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# THE DEAN OF CANTERBURY

ON

## SCIENCE AND REVELATION.

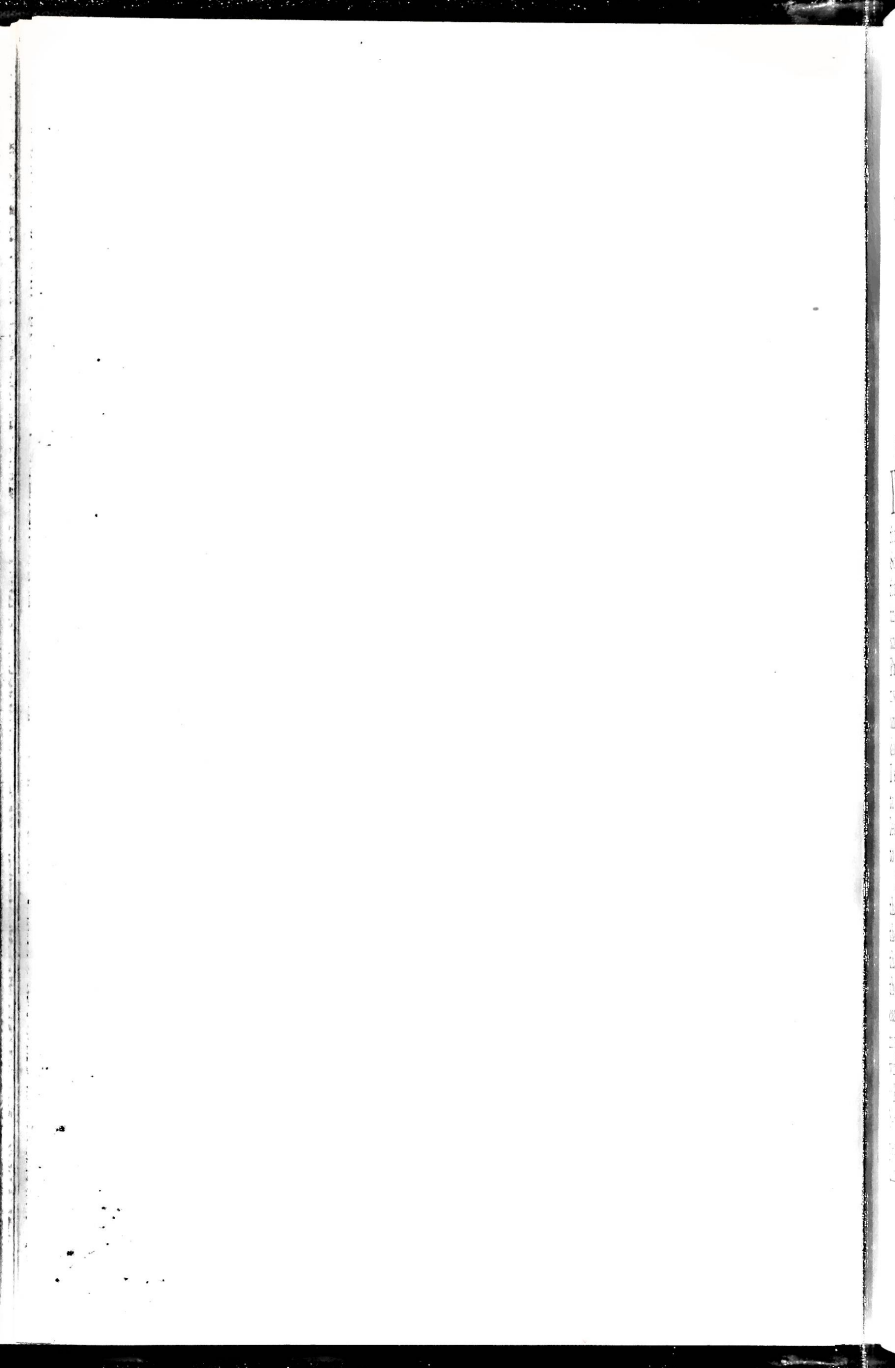
A LETTER

By M.P.



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# THE DEAN OF CANTERBURY

ON

## SCIENCE AND REVELATION.

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DEAR MR SCOTT,—

YOU are perhaps aware that there has been a Society in existence for some time (I do not know for how long a time), called the "Christian Evidence Society." Its object is stated to be "to meet current forms of unbelief among the educated classes." In the number of its accredited lecturers are to be found an Archbishop, two Bishops, a Dean, a Canon, and a Professor of Divinity, and of the remaining lecturers, five are men of eminence in the Church of England, and the sixth is, I believe, a distinguished orthodox Nonconformist. These twelve gentlemen may, I suppose, be fairly taken to be the men "put up"—to use House of Commons phraseology, by the intellectual part of the so-called religious world, to reply to infidelity in its various forms.

