

ONE SHILLING.

THE
AFFIRMATION BILL.

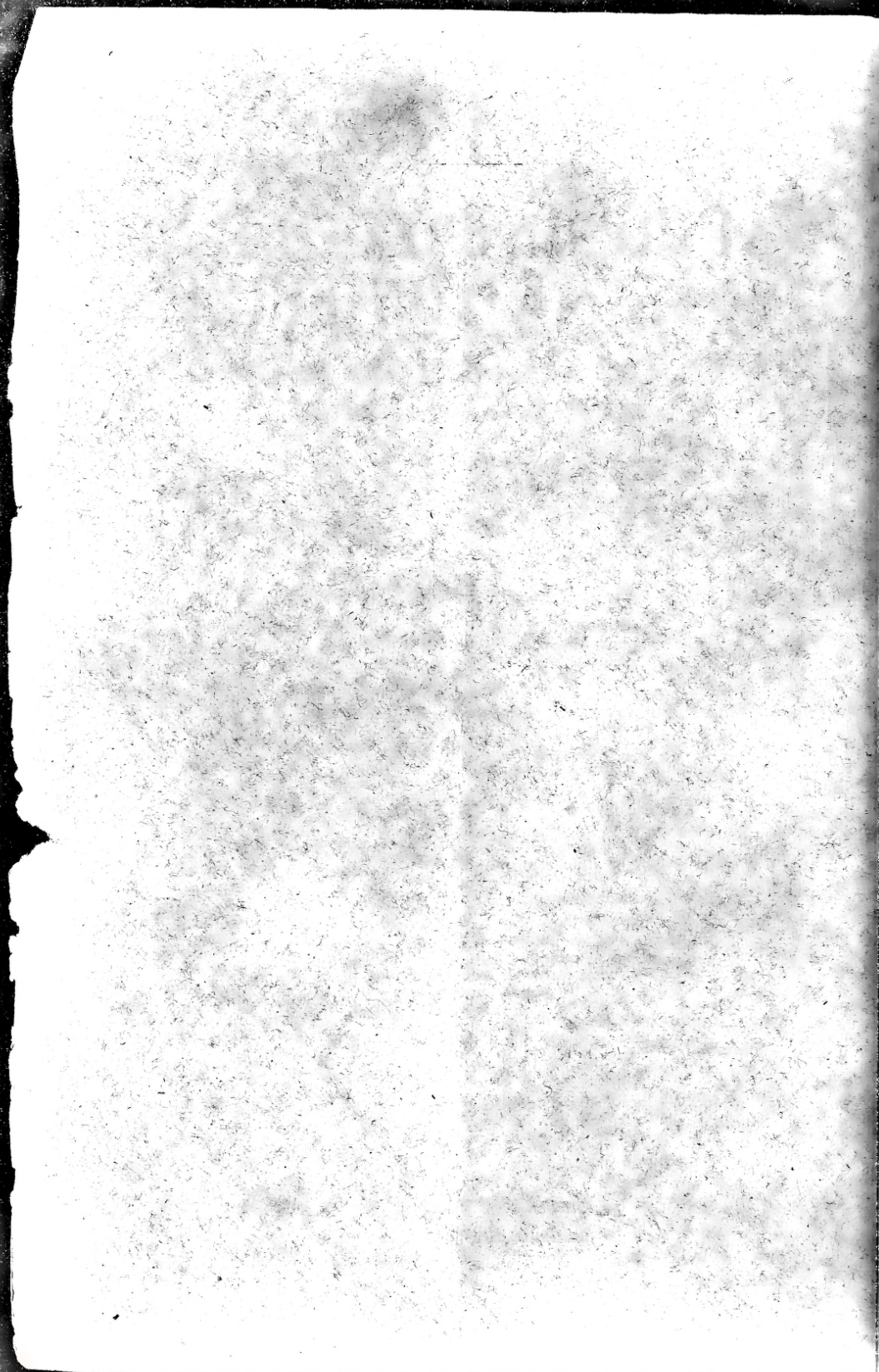
10-30
*REASONS WHY IT CANNOT BE
PERMITTED TO BECOME THE LAW OF THE LAND
CONSIDERED AND STATED.*

IN A PUBLIC LETTER ADDRESSED
TO THE
RIGHT HON. THE SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE OF COMMONS,
And to all its Members.

BY
TERTULLIAN.

*Justum et tenacem propositi virum
Non civium ardor prava jubentium,
Non vultus instantis tyranni,
Mente quatit solidâ ;
HOR. III. Odes iii. I.*

LONDON:
DAVID BOGUE, 3, ST. MARTIN'S PLACE,
TRAFALGAR SQUARE.



B3173

N636

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY
THE

AFFIRMATION BILL.

*REASONS WHY IT CANNOT BE
PERMITTED TO BECOME THE LAW OF THE LAND
CONSIDERED AND STATED.*

IN A PUBLIC LETTER ADDRESSED
TO THE
RIGHT HON. THE SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE OF COMMONS,
And to all its Members.

BY
TERTULLIAN.

*Justum et tenacem propositi virum
Non civium ardor prava jubentium,
Non vultus instantis tyranni,
Mente quatit solidâ ;*

HOR. III. *Odes* iii. 1.

LONDON :
DAVID BOGUE, 3, ST. MARTIN'S PLACE,
TRAFALGAR SQUARE.

SECTION	PAGE
whose one sole chief end of his being would seem to be to make himself as widely known as possible as the man who denies the existence of GOD, and the consequent possibility of any religion.	34
IX. A second brief word touching the horns of a comical dilemma of which the supporters of Mr. Bradlaugh will be compelled to make the best that they can.	35
X. The near view of the precipice.	36

A Word in Conclusion.

If every Member of the House of Commons has bound himself to the duty of defending the Throne by his having sworn his Oath of Allegiance, how will such Member be able to vote for the removal of one of the principal safeguards and defences of the Throne in any other way than by the perjury of his Oath? 39

THE AFFIRMATION BILL:

*REASONS WHY IT CANNOT BE SUFFERED TO
BECOME THE LAW OF THE LAND.*

RIGHT HONOURABLE SIR,

There cannot be a better proof of the honour and dignity which the Empire of Great Britain confers upon those who inherit by birth and social standing the privilege of being its citizens, than the liberty of speech which is their birthright, and of which it must be their constant solicitude to prove themselves worthy, by the care they are seen to take not to overstep in their use of it, the limits of justice and becoming respect for all its constituted authorities. It is, then, this privilege of freedom of speech which is the English citizen's highest honour, so long as he studies not to abuse it to unworthy ends, that enables one who otherwise would be but a humble and retiring member of the commonwealth, known only as a person engaged in the usual pacific employment of his everyday life, to take up his pen to address the Speaker of the most eminent and powerful legislative assembly, which is known to the civilized nations of the world. How great this assembly is over which you, sir, so worthily preside in the name of the Majesty which sits on the time-honoured Throne of England, the laws emanating from it, whose jurisdiction comprises a far wider expanse of the territory of the earth than that which two thousand years ago was subject to the rule

of the far-famed Senate of Rome, bear their ample and world-wide testimony.

