

252.6 Mol

THE LIFE AND DEATH OF GARFIELD

A DISCOURSE
BEFORE THE SOUTH PLACE RELIGIOUS SOCIETY,

SEPTEMBER 25, 1881,

BY

MONCURE D. CONWAY.

LONDON :

11, SOUTH PLACE, FINSBURY.

PRICE TWOPENCE.

CHURCH & DWIGHT

FREDERIC G. HICKSON & Co.
257, HIGH HOLBORN,
LONDON, W.C.

THE NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

ASTOR LENOX AND TILDEN FOUNDATIONS

THE LIFE AND DEATH OF GARFIELD.

HOW good-hearted is this much abused old world of ours—this great world of men, women and children! Theologians have pronounced it depraved. Even poets have called it hard and unfeeling; as one wrote—

“Man’s inhumanity to man
Makes countless thousands mourn.”

Yet, even in his indictment, the poet suggests the fundamental goodness of human nature, since he calls its reverse ‘inhumanity.’ Were human nature bad, to be humane would be also bad; the more humanity, the more depravity. The race records in its language the simple verdict on itself, that to be human is to be good-hearted; the evil heart is inhuman. Really it is man’s ignorance of man that makes countless thousands mourn. The great world moves on its daily round of toils and joys, self-centred as its planet, and heeds little, because it sees little, the agonies of those crushed beneath its wheels. But when it does see such, when its unheeding rush and roar is arrested by some salient tragedy; when its innumerable eyes are fixed upon a deed in which all the evil powers of nature are seen

venting their triumphant cruelty upon innocence and excellence ; then the human race has but one heart, purely good ; under it the depraved is shown to be not man, but monster ; the excellent is immortalised.

The great crime against humanity, consummated in the death of the President, has moved the heart of humanity. The Court in mourning reflects a sorrow felt in every cottage and hall. The money-changers turn from their speculations to bow their heads before a poor man carried to his grave four thousand miles away. 'Tis a tragedy all can comprehend. There have been cases where crowned assassins of men and women have felt in their own hearts the weapon they had used against others. Though it be deplorable that any man of the people should degrade himself to the foul weapon of tyrants, we must sometimes say that, if despots dislike assassination, they should avoid setting the example. But in this case there is nothing to confuse the judgment of mankind. The eye of the world is brought face to face with an infrahuman spirit acting through forces of the human form, and sees beside the fallen man the real Satan with which all real saviours have to measure their strength.

The universal cry of horror, sympathy, indignation, is really a protest of the human heart against the cruelties of brute nature, and, however unconsciously, brands the creeds that deify the destructive powers of

nature. "Vengeance is mine," says the Lord of the creeds; "Vengeance is mine," says the assassin of the President. How does the reciter of the creeds like deified vengeance when mirrored in the crime of a vindictive man? Their real faith is rather that of the poet—

"A loving worm within its sod
Were diviner than a loveless God
Amid His worlds."

Man cannot worship the ancient images of elemental force. Those old dogmas have left phrases upon our lips about the inscrutable dispensations of Providence; but they have no root in the millions of hearts that now rise in grief and wrath against a great wrong and calamity.

The ancient sacerdotal theology regarded calamities of this kind, falling upon eminent men or families, as the carrying out of fatal decrees of the gods. The victims might be quite innocent, but they had to suffer vicariously for the offence of some remote ancestor. Nor was this notion merely 'pagan.' In Christian theology, all pain and death are the doom of ancestral sin, and there are instances in the Bible where Jehovah strikes the innocent for the sin of the guilty (Exod. xi., 2 Sam. xii.), just as the house of Atreus is divinely hunted down for a remote ancestral offence.

That pitiful providence (if we may so speak of a

phantasy of the primitive brain) measuring its strength against the innocence unsuspecting its malice,—too weak to punish justly, strong only in cruelty, powerless to protect,—is a providence no longer believed in. We only know that it was once believed in, by a bequest of cant phrases, which, if they meant anything to-day, would mean that the murderer Guiteau belongs to the divine administration. Of course, these dogmatic anachronisms will survive for a long time yet, on paper, and in conventional rites and forms. A great many interests will see to that. They are not amenable to reason, because not products of reason. In a sense, therefore, they are unanswerable. The Prince of Wales was very ill. The churches and chapels all prayed for him, and he recovered. It was claimed as an answer to prayer. The President lay long in agony and peril, which even his assassin pitied. The churches and chapels of a hundred millions of Christians, the very synagogues of Palestine, prayed for his recovery. He died. (The whole human world, with one voice, supplicated its God for this one life ; and he who could raise his personal friends out of their graves in Palestine would not answer the prayer of all mankind in behalf of his devout worshipper in America !) This, of course, is said to be a mysterious dispensation of God. Whatever the event, Theology is thus unassailable. Common-sense may ask whether God cares

more for Prince than for President ; whether typhoid fevers and assassins are heavenly ministers, and, if so, whether physicians should resist the one or judges sentence the other. But common-sense will ask in vain. Theology will go on with its days of thanksgiving or of humiliation, because its appeal now is to those who do not think, nor inquire (whether from incompetence or fear) ; and who so cannot realise that their creeds are the stultification of their true hearts and sincerest lives.

But let us be of good cheer ! Amid these hereditary euphemisms about evil, now and then the real heart of mankind speaks, and we recognise that it does not regard wrong and cruelty as divine in any sense. It has an unsophisticated answer to the widow's cry, " Oh, why am I made to suffer this cruel blow ! " It resents the blow, providential or not. It hates the villainy and the baseness with loathing. It loves mercy and justice. This is the feeling that lies deep down in all—even in those who pay lip-service to a God of Wrath and Vengeance. This is the divinely human sentiment which has been brought out legibly, as if on every man's forehead, by the tragedy at Washington ; and it is a prophecy of the coming of the true son of man. In this passionate sympathy with goodness and horror of evil, lies the hope of man's salvation from all evil.

