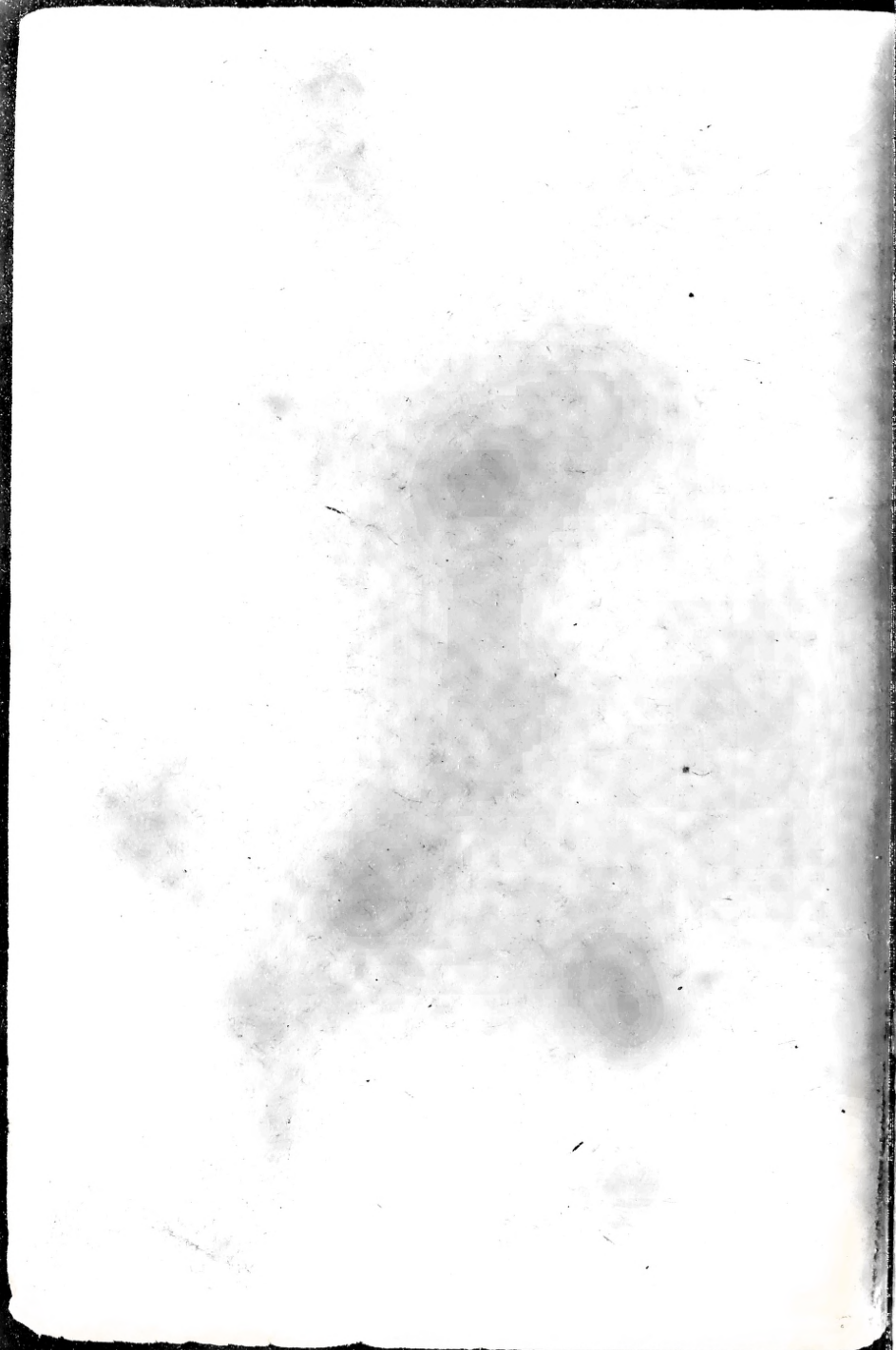


11/3/09

Letters to the Clergy

G W Foot



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NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

LETTERS

TO

THE CLERGY

BY

G. W. FOOTE.



LONDON:
PROGRESSIVE PUBLISHING COMPANY,
28 STONECUTTER STREET, E.C.

1890.

LONDON :
PRINTED AND PUBLISHED BY G. W. FOOTE,
[28 STONECUTTER STREET, E.C.

P R E F A C E .

MANY readers of the *Freethinker*, in which the following Letters appeared at various dates, have requested me to reprint them in a separate and convenient form ; but as I always intended to do this, I make no pretence of my natural modesty being overcome by "the urgent solicitation of friends," nor bespeak the reader's "kind indulgence." When a writer of considerable practice deals with familiar subjects, and takes pains with his composition, he would be something worse than modest if he imagined that what he wrote could be of no interest to any section of readers. So far, indeed, am I from imagining anything of the kind, that I frankly confess to a belief that these Letters form a fairly all-round statement of the Freethought positions in regard to Christianity ; and, as such, they will doubtless be useful to many who would otherwise have to wade through a great many volumes, without, perhaps, obtaining the same satisfaction.

To instruct it is necessary to interest, and to procure a hearing one must condescend to excite attention.

For this reason, among others, I adopted the epistolary form of writing in the present instance. It gives an air of nearness to the remote, and of reality to the abstract; it imparts a feeling of personality, which I hope has never run into virulence or abuse; it endows a paper warfare with some of the actuality and vividness of a face-to-face encounter; and, lastly, more perhaps than any other form, it allows the writer to avail himself of a great variety of rhetoric, and especially of the apostrophe, which is the most striking of oratorical arts, but is apt, in impersonal forms of composition, to appear stilted and affected.

In order to correct the abuses of the epistolary style, I have endeavored to fix my attention upon the arguments I was discussing, rather than the persons I addressed. Most of these, indeed, were unknown to me except by repute, and this made it the more easy to avoid falling into mere personalities.

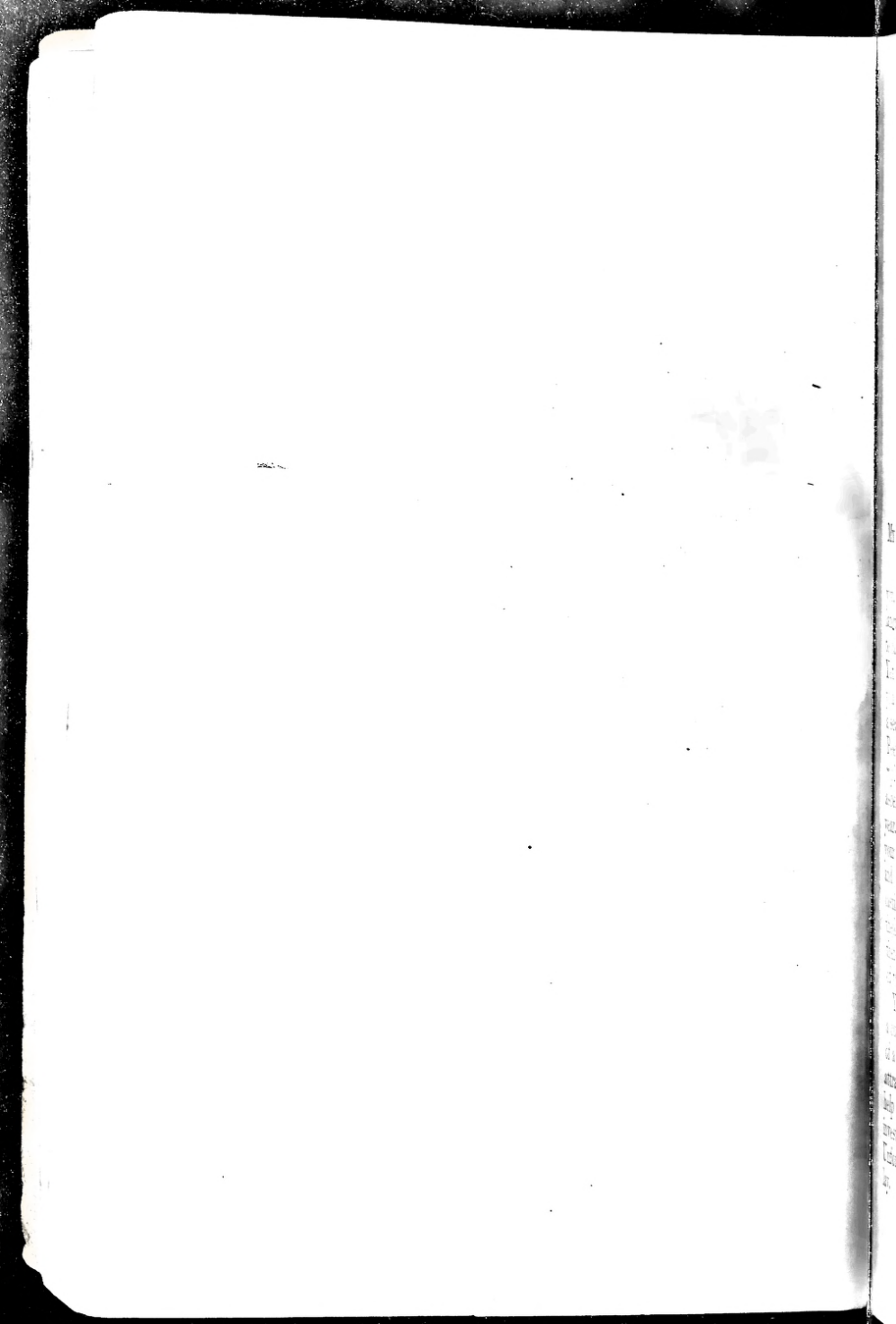
Open letters are little likely to elicit replies from the persons addressed, and my experience is no exception to the rule. Besides, it is the fashion in Christian circles to ignore the editors of Freethought journals; the conspiracy of silence being, indeed, the last resource of a tottering faith. As a matter of fact, I expected no replies, and consequently I am not disappointed. What I write will produce its proper effect, whether it is replied to or not; and I have obviously written for the general reader rather than the ministers whose names decorate the tops of my Letters.

For the convenience of many readers, who may keep this collection of Letters by them, and refer to it at intervals, I have had it printed in large clear type. There is a curious impression among the orthodox that Freethinkers, for the most part, are frivolous young persons; but the chronology of this impression is on a par with that of the Bible; in other words, it is an arbitrary conjecture. Happily there *are* young Freethinkers, and they are the hope of the future; but a very large proportion are "declined into the vale of years," and their eyes will find the type of this little volume a positive comfort.

I have not burdened my pages with footnotes or references. Except from the work I was answering, I have seldom had occasion to quote from living or dead authors. Whenever I have done so I have indicated the work, but I have not thought it necessary to give the edition, volume, or page. In no single instance, I believe, have I cited any author as *an authority*. I have always appealed to the reason of my readers. I pay them the compliment of supposing they think for themselves. And in this case an apt quotation may occasionally be indulged in, for the sake of its beauty or felicity, without begging the question, or overawing the reader's judgment, by appealing to great names. There are no authorities in the realm of thought. Only that is true thinking which goes on in the individual brain. Every so-called belief which reposes on external authority, may be acquiescence or prejudice, but never judgment or conviction.

This is all I have to say in introducing this little volume. I now leave it to destiny. Hope and fear, perhaps, are alike unphilosophical; yet, as the future is unseen, and imagination *will* seek to pierce the veil, I fondly indulge a hope that if I do not succeed in converting anyone to what I regard as the truth, I may nevertheless excite an interest in questions that underlie private and public life in every Christian country. Indifference on such matters implies a want of insight or seriousness, and I would fain stimulate the temper which prompts us to look beyond the material or transient interests of life into the higher region of the spiritual and durable—the region where intellect is free from the trammels of personal loss or gain; where imagination takes no shape of individual hopes and fears; where conscience is the august voice of Humanity echoing through the chambers of our hearts.

LETTERS TO THE CLERGY.



CREATION.

TO THE BISHOP OF CARLISLE.

MY LORD,—

It seems strange that I should have to address you, at least for the sake of courtesy, in such exalted language. Your Lord and Savior bade his disciples to call no man Master, and Lord is a still loftier title. Yet you are legally entitled to this designation, and you are a lord in reality as well as in name. You have a seat, when you like to occupy it, in the House of Peers; you reside in a palace; and, besides your "pickings," the extent of which I have no means of ascertaining, you enjoy a settled income of £4,500 a year. I knew not how to reconcile these things with your profession as a minister of the gospel of poverty and renunciation; but I presume your powers of casuistry are equal to the task; and, after all, as theology is full of mysteries, it is not unnatural that there should be mysteries in the character and conduct of theologians.

You have been good enough, my lord, to write a curious little volume on "Creation." It is the first of a series entitled "Helps to Belief," which naturally attracted my attention. I happen to require as much help to belief as any man I know, and accordingly I invested ninepence in a copy of your production. Unfortunately it has not recompensed me for the outlay. My unbelief is rather confirmed than shaken,

and I am farther off than ever from the repose which is to be found on the pillow of faith. I have, however, read your volume with great care, and I venture to offer a few remarks upon it.

Let me first congratulate you on an admission. You say—

“The very difficulty, so to speak, with regard to the theological view of the opening of the book of Genesis is, that theologians will not consent to regard the document as a lesson addressed merely to the infancy of humanity, will not allow it to be regarded as a childish thing to be put aside by the human race in its manhood.”

Your language is skilfully guarded; it might be read in either of two opposite ways; yet I interpret you as I would a Sibylline oracle, and take the most favorable meaning. Regarded in that light, your description of the Creation story is admirable; it does credit to your candor and intelligence, as well as your style. I thank you for the phrase. “A childish thing” is the finest commentary on the first chapter of Genesis. The very epithet “childish” is supremely felicitous. What is childlike in infancy is childish in manhood; what was excusable in an age of ignorance and barbarism is contemptible in an age of science and civilisation.

Let me next indicate a few points on which I have the honor to agree with you. “Creation,” you state, “begins and ends with the formula ‘God said.’” Yes, my lord, that is the alpha and omega of the mystery. In the language of Hamlet it is “words, words, words.” Logomachies, in theology and metaphysics, pass current for realities; but the first attempt to define them in consciousness exposes their vacuity. “God said let there be light, and there was light,” is the statement of Genesis; similarly the Hindu scriptures declare that “Brahma said let there be worlds, and there were worlds”—and the one text is as true as the other.

You affirm that Genesis makes “no pretension to being a scientific history.” The discovery is rather

late in the day, for your Church has, during the better part of two thousand years, insisted on the contrary doctrine; and from the days of Galileo until now it has persecuted to the full extent of its power the scientific men who, in the words of Professor Huxley, have refused to degrade nature to the level of primitive Judaism. Nevertheless, as you disclaim this "pretension," it may for the moment be dismissed. You appear to admit that Genesis is not "a scientific history," and the admission shows you are fully aware that Hebrew mythology can no longer be opposed, as a divine truth, to the teachings of Evolution.

You assert that such "truths" as the Incarnation and the creation of man in God's image "belong to a high ethereal region to which it is impossible for either philosophy or science to rise." One half of this sentence, my lord, is perfectly true. Philosophy and science cannot breathe in the attenuated atmosphere of faith, nor are they able to see through the clouds of mystery. The very language you employ when you speak as a theologian is foreign to them. "Creation," you exclaim, "is a mystery, heaven and earth are mysteries, but through all these there shines the light of a living God—He, too, a mystery." How one mystery illuminates another mystery is a curious problem which philosophy and science will gladly leave to the "high ethereal" intellect of the pulpit. They may accept your statement, however, without feeling that it amounts to a revelation; for to the eyes of reason a mystery is nothing but ignorance or self-contradiction. A galvanic battery is a mystery to the savage, the telephone is a mystery to country clergymen, and the origin of life is still a mystery to biologists. On the other hand, the Trinity is a mystery to the arithmetician, and the Almighty Goodness and Wisdom is a mystery to those who see and feel the existence of evil. In the one case, the mystery is an unexplained fact; in the other case, it is a contradiction between a fact and a theory. Mystery, in short, is mist; sometimes cloud,

and sometimes smoke. The cloud is ignorance, and the smoke is theology.

Persons who deal in mystery, my lord, are apt to contract a taint of insincerity. I am sorry to see you referring to Moses as the author of Genesis, and still more to see you referring to "some ancient documents" which he used in its composition. Surely your lordship is aware that no single scrap of the Old Testament can be carried beyond the tenth century before Christ, which is several hundred years from the supposed date of Moses; surely your lordship is aware that no Jewish "documents" existed at the time of the Exodus.

You display the art of a professional pleader, my lord, in dealing with Professor Haeckel's remarks on Genesis. While rejecting it as a "divine revelation," this Great Evolutionist says it "contrasts favorably with the confused mythology of Creation current amongst most of the other ancient nations." You subsequently allude to this as "a striking tribute to its scientific character." Nay more, you convert *most* into *all*, and exclaim "From Moses to Linnæus! A tremendous step; and before Moses no one."

Without dilating on your perversion of Haeckel, I would ask you, my lord, whether you are ignorant of the fact that the Creation story in the first chapter of Genesis was borrowed from the mythology of Babylon, as the story of the Fall in the second and third chapters was borrowed from the mythology of Persia? Should you be ignorant, your ignorance is inexcusable; should you not be ignorant, your pretence of ignorance is unpardonable.

You deal at considerable length with the word "create," but you evade every difficulty it raises. You rush off to the Greek, the Sanscrit, and so forth; but you never refer to the Hebrew, which is the original language of "inspiration." The Hebrew *bara* does not express absolute creation out of nothing, for such a metaphysical absurdity never entered into the heads of the ancient Jews. For this reason, perhaps, you

journeyed north, south, east, and west, instead of staying at home, and consulted every language but the one containing "the oracles of God." You do not wish to be precise. You "define creation as the embodiment of thought in an objective form," which leaves the matter indeterminate. An artist embodies his conceptions by means of pre-existing materials. Do you imply the same of God? If you do, you assume the eternity of matter; if you do not, you assume creation out of nothing. This is the doctrine upheld by your Church, and you should plainly avow or disclaim it. Bishop Pearson, whose *Exposition of the Creed* is still a standard work in your colleges, gives forth no uncertain sound. "Antecedently to all things beside," he says, "there was at first nothing but God, who produced most part of the world merely out of nothing, and the rest out of that which was formerly made of nothing." You, my lord, express yourself more obscurely. You state that the material universe—in contradistinction, I presume, to the immaterial universe—points to "some kind of origin." And you add that "the existing *cosmos* testifies in a thousand ways to a pre-existent *chaos*, out of which *cosmos* has grown; according to modern language it has been *evolved*; God created the *chaos* and evolved the *cosmos*."

This is what your lordship proffers as a help to belief! Why did you not adduce one of those "thousand" testimonies to *chaos*? Can you really conceive *chaos*—a universal confusion, in which things happen at random, and nothing is anything? Do you know of a single Evolutionist who teaches that matter once existed without its properties? Are not the properties of matter the same in a comet as in a planet? Do you know so little of the nebular hypothesis as to suppose that Professor Tyndall's "fiery cloud," of which worlds are formed, is the primitive substance of *chaos*?

You refer to the nebular hypothesis, my lord, as

though you firmly embraced it; but you fail to recollect, or you forget to mention, that the great French astronomer Laplace, whose account of this luminous theory you summarise, was a convinced Atheist. You proceed to assert that there must have been "something" behind this "primitive cause of the existing cosmos." "Whence," you inquire, "came the particular constitution of the materials, and the laws by which the constituent particles of the matter are governed?" The sentence is extremely vicious. You are guilty of tautology, for the "constitution" of matter and its "laws" are the same thing. You are also guilty of begging the question, for in asking whence they came you assume their advent, which you may justly be called upon to prove. The *petitio principii* is a favorite fallacy with theologians. I find a beautiful instance in another part of your volume, where you innocently observe that "we cannot contemplate Creation, without regarding the Creator." The remark is a truism, my lord; Creator and Creation imply each other, and by designating the universe a Creation you beg the whole question at issue.

That matter began to be, or will cease to exist, it is easy to affirm, and as easy to deny; but all analogy points to its eternity. Science shows us that matter cannot be destroyed any more than it can be created, and force is never diminished although it assumes different manifestations. The presumption, therefore, is in favor of the everlasting existence of both, whether in the ultimate analysis they are co-eternals, or different aspects of the one infinite substance of the universe. I say the *presumption* is in its favor, and before that presumption can be shaken you must give solid reasons for supposing that the universe had a commencement. It is futile, my lord, to observe that its eternity is inconceivable, since it is equally impossible to conceive of its beginning or ending. Where experience fails us reason moves but blindly,

and speculation has no other guide than the light of analogy. And what analogy lends the slightest color to your hypothesis of Creation? The highest mind of which we have any knowledge is the mind of man, and the mind of man cannot create, it can only conceive. The utmost man is able to do is to move matter from one position to another. He does so in conformity with his conceptions; but, like himself, his "creations" are not imperishable. The universe which produced him finally absorbs him; his proudest "creations" may last for a few thousand years, but the effacing hand of time is ever at work upon them, and sooner or later they disappear, unable to resist the claim of Nature who allows of no eternity but her own.

Recurring for a moment to your treatment of Genesis, I see you remark that "to all persons capable of forming an opinion, the chief doctrines of geology are now beyond the range of controversy." You admit the great antiquity of the globe and the slow evolution of living forms, and you proceed as follows:—

"Many persons, perhaps at one time almost all thoughtful persons, who read the account of Creation in the first chapter of Genesis, concluded that the change from chaos to cosmos, though gradual, was one soon brought about by several quickly succeeding fiat of the Almighty will. Geology teaches with irresistible force that this was not so."

These thoughtful persons, my lord, who were nevertheless mistaken, paid the Scripture the compliment of supposing it meant what it said. They never suspected the wonderful elasticity of language in the grasp of theologians. They took the Bible, as you, my lord, are bound to take the Thirty-nine Articles, in the "literal and grammatical sense." Geology, therefore, was honestly resisted as impious, until a new and more dexterous race of commentators arose, in whose hands the time-honored language of Revelation became as plastic as clay in the hands of the potter or the sculptor, and capable of being fashioned

into any form that suited the exigencies of the struggle between Reason and Faith.

Your position is that there is no "antagonism between the hypothesis of Evolution and the truth of Creation." Admitting the justice of your language, your position is impregnable. There cannot be antagonism between Evolution and any *truth*. But I deny the justice of your language. I say that you reverse the proper order of words. Evolution is the "truth," and Creation is the "hypothesis." Thus regarded they are not antagonistic, for there cannot be antagonism where there is no contact. You are, of course, free to assert, without even defining your terms, that a "spirit" works through the process of Evolution. You are likewise free to affirm that a "spirit" mixes the oxygen and nitrogen in the atmosphere, and the oxygen and hydrogen in water. Science is unable to contradict these statements, just as science is unable to dispute the meat-roasting power of the meat-jack. But, on the other hand, it does not trouble about what cannot be proved or refuted, and leaves metaphysical entities and quiddities to the irony of Swift or the raillery of Voltaire.

From Haeckel, my lord, you quote a strong passage against "purpose" in Nature; and you might have added that Darwin saw "no more design in Natural Selection than in the way in which the wind blows." Does it not occur to you that these lords of science, these satraps of magnificent provinces in her empire, know her more intimately than you do, and that what escapes their vigilant attention is in all probability rather fancy than fact? Your unpractised eye sees God everywhere; their practised eyes fail to detect his presence. Even other eyes than those of the great English and German biologists have been unable to perceive what to you is so obvious. Sir William Hamilton, for instance, before Evolution challenged the public mind, declared "that the phenomena of matter, taken by themselves, so far from warranting

any inference to the existence of God, would, on the contrary, ground even an argument to his negation." A very different writer, Cardinal Newman, confesses, "If I looked into a mirror and did not see my face, I should have the same sort of feeling which actually comes upon me when I look into this living busy world and see no reflection of its Creator." You, my lord, look through Nature up to Nature's God. I have your word for it, but I doubt if your vision is so telescopic.

