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DOES THERE EXIST A

## MORAL GOVERNOR OF THE UNIVERSE?

AN ARGUMENT AGAINST THE ALLEGED

### UNIVERSAL BENEVOLENCE IN NATURE.

BY AUSTIN HOLYOAKE.

The belief in a great Moral Governor of the Universe is held by all Theists, and the vast majority of them believe also in a Superintending Providence, who takes special interest in man's welfare, who knows his every thought and deed, and who is to be propitiated by praise and prayers, and induced to suspend the operations of Nature to meet the wants and wishes of every earnest suppliant. These are the orthodox believers. There are many Theists—men whose theology is modified to suit their advanced views—who reject the Special Providence theory, and hold what they term a "philosophic conception of Deity." They believe that an all-wise and all-merciful God made all things for man's especial good; that his laws are fixed and unalterable; that he Himself is compelled to act solely through the medium of unbending and undeviating law. For one who holds this idea, there are millions who hold the idea of a Special Providence. Nevertheless both maintain that Universal Benevolence reigns over all. But the fallacy underlying the position of the believers in universal benevolence, is the *assumption* that a God made all things for a wise purpose—that is, for the benefit of man. I use the term *God* in the sense of a being of infinite power and goodness, who made all things, and who is capable of controlling all things. Anything subject to the "unbending and undeviating laws" of the universe must be within nature, and therefore part of it, and therefore not God at all. I wish to be explicit in the meaning I attach to the terms I use, as I do not desire to mislead others, or, what is equally as bad, mislead myself. I then at once join issue, and say without hesitation that I do not believe that what we know of the operations of Nature will at all warrant the conclusion that the laws of the universe always act for man's benefit.

The convulsions of the earth have caused at various times as much destruction of human life as the great battles between contending armies. The destruction of Pompeii and Herculaneum were occurrences which have rendered the name of volcanoes words of terror throughout the world. Yet some writers, who claim to hold the "scientific" idea, speak of volcanoes as being made by a good God for a wise "*moral*" purpose"—though what morality there is in them it would puzzle a scientific man to find out. I think they serve a *physical* purpose in occasionally letting off the incandescent matter and gas which accumulate in the earth. Admitting it would not be a wise objection to make against the use of steam engines that they occasionally blow up, but it is always an objection against the *maker* of the boiler when defective plates are used which cause the

explosion; or when the safety-valve refuses to act, and the boiler, becoming overcharged, bursts, and spreads destruction all around. But if it were not for volcanoes, argue some persons, there would be earthquakes. But earthquakes are continuous notwithstanding, and whole cities are swallowed up, and thousands of human beings are hurled to destruction. What moral purpose is served thereby? With what possible conception of a God who is worthy of veneration and worship will this harmonise? He makes the gases and the burning lava in the interior of the earth, and he makes the volcanoes to act as safety-valves; but they do not always act, and frightful convulsions are the consequence. Then this arrangement is not perfect, and man is still the sufferer.

The countless forms of physical suffering in the world are totally irreconcilable with the idea of an all-wise and all-good Designer. No amount of logic can bridge over the difficulty. Though frequently out of evil cometh good, and by suffering we are elevated; yet why not have the good and the elevation without the evil and the suffering, if wisdom and benevolence rule the world? Take a homely illustration. An aged or infirm person goes to the seaside and takes up his residence at an hotel, and it is more conducive to his health that he should live on the top floor, notwithstanding the fatigue of walking up and down long flights of stairs. But what says the human designer, who lays no claim to perfect wisdom and celestial benevolence?—why, that the aged or infirm shall have the benefit of the top floor unmixed with evil, and he at once erects a “lift” which will enable the invalid to attain to any elevation without the slightest fatigue. The whole economy of nature seems to be a struggle between ignorance and force. Nature has secrets to impart and treasures to yield, but weak man only attains them after toil, anxiety, and danger. Suffering is the order of the whole of the animated world. Animals, from the simplest organisms, prey upon one another; and man, by the power of his superior endowments, preys upon them all; but he is gifted with reason and mental faculties of a high order, and these cause him the most exquisite torture, at times far transcending physical pain. Coal is a great agent of civilisation, and adds considerably to the comforts of life; man therefore descends into the bowels of the earth to procure this treasure. But the demon Firedamp, who has been lying in wait for him during untold ages, suddenly rushes from his lair, and sweeps him to destruction without a moment’s warning. We embark in foreign enterprises, and to carry on the commerce of nations, “men go down to the sea in ships,” when the Storm Fiend rises, and the pitiless ocean engulphs them, and they are seen no more. These and other objections to the idea of universal benevolence have been sought to be met by the declaration that “whatever is, is *right*.” Can self-stultification go farther than this? Whatever is, *is*; but to say that the good and the bad are *right*, is to confound all language. To assert that evil is right, and to overcome evil is right also, is simply incoherent talk.