Nothing can be more proper, or indeed advisable, than that such a course should be adopted by the orthodox leaders. And these gentlemen may be sure that their views will meet with every attention from their opponents, even although they should fail to carry conviction. A slight preliminary objection may indeed be taken to the form of these lectures; which, however, would apply, with equal force, to "Essays and Reviews." They are twelve in number, they are the productions of men writing independently of each other, and applying themselves to difficulties in the way of belief which are of a somewhat

unconnected character, and they appear to be written with a view to each of them occupying an hour, or not much more than an hour, in delivery. It is not easy, within such limits, to do full justice to a subject such as that chosen by Professor Lightfoot, "Internal evidence of the Authenticity of St John's Gospel," or to "The alleged difficulties of the Old and New Testament." A like observation may be applied to "Science and Revelation" by the Dean of Canterbury, on which, as being the only one of these lectures which has as yet fallen into my hands, I propose, with your permission, to make a few remarks.

Dean Smith professedly founds his argument upon that of Butler. But I do not intend to discuss Bishop Butler, and shall confine myself to Dean Smith. The Dean starts by telling us that the duty imposed upon him, is to show that a Revelation is not only possible, "but a necessary part of the system of the world," the word revelation being, of course, here and throughout the lecture, used in the strictly orthodox sense of a miraculous communication from the Deity to mankind. And he goes on to say, that as his programme further joins science and revelation, he feels himself debarred from offering any but a "strictly scientific proof." This, it must be admitted, is a somewhat ambitious opening. The Dean is not merely going to demonstrate to us the antecedent probability of a miraculous intervention on the part of the Deity in the affairs of mankind, but its absolute necessity. It would seem, from this, to be quite inconceivable that God should have framed intelligent creatures with faculties such as to enable them to arrive at a conviction of his existence, and a knowledge of their duties to each other, except through the medium of miracles.\* At any rate, men are not, and cannot be such creatures. And the total untenableness of any such view of God's creation and man's position on

\* The Dean admits afterwards that this is "conceivable."



this planet is about to be demonstrated to us by a *strictly scientific proof*.

It is true, that a little further on, the lecturer, as if somewhat embarrassed by the task lying before him, seems to modify his programme. "My business is to show that a revelation was to be expected; that it was probable, or at all events possible, and, therefore, that the evidences of Christianity have a claim upon the consideration of every right thinking man." And again, "Now the argument which I shall use as my proof of the probability of a revelation is simply this." However, let this pass with the remark, that if the Dean is arguing that a revelation is *possible*, I, at any rate, have no lance to break with him.\* But we must take him to mean something more than this, as proposing to fulfil "the duty which has been imposed upon him," and which duty, as we have seen, is to show—and that too by strictly scientific proofs—that a world of men and women, without miracles to help them, can be after all only a "pestilential congregation of vapours," or, as he himself puts it further on, that man, without a revelation, is a bungle, a failure, and a mistake.

How does he proceed to show this? His argument is, I think, capable of condensation, and it may be set forth, with scarcely a deviation from his own words, in the following terms:—

"In the present system of things, we find no being endowed with any faculties, without there being also provided a proper field for their exercise, and a necessity imposed upon that being of using those faculties. We are in a world in which there is a very exact correspondence between the endowments and faculties of every existent being, and the state of

\* I am, of course, aware that there are those, who, like the late Baden Powell, hold that "no evidence can reach to the miraculous." The remark above made would not be applicable to this school of thinkers.

things in which it happens to be : a world of apparent cause and effect, full of infinitely varied forms of life, fitted in every portion of it to find its own subsistence and to propagate its species. If a plant is not suited to its habitat, nature imposes upon it the severe penalties, first of degradation and then of death.

Upon the animal world she imposes just the same penalties : whatever she gives must be used, and in point of fact, animals do use all their powers, and have to use them all. Every living organization fully possesses all those faculties which it needs, and must use all its faculties on the penalty, first of degradation, and finally of extinction.