The heart of humanity is man's true providence. It is that which ever brings good out of evil. It has been my lot to witness, and study, the effect of the dastardly assassination of two of the noblest American Presidents. Many of you will remember the dismay spread by the tidings that Abraham Lincoln, liberator of his country from slavery, had fallen. The bullet that pierced his heart evoked all that was best in the heart of his country and of England. There had been up to that time a large number of persons in this country utterly deceived as to the spirit of slavery, who still sympathised with the lost cause of the south, because they did not recognise that those valiant defenders of slavery were its chief victims. The murderous bullet that slew Lincoln slew that party here. There was also a spirit of mistaken clemency in America, which, respecting a brave foe fallen, was about to make concessions which, it is now seen, might have repaired the evil system that had engendered civil strife. President Lincoln shared that spirit. But his death revealed to the people the irrecoverable nature of slavery, and they extirpated it. So did the providential human heart educe good out of evil. And it will do so again in this case. Already it has done so. This terrible tragedy has not only revealed to the peoples on both sides the Atlantic in how profound a sense they are of one blood—that their

common blood is thicker than the ocean of water that divides them—but it has united the North and the South in America in a feeling that has not before existed between them for two generations. They are gathered to-day in the unity of sorrow around their dead President. The spirit of faction, too, which had raised its head in the North, some of whose venom the murderer had caught, has received its check. And all these benefits following a great crime lay not in that crime at all, but in the good sense and just heart of the people. They represent in a swift and startling way the process which, in slow ways, is always going on. It is that which has thus far civilised the earth. The steady pressure of the good against the evil in the world; the gradual turning of experience into wisdom, the lessons of suffering teaching the laws of well-being, shadows of error pointing to the light of truth—these make the law of human progress and the evolution of a true man upon the earth.

The subject that had been named for to-day's discourse was, "Our life estate." By that I meant that to each man his life is an estate which he inherits; in which he has a life interest; which even for the poorest holds many treasures; an estate necessarily transmitted by each, improved or unimproved, to be the inheritance of others. The tremendous event which has super-

seded that topic, has, beyond its startling voice, a still small voice that may well impress upon us this lesson concerning a man's life estate, and the way it goes on after he has died out of it.

Behold the dead President lying in the Rotunda of the Capitol, where the sympathy of a world surges around him and breaks into tears! From poor and honest parents he received his life estate. It was in a small corner of the world—a lowly estate—but all sound and honest, and large enough to give play to the greatest principles and activities of man's nature. The father came of one of those old English families that crossed the ocean to build a new England where conscience might be free. He was a pioneer of civilisation in the forests of Ohio, and died of a disease caught while defending his fields from a forest fire. The harvest was saved, though the farmer died. The brave mother and her children struggled on, and their courage and energy prevailed. The boy had a strong constitution, a love of work, and a thirst for knowledge. He earned money by driving the mules that drew canal boats. There was nothing noble about that; he was neither proud of it or ashamed of it. It was his lot in life, and he fulfilled its duties. But he aspired to a larger lot. He studied hard. He and his mother laid up money enough for him to go to college. He climbed to his degree; he climbed

beyond it, step by step, without any leaps over difficulties. There was no sleight-of-hand in his culture. He became a scholar, afterwards a College President. As with every healthy young man, his religious sentiment began to develop. The region around him was now populous, even fashionable, and all the great sects were there. This youth selected to take his place among a very humble circle, who called themselves "Disciples of Christ." They have no creed. They are generally believers in the supernatural character of Christ, but refuse to use the word "Trinity," or in any way to bind themselves with any of the hereditary formulas called creeds. This gave them freedom to grow with the mind of their country. They are the youngest of the denominations, founded in 1827, but they have grown fairly well in culture and influence. A telegram in the *London Times* says the funeral to-morrow will be conducted by the late President's chaplain. But the President never had any chaplain. Such an office does not exist; and, if it did, the late President would have abhorred it. He used to gather the students of his college in the chapel, and lecture to them on many different subjects,—sometimes on writings of Tennyson, Carlyle, Emerson, Darwin, and other contemporary authors. His spirit was thoroughly liberal. He had not in him a drop of sectarian blood; his Christianity consisted

in a sincere desire to make the love and heroism and gentleness of Christ an influence upon the life of himself and others.

As he had not taken the side of the conventional and powerful in religion, but associated himself with humble, creedless, "Disciples of Christ," so, in politics, he joined himself to the small band of constitutional opponents of slavery who knew nothing but defeat. The republican (then "free-soil") party which now rules the United States was laughed at as a feeble fanaticism when Garfield began speaking and working for it. It had nothing to offer or to promise him. Few could have then dreamed that this century would witness its success. But slavery had the keen instinct to foresee its doom in that small concert of free hearts, and met its slow though steady growth with a mad blow at the Union.

Then the College President sprang forward to his country's rescue. With a hundred students from the college over which he had presided, to begin with, he formed his regiment. They marched to the front and won the first Union victory in that war. When he had faithfully served his country through the war, his neighbours sent him to Congress, where he did much to save the harvest of the battle-field—namely emancipation, and the constitutional equality of races which alone could secure it. For slavery, foiled in

battle, was aiming to gain political control of the slaves it had lost.

So did this man bravely and faithfully improve the life estate he had received from the past—from his English ancestor who helped to found the freedom of New England, from his father who cleared forests in Ohio. 'Tis said there will be sung over Garfield's grave his favourite hymn, "Ho, reapers of Life's harvest!" Possibly when he used to sing it he remembered how his father died from trying to save his harvest—the bread of his family—from a forest-fire. They who now sing it will remember that it was while protecting the great national field from an encroaching evil that the President received his death-wound. The reapers of the harvest of his life will bitterly feel the grief that he cannot share their harvest-home. But what of his own harvest-home? What becomes of the faithful servant's life estate? Does that die too? Is that shrunken form of the powerful man, which his friends shudder to look upon,—is that the end of James Abram Garfield?