The Rev. Charles Voysey, of the Church of England, and the Rev. John Page Hopps, of the Unitarian Church, both hold the scientific theory of God. Both gentlemen, in their respective circles, are men of mark, and what they say is worthy of attention. Mr. Hopps has written upon this subject, and has challenged my criticism of his views. For his mode of controversy I entertain the highest respect, but from his conclusions I differ widely. I take one example. He says:—“I see nothing contrary to the supposition of a God of perfect power and perfect goodness in the burning of a ship at sea.” Is this an adequate conception of God?

Granted that the burning of ships at sea always results from carelessness (which would be a monstrous supposition), do not the innocent suffer with the guilty? And where is the goodness of that? Take the large ocean steamers. What have the passengers to do with the management of these vessels—the women and children especially? Yet the ship is burnt and they perish. Where is the goodness to *them*? There is nothing inconsistent, that I can see, in asking a God of *mercy* to “interfere to prevent the fire burning the poor fellows in the blazing ship.” If one *could* imagine an all-powerful God making laws which he could not control, it is not possible to believe that a God of *universal* goodness would allow beings of his own creating to become victims of these laws. I embark in a vessel with the full knowledge that fire applied to combustible matter will cause a conflagration—I know it is inevitable; I therefore do not commit the folly of burning the ship and still expect to go scotless. But some one else may fire the ship without my knowledge, and when I am powerless to help myself; I thus lose my life, not through any fault of my own, but through the wilfulness or carelessness of others. If I saw the crime about to be committed, and had the power to prevent it, I should do so without hesitation. But an all-good and all-powerful God looks calmly on and permits the evil. You thus degrade the Deity below the level of humanity. How can I praise and worship a Being thus constituted? It is no use saying that “*partial* evil is *universal* good!” That is illogical. When *we* suffer we cannot be brought to believe that it is good we should suffer. Then why should we presume to say it is good when others suffer under pain and disease, misfortune and calamity? But ships are lost at sea from other causes than fire and neglect. Storms occasion more destruction to life and property at sea than all other causes put together. But who can provide against all storms? Men build little ships, and they are lost; they build big ships, and they are dashed to pieces. The laws of nature are undeviating, but how can weak man withstand their various operations? It is an eternal warfare between ignorance and force, and millions perish miserably in the encounters; and you would have me believe that it was all designed for man’s especial good. Men, it is true, have more knowledge of the laws of nature now than they had centuries ago, and they have better opportunities of recording the results of their investigations; but they cannot transmit their knowledge to their offspring—nay, is it not a physiological fact, that the children of highly intellectual parents have generally but mediocre mental powers? All are born totally ignorant, and the same struggle for knowledge has to be gone through by every generation; the same mistakes are made, and the same calamities follow ignorance. A knowledge of the laws of nature is man’s best safeguard, but how little can be learned, even under the most favourable conditions, in the brief span of human existence.

As I view nature and man’s position on this earth, I see no reason to believe that he is more favoured than the meanest animal. He dies from excessive cold—he dies from excessive heat. On whatever spot of this globe he may happen to be born or thrown, he perishes prematurely by the agues or fevers incidental to the clime. If ever there were a Creator and a “creation,” in the divine plan “man had no pre-eminence above the brute.” Man, from selfishness and egotism, has created an immortality for himself alone, and he has imagined an ever-merciful God watching over his especial interests. Rash men pretend to comprehend the purpose of all things, and the more cautious, while confessing the profound mystery of the unfathomable, still persuade themselves that boundless benevo-

lence reigns over all. But man's weak conjectures receive the rudest shocks; for Nature sweeps on her majestic course sublimely indifferent to the frantic cries of humanity. The heaving billows wreck the frail barque; the volcano overwhelms the smiling village; the earthquake rends the earth and engulphs the fairest cities; the lightning blasts the oak; the hurricane and the tornado spread destruction o'er the plain; the pestilence exhales its poisonous breath through the affrighted town; and the busy haunts of men become more hateful than the howling wilderness.

The Rev. Mr. Voysey did me the honour of forwarding to me Parts viii. and ix. of his *Sling and the Stone*, containing four sermons preached by him at Healaugh on a passage from Isaiah lv. 8, 9: "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts." I have read these four sermons attentively, and while agreeing with much that is in them, and heartily approving of the admirable spirit which pervades the whole, I take exception to the assumptions and conclusions arrived at by the preacher, as I must maintain that he has absolutely no data to go upon.

