

THE  
MIRACLES OF CHRISTIAN  
BELIEF

A REPLY TO THE REV. FRANK BALLARD'S  
"MIRACLES OF UNBELIEF"

BY  
CHARLES WATTS

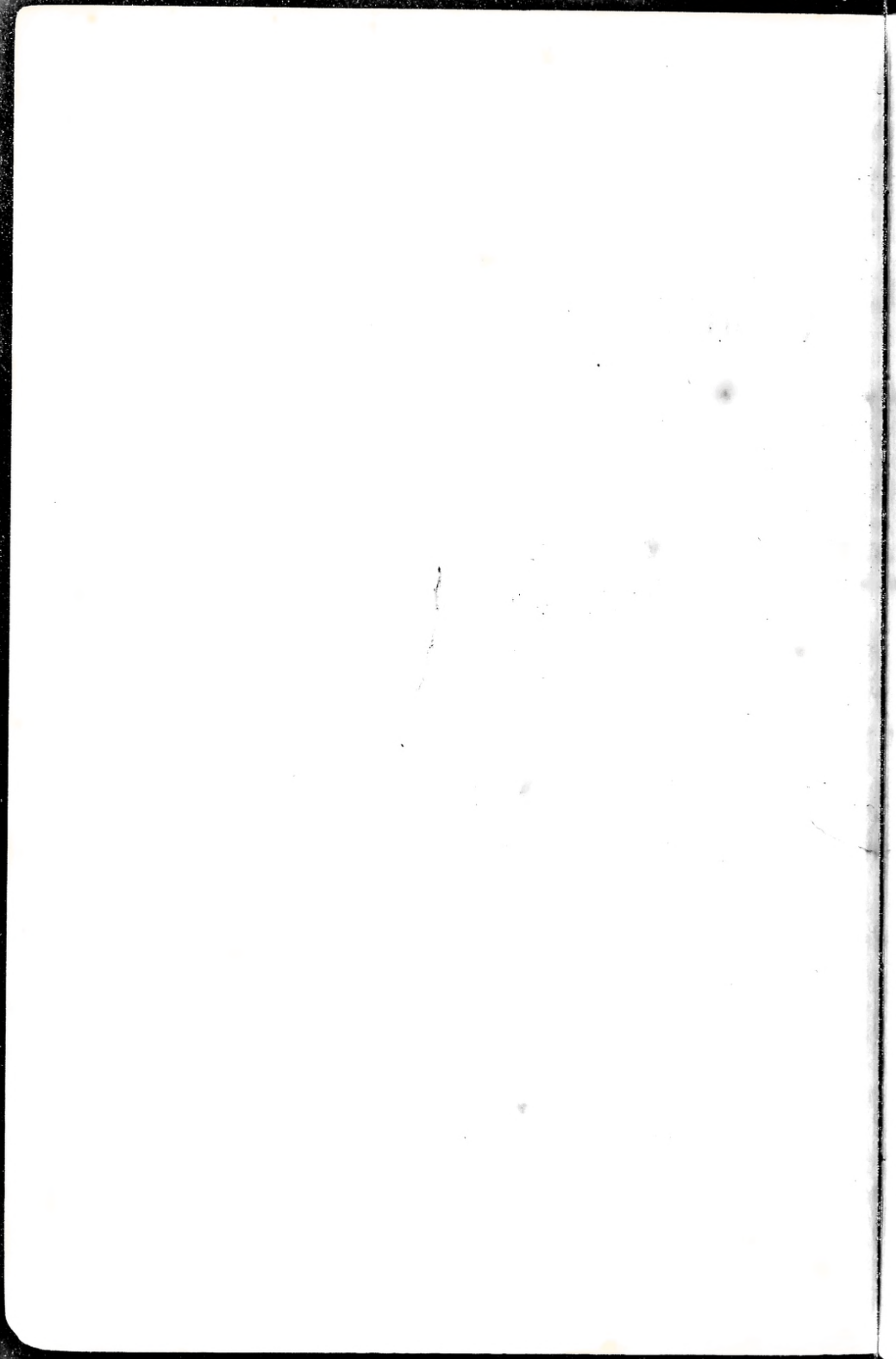
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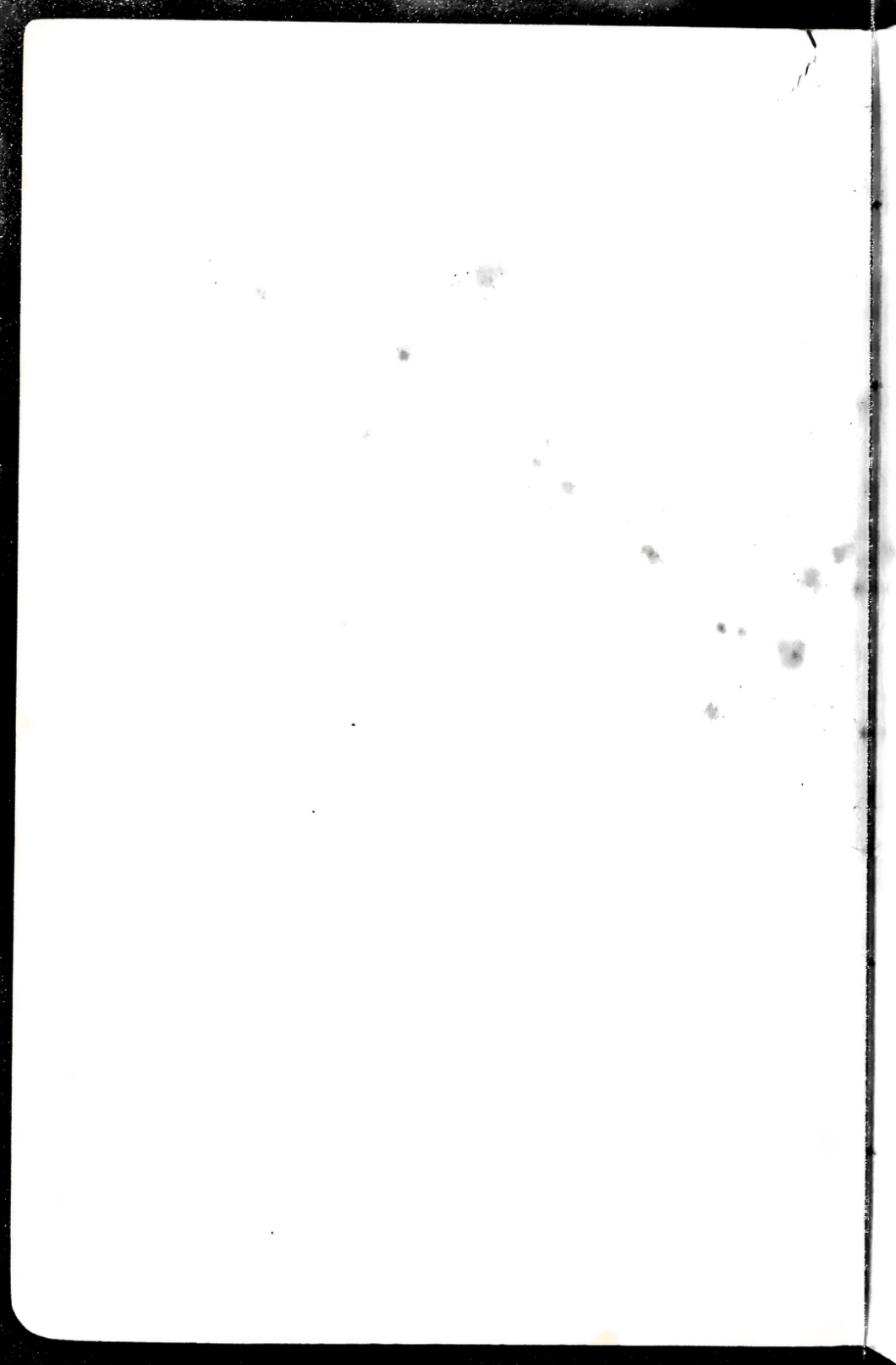
NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY



# NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

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## PREFACE

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DURING the past year a second edition of *The Miracles of Unbelief*, by the Rev. F. Ballard, M.A., B.Sc., F.R.M., etc., was published. The work is no doubt by far the best exposition and defence of Christian claims that has been made in recent times. Differing as I am bound to do from most of the author's conclusions, I the more readily admit the ability and the apt method he has displayed in dealing with his subject. It was not Mr. Ballard's fault that he was unable to perform a "miracle," and to prove error to be truth. Whatever argumentative defects there are in his work may be attributed rather to the subject than to the treatment thereof.

The principal drawback of Mr. Ballard's efforts is that he assumes that the Christian claims are proved to be true; whereas the truth is that most of them are still disputed even by professed Christians themselves. It is a serious objection to Christian propagandists that, as a rule, they positively assume they have upon their side "the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth." Mr. Ballard is

no exception, for he also commits this mistake. Hence, on page 25, he writes :—

The first grave charge brought by Christian faith against all forms of modern unbelief is, not that they are plain proofs of moral depravity, but that they do unquestionably exhibit mental obliquity.

Here in the last affirmation is a manifestation of dogmatism, which it is always wise to avoid, but particularly when dealing with controversial subjects. Could not the Unbeliever retort with equal force by saying that the various and contradictory forms of belief “unquestionably exhibit mental obliquity”? The man whose mind is so warped by prejudice that he thinks he is infallibly right in his speculative views, and that those who differ from him must necessarily be wrong, is incapable of fairly judging the *pros* and *cons.* of disputed questions.