The symbols that surrounded him as he lay in state in the Capitol, reveal the compassionate longing of the human heart that the great wrong shall be righted, and to him personally. It seems too bad, too cruel, that one who from the tow-path had climbed by patient, honest steps up to the White

House, should have all his honours and joys snatched away, ere tasted—his highest success turned to dust, his happiness to agony, his great opportunity made his death ! So beside him a shaft built of roses has on its broken top, nestling amid immortelles, the dove that mourns, with downbent head ; while on his pillow is the dove with uplifted eye and wing, about to fly away—emblem of his soul. Over him is suspended the crown of righteousness gleaming against the black draped canopy of the dome. All these are symbols of the faith that the late President's personal possession of his life-estate has not ended. In earlier ages such enthusiasms have given rise to beliefs among men that their heroes were not dead—could not die—but lived like Arthur in happy valleys, or invisibly walked the earth like St. John, or led armies like St. James. Such beliefs still mould for many their conception of immortality ; but they who confess their eyes too weak to pierce the veil beyond the grave, do not the less believe in the actual immortality of the life which a good man bequeaths to the world. A right and true man may be defrauded of his share in his own estate of life, but mankind cannot be robbed of it. For them he will go on living, and his life will expand in influence as much as if he were personally alive. Nay, more ! The dead will elevate the policy of the living President.

He binds together nations that were estranged, and sections which were at strife. He is not dead, nor does he sleep.

But there is a life that casts its shadow athwart the world. Crouched in his cell is the wretched criminal who has caused all this agony. Perhaps in all history no two lives were ever brought into contact more representative severally of the best and the worst forces that can control human life. The whole life of that miserable murderer has been tracked, and it has been found that he has for years been going through the country like a sort of mad dog, leaving in many regions traces of his disastrous march. Licentiousness, fraud, falsehood, faithlessness to woman and to man, appear to have been the footprints of his career. And during all this horrible career he has been possessed with the belief that he is a specially religious man. For years, and up to the very hour of the murder, Charles Guiteau was a lecturer against infidelity. He was celebrated for his prayers in the meetings of Mr. Moody. He went about the country defrauding hotels at the very time that he was denouncing the wickedness of the Hon. Robert Ingersoll for disbelieving in Christianity. Even since the murder, and in his prison, Guiteau has continually read his Bible, is eager to talk theology with the officials, fiercely denounces infidelity, and argues for orthodoxy.

These things I gather from reports that seem unbiassed and uncontradicted. I have no disposition to base upon them any theory against Christians. Orthodox people generally have as much horror of crime as any others. Nay, so long as Protestant orthodoxy was able to unite morality and religion, and convince men that crime was punished by a burning hell, it was able to do something towards restraining the hell of human passions. But gradually it has developed a theology which necessarily and logically maintained that the blood of Jesus could cleanse from all sin.

“ While the lamp holds out to burn
The vilest sinner may return.”

The majority of criminals have accepted the blood of Jesus, after the law had clutched them, and believed that they were ascending from the gallows to Abraham's bosom. It is not often that a man of Guiteau's education is found so utterly demoralised by a self-righteous theology. And, although it is logical for him to stand on his dogmas, and say “ I the chief of sinners am, yet Jesus died for me,”—it amounts to moral lunacy. His combination of piety and criminality make him a monster. Goethe said, “ Nature reveals her secrets in monsters.” And one may hope that Christians will study this theological assassin as a specimen showing what certain natures may deduce from the dogma of salvation by faith

without works. Happily that is not the tendency of Christians, which is less and less characterised by dogmatism, more and more by imitation of the benevolence and charity of Christ. But there is a tendency of the old dogmas as they are deserted by the best minds to gravitate downward among the least educated and least restrained regions of society, and to make their vulgar visionaries depend more on abjectness before God than on rectitude before man for security after death.

It may be that Guiteau will find no defender on his trial. No lawyer may be willing to take on himself the stigma of having been the counsel of such a creature. Yet, I can imagine, a day may come of calmer judgment when a plea in palliation might be made even for him. It would show that there was bequeathed him as his life estate a morbid temperament which exaggerated all the worst teachings of morbid dogmas impressed on his mind in early life. He was taught that the supreme object of existence was to save his own soul—that first lesson in selfishness taught to millions of children (which only the restraining grace of human nature prevents from making them soul-less!) He was taught that with God human goodness availed nothing—neither justice, nor pity, nor gentleness, nor sympathy, nor unselfishness, nor purity of life. All these amounted to just

nothing in the work of bringing man to his highest joy. He was taught that morality could save nobody, and good works but filthy rags in the sight of God. He was taught that death was a small affair, and to a Christian great gain; passage from an accursed world to a blissful paradise. The only fatally wicked thing was to him unbelief. These dogmas were given him as the guides of his life; they were not merely put on his lips, as in most cases, but seem to have taken deep root in him, insomuch that even in prison they were his meditation day and night, if one may judge by some reports of his interest in theology.

This is a perilous kind of teaching. This is the second time in the last few years that America has been brought face to face with some of the possible results of preserving the forms and phrases of barbarian religion. One was the case of the Massachusetts preacher Freeman, who believed himself called, like Abraham, to sacrifice his beloved child. He plunged a dagger in her breast. The little victim is in her grave; the father is in a lunatic asylum. Probably, if the murderer of Garfield could be thoroughly tried, he also would go to the asylum; but, as it is, he will probably rest in a nameless and execrated grave.