The believers in a God of mercy and benevolence occupy a position both amusing and painful. Firmly convinced in their own minds that a God exists whom they are bound to worship, they set about to invest him with attributes which, according to their judgment, will justify their adoration. But their difficulties are only increased thereby, and many a contradiction they have to gloss over, and many an anomaly they have to gulp down. In the words of the text, the Lord's "thoughts are not their thoughts, neither are their ways his ways." And this must ever remain so, and to attempt to comprehend them or describe them, is a piece of self-delusion of the most ludicrous kind. Yet men are constantly doing this. They are not content to confess that the God whom they seek is the Nature that they know. But how little even of the nature which surrounds them, and of which they form a part, do men comprehend.

I wish the Rev. Mr. Voysey had given his conception of what God is—whether an organised being, subject like all of us to the laws of nature; or an indefinable something above and beyond all influence. He appears to hold both notions, paradoxical as it may appear, for in some places he speaks of God's *thoughts*, and we cannot conceive of thought apart from mental organisation.

Whence Mr. Voysey derives his conception of Deity I cannot tell. At one time you think he takes it from the Bible, but that supposition soon becomes dissipated when you find him expressing, in the most unequivocal terms, his disbelief of portions of the supposed "Word of God." He appears to place implicit belief in the words of the above text, and he believes that God sent Jesus with a message of "world-wide love;" but when that messenger is represented as saying, "Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass till all these things be fulfilled," he says he does not believe Christ ever said anything so irrational, or ever intended to say it! But then Mr. Voysey obtains both declarations from the self-same source, and the evidence for the one is quite as conclusive as the evidence for the other. Here is bewilderment indeed. The rational man is at liberty to reject anything that does not approve itself to his judgment which he finds in the Bible, but the orthodox man is not.

Mr. Voysey is no believer in the infallibility of the Bible as we have it. But his prosecutors will have a difficult task to perform, to reconcile the

solemn prophecy of a supposed infallible being with its non-fulfilment. Mr. Voysey does not believe in this prophecy, though he says some of the Apostles did; neither does he believe in some of the absurd representations in Genesis as to the firmament, and the windows in heaven through which the rain came. As a sensible man he is bound to reject those things which science has proved to be fallacies; but in clinging to the notion of immortality, and the idea of a God of universal benevolence, he plunges into a sea of difficulties, from which Rationalism alone can rescue him.

Mr. Voysey's second sermon is devoted to a consideration of the existence of pain and suffering in the world, and an endeavour is made to reconcile that painful fact with infinite wisdom and universal benevolence. I consider the effort a total failure, as all such efforts must be. You cannot make the bad good by merely changing the name. Mr. Voysey, all through his sermon, does violence to his better nature. He is like a fond son endeavouring to palliate and gloss over the errors and shortcomings of an erring father. He loves the idea of God, and clings to it with a fervency that obscures his judgment. This is apparent notwithstanding the candour with which he states the difficulties of his case. He says the earthly life of man displays thoughts and ways of God very different to what we should have adopted for ourselves, and very different to what at first we should have expected from a *good God*. But he passes this over by remarking, that God's thoughts and ways are best after all, and that His purpose with men is much higher than we dreamt of. This is begging the whole question. The first duty of the Deist should be to prove the existence of a Being possessed of the attributes he assigns to him. The manifestations of nature, and the lives of all men, contradict the assumption of universal benevolence. To maintain otherwise, is to violate all reason and logic. We cannot conceive of any one being cruel and kind at the same time, in the sense claimed for a God. Doctors daily and hourly cause pain to their patients in their efforts to save their lives or to restore them to health. The parallel of divine wisdom will not hold. No surgeon amputates a limb, if he can save the sufferer without doing so. When he operates, it is because he has no alternative. Deity is represented as making the evil or pain in the world as well as the good, and he surely had a choice.

Language has no meaning, if it is not to designate that which causes pain and misery and suffering, as *evil*; and that which secures human happiness, as *good*. Mr. Voysey says, God's ways *are* higher than our ways, "because pain is necessary to change, decay, and death; and change, decay, and death are, in their proper order, necessary to succession." This is the order of nature, and the Atheist accepts it as such; but he does not say that "pain, decay, and death," are better than life, health, and happiness. If he had the power, he would banish pain utterly from the world. Mr. Voysey says, "I know that it can easily be answered by saying, 'why does not God produce succession without death, decay, change, and pain?' *This I cannot answer*; but I do think we might just as well ask, 'Why does not God make earth a cube, instead of a sphere?'" Our preacher is quite right when he says he cannot answer this unanswerable query, and he would be consistent if he stopped there, but he attempts to do that which he confesses he cannot do, when he goes on to argue that the reason why God does not prevent pain and misery in the world, is because his ways are wise, and calculated to promote man's highest happiness. I do not see that the question, "Why does not God make the earth a cube instead of a sphere?" is any solution of the difficulty. Mr. Voysey's argument is, that a good God has made men miserable, but he intended to

make them happy. We find the earth a sphere, and it does not concern us to inquire why it is so; but if any one were to argue that it was intended to fit into a square hole, then we should have the right to ask why it was made round!

