failed to enter heaven on account of the commission of personal sins; a veritable living devil, ever on the alert to seduce and damn the



souls of men, women, and children, and drag the unwary down to everlasting confusion and suffering in the bottomless pit—the *unpardonable sin*—have for centuries terrified the weak and timid devotees of certain phases of religious belief into hopeless insanity. The violent exercises of certain religious sects, during the performance of *so-called* religious exercises, such as shouting, hopping, jumping, dancing, *demoniacal* ‘*holy*’ laughing, often induce epileptic seizures, and inaugurate such congestion and exhaustion of the nervous structures as induce religious melancholy and end in hopeless insanity. The hallucinations which, in the experience of the Professor, exercise the greatest influence on the victims of insanity are: 1. The firm belief by the victim that he is the slave and the abject subject of the devil. To all remonstrances the victim replies that he must obey his master, the devil. I have observed and treated cases where the victim of religious melancholy and hallucination has for days and weeks refused all food because his master the devil commanded him not to eat. In some cases, every agent and every effort to induce the patient to take food have failed, and death has resulted from starvation. 2. The commission of the unpardonable sin. 3. The eternal damnation of the human soul: lost, lost, lost for ever.”

The lesson from experience is that theological beliefs, when sincerely and fanatically entertained, are manifested more or less in conduct. It is, therefore, our duty to inculcate more reliance upon practical knowledge and less dependence upon fanciful beliefs. It is well known that “knowledge is power,” to whose magic influence the world is indebted for its progress, enabling as it does those who possess and utilise it to fight the more earnestly, and with a better prospect of winning, the great battle of life.

*Religion: Natural and Supernatural.*—Natural religion is based on love, while so-called Supernatural religion is based on fear. Many persons object to the use of the term religion, and no doubt the objection would be a good one if that word retained its old orthodox associations. There is, however, a

rapidly-growing tendency to employ the word in its etymological and ethical meaning rather than in its alleged supernatural sense. Accepting religion as ethical unity, established to promote the welfare of mankind on earth, its proper basis is enlightened benevolence. This great human instinct is not dependent upon any form of supernaturalism for its manifestation ; its activity is evoked by a desire to alleviate the sufferings of the afflicted, and to enhance the happiness of the unfortunate. The hope of securing a fair opportunity for the exercise of this true benevolence prompts the lover of nature to aim at correcting every cherished error by the substitution of a true knowledge of the natural for the old doubtful speculations as to the Supernatural. "The error," remarks a popular writer, "of the supernatural religions is apparent, inasmuch as they possess only artificial life, and, deprived of this, they soon succumb and perish. Their buttresses and supports have been the despotism of princes and the fraud and chicanery of priests. The savage Gauls, when they entered the Senate, were awe-struck at the majesty which stood upon the brows of the venerable Senators. One of the barbarians, however, ventured quietly to stroke the beard of one of the Fathers of his country. The aged representative of Old Rome for an instant forgot his dignity, and he pushed the intruder violently from him. The spell was broken, and the swords of the savages drank the life-blood of the Conscript Fathers. So has it been with many of the religions. So long as men were awe-stricken at their mysteries, so long were they the victims of priestcraft. When, however, men dared to examine for themselves, when they laid their hands on the veil it was rent from top to bottom, and the inner chamber, the *sanctum sanctorum*, was found to contain little else than a mere anthropomorphic image."

History plainly teaches that, when Supernatural religion has been aught more than a system of mere belief and profession, it has conduced to wrong action. The records of mankind furnish ample proof of this. Whether it be Pagans with their deities, Jews with their Jehovah, or Christians with their Trinity, all such theologisms have brought forth cruelty, oppres-

sion and intolerance. Truth, virtue, and love are the three elements which should go towards the foundation of Natural religion. They formed a humanitarian religion in the case of Buddhism ; they form the basis of the great religious humanitarianism of Auguste Comte ; they, with the great science of man's true education and enlightened benevolence, as promulgated by that great philanthropist, Robert Owen, formed what probably will be ultimately accepted as a practical religion of daily life. The love insisted upon by Natural religion is, moreover, active love. It does not reach to the clouds, or attempt to penetrate behind the veil of Nature into the region of the unknown and unknowable, but it aims only at instructing and inspiring human nature, so that there may be perfect harmony between that and external nature, and absolute peace, concord, and kindness between man and man. It is not anti-Christian, in so far as the Christian believer remains true to the lessons of love, of mercy, of justice, and of well-doing.