But what will theology have to say of this victim of an enthusiasm for faith without the deeds of the

law? Will the potent blood of Jesus in which he fervently trusts carry him among the angels with the blood of Garfield on his hands? Or are there limits to the efficacy of Christ's blood? That is a problem we may leave to the theology which has raised it. For us a more serious question is, What shall be the result of that evil-doer's career on earth? What is the life estate which he will part from and transmit? Has it a vitality, a permanence equal to that of the President he has slain? Will his evil career go on widening into further and larger evil, as the good life survives in expanding influences of good? I believe not. I find nothing in history or experience to justify that half-pessimistic view of nature which holds that evil in this world has a force co-extensive with that of goodness. It must be admitted that evil now withstands good in a passive, obstructive way; but it must also be admitted that, since the reign of man began, the good is selected and developed, the evil steadily diminished and exterminated. As from the woods and fields of these islands the wolves and vipers have nearly disappeared before human culture, so in the world at large the wolfish and venomous passions are steadily driven towards their strata of extinction. The cumulative worth and excellence of the whole world form the life estate of the good, and at their death is consigned and preserved as a sacred trust to

right and true men, who will not willingly let die one benefit transmitted, or one example of excellence.

President Garfield was never so great and strong an influence in his life as he now is when borne to his grave on the shore of Lake Erie. When he was a candidate for the highest office in America, partisan charges were urged against him. After his election they clung to him. Death has dissipated them all. While he was on his death-bed every secret thing concerning him was brought to light, and few records in history have ever come forth from such a search with such enhanced clearness and brilliancy. Fact after fact has been remembered and elicited; and it has been shown that his life from childhood to death is one whose heroism had never been recognised. It never would have been recognised but for this fearful tragedy, and but for the essential justice of mankind. He fell a Republican President; he rises as an exemplar for the world. However beneficial his administration might have been had he lived, he could never have hoped to unite the sections of his country as much as his death has united them; and whatever his foreign policy, he could never have hoped to bring together England and America in such close alliance of affection as they have been brought by sorrow and sympathy at his grave. This last benefit, indeed, he partly saw before death, and he was sustained by it

through the long agony. And we may hope that the wonderful serenity amid pain—the patient, uncomplaining sufferance of the terrible eleven weeks—were those of a mind visited by happy visions of his country united, North and South—and of an Anglo-American unity—secured and cemented by his blood that at first seemed so idly shed.

Let all good men and women try to make that vision a reality ! Let us remember that the life estate of all who die falls as a bequest to those who are living,—to be terminated if it be evil, to be enlarged and improved if it be good. The dead President has bequeathed to each and all of us a benefit and a hope which we little suspected was so near us. His life and tragical death have stirred the hearts of the two greatest nations of the world,—representing nearly a hundred millions of people standing in the vanguard of civilisation,—nations which seventy years ago were at war, and sixteen years ago were quarrelling. It has been the belief of great thinkers that it would be a token of higher civilisation if these two great nations could recover their ancient unity on the broad basis of liberty,—if instead of an extinct Anglo-Saxon race there could be formed an Anglo-American race. The pulses of sympathy and sorrow every hour beating towards America are far grander as an expression of civilisation than the mastered

magnetism that is their messenger. Old fables tell of a magical music that built the walls of cities ; but the ocean cable that vibrates with the love of nation for nation is a harp-string of earth's heart whose music builds ideal civilisation. This day the fifty millions of that stricken land behold on the darkness a star of brightness ; it is a wreath of flowers laid by the Queen upon the President's bier, fragrant with the sympathy and bedewed with the tears of her people. Those flowers must live. It is for all good men and women to cherish them that they may never fade. Their fragrance is more potent than armies and navies. They are blossoms of a springtide of civilisation such as our poor blood-stained earth has vainly sighed for through the centuries.

Ah ! I know that they will never fade ; they will be cherished in the hearts of children's children, and they will still expand in the happy sunshine when all the battle-flags that ever floated between America and England are furled and forgotten.

That is General Garfield's bequest to you and me,—to help keep fresh those flowers that mean the hopes of nations. He bequeathes us also the story of his life. To every Anglo-American child shall be told the brave story of how a poor western lad toiled and studied, and nourished his mind and heart with pure and patriotic aims, until he rose to greatness and

the highest power,—then, dying, clasped together the hands that had smitten, the hearts that had been estranged, and bequeathed to humanity the grandest estate it could have, a heart-union of the two nations which mainly hold the destinies of the world and must mould the future of mankind.

So much could one poor lad achieve. Think of it, young Englishmen. Do not suppose that such ascent and success is peculiarly American. It was English long centuries before it was American. The German, Goethe, said to a youth who proposed going to seek his fortune in America, "Your America is here or nowhere." The science of England and its welfare are largely forwarded by men who were once poor lads. Before enterprise and endeavour, barriers will yield here as elsewhere. Your aim is not title or ostentation; it is to become fully possessed of your life estate, to make the most and best of all your powers for the good of mankind, so that no mischance, no blow of fate, can destroy your work, but it shall rise on grandly over your grave as by the labours of your life.

SOUTH PLACE CHAPEL.

WORKS TO BE OBTAINED IN THE LIBRARY, BY M. D. CONWAY, M.A.

	Prices.
	s. d.
The Sacred Anthology: a Book of Ethnical Scriptures	10 0
The Earthward Pilgrimage	5 0
Do. do.	2 6
Republican Superstitions	2 6
Christianity	1 6
Human Sacrifices in England	1 0
Sterling and Maurice... ..	0 2
Intellectual Suicide	0 2
The First Love again... ..	0 2
Our Cause and its Accusers... ..	0 1
Alcestis in England	0 2
Unbelief: its nature, cause, and cure	0 2
Entering Society	0 2
The Religion of Children	0 2
What is Religion?—Max Müller's First Hibbert Lecture	0 2
Atheism: a Spectre	0 2
The Criminal's Ascension	0 2
The Religion of Humanity	0 2
A Last Word	0 2

NEW WORK BY M. D. CONWAY, M.A.

Idols and Ideals (including the Essay on Christianity), 350 pages	6 0
<i>Members of the Congregation can obtain this Work in the Library at 5s.</i>	

BY MR. J. ALLANSON PICTON.