That "volition originates," as you allege, is only true within certain limits. Volition does, indeed, originate fresh collocations of matter, but it originates nothing else. And when you say that volition "has no cause preceding itself," you are simply alleging that all volition is eternal, which is diametrically opposed to your own doctrine that the human will, the only one of which we have absolute knowledge, is a gift from God. You will find, my lord, an admirable discussion of this point in Mr. Mill's Essay on Theism. Volition, as he points out, only acts by means of pre-existing force, first within the body, and afterwards outside it. It does not answer, therefore, "to the idea of a First Cause, since Force must in every instance be assumed as prior to it; and there is not the slightest color, derived from experience, for supposing Force itself to have been created by a volition. As far as anything can be concluded from human experience, Force has all the attributes of a thing eternal and uncreated."

Your argument for a First Cause is completely answered in the same Essay. In reality, my lord, a First Cause is a contradiction in terms. Causes and effects only differ in their order of succession; both are phenomenal changes; every cause has been an effect, and every effect becomes a cause. Causation, indeed, only applies to the changes in Nature, without affecting its permanent substance. Your whole remarks on Causation betray an imperfect acquaintance with the subject or a miserable trifling with your readers. Certainly "the idea of cause is in the mind itself," but

how did it get there? You deny that it is generated by experience, and you add that "a moment's consideration will show that this cannot be so." Do you really suppose, my lord, that the Experiential philosophers, from Locke to Bain, have not given a moment's consideration to the question? Do you assert this of Herbert Spencer? Do you assert it of John Stuart Mill? Have you read the fifth and twenty-third chapters of the third book in Mill's *Logic*? If you have, I say you are taking advantage of your reader's ignorance; if you have not, you are unfitted for the task you have undertaken.

Thus far, my lord, you have not arrived at a Creator, since you have not proved Creation, nor even defined it in intelligible language. Were I, for the sake of argument, to grant that mind is an entity as well as matter, the presumption would be in favor of their eternal co-existence. Whatever Deity you affirm is shorn of the attributes of infinity; he cannot be infinite in power, at least, even if he be in wisdom and goodness, for he has an everlasting rival or an everlasting colleague. Nor are your difficulties ended here. The benevolence of your Deity is imperilled. It was the opinion of Plato that God is prevented from realising his beneficent designs by the inherent badness and intractable qualities of matter. But this view is easily confronted by an opposite dogma. Bentham was justified in saying, "I affirm that the Deity is perfectly and systematically malevolent, and that he was only prevented from realising these designs by the inherent goodness and incorruptible excellence of matter. I admit that there is not the smallest evidence for this, but it is just as well supported, and just as probable as the preceding theory of Plato."

From metaphysical arguments, my lord, I turn to what you say on Design. "The argument from design," you allege, "is, in fact, one of the foundation stones of natural theology, and remains unshaken."

But I doubt if you really mean this, for if the argument is "unshaken" it is difficult to see what induced you to support it afresh. "Helps to Belief" is a title which implies that belief is enfeebled.

You have the sense to drop Paley's preposterous illustration of the watch, and you dilate upon the human eye, which is an optical instrument so "delicate and complicated" that it must be held to "indicate design," and to deny it is "something like an absurdity." Again, my lord, I say you are begging the question. However delicate and complicated an organ may be, if we discover how it became so we have explained it; and if the process, at every stage, has shown nothing but the action of natural causes, what necessity is there for a supernatural hypothesis? When Napoleon said to Laplace that his system left no room for God, the great astronomer replied "Sire, I have no need for that hypothesis." The law of parsimony forbids the assumption of occult causes when known causes are adequate to account for the phenomena.

Now, my lord, it is indisputable, and you are well aware of the fact, that the human eye did not spring into existence suddenly. We are able to trace the evolution of this organ down to its beginnings in low forms of life, where it is but a local susceptibility to the stimulus of light. To this you reply that the result is no "less ingenious or an indication of design, because you can trace the process by which the result is attained." The ingenuity, my lord, is not in the result but in the process. You must find it there or not at all. You seem to admit Natural Selection as an established truth, but is it not incompatible with Design, except in that universal sense in which Design can only be an assumption? If adaptation can be explained as a result, without introducing design as a cause, theology has nothing to gain by pointing to any organ however exquisitely developed. And if Natural Selection involves, as it does, the elimination by wholesale massacre and torture of countless unfit specimens,

does not this conflict with all our notions of the wise use of materials and the intelligent adjustment of means to an end ?

There is also, my lord, an aspect of the case which you prudently conceal. According to your theory, God has been making eyes for hundreds of thousands and perhaps millions of years. How is it, then, after such long and extensive practice, that he produces so many failures ? How do you account for short-sighted eyes, and even blind eyes ? What is your explanation of ophthalmic hospitals ? Would not any human workman be laughed at who turned out such multitudes of mistakes ?

You declare, my lord, in the language of Paley, that "a man cannot lift his hand to his head without finding enough to convince him of the existence of God." In a certain sense the remark may be true. Should the head be dirty, the man might find one of those objects which satisfied the magicians of Egypt that Moses and Aaron were inspired, and induced them to exclaim "this is the finger of God."

For the purpose of your case you dwell upon the greatness of man. Your language savors more of the platform than the pulpit. Century after century your Church has taught the doctrine of the Fall, and man's utter depravity. You, however, speak of his "front sublime," which, if the human race be taken as a whole, is positively absurd ; you speak of his "grand powers," which are difficult to find in a savage who can only count three ; and of his "exalted instincts," which are not discoverable in countless millions of mankind. Thus you praise "God's handiwork" to prove his wisdom and beneficence ; while, in the pulpit, you go to the other extreme to prove the doctrine of original sin.

Pursuing the Design argument, you point to "the truth" that "every arrangement in a plant or animal accomplishes some definite end." What then, you ask, is "the justifiable conclusion as to the origin of the

organism? Is it not this, that the organ is the outcome of a creative mind?"

Supposing the statement to be true, your conclusion is not a necessary one. In the struggle for existence the superfluous is harmful, and its possessors would tend to extinction. In the long run also, as organs grow by use and atrophy from disuse, the useful organs would flourish and the useless decay and disappear. There is no magic in the process, and nothing magical in the result.

But your statement is not true. Man himself possesses rudimentary organs, which are of no service; they fulfil no function, being useless relics of a long anterior state. One of them, the vermiform appendage of the cæcum, has been known to harbour seeds, which have set up inflammation and caused death.

Man has a rudimentary tail; rudimentary muscles for moving the ears and the skin; rudimentary hair over the body; and rudimentary wisdom-teeth, which are a great nuisance, and a common cause of neuralgia. Through the law of inheritance, likewise, the generative and nutritive organs of one sex are partially transmitted to the other. Perhaps your lordship will be good enough to inform me what "definite end" is served by the rudimentary mammæ in men?

You merely allude to these things, my lord, as "very exceptional cases," as though a theory need not cover all the facts. You even venture on the remark that "exceptions prove rules," which is not an admitted law in any system of logic I am acquainted with.

You also observe that these "exceptions" only raise "a plausible objection" to the Design argument. Haeckel considers them "a formidable obstacle," and I prefer his opinion to yours, especially when I watch your curious attempt to explain away "the plausible objection."

"A friend once presented me with a warm garment of exceedingly ingenious construction, and bade me wear it during the coming winter. I did so, and for some time I had two feelings

with regard to the garment: one, that of admiration of the ingenuity of its construction; the other, that of gratitude to my friend for thinking of me and trying to keep me warm. But one day an observing neighbor, with a keen eye and much penetration, discovered a button which appeared to be of no use. I may say that the explanation of the button was that it was an essential part of a garment, somewhat like mine, and which my friend had originally intended to give me; but in the course of the construction he had determined to adopt a somewhat improved form, and so the tailor altered the pattern, but omitted to remove the button. My observing neighbor suspected that this was the case; for my own part I had no strong opinion on the subject. It seemed to me that, button or no button, the garment was admirably contrived, and that the kindness of the giver was beyond a doubt."

God then, my lord, forgets the buttons! It is a poor compliment to his omniscience. He decided to make things in one way, altered his mind, left in some of the old pattern through inadvertence, and hence the presence of rudimentary organs. How charming! How pretty it would be in a nursery book! Do you really mean it, my lord; and do you really see any analogy between the making of a coat and the growth of an organism?

Turning to the mental and moral aspects of the world, you are confronted, my lord, with the existence of evil. You are obliged to admit the presence of "phenomena which it seems difficult to reconcile with the most obvious notions of perfect benevolence." You allow that God "permits the existence of much which is evil," and you are ashamed to fall back upon the orthodox theory of Satan, who does all the harm while the Deity does all the good. Accepting evolution, at least up to the point of man's "soul," you must be perfectly aware that pain and misery are not on the surface of things but part of their very texture; and that Natural Selection acts through a struggle for existence which makes the earth a shambles. "Kill or be killed" is a strange rule of life for Beneficence to impress on its creation. You see this, my lord, and you have two ways of surmounting the difficulty.

First, you say that the abounding evil of this world is "inconsistent with *certain conceptions* which we have formed." It is to be presumed you mean that God's ways are not our ways. I concede the fact, my lord, but how is it to be reconciled with your theory? Why do you call the Deity "good" if you mean that his goodness and ours are different "conceptions"? Can you expect me to worship a God whose beneficence has to be vindicated by arts which insult my understanding? Let me remind you of the memorable protest of Mr. Mill in his reply to Dean Mansel, whose footsteps you follow with a faltering tread. "I will call no being good," he said, "who is not what I mean when I apply that epithet to my fellow creatures; and if such a being can sentence me to hell for not so calling him, to hell I will go."

Secondly, you suggest that God was hampered by unfavorable conditions. "Perhaps, if we knew all," you say, "we should know, as in our ignorance it may be permissible to guess, that the method of Creation actually used by the Creator was the only one possible in the nature of things." You say again that God is carrying out a purpose, and that he knows the best, or "perhaps the only way of doing it." You also surmise that "he was pleased to submit himself to limitations."

If the Deity submitted himself to limitations, who imposed them? If he had a choice, as your language implies, is he not responsible for the selection? Did he not create "the nature of things," and if it was unsuitable could he not create another "nature of things?" Can you conceive any limitations of Omnipotence? Is it possible to imagine Omniscience doing "the best in the circumstances"? You trust that "somehow things will come right at the last." But is not this the language of blind faith? Is it not also an admission that things are wrong at present?

I see no force in your remark that "he who does not believe in God does not get rid of the evil and sorrow." He may try to lessen them, my lord; and he gets rid

of the belief in a monster. At the very worst "The grave's most holy peace is ever sure," and meanwhile it is a comfort to think that,

No Fiend with names divine
Made us and tortures us ; if we must pine
It is to satiate no Being's gall.

In your opinion "Atheism is connected either with the excessive ingenuity of a subtle intellect, or with moral considerations of a perverse and morbid kind." I differ from you, my lord ; but I allow that you have cleverly dressed up the old fiction that every Atheist is a fool or a rogue.

Atheists are not to be deceived by phrases. When you say that "life must have come from a fontal origin of life" you are only making a "mystery" more mysterious. When you say that "the egg contains a principle of life, which postulates a giver of life," you are once more begging the question.

You are an Evolutionist except at the beginning and the end. You assume that God created life, and you are loth to believe in the natural genesis of man. You remark that the "missing link" is "not to be found in any of the geological records of the past." How do you know that? The geological record is imperfect, and the preservation of "missing links" is not a natural necessity. Nor have geological investigations been made in any part of the world where the human race could have originated. You smile at Haeckel's belief that "the remains of our early progenitors are embedded in the depths of the Indian Ocean," and you remark that "an imaginary continent is, of course, not science, and does not really help us." The continent, however, is not so "imaginary." Certainly it is not so imaginary as the supernatural theories you introduce to account for what we do not understand, and to contradict what we do. Nor is it so imaginary as the "distinction" you find in Genesis between the life of man and the life of the lower animals. The

Revised Version informs us that the "living soul" or "breath of life" was common to both.

The "soul" elicits one of your characteristic sentences. "Here," you say, "Science fails us altogether, Philosophy speaks with a doubtful accent, and Theology remains master of the field." True, my lord; theology is always master of the field of ignorance, and where our knowledge ends our religion begins. What we know is Nature, what we do not know is God. Science is ever widening the circle of light in which we live and work, and on the border of darkness the theologian plies his trade, passing off as the voice of the Infinite the echo of his own babblings.

THE BELIEVING THIEF.

TO THE REV. C. H. SPURGEON.

SIR,—

You are one of the most popular preachers in Christendom, you gather round you a congregation of five thousand men and women, and your printed sermons are said to be circulated in every part of the world where the English language is spoken. Nature has endowed you with a clear musical voice, not the orator's voice, which is capable of expressing every emotion, from the soft whisper of pity to the thunder of denunciation, but the preacher's voice, fitted to express the subdued and monotonous feelings of Protestant theology. This gift, combined with a fair command of homely English, and a Saxon capacity for work, accounts for your remarkable success. You are not an evangelist of new ideas. You have not to

create an appetite for what you supply. The material upon which you work was produced in unlimited quantities before you were born. Orthodox instincts, orthodox sentiments, and orthodox ideas, were already in existence, and you have only played upon them. Out of the five million inhabitants of London, who are mostly Christians by training, temperament, and profession, you have collected five thousand. This proves you an able competitor against other preachers, but it gives you no position as a leader of thought or a general in the army of progress.

You have a certain vein of facetiousness, and a reputation for telling "good stories," but your gifts in this direction are heightened and exaggerated by contrast. The pulpit is expected to be dull, or at least decorous, and feeble witticisms from such a quarter are apt to pass as potent; just as a somersault, which is commonplace on the part of a street arab, would be comic if cut by a clergyman.

Your private life is said to be exemplary. I have no means of judging, but I am content to believe; as a man I value my own character, and I am ready to respect yours. But I am unable to reconcile your mode of living with your profession. I cannot understand how anyone with a fair amount of sincerity can preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and above all the gospel of the Sermon on the Mount, and at the same time maintain an establishment like yours. When I hear that your residence is one of the finest in the south of England, that your grounds are magnificent, that your live stock rivals the Queen's at Windsor, that you keep a splendid carriage and several fine horses, that your table is well appointed and your cigars are excellent, I am positively amazed at your Imitation of Christ. At such a rate the cross is easy to be borne. When I consider that you fully enjoy all the good things of this life, which must be provided by the labor of others, and that you have in addition the glorious assurance of a reserved seat in Paradise, I

cannot help reflecting that there is after all a profound truth in the text that "godliness is great gain."

What a difference there is between the founder of Christianity and its modern exponents! He had not soived the problem of how to make the best of both worlds. He drank to the dregs that bitter cup which has furnished them with an easy theme for the cheapest eloquence. He died upon the Cross, and they live upon the Cross. I am not one of his devoted admirers, but I turn from them to him with a sense of relief. He looks pathetic, tragic, sublime, in comparison with these who coin his blood into golden shekels.

Nor am I able to reconcile your enjoyment of life with your belief in predestination, hell, and the eternal perdition of the majority of the human race. You do not merely accept these doctrines; you cling to them, and you denounce your brethren who would desert them for a sweeter faith. You see multitudes of your fellow-creatures dancing along "the primrose path to the everlasting bonfire." The friend whose hand you clasp to-day may be in Hell to-morrow. Your own children may fall into the place of torment. Yet you smile, you crack jokes, you grow fat, you contract the rich man's disease of gout. Is this consistent? Is it honorable? Is it humane? If I believed your frightful creed I hope I should have the decency to be solemn.

When your gout is acute you show your trust in God, and your belief in the efficacy of prayer, by taking a holiday at Mentone. You leave the congregation to pray for your recovery while you try the effect of the air and sunshine of the Mediterranean. Does it not occur to you that an Atheist might get better in such circumstances? Why is it that God does you more good in the South of Europe than in the South of London? Why is prayer offered up in one place and answered in another? Why does God help you, and give no relief to the suffering thousands

within a mile of your Tabernacle, who do not earn a splendid income by preaching "Blessed be ye poor," who must bear their afflictions in the fetid atmosphere of narrow streets, and languish and die for want of the resources which keep you out of heaven.

This is a long exordium to a brief letter. Let me now pass to the sermon I wish to eriticise. It was preached on April 7, and is therefore an expression of your ripest wisdom. Its title, "The Believing Thief," attracted my attention. There are so many believing thieves, and I wondered which of them you selected. Six years ago I fell among thieves myself, and they were all believers. An Atheist was a *rara avis* in Holloway Gaol. There were Catholics and Protestants by the thousand, during the twelve months I enjoyed a seasonable relish of Christian charity, and I was fully prepared to meet a believing thief. You have introduced one. You select the first on record, the thief who begged a favor of Jesus on the cross. He was the very first Christian who ever entered heaven, and you "think the Savior took him with him (I don't admire your grammar) as a specimen of what he meant to do." This fortunate gentlemen, you admit, was a convicted felon, and perhaps a murderer, but he believed on Jesus at his last gasp, and his soul soared away from the cross to the realms of bliss and glory. The other thief missed his opportunity, and that one mistake made all the difference between heaven and hell. It seems a heavy penalty for a single blunder, but everyone knows that the difference between heaven and hell is no greater than the difference between divine and human justice.

I cannot but admire the airy manner in which you skim over the discrepancy in the gospel narratives. Luke is the only one who relates the incident of the believing thief; the others represent both thieves as mocking Jesus. But instead of seeing a gross contradiction, as you would in any other history, you suppose they both mocked Jesus at first, and one of

them was converted while engaged in this pastime. Such a method of interpretation would make a harmony of the wildest discord.

According to Luke, Jesus said to the believing thief "To-day shalt thou be with me in Paradise." You dwell upon *To-day* with "damnable iteration," and you affirm that the converted felon was in Paradise that very evening. You decline to speculate "as to where our Lord went when he quitted the body which hung upon the cross," though you must be aware of the importance of this problem. The Creeds say that he "descended into hell." This was the opinion of the greatest Fathers, it is endorsed in the Church of England articles, and it is countenanced by Peter and Paul. You shun the discussion of this point, and indulge your foible of dogmatism. Jesus died an hour or two before the thief, and "during that time the eternal glory flamed through the underworld, and was flashing through the gates of Paradise just when the pardoned thief was entering the eternal world," so that the Savior and his "specimen" went through the pearly gates together. You add that "We know Paradise means heaven, for the apostle speaks of such a man caught up into Paradise, and anon he calls it the third heaven."

Your uncritical audience may swallow this as gospel, but I can hardly suppose you so ignorant. You must be aware that the matter is not so simple. Learned divines have written at great length on the subject, and although their speculations are not infallible, there is still less infallibility in your dogmatism. Take up so accessible a book as Bishop Beveridge's *Ecclesia Anglicana Ecclesia Catholica*, read his chapter on the third Article, consult his learned and voluminous footnotes, and then ask yourself whether it is honest to veil the controversy from your congregation, and to decide it for them peremptorily as though you were an independent oracle of God.

Learning apart, sir, there is another reason against

your dogmatism, and that is the language of Scripture. If Jesus went to heaven the very evening of his Crucifixion, did he descend again to re-animate his body on the Sunday morning? And why did he undertake two such journeys? Was it simply to fulfil his promise to the believing thief? Or was it to settle with his Father the arrangements for his public ascent?

Not being inspired, you may decline to answer these questions. But there is another question to which I may demand a reply. According to your assertion, Jesus went up to heaven on the Friday evening; but according to John (xx., 17), Jesus met Mary Magdalene in the garden on the Sunday, and when she would have approached him, he cried, *Touch me not, for I am not yet ascended to my Father.* If Jesus did not speak these words, we may as well sell our Bibles for waste-paper; if he did speak them, you have been preaching a falsehood. I know the tricks of your craft, but I refuse to be deceived. I take a sentence in its plain and grammatical meaning. "I am *not yet ascended* unto my Father," is as clear a sentence as ever came from the lips of God or man. If Jesus had visited "the third heaven" before, he would have said "I am now descended from the Father." You may answer (what will not a minister answer?) that the "I" refers to Christ's *body*, but this is flying in the face of common sense. "I" may mean soul and body, or soul without body, but it cannot mean body without soul.

Three-fourths of your pretty rhetoric is thus exploded. The believing thief was not in Paradise with Jesus that very day. Forty days elapsed according to one narrative—and *you* must accept it—before the Lord ascended; and during that time the believing thief must have hung about "the pearly gates" waiting for his Redeemer.

Let me press the dilemma. If Jesus said "To-day shalt thou be with me in Paradise," he was mistaken,

and if he was mistaken then, he may have been mistaken on a hundred other occasions. If Jesus did not say it, Luke is mistaken, and if Luke was mistaken once, he may have been mistaken often. Nay, if Luke was mistaken, Matthew, Mark, and John may have been mistaken; and your infallible Scripture is like a dilapidated spider's web; or, if you prefer the simile, like a leaky kettle, which lets out the water of inspiration, and puts out the fire of belief.

The lessons you deduce from the story of the believing thief are not very edifying. First, you say, it shows the Savior's condescension; and as man, in your view, is the riff-raff of creation, there is a great solace in his stooping to the worst of sinners. "It gives me an assurance," you exclaim, "that he will not refuse to associate with *me*." I presume you would call this modesty, but to my mind it is the pride which apes humility. You cannot boast of being the chief of sinners, for St. Paul seized upon that distinction. Nevertheless you may pride yourself, with a humble face, on being an excellent second. This attitude is common among the elect. They are miserable worms; but how they rear their heads if others tell them so!

Several times in the course of your sermon, you positively annex the Redeemer, calling him *yours*, and inviting your fellow sinners to come to "my Lord." See, sir, how tastes differ. You regard this as solemn; to me it is laughable. I smile at your masked pride, and when you turn the seamy side of your cloak outwards I observe that the purple is all the nearer your heart.

A great poet has satirised this "humble" posturing, and you will forgive me for quoting his epigram.

Once in a saintly passion
I cried with desperate grief
"O Lord, my heart is black with guile,
Of sinners I am chief."

Then stooped my guardian angel
And whispered from behind,
"Vanity, my little man,
You're nothing of the kind!"

The second lesson is the supremacy of grace over works. According to your philosophy—borrowed chiefly, I suspect, from Martin Luther's commentary on *Galatians*—our noblest virtues are only splendid rags, that will make us burn all the better in Hell. Works cannot save us. The best man on earth deserves everlasting torment every minute of his life. We are saved by grace. And the crowning proof of it is the salvation of the believing thief. Death stared him in the face; he was incapable of good works. The grace of God entered into his heart, his soul was filled with faith, and, notwithstanding his life of crime, he soared from the cross into Paradise.

Let me ask you why the other thief was less fortunate. Why did the grace of God hold aloof from him?

Without that grace we cannot have faith, and without faith we cannot be saved. Do you not see that this makes God everything and man nothing; that it is a gospel of fatalism, or arbitrary predestination; that all your preaching is wasted, except as it procures you a living; and that it cannot possibly make the slightest difference how men act in this world, since God imparts grace or withholds it at his pleasure, saving whom he will save and damning whom he will damn?

The third lesson is that the vilest sinner, who has led a life of selfishness or crime—the thief, the seducer, the adulterer, the murderer—may be saved at the very last minute. "In a single instant," you declare, "the sins of sixty or seventy years can be absolutely forgiven." "If a man dies," you say, "five minutes after his first act of faith, he is safe as if he had served the Lord for fifty years." The believing thief went to Paradise through faith, and faith will enable the heaviest sinner to fly up to the pearly gates.

Far be it from me to say that God, who made men, should plunge them into Hell, or inflict upon them the smallest suffering. I even deny his right to do so. He would be infamous to punish his own failures. Whatever responsibility there is in the case is from

God to man, not from man to God. The creator is responsible, not the created.

Still, man is governed by motives, and your doctrine is a premium on immorality. You set up a Heaven and a Hell, you offer pleasure or pain hereafter, and declare that a death-bed repentance will wash out a life of sin. True, you stipulate that the repentance shall be sincere, but the sinner will have little apprehension on that account. You appeal to his personal hopes and fears as to the future life; and you tell him that, however wicked he may be, he stands as great a chance of Heaven as the holiest saint, if he only looks to Jesus at the last. You call this a glorious gospel. I call it infamous. It is not a doctrine of mercy, but a doctrine of license. After appealing to men's selfishness, without regard to reason or humanity, it shows them an easy way of making evil as profitable as good. Were I to adopt your own language I might call it "infamous bosh."