As to the value of Mr. Ballard's numerous authorities, it should be borne in mind that in most cases the passages quoted are but the opinions of the various writers referred to, and the value of such opinions depends chiefly upon the facts (if any) which support them. At one period in our history plenty of authorities could be, and indeed were, cited in favour of the fallacy of the earth being flat and of the reality of witchcraft. Such authorities, however, did not prove the truth of these delusions, although they were endorsed by the Christian Church.

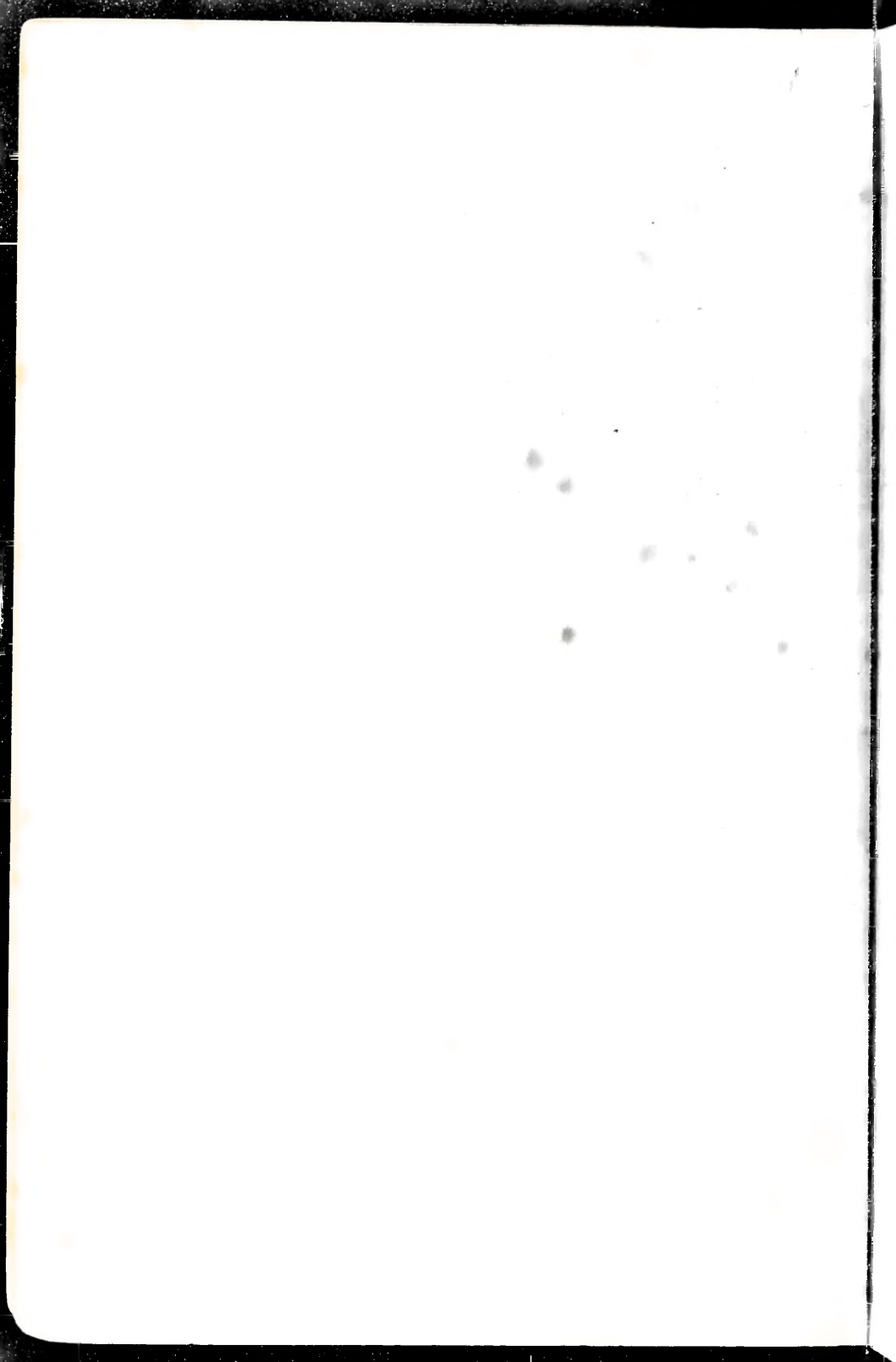
In submitting the following unpretentious pages to the reader, I wish it to be understood that they are penned in no spirit of bigotry or arrogance.