The Transfiguration of Religion	0 2
--	-----

BY A. J. ELLIS, B.A., F.R.S., &c., &c.

Salvation	0 2
Truth	0 2
Speculation	0 2
Duty	0 2
The Dyer's Hand	0 2

BY REV. P. H. WICKSTEED, M.A.

Going Through and Getting Over	0 2
---------------------------------------	-----

BY REV. T. W. FRECKELTON.

The Modern Analogue of the Ancient Prophet	0 2
---	-----

BY W. C. COUPLAND, M.A.

The Conduct of Life	0 2
----------------------------	-----

Hymns and Anthems... ..	1/-, 2/-, 3/-
Report of the Conference of Liberal Thinkers 1878, 1/-	

53302

LAUREATE DESPAIR

A DISCOURSE GIVEN AT

SOUTH PLACE CHAPEL

DECEMBER 11th 1881.

BY

MONCURE D. CONWAY, M.A.

LONDON

11, SOUTH PLACE FINSBURY.

PRICE TWOPENCE.

FREDERICK G. HICKSON & Co.,
257, HIGH HOLBORN,
LONDON, W.C.

LAUREATE DESPAIR.

LET me say at once that I am glad the Poet Laureate has written the poem called "Despair," which I propose to criticise. It is a cry out of the heart of an earnest man; it utters the sorrow with which many people in our time see their old dreams fading, and no new ones rising in their place; and it reminds free-thinkers that theirs is a heavy responsibility and duty. They have to meet and respond to that need and pain which thousands feel where one can give it expression. Men of science and philosophers do not always understand this. The most eminent of them are pursuing ideals far more beautiful to them than those that have set. They have special knowledge, or special aims, which kindle into pillars of fire before their enthusiasm, and cannot see how to those of other studies and pursuits their guiding splendour is a pillar of smoke rising from a fair world slowly consumed. The man of science, hourly occupied with discoveries which blaze upon him, star by star, till his reason is as a vault sown with eternal lights, feels that he is in the presence of conceptions beside which the visions of Dante and Milton are frescoes of a time-darkened dome. The enthusiast of Humanity holds

in his eye a latter-day glory of which history is the prophecy and developed man the fulfilment. Such enthusiasms imply continual studies, occupations, duties, which leave little room for attention to the shadows these lights cast upon the old world of dreams—each shadow a dogma or its phantom. Nevertheless, that world of dreams, shades, phantoms, is still real to many. It is real not only to the ignorant, whom it terrifies, and to the selfish, whose power rests on it, but to spiritual invalids, who need sympathy. And, beyond this reality, the phantasms on which religion and society were founded possess a quasi-reality even for robust minds. You may recall the saying of Madame de Stael, that “she did not believe in ghosts, but was afraid of them.” After dogmas are dead their ghosts walk the earth; and even some who no longer believe in the ghosts are still afraid of them. When their intellects are no longer haunted their nerves are.

There are others, again, for whose vision or nerves the pleasant dogmas alone survive in this attenuated, ghostly form. They no longer believe in the ghosts, but still love them. Of this class is the literary artist. To the pictorial artist a ruin is more picturesque than the most comfortable dwelling. 'Tis said of an eminent art-critic that, being invited to visit America, he replied that he could not think of visiting a country where there were no ruins. Alfred Tennyson is the consummate artist in poetry. We all know with what tender sentiment Tennyson has

painted the scenery of Arthur's time, with what felicity described many other reliques of human antiquity. "His eye will not look upon a bad colour." He sees the mouldering ruins in their picturesque aspects, leaving out of sight the noxious weeds and vermin that infest them. Where these loathsome things appear no man more recoils from them. If the White Ladies of Superstition haunt them, these he admires ; but he impales the gnomes and vampyres.

In this, his latest poem, "Despair," he shows a childlike simplicity of desire to retain all the pleasant and reject all the unpleasant consequences of the same principles. His attitude is indeed kindlier to the agnostic than to the orthodox ; for the first he has lamentation, for the other anathema. His denunciation of orthodoxy is bitter. The poem is the supposed utterance of a man to his former minister. "A man and his wife, having lost faith in God and hope of a life to come, and being utterly miserable in this, resolve to end themselves by drowning. The woman is drowned, but the man is saved by the minister of the sect he had attended." He has no gratitude for the minister who rescued him, only a curse, attributing to him the first cause of the hopeless horrors amid which the two found themselves. He tells the minister they broke away from Christ because Christ seemed to speak of hell, and so they passed from a cheerless night to a drearier day—from horrible belief to total unbelief.

Where you bawl'd the dark side of your faith, and a God of
eternal rage

Till you flung us back on ourselves, and the human heart, and the Age.

But pity—that Pagan held it a vice—was in her and in me,
 Helpless, taking the place of the pitying God that should be
 Pity for all that aches in the grasp of an idiot power,
 And pity for our own selves on an earth that bore not a
 flower.

Again he says :

Were there a God, as you say,
 His Love would have power over hell till it utterly vanish'd
 away.

Ah, yet—I have had some glimmer at times, in my gloomiest
 woe,
 Of a God behind all—after all—the Great God, for aught that
 I know :

But the God of Love and of Hell together—they cannot be
 thought :

If there be such a God, may the Great God curse him and
 bring him to nought !

This is what the Poet Laureate thinks of the God of every
 creed in Christendom, for every creed maintains an
 eternal hell.

But the agnostic, the know-nothing sceptic, is summoned
 to bear his share in this tragedy of hopelessness and
 suicide. The poet does not suggest that disbelief in a
 future life or in a Deity would alone lead to suicide. In
 his imaginary case unbelief is only a factor. The man
 and wife were in terrible trouble. One of their two sons
 had died ; the eldest had fled after committing forgery on
 his own father, bringing him to ruin. It is under such
 fearful circumstances that, without faith or hope, they sink
 into despair. The man says :

Why should we bear with an hour of torture, a moment of
 pain,

If every man die for ever, if all his griefs are in vain,

And the homeless planet at length will be wheeled thro' the
 silence of space,
 Motherless evermore of an ever-vanishing race?