When St. Paul had the privilege granted to him, by way of a special favour, that he might have a public hearing for his cause before the King Agrippa who happened at that moment to be a distinguished visitor of the Roman procurator Festus, whose prisoner Paul was, this was to him a source of the most real rejoicing. Now he knew that he should be at least able to plead his cause and give an account of himself in the presence of one whose ears would be open to listen to him as an obligation of public justice. But he had even a still stronger reason for rejoicing than this. He knew that he was to plead before one, who, by reason of his Jewish education and his knowledge of, and respect for, the Sacred Scriptures, was both able and willing to give, that which must ever be the highest good to the public speaker, after that of having a just and religious cause—the most appreciable boon of a right-minded and intelligent hearing. It is in a like manner a source, to the present writer, of a similar unfeigned satisfaction to know, that his Englishman's birthright, his freedom of speech and his right to raise his voice, in season and out of season, in defence of the cause of God and of his country—procures for him the honour of pleading his cause in the hearing of one, to whom, as Speaker of the House of Commons, the true and lasting welfare his country will ever be the supreme rule and guide of his judgment.

He may not, indeed, hope that it should be given to him to emulate the eloquence of the Apostle, but he may hope to be found not to fall too far below the inspired model that is before him in point of courage and fidelity to his cause. From the Apostle he may learn that it can be the duty of a Christian to resist any adversary, even one, the excess of whose confidence in his own powers stands

forward in a singularly marked contrast with the infamy and abjection of the designs which he is pursuing.

The Tertullian whom he ventures to take as the especial model and pattern of his undertaking, has put before mankind the example,—that with a view the better to secure a calm and dispassionate hearing for the many remonstrances which belong to his cause and its pleading, there may be circumstances when it will be the wisest course to trust entirely to the efficacy of what he calls the “*occulta via tacitarum literarum*,” the retiring method of silently advocating his cause in writing. This is, then, his choice. His cause is too grave and sacred for the counter recourse to a rival antagonist, noisy clamour of street gatherings, and to further poisoned vehemence of the partizan oratory specially designed and prepared for them.

Elijah on the Mountain Horeb was witness to the strong wind that passed over the mountain and its effect, but “the Lord was not in the wind”—then followed the earthquake, but “the Lord was not in the earthquake,”—then after the earthquake there came a fire, but “the Lord was not in the fire.” After all these had passed, there then came the “*still small voice*,” and this was the voice of the Lord (1 Kings xix. 12).

In the phenomena which have already manifested themselves in Mr. Bradlaugh’s short career, a very little gift of discernment is all that is needed to perceive, at least the first beginnings of the same calamities about to be visited upon the kingdom and people of England which are well-known to have desolated the neighbouring land of France for the whole of the present century. In the wind is figured the storm of atheistic impure and revolutionary doctrines, which have been disseminated with an evil energy on purpose to carry away the masses of the population from all the ancient hereditary landmarks and strongholds

of the Christian religion, as well as to make war on the boasted belief of the English people in the inspiration of the Bible as the Word of God.

These atheistic impure and revolutionary doctrines are planned to prepare the way for the "earthquake," which will first manifest itself in the overthrow of the right of all private property, the fruit of legitimate industry and labour, and in the sinking of all in one level of indiscriminating communism. To this will be added the abolition of the sanctity of family life, and the establishment in its stead of the brute beast state of promiscuous concubinage, falsely honoured with the inviting but appallingly deceptive name of socialism.

But as nothing can subsist any length of time that presumes to place itself in an attitude of defiance to the Law and the Will of the Divine Creator and Sovereign Lord of His Creation, the state of things which will follow the contemplated earthquake of communism and socialism is aptly figured by the pregnant term "fire." "Fire" is a word that expresses far more if left to stand by itself than would be gained by attempting a commentary. Nor will it serve the cause of the profane and impious mockers of sacred truth to say, that the day for believing in the Bible is past; mankind has been held long enough in bondage to its pious and totally vain terrors. Let these impious scoffers account for the phenomenon of one of the most distinguished poets of the present or indeed of any century, giving the form of his imperishable verse to his perfectly similar provision of the kind of future which is in store for the nations where the storm of revolutionary doctrines is allowed to have its free course to work out their destructive issues. I may now be allowed in the present state of our knowledge of German to cite the lines in the original, to which no translation can render adequate justice :

Da werden Weiber zu Hyänen
 Und treiben mit Entsetzen Scherz;
 Noch zuckend, mit des Panther's Zähnen
 Zerreißen sie des Feindes Herz.
 Nichts heiliges ist mehr, es lösen
 Sich alle Bände frommer Scheu,
 Der Gute räumt den Platz dem Bösen
 Und alle Laster walten frei.

Schiller's *Lay of the Bell*.

Such is the future prospect for human society under the ascendancy of the career, the beginnings of which Mr. Bradlaugh has, by the sheer strength of the rage which displays so much power of moving forward to its evil ends, for the reason which the Scripture gives, because it knows "that its time is short."

The former, Tertullian, it may be easily perceived, had a very different task before him from that which lies before the writer who succeeds to his name. The Christian cause then was comparatively weak in numbers, but it was strong in mind, and was, in the main, lion-hearted in the presence of its rival and persecutor—the great Imperial power of Rome. This power is known to have elected to throw all the weight of its administrative action to the propping up the falling cause of the idolatrous popular religion. The present moment, it must be confessed, appears to have witnessed a strange phenomenon of a totally contrary kind—a temporary paralysis of all the ancient Christian statesman-like courage and discernment of the nation. We wonder what has become of all the vigorous independent power of thought and judgment which has, in all great emergencies, been known as the chief honourable mark and sign of the true Englishman. Numbers, whose ruling characteristics are to be sought for in their feebleness, cowardice, and helplessness, it must be borne in mind, cannot possibly be the strength of any cause however good in itself. On the contrary, they

are the incurable weakness of their cause, whatever it may be. Nothing can possibly lead cowards to victory.

We must be extremely careful, however, how we risk a fall into a most serious error. We must not mistake for cowardice what it is incomparably more reasonable to suppose can be in reality nothing more serious than a momentary and passing fit of stupor. Such a stupor it is quite easy to conceive might be for a time occasioned by the unexpected and unparalleled effrontery of one single man, destitute of any single qualification other than that of his present unexampled boldness in daring to offer himself as the leader of a public cause. It is too terrible a thought to have to contemplate even the possibility of a cowardice which renders a whole multitude, comprising the entire wealth, property, and education of the nation, incapable of stirring a hand or foot in the defence of all that they are bound to hold to be dearer to them, even than life.

The moment for waking up must come! The Roman poet, indeed, has given utterance to a very undoubted truth—

Qui sibi fidit,

Dux regit examen.

But Heaven save our country from the depth of its fall over the precipice which is being prepared for it. It must be absolutely impossible for it to be true that the educated classes of Great Britain can have come into the condition of consenting to be the mindless swarm, helplessly led in obedience to his will, by the atheist, Bradlaugh.

The task, then, for the Tertullian of the present time is the quiet, unpresuming labour of a patient remonstrance, addressed to the higher intelligence of the nation, which may be most truly said to find its honourable representative in yourself, as the Vicegerent of the Throne, and the Speaker or President of the chief really great Legislative

assembly of the world at the present time. His work has to offer itself as the "*small still voice*" of Divine truth, opposing itself to the noisy clamour of the streets, and calling all who love their country and who, as legislators, are responsible to God and the throne, to seek its true prosperity in the only paths in which it is to be found, the fear and honour of God. He has the honourable task of asking them to weigh well and consider the exceeding great issues about to be placed before them. It is then with this weighty task resting upon him that the Tertullian of the present hour ventures to crave your attention for the truths which he now proceeds to submit to consideration, in the order in which they are laid out to view in the Table of Contents.

- I. The inevitable degradation, in the eyes of the whole world, which an Imperial Legislature must submit to incur, if it should be seen to have legislation forced upon it by a mere mob outcry confined to a simple handful of its own towns.