Mr. Voysey enters into the question of immortality; but his ideas of a future life, like all ideas of God, are peculiar to the person who conceives them. Mr. Voysey speaks of a "future life of progress for man." The orthodox, who are the vehement proclaimers of a life after death, talk of its being a state for the "just made *perfect*." But Mr. Voysey says that without pain and death there would be no progress, and that therefore death, which leads to this future life of progress, is "a transcendent *good*," and all that prepares us for it and leads to it may be looked upon as part of a good plan." Then of course this plan of pain and death is carried on in the next world! And if it be so, will not man be suffering, and sighing, and dying through all eternity? A cheering prospect, certainly, for the human race, who are asked to believe that all things are arranged for *their* especial good. From what I can judge of the life of most people on this earth, I do not think it is a matter to be sighed for, to be perpetuated for ever and ever.

If death is a blessing to man, why is the instinct of life implanted so strongly in him? "Divine wisdom" has made him regard death as the greatest calamity that can befall him and his. Every hospital and every doctor is a standing protest against this "transcendent *good*." And if pain is wisely ordained to lead to death, why is pain so disproportionate among suffering humanity? Why should not the smallest amount of pain to *all alike* suffice for this happy result? This plan, like every plan that can be imagined by man for God, must fall far short of ideal perfection.

Mr. Voysey devotes some consideration to the question of the influence of pain as a corrective of man's evil passions. But he also sees that there are numberless instances in which pain has done no possible good—in which it has simply been wanton, aimless, profitless woe, as if it had been inflicted by a blind and savage Being, who tortured for torture's sake. In the case of shipwreck, we not unfrequently see examples of both kinds of result from the infliction of pain. The same catastrophe, the same appalling terror, ennobles some and debases others—makes some brave, others craven—some generous, others selfish. To all this Mr. Voysey remarks:—

"These apparent anomalies are to be explained, not by laying the blame of the evil on the presence of pain, but by taking into account the complex nature and various stages of man. What does him good at one stage, is fatal at another—what exasperates him at one stage, subdues and raises him at another. We, none of us, think of objecting to the sun, which is the very source of all life on earth, because under some circumstances, exposure to its rays is certain death. The varied effects of pain must be accounted for by taking also into consideration the different circumstances and conditions of the men who are exposed to it."

How comes it that Mr. Voysey, who is an earnest thinker, overlooks the fact that the same Almighty Benevolence for which he is pleading, made the one organisation which receives pain as a chastening and elevating chastisement, and the other which becomes brutalised under its influence—and yet it was *intended* to improve each in the same degree? Does Mr. Voysey's argument remove one difficulty from his path? Neither is his illustration about "objecting to the sun" a happy one. We *do* object to the sun in all countries when we find his rays hurtful to our health and happiness; in the same way that we object to too much rain and to too

much drought, and all inclement seasons. The elements the world over are at times the enemies of man, and regard him not. Who object more to the elements than orthodox Christians, who are perpetually putting up prayers to heaven for fine weather, for rain, for protection from storms, for good crops in bad season? Man's life, both on land and sea, is a ceaseless strife with the forces of nature. The lightning conductor is a protest against the electric currents in the air, which, singularly enough, frequently strike churches and destroy worshippers, but seldom or never visit gin palaces or dens of infamy and vice!

This sermon concludes with the declaration that man's thoughts are like God's thoughts, when man, in his devotion and love to his children, inflicts pain and sorrow upon them for their good. "And we know, too," it says, "that children always love those best who do not let them have their own way, and who inflict pain upon them for their good." This is not true, and if there is such a thing as blasphemy in the world, it is this lowering of God to the level of imperfect man. Those who inflict pain upon their children are not the best parents, but those who train even stubborn and wilful natures by loving watchfulness and tender care. Harshness never begets love, and never will. The adult who cherishes an affection for his severe parents, does so, not for their severity, but for some other quality. Let every man and woman ask his or her own heart if this is not so.

Mr. Voysey's God is the maker of all the misery, pain, disease, suffering, and death in the world, and these sermons were preached in order to show that all is designed for a wise purpose and for man's highest happiness, and therefore man ought to love and adore the hand that smites him. But does man do so? Does Mr. Voysey himself? Which does he admire most, the lovely Alpine valley, or the fearful avalanche which suddenly overwhelms the smiling village?—the gentle breeze and the rippling sea, or the howling wind and the heaving ocean that wrecks the stout ship and engulphs her living freight?—the bloom of health on the cheek of his child, or the pallor that shows the presence of the fell disease which is stealing its young life away? Human nature must be entirely changed, before it can be made to love that which causes it pain, whether inflicted by man, or by a supposed supernatural Being.