* * * * *

For these are the new dark ages, you see, of the popular press,
 When the bat comes out of his cave, and the owls are
 whooping at noon,
 And Doubt is the lord of this dunghill, and crows to the sun
 and moon,
 Till the Sun and Moon of our science are both of them turned
 to blood,
 And Hope will have broken her heart, running after a shadow
 of good.

It is a striking fact, in our sceptical age, that such lamentations as these are not heard from among the poor and the drudges of society. They who are asking whether life be worth living without the old faith in immortality, and they who say it is not, are persons of position and wealth. Any one who has taken the pains to observe the crowds of working people who attend the lectures of secularists, or to read their journals, will know they are cheery enough. We never hear any of them bemoaning the vanished faith. In truth the more important fact is not that the belief in immortality is gone, or the belief in Deity, but that belief in a desirable immortality and a desirable Deity has gone out of the hearts of many. In one of his humorous pieces Lucian, describing his imaginary journey through Hades, says he could recognise those who had been kings or rich people on earth by their loud lamentations. They had parted with so much. Those who on earth had been poor and wretched were quiet enough. We may observe similar phenomena in

this psychological Hades, or realm of the Unseen and Unknown, into which modern thought has entered. Those to whom God has allotted palaces, plenty, culture, beauty, can easily believe Him a God of Love ; and it were to them heaven enough to wake from the grave to a continuance of the same. But they who have known hunger, cold, drudgery, ignorance, have no such reason to say God is Love. Such may naturally say, "If we have waked up in this world in dens of misery, why, under the same providence, may we not wake up to a future of misery?" The old creeds met that difficulty. They showed a miraculous revelation on the subject, by which God had established an insurance against future misery, an assurance of future luxury. It was all to be supernatural. By miraculous might poverty was to be changed to wealth, the hovel to a palace, rags to fine raiment, ignorance to knowledge, folly to wisdom, and scarlet sin to snow-pure virtue. Without such tremendous transformations the masses of the miserable could have no interest in immortality. But gradually the comfortable scholarship and theology of our time, in trying to prove a God of nature, have done away with the God of super-nature. Their deity of design is loaded with all the bad designs under which men suffer. Fifty years ago Carlyle groaned because he could not believe in a Devil any more. Philosophy had reasoned a Devil out of existence. The result was to make the remaining power responsible for all the evils in the world, and ultimately bring him into

doubt and disgrace too. Dismssing the Devil out of faith
 does not dismissed evil, the mad work of earthquake, hurri-
 cane and fire. As we think of the shores with their wrecks,
 as we think of those people in Vienna gathered around the
 charred remains of their families and friends, must we not
 ask if this is providential work what would be diabolical
 work? Reason says to Theology, "At least you can be
 silent, and not malign the spirit of good within us by
 asking us to call that without good which we know to be
 bad!"

Similarly theologians in trying to rationalise the idea of
 immortality have naturalised it. They have tacked it on
 to evolution. But what the miserable suffer by *is* evolu-
 tion: unless they can be assured of a supernatural change,
 of a heaven, they do not want to be evolved any more.
 Only a miraculous revelation could promise them that
 miraculous heaven; and the only alleged revelation is
 rejected by the culture and the charity of our age. It is
 denied by Culture, because it reveals some impossibilities;
 by Charity, because it reveals a God capable of torturing
 people more than they are tortured here. What are eight
 hundred people burned swiftly in a theatre compared to
 millions burning in hell for ages, if not for ever, as Revela-
 tion declares? Our Poet Laureate is a man of both
 culture and charity; he cannot sing of a revelation which
 concludes Hell, however he may cling to hopes that came
 by the same revelation, or mourn at thought of parting
 from a world so fair.

Candour compels us to admit that there is as yet no certainty of a future life for the individual consciousness. The surviving seed of the human organism if it exist has not been discovered. There is nothing unnatural in the theory. It would not be more miraculous to find ourselves in another world than to find ourselves in this. If two atoms of the primeval nebula, thrown together, had been for one instant capable of speculation, how little could they have imagined a company of men and women gathered to meditate on life and eternity! All this is very marvellous if we conceive it contemplated from a point of non-existence. For all we know there are more marvels beyond.

But suppose there are none; suppose death be the end of us; is there any reason for despair? Even for the man and woman on whom life had brought dire calamities, was there any reason for suicide? Just the reverse, I should say. Belief that this life was all were reason for making the most of it. Belief that their ruin would not be repaired hereafter were reason for trying to repair it here, as well as they could. Has Tennyson evolved his man and woman out of his inner consciousness? It is doubtful if in the annals of freethought such a case can be pointed out; though many instances may be shown where believers in a future world slew themselves to get there. Suicide was a mania in some old convents until the church fixed its ' canon 'gainst self-slaughter.'

However, it may be that instances of the kind Tennyson describes may occur. We are but on the threshold of the age when men are to live and work without certainty of future rewards and payments. The doubts now in the head must presently reach the heart, then influence the hand; if people have built their houses on the sand of mythology, and they fall, it may be that some will not have the heart to begin new buildings on the rock. What then? It will be only the continuation of the old law—survival of the fittest. Suicides at least do not live to increase their race. Only those tend to prevail in nature who can adapt themselves to the conditions of nature. If nature has arrived at a period of culture when supernaturalism passes out of the human faith, then they who sink into despair or death, on that account, show themselves no longer adapted to nature. There will be a survival of those more adapted to the new ideas; who prefer them; who do not aspire to live for ever, but have a heart for any fate, and a religion whose forces and joys are concentrated in the life that now is. If nature and humanity need such a race for their furtherance, such a race will be produced; and they will read poems like this "Despair," with a curiosity mixed with compassion, wondering how their ancestors could have been troubled about such a matter.