They simply contain a record of my honest convictions, which are arrived at as the result of over forty years' careful study. Whether or not my conclusions are legitimate must be left for those to decide who do me the honour of reading what I have written. Further, I desire it to be borne in mind that no attempt is made to reply to the whole of Mr. Ballard's book, for to do that would require more space than I have at my command. My purpose has been to take a few of his leading positions, and to endeavour to show from a Rationalist standpoint that his arguments are defective, and therefore inconclusive. I hope also to demonstrate that the miracles (or difficulties) of Christian belief are far greater than those which are said to pertain to unbelief.

C. W.

*February, 1902.*



THE  
MIRACLES OF CHRISTIAN BELIEF

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CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTORY

THE two mental forces which now, more than ever, occupy intelligent minds are known by the terms Belief and Unbelief. Mr. Ballard, in his book, uses these words, in a limited sense, as applying only to the teachings of the New Testament. I shall do the same in replying to what I regard as some of his erroneous allegations and unreasonable conclusions. That unbelief upon these subjects obtains is an undisputed fact; the question, however, arises, Have Christian teachings a reasonable foundation? In other words, are they supported by truth or by error? My answer is that they are maintained by a combination of both. Hence the Rationalist considers that a dispassionate examination should be made of Christian claims, and of the reasons why many reject them, both by the believer and the unbeliever. No superstition is entirely devoid of truth, and no unbelief is infallible.

Mr. Ballard observes (p. 25): "The affirmation of belief is that unbelief is demonstrably unreasonable." In reply to this very positive statement, it may with equal modesty be said that the affirmation of unbelief

is that the belief in orthodox Christianity is demonstrably unreasonable. The defenders of the former allegation shelter themselves behind the assumption of supernatural agencies; while those who make the latter statement proclaim that, so far as is known, all that exists proceeds from natural causes. Against this sceptical allegation Mr. Ballard urges (p. 151) :—

By no "natural" possibility whatever can hypocrisy flood the world with sincerity. No brainless fanaticism can naturally enforce universal sobriety. Fraud cannot, save by miracle, build up through all the ages the pure and lofty temple of truth. Weak-minded and heartless selfishness cannot naturally give birth to an unquenchable world reform.

Now, if this is intended as a mere statement of a self-evident fact, well and good; but if it is meant as an argument in favour of the claims of Christianity, it is the most glaring sophism that ever emanated from a partisan's brain. Who claims that "hypocrisy can flood the world with sincerity"? When and where has "universal sobriety" ever existed? What is "the pure and lofty temple of truth," what is the "unquenchable world reform," and where are they to be found to-day? Certainly not in the orthodox churches, for there hypocrisy and fanaticism abound, while the "lofty temple of truth" and the "potentialities for world reform" are absent. Even the Christian writer, Dr. Dick, states :—

There is nothing which so strikingly marks the character of the Christian world in general as the want of candour [and the existence of] the spirit of jealousy...slander, dishonesty, falsehood, and cheating are far from being uncommon among those who profess to be united in the bonds of a common Christianity.<sup>1</sup>

And Wesley, after stating that "Bible-reading

<sup>1</sup> *Philosophy of Religion*, pp. 366-7.

England" was guilty of every species of vice, even those that nature itself abhors, adds :—

Such a complication of villainies of every kind, considered with all their aggravations ; such a scorn of whatever bears the face of virtue ; such injustice, fraud, and falsehood ; above all, such perjury and such a method of law, we may defy the whole world to produce.<sup>1</sup>

This is not indicative of "the pure and lofty temple of truth."

As to "brainless fanaticism," what has fanned the fanatical spirit more than Christian "sincerity" ? During the times when fanaticism was at its height Christianity was paramount, unrestrained, and untrammelled. It was then that the blood, the genius, and the chivalry of Europe were wasted in the seven mad and useless Crusades. In one expedition alone, instigated by fanatical priests, the lives of no less than 560,000 persons were sacrificed. For nearly two hundred years one of the most romantic portions of the known world was crushed and prostrate. The baneful influence of fanaticism was further seen in the history of the Christian emperor Constantine, who, with the sword in one hand and the cross in the other, pursued his relentless career ; when, in the fifteenth century, the blood of defenceless Protestants flowed in the streets of Paris ; in the valleys of Piedmont, which were the scene of a most inhuman butchery, when women were suffocated by hundreds in confined caves by professed Christians ; and, finally, in the history of the Inquisition, to whose power three millions of lives were sacrificed in one century.