But man is a living organization, and must therefore come under this law. The fact confirms this deduction. In all the long line from the Ascidian up to man, Nature has supplied none but physical wants; when we come to man, we find these physical necessities equally well provided for. Man is provided with the means of obtaining food, of providing for his safety, &c., but he attains to these ends by the use of his reason, which at once makes a strong difference between him and the animals below him, just as their instincts are an advance upon the processes of plants; and with the possession of reason there also goes the possession of what we call mental faculties. Not only can man, by the use of his reason obtain food, provide for his safety, and continue his race, but higher ends are made possible for him, to be attained by the use of this higher endowment. But man has higher powers than physical and mental powers. There is another broad distinction between man and all the other inhabitants of this earth ; he alone distinguishes between right and wrong. And as he possesses this faculty, if Nature's laws are universal, he is bound to use it, will suffer from not using it, and will have a proper field provided for its use.

Confessedly there is ample field for using it; morning, noon, and night the question of right and wrong perpetually arises, we cannot take a step in life without conscience intervening. Struggle as we may, the conclusion cannot be evaded, that we can distinguish between right and wrong, that we ought to do so, and that we must do so."

So far, I suppose that you and I should agree generally \* with the lecturer, but without perhaps anticipating whither our assent to his propositions is about to lead us. For the Dean continues, "If so, what follows? I answer, the necessity of religion, and therefore of revelation."

The chain of reasoning which leads us inevitably to the conclusion that a revelation is necessary, is virtually as follows:—"If man is compelled to distinguish between right and wrong, he is a responsible agent, subject to penalties for the misuse, &c., of his moral powers. He must be responsible to some one. That *some one* must be omniscient and omnipotent (or little less) in order to act as Judge of Humanity and to mete out adequate rewards and punishments. As these adequate rewards and punishments do not follow in this life, there must be a future state. If not, there would exist in man a whole class of moral faculties which seem to find in this present state of things an appropriate field for their exercise, but which man is under no necessity of using."

\* I say, "generally," because there are really one or two places in which he either begs most important questions, or else does not exactly express what he means, *ex. gr.*, in the last paragraph but one, "There is another broad distinction" (besides reason) "between man and all the other inhabitants of this earth; he alone distinguishes between right and wrong." A whole school in philosophy would say that it is reason, and reason alone, which enables a man to *distinguish* between what is right and wrong. If the Dean means that man feels bound to act in accordance with his convictions of what is right and what is wrong (the moral faculty), and I think we shall see directly that that is his meaning—he has not expressed himself quite clearly.

Subject to some reservations, I should personally be still disposed, so far, to yield a general assent to the lecturer. It is true that there are some who would not; but I take it that the majority of "educated unbelievers," for whose behoof these lectures are specially intended, are believers in God and in a future state. Their difficulty is with regard to a miraculously communicated revelation on these points. They admit the possibility of such a revelation being made; but they think the evidence, upon the whole, strong against one ever having been made. They think, moreover, they can see that man has been endowed with faculties sufficient to enable him to arrive, by slow and painful steps, at a conviction of God—a knowledge of his duty, a belief in a future state, and a consequent incentive for doing his duty, and that such a *modus operandi* on the part of the Deity is, in reality, far more in accordance with the "analogy of nature" than the orthodox view of a violent interference by the Great Artificer in the orderly evolution of His design. This, at any rate, is the particular difficulty which the lecturer has got before him, and he disposes of it in a single page, or rather in four words.

"Now it is conceivable that God might have given us this knowledge by means of the light of nature, as it is called. *But He has not.* Confessedly natural religion is neither clear enough, nor certain enough, to affect powerfully the masses. Man's nature is fraught with the most dangerous passions. Reason cannot control these passions. To take the lowest ground: as nature has given us moral qualities, moral excellence is a thing as necessarily to be attained to, as physical and mental excellence. But while nature has provided ample means for attaining to the two last, she will not, without a revelation, have provided sufficient means for the attainment of the first. By the aid of religion about as many men attain to moral



excellence as by other natural means attain to physical and mental excellence. Without religion [query,— Revelation?] nature will have broken down."

The rest of the lecture does not add to the argument, and need not be noticed here. The argument is simply this: Every being on this planet is endowed with certain faculties, a necessity is imposed upon it of using those faculties, and it is provided with a proper field for the exercise of those faculties, by natural means. *The one exception is man.* Man is endowed with certain faculties for the exercise of which no proper field has been furnished him by natural means. Therefore, it requires a supernatural interposition to provide him with one.