Mr. Voysey devotes two sermons to the question of "Sin," in which he appears to me to use extraordinary arguments. Take this as a specimen:

"There is no such thing as *darkness*. It is not a thing at all. Light is *something*. Where light is not we call the darkness—just as where nothing is, we say there is emptiness. God does not create emptiness. It is absurd to say that that which is nothing can be made. So God did not create *darkness*, for darkness is only a word, and nothing more—a word by which we express the absence of light."

Now if this is logical, what was the use of the previous sermon on "Pain?" If there is no such thing as darkness, as darkness is but the absence of light, surely there can be no such thing as *pain*, for pain is but the absence of pleasure. There is nothing in the world that may not be reasoned out of it, if words are thus to be juggled with. Berkeley's idea of "no matter" is lucidity itself after this. Darkness is as palpable to the senses of all sane persons as daylight, and therefore for all rational purposes one *exists* as much as the other. From Berkeley's theory that only *ideas* exist, and not matter, it would follow that man does not exist, for he surely is matter as much as anything we see about us. He would have only the idea of his own head; but it is as bad as knocking

the idea of a head against the idea of a post in endeavouring to comprehend such airy and fanciful theories.

I do not think the position I take on this question a fallacious or illogical one. All I am doing, is stating what I conceive to be fatal objections to that theory which claims for God universal goodness, so far as human beings are concerned. To my mind the facts of nature are against the theory. I accept nature as it is, and it is useless to repine, because to most of us the suffering incidental to existence is quite equal to its pleasure. The Rev. John Page Hepps says that agony and calamity, and all the ills that flesh is heir to, are signs of the "truest mercy and the highest goodness." The Rev. Charles Voysey endows his Deity with perfect wisdom and perfect benevolence. To sustain his position, he has recourse to what may, without offence, be termed an elaborate attempt at self-deception, by endeavouring to show that "there is no absolute evil in the world."

One feels, in reading these sermons, that they are utterly valueless, as no one who wishes to regulate his life by the light of facts as they really exist, can ever admit the truth of the propositions laid down. As before observed, it is self-deception from beginning to end, arising from the desire of the preacher to reconcile the irreconcilable. Denying facts in order to overcome difficulties is unwise, for the facts will remain in spite of the denial, and people will believe them, whoever may declare to the contrary. To deny that the earth moves does not stop its revolution round the sun.

Materialists are accused of obstinacy, or something worse, for not accepting the God-idea. But they find it difficult to make a selection. If they go no farther than this small island, they meet with so many differing and contradictory conceptions of the unknown source of natural phenomena, that they are compelled to pause, and, in presence of the profound ignorance which prevails on the subject, they suspend the assent to any representations that are upon record. Even believers accuse one another of holding "inadequate" conceptions. Some believe in Special Providence; others reject that idea, asserting that God himself is bound by the laws of the universe, and cannot alter them. The real difficulty that strikes an Atheist is, not for man to form an adequate idea of God; but for man to form a God adequate to the desires of men. All known ideas of Deity are so confused, so contradictory, or so repulsive, that the thoughtful Atheist rejects them; and being totally unable to comprehend the incomprehensible, he is virtually "without God in the world."



*In Memoriam.*

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**AUSTIN HOLYOAKE,****Died April the 10th, 1874.**

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WHEN my brother Austin Holyoake was born I was a boy ten years old, wondering very much at arriving at that age. I had been for some time acquainted with a soldier who had served in India. A traveller is always fascinating to a youth, and I persuaded my father to take him into his employ, that I might see more of him. His name was Austin Graves. I thought Austin a pretty name. It was associated with stories Graves told me, and I persuaded my mother to give his Christian name to my new brother. The family choice lay in a different direction. My father was named after King George, and I was named after him, and one of my sisters was named after Queen Caroline. One of my Australian brothers, as we call them, bore the name Horatio, after Nelson. Royalty and patriotism, as well as piety had adherents among us. Another brother was named Rowland, after the first politician I came to read of and admire—Rowland Detrosier. At that time news came of his premature death, and the first public subscription I ever joined in was in that for Detrosier's family. I believe I pleaded for both names to be given to that brother, and I got my eldest sister to help me, who in her kindness was always ready to side with me, but my mother, whose will prevailed as to names, would not listen to one so outlandish as Detrosier. She was a dear, insular, English soul. My father left names to her, and her decision was final. My brother now dead, came to be named Austin after the manner I have stated. It is curious how death brings old things to mind. During the forty-seven years of Austin's life, I never remember telling him this, nor am I aware whether he knew it.

My business connection with my brother—a happy portion of my life with him—extended from 1845, less or more, until 1862. For me to give any adequate idea of what manner of man he was, and with what devotion he promoted public ends, I must

say a word about that period, for the only praise that men do not forget is that of facts; certainly acts are the most lasting eulogies of the true.