Mr. Ballard is quite right in not condemning unbelief in consequence of the "rabid utterances" of some of its advocates. Unfortunately, no system

<sup>1</sup> *Sermons*, vol. xii., p. 223.

is free from enthusiastic "friends," and Christianity is no exception. It has been my misfortune to listen, in Hyde Park and in other places, to Christian speakers who have used the most "rabid" language towards their opponents. No words of mine can be sufficiently strong in denouncing such vulgar advocacy, let it be indulged in on which side it may. Men who cannot defend belief or unbelief without employing scurrilous language should not attempt to espouse any cause. They are an incubus to all movements, a disgrace to themselves, and a hindrance to the attainment of truth. Abuse is not argument, and vituperation is not reason. In the following pages the fact will not be overlooked that no one man, nor any one system, monopolises all truth. It is equally necessary to bear in mind that all persons are entitled to their own views, however much they may differ from traditional belief. It is this spirit of justice and consideration due to those whose views do not accord with my own that will influence me in the following examination of some of the difficulties of Christianity. Personally, I prefer the use of the term "difficulties" rather than that of "miracles," because much confusion and misapprehension, and many contradictory views, obtain as to what the latter word signifies; but, as Mr. Ballard selected the word "miracles," I have also used it for the purpose of showing that, while it may be figuratively applied to belief in Christian supernaturalism, it has no sort of applicability to unbelief in Christianity.

It is not only admitted that unbelief extensively exists, but Mr. Ballard confesses that the Christian Church has failed to successfully grapple with it. He boldly states that "Christian preaching" is not

in touch with the requirements of the present time. The principle that "reason should precede belief," he says, is, in the Churches, "more honoured in the breach than in the observance"; and he asks: "As a matter of fact, are not statements allowed to pass unchallenged in the pulpit which would anywhere else be subject to immediate and rigorous discussion?" He tells us that "the pulpit itself may sometimes truly, even if unkindly, be called a 'coward's castle,'" and that "Christian teachers are content to ensconce themselves behind legal protection, and simply assume that all who differ from them are either weak or wicked." This, no doubt, is quite true; and it is a marked evidence of Mr. Ballard's "unbelief" that he has the courage to censure such a method. He states, as a result of such Christian preaching, that there are

in London alone some four millions of human beings unassociated with any Christian Church, and a like proportion of "outsiders" in all the other great cities throughout the realm.... In England, confessedly the most Christian nation on earth, three-quarters of the population are apparently unconvinced of the Deity of Christ, with all that flows from it, especially the supreme present import of His message to mankind.—(Pp. 17 and 19.)

It is no marvel that Mr. Ballard notes the "revival of Rationalism and the tendency of sceptical thought to-day."

Upon these and similar facts Mr. Ballard bases the three following significant truths:—

(1) That there are around the churches on every hand vast numbers of men and women who are manifestly "out of touch" with Christian sanctions and institutions. (2) These are, to a large extent, not kept away from Christian associations through moral indifference, or practical hindrances, or social engrossments, so much as for reasons sufficiently intellectual to be truly described as "difficulties" in regard

to "orthodox" Christian doctrine. (3) The neutral and hesitant spirit thus manifest shows every sign of increasing rather than diminishing with the advent of the twentieth century.—(Introductory, p. 9.)

Such is the reverend gentleman's statement of the present position of Unbelief. It now becomes my duty to examine some of the reasons he gives in favour of what he terms "The Miracles of Unbelief."



## CHAPTER II.

### WHAT ARE MIRACLES ?

THE value of Mr. Ballard's book depends chiefly upon what is meant by the term "miracles." It is not quite clear whether he regards them as purely natural events, or as the productions of an alleged supernatural power. Like most questions upon which nothing is really known, miracles have been the subject of the most diversified speculations. Passing over the earlier attempts to define their meaning, we find such writers as M. Priaux, Dr. Middleton, Dr. Wardlaw, Dr. Pye Smith, Bishop Watson, Rev. Dr. Gladstone, Professor Stewart, and others, giving their explanations of the miraculous, but no definite and uniform answer has been vouchsafed to the question: What is a miracle ?

Dr. Johnson defined a miracle to be "an act performed by a supernatural power which is above natural power." But here the difficulty arises, that if we see an act performed, and we do not know the cause or causes of that act, how can we tell that it is not the result of natural power ?

Professor Pflaiderer, of Berlin, states: "It is the axiom of physical science that every event in space and time stands under the absolute sovereignty of the law of causation. The chain of cause and effect, therefore, can never be interrupted by supernatural acts or 'miracles.'"

Mr. Ballard says (p. 38) : " The very essence of the thesis of the following pages is that miraculous Christianity is demonstrably far more natural than non-natural." After such a statement as this it was only reasonable to expect that the writer would be explicit in stating what he meant by the term " miraculous." He has, however, been exceedingly reticent and non-committal upon this point, contenting himself principally with stating what he considers a miracle is not, rather than with what it is. His allegation " that miraculous Christianity is demonstrably far more natural than non-natural " is somewhat obscure, and savours more of the pulpit than of the study. Of course, in the strictest sense of the word, all events and systems are natural, but that does not prove that " miraculous Christianity " comes in the same category. For instance, so far as I am aware, there are no known natural processes by which a child could be born without a father ; a legion of devils extracted from a physical body ; or a dead man restored to life after decomposition had commenced. Yet this is a part of " miraculous Christianity," though it requires no miracle to enable a person to disbelieve it, for, as Dr. Middleton observes : " No force of testimony can alter the nature of things."