The Legislature of Great Britain, as it is almost out of place in an ordinary citizen of the land to venture to submit to those who are its legislators, is a "city set on a hill which cannot be hid." Whatever its legislative acts are—wise, just, and statesmanlike as every true citizen of the empire will always desire that they may be; or extorted from its unworthy fears, by a noisy and godless clamour outside—nothing can be more certain, than that such as the acts of the Legislature of Great Britain may be, they are passed under the destiny of being carried by the newspaper press to the knowledge and judgment of all the civilized nations of the world.

It has again often been said that the Imperial power of Great Britain stands upright in the world not so much by the force of its armaments, which are less than those of other nations, as by the known solid

character, both of its legislature and of its executive government. The virtues of truth, firmness, and justice are honourably recognized in the world at large as placing British power above the reach of being swayed by the voice of faction, or of being misled by mean and unworthy motives. In this respect the history of the present times only repeats the lesson of former periods. In the ancient military Rome, the empire of the city over the nations is seen in her history to have been firm and stable so long as the Senate of Rome was able to impress upon the nations the universal sense of fear, and respect for the justice, capacity, and inviolable fidelity of its senators. And in proportion as the respect of the nations for the Senate of Rome, which appears almost always to have been willingly given, was rendered no longer possible in consequence of the too manifestly feeble and unmanly character of the Senate itself and its public action, the power of Rome over the nations then began to dwindle away, until it at length died out.

What can be a more fatal sign of the danger of an irruption of a similar spirit of disastrous degeneracy into the Imperial Senate of the British Empire, than that it should be universally seen to be willing to suffer itself, even for a moment, to submit to the disgrace of allowing a mere mob leader outside itself, to dictate to it what its legislation is to be or what it is not to be? How is this manifest proof of degeneracy to be possibly concealed from the rest of the world? Will not the other nations at once take up their parable against Great Britain, and say to her, "Art thou also become weak as we? Art thou become like to us? Thy pomp is brought down to the grave; the worm is spread under thee; the worms cover thee."

Yet it is the boast of Great Britain, that as the Assyrians were the Romans of the early civilization of the world, so Great Britain is the Rome of the living world. And this

resemblance of the English character to that of the ancient Romans, the conquerors, legislators, and peacemakers of the world, has been very remarkably recognized by an extremely distinguished French writer, the Comte de Champagny. In the first volume of his history of the Empire of Rome, he says that John Bull has always appeared to him to be the younger brother of Romulus. Accepting, then, a testimony which is as honourable to the giver as it must be gratifying to the receiver, allow me to pass from my first point, by citing an example of the manner in which the spirit of ancient Rome could reject with the sternest indignation the very thought of accepting the least legislation in obedience to an external dictation. The passage of history occurs in the eighth book of Livy, § v. and runs as follows :—

“A certain Annius, a native of the municipality of Setia (now Sezza), on the confines of the Pontine marshes, came to Rome in the year of the city 415, as the legate of the Latin Confederacy, to demand that one of the consuls of Rome should be chosen from Latium.” The Senate paid the Latin envoy the mark of deference to hold a special assembly for the purpose of hearing and considering his demand, which it would appear that Annius made in an extremely confident and peremptory manner. This attempt to dictate to Rome what its legislation ought to be, so stirred the Roman spirit of Titus Manlius, the consul, as to cause him to rise up from his seat there and then, and to exclaim aloud, “that if any such madness could come upon the conscript fathers that they could be ready to take their laws from a man of Setia, he would come himself into the Senate house, sword in hand, and with his own arm slay any man of Latium whom he found in it.”

The senators of your honourable assembly, Mr. Speaker, will hardly fail here to perceive that the Lucius Annius above mentioned as the representative of the entire Latin

Confederacy, contrasts more than favourably with the man who has outraged the Christian religion of the entire nation by his impious denial of the very existence of God. And yet the Rome which at that time repelled Lucius Annus was only a city in the Latin Confederacy, without the least prestige of any sort or kind to maintain in the sight of the wide world. Notwithstanding this, Rome, the simple isolated city, standing by herself, is seen to have made it a point of honour to herself to repudiate so much as the thought of submitting to the least approach of dictation from without.

II. A great and fundamental change of the law is proposed to be introduced, subversive of the entire religious constitution of the empire. Is there one solitary spokesman representing the property and education of the empire, who is known to have directly called for this change?

When Esther, the Persian Queen, fell down before Ahasuerus, to intercede for the life of her people, the King in amazement asked her, "Who is the man, and what is his power, that he durst presume in his heart to do this thing?" The whole of the education and property of the entire empire asks itself the question in a perfectly similar amazement, Who is the man, and what is the secret of his power, who has been able to prevail so far, as to cause a formal proposal to be entertained by your Honourable Assembly, to take the initiative step to bring about this contemplated subversive change in the time honoured constitution of the kingdom?

Great legislative assemblies, it is undoubtedly true, have been known to have been led into their legislative acts by the voice of one man. The life of the late Mr. Wilberforce affords a remarkable example of this kind. The counsels of the nation unquestionably suffered themselves in the end to be moulded in conformity with the

policy of which for some time he stood alone by himself as the advocate. But between the case of Mr. Wilberforce and that of Mr. Bradlaugh, where does the shadow of a parallel exist that can be perceived? In the one instance we have the man of piety and religion, pleading the cause of the natural right of an oppressed race to their liberty, and step by step, through his assiduity, his patient eloquence and powers of persuasion, winning over the thoughtful religious men of the nation to befriend his cause, which indeed was that of suffering and downtrodden humanity. In the other, we see the man of impiety and irreligion, by his own avowal the profane disbeliever in God and the despiser of His laws, the advocate of no known cause, except that of his own wild will to break through the barrier which the existing immemorial constitution of the kingdom places in the way of his ambition. Is this the man to mould the counsels of an empire?

For the sake of this man, however, it is now proposed that a sacred, ancient, and immemorial religious landmark of the Christian religion is to be removed. Can it be shown that this man has won over so much as a solitary representative of the independent property and education of the country to desire the proposed change for its own sake? The extreme suddenness, added to the intrinsic impiety and irreligion of the proposed change, may doubtless have produced a momentary sense of stupor and paralysis, and for a time have kept back the expression of the deep-seated horror that is entertained against it. But in the nature of things, the stupor and paralysis will pass away, while the horror and the detestation will remain.

III. The Prime Minister is seen to be reduced to the humiliating position of the humble slave of Mr. Bradlaugh's dictation. The question to come before the Legislature will be, will it elect to become a participator in the Prime Minister's humiliation?

No doubt that it would be perfectly possible for the Prime Minister, if he were honestly to elect to come before the empire of whose destinies he has been raised to be the chief arbiter, as a convert of conviction to the denial of God—to which alone his new protégé owes the degree of unhappy notoriety which he has gained—to make good by such an avowal his claim to be Mr. Bradlaugh's free, noble, and most enlightened patron. In this case, nothing could be more unjust and unfounded than to attempt to breathe a word about the Prime Minister being the slave of Mr. Bradlaugh's dictation. He might then say to Mr. Bradlaugh, Welcome brother in unbelief and in the contempt of God and his law. Too late in life have I learned the folly and emptiness of my former belief in the inspiration of the books of the Bible. What might I not have spared myself if I could have come earlier to share in your illumination. But henceforth, at least, I shall be able to walk arm in arm with you in the light of day, emancipated from all the vain superstitions and empty dreams of my previous life." If Mr. Gladstone would only come before his country with a full and open avowal of the errors and deceptions of his past life as a religious man, and profess himself to have become henceforward a free and enlightened follower of the "Fruits of Philosophy" of his new political associate, we could then perfectly understand his position.