After the Bristol and Gloucester imprisonment of two of the editors of the *Oracle of Reason*, we had to carry our printing operations to London; and I invited Austin, then a very young man, to come to London; and subsequently made him a partner with me on the express condition that we never incurred any debt without the knowledge and consent of each other. In those days all our bill-heads bore the name of "Holyoake Brothers," and it was my desire and intention that we should ultimately publish together under that pleasant name. But I took care not to involve my brother in the unknown responsibilities of the Fleet Street House, which I subsequently opened, where all I possessed, or received, or earned, alike were consumed. My brother well knew this, for the £250 given me after the Cowper Street debate, and all subsequent sums, were all paid away, through his hands, in maintaining the Freethought organisation there. It seems fair to mention these facts, because they prove the gallant and untiring co-operation he rendered in those unrequiting days. The errors of the affair in Fleet Street were my own. I attempted too much; I promised too much; I trusted too much. Things, however, which we did serviceably together, were often as much his suggestion as mine, and the willingness and resource with which he executed whatever belonged to his departments, and the labour he volunteered for public objects, won for him the personal regard of all who sought or accepted the service of that House. When on one happy morning towards the end of our occupancy, £250 were given me by an unexpected friend, for my personal use, I remember with what honest pride he concurred in its being paid away to such creditors as remained; regardless that it would not leave me anything to divide with him, as would have been his right, had anything remained in my hands. Looking through the window as we spoke, and seeing the largest creditor we had on the opposite side of the street, I gave him £60, and told him to go out and give it to him, which was done in the street, and thus ended that obligation. Often, in after years, my thoughts have recurred to his honest speech of that morning; and when I looked, a few days ago, on his cold and silent face, as he lay in his coffin, the memory of that speech came back afresh, as I thought how many, who believed more than he, had less of his honesty of spirit, which must be the best recommendation to man or God.

The same course I took with pecuniary I took as respects political responsibility. When we issued Felix Pyat's letters on

“Parliament and the People,” information was given to the Government that it was my act, and applications for summonses were against me. The Exchequer writ for publishing unstamped newspapers was issued also against me. It bears my name alone. Rudio took with him to America my cloak, which my brother Austin kept under the counter, at hand for six weeks, for me to put on in case of my apprehension, as I had experience of the discomfort of spending a night insufficiently clad, in the Cheltenham Station House. But though I took care that no one was left liable for my acts, my brother was quite as ready as myself to share any risk of this kind, had it been necessary, and deserves as much credit as though it had fallen to him. Though I deemed it base to do anything for which another might have to answer, my brother never cared for a moment if by any accident of law or rancour he was involved. His courage was undoubted. I always regarded him as capable of anything that ought to be done. His position at the head of the printing department, and representative of me in the publishing, was entirely independent. Whenever I spoke in public about our connection, I always said so, and any honour showed to him was a new pleasure given to me. Long after we were separated, I sent him for publication my high estimate of him, and whenever I wrote of him in public it has been to his honour. I say this to show that it is not his death alone, but his life, that inspires the words of respect and regret I write now. A great merit of his was, that he would do whatever he could to cause Freethought to command influence. He cared for its future credit more than its immediate success. He would work day or night to do, within needful time or with greater taste, something or other we thought useful to issue. I should never have attempted what I did at Fleet Street had I not been sure of his co-operation; and all I take most pride in of what was done there, could never have been accomplished without his aid. It never occurred to him to evade work, nor to ask himself how little he might do of that which outside publicists asked him to help them in; his first thought was how much more could he do, and how much better, if possible, than it was being done. Military or social enterprises were alike to him, if promise of help appeared in them for those who struggled for independence; whether patriots, or women, or slaves. My brother entered into everything within his range, and gave time to everybody. His value and his misfortune was, that he thought more of what he could do than of himself, and so wore himself out by generous exertions before his time; and whatever may be given now in the way proposed since his death, for the benefit of his family, has been over and

over again earned by him, in a way that may fairly be recognised rather as an act of justice than of charity.