It is no definition to say, as Mr. Ballard does, that " a supernatural miracle " is " a vivid manifestation of Divine energy." This is only adding to the dilemma, unless the information is vouchsafed as to what this energy is, and how it can be recognised. Further, supposing it to exist, wherein does it differ from human energy, and how can the one be differentiated from the other ? It is well known that a man apparently drowned may be resuscitated, a man who

is dumb may be enabled to articulate, and a man who is blind may have his sight restored ; but all this is achieved by natural means. To urge that a miracle is " a manifestation of Divine energy " is to impugn the usual attributes ascribed by orthodox believers to God, whose acts should always be all-good and all-wise. If, therefore, it was good and wise for him to display " Divine energy " two thousand years ago, it would be equally so for him to do the same at the present day. Thus, so long as he withholds his " Divine energy," so long will he deprive his children of the advantages of his practical solicitude. To urge that an act of God may be good and necessary at one time, and not at another, is to reduce his government to the level of that of man, and to admit that the " Divine " economy is neither perfect nor uniform. Besides, granting the existence of God, all sequences were arranged by him. If arranged by him, they were so arranged from eternity ; anything, therefore, acting contrary to that arrangement was either the result of an after-plan on God's part, in which case he was not all-wise and immutable, or, on the other hand, the arrangement took place in spite of God—in that case he was not all-powerful. But is not Mr. Ballard confounding superhuman with supernatural power ? All forces in nature that are more potent than those possessed by man are superhuman ; but that does not prove they are supernatural. That it was thought possible to work miracles through an agency antagonistic to " Divine energy " is evident both from the Old and New Testaments (see Deuteronomy xiii. 1-2 ; Matthew xii. 27, xxiv. 24 ; Mark ix. 38 ; and Acts viii. 9-10). In these instances we have a record of such great " signs and wonders " having

taken place "that, if it were possible, they should deceive the very elect." The power at work, however, was not "Divine energy," but the very opposite to what it is supposed to be; and in one case it was displayed through the medium of a "beast," who possessed such marvellous powers that he deceived "them that dwelt upon the earth by the means of those miracles which he had power to do" (Revelation xiii. 13-14). It is also alleged that sorcery and witchcraft were so successful in producing "signs and wonders" that "all gave heed, from the least to the greatest." This is more than can be said of Christ, of whom it is stated: "Though he had done so many miracles before them, yet they believed not on him" (John xii. 37).

Mr. Ballard says (p. 106): "The reality of miracles, then, so far as they are involved in Christian faith, is purely a question of evidence." This may fairly be admitted, and it is the absence of this very evidence that renders unbelief towards them inevitable. If a man says he has seen a miracle, and that, therefore, he knows from experience that the supernatural does exist, and he brings a dozen persons to verify his statement, what are we to do? A moment's reflection may show that the testimony is unimpeachable, while the conclusion is perfectly erroneous. The event which he describes may have happened; but how is it to be proved to be a miracle? The forces operating in its production may be to him unknown; he may never have seen them in operation before—indeed, they may be new to all mankind; but, still, his evidence could simply vouch for the fact, and the cause should be a matter for inquiry. The thing no doubt happened in nature, for no expe-

rience can extend beyond that; and the assertion that the forces producing it were supernatural is a gratuitous one, and not only not supported by the laws of evidence, but utterly opposed to everything that we know. Of course, there is a region in which speculation may be tolerated; but it must be tolerated as speculation—nothing more. The misfortune is that those, as a rule, who indulge in speculation make their theories do duty as facts. They not only invest their ideas with the importance of legitimate deductions from facts, but they give to them the value of the facts themselves.

Bishop Douglas says: "We may expect miracles to be false, the account of which was not published at the time and place of their alleged occurrence."<sup>1</sup> Now, it is an undisputed fact that the four Gospels were not written until long after the supposed death of Christ. From them, therefore, according to the above test, no evidence is furnished in favour of miracles. Samuel Laing says: "When we come to consider the testimony of the four Gospels, we are confronted by a first difficulty: Who and what are the witnesses? What is really known of them is this: Until the middle of the second century they are never quoted, and were apparently unknown. Somewhere about 150 A.D., for the exact date is hotly disputed, we find the first quotations from them." No trustworthy testimony of any eye-witness who published an account of the miracles "at the time and place of their alleged occurrence" is known; consequently, according to Bishop Douglas's test, there is no "miracle" required to disbelieve them.

<sup>1</sup> *Supernatural Religion*, vol. i., p. 19.