Something like this has occurred in the past in several instances. While Christians find fullest expression of their joyful emotions in the psalmody and prophecy of the

Hebrews they often forget that those glowing hymns say no word about a future life. There is no clear affirmation of immortality in the Old Testament, but much to the contrary. Buddhism also, which has awakened the enthusiasm of a third of a human race, arose as a protest against theism and immortality. In such instances there would appear to have been reactions against previous theologies, which had so absorbed mankind in metaphysics and speculations about the future as to belittle this life and cause neglect of this world. Despised and degraded nature avenged this wrong by making asceticism its own destruction, and worldliness a source of strength and survival.* Some such Nemesis seems to be following the extreme other-worldliness which, for so many Christian centuries, has bestowed the fruits of human toil upon supposed supernatural interests. This earthward swing of the slow pendulum of faith is not likely to be arrested until religion has been thoroughly humanised. As a brave clergyman (Rev. Harry Jones) warned the Church Congress at York, the Church will never conquer Secularism, except by doing more for mankind than Secularism does.

We must almost remember that no oscillations of the pendulum between theology and humanity, no reactions, determine the question. As Old Testament Secularism

* As it is said in Ecclesiasticus: "He has also set worldliness in their heart, which man cannot understand the works that God does, from beginning to end."—DR. KALISCH'S *Translation*.

followed Egyptian Mysticism, Talmudic visions of heaven succeeded. Every ebb alternates with a flow in the tides of human feeling ; and these tides are the generations which nature successively creates to fulfil successive conditions, and to find their joy in such fulfilment, whatever be the despair of the ebbing at faith of the flowing tide.

But, no doubt, these rising and falling ages of speculation and religion will show calmer and happier phenomena in the future than in the past. There are traces in the earth of tremendous operations in the past, which geology was unable to account for by any forces now acting, until Astronomy discovered that the Moon had been steadily receding from the earth, its mother. The moon is now 240,000 miles away, but is proved to have been once only 40,000 miles distant. At that period the tides were to the tides of our time as 216 to 1. This country and many others must then have been flooded with every tide, and the enormous geologic results are now understood. There would appear to be some correspondence in all this with mental and moral phenomena. In religious geology also there are traces of convulsions and huge formations which it has been difficult to account for,—mighty religious wars, massacres, whole races committing slow suicide for the sake of their Gods. Comparative studies now show that the lunar theology was much nearer to mankind then than now, and the tides more furious. The extraneous influence is withdrawing more and more. Where theologians used to burn each other they now fight combats with pens. Where heretics were massacred they

are now only visited with dislike. Instead of crusades, with Richard and Saladin, we have young poets singing on the crest of a sparkling tide, and their elder, from refluent waves, murmuring rhythmic Despair. There is a vast difference between the emotions awakened by belief in a deity near at hand, pressing down upon the life, and those awakened by a hypothetical deity of philosophy or ethics. When men attributed their every hourly hap, good or bad, to the personal favour or to the anger of their deity, their feeling at any supposed affront to their deity, mingled with selfishness and terror, rose to a pitch very different from any now known when few men refer any event to supernatural intervention. Yet do the great movements of the universe go on, the cycles and the periods fulfil themselves, the planets roll on new orbits with changed revolutions; and, whatever be the corresponding changes in human opinion, they cannot alter the eternal fact.

If immortality be the law of the universe, it will be reached by believers and disbelievers alike. But, could the world be made absolutely certain of it beforehand, by the only means of certainty—scientific proof—what were the advantage? It would no longer be a miraculous thing promising all a leap from earthly sorrow to heavenly bliss, but merely a law of nature—mere continuance—the millions rising from their graves to go on with existence, just as they will rise from their beds to-morrow. There would be no further note of despair from the Laureates; but how would it be with the general world? One of the

most powerful poems of our time has been written by a French lady, Louise Ackermann. It is entitled "Les Malheureux"—the Unhappy. The last day has come ; the trumpet has sounded. A great angel descends ; uncovers all the graves of the dead, and bids them come forth for everlasting life. Some eagerly come forth, but a large number refuse. To the divine command that they shall emerge, their voice is heard in one utterance. They tell him they have had enough of life in His creation ; they have passed through thorns, and over flinty paths—from agony to agony. To such an existence He called them—they suffered it ; and now they will forgive Him only if He will let them rest, and forget that they have lived. Such is the despair with which one half of the world might answer the joy of the other should a mere natural immortality be proved.

A great deal of the poetry of the world has invested with glory man's visions of heaven and heavenly beings. The very greatest poets have invested nature and the earth with glory, and set the pulses of the human heart to music. This has been the greatness of Homer, Shakespeare, Goethe. But the majority have given the world visions of heaven, divine dramas, and hymns of immortality ; and it is these that have been taught to earth's millions in their infancy. These happy hymns have for ages soothed sorrowing hearts, and helped the masses of mankind to bear the burthens of life—this not only in Christendom, but in so-called Pagan lands and ages. These have been as the songs of Israfil in Eastern faith.

They said a sweet singer among the angels left heaven to go forth over the suffering world and soothe mortals with his heavenly lyre and his hymns, until all were able to bear the griefs of life because of the joys beyond, rehearsed by Israfel. But once—while this angel was singing with his celestial seven-stringed lyre—one string of it snapped. No one could be found to mend the string or supply its place; and, every time Israfel tried to make music, it was all jangling discords, through that broken string. So Israfel took his flight, and never returned to the world. The tale sounds like a foreboding of what has in these last days befallen the sacred poetry which so long made the world forget its griefs. The lyre of Israfel is the human heart, and the snapped string is its faith in a supernatural heaven. It has been snapped by the development of nature; it therefore cannot be restored unless by a further development: and so Sacred Poetry has taken its flight from the world—its last great song being of a Paradise Lost. In other words, the hope of immortality has ceased to have power to soothe and uplift those who most needed it, because the recognized reign of law forbids belief that such life—should it come—would be very different from the life that now is.