Parts of his "Sick Room Thoughts," the last thing he wrote, are proof that he had increasing and original power, and, had he reserved to himself more leisure, he had the capacity of doing greater service than he had already rendered. The last time I saw him I told him that opinions we had maintained together were now meeting with admission in quarters were neither he nor I expected to live to see their truth recognised; and I repeated to him that the Bishop of Manchester had recently said that "he did not himself believe that mistakes which did not arise from perversity of the will, but from incapacity of understanding, or it might possibly be from the truth never having been put before the mind very wisely or philosophically—he did not believe that mistakes of a speculative kind—mistakes in doctrine or in dogma, even if they were upon what were sometimes considered vital points, would shut a man out of the Kingdom of God.....It was his distinct belief that heaven would be forfeited by no man on account of his theological opinions, unless those opinions had had a mischievous influence upon his conduct, and he had allowed the speculations of his brain to blind and distort the directions of his conscience." My brother had a conscience as pure as any priest's, and needed no external assurance to satisfy him that following conscience was security for self-respect and peace of mind; but I knew he would be glad to hear that prelates took courage, and followed their consciences too, and that the differences between honest men were diminishing day by day. My brother fulfilled the observation of Spinoza, that "a free man thinks of nothing so little as death, and his wisdom is to think of life, and not of death." To my mind my brother did not think enough of life. The base care of yourself, which leads to refusing stout help to others who need it, is certainly to be despised; but some regard to the conditions of a man's own life is reasonable, and even commendable, if he is good for anything. After Death had looked in upon my brother, and given him fair notice of calling again in pretext arose, I could hear of him being two hours in close, hot lecture-rooms at night, and afterwards setting out miles over country in an open vehicle; and later he would be in the chair at an enervating, crowded meeting when he ought to have been in bed. But this was his way. His thoughts were to the end with this world.

The last book I sent to him was "Prince Florestan," which I had mentioned to him, and it was the last read to him. His "Sick Room Thoughts" showed that he thought more of theology than I do. In my opinion the time has come when we

should give our main strength to superseding error, since it is never destroyed until it is replaced by new truth. But we all know that ignorant Christians think that the truth of opinions is best seen by what a man thinks of them in the face of death. As Miss Cobbe has said, in a generous notice of my brother's death in the *Examiner*, many Christians imagine that the soundness of their case will be most favourably seen when disease has weakened a man's power of examining it. My brother did as conspicuous a dying service as man ever rendered, in correcting the impression that Christian error could not be seen to be error in death as plainly as in life. Clear, calm, patient, knowing well that death was waiting near at hand, he shot a bolt, as it were, from the other side the grave, at superstition's strongest popular pretension. He was free of all ostentation; but when a thing had to be done, he had the dash in him which did it. He fulfilled Professor Blackie's prescription of conduct:—

“Wear your heart not on your sleeve,  
 But on just occasion  
 Let men know what you believe  
 With breezy ventilation.”

And he did this with his last breath, when few men think of doing anything.

He will be long and honourably remembered as one of the forces on the side of Freethought progress among the people. I sometimes think that Death, presiding at the great portal through which dead nations have passed, is wearied at times at the monotony of admitting the commonplace crowds, whom ignorance and vice, ambition and baseness, silliness and sin, so copiously deliver there—and himself delights to allure noble travellers to his dominions by holding out to them the high temptations of truth, or freedom, or heart, or genius, or duty, or service; and thus he makes his kingdom richer as he makes us poorer here.

GEO. JACOB HOLYOAKE.

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### SICK ROOM THOUGHTS.

—  
 DICTATED SHORTLY BEFORE HIS DEATH BY AUSTIN HOLYOAKE.  
 —

April 8th, 1874.

All those persons who have taken the trouble to read what I have written in the *National Reformer* for some years past, and also published in pamphlets, will know what my opinions on death and immortality recently were. Those views were formed when I was in perfect health, and after years of reflection and enquiry. I am now about to state how my views remain after protracted suffering.

Christians constantly tell Freethinkers that their principle of "negation," as they term them, may do very well for health; but when the hour of sickness and approaching death arrives, they utterly break down, and the hope of a "blessed immortality" can alone give consolation. In my own case I have been very anxious to test the truth of this assertion, and have therefore deferred till the latest moment I think it prudent to dictate these few lines.

I was born of religious parents, my mother being especially pious, belonging to that most terrible of all sects of the Christian body—the Calvinistic Methodists. From my earliest childhood I remember being taught to dread the wrath of an avenging God, and to avoid the torments of a brimstone hell. I said prayers twice a day, I went to a Sunday-school where I learnt nothing but religious dogmas, and I had to read certain chapters of the Bible during the week. My Sundays were mostly days of gloom; and I may sincerely say that up to the age of fourteen I was never free from the haunting fear of the Devil.

About this period new light began to break in upon me. Robert Owen and his disciples first appeared in Birmingham, and attracted much attention. My eldest brother and sisters went to hear the new preacher, and what they had heard they came home and discussed. I listened with all the eagerness of an enthusiastic boy, and from that hour my mental emancipation set in.

My belief in the infallibility of the Bible first gave way. Soon after commenced my disbelief in the possession of any special knowledge on the part of the preachers of the Gospel, of the God and immortality of which they talk so glibly. But it was years before I thought my way to Atheism. It cannot therefore be said that I never experienced religious emotions.