Such a statement as this requires, I think, careful consideration before we shall be disposed to yield our unfeigned assent to it. The lecturer himself would allow that supernatural aid is not to be called in, in the present state of our knowledge, unless an absolute necessity for it is shown. In this case he undertakes to show the necessity. Man, he says, would be the only thing existing on the face of the earth that would have been a bungle, a failure, and a mistake, if the Almighty had not stepped in with miracles, and portents, and marvels, and every kind of suspension of the ordinary laws of nature on his behalf. One would have thought that man would have been a bungle and a failure, if his introduction into the planet had rendered such contrivances unavoidable, if no adequate field could have been found for his moral faculties except through the violation, or, if you please, modification on his behalf of laws which we notice, in all other cases coming under our observation, to be unchanging and universal. And this impression would not be weakened when we came to remark that all man's other faculties, even those which separate him from the brute (the mental as distinguished from the moral faculties, in the Dean's classification), do find

an adequate field for their exercise in this world, and that by means which are quite natural. Dr Payne Smith, of course, admits this; indeed, it is part of his argument. Take the case, he says, of those whose faculties are most highly cultivated. "Has nature supplied a proper field for the exercise of the mental powers, not merely of Fuegians, but of the most highly developed man? You know that she has." And he instances the arts and sciences, music, painting, eloquence, &c. Well, take any example at random—that of music. We know that man has been supplied with an ear capable of enjoying sweet sounds; and it may be said, without exaggeration, that, with some persons, music is a want, an absolute necessity. The poet tells us that he who is not moved by music is fit for treasons, stratagems, and plots—he is inhuman, in short. Now it may not be inopportune to our subject to consider how this divine gift, among a thousand others, has been communicated to man. Of course, there was a time when it was supposed to have formed the subject of a revelation from on high. Mercury comes down with his lyre and Minerva with her flute, just as Ceres teaches agriculture and Bacchus shows people how to plant vines; interpositions from Heaven covering very much larger ground in those days than they do now, and not having been driven to their last stronghold of the *moral faculties*. But probably no one will now contend that the science of harmony has been learnt by man by any other than a natural and a very gradual process. There must have been a long period of time during which the human ear, so exquisitely adapted to take in and to transmit to the brain the sounds of music, could have heard no such sounds. Even at this day there are populations in the world which have nothing worthy of the name of music. We can picture to ourselves what a succession of ages it must have taken to wring anything like a common

tune out of an instrument capable of producing it. Imagination may dwell on the first rude essay, made, it may be, on the outstretched tendon of some slaughtered animal, which, being accidentally struck upon, was found to emit a sound not unpleasant to the ear; or we may figure to ourselves a savage blowing into a hollow bone with a hole in it, and his glee at discovering that he could make different sorts of noises by covering the hole more or less with his fingers. What a step from this to the performance of the best military band in Berlin or Vienna! The musicians who take part in those bands are the heirs to all the discoveries and experiments in the way of harmony of the ages which have preceded them. Destroy the human race to-morrow and people the earth with fresh Adams and Eves, and everything will have to be gone over again; ages will elapse before such a combination and concord of sweet sounds will again be heard in this planet.

Well, then, seeing as we do, that all the other faculties of man (the mental ones included) are provided with an adequate field for their exercise by natural means; and observing what may be called the system of development in the case of mental faculties, such as that just mentioned, I do not think we shall be altogether satisfied with the Dean's four words. We shall not be prepared to summon miracles to our aid, until we are quite sure that our moral wants are not to be appeased in the same way without them. And if it should turn out, on examination, that the manner in which our moral knowledge has been gradually accumulating, and the faculties of the race in that direction have been gradually sharpened, bears an exact resemblance to what has taken place with regard to the rest of our knowledge and our remaining faculties, I should suppose that our disinclination to admit any but natural causes will increase. Now if it be conceivable



(and Dr Smith admits that it is) that a field for our moral faculties might be provided naturally, I should conclude, judging *a priori* and from the analogy of nature, that it would be provided, subject to the following conditions. These are simply the conditions which attach to the acquisition and diffusion of all other kinds of knowledge—the Exact Sciences excepted—which exercise in any serious degree the reasoning powers of man ; as, of course, from their nature, moral questions must do. I should expect—

1. That the moral truths to be learned would be such as could be deduced from observation of the ordinary phenomena of nature (which is only another way of expressing “by natural means”).