But nothing of this kind is suffered to appear. Mr. Gladstone is known through the pages of the *Graphic* as one who thinks himself honoured by being permitted to wear a surplice, and to deliver before a lectern in his parish church the lessons from the books of the Sacred Scripture,

the reading of which in the presence of the people is an appointed part of the public offices of prayer in all the national sanctuaries. It is, of course, simply intolerable to associate the name of Mr. Gladstone in such acts as those described, with the thought of any possible histrionic ritual exhibition of himself, or any hypocritical performance gone through for the purpose of acquiring a reputation for religion. No ; the Prime Minister, like all the still sound part of his countrymen, is a believer, *ex animo*, in the books of the Sacred Scripture, as containing the Word of God spoken to man for his guidance and direction, and for his instruction as well in the lessons of wisdom that are good for the present life, as in the wisdom which teaches and smoothes the way to the promised heaven of the life that is future.

But the merest tyro in the knowledge of the truth that is contained in the books of the Bible knows as well as possible that nothing in the world can be further removed than Bible truth from observing the least thought of neutrality towards the class of men of whom it is Mr. Bradlaugh's boast, not merely that he is an advanced specimen of their genus, but that he is a distinguished and foremost champion of their speedy exaltation to political power and pre-eminence. Mr. Bradlaugh may be a short-lived hero in the eyes of the mob-following which he has gathered about himself, but before the judgment of the Sacred Scripture, he is nothing more than "the fool that saith in his heart there is no God" (Ps. xiv. 1). He belongs to the class of those of whom God says, "I will beat them as small as the dust before the wind ; I will cast them out as the clay of the streets" (Ps. xviii. 42). He is but one of the men of whom the inspired word says, "He loved not blessing, therefore it shall be far from him ; he clothed himself with cursing as with a raiment, and it shall

“come into his bowels like water, and like oil into his bones” (Ps. cix. 16). Of such men as he is, the word of God in the Bible exclaims, “O my soul, come not thou into their secret; unto their assembly, mine honour, be not thou united” (Gen. xlix. 6).

With such sentiments as the above, which meet our eye in almost every page of the inspired volume, and with a Prime Minister who professes in public his belief in the Bible as the Word of God, what bond of real friendship and mutual confidence can, by any possibility, unite him and his Government to the cause of Mr. Bradlaugh?

Plainly none! If the religious Prime Minister of Great Britain has consented to espouse the cause of Mr. Bradlaugh, there can be but one explanation: Mr. Bradlaugh has become the master by the sheer force of his boldness and firm tenacity of purpose; and the Prime Minister, fearing for the security of his own hold of power, has consented to become the servant. Mr. Bradlaugh holds the instruments of torture, and says—

If thou neglectest or dost unwillingly
What I command, I'll rack thee with old cramps, &c.

And the Prime Minister of the greatest of existing empires replies—

No pray thee,
I must obey; his art is of such power.

Tempest, Act i. sc. 2.

How far more noble would have been the Prime Minister's position—what an infinitely more lasting title to the gratitude of his country he would have earned—had he taken the following all but inspired lines of the Roman poet for his rule of policy:—

Ac veluti magno in populo quum sæpe coorta est
Seditio, sævitque animis ignobile vulgus,
Jamque faces et saxa volant, furor arma ministrat.
Tum pietate gravem et meritis si forte virum quem

Conspexere, silent, arrectisque auribus adstant.
Iste regit animos dictis et pectora mulcet.¹

Aeneid i. 148.

Alas, then, we have but to say, alas for the fall of a great man—Would that charity could throw a veil over his fall! But his fall is the danger of the constitution of the kingdom. To minor political adversaries who may be disposed to mock at his fall, it might justly be said, "Howl, fir tree, for it is the cedar that is fallen." But still, if the cedar is fallen, it is a matter of the highest import that the tree should lie where it has fallen, and that it should not be allowed to draw others after it to be the partakers of its fall.

IV. An atheist faction conspiring to undermine the ancient religious constitution of the kingdom could not hope to succeed in open warfare. To gain their ends, therefore, its leaders have been compelled to take recourse to a juggle and fraud of words.

The atheist faction having to their great joy, in all probability not a little mingled with surprise, gained over an adherent in the Prime Minister, practically fallen from his religious belief, has still to encounter an obstacle of no ordinary magnitude, which by some means or other has to be overcome before any benefit can possibly be derived from their unlooked for conquest in the surrender of the Prime Minister.

To awaken the dormant religious energies of the nation

¹ "As oft when mid'st the multitude has ris'n
Sedition, rage in heart the ignoble crowd;
And now stones, torches fly—what fury finds—
If chance some venerated sage they view,
In sober sanctity severe, at once
Mute, motionless, they stand around,
He rules with salutary words their minds,
And mollifies their breasts."

Beresford's Version.

and to call these into life by the faction letting their scheme come to be discovered before its time, would be totally to shipwreck their design. There is even yet an energy of religion in the land and a vigour of action surviving among the people who still retain their old traditional veneration for the sacred volume, that it would be perilous in the extreme for the faction to do anything whatever calculated even to awaken suspicion, much less to rouse these up into wakefulness and action.

For this end the leaders of the faction in question propose to have recourse to a manifestly unscrupulous, if not, after all, so very crafty a fraud and juggle of words. The fraud is really not so surpassingly profound but that it may be quite readily seen through and detected, even by any ordinarily attentive observer. Nevertheless, its devisers evidently rely upon its being accepted by what they appear confidently to expect will be, the imperturbably guileless and unsuspecting simplicity of the great multitude of the good and peace-loving people whom it is their intention to deceive by it. That the Prime Minister himself should be held to be a *bonâ fide* participator in this guileless unsuspecting simplicity of the multitude, on which the faction place so much reliance, this not even his most deeply fascinated admirers, will find it a very easy task to persuade themselves. But let this pass, and let us have the intended juggle and the fraud of words, on which all their hopes are to be embarked, placed before us in the light of day.

This, then, consists in their purpose of attempting to palm off the ordinary common affirmation of daily life (the only affirmation which an atheist can possibly have the power of making) for the "*solemn*" affirmation which is in its very nature an act of religion, and therefore not capable of being performed by any man who does not profess his

belief in God, as St. Paul says, as "existing and as being the rewarder of those who seek Him" (Heb. xi. 6).

Their trick, then, is to dress up their jackdaw atheist affirmation in the feathers of the jay, and to try to pacify the religious people, always well disposed to ease and quiet, by saying to them, What would you have more, you good religious people? Have we not given you, for your comfort, a SOLEMN affirmation?

Does any one, however, in his senses, suppose for a single moment that the Prime Minister is deceived by this jackdaw atheist affirmation? Singular, it certainly is, that the atheist faction should have ever proposed to dress up their jackdaw in the feathers of the jay to try even to make it pass off with the simple people; just as if after being thus dressed up, it could possibly in the nation of things be the real solemn affirmation which is the exclusive act of the man of religion! Have they, then, really thought all the world to be nothing but absolute simpletons? Or have they, perchance, been so lifted up with the conceit of the towering height of their own intelligence, that it has never occurred to them that compliance with their fraud could be by any possibility refused.

V. A reason briefly stated, why it can never be anything else than a conscious act of the most deliberate, barefaced fraud to attempt to palm off the affirmation of an atheist as even capable of having any thing in common with the SOLEMN affirmation of the man of religion.

A gulph or chasm, it is nevertheless true, and this of an impassable width, separates the affirmation of the atheist (which nothing that he has at his command can by any possibility cause to become solemn) from the affirmation of the man of religion, which is made solemn by the fact of its being an act of his religion.