For twenty years past my mind has been entirely free from misgivings or apprehensions as to any future state of rewards and punishments. I do not believe in the Christian deity, nor in any form of so-called super-natural existence. I cannot believe in that which I cannot comprehend. I shall be accused of presumption in expressing disbelief in an idea which has commanded the faith of some of the best intellects for centuries past. This I cannot help. I must think for myself; and if each of those great men had been asked to define his God, it may safely be predicted that no two would have agreed. I may also be reminded that "the fool hath said in his heart there is no God." This would imply thought, and it is doubtful whether a fool ever thought upon the subject at all; but his idea of a Deity, if it could be got at, would no doubt be as coherent as most

other men's. Many fools have written and spoken as though they had penetrated the secrets of the inscrutable, and many wise men have lost their reason in endeavouring to solve the insoluble ; and the world remains just as ignorant on the subject as it did at the earliest dawn of civilization.

I do not believe in a heaven, or life of eternal bliss after death. There is nothing in this world to induce me to give credence to the possibility of such a state of human existence. Wherever there are living organisms there are suffering and torture amongst them ; therefore analogy would go to prove that if we lived again we should suffer again. To desire eternal bliss is no proof that we shall ever attain it ; and it long seemed to me absurd to *believe* in that which we wish for, however ardently. I regard all forms of Christianity as founded in selfishness. It is the expectation held out of bliss through all eternity, in return for the profession of faith in Christ and Him crucified, induces the erection of temples of worship in all Christian lands. Remove this extravagant promise, and you hear very little of the Christian religion.

An eternal hell seems to me too monstrous for the belief of any humane man or sensitive woman ; and yet millions believe in it. Like heaven, it is enormously disproportionate to the requirements of the case ; as man can never confer benefits deserving an eternal reward, so it is impossible for him to commit sins deserving eternal punishment. The idea must have had its origin in the diseased imagination of some fanatic ; but it has been cherished and improved upon by priests in subsequent ages, till it is now incorporated in the creed of all Christian churches. Father Pinamonti's "Hell Open to Christians," and the Rev. Mr. Furness's "Sight of Hell," show to what a fearful extent this diabolical idea can be used in warping and stultifying the minds of the young.

As I have stated before, my mind being free from any doubts on these bewildering matters of speculation, I have experienced for twenty years the most perfect mental repose ; and now I find that the near approach of death, the "grim King of Terrors," gives me not the slightest alarm. I have suffered, and am suffering, most intensely both by night and day ; but this has not produced the least symptom of change of opinion. No amount of bodily torture can alter a mental conviction. Those who, under pain, say they see the error of their previous belief, had never thought out the problem for themselves.

I cannot conclude without expressing the gratification I have received from my connection with the *National Reformer*. My work on it has indeed been a labour of love, and my association

therein, with my esteemed friends Mr. Bradlaugh and Mr. Charles Watts, for the past eight years, has been of the most harmonious nature. My regret now is, that I cannot do my full share in the work the "Trinity" have hitherto performed; but I must bend to inevitable fate, and content myself by knowing that an abler and better man may be found to take my place. However, of this I am sure, that my colleagues will never meet with a more faithful and ardent friend.

To the true courage and patience of my dear and devoted wife I owe my present tranquillity. In my little son and daughter I have all a father's hope and confidence, and it softens the pain of parting when I contemplate leaving them with one who has all the——

Mr. Austin Holyoake commenced the dictation of this last paragraph a few hours before he died; but being soon exhausted, had to break off, and was not able to resume it.—*Ed. N.R.*

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### ADDRESS BY CHARLES BRADLAUGH,

DELIVERED AT THE GRAVESIDE OF AUSTIN HOLYOAKE, APRIL 17TH, 1874.

"Here we pay farewell tribute to the last remains of my staunch friend and your most loyal brother, and true servant to the cause of human progress.

Death came to him so slowly, yet so certainly and with such constant menace, that it needed great courage to wait the end so long and so bravely as he awaited. Around his grave we are gathered, each reverently placing on his coffin our testimony to his fidelity; trusting that thereout our children's memory will weave an enduring wreath of immortelles to mark at least his life even when his tomb shall be forgotten.

He has left us two legacies:—One the benefit of which inures to all who desire thought, free, and true, this was the tendency of the labour of his life.

The other legacy involving some duty was an unwilling one, he would not have left it us willingly as a burden, His last recorded words—broken short like some death-marking granite splinter—reminds us of this second legacy, his wife, his boy, his girl. To-morrow can alone tell whether his little ones shall have reason to be sorry that their father died believing that the party, whose minister he had been, would try to smooth the life-path his death has made for them so rugged. Of the dead and to the dead I can say nothing, a quarter of a century's recollections and fourteen years unbroken friendship are now in that grave.

He did well, he did his best,  
No more weary—now at rest."