2. That the truths so to be conveyed would not always be capable of a mathematical demonstration, being in many cases simply the solution which the human mind could arrive at as the best possible one of the moral difficulties by which it was confronted, and the only solution which partially or completely accounted for them. That what might be looked for in such cases was man's ultimately attaining to such a reasonable conviction of them, as, if held on other points, would be likely to influence him in the ordinary transactions of life ; and that such a conviction would, in point of fact, have a practical effect in determining his actions nearly as strong as a mathematical demonstration.

3. That the communication of this knowledge would be extremely gradual. In other words, that man being endowed with a capacity for grasping certain great truths, would, nevertheless, have to pass through a very long, laborious, and arduous education before arriving at them ; in the course of which education, he would commit the most frightful mistakes, and fall into the most lamentable errors.

4. That these truths, or approximate truths, would be conveyed, in the course of their gradual develop-

ment, first of all to the highest minds and the most advanced races, and would thus make their way through great difficulties and opposition to the lower minds, where, when once deposited, they would assume the form of axioms.

5. That there would be an immense lapse of time before they would be accepted by the whole world, or more than a small portion of the world.

This, I say, is the only way in which moral truths could be conveyed, if the order of nature is to be observed. Now, the question is, Have they been so conveyed? But, first of all, what are the moral truths we have to consider? The Dean has included them in the following propositions:—

1. Man is endowed with the faculty of distinguishing between what is right and what is wrong.

2. Being endowed with this faculty, he is bound to use it, and will suffer for not using it.

3. A proper field will be furnished him for using it, and in order that there should be such a field there must also be (*a*) a God (*b*) a future state.

Now as to (1) man being endowed with the faculty of distinguishing between right and wrong. No one disputes this: but the real question is, *how* does he distinguish? I answer, unhesitatingly, by experience, painfully and laboriously acquired; and conscience is the product of such experience. A savage has not the remotest idea that it is wrong to kill his fellow savage. A child has not the slightest notion that it is wrong to steal his playmate's toy, till he has been whipped for the act; the whipping being an *argumentum ad puerum* springing from the parent's experience. Nothing can, I think, be more clear than that the ideas of its being wicked to kill your neighbour, or to rob him of his property, or set fire to his house, or make an attempt on his wife, or to lie, or to cheat, or to get drunk, spring necessarily from the formation of bodies of men into settled communities.

They express the conditions under which alone such communities can continue to exist.\* In short, a right action is an action such as, if generally practised, would conduce to the general happiness; a wrong action, one that would have an opposite result; and acts were roughly distinguished by this method before the method was pointed out, just as music was played before it was understood what chords and scales were, and buildings were erected before there was a science of mechanics.† The Utilitarians and their opponents are agreed in the main on this definition of right and wrong: their fight is on another point. It is indeed true that there are settled, and very civilised communities in which deeds, at which we should shudder, are permitted by law. Thus, the Chinese kill their children. This is because they do not perceive that such a course of action is conducive to the general ill-being. We may be pretty sure that the time will come when they will see this. The conviction will, first of all, dawn on the more enlightened minds among them; and prohibitive laws will be passed which will be for a long time fought against by the vulgar. But at last the vulgar will give in, and that infanticide is a crime will become a maxim generally admitted, and not to be openly violated. It is not necessary to add anything more on this oft-discussed point of the origin of our notions of right and wrong; more especially as I am half inclined to think that so far Dr Smith would go with me. His real difficulty will be considered further on. But I would prefer, at present, to take my own order, and to ask—

(2.) If (man being enabled, as I think, to judge

\* I don't want to cumber this paper with quotations. Every scholar will recollect the beautiful account given by the heathen poet of the foundation of human societies.—Juvenal, Sat. xv., *ad. fin.*

† "They builded *better than they knew.*"—Emerson.

between what is right and what is wrong, by natural means), there is any reason for supposing that he could not, by the same means, arrive at a conviction of a God and a future state? It is necessary here to be careful in the use of terms. The Dean, in more places than one, uses the words "knowledge of God." And if by this is meant such a knowledge of God as is capable of mathematical proof, then certainly man has not got it, nor do I see very clearly how he could acquire it. But the question arises, is this kind of mathematical assurance necessary, is it even such as might be expected from the analogy of nature? And this really is one of the chief points round which the controversy between Orthodoxy and Scepticism rages. Now it is important, in considering this question, to observe that revelation itself is not capable of any such proof, nor are any of the great truths or precepts which are most essential for the use of mankind. You cannot prove that it is wrong to kill in the same way that you can show that two and two are four. You can only point to the bearing of human experience on the subject, or if you please to take it in another way, to the moral sense of mankind. Well, then, in respect to this question of a God, the universal human experience is that every effect has a cause. But you cannot *prove* that every effect has a cause. If you and I and a savage were to find a watch in the middle of a desert (to use an old illustration), two of us would be immediately convinced that the watch was the work of a being resembling ourselves. The savage would not. He would very likely take it for an animal. Even when satisfied that it was not, his ideas of cause and effect are too