A very few words will suffice to make it clear in what this impassable gulph consists. Let us take for our test case the oath of allegiance. This is what is known in law as the "juramentum promissorium." It is a sworn promise of true allegiance to the person and prerogatives of the monarch, confirmed by the formula, "*So help me God.*"—Or, as the same would be expressed more fully—*So help me God as I truly keep my promise, and so avenge Thyself against me, God, as I may forswear my promise.*

Between this oath and the true "solemn affirmation" there is virtually no difference whatever. The religious man affirming solemnly has the form of words which he scruples on grounds of religion to utter remitted; but the understanding is nevertheless clear on both sides—viz., on the side of the proponent of the affirmation and on that of the person who makes it—that the person affirming appeals to God to reward or to punish him according as he promises or affirms truly or falsely. The "*solemn affirmation*" is thus perceived to be lifted up above the ordinary affirmation by the appeal made in it to God, which differs only in the particular form of words used from the similar appeal made to God in the ordinary oath.

Now everyone must see there is nothing of this nature to be found in the atheist's affirmation to lift it up above the level of the affirmation of ordinary life. The atheist can know of nothing in the whole of creation higher than himself. The God of Heaven and the Creator of the Earth can indeed swear by Himself, because He alone can know nothing higher than Himself by which He can swear, as St. Paul tells us (Heb. vi. 13). But if the forlorn and abject atheist, in the judicial blindness of his pride, were to claim the right to say, "I also am able to make a solemn affirmation," all that he could possibly hope to gain thereby would be to exhibit himself to the derision of every man of understanding.

No man of sense could see in him anything but a contemptible caricature, trying as a perishable worm of the earth to put himself on a level with the Eternal Sovereign of the Universe, while hoping to be able to make himself the passing wonder of the moment, for the few fools who for the time being might be deceived into a little shortlived marvel at his daring.

But this is somewhat to anticipate. A brief survey of the practice of swearing the oath of religion in the past history of mankind must now engage our best attention. It is indispensable to the completeness of our subject, and not impossibly it may bring to light some few details of antiquity not commonly known, and not without their own claim to prove of interest to their readers.

VI. A brief survey of the reasons which render the swearing of an oath of religion indispensable to the well-being of all civilized society, with a rapid glance at the history of its immemorial practice at every known period of the world.

The reason why the practice of swearing the oath of religion is indispensable to the well-being of civilized society, as well in public or political as in private life, is very easily given. It is seen at once to come under the rule of St. Vincent of Lerins, "Quod ubique," "quod semper," "quod ab omnibus." That which exists everywhere, which has always been, and is received and accepted by all, is placed thereby beyond the reach of controversy or doubt. The oath of religion is no invention of yesterday, but is as old as the civilization itself, which, from our earliest records, is known as simply unable to exist in a condition of well-being without it.

The reason of this inability to dispense with the oath of religion, which is understood and known all over the world, is found in the necessity for truth as the basis of all the human society which aspires to lift itself up to any

degree of civilization. The Word of God says : " Who shall dwell upon Thy holy hill?—even he that speaketh the truth from his heart (Ps. xv. 2) ; and, as regards public life, the same Word says, " Open ye the gates that the righteous nation that keepeth the truth may come in " (Isaiah xxvi. 2). Precisely the same sound is that which is echoed back from all the great voices of the Gentile world. Pythagoras being asked, " In what men in their actions can become like to the gods," answered " If they speak the truth " (Stob. Flori. xi. 25). Pindar says—

Ἀλήθεια θυγάτηρ Διός.—(Ol. xi. 4.)
Truth the daughter of God.

Cicero says that the foundation of justice is *good faith*—that is, the firmness and truth of all that is said, and of everything that is matter of compact (Off. i. 7). Cæcilius, the jurisconsult, in his dispute on the subject of the laws of the Twelve Tables with Favonius the philosopher, says : " The Roman people, by the sedulous practice of every kind of virtue, rose from a very small beginning to their marvellous extent of power ; but above all their virtues they ever studied, in the first place, to cultivate *good faith*, and always held good faith to be most sacred and holy in both public and private life " (A. Gell. xx. i. 39.) Quintilian says : " Fides supremum rerum humanarum vinculum est ; " good faith is the supreme bond of human business.

But this truth and good faith, thus pronounced to be so supremely needed, exists now no longer by nature in human society, since the footing which the devil, the father of lies, has been permitted to gain for himself in our world. David says : " I said in my ecstasy, all men are liars " (Ps. cxvi. 12), which St. Paul confirms in the words : " Let God be true, but every man a liar." It is under this supreme need of truth, beset as it is by the ever present peril of falsehood, that the entire human family, from the

earliest existing record up to the actually present hour, in every known civilized nation under the sun, has discovered no other recourse than the invocation of the Supreme God of heaven—not, however, excluding the lesser celestial powers—to which invocation we now give the name of an OATH, known to the Greeks as ὄρκος, and to the Romans as “juramentum, or jusjurandum.”¹

The oath, then, consists in the solemn formal invocation of God as witness of the truth and good faith of all that is spoken, and as the avenger of any falsehood or breach of faith that may subsequently be committed. The oath, consequently, is at one and the same time both a prayer for a blessing and the imprecation of a curse; it is a declaration of the love of truth and of the hatred of a lie. It is a calling upon God, who is believed to be present, to the effect that He should deign to prosper the speaker in so far as he speaks the truth, and to punish him in the same degree as he may speak falsely. An oath, says Cicero, is “a religious affirmation of which God is the witness” (Off iii., 19); a little after adding, *Nullum vinculum ad adstringendam fidem, jurejurando majores arctius esse voluerunt; id indicant leges in duodecim tabulis, indicant sacratae,*” &c. (Off iii., 31). Our ancestors have provided by law no power more binding to secure good faith than an oath. This is shown in the laws of the Twelve Tables, and in those known as *sacratae*, (*i.e.*, to the non-observance of which a ban was attached).¹

To create the binding force, then, of the oath, it becomes easy to perceive in what way two distinct motives have to concur.

¹ The following are Greek testimonies to the necessity for the Oath as the binding power of political society:—

Τὸ συνέχον τὴν δημοκρατίαν ὄρκος ἐστί. “That which holds the State together is the oath.” “Lycurgus adv. Leocratem,” p. 79. μόνον ἐπορισάμεθα φυλακτήριον τὸν ὄρκον καὶ τὴν ἐπίκλησιν τῶν θεῶν.—We have provided for our only protection the oath and the invocation of the Gods.—(Themistius Orat. XXI.)

And these, indeed, equally concur in the case of every human virtue. There must be as the foundation—faith in the existence of God and of His presence and power—to which succeed, in due order (1) the wish to please Him and to earn His promised reward by acting with loyal truthfulness; and (2) the desire to escape the penalty to be incurred from His anger against deception and false swearing. Without these two grounds there can be no oath.¹

If an objector should here attempt to argue that the great facility, added to the incessant actual occurrence of the perjuries which have been known in all ages, abundantly proves the futility of trusting to the protection of any oath, nothing could be more absurd. Fidelity to the obligation of an oath is the virtue to which perjury is attached as its correlative vice. But then, in the same way, drunkenness and incontinency are the vices attached to the virtues of sobriety and continence. Yet to what man in his senses could it ever occur that the practice of sobriety and continency were to be abandoned as superfluous because of the existence of the vices opposed to them.