You are in the habit of reading Flavel. From his sermon on this very subject you borrow the case of Marcus Caius Victorious, a heathen of the primitive times, who was converted to Christianity in his old age. But you dress up the story in an unscrupulous manner. According to Flavel, the Christians would not trust him for a long time, owing to "the unusualness of a conversion at such an age." Old age, however, is not enough for your purpose, so you turn him into "a gross sinner."

Your accuracy or honesty is a small matter. My object in citing Flavel is to point out that he saw the snare of death-bed repentance, and warned his hearers against it. You are more accommodating, sir; and in view of your belief, the more accommodating you are the more you sap the foundations of morality.

Considering the company you picture in Heaven, the believing thief being a "sample" of the "bulk," I shall not be sorry if I am quartered elsewhere. I do not play the Pharisee, but, like every sensible and

self-respecting man, I choose my company. If it makes no difference to the caterer, I prefer going below in the society of honest and intelligent sceptics, rather than above in the society of all the abject scoundrels who earned salvation by crying "I'm sorry."

You appear to know a great deal about the invisible, and I venture to ask you a question. "Heaven and Hell," you assert, "are not places far away." They are very near; in fact, you say, we may be in one or the other before the clock ticks again. Do you mean that heaven and hell are in the atmosphere? Or do you mean that the soul, on leaving the body, flies with such inconceivable rapidity that distance is annihilated? Surely you have not stumbled on the truth that heaven and hell are *within us*.

Let me conclude by asking you another question. You talk much about the believing thief. Do you know anything about the unbelieving one? Daniel O'Connell declared that Benjamin Disraeli was the lineal descendant of the impenitent thief. Will you tell me if this is true? And if so, have you any objection to preaching another sermon on the unbelieving thief, and his unbelieving posterity? At any rate, it would be quite as instructive as your first sermon, and probably far more amusing.

THE ATONEMENT.

TO THE BISHOP OF PETERBOROUGH.

MY LORD,—

Like your brother in God, the Bishop of Carlisle, you have contributed a volume to the "Helps to Belief" series; and as that volume is necessarily

addressed to as many of the public as it chances to reach, I need not apologise for writing you this letter.

According to the law, my lord, I am a member of the Church of England, and I have a right to look to you, as one of her Bishops, for spiritual guidance; and certainly you should be able to give it, for you are paid the magnificent salary of £4,500 a year, which is only a trifle less than that of the Prime Minister of the British Empire. I can hardly suppose you take such a salary without feeling you deserve it, especially as it was part of the prospect before you when you declared your belief that you were called to your bishopric by the Holy Ghost. It is to be presumed, therefore, that you will not resent my approach, or feel aggrieved at my criticism of the *help* you have offered—at the cost of ninepence—to my *belief*.

First, my lord, let me deal with your Preface. You remark that the Atonement is “a subject the literature of which would fill a library.” True, my lord; the blood of Christ is nothing (in quantity) to the ink which his priests and prophets have shed in explaining it. After so many volumes on the subject one is surprised at the necessity for another. Ordinary blood does not require such a colossal literature. But the blood of Christ is a peculiar article, and its physiology and chemistry seem to change like the combinations of a kaleidoscope.

In one respect your Preface is an apology. You observe that the “large subject of the Jewish and Pagan sacrifices in their relation to the sacrifice of Christ, could be only very inadequately dealt with.” But in an age of Evolution, my lord, when everything is being explained by the law of continuity and progression, this is simply evading your principal duty.

You further observe that it was impossible to “discuss the exact force and value” of such terms as “ransom,” “redemption,” “payment of debt,” and “reconciliation.” Now these terms, my lord, are

found in the New Testament, which, as you frequently assert, is the *sole* authority on the Atonement or any other Christian doctrine. Why, then, did you avoid what, as a preacher of the Word, you are chiefly bound to unfold? It is not true, as you allege, that you have confined yourself to the task of answering the "most common and salient objections to the doctrine of the Atonement," for you devote but one chapter to that object, and four to general exposition. This excuse, therefore, fails utterly; indeed I can scarcely understand it, except on the supposition that your Preface was written before the volume.

Your readers, my lord, are "entreated" to believe that you have "endeavored to deal honestly with objections." Why should you "entreat" them to believe this? Does an honest man beg the world to acknowledge him as such? Does he not rely on his character speaking for itself? You have written and published your volume, and why should you protest your sincerity in the Preface? Had you a shrewd suspicion of its necessity? I admit the difficulty of a man in your position being honest—I mean intellectually. You provide, not proofs, but excuses for faith. You confess that you seek to help those who "only doubt and yet would fain believe." Is not the very suggestion immoral? Why should we *desire* to believe anything? I do not deny the fact; it is a frailty of our nature; but a public teacher should not pander to our infirmities. Writing for those who would "fain believe" is an easy occupation. Feeling ekes out the deficiencies of reason, and premises are distorted to justify impossible conclusions.

That you have "dealt tenderly with doubts and difficulties" I cheerfully admit. You smooth down the feathers of doubt with a loving hand, and deal tenderly—oh, *so* tenderly!—with every difficulty. I shall not emulate you, my lord, in this respect; and perhaps *you* will find eventually that difficulties are like nettles, that if you cannot grasp them will sting.

Your first chapter, my lord, opens with a piece of advice, namely, that those who explain a Christian doctrine should first "state it in the very words of Scripture itself." But you do not follow your own recipe. You select a passage in which "atonement," "redemption," or "propitiation" does not occur. I admire your prudence and *tenderness*, but I wish you had more courage. The passage you select is as follows:—

"If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 Ep. St. John i., 8, 9).

Now, my lord, I ask you frankly whether any theologian, except one who deals tenderly with difficulties, would ever select this as his text for expounding the Atonement. The passage does not contain a reference to the doctrine. Would it not have been braver, and more honest, to select a strong, downright passage from Paul or Peter, to explain it, defend it, and stand by it to the death? Why should Revelation require the assistance of the most dexterous special-pleading? Why should God's truth be championed with subterfuges? Why is it necessary to present the teachings of infinite Wisdom and Goodness in the least offensive manner? To my mind, you had better leave the "difficult, abstruse mystery," as you call it, to take care of itself, than defend it by such specious arts.

Let me, however, follow your divagations. You ask, *What is sin?* and you define it as "that tendency in our nature which induces it to resent and rebel against law"—a definition which would delight the Czar of Russia or the late King Bomba of Naples.

You say that man is "essentially *lawless*, and he is, moreover, the only being in creation that is so." Other creatures live in harmony with their environment, but in man there is a struggle between conscience and desire.

There is little struggle, my lord, between conscience

and desire among the lowest savages. A Thug has been known to feel remorse at having missed an opportunity of assassination, but this illustration will not serve your turn. As man ascends in the intellectual and moral scale, he is able to perceive the law of reason, his sympathies are developed, and his imagination "looks before and after." He forms ideals, which he more or less strives to realise; and the conflict in his nature, to which you point, is simply an incident of his upward struggle. It is the antagonism of past and future in the arena of the present. To the Evolutionist it is perfectly intelligible. Tiger passion, or monkey lust, is no more a mystery than our rudimentary tail. They are marks of our descent. And our ideals and aspirations are fore-gleams of the goal to which we are ever advancing.

You make a mystery also of conscience, this monitor "which blames us when we transgress, which punishes us for it, too, by a very sore penalty." Not in all cases, my lord. Remove the fear of discovery, and the dread of punishment, and there is a small residuum of conscience in millions of Christians. I have yet to learn that the clergy themselves are more sensitive than their neighbors. Thousands of Church livings are bought and sold in the market as openly as any other merchandise, yet every clergyman, on taking a benefice, solemnly swears that he has not been a party to any simoniacal contract. Do you mean to assert, my lord, that this perjury causes the hypocrites a single pang?

You desire the sceptic to inform you why man blames himself for wrong-doing, and why he does not blame himself for being stunted, sickly, dull, or stupid. You ask how it is he feels no remorse because he cannot write like Shakespeare or paint like Raphael. Does it not occur to you that conscience deals with conduct, and that conduct is determined by motives? One element of conscience, and perhaps the strongest, is susceptibility to public opinion; but public opinion, while it may induce a man to act in one way rather

than another, cannot alter the limits of his nature. If stature, health, good looks, and ability were amenable to motives, conscience would have asserted its supremacy over them. We only blame ourselves for what is blameworthy in others, and we reserve our reproaches for what is alterable. We do not blame a chimney-pot for falling upon us, because it is useless. For the same reason we do not blame a man for being short or ugly. If our reproaches had any effect, there would soon be a forceful pressure of public opinion on little ill-looking people.

I have said, my lord, that we only blame ourselves for what is blameworthy in others, and I add that what condemns is in both cases the same. "I" and "me" are very convenient terms, but they sanction a great deal of nonsense in philosophy and theology. It is "I" who am selfish and "I" who am generous. It is "I" who do wrong and "I" who repent. But this "I" is a very complex being, and in reality it is different parts of my nature that act in these various ways. I have personal impulses and social instincts. When I sin against the law of reason and humanity my better feelings condemn the transgression, and my remorse will be proportionate to their strength. Were I to strike my child in a moment of anger (I have never done it, and I hope I never shall), I should have little to fear from public opinion, which still sanctions such outrages; but I should suffer remorse, because my love for my child, and my sense of personal dignity, would utter their emphatic protest when my passion subsided.

Where is the mystery, my lord, and why do you assume that the Materialist is unable to account for the facts? Why should you tell us that God has designed the sting of conscience as a punishment for disobedience? Is it a mark of divine wisdom that the good should feel it most and the bad least? Would a cattle-drover prod the swift ox and leave the slow ungoaded?

Recurring to *sin*, my lord, I see you define it as "an offence against a person." I agree with you; but I differ from you when you say the person is God. I cannot sin against God, because I cannot injure him; although he *can* sin against me, for he can make me happy or miserable. I can only sin against my fellow men. This idea does not seem to have entered your mind. You refer me to God for forgiveness. A cheap philosophy, my lord! What of those I have wronged? Were I a pious bank director, who had feathered his own nest and ruined thousands, I might obtain God's forgiveness, but would it be any reparation to those I had robbed? Would it restore the suicide to his happy home? Would it drown the curses of my victims?

You admit yourself "how unavailing penitence must be to remove the consequence of transgression." But you draw a distinction between forgiveness as an *act* and forgiveness as a *sentiment*. Nevertheless you see that this will not serve your purpose, for the doctrine of the Atonement involves the remission of penalties. You therefore fall back upon "something strange, wonderful, not easy to understand or believe." You assert that Christ procures actual forgiveness for us "in some mysterious way." You say it is effected by a suspension of the laws of nature, which "in some way" withdraws us from "what would otherwise be their inevitable and necessary operation." In other words, my lord, you take refuge in a miracle, where I decline to follow you. You begin by appealing to reason, and end by renouncing it. No wonder you exclaim, a little later, when dealing with an objection, that "this is merely an intellectual difficulty!"

When we plead to God for mercy, you tell us that "our cry is helped, is made more prevailing, by the pleading for us of another, and that other Christ." You say that this is neither immoral nor absurd, for "friendly intercession is a familiar fact of our human experience," and if it is neither unnatural nor unworthy

as between man and man "why should it be so as between man and God?" Do you not see that the illustration is a poor compliment to the Deity? You make the Son more merciful than the Father. And as, according to the articles of your Church, it is all settled beforehand, the whole business is a divine comedy. I do not understand how "there may be a wrath of God that is kindled by the flame of love," but if you choose to picture the Father "nursing his wrath to keep it warm," and the Son cooling him down and coaxing him into a good temper, I have no right to quarrel with you. England is a free country—especially for Christians.

"Our repentance," you say, "could not avail to obtain our pardon were it not for what Christ has done and is doing for us." But what has he done, and what is he doing? He is the "propitiation for our sins." But what does this mean? You say it will "help us little to have recourse to grammar and dictionary." Perhaps so. But would it not help us to have recourse to the language of Peter and Paul? You studiously avoid their utterances, and in my opinion you do so because they teach a doctrine of the Atonement which you desire to conceal. You repudiate their plainest teaching. "Where," you ask, "in the whole New Testament is it alleged that Christ died in order to appease an angry God? Nowhere!" Turn, my lord, to Romans v., 9, and read—"Being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him," or, according to the Revised Version, from "the wrath of God." Again you say that "this idea of Christ suffering the same, or an equivalent, penalty with that which is due by us, and this suffering being a satisfaction to the justice of God, is wholly indefensible." Now Peter says (1st, iii., 18) "Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust." Paul says (1st Cor., vi., 20) "For ye are bought with a price." He repeats this sentence in the next chapter. If words have any meaning your "indefensible" doctrine is supported by

Scripture. Your own words that "in the sacrifice of Christ's death there was an atoning, a propitiatory efficacy," really concede the whole case you would dispute. You hedge and trim, and talk mysteriously, but you finally settle down on the good old orthodox doctrine; the doctrine of Peter and Paul; the doctrine of your standard authorities, Beveridge and Pearson; the doctrine of your Book of Homilies; the doctrine of the eleventh Article of the Church of England.

Adam fell, and we, his posterity, inherit his sinful nature, which, as your ninth Article declares, "in every person born into this world deserveth God's wrath and damnation." Christ came to be crucified, as your second Article declares, in order "to reconcile his Father to us, and to be a sacrifice, not only for original guilt, but also for all actual sins of men." According to Scripture we must be saved by the name of Jesus or not at all; wherefore your articles (10, 13, 17, and 18) distinctly affirm that only those are saved who are "chosen in Christ," that our best deeds without "the grace of Christ" are displeasing to God, and that the noblest men, outside the Christian pale, whether heathen or unbelievers, are doomed to everlasting hell. Your heart, my lord, or your prudence, revolts against this hideous doctrine. But why did you sign the Thirty-nine Articles? Why do you take £4,500 a year to teach what you cannot believe? Would it not be more manly to teach it plainly or disown it publicly?

You tell me that "in *some* way Christ's death has removed *an* obstacle to our forgiveness;" you say you admit "an Atonement" but no "particular theory of the Atonement;" you say "we are wise if we refrain from at all attempting to define;" and finally you appeal to Faith to justify your "strange, mysterious, difficult, perplexing dogma." Why should I believe what is strange, mysterious, difficult, and perplexing? You have many good reasons for pretending to—a bishopric, a seat in the House of Lords, social distinc-

tion, and £4,500 a year. But what reason have I—a poor, persecuted Freethinker—to believe what I cannot understand; or what, so far as I do understand it, I utterly detest and abhor?

Pardon me, my lord, for introducing the name of Thomas Paine; but he was a great man, and his name will outlive that of any member of the present bench of Bishops. My object in mentioning this illustrious writer is to show you the impression made upon his mind, in boyhood, by your doctrine of Atonement; and I will give it in his own words from the *Age of Reason*.

“I well remember, when about seven or eight years of age, hearing a sermon read by a relation of mine, who was a great devotee of the Church, upon the subject of what is called *redemption by the death of the Son of God*. After the sermon was ended, I went into the garden, and as I was going down the garden steps (for I perfectly recollect the spot) I revolted at the recollection of what I had heard, and thought to myself that it was making God Almighty act like a passionate man that killed his son, when he could not revenge himself in any other way; and as I was sure a man would be hanged that did such a thing, I did not see for what purpose they preached such sermons. This was not one of those kind of thoughts that had anything in it of childish levity; it was to me a serious reflection arising from the idea I had, that God was too good to do such an action, and also too almighty to be under any necessity of doing it. I believe in the same manner to this moment: and I moreover believe that any system of religion that has anything in it that shocks the mind of a child, cannot be a true system.”

I do not know whether God is too good to do such an action, for I have less acquaintance with him than Paine, who was a Deist; but, with that exception, I have the honor to endorse every word in this passage.

You deny that the sacrifice of Christ was made “to appease the wrath of an angry God,” but you allow that it was “to effect the compassionate purpose of a loving God.” What is this but juggling with words? It is not the form of expression I object to, but the substance of the doctrine. However you state it, the fact remains that God required the sacrifice of his own

son before he would be reconciled with his creatures. Nor will it avail to plead that Christ was a willing victim. This may prove his generosity, but it does not save the reputation of his father. Whether Christ came, as you affirm, or was "sent," as I read in St. Paul, your Deity is equally cruel and detestable.

Calvinism boldly takes its stand on what it calls divine justice, which is happily very unlike human justice, and follows St. Paul in affirming God's right to do as he likes with his own. It is not for us to question, but to obey. He is angry with us for our sins, which he regards as infinite because they are committed against an infinite being; and as our sins, nay, every one of them, deserves an infinite punishment, it follows that we must suffer for them eternally. There is, however, one way of escape. Being a trinity, God is able to act in three different ways at once. Justice is therefore wielded by the Father, mercy by the Son, and grace by the Holy Ghost. The Father insists on payment of his debt of damnation, the Son offers to pay it all with his own sufferings, and the Holy Ghost undertakes to supervise the contract.

Such is the time-honored doctrine of the Atonement, and although I regard it as a theological pantomime, I am bound to confess that it hangs together logically; while your doctrine, if I may be allowed a colloquialism, is neither fish, flesh, fowl, nor good red herring.

I have already observed, however, that you use language which implies the whole orthodox theory. You allow the three ideas of propitiation, sacrifice, and atonement; and as an anatomist from a few bones, or even one, will construct the entire skeleton of the organism to which they belonged, so a skilful Calvinist would develop his complete theory out of your admissions. Your only escape from his remorseless logic is to cry "A mystery, a mystery!" But it is easy for the Calvinist to reply that, while the reason of a process may be a mystery, the process itself is not so,

and that while the facts are uncertain, it is idle to discuss their explanation.

Having tried to understand what *you* mean by propitiation, I can discover nothing but this, that Jesus Christ puts the Almighty in a good temper; but you do not state how the operation is performed, or why it is needed. You are equally hazy as to sacrifice. You tell me that the death of Christ removed *an* obstacle to our forgiveness, an "obstacle existing not on the human but on the Divine side." But you do not state the nature of the obstacle, or explain how one part of the Trinity removes obstacles from the mind of another part of the Trinity. As for atonement, you veil your meaning, if you have a meaning, in a cloud of words. It is possible that you will impose or a number of invertebrate readers, but every thinking person who reads your essay will wonder how it is that Christian doctrines are defended by the method of emptying every leading term of the meaning it has borne for nearly two thousand years. The Christian ship is to be rebuilt and refitted, a fresh cargo is to be chartered, new bunting is to be run aloft, and all that is to be retained is the old figure-head!

To my mind it is beyond a doubt that the Christian doctrine of the Atonement is a sublimation of the old Jewish and Pagan notions of sacrifice. This you deny, and for various reasons. The first is that the Pagan idea of sacrifice was "the substitution of an unwilling victim." Not necessarily so, my lord; and if you read the two stories attentively you will find that Iphigenia was no more and no less an unwilling victim than Jesus Christ. Your second reason is that the immolation of victims was "selfish and cowardly," and I presume you intend it to be inferred that it is "generous and brave" on the part of Christians to avail themselves of the sufferings of their Savior, and that the beautiful hymn "Throw it all upon Jesus" is the perfection of disinterestedness. I cannot admit

the inference, and I dispute the fact. The ancient sacrifices were not necessarily "selfish and cowardly." They were nearly always corporate ceremonies. There was supposed to be a spiritual autonomy of the tribe or nation, and if the gods were offended they plagued the whole body of their worshippers. For this reason, as is pointed out by Rénan, the national gods were always the most bloodthirsty and terrible, while the domestic gods were merciful and benign. The sacrifice, therefore, was made in the interest of the whole people, to avoid pestilence, famine, or extermination. It was not selfishness and cowardice, but a dark superstition, which led the Jews to hang the sons of Saul in order to arrest a famine. After three years' suffering they inquired of David, who inquired of the Lord, and the Lord's answer was singularly felicitous for David's ambition. "It is for Saul," said Jehovah. The sons of the late king were then hanged, David was relieved of the presence of seven possible pretenders to the throne, and "God was entreated for the land."

Your third reason is no less unhappy. That the Jewish mind could entertain the "abhorrent" idea of human sacrifice, which is involved in the death of Christ, you say is inconceivable. But you forget two important things; first, that Christianity spread chiefly among Gentiles and Jews who lived in Gentile cities; second, that as the doctrine of the Atonement grew up gradually, the sacrifice of Christ was at once mystical and retrospective. His death was not the death of a man, but the death of a man-god; and that very fact is the secret of the Atonement.

You are discreetly silent, my lord, as to the Blood of Christ, but it contains the whole mystery of the Atonement. Being at once God and man, he was proxy for both in a blood covenant, and thus the two estranged parties were made at one with each other. He was also a perfect sacrifice once for all, dispensing with the further immolation of men or animals.

Not only was his the "blood of the new covenant," it was "shed for the remission of sin." "Without shedding of blood," says St. Paul, "there is no remission," and Christ fulfilled the whole of the conditions. This is the meaning of propitiation, sacrifice, and atonement. From beginning to end it is a doctrine of blood. It is the final development of a superstition which has prevailed in every part of the world, beginning in the blood covenant of savages, ascending into the blood covenant of sacrifice in barbarous religions, and reaching its acme in the bleeding figure of your god-man Jesus Christ upon his sacrificial cross. His bloody sweat, his blood-stained brows, his gory hands and feet, and the blood-spurt from his wounded side, are all designed to emphasise the central idea. It is his blood that cleanses us from sin; we have "redemption through his blood;" we are "justified by his blood;" he has "made peace through the blood of his cross." And every time you renew your covenant with God at the communion table, you do so by drinking the blood of Christ. The passionate words of Othello are a splendid summary of your creed—"Blood, blood, Iago, blood."

Let me conclude, my lord, by reminding you of a great distinction, and the only distinction, between the Christian and the Pagan ideas of sacrifice. The Pagans, and also the Jews, sacrificed animals, and occasionally human beings, on the altars of their gods. The Christians, however, conceived the idea of their God becoming his own victim, and shedding his own blood instead of theirs. The Pagans were ready to die for their gods, but the Christians made their god die for them. It was a brilliant conception; worthy of the meekness which has walked the earth with fire and sword, and the humility which has revelled in dogma and persecution.

OLD TESTAMENT MORALITY.

TO THE REV. EUSTACE R. CONDER, D.D.

SIR,—

You have undertaken a bold task, but I fear your success will not be commensurate with your courage. The defence of the morality of the Old Testament is a forlorn hope. Victory is impossible. The utmost you can do is to show your possession of that virtue which is called fortitude in a king and obstinacy in another animal.

The *Present Day Tracts* issued by the Religious Tract Society are written by men of eminence and ability. When the recent tenth volume fell into my hands it excited my respectful attention. Your own tract on "Moral Difficulties in the Old Testament Scriptures" appealed most directly to my curiosity. I read it carefully, made copious annotations in the liberal margin which seemed provided for the purpose, and set it aside for criticism in the *Freethinker*. I am now able to carry out my intention in this open letter, which I trust you will do me the honor of perusing. Should you desire to answer my criticism, I will gladly place the columns of my paper at your service.

Wishing to track you step by step, I will first notice your introductory remarks. They exhibit your point of view, contain your definitions, disclose the principles that guide your judgment, and settle the ground on which discussion must take place.

"Mere intellectual difficulties," you say, ought not to surprise us and need not trouble us. You regard them as natural, nay, inevitable, in the revelation of infinite wisdom. But "the case is otherwise with moral difficulties," and we are "constrained to solve them." You define *moral difficulties* as "any such representa-

tions of the character and dealings of God as we are at a loss to reconcile with perfect rectitude, wisdom and love." I accept the definition as excellent. Yet I cannot agree with you that "the supposition that the character of God actually falls short of absolute excellence, or that his wisdom is fallible," is to "a sane and virtuous mind inconceivable." John Stuart Mill denied the possibility of demonstrating the existence of a God at once all-wise, all-powerful, and all-good, in face of the tremendous evils that afflict and desolate the world. The only God, in his opinion, consistent with the facts of experience, is one of limited power, and perhaps of limited intelligence and benevolence. What you declare inconceivable he regarded as possible, or even probable; and neither you nor your colleagues will find it easy to induce the world to consider you more "sane and virtuous" than this illustrious philosopher.