\* Bishop Butler admits that it is not, and he makes this an argument in favour of the Christian revelation. It may also be made an argument for a revelation by natural means. But I must again repeat, that I am not discussing "Butler's Analogy," but Dr. Smith's "Science and Revelation."



vague and undeveloped to render it apparent to him, as it is to us, that the watch had a maker, the design a designer. The world has passed—is in places still passing—through this mental condition of the savage. Now, “that every effect has a cause” leads inevitably, but only through a variety of stages, such as Fetishism and Polytheism, to the belief in one great First Cause, one great original designer.\* And it is idle to assert that such a conviction cannot be arrived at by natural means, when we know that Xenophanes, Socrates, Plato, Cicero, Seneca, and a number of other persons have thus arrived at it. But it will be said, These were only a few, and the rest of the world was plunged in idolatry, as a large portion is now. That is just what I should have expected from the analogy of nature. The rays of the sun strike, first of all, upon the mountain tops; so must truths dawn upon the most advanced men and the most advanced races. Bishop Butler has, on this head, unfortunately for his followers, cut the ground from under their feet. For it is part of his argument that the circumstance of a revelation being known only to a very small portion of mankind is no argument against its having been made. This, he says, is in accordance with the “analogy of nature.” And surely the same remark must apply to the belief in a God acquired by natural means. We should expect, as I have already intimated, that its progress would be slow and uncertain, that it would pass through numerous phases, and meet with countless obstacles, before being universally or even generally accepted.

The conviction which many ancient philosophers

\* This, it is true, is open to dispute, and I am afraid that to maintain the position in the text would require a separate essay. At present, I must content myself with saying that, in my opinion, an observation of cause and effect will *practically* land all but a few minds in the conception of a mysterious First Cause, as being, at any rate, a solution preferable to any other.

entertained of the existence of a God was based on reason and observation. Such a being was to them the only possible solution of the phenomena which they noticed within and around them. There is no "royal road" to a knowledge of God, any more than to any other kind of knowledge. The intense craving of certain minds for absolute certainty on this point—a certainty which is not to be acquired in any other department of human enquiry—has, from our point of view, produced revelations. But this craving is becoming less and less as civilisation advances, and hence, and from other causes, revelations are becoming slowly but surely discredited. It is beginning to be seen dimly by the masses, that they are not only out of harmony with everything else that comes within our range of observation, but unnecessary. We know that many men have believed in a God without them. The time when the belief could spread was not then. The soil was not ripe for the sower. Wickliffe with his protests against Rome, Montaigne with his protests against torture, Adam Smith, with his free trade doctrine, the advocates of universal disarmament and international arbitration in the eighteenth and seventeenth year of the Christian era were not more utterly out of place, as immediate and successful propagators of their ideas, than Socrates at Athens, with his one God, and in this I see the "analogy of nature" perfectly carried out. But whenever the idea has taken hold of any body of men sufficiently numerous to give them a status in the world and cohesion among themselves, it has never been dropped. Their moral sense has been satisfied by it—a sure proof of its divine origin. There is no instance of a race which has once held Monotheism lapsing into any other belief. The fact that Mahometans, under corrupting and adverse circumstances, have never turned to idolatry, while Christians have constantly fallen away, is mentioned

by Mr Lecky as among the most startling facts in history. The reason is that Mahometans are Monotheists and Christians are not exactly Monotheists. The same remark applies to the Jews, who, although in the early days of their history, and before their belief in one God was clearly defined, they lapsed temporarily into the worship of strange Deities, have now for near two thousand years adhered to one great universal Divinity. The religions which have sought to attract them are more or less polytheistic: Protestantism with its three Gods in one; Catholicism with its three gods and a goddess for the educated, and a more extended polytheism, in the form of saints, for the masses. These latter systems of belief are altogether too elaborate for rude tribes. When instilled, or rather when attempted to be instilled into them, they soon become, if these tribes be left to themselves, something hardly to be recognised as Christianity, as in the case of the Abyssinians.