The perfect love and fear of God would doubtless suppress all perjury, and give increased value to the binding power of an oath for the great improvement of human life. But then it would do exactly the same for the suppression of all the other vices, and give a wonderful

¹ The accustomed form of the conclusion of the oath among the Greeks as numerous inscriptions which have been found upon various public monuments, was the following :

“*εὐορκούντι μὲν μοι εὖ εἶη, ἐφιορκούντι δὲ ἐξώλεια καὶ αὐτῷ καὶ γένει τῷ ἔξ ἐμοῦ.*”

(May it be well with me if I am true to my oath, but if I forswear myself, may utter ruin come upon me and all my race).

This is the formula of the oath which Demosthenes swears in his Oration de Coroná.

impulse to the contrary virtues. Only our world is without the perfect love and fear of God, and yet we do not therefore abandon all thought of the practise of virtue as an impossible chimera.

The ordinary economy of the government of God in dealing with both the virtues and the forfeits of those who swear His oaths, may be easily seen to be conspicuous in an eminent degree for its efficacy and considerate wisdom. His rewards for the faithful observance of the obligations contracted are neither so openly manifest as to assume the character of a bargain, nor are the punishments for falsehood so certain as to provoke impious and daring contumacy and resistance. There is sufficient concealment of both the one and the other to leave men on the one hand in full possession of their liberty, and on the other to try and prove their fidelity and attachment. It is clearly his perceiving the above truth that has caused Solomon to say: "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil; nevertheless, though a sinner do evil a hundred times, and his days be prolonged, yet surely I know that it shall be well with them that fear God, and which fear before Him: but it shall not be well with the wicked, neither shall he prolong his days, which are as a shadow; because he feareth not before God" (Eccles. viii. 11).

With the above judgment of Solomon the voice of mankind in general has never been otherwise than in the most complete accord. It has ever borne witness that a marked prosperity has, on the whole, been well-known to attach to the faithful observance of an oath, while a contrary marked career of mishap and misfortune has always, on the whole, followed in the wake of false swearing and perjury. Pindar says;—

Πολλοὶ δ' ὀδοὶ
Σὺν θεοῖς εὐπραξίας.

The favour of the gods is the way to every sort of good fortune; and in the extravagant caricature which Aristophanes appears to have been prompted to make of Socrates, Strepsiades, in questioning him upon the subject of the nature of thunder, expresses the universal sense of the Athenian world that the perjured man was the certain object of the anger of the gods:—

τούτων γὰρ δὴ φανερώς ὁ Ζεὺς ἔησ' ἐπὶ τοὺς ἐπιόρκους ("Nub." 397.)

At least it is clear that Jupiter hurls this (thunder) against those who forswear their oaths.¹

Cicero again admits that the Greeks were possessed of excellent doctrines as regards the obligation of an oath, but they had to come to the Romans for examples of their doctrines being carried out into practice ("De Oratore," iii. 34), and Quintilian says the same: "Quantum Græci præceptis valent tantum Romani, quod est magis, exemplis" (xii. 2, 30). And the corresponding result is patent on the face of history. The Greek cities soon lost their autonomy and independence, while the Roman power, founded on its love for truth, came to be so firm and stable that it advanced in the world at large, without any effort at seeking this, to acquire from all the nations the attribute and character of eternity.²

Herodotus, in his history, happens to relate an anecdote of a certain Glaucus, which sums up in so singularly descriptive a manner the vivid sense that has pervaded the whole human race, that perjury cannot possibly go unpunished, that I must ask leave to relate it in the words of Herodotus' own narrative. "One Glaucus, a citizen of

¹ Compare "Iliad IV." 166 and "Æneid XII." 894.

² Cicero has the following testimony concerning the faithlessness of the Greeks to their oaths:—Hoc dico de toto genere Græcorum; tribuo illis litteras, do multarum artium disciplinam, non adimo sermonis leporem; ingeniorum acumen, dicendi copiam, denique si qua sibi alia sumant non repugno; testimoniorum religionem et fidem nunquam ista natio coluit, totiusque hujusce rei quæ sit vis quæ auctoritas, quod pondus, ignorat.—(Orat. pro. Flacco, iv. 9.)

Sparta, had a great reputation for justice, which induced a citizen of Miletus to deposit a large sum of money in his care, to be given to whoever later on should present the tokens agreed upon; Glaucus received the money on these conditions. After a long time had elapsed the sons of the man who had deposited the money came to Sparta, and having addressed themselves to Glaucus, and having shown the tokens, demanded back the money. Glaucus repulsed them, answering as follows: I neither remember the circumstance, nor does it occur to me that I know anything of the matter you mention, but if I can recall it to my mind I am willing to do everything that is just; and if, indeed, I have received it, I wish to restore it correctly; but if I have not received it at all I shall have recourse to the laws of the Greeks against you. I therefore defer settling this matter with you for four months from this present time. The Milesians, therefore, considering it a great calamity, departed as being deprived of their money. But Glaucus went to Delphi to consult the oracle; and when he asked the oracle whether he should make a booty of the money by an oath, the Pythian assailed him with the following words: "Glaucus, son of Epicycles, thus to prevail by an oath and to make a booty of the money will be a present gain; swear, then, for death awaits even the man who keeps his oath. But there is a nameless son of perjury, who has neither hands nor feet, but he pursues swiftly, until, having seized, he destroys the whole race, and all the house. But the race of a man who keeps his oath is afterwards more blessed. The Pythian also said, that to tempt God and to commit the crime was the same thing.

"Glaucus, therefore, having sent for the Milesian strangers, returned them the money. With what design, O Athenians, this story has been told you shall now be mentioned. There

is at present not a single descendant of Glaucus, nor any house which is supposed to have belonged to Glaucus, but he is utterly extirpated from Sparta. Thus it is right to have no other thought respecting a deposit than to restore it when it is demanded ("Erato" 86, Cary's translation).

The visitor to the quiet little market town of Devizes, in Wiltshire, who takes his stroll into the market place, may there have his attention drawn to a remarkable record engraved on a metal plate stating the year and the day of the occurrence. It relates the judgment of sudden death inflicted by the hand of God, on a market woman, who falsely took God to witness, something in the manner that Glaucus had only turned over in his mind, that she had duly paid her share of a joint purchase, when the money was found fraudulently concealed in her hand.¹

¹ The subjoined extract gives the full details of this striking instance of the divine punishment of a perjury:—

"The Mayor and Corporation of Devizes avail themselves of the stability of this building (the market cross) to transmit to future times the record of an awful event which occurred in the market place in the year 1753, hoping that such a record may serve as a salutary warning against the danger of impiously invoking Divine vengeance, or of calling on the holy name of God to conceal the devices of falsehood and fraud.

"On Thursday, the 25th of January, 1753, Ruth Pierce, of Potterne, in this county, agreed with three other women to buy a sack of wheat in the market, each paying her due proportion towards the same. One of these women, in collecting the several quotas of money, discovered a deficiency, and demanded of Ruth Pierce the sum which was wanting to make good the amount. Ruth Pierce protested that she had paid her share, and said, *she wished she might drop down dead if she had not*. She rashly repeated the awful wish, when, to the consternation and terror of the surrounding multitude, she instantly fell down and expired, having the money concealed in her hand.

"The narrative of this solemn event was, by order of the authorities, recorded on a tablet and hung up in the market house (a row of sheds near the cross). When the building was taken down, Mr. Halcombe, who kept the Bear Inn, in order that the remembrance might not be lost, caused it to be inscribed on the pediment of a couple of pillars which stood opposite his inn, supporting the sign of the Bear.