There are two qualities you claim as indispensable to a proper consideration of the subject—*reverence* and *honesty*. You complain that "reverence is reckoned superfluous by some who pride themselves on their honesty." Sir, the complaint is unjust and illogical. Honesty is all you have a right to require or reason to expect. Reverence is not a preliminary; it should be a result. I decline to reverence your book, your doctrines, or your deity, without examination. I must discuss them openly, fearlessly, and completely. This is the only honest plan. If at the end I find what *deserves* my reverence, I shall yield it without solicitation. But were I to *approach* your views with a feeling of reverence, the discussion would be decided before it commenced. I cannot swathe the sword of criticism at your bidding. Let it flash and cut; only falsehood will suffer; truth is invulnerable.

It is idle to tell me that the Bible is "the most venerable, wonderful, and indestructible monument of human thought." If by *venerable* you mean *ancient*, the statement is untrue; in any other sense you are begging the question. Nor am I to be imposed upon

by your lavish chronology. The Bible has not been a power and a consolation "through thousands of years." Even its oldest fragments are not to be carried beyond the ninth century before Christ. The greater part of the Old Testament is later than the Captivity. You have thus a chronology of considerably less than three thousand years; and during half that period the Bible was a sealed book to the people. Until the Reformation they were unable to read it in their vernacular tongues and become acquainted with its contents.

You may regard me as "coarse and vulgar"—to use your own polite language—but I *cannot* reverence your "venerable documents." Age is not necessarily respectable. Old thieves are found in the dock, and ancient superstitions in the human mind. Witchcraft is older than Christianity; would you therefore treat it with reverence if you heard the nurse teaching it to your children?

"Coarse and vulgar" are hard words, but I persist with my objection. I cannot allow that "the sceptic is bound to keep a check on his hostile feeling" while "the Christian is not bound to suppress his love to the Bible, or to affect an impossible impartiality." If impartiality is impossible on the one side, why demand it so strenuously on the other? You speak of "professional" assailants of Christianity. Are you not one of its "professional" champions? You frown at those who are "bent on making out a case." Is not that the object of your Tract? You say that the sceptical objections to Scripture have been "discussed, and more or less satisfactorily disposed of, times without number." Might not the sceptic say the same of your "evidences"? You assert that the moral difficulties of the Bible "occupy but a small place in it," and that "anywhere out of the Bible they would give us no trouble." Is this true? Are there not bestial stories in the Bible, voluptuous descriptions, and obscene phrases, that would subject an ordinary volume to prosecution, and its publisher to fine and imprisonment?

Another remark in your introduction remains to be noticed. You declare that "a real Christian" is "not less, but more sensitive than a sceptic to moral difficulties in the Bible." Then, sir, the real Christian has a miraculous power of concealing his perturbation. Honest sceptics—even such eminent men as Voltaire and Paine—have been insulted and persecuted. Their criticisms met with no other answer until such replies had ceased to be effective. According to my information, the moral, as well as the "merely intellectual" difficulties of the Bible, have been exposed by sceptics, and seldom, if ever, by Christians. The orthodox plan has been to commence with persecution of the critics of Scripture; then to pass on through successive stages of insult, denunciation, deprecation, and silence; finally, to resort to labored and disingenuous apologies, with the pretence that the world is really indebted to Christians for its knowledge of the "apparent" defects and deficiencies of Holy Writ.

I come now to your specific treatment of the moral difficulties of Scripture. The first case is that of God's dealings with Adam and Eve. Whether the story be literally true, or an allegory, you allow that the "moral and spiritual meaning" is the same. Man, you say, was "endowed with a moral nature in which sin had no place," a statement which is belied by the fact that he fell. He sinned; he was guilty of "a deliberate violation of known duty;" he disobeyed "God's positive command;" he committed a breach of that "law written in the heart;" and he suffered the inevitable penalty.

Such is your argument, and nearly every word is false. The fact is that Adam ate an apple, which he was forbidden to touch. Millions of boys have done the same thing since, but their parents have not damned them everlastingly for such a trivial offence. You may tell me that a parent's command is one thing, and God's another. I answer that an act cannot be affected by the greatness of the person who forbids it; otherwise

morality is nothing but submission to authority, and the goodness or badness of conduct depends on the disposition of lawgivers and executioners.

What could two beings in the position of Adam and Eve know of duty? Mr. Gladstone himself, in his reply to Colonel Ingersoll, is obliged to admit that this unhappy couple had no "ethical standard," no rule of "consciously perceived right and wrong," but were under the law of "simple obedience." "Their condition," he continues, "was greatly analagous to that of the infant, who has just reached the stage at which he can comprehend that he is ordered to do this or that, but not the nature of the thing so ordered." In other words, they were infants in knowledge, experience, and wisdom, and they acted like infants in the presence of a shining allurements. I know not whether you have children, but, if you have, I suppose they have often done what you told them not to do. Yet I have no doubt you are too humane to turn them out of your house, and if you did the law would make you support them. It is a crime to strike a child, it is foolish to punish. Love is the true discipline, and wisdom and patience are its best instruments. I have a right to show even a child that certain things annoy me, but no right to beat it for a mistake, or to curse it for an indiscretion. Even if it sometimes showed a bad disposition, I should reflect that it probably derived it from its parents, and feel all the more tender and patient on that account. Nothing is more miserably stupid than the mere imposition of one's will, with no other justification. Parents should guide, and in some cases restrain; but it is a wretched egotism which prompts them to say "Do this because I tell you to."

Let us apply this truth to the story of the Fall. Why did Jehovah act in a manner which I, as a human parent, should consider disgraceful? Why did he steel his heart against his own creatures? Why did he curse his own children? Why did he prohibit an action in itself harmless? Why did he plant a trap for

two inexperienced beings, and punish them for falling into it? Would he not have shown more wisdom and humanity if, instead of telling them not to eat apples, he had told them to be just, kind, and merciful to each other, fortifying the precept with his own example?

Let me ask you to consider the curse pronounced by your God on his "disobedient" children for their first "offence." I pass the grotesque curse upon the serpent who tempted them, and the ridiculous curse upon the inanimate ground beneath their feet. What remains is sufficient for my purpose. Jehovah sentenced the man to earn his bread by the sweat of his brow. This may be regarded as a curse in hot countries, where labor is irksome, and everything invites to repose; but in temperate climates like ours it is a pleasant and wholesome discipline. There is a great deal of truth in the observation of an American humorist that "doing nothing is hard work—if you keep at it." I admit, however, that the woman's sentence was far more serious, and a curse indeed. "I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and conception," said the Lord, "in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children." Such language is to mind infamous. I had a mother, I have sisters, I have a wife. I know that a woman, especially with her first child, needs all sympathy and support during her confinement. Motherhood, as Ingersoll remarks, is the most pathetic fact in nature. Surely, sir, if the woman merited punishment—which I am far from conceding—a merciful God would not choose the most piteous crisis of her life to inflict it upon her. A fiend sent to torment her at such a moment might melt with compassion, and murmur: "Not now, not now!" Am I, then, to worship a deity who is too callous to relent? No, I will not. As the son of a woman, as the husband of a woman, I say that if there be a God who deliberately adds a pang to the sufferings of a woman in childbirth, I hate him with every drop of blood in my veins. Words are too feeble

to express my scorn and loathing. I would rather have his room in Hell than his company in Heaven.

Why did Jehovah place a temptation in the way of his inexperienced children if he knew that their fall would involve such awful consequences? Why did he allow the Devil to heighten the temptation with all the arts of a consummate seducer? Why did he not warn them against the wiles of their enemy? Why did he station a cherubim at the gate of Eden to prevent them from returning after their expulsion? Would it not have been more considerate had he used the same means to prevent the Devil from disturbing their innocent serenity?

You justify God's inflicting the penalty of Adam's transgression upon his remote posterity. You say that they were "involved in his sin." In what way, sir? To tell me that Adam begat a son "in his own image" is only to tell me that the son was his father's child. It does not justify the transmitted curse? It does not explain why a being of "perfect rectitude, wisdom, and love" punishes millions of souls for the fault of one soul milleniums before their birth. To my mind it seems perfectly clear that, if each soul is to be saved or damned alone, every soul should have a fair start. I deny that I should be prejudiced by the sin of another. If God makes me responsible for the offences of my ancestors, I suppose I must submit to his power, but I will never acknowledge his justice.

Your own heart, sir, is evidently superior to your creed. You perceive that the conduct of Jehovah is incapable of justification on the ordinary principles of human morality. You fall back, therefore, upon the position of Bishop Butler, which is inexpugnable to the attacks of Deists, but indefensible against the attacks of a later scepticism. You ask whether the Bible account of the Fall presents "any moral difficulty which does not meet us equally in daily experience?" But this is not the argument you undertook to maintain. You set yourself the task of reconciling

the conduct of Jehovah with "perfect rectitude, wisdom and love." It is idle to point out that worse things than those in the Bible happen in the ordinary course of nature. The universe is not on trial, nor its ruler. We are not, for the moment, concerned with the God of Nature, if such a being exist, but with the God of the Bible. It is useless to defend your Deity by saying "Mine is as good as yours." I have no deity to defend. You have; and I must beg you to defend him on the principles you accepted in your introduction.

Before I proceed further I will quote the following passage from your essay:—"We must understand love and righteousness in God to mean substantially the same thing with love and righteousness in man, only free from all limitation and defect; otherwise, neither objections nor replies have any meaning." This is your own rule of judgment, and you cannot complain if I rigorously apply it to the rest of our "moral difficulties."

With regard to the Deluge, you make the gratuitous assertion that "the substantial and weighty evidence for its reality is often overlooked by those who ought to know better." After this somewhat pedagogic utterance it is amusing to read the footnote, in which you refer your readers "for the bearing of geological science on the question" to a tract by Sir William Dawson. I have read this tract, and the author argues for a partial flood. To use his own words, it was "one of those submersions of our continents which, locally or generally, have occurred over and over again, almost countless times, in the geological history of the earth." Yet I find you asserting, in the very teeth of your picked authority, that the Deluge "stands alone" by reason of its "stupendous scale." May I conclude that this is a dexterous way of steering between the Scylla of the heterodox view of a local flood and the Charybdis of the orthodox view of a universal flood? At any rate, you commit yourself to neither, but moralise on either side as it suits your purpose.

Let me also express my astonishment at the use you make of an awkward text, which you would have shown more discretion in avoiding. After drawing a dark picture of the awful sin of the antediluvians, you quote the sentence "There were giants in the earth in those days," and you ask the reader to imagine what might have happened if men with the lust and cruelty of a Nero or a Borgia, the strength of a Samson, and the intellect of a Cæsar, had lived for a thousand years. Do you believe in the reality of such prodigies? That they are conceivable I admit, but so is a centaur, a dragon, or a satyr. Such imaginary beings do not trouble the heads of sensible men, nor are your antediluvian prodigies any more entitled to respect. You are ill-advised in introducing these "giants." As the Revised Version discloses to the unlearned reader, they were simply *Nephilim*, who, as the context indicates, were like the Gigantes of the Pagan mythology, the mixed offspring of heaven and earth. You are a devout believer in the existence of these fabulous monsters, but the existence of the Pagan giants, as Lemprière says, was also "supported by all the writers of antiquity, and received as an undeniable truth."

Taking the Bible record as it stands, as you profess to, with its "stupendous" slaughter of men, women, and children—in fact, the extermination of the whole human race, with the exception of eight persons—what is your excuse for the God who planned and executed this unparalleled massacre?

First, you remark that the same kind of thing frequently happens, although on a smaller scale. People have been swallowed by earthquakes, swept away by pestilence, and destroyed by floods. Volcanoes have buried cities, the sea has engulfed myriads of ships with their crews. But all this is beside the point. As well might a murderer argue that his victim must die at some time, and that cholera and small-pox kill a great many more than he does. The only reply you can possibly make is the one which St. Paul resorted

to when he desired to silence the objectors to predestinate damnation; namely, that God made us, and has a right to do as he will with his own. But this exalts his power at the expense of his beneficence, and puts an end to all controversy on the subject.

You next observe that the antediluvians were awfully wicked. Still, they were God's creatures, and surely the Maker could have reformed his own handiwork. Could not the being who said "Let there be light! and there was light," as easily have said "Let all men be good—or decent" with a similar result? No doubt you will reply with the argument from "free-will." But, for my part, I think it shocking to make men what they are, to curse and torture them for being so, and to offer them consolation or excuse in the shape of a metaphysical puzzle. It is not thus that we reason on any other subject than theology.

According to the story, God gave the devoted multitude a warning. Noah, that "preacher of righteousness," admonished them for the space of a hundred and twenty years. But the Lord should have selected a better prophet, or, if that were impossible, he should have sent a capable missionary from heaven. Noah's character, as revealed by his conduct after the Flood—when he indulged himself in drunkenness, indecency, and indiscriminate cursing—was not calculated to lend persuasion to his appeals. Indeed, I have often wondered why Jehovah took the trouble to preserve this precious specimen of his primitive creatures. Admitting the necessity of a wholesale massacre, it seems to me that the Lord should have completed the work and left none of the old race surviving. This would have enabled him to start with a fresh stock, instead of re-peopling the world through Noah. Had he followed this sensible method, it is to be presumed that the world, a few centuries later, would not have fallen into such wickedness that a whole city could not yield a handful of righteous men to save it from destruction, while the elderly gentleman who *was*

spared on that occasion celebrated the event by getting drunk and committing incest with his own daughters.

Suppose I grant you, for the sake of argument, that the antediluvians were all incurably wicked, that there was no room for gradations, that every man and woman was full of iniquity. Still, there remains the fact that multitudes of children perished in the catastrophe, who could not have sinned as they were too young to be responsible. You are unable to dispute the fact, and your explanation is preposterous. You declare that "the suffering of the innocent with the guilty, and on account of the guilty, is part of the mysterious economy of human life." Do you seriously mean that such bungling is a mark of "perfect wisdom" and such indiscriminate slaughter a mark of "perfect rectitude and love"? Could not Jehovah have spared the children as easily as the family of Noah? Was there not wood enough to build a thousand arks, and time enough for their construction? No wonder you close this section of your essay by deprecating further criticism, and bidding your readers "reverently bow before the veil, and patiently wait till God's own hand withdraws it." But if we have to await God's convenience, after all, it is a waste of time on your part (not to use a harsher phrase) to offer temporary explanations.

Were I not acquainted with the petrifying influence of religious dogmas on the best feelings of the human heart, and the febleness of the human imagination with respect to distant scenes and events, I should marvel at the continued worship of a Deity who could find no other method of dealing with his creatures than drowning them. It is easy to kill, it is difficult to educate and develope; the one shows ignorance and brutality, the other wisdom and humanity. The destructive impatience of Jehovah—who, like all barbaric gods, was fond of hurling his thunderbolts—would be an intolerable anachronism in our civilised jurisprudence. But what would be

detestable in human practice is sacred in religious theory. Men who would not hurt a child, and who shudder at the sight of blood, ascribe wholesale massacres and the most relentless cruelty to the God of their inherited faith. For the most part, I am convinced, they never attempt to realise these horrors, which, if vividly conceived, would drive them mad or destroy their belief. But let it not be supposed that it does the character no injury to harbor such notions of the being one worships. The debasement of our ideal must re-act upon our feelings, and it would startle many a Christian philanthropist to recognise how much of the brutal callousness of mankind is due to the worship of barbarous and bloodthirsty gods. Here and there, indeed, worship is carried to the point of imitation, and the result is an Alva or a Torquemada. It is even held by Dr. Forbes Winslow that if "Jack the Ripper" is ever caught, he will be found to be suffering from religious mania, and perhaps to consider himself charged with a murderous mission from heaven.

Passing from the Deluge I come to the destruction of the cities of the plain. You compare this event with the destruction of Herculaneum and Pompeii, whose inhabitants you conjecture to have been "equally wicked." What is your reason for saying so? There is nothing in the authentic records of history to justify the conjecture. You are a thick-and-thin pleader for Jehovah, but you have no scruple at libelling your fellow men. In any case, the analogy is useless to your object. Educated men—to whom, I suppose, your tract is addressed—are not so superstitious as to imagine that Mount Vesuvius is a providential reservoir, which belches out its contents when the Lord has someone to punish. Nor is there any similarity between a volcanic eruption, which is as natural as a thunderstorm, and the "fire from heaven" which the Lord rained down on Sodom and Gomorrah. The one is natural, the other is miraculous. Some

perception of this difference must have been present to your mind when you fell back upon the Abrahamic exclamation "Shall not the judge of all the earth do right?" This, you say, is "the one reply" to all such difficulties, and "it is adequate." I deny its adequateness; I call it a begging of the question. But I admit it is "the one reply" of Bibliolators. They cry off in the crisis of debate, close their eyes, and offer up a prayer.

Scientific criticism of the Bible removes the "difficulty" in quite another fashion. The cities of the plain are imaginary places. Ancient peoples associated legends with every striking aspect of nature. Ignorant of geology, the Jews and other orientals ascribed a supernatural origin to the Dead Sea and its volcanic surroundings. The story grew up of cities that were destroyed on its site, and to this day the natives believe they see fragments of buildings and pillars rising from the bottom of the lake. Similarly, the story of Lot and his daughters is legendary. Moab and Ammon were for many centuries the implacable enemies of the Jews, who libelled them generically by tracing their origin to the incestuous and prolific intercourse of a father with his own offspring.

Let us now consider the case of the "heathen nations" whose slaughter you admit to have been "authorised by God's express command." You protest against these massacres being judged by our modern ideas of humanity, and this may be a fair excuse for the Jews, but what excuse is it for Jehovah? It is idle to talk of the barbarities of ancient times; we are not discussing the morality of the ancient Jews, but the morality of an "inspired" volume, which, if it comes from a God such as you define, can never sink below the loftiest benevolence, and still less shock the common feelings of civilized men and women.

One of your observations on the chosen people is ludicrous, even as a piece of special pleading. Con-

sidering the cruelties of antiquity, you remark that the "Hebrews, far from being a ferocious and bloodthirsty people, were marked by superior self-restraint and humanity." You seem astonished at their moderation. But is it not obvious that the Jews were never treated by *their* conquerors with the cruelty they displayed towards their own victims? Had they been so, they would have been annihilated. The Assyrian government was coarse and brutal, but it never equalled the ferocity of Jehovah's warriors. So far were the Jews from being ill-treated during the Captivity, that many of them who had settled in Babylon refused to return to Palestine when they were free to do so. Even under the Pharaohs, they had been allowed to multiply enormously, and if they were compelled to work they were not allowed to starve, for when they were sick of the desert manna they bewailed their loss of the flesh-pots of Egypt.

I can conceive of nothing more absurd, or more immoral, than your plea that every man must die, and that death by the sword is generally less painful than death by disease. It is an outrage on common sense and common humanity. It would justify every private murder and every public massacre that ever was or could be committed. I know that I must die, but I do not wish a set of pious assassins to decide when and how I shall expire; yet, according to your argument, I should thankfully hold out my throat to any inspired butcher who will do me the honor of cutting it.

Your next argument is that the nations, whose territory the Jews requisitioned, were doomed to extermination as "the just punishment of their outrageous wickedness." You forget that the Jews vexed the Lord more than the nations he drove out before them. You also forget that the defeated side is always in the wrong, and that the character of the Canaanites is described for us by those who robbed and murdered them.

That the Jews were God's executioners is open to

suspicion when we reflect on their interest in the massacres. Nor is it tenable that in the extermination of whole nations of men, women, and children, there is "no principle involved different from what is involved in the execution of a single murderer for a single crime." There are two objections to this argument, and both of them unanswerable.

In the first place, it is quite inconceivable that "outrageous wickedness" was universal. Had it been so, the Canaanites would have perished from social anarchy, without waiting for "God's executioners." There must have been a moderate regard for the primary laws of human society. Men must have supported their wives and families, and mothers must have cooed over their smiling babes. Yet we read that the massacre of these people was universal and promiscuous. Nay more, we read that the camels and asses were involved in the slaughter, while the horses were subjected to the infamous process of houghing. You would cry "Shame!" if this were done by a desperate Irish peasant, but you ask me to regard it as divine justice when it is done by Jewish marauders in the name of their God.

In the next place, the object of individual punishment is not vengeance, but the protection of society. It is a warning, an example, a deterrent; characters which can never belong to massacre and extermination. Edmund Burke professed himself unable to draw up an indictment against a whole people; but you, sir, are ready to draw up their indictment, pronounce their sentence, and superintend their execution.

There is something worse than death. It is dishonor. There is something worse than murder. It is violation. I do not wonder at your silence on this topic. You feel that a plea for the selection of virgins for the Jewish conquerors would affront the conscience of humanity. Yet I must remind you that this was done by the express command of Jehovah. Youth and beauty were sacrificed on the altar of lust. Maidens

were handed over—*by your God*—to the bloody embraces of the murderers of their fathers and brothers.

Your treatment of the projected sacrifice of Isaac by Abraham does not lessen its "difficulties." That human sacrifices were common at that time is probable; that parents had power of life and death over their children is certain. But what has this to do with a *divine* command? Was Jehovah unable to rise above the morality of the age? It may be that such a sacrifice was not "at variance either with Abraham's own conscience or with the ideas of morality then universally prevailing." But Abraham's conscience is a poor standard, and we are not bound by the moral ideas of that period. You forget the real point at issue. It is Jehovah who is on trial. Why did he tell a father to slay his son, or lead him to suppose that such a sacrifice could be acceptable?

Should a father obey a voice from heaven commanding him to kill his son? Not now, you reply, for the voice would be a delusion. But that is your opinion. The voice is not a delusion to the man who hears it. If he acts in all sincerity is he justified? I defy you to answer this question without absolving him or condemning Abraham. Twenty voices from heaven would not induce a brave and tender man to commit a murder. If Jehovah thundered in concert with all the gods of the Pantheon, from the Himalayas to Olympus, I would not dip my hands in blood at his bidding. I would rather incur his vengeance than earn his rewards. I would despise his heaven, and never fear his hell.

The cursing Psalms are another theme for your sophistry. You quote a few of the mildest as though they were fair samples of the rest. You cannot complain, therefore, if I quote one of the worst:—

"Let his children be fatherless, and his wife a widow. Let his children be continually vagabonds, and beg: let them seek their bread also out of their desolate places. Let there be none to extend mercy unto him: neither let there be any to favor his fatherless children."

Such infamous words would disgrace the lips of a fiend? Is it not strange to find them in "an inspired manual of devotion"? Do you imagine that the study of these curses upon the innocent wives and children of one's enemies is calculated to make men tender and merciful? You allege that "the persons denounced in these Psalms were enemies of God, of religion, and of the commonwealth," but you admit that they were "also (at least in some cases) personal enemies of the Psalmist." Do you not see that this is a very convenient way of gratifying malignity under the cloak of religion? Will you also tell me how the "widows" and the "fatherless" were the "enemies of God, of religion, and of the commonwealth"?

Your defence of David is labored and curious. With regard to the very politic execution of Saul's male descendants to arrest a famine, you bid me remember the old principle of blood-vengeance. Is the man after God's own heart to be judged by secular standards? What is the use of the Grace of God if it leaves men slaves to the foolish superstitions and coarse morality of their age? There is one point of the story which you conveniently forget. After the execution of the seven victims "the Lord was entreated for the land" and the famine ceased. Does not this make Jehovah an accomplice of David's? Will you ask me to excuse David and Jehovah on the same grounds?

David's mean, treacherous, and cowardly murder of Uriah, after vainly endeavoring to make him pass as the father of Bathsheba's bastard, is enough to damn him in the eyes of every honest man. It reveals a dreadful turpitude of character. It was not one act of passion, but a series of calculated villainies. Yet all you have to say in palliation is that David *repented*, and you appear to think that repentance is higher than innocence. I differ from you, but I will not argue the point. I will merely say that David's repentance was rather fear than remorse. I read that he made atonement by going to war, and butchering his prisoners

with every circumstance of horror. "Where," you ask, "shall we find a parallel to his repentance?" I answer—happily nowhere.