The Supernaturalist talks of Jesus as though he had more than human love for man, and a superhuman desire to effect his welfare. The Naturalist, instead of this, maintains that the same high and lofty feeling of philanthropy, of brotherly love, beats in every human bosom, and needs only wise and patient cultivation to bring forth golden fruit. Natural religion declares that there can be no grander impulse, no loftier, more animating incentive, than an honest, steadfast desire to benefit the whole human race. This is also the principle of Secularism—that of active, practical love ; of affection manifesting itself in benevolence, and earnest, kind efforts for the welfare of man, woman and child.

Among the first indications we find in human history of the supernatural feeling is fetichism—the worshipping of trees, rocks, animals, etc. If, however, fetichism were only such as is here described, it would be Naturalism, not Supernaturalism, inas-much as a tree, a stone, an animal, a fish, or a bird, is each a something pertaining to Nature. Such worship, however, was given, primarily, not to the tree, etc., but to an imaginary something supposed to be latent or hidden in the perceptible object



adored. In this manner there gradually grew up among primæval men the notion of a non-natural—that is, a Supernatural—world, a world of spirits, of beings which lay, as it were, at the back of all phenomena.

Religion, to be acceptable to the intellects of the present age, must be recognised in its truest sense—as a binding system between man and man—as being based on Nature, from whose prolific source the highest thoughts, the purest conceptions, and the loftiest inspiration are derived. Tell us not that the Natural is impotent to kindle within us the warmest rapture of enthusiasm. Contemplate, for instance, the setting of the sun, and may we not exclaim: “How glorious, how radiant with magnificence, yon setting sun, pouring its floods of golden light o’er half the world! The solid earth’s proud mountain tops are crowned! the lowly vales, with cities, hamlets, lonely cots, rejoice in chastened splendour. The ocean’s mighty mass is turned to liquid fire; above, the sky is bathed in brightness, and the clouds are melting into molten gold. Who has not hailed the vision and confessed its glory until the burning of these sunset fires has kindled flames of rapture within them?”

Oh! man, why dost thou wander seeking peace from some far-off and unknown God, refusing Nature’s loving sympathy? Oh! listen, whoe’er thou art, to her voice, and hearken to her language, ’tis fraught with holiest wisdom from the fount of truth; listen to the soft whispers from the vernal breeze, to the gushing of the fountain, to the wind’s low sighing or the ocean’s melody, and thou wilt know in thy mind’s depths a sweet, a holy, deep communing far other than thou yet hast known, with man or other Gods. Wouldst thou worship, turn thee oft at morn, at noon, at stilly eve—at the sunset hour, to the spacious temple of the universe, and in thy melting sadness or thy loving gladness revel in the nature within thee and without. Art thou stricken, and in thy bitterness art weeping? All nature will look on thee lovingly, and a smile shall chase away thy spirit’s gloom, and thou shalt feel a sympathy that shall soothingly stay the tide of thy agony. Art thou glad? Thy spirits buoyant, thou shalt feel a thrilling rapture blending with thy spirits’

gladness, and from the hidden depths of Nature thou shalt hear a sound of harmony exquisitely beautiful, attuned to thine own melody.

Knowest thou not, oh man, that Nature seeks to win thy affections by her charms, that she may feed thee with beauty and with knowledge from the unfathomable stores of the Infinite, that thou mayest read in thine own self the symbols of her wondrous mysteries? As thou gazest on the mystery of the dread and trackless depths of boundless space, thronged with its myriad hosts of living wandering fires, oh! readest thou not the symbol—the boundless intellect of man—wherein thou art linked in fellowship with the Infinite? As thou gazest on the earth-encircling ocean as its bounding waves joyously ride foaming and flashing with the rising breeze, or as thou gazest 'neath the deep blue wave, where finny life, in playful mood, is sporting over wealth untold of dazzling pearls, gems and gold, the spoils of ages and the wrecks of thousand years, oh! readest thou not the symbol within thee again—the all-embracing bond of human brotherhood, the high transcendent worth of pure affection, the priceless of love?

As thou gazest on the vast concave—the sky of richest azure, shading sweetly down to softest sapphire—dost thou not *feel* that there is purity? And as the sapphire sky is o'erspread with gold, and floods of sunset glory shed their living lustre o'er earth and ocean, e'en where mortal tread hath marked no pathway, but where life, loveliness and intelligence rejoice, oh! hast thou not felt in that vesper hour the pensive calm thrill through all thy pulses, and thy spirit fill with a chastened holy stillness? Then, as a strength is given thee from the Mighty Infinite, reciprocating in thy deep emotion, thou hast offered to Nature as a grateful offering, the incense of thy spirit on the altar of thy heart. In such a moment would not thy inmost nature all revolt against the doctrine of our "inborn sin" that all within thee is depraved? All nature pleads the sacredness of human nature, and all together cry, "Holy, holy, holy is the tabernacle of a man."