Unbelief does not necessarily imply a denial of many of the events termed "miraculous"; but it says, if they did take place, there is no reason for believing that they were caused by other than natural means. In referring to the miracles of the New Testament, Mr. Laing writes:—

Of a large class of these miracles it may be said that there is no reason to doubt them, but none to consider them as violations of law, or anything but the expression, in the language of the time, of natural effects and natural causes. When a large class of maladies were universally attributed to the agency of evil spirits which had taken possession of the patient's body, it was inevitable that many cures would be effected, and that these cures would be set down as the casting out of devils. In many cases, also, a strong impulse communicated to the brain may send a current along a nerve which may temporarily, or even permanently, restore motion to a paralysed limb, or give fresh vitality to a paralysed nerve. Thus, the lame may walk, the dumb speak, and the blind see, with no more occasion to invoke supernatural agency than if the same effects had been produced by a current of electricity from a voltaic battery.

This able writer, however, very justly points out that the case is different when we come to the class of alleged supernatural miracles, which could not have occurred as described unless some outward agency had suspended or reversed the laws of nature. He continues:—

As regards such miracles, a knowledge of these laws enormously increases the difficulty in believing in them as actual facts. Take, for instance, the conversion of water into wine. When nothing was known of the constitution of water or of wine, except that they were both fluids, it was comparatively easy to accept the statement that such a conversion really took place. But now we know that water consists of oxygen and hydrogen combined in a certain simple proportion, and of these and nothing else; while wine contains in addition nitrogen, carbon, and other elements combined in very complicated proportions.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Modern Science and Modern Thought*, pp. 246-7.

Enough, perhaps, has been said to show that the belief in the Christian theory of miracles has no logical basis, and, therefore, disbelief in them is rational, and needs no miracle. There is nothing unreasonable in rejecting a belief in that which is not demonstrated by fact; and this is the case with Christian miracles. Experience furnishes no proof that the miracles ascribed to Christ ever occurred, and what is said to have happened in several instances is opposed to all that science teaches. Therefore, there is nothing miraculous or extraordinary in the unbelief which confesses the inability to regard as true that which no one can understand; to accept as verities mere speculations based upon doubtful records and weak traditions; and to ignore the "constancy of succession" which is observed in the forces of nature. The miracle, if any, is how intelligent professors of Christianity can believe in that which reason does not sanction and experience does not justify. With all due respect to Mr. Ballard, it may fairly be alleged that before anyone can positively affirm the reality of Christian miracles, it should be shown what the signs of a miracle are, and then that the New Testament furnishes a trustworthy account of how it was performed. Until this is done unbelief towards them is no miracle, but the result of legitimate ratiocination. In times past the most exhaustive attempts were made to establish the truth of the miracles of witchcraft. Their claims were sanctioned by judicial decisions of law courts, supported by undivided public opinion, and by investigations of the ablest men of the period; and yet, says Lecky, "there is now scarcely an educated man who will defend these miracles."

The same writer observes:—

The positions for which I have been contending are that a perpetual interference of the Deity with the natural course of events is the earliest and simplest notion of miracles, and that this notion, which is implied in so many systems of belief, arose in part from an ignorance of the laws of nature, and in part also from an incapacity for inductive reasoning, which led men merely to collect the facts coinciding with their preconceived opinions, without attending to those that were inconsistent with them. By this method there is no superstition that could not be defended.<sup>1</sup>

My conclusion is that unbelief in miracles rests upon the belief in the constant order of nature, which means that certain phenomena invariably follow, under the same circumstances or conditions, certain other phenomena. That is, reliance upon the "stability of nature" justifies the rejection of miracles as being opposed to the laws—sequences—of cause and effect. And, be it observed, we only know of existence as we discover it to be. We judge of it from that nature which experience and investigation teach us it possesses. Heat at certain degrees will burn, water will drown, poison in given quantities will destroy life, and to believe otherwise is for man to discard facts and reason, and to revel in fancy and credulity.

<sup>1</sup> *History of European Morals*, vol. i., p. 384.



## CHAPTER III.

### THE NATURAL AND THE SUPERNATURAL

THERE is a marked difference in Mr. Ballard's reasoning when dealing with questions that come within the acknowledged domain of the natural and with those that belong to the alleged supernatural. In the former case he indicates a discriminating mind, but in the latter he appears to be tossed about upon the waves of speculation, unable to find a safe landing place. This is not surprising, because in the one instance he directs his attention to the known, and in the other to the unknown. In his preface (pp. xxiii. and xxiv.) he writes :—

No conceivable amount of modern knowledge, no kind or degree of mental effort, can compress into the term "natural" more than the human mind is able to apprehend of this incomprehensible universe. The "natural" rightly includes all nature—both "*naturans*" and "*naturata*"—so far as we can know it. But in spite of all present-day scientific generalisations, and these based on the widest inductions possible to us, we have no warrant whatever for the assumption that the possibilities of the universe end where our human apprehension of nature has reached its *ne plus ultra*. The acceptance of the supernatural, therefore, simply amounts to an acknowledgment of the limitations of our faculties.