"The sign was removed in 1801, and a few years after, Lord Sidmouth, having presented to the town the new cross, which forms the central ornament of the

Between the date of the judgment which brought total extirpation upon Glaucus and his family and that which brought the visitation of sudden death on the market woman of Devizes, who shall say how many and how signal have been the similar acts of the judgment of God falling on the heads of the perjurers of their oaths? Who, then, will very easily dare to maintain that an oath which calls upon the God of Heaven to be the witness to the truth with which it is spoken is a thing devoid of sanction, notwithstanding that the general rule of the Divine Government is well known to be one of long proved patience and forbearance, under which the perjurer is permitted often for years, and sometimes for the whole of the present life, to be seen to go unpunished.

It is beyond doubt, then, that the interests of the truth which human society needs as the basis of its well-being, and for the securing of which the recourse to an oath has remained the uninterrupted practice of nearly four thousand years standing in every civilized nation of the earth, may, as constant experience shows, be defeated and undone in the particular case, by the sin and crime of perjury. Who does not know this perfectly well? Nevertheless, remove the extremely real sanction and protection of truth, which the most just fear of visitation from the anger of God and of infamy in the sight of man necessarily strikes into the soul of the intending perjurer, and you will have inflicted a most deadly wound upon the welfare and happiness of human life. Does not an apostle say to us, "Men swear by the greater, and in every dispute of theirs, the oath is

market place, the Mayor and Corporation 'availed themselves,' to use their own language, 'of the stability of the new structure to transmit to future time a record of the awful death of Ruth Pierce, in hope that it might serve as a salutary warning against the practice of invoking the sacred name to conceal the devices of falsehood and fraud.'—"The Other World; or, Glimpses of the Supernatural. By F. G. Lee. Pp. 289, 290. London. 1875.

final for confirmation." (Heb. vi. 16.) Wherever we turn, to the pages of inspiration or to the histories of Gentile and Christian writers, to the books of jurists and the homilies of the Divine, we always hear one and the same concordant testimony, bearing its witness to the indispensable need of the maintenance of the oath of religion, in the full measure of the religious honour and solemnity which is due to it.¹

What, then, must be the inevitable conclusion from this brief and rapid survey of the reasons of this immemorial recourse to the oath of religion? The first conclusion will be that Mr. Bradlaugh's impious denial of the existence of God necessarily takes away the possibility of this indispensable recourse to the oath of religion "in radice," in its very root. Where no God is held to exist, what can be more idle and absurd than to say that there can be any appeal for the guarantee of truth to that which, according to Mr. Bradlaugh's doctrine, is pure and simple vacuum, mere negation of being, absolute nothing?²

And, again, further, in the same degree in which the preceding survey, brief and imperfect as it has been, has succeeded in bringing to light the truth that the oath of religion is an indispensable condition of the well-being of civil society, and this equally in its public as in its private life, the conclusion must be just as inevitable—that Mr. Bradlaugh, by his open denial of the existence of God, is to be held by all reasonable men, to be not only a very bad enemy

¹ The Roman Jurisconsults re-echo St. Paul's testimony:—*Maximum remedium expediendarum litium in usum venit juris jurandi religio, qua, vel ex pactioe ipsorum litigatorum, vel ex auctoritate judicis deciduntur controversiæ.*—Gaius, fragm. (xii. 2).

² The following are the testimonies of Juvenal to the little credit to be attached to the oath of an atheist, and still less to his affirmation:—

Sunt qui nullo credunt mundum rectore moveri

Atque ideo intrepide quæcunque altaria tangunt.—Sat. XIII. 89.

Falsus erit testis vendens perjuriam summam

Exiguam, Cereris tangens aramque pedemque.—Sat. XIII. 218.

of God, but likewise also in the same degree, an equally bad enemy of the social well-being of his fellow-men.

Are the above-mentioned truths, then, it is to be asked, things that are wholly unknown to the Prime Minister? Ask, rather, are they things that can by any possibility be unknown to whoever possesses even the ordinary education which is the necessary preparation to entering into any one of the learned professions? Certainly not! To what honest ordinary man, indeed, can they be unknown, seeing that they are the elementary traditions of the original primitive revelation {made to man in the beginning of the world? The Gospel has but gathered them together from the wreck of the Old World, and rehabilitated them with new and still stronger sanctions for the light and guidance of the Christian people.

How is it, then, it is to be asked, that the Prime Minister and his Government are found openly espousing the cause of a man, whom on this showing it would be an insult to their understanding, to suppose that they do not recognize in him equally the enemy of God and the enemy of his fellow-man?

Singular fascination of the hope of being able to gain a little political support which appears to have the power to blind their eyes to the reality of what they are doing. Experience, nevertheless, has shown that precarious political support may at times be bought too dear even for the transitory ends for which the price for it has to be paid.

When the great Divine truths on which human society is known to have been built from the beginning of the world are to be made the price of a few paltry votes, the outcome of the bargain may disappoint the calculation on which it was made. The hoped-for gain may find itself simply struck down to the ground with a sudden terror at the very magnitude of the forfeit about to be consummated.

VII. The designs of the atheist faction may, in the meanwhile, be most effectually resisted, by the unsparing exposure of their fraud, in attempting to palm off the common affirmation of the atheist, for the solemn affirmation of the man of religion.

The legislator here who is determined to discharge the duty of his conscience to God, and not to suffer himself to be hoodwinked by mere words, may be asked to say to himself, Before I will vote I will insist upon an explicit formal definition being embodied in the bill, "sine dolo malo," declaring in express words, what it is to be—that is, to make the affirmation of a man declaring himself to be an atheist become a *solemn affirmation*. I will not be consciously a party to any fraud or deceit on this point. I will resist to the last and protest against any ambiguity or obscurity on this head. Ambiguity or obscurity in this matter carries with it—the guilt and shame of conscious fraud upon the religious conscience of the nation. It also involves open derision of the Majesty of God by the Legislature appearing to be willing to try to palm off an affirmation in the face of day as solemn, in which there cannot possibly be any act of religion. The fraud is recommended under the false guise of the equivocal use of the Name of "solemn." It will be in effect the saying to God, we are going to deceive you with the use of a name, that cannot have any meaning whatsoever, which will be to your honour.

VIII. A brief word on the comic absurdity of the pretence which proposes to give the name of an act of religion to the act of a man, whose one sole chief end of his being would seem to be to make himself as widely known as possible as the man who denies the existence of GOD, and the consequent possibility of any religion.

The best generally received definition of the word "religion" derives it from the word *religare*, to reunite or to bind together, and therein points to the rehabilitation of the

union of friendship between God and man, which it is the mission of religion to restore. If so extremely serious a subject could be allowed to have its comic side, this would be certainly found in the singularly burlesque spectacle which Mr. Gladstone and his Government now propose to introduce on to the arena of public life, and to exhibit to the astonished eyes of all the nations and people of the world.

This new and unexpected spectacle, then, is Mr. Bradlaugh, the Atheist, the profane scorner of God and the denier of the mere possibility of such a thing as any religion, introduced into the British Parliament, as quite capable in the judgment of Mr. Gladstone and his Ministry, making of the solemn affirmation of the man of religion! The nineteenth century is certainly fruitful in wonders!

IX. A second brief word touching the horns of a comical dilemma of which the supporters of Mr. Bradlaugh will be compelled to make the best that they can.

The absolutely open and avowed atheist platform is not yet a possible thing in Great Britain and the United Kingdom.

Mr. Bradlaugh, consequently, atheist as he avows himself to be, and as he seeks to be universally known, cannot, nevertheless, for the present hope to be able to enter the British Parliament in any other way than as a wolf in sheep's clothing. Atheist, as he persists in calling himself, he has no chance whatever of being admitted, except under the disguise of a man of religion. He must be held to be capable of performing the act of religion, known as a "solemn affirmation."