When the human mind has once conceived the idea of a God, it is compelled, by its very constitution; to personify him and to endow him with attributes. You can as easily conceive matter without substance, or space without extension, as a God without attributes. And they must be such as we have experience of. This is only another way of saying that phenomenally (*i.e.*, for man) the Deity possesses certain human qualities. When many Deities are believed in, there will be a kind of division of parts among them, though even then the tendency of the human mind will be to set up one supreme God—as, for instance, Zeus. When a more advanced stage of thought has been reached, man will invest the one God with all those qualities—infinite multiplied—which he observes to be the most excellent and admirable in humanity, according to the varying estimates of successive periods. He will be, above all things, a Judge, a rewarder of what is held to be good and a punisher of evil; and as it is observed that



good actions are not adequately rewarded and bad actions not adequately punished in this world (or at least that they do not seem to be) his judicial functions will be conceived as chiefly exercised in another and a future state of being. And such a God, who has so revealed himself, will ultimately exercise an influence on the actions of men quite as powerful as, nay much more powerful than, the Deity of the world's nursery tales.

And this brings me to say a word about a future state of rewards and punishments. It will scarcely be contended that a belief in such a state could not have arisen in the world without a revelation; for such an assertion would be directly contrary to history. We know that a large portion, probably a majority of mankind, have had a strong conviction on this subject, quite independent of any revelation, and founded on a natural and well-observed craving of the human mind. A belief in the immortality of the soul, in a heaven and a hell, is to be found not only among the philosophers of antiquity, but, in a crude state, among the vulgar. I believe there is hardly a race on the earth, however low in type, that has not got it at the present day. And it is certainly worthy of very special notice that a strong conviction of a future state had made its way into the world by natural means before any revelation on the subject can be said to have been made. Greek sages held the doctrine at a time when the only people on the face of the earth, who are alleged by Christians to have received a series of special communications from the Almighty, were profoundly ignorant on this, which one would imagine likely to form one of the most prominent subjects of such communications. Nay, there is strong reason to suppose that the Jews (God's own people) derived it from the heathen.

Of course, as in the case of God, so also in this one, it will be said that without a revelation there

would be no *certainty*. In other words, we can't prove the existence of a future state. The remarks I have before made will apply here with increased force. It has been said that a belief in a future state has hardly an appreciable effect upon a man who is determined to sin. Without going so far as that, I will make bold to say that a reasonable conviction that a future lies before us (or say, apprehension that it may lie before us), in which our condition will in some way depend on our conduct here, is likely to have quite as great an effect upon an individual as a certainty on the subject. That a conviction of this kind has been, and is to be found extensively in the world, apart from miracles, is a matter of notoriety: its genesis is clear, it is conformable not only to a natural want, but to all that we can gather of the moral government of the universe. Stronger assurance than this is not to be expected. Surely a miraculous revelation has no place here, even in the "Analogy of Miracles," if there be such a thing. Miracles, I should suppose, are not usually perpetrated, except to bring some truth into the minds of men which could not otherwise have found its way there.

(3.) And now, to turn briefly to the question of man being *bound* to exercise his faculty of distinguishing between right and wrong. The Dean tells us that unless there be a God and a future state, there is no field for the exercise of man's moral faculties. What he means is, unless there be a *knowledge* of God, &c., for God and futurity might conceivably exist, without our having a suspicion of their existence, in which case there would not be any such field, or at any rate we should not know of any such field. Well, he says, it is the knowledge of a God, &c. which enables us to answer the question, "Why am I *bound* to do that which is right?" "Conscience never asks whether a thing is a sin against society; it never troubles about consequences, knows nothing about

political economy, or political morality either. It judges by a higher and absolute rule. . . . When conscience condemns, it is because the thing is a sin against God." This is really a statement of the old difficulty urged against the Utilitarian school, and which Mr Lecky in his "European Morals" has recently gone into at some length. I cannot put it better than in Mr Mozley's words. "But supposing this criterion of rightness in actions themselves to be adopted, viz., their producing happiness, the question still remains, 'Why must I perform these actions? What have I to do with the happiness of others?'" (Bampton Lecture, p. 322.) Several answers might be made to this question, but in order to adhere strictly to the Dean's lines, I will give this one. "Because these actions appear to me to be conformable to the will of God, and also because if I neglect to do them, I shall very likely be punished in a future world. I can't prove these things mathematically, but I am so convinced of their truth that I feel myself bound to act upon them." In short, if you substitute for the Dean's word "knowledge" the word "belief" (and we know that such a belief can be acquired by perfectly natural means), the man who "believes" is furnished with a "sufficient field for the exercise of his moral faculties," and the whole argument in favour of a miraculous revelation crumbles immediately to pieces.\*