"An exhaustive treatment" of the moral difficulties of the Old Testament is not your aim. You add that "perhaps no such treatment is possible." Here, at least, I have the honor to agree with you. No special pleading, however able and subtle, can make the Jewish scriptures anything but a record of barbarism, with gleams of growing culture, and occasional aspirations towards higher things. Some of the Old Testament pages are filthy, some are brutal, and some are disgusting. To defend these is to palter with conscience, and to sap the very foundations of morality.

INSPIRATION.

TO THE REV. ROBERT F. HORTON, M. A.

SIR,—

Sundry press notices drew my attention to your work on *Inspiration and the Bible*. The *Pall Mall Gazette* praised your "able and courageous treatment of the subject." The *Scotsman* spoke of its "perfect candor and fairness." The *Scottish Leader* "could not but commend the book." Canon Cheyne himself, in addressing the last Church Congress, described your volume as "freshly-written and stimulating." These are good testimonials, as testimonials go, and I turned to your book with curiosity and expectation.

What you have to say is addressed to believers, and I am not a believer. Why then, you may ask, do I meddle with what does not concern me. I do so, first,

because the subject is interesting to every citizen of a country in which the Bible is legally declared to be the Word of God. I do so, secondly, because I have suffered imprisonment for "bringing the Holy Scriptures into disbelief and contempt," and I have a personal interest in the question. I do so, thirdly, because every man who publishes a book submits it to public criticism. I do so, lastly, because you have not scrupled to give your opinion of the "modern infidel" and the "poor Secularist."

Pardon me for saying that you quite misunderstand the "modern infidel" and the "poor Secularist." Dealing with what you are pleased to call the "cast-iron theory of inspiration," you say :

"We have multitudes among us who have thrown their Bibles away, or are using them only as *corpus vile* to flog and to deride. We have only to glance at the literature which issues from the infidel press to see that our working men at least, the part of the community for whom Christ's religion is peculiarly adapted, the cast-iron theory has rendered no very signal service. From it and it alone in almost every case comes the first difficulty to the young mechanic, who is just beginning to think for himself. To it is due first the sceptical suspicion and last the utter rejection of the Book; and when the poor Secularist after years of vainly beating the air is brought back again to truth and reality, it is by the living Christ, whom he might have known and loved from the first."

How many "poor Secularists" have you brought back to "the living Christ"? How many have you seen brought back by other preachers? I suspect you drew on your imagination for the facts, and so long as they "point a moral or adorn a tale" there is nothing to shock a mind accustomed to the time-honored methods of Christian apology. From the earliest ages, when fraud and forgery were rampant, down to the present, when the silliest fictions are circulated in religious tracts and periodicals, your Church has conserved the precious art of hoodwinking its devotees. I say *your* Church, because the spirit and policy of every sect has been essentially the same.

I observe in your preface that you "hardly know an argument waged at the present day on the Secularist platforms which does not derive all its cogency from the false impression which we have ourselves given about the nature and claims of the Bible." If you honestly believe this, you are basking in a fool's paradise. It is true that Secularists point out the self-contradictions, the absurdities, the immoralities, the indecencies, and the scientific and historical blunders of the Bible. But if you could purge the Bible of all these, if you could abolish the peccant parts from human memory, so that no one could ever know that they existed, you would find the Secularist, or the "infidel," ready with strong and plentiful arguments against the inspiration of the rest. You cannot cheat us by flinging overboard what you consider contraband. We object to your ship, your flag, your figure-head, and your cargo. We shall never be satisfied until the Bible ranks with other books, and is judged by human standards. We shall wage our battle against Christianity until it ceases to exist. We are pledged to oppose every species of supernaturalism, whether it assumes the lordly air of infallible authority or the humbler attitude of defence and apology.

You admit that Biblical criticism is very largely the work of rationalists, though you "do not refuse to build a church because the masons employed are Free-thinkers." The illustration is an unfortunate one. Do you suppose the Freethinking masons are building for you? Will the clergy play the part of architects, while the materials are supplied and wrought by their superiors? You deceive yourself if you think so. Scientific criticism has not finished its work on your creed. Its solvent influence cannot be arrested. You admit that much has been destroyed, and the fate of the rest is equally certain. You are like a Russian traveller chased by wolves. What you fling to your pursuers only whets their appetite for more. There is no shelter in sight, the snowy steppe stretches out

illimitably, and the age of miracles is past. You will be surrounded, and every bone will be neatly picked.

You waste your time in telling Agnostics and Rationalists that there *is* a "middle course" between the old doctrine of inspiration and the theory that the Bible "is not different from the Sacred Literatures of other Religions." Were your Scriptures a greater monument of genius and power than its rivals, it would still be open to the fundamental objections which apply to all revelations. The rationalist rejects miracles in literature as well as in physics. All the books in existence were written by men, and all of them, including the Bible, bear the unmistakable marks of their human origin.

You are too sagacious and well-informed not to see that the Bible *does* bear these incontestible marks of a human production. Consequently you are anxious to get rid of the "cast-iron theory of inspiration," according to which every book, every chapter, and every verse of Scripture is directly inspired by an infallible mind. You declare it "almost incredible that any reasonable person could entertain" such a theory. But I must remind you that this is still the official theory of nearly all the churches. Just as the Church of England insists on its Articles being taken in the "plain grammatical sense," so the ministers of almost every denomination present the Word of God as textually inspired. They make reservations in controversy, and subtle distinctions in books for educated readers, but the "cast-iron theory," is implied in the majority of their sermons, and openly taught in Sunday-schools. There are, indeed, some eminent ministers who are accounted "reasonable persons," and who nevertheless teach what is "almost incredible." Mr. Spurgeon, for instance, has recently declared his solemn conviction that every word of the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, is absolutely true. It must be allowed, however, that this view, is becoming more and more impossible in these days of general education; and if

your Bible is to be saved out of the storm of debate, it can only be by changing the old theory of inspiration. Whether the change can be successfully made, or whether the success can be permanent, is quite another matter. You have your opinion, I have mine, and we must agree to differ.

There is one aspect of the question which you overlook, and the point it involves is more vital than any you have considered. If the Bible is inspired at all it must be inspired in the *original tongues*. Those who cannot read Greek and Hebrew are without an inspired Bible. A translation is the work of fallible scholars. However accurate they may be, they must make mistakes; however honest they may be, they will be influenced by prepossessions; however learned they may be, they must find it impossible to overcome the difficulty which arises from the diverse genius of different languages. Sir William Drummond was unacquainted with any two Hebrew scholars who translated any two consecutive verses alike; and although Greek is more precise in construction, and less obscure in consequence of its varied literature, there are a host of conflicting readings of texts in the New Testament. In any case, therefore, unless we meet with the miracle of an inspired translator, it is absolutely impossible for an ordinary Englishman—who must be saved or damned in English—to have an inspired Bible. What is revelation to the reader of Greek and Hebrew is only hearsay to the readers of translations. They may catch gleams of the poetry, master the philosophy, and understand the ethical teaching; but they can never be sure of possessing an exact knowledge of the divine or doctrinal parts of the revelation, which may lurk unperceived or appear perverted in an ill-rendered text. The Catholic has a way out of this difficulty, for the voice of God remains with the Church, and enables her to decide infallibly what is the right interpretation of Scripture. But the Protestant has no way of escape, and unless he is a Greek and Hebrew scholar

he is without an inspired book. You might call the English Bible an *approximate* revelation, but I regard this as an absurdity. Revelation means certitude, and certitude has no degrees. Besides, it appears to me that an omniscient God is able to speak in English, and that he would do so if he had anything to communicate to Englishmen. I cannot believe he would send his message through foreign channels, and place us at the mercy of translators and interpreters.

My own opinion is that not one Christian in a thousand has ever given five minutes' thought to the question of inspiration. "The point which strikes us," you write, "is that Christians are more certain that the Bible is inspired than they are of the grounds of their certainty." What is this but saying that their certainty is only acquiescence, and their belief only a superstition?

Before I deal with your definition of inspiration I will go to the etymology of the word. I will ascertain what it originally meant, and I will inquire what it still means among savages and barbarians. There is nothing like going to the roots of a question. A religion which comes to us from a remote past cannot be understood without a knowledge of its primitive character.

The term Inspiration comes from the Latin *in*, and *spiro* to breathe. From this also we derive the word *spirit*. Now, among barbarous people, the breath is a symbol of the soul, which is supposed to go in and out of the body, in trance or dreams, through the organs of respiration; and there is nothing more certain than that the primitive idea of inspiration was the actual possession of a human organism by the spirit of the god. "The inspiration or breathing-in of a spirit into the body of a priest or seer," says Tylor, "appears to such people a mechanical action, like pouring water into a jug." The god enters the man's body, and talks with his voice, and "the convulsions, the unearthly voice in which the possessed priest answers in the

name of the deity within, and his falling into stupor when the god departs, all fit together, and in all quarters of the world the oracle-priests and diviners by familiar spirits seem really diseased in body and mind, and deluded by their own feelings, as well as skilled in cheating their votaries by sham symptoms and cunning answers."

This view is supported by a study of the Old Testament. Dr. Maudsley is of opinion that Ezekiel and Hosea, to say nothing of other prophets, were mad; and certainly no man in his senses would spend nearly four hundred days besieging a tile, or marry a degraded prostitute. When the Hebrew prophets opened their mouths they said "Thus saith the Lord." Their messages were plain and peremptory. It was not they who spoke, but the Deity through their lips. Coming to the New Testament, also, we find the primitive theory still current. When the Holy Ghost descended on the Apostles they spoke with strange tongues. Paul himself is sometimes careful to distinguish between his personal teaching and the direct commands of God. He ridiculed, though he admitted, the gift of tongues. Doubtless he heard too much of what Tylor calls "the unearthly voice," which still survives in the Christian pulpit, for artificial tones are thought the proper vehicle for the language of inspiration.

Among the Arabs of the Soudan there is an implicit belief in the primitive idea of inspiration. The deity speaks through the dervishes, and the Mahdi, without question, utters the authentic oracles of God. Similarly, the ancient Jews, who were a branch of the same Semitic stem, and in very much the same stage of religious culture, looked to their prophets as mouth-pieces of Jahveh. The contention is absurd that this view of inspiration grew up after the time of Ezra. It only became systematised and retrospective. Inspiration ceased to be current simply because a well-organised theocracy set its face against unlicensed

traders, and because when the monarchy had disappeared there was no longer room for prophetic dictators.

Having dealt with the primitive meaning of Inspiration, which you were perhaps too discreet to mention, I come to the present use of the word. Not only is the Bible said to be inspired, but the same is said of the orator and the poet. This implies a gradual secularisation of the idea. The teacher, the enthusiast, the prophet, is no longer the oracle of an indwelling divinity. Genius has ceased to be what it once was, a spirit attending a man and speaking through him; it means no more than a natural exaltation of certain mental or moral powers. It would seem that the time is approaching when the word Inspiration will be emptied of all supernatural meaning. When that time arrives, as it assuredly will, I very much doubt if the Bible will hold its place at the top of our literature. There are splendid things, when adequately translated, in the old Scriptures of India, and the great voices of Greece and Rome carry a high message. Nor did the vein of Inspiration close with the ancients. Poets, thinkers, and moralists, as lofty as any of antiquity, have been amongst us, and only require age to mellow their golden reputations. One of them, the mightiest in the roll of fame, the magisterial genius of this planet, lived, died, and was buried in our own England. Upon his brow sits the shadow of thought beyond the scope of the bards of Israel; his eye has depth within depth, until the beholder is lost in its profundity; every passion trembles on his mobile lips; and in the corners of his mouth there lurk the subtle sprites of wit and humor—a wit as nimble as the lightning, a humor as sweet and impartial as the sunshine. His very language is divine, speaking every note from the whisper of love to the tempest of wrath, from the mother's lullaby to the hero's challenge, from the soft flutings of sylvan peace to the thunder-roll of battle and death. Let the poets and prophets of Israel approach. The mighty palace of his genius shall find them all an

appropriate apartment, leaving a host of chambers to spare, in some of which the decorations are too lovely for their stern regard.

You contend, however, that Shakespeare was not inspired. You claim Inspiration solely for the writers of the Bible. The Book of Jonah is, in that sense, more precious than "Hamlet," the Song of Solomon than "A Midsummer Night's Dream," the story of Samson than the tragedy of Lear or Othello. What, then, do you mean by Inspiration? I seek in your pages for a definition, and I cannot even find a description. You move in a vicious circle, making no more progress than a gin-horse. You remind me of Mr. Micawber's steed, who was all action and no go.

"We mean by Inspiration," you say, "exactly those qualities and characteristics which are the marks or notes of the Bible." This is vague enough for a Pagan oracle. But you improve on it a few pages further on. You there say—"What is Inspiration? We have to answer, precisely that which the Bible *is*." In other words, the Bible is inspired, and Inspiration is the Bible.

You seem to me to be feebly following in the footsteps of Samuel Taylor Coleridge. You have his equivocalness without his genius, his mysteriousness without his flashes of light. When he said certain things in the Bible "find me" he was expressing a real truth, though in a mystical manner; but when you speak of "marks and notes" of the Bible, without telling what they are, or giving the slightest hint as to how they may be recognised, you are only darkening the obscurity you pretend to enlighten.

Your real drift is not to be discovered in your definitions, but in your incidental remarks. You say the Bible "reveals another Order, a Kingdom of Heaven, a view of human nature and of human destiny which lies quite beyond our ken." Its writers are inspired "as revealers of God, of God's purposes, of God's methods." The whole book is inspired because "by

reading it and studying it we find our way to God, we find His will for us, and we find out how we can conform ourselves to His will."

Does it not occur to you that the Mohammedans can say the same of the Koran, the Brahmins of the Vedas, the Buddhists of their many Scriptures, and even the Mormons and the Jezreelites of Joe Smith's gold tablets and James White's flying roll? Is it not a fact that, taking the world as a whole, people find their "way to God" through the Bibles of their native lands? Is it not a matter of training and habit? Can it be said that so many as one in a thousand ever forsake the Scriptures of their fathers' faith for the Scriptures of another creed? If you had been born and bred in Turkey, would you not have defended the Koran by the same specious arguments as you now employ in defence of the Bible?

I cannot help saying that you treat the Bible as a fetish. You are ready to admit that the tales of its manufacture are very questionable; you are willing to paint it afresh, and put it in a new light; but you will not abandon the idol, and trust to your own reason and conscience for guidance. You allow, for instance, that Paul was not the author of several epistles that bear his name. One of his disciples "would not hesitate to veil his own hand under the form of a letter from his master," and "what we call *forgery* he would call modesty." But this does not interfere with the inspiration of such documents; there they are in the Blessed Book, a precious possession for ever!

Pardon me for holding that you are mistaken. I do not believe your view will commend itself to the common sense of mankind. Paul was believed to have been miraculously converted, and selected to preach the Gospel to the Gentiles. That belief gave a stamp of authority to his writings. But if it is proved that he never wrote many of the documents bearing his name, they will inevitably lose that stamp of authority, and come to be regarded as the writings of unknown

and irresponsible imitators. Nay, more, the whole Bible will suffer from such exposure. A few chambers may remain intact, but the rest of the edifice will be in ruins.

What is really left in your theory of Inspiration? You concede that the Bible writers were fallible, that they made gross mistakes in science and history, and even blasphemed the Deity in their pitiable ignorance. In what department then were they inspired? I deduce your answer from a remark on the Epistles to the Galatians, which displays "inspired dealing with ethical questions." You assert that Paul's ideas had not "their genesis in the character or training of the writer," and "can only be explained by referring them to the Eternal Mind itself."

Here then is your last plank. The Bible is ethically inspired. You cling to Bible morality as your rock of ages in the weltering sea of discussion. But the event may prove you are trusting to a treacherous support. Modern criticism is not inclined to respect your last refuge. It points to the moral crudities of the Bible, which, on your own admission, make "a very pretty picture" when they are collected together. But that is not all. Were a similar collection made of all its best teachings, its loftiest appeals and its wisest apophthegms, every item could be amply paralleled in the profane writings of antiquity; and some elements of morality could be found in those writings which are wanting in your Bible. Whoever asserts that the Bible contains any ethical teaching at once new and true, is an ignoramus or an impostor. Whoever, therefore, asserts that the morality of the Bible is inspired, occupies a position which, if he were wise, he would never seek to justify by *reason*, but would only vindicate by *faith*.

THE CREDENTIALS OF THE GOSPEL.

TO THE REV. PROFESSOR JOSEPH AGAR BEET.

SIR,—

I purpose to criticise your Fernley Lecture delivered at Sheffield on the fifth of August, entitled "The Credentials of the Gospel: a Statement of the Reason of the Christian Hope." I understand the Lecture is to be amplified into a volume, and supported with an army of references. But, as it stands, it contains the whole of your argument, and a concise statement is preferable to a diffuse one as a basis of discussion. It affords less opportunity for deviating into side-issues, or getting lost in a crowd of authorities.

Your lecture purports "to test the firm and broad foundation on which rests the Christian hope." It is characteristic of the present state of religious controversy that you say nothing as to the Christian *fear*. The doctrine of Hell is gradually disappearing. Heaven is promised to believers, and in the words of Hamlet "the rest is silence." I have no doubt that this compromise will be serviceable for some time. But it cannot be permanent. Heaven and Hell are logical correlatives. They are like the Siamese twins. Destroy the one, and the other may linger for awhile, but its doom is sealed. Hope and fear move forward together. They are inseparably linked, and both are extinguished by knowledge. Where we are certain, we do not conjecture; but where there is incertitude, the imagination *will* play in all directions.

"Our investigation," you premise, "shall be on methods scientific and philosophical." I do not consider you have kept your promise. It is not scientific to reiterate dogmas; it is not philosophic to ignore

replies, as the hunted ostrich ignores its pursuers. You do not "test" the foundation of your faith. You merely give a ground-plan of the building.

You affirm that "the foundation and root and source of all religion" is "the inborn moral sense." The metaphor is mixed, and the assertion is false. Nothing is more certain than that religion and morality are of separate origin and have no necessary connexion. Such connexion as they have is formed gradually. It is conspicuous in high civilisations, but almost imperceptible in the lowest stages of culture. "Many religions of the lower races," as Tylor says, "have little to do with moral conduct." The gods of an American or African savage "may require him to do his duty towards them," but "it does not follow that they should concern themselves with his doing duty to his neighbor." A robber, a brute, or even a murderer is not necessarily hateful to the gods; in fact, such a man is often a great medicine-man or priest. Among the lower moral strata of our European population, two classes noted for piety are brigands and prostitutes. Religion, as the practical recognition of invisible powers, is most prevalent among savages and barbarians. In this sense modern Europe is less religious than mediæval Europe, and the countries which are most saturated with religion are the most ignorant and degraded. The more progress men make in mental and moral culture the less does religion overshadow their lives. Ethical science emerges as religious influence declines, and in the words of Lecky, "the formation of a moral philosophy is usually the first step in the decadence of religions."

The association of religion with morality is, indeed, an inevitable concession of the dogmatic to the useful. While self-preservation is the first law of nature, everything must yield to the necessities of personal and social life. Natural selection weeds out the most superstitious in the struggle for existence. The main current of religion must accommodate itself to the

average conditions of contemporary civilisation. Apparently it is religion that dictates, but in reality it obeys, just as the laws in a constitutional monarchy are enacted by Parliament though executed in the name of the Crown. Religion conforms to what it cannot avert, and finally, after a long succession of changes, it descends to the position of a servant of its old subject, whose interests it pretends to safeguard, just as the monarchy ends by posing as the bulwark of the people's liberties. By this time it has lost its once imperial tones, it speaks in apologetic accents, and instead of commanding earth in the name of heaven, it proffers itself as an occult assistant of secular interests. When we are told that religion is a powerful aid to morality, we are also reminded that morality occupies the seat of sovereignty.

With regard to our "inborn moral sense," I admit its reality, as I admit the reality of our musical sense or our mathematical sense. But I deny its being "inborn" except as *inherited*. It is a product of evolution, like all the rest of our faculties, and it has all degrees of development, from the incipency of the congenital criminal to the relative perfection of the true philanthropist.

I am occupying no novel position. Giants of thought, such as Darwin and Spencer, to say nothing of older writers, have laboriously constructed it, and I do no more than take advantage of their labors. While the books of such men are in the hands of educated readers, it is idle, nay ludicrous, to go on asserting the old doctrines as though they were unchallenged. It is undignified, no less than futile, to sit upon the shore and ignore the flowing tide. Mrs. Partington herself, sweeping back the Atlantic with her broom, was less absurd; for her exertions were heroic, and she kept on the safe side of the waves without beating a sudden and ignominious retreat.

You begin the real argument of your lecture by appealing to our "moral judgments," which "differ in

kind and differ infinitely from all others." You assert that this difference "is revealed by the different emotions worked in us by a great calamity and a great crime."

This is very vague language. What is it that makes us regard calamities and crimes differently? Is it not a question of agency? We feel no resentment against a flood or a fire. Why? Because they are insensitive, and unamenable to motives. Men, on the other hand, *are* amenable to motives, and their wrong-doing excites resentment; first, in those they directly injure; and, secondly, in society at large. I do not mean that the feeling is a simple one. It includes hatred—which is only an intense form of dislike—fear, wounded self-love, a sense of disturbance, and, in many cases, though not in all, an imaginative perception of danger to the community.

So much for the *feeling*. The *judgment* is entirely different. It is purely intellectual. Some cases are perfectly obvious. The "extreme cases" you refer to are as easy of decision as whether water is good to drink or bread to eat. But the vaster multitude of intermediate cases call for great exercise of the mental powers. This is the reason why many persons of excellent dispositions are so often perverse in their moral judgments. Even *your* moral judgment is defective, or you would not instance as "a villain of very deep dye" a man who has "deliberately, and without provocation, killed his mother." I should say that a man who murders his mother, *without provocation*, is not a villain, but a lunatic.

"These confident judgments," you say, "imply an infallible standard of comparison." What is an infallible standard? I do not understand the adjective. A standard is simply a standard. It may be *applied* with all degrees of efficiency. A foot-rule is a foot-rule. One man uses it well, and another ill; one will take the dimensions of a room with reasonable accuracy, and another make exasperating blunders. The

"infallibility" must be in the *application* of the standard.

Your confusion on this subject is such that I feel no surprise at your silence as to the standard itself. You do not say what it is. You call it infallible, but that is no information. You speak of "an eternal law of right," and of the "voice" within us. But the voice is, in my opinion, only the echo of our own sentiments; while the "eternal law of right" may mean anything or nothing until it is explained. Words like *eternal* and *infallible* do not enlighten me. I want to know *what* is your "law of right." That is an indispensable preliminary.

When you tell me that the moral judgment is "universal," I must deny the proposition if it means that "all men everywhere know that treachery, lying, theft, adultery and murder are condemned by a law which speaks with an unerring voice of indisputable authority." The Hindu Thug deems it right to murder, and the Thugs of your Church, in former ages, thought it a pious duty to slay heretics and infidels. Adultery among women is held to be wrong in most countries, but millions of savages would laugh at you if you told them that adultery among men was either a crime or a vice. Theft and treachery are wrong within the tribe or association, but frequently a virtue if practised on outsiders. Lying is only a vice within the same limits. These statements are indisputable, and I understand why you shun such witnesses as "modern travellers or missionaries." The breath of a single one of them would shatter the very basis of your argument.

In a certain sense, however, I agree with your statement that "to the mysterious tribunal within appeals all external teaching, moral or religious." The only thing I object to is the epithet of "mysterious." For the rest, your statement bears out my contention that morality is primary, and not secondary to religion. Our reason is the proper judge of

Revelation on the intellectual side, and our moral sense its judge on the ethical side. But this makes a clean sweep of every system which is based on *faith*.