But there is another story of a broken string, with a different ending. It comes from Greece (Browning has finely told it in *The Two Poets of Croisic*), the land of Art and of the Beauty that adorns the earth. It is of a bard who came with his lyre to sing for a prize. He came with other competitors before the solemn judges.

The others had all sung their poems ; now came our youth with his. His theme rose high and higher, till at length he came to the great theme of his song—Love. Just then he felt beneath his finger that one string of his lyre had snapt, a string that presently must do its part, or else his song be put to shame. On, on, his strain went, as if to its death ; but just as he drew near his note of Despair, lo, a cricket chirped loud, chimed in with just that needed note ! Saved, he went on, and ever as he returned to this broken string the cricket duly made good the snapt string, and thus the judges missed no note of the music, which won the crown. On the poet's statue was carved the cricket which contributed from the lowly hearth the needed note in that hymn of Love, when the old string had broken. That tale too, I doubt not, came out of that truest of all poets, the human heart. For the heart of our race is aged in such experiences as those which elicit rhymes of Despair. It has seen beautiful symbols fade in myriads ; symbols of heavens innumerable, every one clung to by suffering Egyptians, Persians, Greeks, as much as any Christian clings to their successors. It has seen troops of bright gods and goddesses perish, nymphs and fairies leaving wood and vale desolate ; and yet, just as its gladdest heart-string has snapt, its faith in heaven given way, some cheery note from the earth has come to remind it of the love near at hand, of the divine joy vanished from its ancient heavens only to be revealed at the hearth.

A cricket-chirp ! That is all. While our great Laureate

is employing his art to sing of despair, and other poets aspire to ambitious themes, the notes are as yet but few and humble, which cheer man with a trust in the love that is near him. But there are such notes making up for the creed's snapped string. Nor are they near only the happy. The cricket sings from many an overshadowed hearth. It tells the heart to be brave, and never count life lost so long as courage remain. It bids man cease thinking so much about himself—whether he be likely to die next year, or die for ever—and go fall in love with something, an out-self; to dispel morbid meditations. It warns us not to worry over what may never happen, or, if it happen, may be for the best, but turn to make what paradise we can on earth; nor admit into it the destroyer of every paradise, care about the morrow, or about the far future. All these spiritual despairs are diseases of the imagination. In a sense, it is hereditary disease. For many generations our ancestors employed their imaginations for little else than to realise the charnal-house and picture happiness or horrors beyond it. So their children have inherited a morbid tendency of imagination, whereby they may turn from the happiness they have and make themselves miserable with dreams about its vanishing. Such work of the imagination is illegitimate. Imagination is the brightest angel of the head, as Love is of the heart; they are twin angels and their office is to make life rich and beautiful. And they can so enrich and adorn life, though passed in a hovel, though amid pain, though destined to end for ever, provided they be not dismissed from their

post of present duty and sent wandering through clouds to find love's objects, or digging into graves to find life's fountain. I love and admire our Laureate for his great heart and his beautiful art, but will not follow his muse, singing of Despair, except with a hope that it is his way of writing its epitaph. I will follow the happy minstrel. That poet who shows life to be environed with beauty, makes deserts blossom in his song, whose poem is a fountain of joy for all the living, bringing forgetfulness to pain, and a sweet lullaby for the dying—that shall be my poet. And if, among the minstrels of our time, such happy ones cannot be found, because some string of faith or heart is snapped, then let us listen to the cheery cricket, to the voices of children, to the gentle words of affection, to the unbroken song of the merry hearts in nature that remember only its loveliness. We will listen to these until the new Poetry shall arise—as arise it will—with fresh songs, to bid all spirits rejoice in that which to the old brought despair. That is the task of Poetry and Art. Every new thing destroying the old brings despair; none brought more than Christianity—shattering the fair gods, and Protestantism—over whose havoc of prayers and pieties Luther's poor wife wept; but Poetry and Art did their work, and none now long for restoration of Aphrodite or Madonna. So also shall our age of conscience find its poets and artists, and our children shall no more long for a buried faith than we for the holy dolls of crumbled altars, whose power to charm has fled.

SOUTH PLACE CHAPEL.

WORKS TO BE OBTAINED IN THE LIBRARY.

BY M. D. CONWAY, M.A.

	Prices.
	s. d.
Demonology and Devil-lore... ..	£1 3 4
The Wandering Jew	5 0
Thomas Carlyle	5 0
The Sacred Anthology: A Book of Ethnical Scriptures ...	10 0
Idols and Ideals	6 0
The Earthward Pilgrimage	5 0
Republican Superstitions	2 6
Christianity	1 6
Human Sacrifices in England	1 0
Sterling and Maurice... ..	0 2
Intellectual Suicide	0 2
The First Love Again	0 2
Entering Society	0 2
The Religion of Children	0 2
The Criminal's Ascension	0 2
The Religion of Humanity	0 2
The Rising Generation	0 2
A Last Word	0 2
Thomas Carlyle	0 2
The Oath and its Ethics	0 2

BY MR. FREDERIC HARRISON.

"Pantheism and Cosmic Emotion"	0 2
---------------------------------------	-----

BY DR. ANDREW WILSON.

The Religious Aspects of Health	0 2
--	-----

BY A J. ELLIS, B.A., F.R.S., &c., &c.

Salvation	0 2
Truth	0 2
Speculation	0 2
Duty	0 2
The Dyer's Hand	0 2
Comte's Religion of Humanity	0 4

BY W. C. COUPLAND, M.A.

The Conduct of Life	0 2
----------------------------	-----

Hymns and Anthems	1s., 2s., 3s.
--------------------------	---------------

REPORT OF THE CONFERENCE OF LIBERAL THINKERS,
1878

1 0