\* The Dean's reasoning may be put in the form of two syllogisms: 1. Every being in nature is provided with a field for the exercise of his faculties. 2. Man is a being. 3. Therefore man is provided with a field, &c. Syllogism two is this: 1. In order that man should be provided with such a field, he must have a *knowledge* (i.e. certain knowledge, or at any rate a greater knowledge than he can possess by the light of reason) of God and a future state. 2. Such a knowledge can only be acquired by a revelation. 3. Therefore there has been a revelation, Q. E. D. The error is, I think, in the major premiss of the second syllogism, which begs the whole question at issue, and in support of which the Dean has only advanced four words of assertion.

I have troubled you at too great length already, but I can't help adding, in conclusion, that what has misled the Dean and other amiable and intelligent reasoners on the orthodox side, is simply this: They have observed, or think they have observed, that only a few men, comparatively speaking, have as yet arrived, by the light of nature, at such a belief in a God and in a future state as I have indicated—a belief strong enough to take the place of a demonstration, and to influence their actions and their thoughts. It is shocking to them to see a whole world left for so many ages in darkness, with light streaming in only on the mountain tops,—“One Plato, surrounded by the mass leading the most grossly sensual life,” exclaims the Dean. They, therefore, hail an intervention of the Deity to make all these things quite sure and certain, failing altogether to take into account the stupendous scale, as to time, of the workings of the Great First Cause, the marvellously gradual way in which all truths burst from their sources, the appalling mental and physical suffering which has been inflicted broadcast on myriads of human beings—for purposes which the Dean and you and I believe to be ultimately wise ones.\* And yet, with singular inconsistency, they invoke this identical gradual dissemination of truth as an argument when defending their own side of the question, where it figures as a very weak argument indeed. I have mentioned Bishop Butler in passing: there is another Bishop, a lecturer in this series, whose

\* To take a familiar example, how many thousands of innocent human beings have been tortured and killed as witches, before it came to be known, first to the highest minds, then to the bulk of the educated, last of all to the vulgar—if yet indeed to the vulgar, even in England—that there is not such a thing in the world as witchcraft? And yet there have been no miracles to enlighten mankind on this point. The only recorded miracles have, unfortunately, tended to keep up the delusion.



contribution has only this moment met my eye. His lecture is called "The gradual development of revelation." At page 22 he writes, "The conclusions of science, and even the guesses of scientific men, . . . tend to make untenable any objections to the revelation of God contained in Scripture, on the ground of the gradual manner in which that revelation is alleged to have been made." And again, page 18, "When we look to nature it is impossible not to be struck by this fact, namely, that gradualness of development appears to be a universal law," &c., &c. This argument has to be pressed, because the awkward fact has to be met, that probably not one-thousandth part of the human beings who have existed on this planet have ever heard of the Revelation which is supposed to have been made for the general benefit:—that is to say, only an infinitesimal portion of mankind have ever had "a field furnished for the exercise of their moral qualities."! Hence, revelations are represented as being likely to follow the analogy of nature, in being gradual. The answer to this, and to a good deal of the two Bishops' reasoning, seems to me to lie on the surface. Revelations are, from their very character, outside all ordinary laws, and cannot be expected to conform to those laws, of which they are, in point of fact, a seeming violation. If they be part of a "higher law," we, who know nothing of that higher law, cannot predicate of it that it is gradual in its operations.

On the other hand, this "gradualness," as the Bishop calls it, may be made a real weapon in the hands of the upholders of a natural development of moral truths and moral knowledge. You would expect such a development to follow natural laws, and to be very gradual indeed. Hence the fact, that as yet very few persons in the world have arrived at a conviction of a God and a future state by natural means, if such a fact can be shown, would be no argument against these truths being capable of being

imparted by such natural means. It could only show that the rate of progress has been slow, which we admit.

In short, I fail to see that the Dean has shown the necessity of a revelation—much less that he has shown it by a “strictly scientific proof.” And, if he has not done this, if he has failed in his object, then, although he has delivered a very interesting lecture, he cannot be said to have advanced the cause of the Christian Evidence Society.

I send you this hurried letter, written under a press of other engagements, as my protest against the Dean's assumptions. You are quite welcome to make what use of it you like, if you should think it calculated, in its rough state, to be of any use at all.

Believe me,

Yours sincerely,

M. P.

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