"The teaching of Jesus," you say, "is no exception." I agree with you. But do you see the logical result of this admission? If my moral sense is the judge of his teaching, in what sense can that teaching be called divine? If it be divine, my moral sense must be diviner still. And if I have a faculty which is able to sit in judgment on his teaching, I have a faculty which would, in the course of time, enable me to discover all that is best in it without his assistance.

"We wait with intense interest," you say, "to hear the verdict and sentence on the gospel of Christ pronounced by this unerring judge." The attitude would do you credit if it were not assumed. The fact is, you are *not* waiting. You and your co-religionists *never did* wait. You were brought up as Christians because you were born in a Christian country, just as you would have been brought up as Mohammedans if you had been born in Turkey. You did not make up your minds; they were made up for you. Education and authority have determined your creed. You were prejudiced in favor of Christianity. You took sides before you were able to judge. And you can only say that you are waiting for a verdict on Christianity in the sense in which an advocate is waiting for the decision of the judge and jury.

How little you are *waiting* is seen from your very next sentence. You declare that "The *judgment is decisive*." But you do not say *whose* judgement. You affirm that "The moral teaching of the New Testament commends itself at once and irresistibly to our moral sense as right and good." Whose is *our* moral sense? I presume you mean the moral sense of Christians. And why do you confuse "the teaching of Jesus" with "the moral teaching of the New Testament?" Does not the second half of the Bible contain the teaching of Peter, James, John, Paul, and

several unknown writers, as well as the teaching of Jesus Christ? Finally, how does the moral teaching of the New Testament commend itself *at once* and *irresistibly* to our moral sense, when thousands of books and articles have been written by honest and able men and women to show that Christian morality is often imperfect and sometimes pernicious?

You are obviously addressing Christians, and Christians only, when you assert that "every moral excellence" is "but a feature" in the "portrait" of Jesus Christ. This is not a view which commends itself to Freethinkers, nor does it seem to commend itself to the Buddhists and Confucians among whom your missionaries labor. Unfortunately you do not enter into details. Your panegyric is general, and I can only raise a general objection. That the Jesus of the Gospels was a *bad* man is not often maintained, nor is it likely that his biographers would depict him as such, seeing he was the object of their adoration. But there are many degrees between badness and perfection, and Jesus does not reach the ideal height. Many elements of greatness were lacking in his character. The fact is, no man that ever lived was perfect. It is a false hero-worship which refuses to see most obvious failings. And the arbitrary veneration of a single ideal must have the effect of narrowing our sympathies and aspirations.

You tell me "The Carpenter declares that *he alone knows God.*" It is an assertion easily made, impossible of proof, and impossible of refutation. You also say that he makes other "unheard-of assumptions," yet calls himself "meek and lowly of heart," and "strange to say, we feel that these words are true." Now "strange to say" I do *not* feel that the words are true. I cannot see the meekness of his denouncing those he could not convince; or the meekness of his extravagant railing against his religious rivals in the capital; or the meekness of his triumphal entry into Jerusalem amid the seditious plaudits of a fickle and fanatical mob.

That "we see him possessing infinite power" and "infinite resources," is belied by his inability to work wonders in certain cities because of their unbelief (Matt. xiii., 58). Did he not also feel that virtue had gone out of him when he was touched by a diseased woman? Do you mean that "infinite power" could feel the loss of energy? And do you think it was a being of "infinite power" who cried out "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me?"

Such a dream as the Gospel life of Jesus you say was "never dreamed before or since." Indeed! Are you unacquainted with the life of Buddha? Did he not renounce the splendors of a royal court for a beggar's robes? Did he not wander as a poor mendicant through the land he might have ruled as king? Did he not practise every form of self-sacrifice? Do not the stories describe him as giving up everything for the love of others, even yielding himself to be eaten by a tigress, out of pity for the emaciated creature and her famished cubs? How beautiful is this in comparison with the callous exclamation of St. Paul—"Doth God care for oxen?" As "a dream" the life of Buddha is, in my judgment, more pathetic and inspiring than the life of Jesus.

I pass from your panegyric on Jesus to your doctrine of sin. You say that the vision of Jesus "brings to light our own deep pollution." Do you think that language of this kind is true or useful? It is the historic language of your creed, I allow, but the modern mind is turning from it with disgust. Dwelling upon our moral infirmities is no more wholesome than dwelling upon our physical ailments. The man who made a public display of his ulcers, or made them the theme of his conversation, would be regarded as a nuisance; but the man who makes a public exhibition of his moral maladies, and talks about his "deep pollution," is regarded as a promising candidate for heaven. I protest against this morbid spiritualism. It does not strengthen, it enervates us;

and too frequently it leaves more nastiness than it finds. Evolution shows us a better method of culture. Our vices are not diminished by studying them; they perish of inanition through the exercise of our virtues. Our welfare lies, not in exploring our defects, but in practising our powers.

The clergy have always cried up original sin, and dwelt on our "deep pollution." The medical quack behaves in the same way. His object is to make us feel desperately ill, that we may fly to him for relief. The deeper our sense of "corruption," the greater the power of the priest. He battens, like a parasite, on the decadent side of our nature. He trades on our misery and our fears, allowing us as much hope as keeps us alive to patronise his nostrums.

You dilate on our sense of sin, our apprehension of future punishment, and our expectation of future reward. Your philosophy is very lofty in its pretensions, but very grovelling in its essence. You deny that virtue is its own reward, or vice its own punishment. Where, you ask, is the punishment of the successful rogue; where is the reward of the martyred hero? There must be a future retribution to balance the account. Beyond the grave "there is absolute recompense."

Such is your teaching, and it involves a gross assumption as to "the future," and a sad misreading of human nature.

How do you know that the *next* life, if there be one, will exactly rectify the injustices of *this* life? If there be a governor of the universe, the presumption is that the polity of this world is a fair sample of his methods. Analogy would lead us to believe that what goes on here will be continued elsewhere. On the other hand, your crude jurisprudence would create as many evils as it rectified. The supposition is infantile that men may be divided into two classes, the good and the bad, the sheep and the goats. We are all of us mixtures. Human character is more diversified than the ever-

changing aspects of the external world. The best man has his failings, and the worst his redeeming qualities. A perfect adjustment, therefore, of consequence to conduct in a future life, would necessitate not one, but a million heavens and hells, each of them nicely varied and graduated for their appropriate inmates. Even then the balance would be fatally vitiated by the eternal rectification of temporary disorders. In short, the idea of "absolute recompense" in a future life is a childish dream, which is seen to be grotesque the moment we try to realise its details.

Do you not see, also, that the "absolute recompense" you promise on the other side of death turns morality into huckstering? On this principle, virtue is only shrewd calculation, and vice a foolish mistake. The main-spring of your ethic is personal profit. You look with disdain on the utilitarian, but his philosophy is infinitely superior to yours. He makes happiness the goal of effort, but not the mere happiness of the individual actor. The welfare of society is his criterion of right and wrong. His standard is not personal but universal. In the presence of self-sacrifice for the good of others he is not embarrassed by your difficulties. He is not staggered, as you are, by "the case of a man who has lost his life by doing a noble action."

I have said, and I repeat, that you misread human nature. Can you imagine a great dramatist depicting a hero on your principles? Were the dying hero to exclaim "I have done right, I have lost my reward, but God will give it me in heaven," he would at once alienate our sympathies. We should feel that he had been actuated by false motives, and our interest would vanish with the confession of his selfishness.

Do you imagine that an Atheist soldier would shun the post of danger any more than his Christian comrade? Would a regiment of Freethinkers fight less gallantly than a regiment of priests? Did the three hundred Spartans die in the pass of Thermopylæ for

patriotism or for reward? Did they lay down their lives less cheerfully because they had no thought of "future recompense"? Do you seriously suppose that an Atheist fireman would not do his duty amid the flame and smoke? Would he hesitate to save the lives of women and children because he had no hope of heaven?

Fortunately we act upon our impulses, and not upon the momentary calculations of expediency. Our social instincts are not at the mercy of the schools. They have been developed in us by ages of evolution, and they strengthen as civilisation advances. Self-sacrifice is an expression of sympathy, and sympathy is independent of religion. I will do the martyrs of your faith more justice than to suppose they were always animated by the hope of heaven; and, on the other hand, I trust you will concede that the martyrs of my faith have shown equal courage with your own. Vanini and Bruno died at the stake, without hope of a "future recompense." And have you not heard of Millière, who bared his breast to the bullets of the Versailles troops, and fell upon the church steps with the cry of *Vive L'Humanité* upon his lips?

The pivot of your scheme, however, is rather fear of punishment than hope of reward. You illustrate the line of the Roman poet that all religion began in terror. You say we "cannot throw off the dark foreboding that sin will be followed by punishment," that "we are compelled to believe that retribution awaits us elsewhere," that "forebodings of punishment" trouble us as we approach "the dark river of death," and that "we dread the penalty of our sins."

I am tempted to remind you of Carlyle's grim remark on Ignatius Loyola. When this "saint" was laid low by "the Cookery-shop and the Bordel," he felt he was an awful sinner, but he recovered his health, and his puriency took the new form of Jesuitism. His sick repentance was only a shrinking from future punishment. "Had he been a good and brave man," says Carlyle, "he should have consented at that point

to be damned—as was clear to him that he deserved to be.” So I am inclined to say to any man who feels he ought to be damned—“Go and be damned, and take it quietly.”

Such manliness, however, is not found in Christian sinners. They want pardon, or “deliverance from the future penalty of past sins.” But “the moral law knows nothing of pardon,” and the result would be “despair” if it were not for “the Gospel of Christ,” which “comes to us with a voice of mercy.” A sweet and easy Gospel indeed! It is preached from our pulpits, but set at naught in our criminal courts.

How selfish is this Gospel! Surely when a man has done wrong his first thought should not be for himself, but for the victims of his wrong-doing. But on this matter you are silent. You point him to a way of escape, while he leaves the real burden of his sins behind him. Is this a gospel of strength or a gospel of weakness? For my part, I prefer the philosophy of old Omar Khayyám.

The Moving Finger writes; and, having writ,
Moves on: nor all your Piety nor Wit
Shall lure it back to cancel half a Line,
Nor all your Tears wash out a Word of it.

I admit this is not a gospel for knaves and weaklings. It is a gospel for brave and honest men. Conduct and consequence are inseparable in this world. The bond cannot be broken. Any system that teaches otherwise is false and pernicious.

According to your philosophy, Christ not only saves from the future penalty of past sins, but also from the power of present sin. It is possible that you believe this, but what evidence is there to prove it? It is clearly impossible to examine the lives of individuals, or to penetrate the secret recesses of personal character. We are able, however, to judge of a general influence by average results, and an appeal to statistics does not show us that Christians are morally superior to unbelievers. I defy you to adduce a single reason for

believing that they are so. When I was imprisoned for bringing your religion into "disbelief and contempt," I found it was taken for granted that every criminal belonged to some form of faith. There were a few Jews, many Catholics, and more Protestants. Their religion was stated on the cards affixed to their cell-doors, mine being accurately described as "None." A chapel was maintained for their devotions, and a clergyman to physic their souls. Surely, then, you will not maintain that unbelievers fill our gaols, or populate them even in proportion to their numbers. Nor can it be maintained that they neglect their share of positive duty. They recognise the law of "thou shalt" as well as the law of "thou shalt not." You will find them conspicuous in every advanced movement; not, perhaps, in soup, blanket, and coal societies, which only skin and film the ulcerous sore, but in those radical associations whose object is rather justice than charity, and the prevention of evil rather than its mitigation.

It is idle to tell me that the "wonderful fitness" of Christianity as a moral gospel has been "tested by thousands of men and women." The advocates of Buddhism, Brahminism, or Mohammedanism might make a similar assertion. The "fitness" in every case is the result of training. What men are "fitted" to is fitted to them. Had you been born and bred outside the pale of Christendom, you would have appreciated the "wonderful fitness" of some other faith.

Thus far I do not see that you have established the credentials of your creed. I will now follow you through the remainder of your argument.

You erect a number of dogmas on the basis of our ignorance of the origin of life and the evolution of mind. But this is entirely illegitimate. We are not entitled to reason from our *ignorance*. Every argument must be based on what we *know*. And while science is seeking a solution of new problems, I would remind you that its solution of old problems was always

in opposition to religious dogmas. The clergy have always *been* wrong, and the presumption is that they are *still* wrong. I would also observe that the doctrines of the existence of God and the immortality of the soul prevailed for thousands of years before Christianity was born, and are therefore no part of the *speciality* of your faith.

You are more to the point in asserting that "one religion"—to wit, your own—"occupies a place of unique superiority." Yet the statement is somewhat vague. I understand "unique," and I understand "superiority," but I cannot put them together as adjective and substantive. What is unique is not superior, and what is superior is not unique.

You assert that "all Christian nations stand immeasurably above all others." Do you include Abyssinia in "all Christian nations," and if not, why not? Or do you regard it as "immeasurably above" Ceylon in morals or China in civilisation?

What, also, do you mean by asserting that "in spite of their many wars, the Christian nations of the world form, in a very real sense, a political brotherhood"? Where is the political brotherhood between France and Germany, or England and Russia? Is it not a fact that nine-tenths, at least, of the quarrels in the world are between Christian nations? Have not Christian nations carried the art of war to its highest development? Do they not manufacture all the rifles, all the cannon, and all the gunpowder, as well as all the rum, brandy, gin, and whiskey? You yourself admit that "No army has the slightest hope of victory unless armed with the weapons and directed by the strategy of Christian nations." You add triumphantly that "The sword has passed into the hands of those nations who recognise the unique majesty of the lowly Nazarene."

This is the only part of your lecture with which I have the honor to agree. I would remark, however, that the military power of Christendom has nothing

whatever to do with Christianity. Where were the "weapons" and the "strategy" of your faith when it vainly hurled crusade after crusade, for three centuries, against the infidel Saracens? Where were the "weapons" and the "strategy" of your faith in the seventh and eighth centuries, when the successors of Mohammed swept Christianity out of Asia and Africa? Did not the Cross go down before the Crescent on a thousand battle-fields? And what has turned the tables? What has put the power of the sword into the hands of Christian nations? Is it not that Science which the Church fought tooth and nail, with the vigilance of a sleuth-hound and the ferocity of a tiger? Without Science, the British troops would not have slaughtered the Soudanese. Without science, England would have established no empire in India; without science, the Anglo-Saxon race would never have colonised the world. Had Christianity succeeded in strangling Science, as she furiously endeavored, Europe would still be plunged in barbarism, and would have to hold its own against the hordes of Asia and Africa by sheer physical valor.

It is well that civilisation gives us the means of defending it. It is well that Europe is for ever safe from the incursions of outer barbarians. But how strange the eulogy of our military prowess sounds from the lips of one who "recognises the unique majesty of the lowly Nazarene." Did he not declare that whoso took the sword should perish by the sword? Did he not teach the sinfulness of resisting evil? Did he not command his disciples to present their cheeks humbly to the smiter? Are you not glorifying Science instead of Christianity? Are you not riding roughshod over the plainest teachings of your master? How will you present yourself at the Day of Judgment before the preacher of the Sermon on the Mount?

With respect to Art, you assert that it "owns the supremacy of Christ." You remark that "Non-Christian nations contribute nothing to our galleries of

painting and sculpture, or to the world's treasury of music." The grain of truth in these statements is simply this, that Europe leads the world's culture. But it did this before Christianity appeared, and the explanation is not religious but physical. Christianity has not given the Abyssinians any ascendancy. It will not give it to converted negroes or South Sea islanders. The question of superiority is simply one of race and climate. Given the Caucasian, with his large and complex brain, and his superior facial angle, and he is bound to lead the march of progress. Science, literature, and art are not the product of Christianity; they are the product of the Caucasian brain. This was true before Christianity appeared, and it will be true when Christianity has vanished.

Your remarks on the impermanence of ancient civilisation, as compared with the modern, are simply amazing. Dating from the time of Charlemagne, which is a very liberal concession, we find modern Europe to be about eleven hundred years old; and during a large portion of that period it is only by courtesy that the West can be called civilised. The existence of Rome, under the Republic and the Empire, was nearly as prolonged, and the older civilisation of Egypt stretched back into the deepest mists of antiquity. It is true that Greece had but a brief career of glory, for she fell under the mightier sway of Rome. She was not conquered, however; or, if she was, she avenged herself. She liberalised her ostensible conquerors, and bequeathed the bases of our modern civilisation. Dig where you will, you come to Greece at last. Your very New Testament is written in Greek, and it was the Grecian mind that gave Christianity all its fecund power.

It is perfectly true that Christianity arose in an age of decadence, and its doctrines and ethics savor of its origin. But there is, as I have already urged, no mystery in the remarkable progress of Europe after the long night of the Dark Ages. You say that

“this phenomenon”—the advance of Christian countries—“demands explanation.” I assert that the explanation has been given. Modern civilisation arose among the same race, and in the same part of the world, as that in which the immediately preceding civilisation had flourished. The Renaissance itself began in the very country which had been the seat of the Roman empire. Your assertion, therefore, that “of the pre-eminence of the Christian nations, *no explanation can be found except in their Christianity,*” is a piece of baseless dogmatism.

Why the Turks have stagnated and decayed, while the Hungarians have advanced and improved, is a more complicated problem than you seem to imagine. If Christianity made all the difference, I ask you why Christianity did not civilise Abyssinia? There are political and climatic differences of the highest importance, as will be admitted by every student of history and ethnology.

With respect to Christianity itself, I know not why you should say that it “arose suddenly.” It is indisputable that Jesus Christ—if he existed—was born in a particular year; but that is the only element of “suddenness” in the history of your faith. Many influences besides that of the Prophet of Nazareth contributed to the formation of Christianity. This is such a commonplace of criticism that I will not condescend to argue it. Your religion is as much a product of evolution as any other system with which we are acquainted.

That Christianity “overspread the mightiest empire in the world” is undoubtedly true. It had converts in all parts of the Roman empire. But they scarcely numbered a twentieth of the population when it was made the state religion by Constantine. From that moment, it was not persuasion that made converts, but wholesale bribery and persecution. Proscription, fine, imprisonment, and murder, were the agencies by which the triumph of Christianity was completely secured.

You assert that Christianity is "now spreading to the ends of the earth." I deny it. The Christian populations outside Europe are descended from European emigrants. The extension is merely physical. What impression have you made on the heathen populations of Asia and Africa? Is not the failure of your missions a byeword?

Nor can I follow your assertion that "The entire history of man affords no example of personal influence, and of devotion to and confidence in a person, which can for a moment be compared to the influence exerted by, and the devotion paid to, Jesus of Nazareth." You are only speaking as a Christian to Christians. The names of Mohammed and Buddha are a sufficient refutation of your statement.

I am astounded at your assertion that "Paul's firm belief of the Gospel reveals the deep impression made upon him by the personality of Jesus." Is there the slightest evidence that Paul ever saw or heard Jesus? Did he not despise and persecute his followers? Was he not converted by a miracle or a sunstroke? And is it not a fact that the Jesus of Paul's epistles is far more a doctrine than a person? I appeal to everyone who has read his epistles *apart from* the four Gospels.

Paul did, indeed, declare that Jesus had risen from the dead. But what is his testimony worth? Do not his statements in Corinthians flatly contradict the Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles? Did he not disbelieve the Resurrection on its intrinsic evidence? Is not the fact apparent from his persecution of its believers before his strange experience near Damascus? Does he not place *this* "appearance" of Jesus on a level with his appearances to the eleven? And is not his testimony vitiated by this hopeless confusion of the subjective and the objective?

"Was the dead body of Christ raised to life?" you ask; and you add that "upon this matter of historic fact depend the highest hopes of man." If you believe

this, as I have no doubt you do, it is natural that you should make a little evidence go a very long way.

You make no attempt to prove the Resurrection. You simply ask the sceptic "How do you account for this and that if he did not rise?" And the this and that are not facts of ordinary history, but *part of your own records*. You ask the sceptic to explain the "belief" in the Resurrection. How do you explain the belief of the Mormons in Joe Smith's gold tablets? Mr. Froude tells us of Julius Cæsar that "the enthusiasm of the multitude refused to believe that he was dead. He was supposed to have ascended into heaven, not in adulatory metaphor, but in literal and prosaic fact." How do you explain that?

You say that the story of Christ's resurrection was "accepted by thousands of Jews." The statement is founded on your own dubious records, written long after the time. But if it be true it proves nothing, unless the Jews were men of unconquerable incredulity, whereas they were grossly superstitious. If Jesus *did* rise from the dead, the great wonder is that *all* the Jews did not believe it. "It must be admitted," says Diderot, "that the Jews were a wonderful people; everywhere one has seen peoples deluded by a single false miracle, and Jesus Christ was unable to impress the Jews with an infinity of true ones." The incredulity of the Jews is a greater miracle than the Resurrection.

What you have to say about the dead body of Jesus shows a great want of historic perspective. How can it be affirmed that "the most powerful party in Jerusalem had the strongest motive" for disproving the story of the resurrection? They had put Jesus out of the way, his disciples were a mere handful of insignificant men, and what did it matter if they talked about his having risen from the dead? It was a harmless craze, and the priestly party had other matters to attend to. That they were "exposed to a deadly peril" is a wild assumption, utterly at variance

with what is known of the very slight spread of Christianity among the Jews. Had it spread like a wildfire, and become threatening, and had the priests been publicly challenged to produce the dead body, there would be something in their silence. But nothing of the sort happened. Even if it had, and if after the lapse of months or years the sepulchre had been found empty, the priests might justly have answered that the body had not been buried by them, but by one of Jesus's disciples, and that the disappearance of a corpse, in such circumstances, was anything but miraculous.

Still more absurd, if possible, is your plea that the disciples would not have shown such courage in propagating a delusion. The strength of a conviction is no proof of its validity. History shows us that men have displayed the most heroic courage in defending falsehood and imposture. Self-sacrifice proves a man to be in earnest, but does not prove him to be in the right.

You say that the Resurrection "has held captive many of the most intelligent and cultured of men, and now for many centuries nearly all the best of men." You forget that these men have been *trained* to believe it. With the exception of Paul, whose conversion, as I have said, was due to a miracle or a sunstroke, how many "intelligent and cultured" men accepted the Resurrection in the primitive ages? Is it not a fact that Christianity spread among the poor, the lowly and the illiterate? Is it not also a fact, as Gibbon observes, that the illustrious Pagans of that period considered the Christians "only as obstinate and perverse enthusiasts, who exacted an implicit submission to their mysterious doctrines, without being able to produce a single argument that could engage the attention of men of sense and learning"?

Passing to the question of miracles in general, you admit that "miracles do not happen," but you deny the right of anyone to say that they never did.

Theoretically you may be correct, but practically you are wrong. Men cannot help reading the past by the present, and if miracles do not happen now the inevitable presumption is that they never did happen. Against this presumption you must bring an overwhelming array of evidence in favor of any particular miracle, and such an array of evidence is never produced. To talk about the "mysteries" of nature is nothing but jugglery. If we cannot, at present, explain the origin of life, we know what kind of evidence is requisite to justify us in believing that a man rose from the dead. And assuredly you will never impress a man of ordinary culture by telling him that when he lifts a weight he "defies the law of gravitation."

If the Resurrection be a delusion, you remark that "a delusion has saved the world." To prove this extraordinary paradox, you paint in dark tints the "corruption" of the Roman empire, and in light tints the morality of Christendom. Does it not occur to you that some progress might be expected in two thousand years? Is it fair, is it rational, to point to the improved morality of this sceptical age, and cry "Behold the fruits of eighteen centuries of Christianity?" Turn to Mr. Cotter Morison's book on *The Service of Man*, and read his chapter on "Morality in the Ages of Faith." Take the case of France alone, and see the effect of Christianity on private and public life. "The court of the later Valois," says Mr. Morison, "is painted for us by the garrulous Brantôme; and one fails to see how it differed, except for the worse, from the court of Caligula or Commodus."

The same writer puts the whole question at issue in a few sentences.

"Do we find, as a matter of fact, that the Ages of Faith were distinguished by a high morality? Were they superior in this respect to the present age, which is nearly on all hands acknowledged not to be an age of Faith? The answer must be in the negative. Taking them broadly, the Ages of Faith were emphatically ages of crime, of gross and scandalous wickedness, of cruelty, and, in a word, of immorality. And it

is noteworthy that, in proportion as we recede backward from the present age and return into the Ages of Faith, we find that the crime and the sin become denser and blacker."