His supporters, in consequence, find themselves in the following dilemma :—

This *solemn* affirmation, which Mr. Bradlaugh hopes by their aid to be allowed to make, and so to enter to take his seat, is compelled to be one or other of two things—

(I.) Either it is the fraud already exposed, invented and designed by malice prepense, to deceive religious people, and to throw dust in their eyes; or

(II.) It is in itself a real, true, and genuine solemn affirmation, "sine ullo dolo malo," without a shadow of deception.

In the first case, the British Legislature will expose itself to the whole world, as has been pointed out, as lending itself to a proceeding of simple fraud. In the second case, if the affirmation is to be maintained to be "solemn," then there must needs be something special which can be the root and cause of this solemnity. This something will of necessity have to be sought for in the person of Mr. Bradlaugh himself for the obvious reason that it is not to be found anywhere else. On his own reiterated averments he knows of nothing in creation greater than himself. So that in order to make good the claim that his affirmation is to be held to be solemn, the British Legislature will have to exhibit him to the wide world as a little pseudo divinity of their own making, as in short a very small comic caricature of the God of Heaven, who swears by Himself because He knows of nothing greater than Himself by whom he could swear.

X. The near view of the precipice.

It is, of course, possible for a man to be found walking close upon the very edge of a precipice, without his, for the moment, adverting to the fact that the precipice is there, and that to take only a single step more in the direction of the precipice will be to fall over it and to be afterwards taken up dead.

Let none of the members of your honourable House, together with yourself, shut their eyes to the real facts of

the case that will shortly come before them. Your Legislative Assembly is now actually brought to the edge of such a precipice, the fall over which involves the being afterwards taken up dead. Of course dead, in the sense of having the seeds of future death deeply planted in its constitution. The Legislative Assemblies of great Imperial Powers require a considerable time before they can actually die, but unhappily for them they can plant the seeds of future death in themselves in a very short time.

It is proposed, then, by the Affirmation Bill, to remove the oath of religion, promising true allegiance to the throne under the sanction of an appeal to God, from its being the necessary legal condition of a legislator taking his seat and exercising his functions as a maker of the laws and as guardian of the public purse of the Empire. Henceforward the law is to stand that it is to be a simple matter of personal option, to swear this oath or not to swear it, the law providing an open alternative in the form of a nominally "solemn affirmation."

What this "solemn affirmation" is to be and what is to be the power generative of its solemnity, if any,—nothing as yet appears to be known.

The solemnity of it, however, is, as has been said, hopelessly discredited by the fact that, whereas the Oath of Religion for which it is to be substituted is so solemn a thing that Mr. Bradlaugh the atheist cannot by any possibility be permitted to profane it, the solemn affirmation will be so unsolemn a thing that there will be no objection at all, of any sort or kind whatsoever, to Mr. Bradlaugh the atheist being permitted to profane it. Let this proposed substitution of a nominal fictitious solemn thing, which any atheist may profane at his own perfectly free will and pleasure, without rendering himself liable to any sort of penalty or ill consequence whatsoever, either from God or

man, for the immemorial Oath of Religion be effected, and then see what must inevitably follow.

It must inevitably follow, that if the Oath of allegiance to the Throne is not necessary, and may be replaced at the mere will or fancy of each individual by a purely nominal and fictitious substitute as the sole guarantee to be demanded from a legislator of the Empire, neither in this case, as has been already said publicly, will the oath remain necessary, but may be replaced by the same purely nominal and fictitious substitute

for the monarch on the throne,
 for the judges who administer the laws of the land,
 for the witnesses who give testimony in courts of law,
 for the soldiers serving in the army and their officers,
 for the sailors serving in the navy and their officers.

The entire body politic of the empire will thus find itself on the high road to be constituted in a condition of open and avowed denial of God, and the contempt of His sovereignty of the world of which He is the Creator.¹

¹ The true safety of the Christian religion is not to be sought in proofs of the existence of legal enactments in its favour, but in the solid and fervent attachment of the people to its altars and its doctrines. Nevertheless, in an appeal to the legislature of the United Kingdom it will not be wholly out of place to lay before them legal testimonies to the truth that Christianity is even yet the law of the land.

“A sound, solid, contention might be had that any enactment of Parliament, in which Christianity were renounced and repudiated, was *ipso facto* null and void”—p. 37. Life of the worthy and illustrious Thomas Holt, Knight, Recorder of the borough of Abingdon, and one of the King’s Serjeants, &c. Oxford: L. Litchfield. 1706.

“No administration of the oath taken by common jurymen, or by any other, either as witness or testifying, could be too reverent or too solemn; for such are bound to tell the whole truth who so call the Almighty God notably to witness that it be the truth.”—“State Trials,” in Seven Parts. Vol. III. p. 140. London: G. Strahan. 1720.

“In *Cowan v. Milbourne* (L. R. Q. Ex. 230), Kelly, L.C.B., said that Christianity was part of the law of the land. This case, tried in 1867, contains the latest judicial utterance on the matter. In *R. v. Williams* (1797), a celebrated case, where the man was tried for publishing Paine’s “Age of Reason,”

Such is the precipice! Let every member of your assembly look at it, and study it well. Now, what can be the claim of this single man, Bradlaugh the atheist, the daring and profane denier of the existence of God, to push the chief legislative assembly of the world over such a precipice as this must be seen to be?

A Word in Conclusion.

If every Member of the House of Commons has bound himself to the duty of defending the Throne by his having sworn his Oath of Allegiance, how will such Member be able to vote for the removal of one of the principal safeguards and defences of the Throne in any other way than by the perjury of his Oath?

No statesman or legislator of the kingdom will very easily dare to say that the Throne of the United Kingdom with the person of the Monarch has not its just rights under the constitution of the Empire, which as true statesmen they are bound to maintain and defend. Again, no statesman or legislator of the Empire will very easily dare to deny that the oath of true allegiance to the throne, which every one has sworn under the formula SO HELP ME GOD, does not bind the legislator who has sworn it positively to maintain and to uphold,—and that it does not likewise strictly prohibit him from any act whatever calculated even to weaken, let alone remove,—that which is acknowledged and confessed to be the mainstay of the rights of the throne and the prerogatives of the person of the Monarch.

On this point there cannot be a doubt raised.

On the question that the oath of allegiance is and always has been held to be the mainstay and bulwark of the rights

and to be found 26 St. Tr. 653, Lord Kenyon told the jury that "the Christian religion is part of the law of the land." Kelly's exact words in *Cowan v. Milbourne* were "There is abundant authority for saying that Christianity is part and parcel of the law of the land."

of the throne, only open and avowed atheists can take the side of negation. Every one who believes in the Person of a Divine Creator and Sovereign Ruler of the world, and who, *sine dolo malo* and *bonâ fide* has sworn his oath promising true allegiance to the throne, by the very fact of such belief stands on the side of the affirmative.

How, then, will those members of your honourable assembly, who confess this oath of allegiance to be under God the mainstay of the rights of the throne, and who at the same time confess that their oath of allegiance binds them to the firm upholding of this same acknowledged indispensable mainstay be able to give their vote for its removal? How can they do this without directly forswearing the terms of the oath by which they have bound themselves, and without subjecting themselves to all the penalties attached to such an act of perjury.

Public perjury under the laws of the twelve tables was dealt with thus. "Perjurii, poena divina exitium, humana dedecus." "The punishment with which God visits perjury is destruction, man inflicts infamy." Time and the belief of the Christian world has added to, and has not taken anything away, from the force of the ancient Roman law.

I remain,

Right honourable Sir,

Your obedient Servant,

TERTULLIAN.