The present age is the most unbelieving and the most moral the world has ever seen. All you can reply is that "anti-Christian teachers have themselves been trained in a moral and intellectual atmosphere formed by many centuries of Christian influences." This hardly applies to John Stuart Mill, for instance, who was trained without any religion by his sceptical father. Besides, it is a two-edged argument. Suppose I were to say that Christians are kept in check by secular and social opinion. Suppose I were to say that if it were not for the secular civilisation of our age they would return, *viâ* the Salvation Army, to the primitive rites and doctrines of their faith, and show, in anarchy and barbarism, the unadulterated fruit of the Christian tree.

If you have established the "Credentials of the Gospels," you have only done so to the satisfaction of believers. You regard your "proof" as "complete," and I have no doubt it is as complete as you can make it. But I am very much deceived if it succeeds in convincing a single unbeliever.

Let me, in conclusion, say a few words on your "precious possessions." You have "faith in Christ and victory over sin." Your faith in Christ is a subjective phenomenon and can neither be proved nor disputed; but your victory over sin will hardly bear the test of examination. I fail to see that Christians are morally superior to Freethinkers, and I defy you to prove that they are so. On the other hand, you hear "a voice from beyond the grave" promising "to all who believe it immortal life," and you cannot doubt "these glad tidings of great joy." I presume this is the language of "the larger hope," which dwells as little as possible upon hell and as much as possible upon heaven. But, for my part, I do not believe that such a sentimental compromise can be permanent.

I have read the New Testament for myself, and I am satisfied that its heaven and hell must stand or fall together. Consequently I cannot accept your "glad tidings of great joy," which seem to me "sad tidings of great grief." I cannot believe your creed, nor do I need its consolations, and I rejoice to be free from its great horror of eternal torment. I am content to follow my reason and obey my conscience. I may fail in both, for who but a pharisee is perfect? But I still look calmly to the end. Should death be an everlasting sleep, I shall know no sorrow or regret. Should it be the entrance to a new life, I shall expect more sense and justice from God or Nature than I see in the dogmas of your faith.

MIRACLES.

TO THE REV. BROWNLOW MAITLAND M.A.

SIR,—

I have purchased and very carefully read your little volume on "Miracles" in the "Helps to Belief" series. I cannot say that you have in any way helped my belief; though, perhaps, you may reply that I have no belief to be assisted. On the contrary, I feel more deeply than ever the hopelessness of a cause which has to be defended by subtle shifts and elaborate special pleading. What a difference between your plea for Miracles and the simple, manly, straightforward argument of Paley! I am well aware that the great Archdeacon showed a little of the wisdom of the serpent in his skilful illustrations, and that he sometimes pressed his evidence unduly. But his argument is on

the whole an honest one. He appealed to reason and experience, and admitted that, in the last resort, miracles, like everything else, must rest upon adequate evidence. Your treatise, however, is essentially an appeal against reason to faith. Your argument is almost entirely *à priori*, and can therefore have no weight except with those who are already convinced. You devote nearly ninety-three pages to your point of view, to the antecedent objections to miracles, and to the presumption in their favor—all of which Paley dismisses with admirable brevity; and you devote only twenty pages to the direct evidence for the Christian miracles. You give us a large and imposing portico to a small and beggarly house. Three-fourths of your time is employed in drugging the reader's intelligence, so that when he approaches the real question at issue he may be easily deceived. With what contemptuous laughter would a legal advocate be treated, who should spend a whole day in opening his case, and devote an hour or two to the examination of his witnesses! Yet this is precisely the offence of which you are guilty. I am confident that if you conducted your case in this way before any tribunal, however loosely constituted, you would be severely reprimanded for wasting the time of the court, and peremptorily summoned to come to the point.

As though anticipating such a criticism, you assert in your Preface that "the case on behalf of the Christian miracles is considerably simplified by declining to defend them on the ground chosen by the sceptic." No doubt, sir; and the case would be still more simplified by declining to defend them at all. It would be simple and easy to assume the good old orthodox attitude of the days when sceptics were not to be reasoned with, but silenced by the resources of Christian charity. Why not declare at once that Christianity is a divine religion, from battlement to basement; that whosoever believes it will be saved, and whosoever disbelieves it will be damned; that to defend

it is absurd, seeing that God will take care of his own; and that the cavils of the sceptic only proceed from his corrupt and sinful heart? But if you cannot take up this attitude, you are bound to meet the sceptic, ay, and on the very ground he chooses; for if you are defending the holy garrison, instead of leaving the task to its divine master, you have no choice but to repel attacks at the very points where they are made. Nothing could be more ludicrous than rushing off to the opposite side, brandishing your weapons with immortal courage, and declaring that, whatever may be going on elsewhere, the citadel at this point is absolutely invulnerable. If I cared for the honor of your church I might also remind you that it is better to face the enemy than to show him your rear. He will not spare you on account of your cowardice, and if you must fall you should at least fall with dignity.

Declining to meet the sceptic on his own ground, you affirm that the miracles of Christianity are "lifted out of the mechanical into the moral sphere." What is this but saying that they are lifted out of the sphere of reason into the sphere of faith? Your object seems to be to reverse the natural order of things. Instead of proving the foundations to be solid, and afterwards examining the superstructure, you expatiate on the wonderful character of the edifice and argue that it largely guarantees the solidity of the basis. Permit me to say it does nothing of the sort, and to add that no amount of declamation from the windows will prevent the building from tumbling down.

How important is the question of Miracles, and how absurd to treat it with subterfuge, like the ostrich who buries his head to save his body from the hunters! Your own words may be cited against yourself. After pointing out that Christianity is "from beginning to end supernatural," you declare that "the only possible alternatives are—a miraculous Christianity, or no Christianity at all." Reject the miraculous, you say, and "the entire Christian revelation would disappear

with it. No Christ would in that case be left to us. The man Jesus might remain; but the Son of the Father would have vanished, and the Gospel would have shrunk into a fable. Christianity, thus deprived of its cohesion, would fall to pieces, and become numbered with the wrecks of worn-out beliefs." True and forcible words! I heartily agree with you, and I am surprised at your making so feeble a defence for the very life of your faith.

It is not my purpose to follow your remarks on the peculiar solemnity and importance of the Christian miracles. The argument is sentimental, and its force depends on temperament and training. You are able to see some subtle moral lesson in the cursing of a barren fig-tree, and I dare say you would find it in the cursing of a barren woman. You are able to discern a lofty spiritual meaning in the trick of turning water into wine, or the production of half-crowns from the mouth of a fish. But such things impress me very differently. I regard them as childish stories, and marvel at their appearance in a pretended revelation from God.

You may draw convenient distinctions between Christian and other miracles, but I can see none. You smile at the prodigies of Paganism, and you allow that no possible testimony could make the miracles of Catholicism credible. I extend the same consideration to the miracles of your faith. The scientific mind places all miracles in the same category, and the historic mind views them as inevitable marks of inferior stages of culture.

There is no necessity, either, to expatiate on the existence of God and his moral governorship of the universe; or on the doctrine of free-will, which you curiously regard as indispensable to a belief in the miraculous, as though Saint Augustine, Martin Luther, John Calvin, and Jonathan Edwards had never lived or written. Whatever a miracle may be on its theoretical side, on its practical side it is a matter of fact.

What is the use of an elaborate abstract argument to prove that a prisoner stole a watch? What would be thought of a prosecuting counsel whose whole discourse was a disquisition on human frailty? The question at issue is—Did the prisoner steal a particular watch at a particular time and place?—and this must be decided by *evidence*. So with regard to the alleged resurrection of a man from the dead, or his birth without the agency of a human father. If such an event occurred, it must have been at a particular time and place, and in particular circumstances; and the fact must be established before we are entitled to discuss the theories of its explanation. You admit, yourself, in one of your intervals of lucid common sense, that “The question whether it has ever occurred cannot be decided in the negative, any more than in the affirmative, by theoretical considerations, but must be solved by a patient sifting of evidence.” Do you not see that this admission condemns the whole plan of your book? Have you not devoted five-sixths of your space to “theoretical considerations,” and only one-sixth to the “patient sifting of evidence”?

All you have to say about the antecedent probability or improbability of miracles amounts to this, that no one is entitled to say that miracles *cannot* happen. But why such a painful demonstration of a truism? Neither Hume, Mill, nor Huxley, asserts the *impossibility* of miracles. They simply regard them as highly *improbable*, and you appear to be of the same opinion. “Of course,” you assert, “the general experience creates a presumption against the miraculous—a presumption so great as to necessitate a most rigorous scrutiny of the evidence, before an alleged miracle can make good its claim on our belief.” With this statement I concur; my only complaint is that you do not appear to possess the slightest conception of what is involved in the “rigorous scrutiny of evidence.”

Whoever admits that miracles are *possible*,* does so on the ground that *anything* is possible. I am not

prepared to deny the possible existence of a planet made of green cheese. I am ready to believe that a man is able to jump over a moon. All I require, before I believe in such prodigies, is the production of proof. And who will venture to dispute the justice of such a condition? Modesty forbids me to ask more, and common sense forbids me to ask less.

You will see, then, that I am quite insensible to the reproach that good men are the readiest to receive the Christian miracles. No doubt the Brahmin and the Buddhist would address you in the same vein. You will allow me to smile at your statement that "the real touchstone was the doctrine," and at your implication that the disciples of Jesus were the best men in all Palestine, while the rest of the population, who declined to follow him, were either "careless or worldly" or "thoroughly selfish and corrupt." The story of Gamaliel, in the fifth chapter of the Acts, should alone have caused you to hesitate at perpetrating a wholesale libel on the countrymen of your Master. It seems as though the Christian apologist were under the imperative necessity of balancing his exaggerated praise of Jesus with the most unscrupulous defamation of unbelievers.

I must also be permitted to smile at your reference to "the self-satisfied and sensuous sceptic." Jesus forbade his disciples to indulge in the moral attitude of "I am holier than thou," but it is a peculiarity of Christians to neglect all the sensible teachings of their Savior. Nor can I maintain a serious face on reading your description of Christianity as "standing before us with the unmistakable marks on its brow of supernatural energy, and filling the world with fruits which the natural stock of humanity could never by itself have borne." What are "unmistakable signs" of "supernatural energy," and why are they visible on "the brow"? I should also like to know whether you reckon among the supernatural "fruits" of Christianity such articles as racks, thumb-screws, wheels, and red-

hot iron boots ; and such phenomena as persecution, proscription, religious wars, and holy massacres.

I will pass in a moment to your "direct evidence of the Christian miracles." But, before I do so, I wish to point out that you have forgotten to deal with, or even to mention, some of the principal antecedent objections to the miraculous. And yet, at least on one occasion, they lay right in your path. Speaking of the unbelieving Jews, who attributed the miracles of Christ to the power of Beelzebub, or were provoked by them into a passionate hatred, you say that "To all of these alike the miracles were real, according to the testimony of the Gospels." Surely the reflection must have occurred to you, while you were writing this sentence, that it was not the custom, in those ages, to dispute *any* body of miracles. Every religion, every sect, had its special supply ; and the question at issue was, not which were real, but which were superior. Satanic, as well as divine, miracles are recognised in both the Old and the New Testament. Nor did the primitive Christians, or even the Fathers, ever dream of denying the miracles of Paganism. They ascribed them to the agency of demons, and simply vaunted their own as manifestations of the true God. It is beyond question, therefore, that the belief in miracles—good, bad, or indifferent—was then universal ; and extravagant stories derived from an age of such abounding credulity, and gross ignorance of the laws of nature, are antecedently *improbable*. I would also observe that all the New Testament miracles, from the Incarnation to the Ascension, and from the first prodigy of Peter to the last prodigy of Paul, were believed and related by Jews, a race of men famous for their superstition, and laughed at on that account by the Roman satirists. To accept a supernatural story on *their* testimony would be like going to the madhouse for a jury and to the gaol for a judge.

Not only have all religions had their miracles, but the miracles of all religions diminish and finally dis-

appear in the light of science and civilisation. Then we behold the spectacle of a people laughing at the miracles of to-day, and staking their faith on the miracles of yesterday. Distance lends enchantment to the view. But only for a time. In the long run men will argue that miracles *do not* happen, and therefore they *never did*. The student of human culture will see the miraculous in its true perspective, and understand the laws of its birth, development and decay; but the ordinary man, who lives and thinks in the present, will always use it to interpret the past and the future. What happens, did happen; what happens, will happen. Such is his logic, and in the main it is sound. But whether sound or unsound, it cannot be shaken by sermons or apologies.

You say there is a God. Let it be admitted for the sake of argument. The question then arises, *why* did he work miracles in the past? The answer is, to prove and convince; that is, to prove the doctrine and convince the spectator. But does not the same necessity for the miracles still exist? Is not the doctrine more doubted, and even rejected, than ever? Are not the leading minds, in science and philosophy, outside the fold of faith? Are not the Darwins, Mills, Huxleys, and Spencers as influential as the twelve apostles? Why then are no miracles wrought to convince them? You can only reply that the Age of Miracles is past. Yes, and the Age of Reason has come.

I now come to the only pertinent chapter in your little volume. Even there, however, you cannot refrain from your besetting sin. In the very first paragraph you seek to prejudice the reader's mind in favor of what you desire him to believe. You remark that the miracles of Christianity are "sufficiently probable to be believed on such testimony as in other serious matters would carry conviction with it." The phrase is an artful one, and does credit to your subtlety. You insinuate that miracles are to be judged of like

"other serious matters," as though there were no degrees in seriousness, as though the testimony that would convict a man of petty theft would suffice to prove that he raised the dead. Surely you must be aware that the more *wonderful* an allegation is, the more rigorous is the evidence which is required to substantiate it. Suppose, for instance, it were alleged that a dead man had come to life again. Would not the evidence of such an extraordinary occurrence need to be, not only "adequate" but *overwhelming*, before any sensible man would believe it? The testimony of persons who saw him die, and who witnessed his being placed in a tomb, would not suffice. Men have sometimes been thought dead, a doctor has given a certificate, the undertaker has made the coffin, and the "corpse" has revived. It is absolutely necessary, therefore, to have positive proof that the man was really dead. On this point the evidence of ordinary observers is utterly worthless. "Even medical evidence," as Huxley says, "unless the physician is a person of unusual knowledge and skill, may have little more value. Unless careful thermometric observation proves that the temperature has sunk below a certain point; unless the cadaveric stiffening of the muscles has become well established; all the ordinary signs of death may be fallacious."

Now I ask you seriously—for these are "serious matters"—whether any miracle of the New Testament was ever subjected to such a scrutiny. According to Hume, there is no miracle in human history which is supported by the amount and kind of evidence that would be requisite to establish it. No one has ever refuted this assertion, and I challenge you to refute it if you can. Set aside the prodigies of other faiths, and take your pick of the miracles of Christianity. Select the Resurrection if you will, and see whether you can produce as much evidence as would gain you a serious hearing in any court of law.

What is your "direct evidence" of the Christian miracles? You begin by passing over the Gospels, on

account of "the partial obscurity which is alleged by critics of the modern sceptical school to envelope the date and authorship of these records." You select the four "authentic" epistles of St. Paul as "documents over which no manner of doubt hangs;" and upon these writings of a man who was not an eye-witness of the miracles of Jesus, who hardly refers to any miracle whatever except the Resurrection, and who, with respect to this one, flatly contradicts the Gospels and the Acts—you base the colossal edifice of Christian supernaturalism!

Supposing there is any truth in the Acts, it is incontestable that St. Paul disbelieved the Resurrection *on its merits*. He regarded the followers of Jesus with hatred and contempt. And how was his conversion effected? You audaciously assert that "he was won over to it [Christianity] by irresistible evidence of its truth." But what is the fact? His conversion occurred on the road to Damascus. And how? Did he sit down and say to himself "Paul, you had better think the matter over; this Jesus may be God, his miracles may be real, his Resurrection a fact, and his disciples the witnesses of truth; ponder the evidence once more, and carefully, before you proceed with your persecutions"? Did he calmly review the whole case, and rise with a conviction that he had been deceived? Nothing of the sort. The "irresistible" something which turned the current of his life was not the weight of evidence or the power of argument. It was apparently a miracle or a sunstroke; whatever it was, it was not an operation of reason. To assert, therefore, that he was won over to Christianity by "the irresistible evidence of its truth," is to fly in the face of your own records, and to presume too openly on the mental negligence of your readers.

St. Paul's scepticism before this physical convulsion is neglected in your argument. You simply dwell on his subsequent belief. But is this ingenuous? You describe him as a man of "powerful intellect." How

was it, then, that his powerful intellect led him to believe that Christianity was false? Setting aside the miracle, which you cannot assume, as miracles are the question in dispute, what single scrap of fresh evidence was presented to his mind during the rapid process of his conversion? The evidences of the Resurrection remained the same throughout. Before the shock, his unbiassed mind regarded it as fabulous; after the shock, he regarded it as true. But which of these mental states is of the most importance to an unprejudiced inquirer? Assuredly, if you were not arguing in favor of your prepossessions, you would allow that the Resurrection was more damaged by St. Paul's early scepticism than benefited by his later belief.

In any case, St. Paul was not an eye-witness of the Resurrection, and the testimony of eye-witnesses is indispensable. For the rest, I have only to remark that you are ill-advised in claiming those "five hundred of the brethren," many of whom were known to St. Paul as having "seen Jesus alive after his death and burial." The statement is absolutely inconsistent with the Gospels, and especially with the Acts, where we are told (I., 15) that the total number of the brethren, *after the Ascension*, was only "about an hundred and twenty." You cannot expect to take advantage of a point on which your own witnesses flatly contradict each other.

There seems no limit, however, to the assumption of Christian apologists. You not only claim those five hundred brethren, but actually parade them as "hundreds of persons who knew Jesus personally, and went forth at the risk of their lives to testify of his Resurrection," and this in connection with a graphic picture of the sufferings of the early Christians! Again I complain of your disingenuousness. The Christians of the first century must not be credited with the martyrdoms of the second century. With the single exception of Stephen, who lost his life in a religious tumult, as thousands have done since, I defy you to

prove that a single witness of the Resurrection, or a single disciple of Jesus Christ, suffered martyrdom. Upon this point the apologists of your faith have systematically deceived their readers. If we reject the fantastic legends of the travels, achievements, and deaths of the twelve apostles, we are compelled to doubt with Gibbon "whether any of those persons who had been witnesses to the miracles of Christ were permitted, beyond the bounds of Palestine, to seal with their blood the truth of their testimony." Your own records prove that the first Christians found the Roman tribunals an assured refuge against their Jewish persecutors. Not until the reign of Nero (A.D. 64), more than thirty years after the Resurrection, did the Christians fall under the stroke of cruelty; and, as Gibbon is persuaded, the "effect, as well as the cause, of Nero's persecution, were confined to the walls of Rome." The martyr-witnesses of the Resurrection, therefore, are the mere offspring of imposture and credulity.

The fact is, you cannot produce the testimony of a *single* eye-witness, good, bad, or indifferent. You are unable to trace the Gospels beyond a period "early in the second century," and, although you refer to "a pre-existing narrative," you are unable to tell us what it was, or indeed to assure us that there were not a dozen. Such documents, if they ever existed, which I admit is probable, are irretrievably lost. The four Gospels remain. Two of these do not profess to be the account of eye-witnesses, and the other two—Matthew and John—cannot be so in the light of your argument.

You appear to think that the early Christian writers could not be "weak-minded enthusiasts, open to hallucinations, or carried away by marvellous stories which had no foundation in facts." But why not? Why should they, and they only, be exempt from the common frailty of their age? When cultivated Greeks and Romans were deluded by fables, and a grave

Roman historian could relate a public miracle of the emperor Vespasian, is it conceivable that the ignorant and superstitious Galileans should be superior to such weakness? You are ready to ascribe the ecclesiastical miracles to "ignorance, superstition, or craft." But such miracles were unhesitatingly accepted by the very Christian writers you must appeal to in support of the antiquity of your Gospels. Miracles did not cease with the apostles, but continued without interruption. Papias, Justin Martyr, Irenæus, Tertullian, Origen, Athanasius, and St. Augustine, all declared that miracles were wrought in their ages. You believe they were all mistaken, and I believe that the *first* Christians were all mistaken. Honesty is quite consistent with delusion. History shows us that the best men have been deceived.

That the Gospels are "free from any marks of conscious embellishment" I will not now dispute. Men who honestly believe in miracles will relate them as matters of fact. The supernatural is only "dished up" when belief is waning. Simple-minded believers, in former ages, were satisfied with the Gospels; but in this age of refined credulity the Gospels have to be manipulated by theological cooks. Hence the ponderous Lives of Christ that are constantly streaming from the press.

You conclude by remarking with regard to miracles that "since the establishment of Christianity, they have, as we believe, ceased to be wrought." By *we*, of course, you mean Protestants; excluding the Catholics, who form the majority of Christians, and who believe that a stream of miracles has flowed through the history of their Church. But although you hold that miracles have ceased, you hint at the possibility of their resumption. Should some "terrible anti-Christian power" arise to persecute Christianity, and "muster the forces of earth and hell to crush it out of existence," you venture to hope that God will "bare his arm" and come forth to "avenge his own

elect." For my part, I smile alike at your fears and hopes. Unbelief will not persecute your Church, but give it fair play, and let it live or die. You need be under no apprehension of Freethought imitating the vile example of Christianity. But, whatever happens, I do not think you will be assisted by miracles. They do not occur in an age of Science and Board Schools. What Schopenhauer said of religions is particularly true of miracles—they require darkness to shine in. Science is daily revealing to us the most marvellous truths, which dwarf the wonders of theology into insignificance. Instead of raising one man from the dead it saves millions of lives; instead of curing one blind man with clay ointment it places ophthalmic hospitals at the service of a myriad sufferers; instead of feeding a casual crowd, once in a millenium, by the supernatural multiplication of loaves and fishes, it enables us to carry on a gigantic system of commerce, which sustains multitudes who would otherwise be unable to exist; instead of smiting a rock, and calling forth a spring for a single thirsty crowd, it brings a regular supply of water, year after year, to the great cities of our modern civilisation; instead of enabling one man to walk the waves in a tempest, it constructs gigantic ocean steamers that ride the wildest storms, and convey their passengers with comfort and safety across the trackless ocean.

Truth is greater than fiction, and science is mightier than miracle.

PRAYER.

TO THE REV. T. TEIGNMOUTH SHORE, M.A.
Chaplain-in-ordinary to the Queen.

SIR,—

Having read your little volume on Prayer in the "Helps to Belief" series, I venture to address some remarks to you upon it. I have read several other volumes in this series without finding my faith assisted; on the contrary, I have only wondered that such flimsy arguments and paltry evasions could be put forward by men of reputation in the Christian Church. My wonder diminishes, however, when I reflect that men did not become Christians by reason, but by early training. Their faith is not a conviction, but a prejudice; and the least plausible answer to objections is sufficient to preserve a belief which reposes on authority instead of evidence. It was remarked by Carlyle, in his essay on Diderot, that the usual "evidences" of Theism never did, and never ought to, convince any Atheist. The fact is, creeds are taught first, and "evidences" manufactured afterwards; so that they are not the *proofs* but the *excuses* of faith.

I do not deny, therefore, that your volume may help the belief of an otiose believer, who has heard that there *are* objections to his creed, and is satisfied to see some kind of printed rejoinder, in order to assure himself that the ministers of religion are looking after his faith. It will doubtless quiet his apprehensions, and enable him to sleep in peace, while the sentinels are watching at the gates. But I am perfectly positive you will allay no single doubt in the mind of any thinking Christian. Such a person, I am confident, will be tempted to exclaim, "If this is all that can be said in reply to sceptical objections, I had better at

once regard my faith as untenable, and cry like the Israelite of old—Ichabod, the glory is departed.”

According to your Preface, you have made “an attempt to put simply and plainly the answer which may be given to the most ordinary difficulties which are urged regarding Prayer.” I admit that you have put the answers *simply*, but you have not put them *plainly*. You have involved them in a great deal of preaching, as though your purpose were rather exhortation than discussion; and, like the other writers in this series, you contrive to leave the real point at issue until the last chapter, where you treat it with a very discreet, if not judicious brevity.

You insist, at the outset, on the necessity of definition, and ask the pertinent question—What is prayer? But instead of answering it at once, you occupy a dozen pages in talking loosely upon the subject. When you condescend to define, you say that Prayer is “the intercourse of the spirit of the child with the Father of Spirits; it is the submission of the human will to the Divine.” In a later part of the volume you observe that you are not called upon to “explain or to defend parodies of Prayer offered up to travesties of God,” but merely the “reasonableness of Christian Prayer to the God whom Christians worship.”

I venture to assert that your definition is the parody, and that what you call the parody is the true doctrine of prayer. It is true that, with the progress of science and civilisation every religious doctrine becomes attenuated, until at length it becomes a vague sentiment, and finally disappears. But while Prayer has any real existence it will always savor of its origin. Prayer is not the submission of the human to the divine will. That is worship. Prayer is a petition. It is an appeal to God, who, as Jeremy Taylor says, loves to be held in a sweet constraint. The man who prays *asks* for something. He may do it as crudely as the converted heathen, in Tylor's *Primitive Culture*, who, on being asked by the missionary to come to morning prayers,

replied, "Thank you, I don't want anything just now." Or he may do it as superfinely as a Queen's chaplain. But, however he does it, his prayer will be found to contain a request for *something*, that would not arrive in the ordinary course of nature. Even in the Lord's Prayer, between two thick slices of flattery, is sandwiched a petition for daily bread; and when I open the Prayer Book of your Church I find prayers for rain and sunshine, for calm weather at sea, for good harvests, for recovery from sickness, and for "grace, wisdom, and understanding" for "all the nobility," who certainly need it without ever appearing to obtain it. What is all this but an appeal to God's goodness, and an attempt to influence his will? You admit this yourself in a subsequent chapter, and therefore your definition is as childish in substance as it is childish in expression.

Your definition having broken down, I must follow you as closely as your tortuous course will permit. You innocently observe that the efficacy of Prayer must depend on our conception of God. If he answers prayer, it is reasonable to pray; if he does not it is unreasonable. Exactly! If a shop sells bread, it is reasonable to go there to purchase it; if not it is unreasonable. But the question is—*does* the shop sell bread? And that, you will observe, is not a matter of opinion, but a matter of fact.

When you assert that the efficacy of Prayer must only be discussed in relation to "the idea of God" which is expressed in "the doctrine of the Church," you are begging the question most flagrantly. A child might see through such a shallow artifice. Still more absurd, if possible, is your later assertion that "Christianity as a whole is the true explanation and the strongest defence of the doctrine of Christian Prayer." "Admit the truth of Christianity," you say, "and Prayer is perfectly intelligible." Of course it is. Swallow the whole box, and you will certainly have any particular pill. Prayer is an integral part of

Christianity, and telling me that if I admit Christianity I accept Prayer, is informing me of a very obvious truism. You can hardly regard this as an argument, and its use implies a gross contempt for the intelligence of your readers.

Although your definition of Prayer is a lamentable failure, you continue more or less in the spirit which inspired it. You assert that "true Prayer cannot flourish in an atmosphere of probability; it must breathe the air of clear and certain confidence. Only those can really pray who believe absolutely that every true prayer is heard and answered by God." This is a most convenient theory for the theologians. If the prayer be not answered, they can always reply that it was not a *true* prayer—whatever that may be—or that the supplicator's faith was not *absolute*. Nay, I observe that you go to a still greater length of precaution. You assert that "*No* is quite as much an answer as *Yes*." If we obtain what we pray for we are answered; if we do not obtain it we are also answered. What a beautiful theory! How blandly the theologian plays the innocent game of "Heads we win, and tails you lose." Your theory is quite incapable of proof or disproof; argument is useless on the one side or the other; it can only be left to the indignation of honesty and the derision of common sense.

You say that desire and faith are the essential elements of Prayer. But such a truism does not require the elaboration you give it. You might as well dilate on the gastronomic truth that a good appetite is an essential element of a good dinner.

Forgetting that God is omniscient, or taking a singular view of that attribute, you say that we do well to remind him of our wants, but our prayers must be general and not particular. We shall show our modesty by desiring him to oblige us, without stipulating how he is to do it. We must leave that to him, for our knowledge of how anything is to be accomplished in

the "varied and complex conditions of life" is "partial and fragmentary," while he is able to see and foresee everything.

"Thus, in regard to the legitimate ambitions of worldly life, we may (subject to limitations, already and yet to be stated), feel fully justified in praying for our own needs or those of others; though to pray without reserve for any particular promotion, or any definite success as the means of accomplishing it, would scarcely be in harmony with the true spirit of Prayer."

It would therefore be quite right for an ambitious Christian to say to God "please push me on," but very improper to say, "please give me this post." But I think you will find, on reflection, that the human mind thinks by particulars, and that it is impossible to dissociate the idea of advancement from the steps that must be taken to gain it. If my house were on fire, and my child in an upper room, which could not be approached by the staircase; if I were to plant a ladder against the wall, and saw that I must pass a window through which flame and smoke were belching; do you mean that it would be a true prayer if I said "Let me mount to the top and descend in safety," but a false prayer if I said "Let me pass and re-pass that terrible window"?

Your fine distinction seems to me perfectly chimerical. To an omniscient mind every chain of causation, whether extending through a day or a lifetime, is equally finite; and if there be any presumption in the case, it is as great if I ask for a prosperous life as if I ask for a particular blessing. It is true that if God exist he has a superior knowledge of means, but it is also true that he has a superior judgment of ends; and whether I ask for the end or the means, I am acting with equal simplicity. To tell an omniscient God of my wants is childish. Can it be more than childish to ask him for a particular favor?

Prayer necessarily proceeds upon the assumption that man can influence the will of God, and you prove

this by your serpentine efforts to evade it. You draw impossible distinctions between God's ultimate and immediate will. You talk of his unchanging purpose, yet you speak of *exciting* his emotions of tenderness, mercy, and love; as though, in the words of Lady Macbeth, we could screw him to the sticking place! Such words as "plead," "appeal," "beseech," and "implore," are unintelligible, except as exciting emotion and influencing volition. Nor can I follow your assertion that it would be "a mockery" to ask God that the sun may not rise to-morrow, in order to mitigate a scorching heat. This was not the belief of the chosen people, who recorded the stoppage of the sun, in order that they might slaughter their enemies. It is idle to say "we *know* it is God's will that the sun shall rise to-morrow." We know nothing of the kind. I admit we have a very good reason for believing it *will* rise to-morrow, but we have as good—because it is the very same—reason for believing that *every* law of nature will be in perfect operation, without violation, suspension, or accident. When you say that "we do not know in the least whether it may be God's will that a hurricane should die down at a particular moment," and present this as a reason why we should pray for divine help in the crisis of a storm, you are only saying that meteorology is not as well understood as astronomy.

There was a time when Christians prayed against an eclipse. Why? Because they did not understand its causes. They still pray, though with diminishing heartiness, against bad weather. Why? Because they do not understand its causes. When they *do* understand its causes, they will cease praying against it, and confine their supplications to what is still contingent.

Now contingency is nothing but ignorance. When a coin is tossed into the air, men will bet on its falling "heads or tails." But the uncertainty is only in their minds, for the fall of the coin was absolutely deter-

mined on its leaving the tosser's fingers. Similarly next week's weather, or next year's harvest, is determined already, only we do not possess the knowledge that would enable us to foresee it. When we come to the infinitely varied phenomena of human society, we are only able to perceive a few broad sweeps of tendency. All the rest is uncertain *to us*, though certain enough *in itself*; and it is this mighty realm of contingency that you shrewdly mark out as the future preserve of Prayer.

"I maintain," you say, "that in the regulation and variation of these conditions by the human will and choice there is a very wide margin for what I may call contingency." This is perfectly true; but if contingency only means ignorance, and the consequent incapacity of prevision, it is obvious that you are reduced to the extremity of *praying in the dark*. Where light obtains, you find we have nothing to do but submit to the obvious will of God, or, in other words, to the necessity of Nature.

The last quotation introduces a new factor—the human will. You appear to regard this as an independent force, whereas it is the decisive action of a number of concurrent forces. This is an operation you do not appear to understand. You assert that "a child holding a stone in its hand is to a very real and recognisable degree modifying the results of the action of gravity itself." Did you ever know of gravity acting *by itself*? The child no more modifies the action of gravity by holding up the stone, than would a ledge upon which it had fallen. The law of gravity is acting with unerring precision all the time, as you will find by weighing the child, first with the stone in his hand, and then without it. The difference is the weight of the stone, and the weight of the stone is the action of gravity.

You shrink from the cruder notions of prayer, although you ultimately find yourself bound to defend them, and maintain that God answers prayer

by controlling "the physical world indirectly, through his action upon human thought and will." According to this theory, when Smith prays for anything, he is asking God to influence Jones, Brown and Robinson. Instead of desiring the forces of nature to be directed towards his benefit, he is requesting that his fellow creatures may be shuffled into a more favorable combination; and as Jones, Brown, and Robinson are praying at the same time for the reshuffling of Smith, your doctrine terminates in a universal shuffle, and human society becomes a mere transformation-scene under the presiding genius of Prayer.

Having reduced the world to this condition, you easily perceive whatever you desire. "We may then," you declare, "pray for the recovery of a patient, and if God guides the physician's genius to a true appreciation of the nature and the proper remedy for the cure of the disease, we may consider the cure so effected in every true and reasonable sense a direct answer to our Prayer." You call this "true and reasonable." I call it hocus-pocus. You are a Queen's chaplain, and a great deal more dexterous than the simple-minded Peculiar People, but I have a far higher opinion of their honesty. I suspect, if the patient were your wife or child, you would leave as little as possible to the Lord. You would call in a skilful physician, who required but a modicum of divine superintendence; and leave your poorer brethren, who can only afford the services of an inferior practitioner, to experience the utmost efficacy of your celestial nostrum.

Instead of skulking behind ambiguous illustrations, I invite you to take a simple one, and see whether it confirms or contradicts your theory. Let us go to the Prayer Book of your Church, which is a volume that binds you as a clergyman. In the "Forms of Prayer to be Used at Sea" I find a special prayer against storms, containing the following ejaculation: "O send thy word of command to rebuke the raging winds and the roaring sea; that we, being delivered

from this distress, may live to serve thee, and to glorify thy name all the days of our life."

Let me ask you to explain how God's acting upon "the physical world indirectly, through his action upon human thought and will," is likely to make a storm subside. It seems to me that human volition cannot break or bend a single law of nature, and that human thought has no effect on the weather. The only way to save a ship in a storm is to handle her well, and throw overboard a few gallons of oil, which can be done by Atheists as well as by Christians. Superstition says that the will of God can control the winds and waves by some mysterious process. The doctrine is, of course, unintelligible, but you have undertaken to teach it. Yet you did not undertake to explain or defend it, and you are ill advised in attempting to do either. Your safest course is to say "God *does* still storms in answer to prayer, but I do not know *how* he does it."

Not only does your theory of God's control of the physical world by human agency break down, but you connect it with a metaphysical theory which has been repudiated by the greatest doctors of your own faith. Your argument stands or falls with the doctrine of Free Will. You perceive unchanging law in the external world, but you declare that the internal world of man's nature is "another department where God governs, not by Law, but through the freedom of the human Will."

I will not now discuss Free Will. There is no need to do so. You are defending Prayer as a Christian, and are not entitled to assume what many of the greatest Christians have denied. A theory of Christian prayer which would necessarily be rejected by Saint Augustine, Martin Luther, John Calvin, and Jonathan Edwards; a theory which flies in the face of the plainest teaching of Saint Paul; a theory which is explicitly condemned by the tenth and seventeenth Articles of your own Church; such a theory, I say, is totally inadmissible

unless you *prove* it in opposition to these preponderant authorities; and as you make no attempt to prove it, but simply postulate it as though it were a Christian axiom, I am justified in declining to accept it as a basis of discussion.

The only question which is worth discussing, after all, is this—Does God answer Prayer? Or, in other words—Is Prayer answered? Now this is a question of objective fact, for I have contended, and you tacitly admit, that every one who prays asks for *something* that would not happen in the ordinary course of nature. It is idle to say that the lives of praying men prove the efficacy of prayer. You yourself furnish the answer to this sophism, before attempting a singularly feeble reply. It is downright folly to assert that “Christianity as a whole is the true explanation, and the strongest defence of Christian Prayer,” for that is assuming everything at first, and proving it afterwards in detail by means of the general assumption. The question is not whether God might, could, would, or should answer Prayer, but, in your own words, Does he do so? Now the only way to answer this question is to appeal to evidence. It has been proposed by Professor Tyndall, on the suggestion, I believe, of Sir Henry Thompson, that an experiment should be made in some hospital, by especially praying for the patients in one ward, and seeing whether it affords a greater percentage of cures. Such a proposal is alarming to the professors of mystery; for all religions die of being found out, and experiment is fatal to their pretensions. Accordingly you declare that this “so-called experiment would, as a matter of religion, be a blasphemy,” and that “Prayer made under such conditions could not have in it the essentials of Prayer.” But of course you carefully refrain from suggesting an experiment which *would* conform to the true conditions, and which would, at the same time, be a *real* experiment. Nor do you explain why God should regard as “blasphemy” an

endeavor to ascertain the truth or falsity of a doctrine taught by priests. It is only religion that cries "blasphemy!" in the presence of investigation.

Professor Tyndall did not propose that Atheists or unbelievers should pray for the patients in his special ward. His proposal was that they should be prayed for *especially* by every Christian congregation. Why should you regard this as "blasphemy"? Is not this very thing allowed by your Prayer Book? In the "Collect or Prayer for all conditions of men, to be used at such times when the Litany is not appointed to be said," I find these words:—"Finally, we commend to thy fatherly goodness all those who are any ways afflicted, or distressed, in mind, body, or estate; [*especially those for whom our prayers are desired*]." And a marginal note to this clause orders:—"This to be said when any desire the Prayers of the Congregation." It would seem, therefore, that the Church itself commits the "blasphemy" of offering special prayers for individuals, and is hardly entitled to cry "blasphemy!" against others who propose to do the same.

While waiting for *your* experiment, I look abroad in the world, and find no *practical* recognition of the efficacy of Prayer. No Life Assurance Company would calculate a sovereign's life policy on the ground that her subjects asked God to "grant her in health and wealth long to live." No Fire Insurance Company would grant a policy on a House of Prayer unless a lightning conductor were run up to prevent the Deity from making mistakes in a thunderstorm. Underwriters never think of asking whether the captain prays or swears, or whether he carries rum or missionaries. And when the Peculiar People use prayer, without mixing it with medicine, they are browbeaten by Christian coroners and jurymen.

Let me advise you, sir, before you write again on this subject to read Mr. Francis Galton's article on Prayer in the *Fortnightly Review* for August, 1872. This keen,

scientific writer points out that in all the medical literature of modern Europe he has been unable to discover "any instance in which a medical man of any repute has attributed recovery to the influence of prayer." Yet they are always on the watch for sanative agencies, and if they do not strive to obtain the healing influence of prayer for their patients "it is not because their attention has never been awakened to the possible efficacy of prayer, but, on the contrary, that although they have heard it insisted on from childhood upwards, they are unable to detect its influence."

Mr. Galton finds a way, too, of dexterously passing your wing and attacking you in the rear. Granted that the future is uncertain—that is, unforeseeable—there is still no uncertainty about the past. What has been has been; and although God, as you suggest, might frown upon and frustrate an attempt to make him the subject of a scientific experiment, not even Omnipotence can undo the past, and we may investigate it for the purpose of ascertaining whether prayer *has been* efficacious. Pursuing this line of inquiry, by the aid of historical and statistical tables, Mr. Galton discovers no trace of Prayer as an efficient cause. For instance, it is presumable that pious parents pray for their unborn offspring; as a still-birth is usually regarded as a misfortune, and baptism is thought so necessary to salvation that the Catholic Church provides in extreme cases for the baptism of the child in the womb. Yet Mr. Galton found, on analysis, that the lists in the *Times* and the *Record* showed exactly the same proportion of still-births to the total number of deaths. And this is only one of a dozen illustrations of the absolute nullity of your theological specific.

You give only two answers to Prayer, and they are extremely ancient. Nay more, they are selected from the Bible! *O sancta simplicitas!* Moses prayed to see "the good land beyond Jordan," and died without seeing it; but fifteen hundred years or so afterwards

he saw it from "the summit of Tabor" when Christ was transfigured. What a precious "help to belief!" Paul also prayed God to remove his "thorn in the flesh"—whatever that was; and, although the thorn was not removed, God "gave the grace to bear it." Well, if there be a God, let us hope he will give us grace to bear the logic of theologians.

Pardon me, sir, for citing another answer to Prayer; no more apocryphal than *your* instances, and more recent and refreshing. In a Western State of America—you see the story is not two thousand years old—there was a long and unprecedented drought. All the farmers were in despair, for if rain did not soon fall there would be no crop in the locality. The Baptists therefore resolved to hold a Prayer Convention. Delegates assembled from all the churches and prayed lustily for rain. After two hours' wrestling with God they received a telegram from a town with a large annual rainfall. It ran thus—"Stop praying at once, we are flooded out."

Pardon me, also, for citing another answer to Prayer. The great Johnstown reservoir—a lake three miles by one—burst in the early summer of 1889, and devastated a populous valley, sweeping away houses, factories, and churches, and drowning ten thousand people. When the deluge had done its awful work, one bereaved woman was found near a muddy pool looking for her loved ones. On the rescuers approaching her she cried, "They are all gone. O, Heaven, be merciful to them! My husband and my seven dear little children all swept away, and I am left alone." Her terrible story is best told in her own words, as reported in the papers at the time.

"We were driven by the awful floods into a garret, but the water followed us there inch by inch. It kept rising until our heads were crushing against the roof. It would have been death to remain; so I raised the window and placed my darlings, one by one, on some driftwood, trusting them to Providence. As I liberated the last one, my little boy, he looked at me and said, 'Mamma, you have always told me that

the Lord would care for me! Will he look after me now? I saw him drift away with his loving face turned towards me, and in the midst of my prayer for his deliverance he passed from my sight for ever. The next moment the roof crashed in, and I floated outside to be rescued fifteen hours later. If I could only find one of my darlings I could bow to the will of God, but they are all gone. I have lost everything on earth now but my life, and I shall return to my old Virginia home and lay me down for my last great sleep."

That poor woman taught her darling a lie. She did not think so; she took it on trust from the priest, who taught it as a trade. The worth of the doctrine might have been read on the boy's dead face and the mother's bleeding heart.

Let me presume a little further on your patience. You will remember, perhaps, that the Prince of Wales was once stricken with gastric fever. Prayers were offered up for him daily, and the newspaper articles were nothing but sermons. But secular means were not neglected. The prince was tended by skilful nurses and the most eminent doctors. With their assistance, and the aid of a good constitution, he recovered. But the clergy insisted that his recovery was due to prayer. Accordingly a national Thanksgiving Service was held in St. Paul's Cathedral. God was duly thanked, but the doctors were not forgotten. One of them was knighted, and all were handsomely rewarded.

Probably you would claim the Prince of Wales as a living proof of the efficacy of Prayer. But before you boast of it let us see what happened in America. President Garfield was shot by a pious assassin. Week after week Science fought with Death over his sick bed, and the awful struggle was watched by a trembling world. "O God, let him live!" prayed millions in church and chapel. "O God, spare him, my husband, my darling!" cried the agonised wife. But his life ebbed slowly away amidst a nation's prayers for his recovery.

If God saved the Prince of Wales, why did he not save President Garfield? Is he a respecter of persons after all? Or does he love Monarchies and hate Republics? You are bound to give *some* answer; for what sensible man will let you prove the efficacy of prayer by counting the hits and neglecting the misses? And I defy you to give any answer without confuting your doctrine or dishonoring your God.

In the little sermon with which you conclude, you picture Christ standing "amid the surging, weeping throng of agonised humanity"—all created by the God of love—and hearing their cries for help from "sin." But is it not a fact that all the alleged miracles of Christ were *physical*? Where in the whole of the Gospels, did he make a single bad man good? "I have chosen you twelve," he said; "and one of you is a devil." He had, therefore, in Judas a fine subject for one of his "spiritual" miracles. But did he work it? No, the "devil" betrayed him, and Judas has been cursed by Christians ever since.

Pursuing the same idea, in an earlier part of your volume, you assert that "if Prayer, and answers to Prayer, are sometimes concerned with material and physical matters, it is only in connection with spiritual and moral conditions." If you mean that miracles are always wrought in connection with religion, you are only uttering a barren truism; but if you mean that Prayer is never answered for the merely temporal welfare of men, you are flying in the face of the Bible and the Prayer Book; and I must add that such a trick of special-pleading is a curious commentary on the airs the clergy give themselves as the divinely called servants of "the God of truth."

Let us take the Lord's Prayer, for instance, to say nothing of the many material answers to prayer in the Old Testament. Does it not contain a distinct request for "daily bread"? And what is there spiritual or moral in this petition? Is it not merely the voice of self-preservation, a cry from the stomach, a plea from

the animal nature? And is it not in strict conformity with the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount, where we are told to take no thought for the morrow, what we shall eat or what we shall drink, but to leave all such things to the care of God?

Prayer, in its beginning, was purely material. In the higher religions of civilised and moralised nations other characteristics are found. The deity is besought to diminish social evils, to redress wrongs, to punish the wicked, and to increase righteousness. But just as the anthropoid in developing his brain did not lose his stomach, so the loftier developments of Prayer overlay without destroying this primitive stock. In its earlier stage, as Tylor says, it was "unethical." Look at this prayer, offered by the head of a family in the Samoan Islands, when the libation of ava was poured out at the evening meal.

"Here is ava for you, O Gods! Look kindly towards this family: let it prosper and increase; and let us all be kept in health. Let our plantations be productive: let food grow; and may there be abundance of food for us, your creatures. Here is ava for you, our war gods! Let there be a strong and numerous people for you in this land."

So the Gold Coast negro prays, "God, give me to-day rice and yams, gold and agries, give me slaves, riches, and health, and that I may be brisk and swift." Here is a Vedic prayer—"What, Indra, has not yet been given by thee, Lightning-hurler, all good things bring us hither with both hands . . . with mighty riches fill me, with wealth of cattle, for thou art great." This is a Moslem prayer—"O, Allah! make this town to be safe and secure, and blessed with wealth and plenty." So your Church Service bids the congregation pray on behalf of the Queen, "grant her in health and wealth long to live." And so the Lord's Prayer sums up all these material petitions in one compendious phrase—"Give us this day our daily bread." "Throughout the rituals of Christendom," as Tylor observes, "stand an endless array of supplications unaltered in principle

from savage times—that the weather may be adjusted to our local needs, that we may have the victory over all our enemies, that life and health and wealth and happiness may be ours.”

Your Prayer Book contains special forms of prayer against storms at sea, against sickness, for rain, for fine weather, and similiar mercies. What have these to do with “spiritual and moral conditions?” They are all bodily or material, and have nothing to do with “the soul.” That you are well aware of them goes without saying, for, as a clergyman of the Church of England, you must have uttered them frequently; and the Prayer Book is not so large a volume that a minister might plead ignorance of its contents. Your own ritual is thus a clear and flagrant proof that supplications are made to God for material blessings, quite independently of any other results.

Obviously, then, to assert that Prayer, even in Christian circles, is always connected with spiritual and moral conditions, is quite unwarrantable; and especially so on the part of a clergymen of the Church of England.

Here I take leave of your volume. You have not “helped” my “belief.” You have said nothing to convince a doubter of the efficacy of Prayer. But you have shown me, once more, that Christianity has in its service a number of intelligent, accomplished, and *well-paid* men, who juggle and chop straw for a living. If I prayed at all, I would pray that they might despise the wretched business, and earn even a scantier allowance of bread in a more honest avocation.