Here we have Mr. Ballard's position as to the natural and the supposed supernatural frankly declared, but his statement of fact as to the apprehensive power of the human mind is accompanied by an erroneous allegation and a false assumption. Unbelief does not pretend to have reached the highest

“possibilities of the universe.” It does allege, however, that we have no knowledge of anything apart from, or beyond, the natural. Moreover, if by “the limitations of our faculties” is meant that something “supernatural” exists which we are unable to apprehend, then that is a mere assumption which has not been proved. To dogmatise about the existence of something more than nature is nothing but vain conjecture, for that which is beyond “the limitations of our faculties” cannot be based upon our knowledge, and is, therefore, to us non-existent. Besides, how can anyone reasonably affirm the reality of that which is not known? This would be a miracle which belongs to Christianity—not to Rationalism. Granted, as Mr. Ballard quotes, that there are “more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in our philosophy,” it does not follow that the “more things” are not natural. He admits it “may be” that “everything in this universe within our ken is according to law”; but such a statement, he says, does not prove “that the universe contains nothing beyond our ken,” nor “that the only working laws within our ken are those which human science at present recognises.” My reply to this is that it is not simply a question of “may be,” but one of fact. Science has proved that the universe is governed by natural law, a phrase used to express the constant relations between persons, things, and forces. Lecky said:—

The whole history of physical science is one continued revelation of the reign of law. The same law that governs the motions of a grain of dust, or light of a glowworm’s lamp, is shown to preside over the march of the most majestic planet, or the fire of the most distant sun. Countless phenomena which were for centuries universally believed to be the results of spiritual agency, portents of calamity, or acts of Divine vengeance, have been one by one explained, have been

shown to rise from blind physical cause, to be capable of prediction, or amenable to human remedies... From this vast concurrence of evidence, from this uniformity of experience in so many spheres, there arises in the minds of scientific men a conviction, amounting to absolute moral certainty, that the whole course of physical nature is governed by law, that the notion of the perpetual interference of the Deity with some particular classes of its phenomena is false and unscientific, and that the theological habit of interpreting the catastrophes of nature as Divine warnings, or punishments, or disciplines, is a baseless and a pernicious superstition.<sup>1</sup>

Unbelievers do not allege that there is nothing in the universe "beyond our ken." They admit that our knowledge of nature is at present small, but it is large compared with what it was, and no doubt it will be larger still in the future if we only devote proper time to the manifold lessons which she is always presenting to earnest students. Instead of boasting of our superabundance of knowledge, we rather lament our ignorance; but it is of that which can be known, not of that which is, in all probability, altogether unknowable, and about which it is useless to inquire and idle to speculate. Neither does the unbeliever affirm that the only "working laws within our ken" are those recognised by science. What Mr. Ballard says is, that the laws recognised by science are the only ones known. To talk, therefore, regarding that which lies beyond—if even it were possible to conceive of a beyond—is to indulge in the language of credulous theologians, and to ignore the lessons of modern scientists.

The difficulty of Christianity in reference to the natural and the alleged supernatural, and one Mr. Ballard has not removed, is that its believers contend for the existence of something above nature, and yet

<sup>1</sup> *History of European Morals*, vol. i., pp. 375-6.

they are unable to say what that something is. If the term nature represents all we know, where is there room for this much-talked of supernatural? To believe in anything more than everything may, perhaps, require a miracle, but to disbelieve in that which none of our senses can cognise needs no such aid. Nature, so far as the human mind can grasp, is everything that exists, or that can possibly come into existence in the hereafter—that is, all the possibilities of existence, whether past, present, or future. If it be asked upon what ground is included in this definition that which to-day does not exist, but which may come into existence hereafter, I reply: Because that which will be must be, potentially at least, even now. According to science, no new entity can come into being; all that can occur is the commencement of some new form of existence, which has ever had a being, at least potentially. No new force can appear, some new form of force may. But then, that, when it comes, will be as much a part of nature as the rest —is, indeed, even now a part of nature, since it is latent somewhere in the universe. Nature, in a word, is everything, besides which, to us, there is and can be nothing.

Of course, one part of nature may be higher than another, according to human conception, for all nature is not the same in every particular. We have inorganic nature—that is, nature in which only certain forms of force are seen in operation; then we have vegetable, animal, and the last—the highest of all—human nature, in which forces are displayed which are not seen in any other part of nature. All these phenomena, however, are natural. The profound thought of Plato, Aristotle, and Bacon, or the mighty

flights of genius manifested in the productions of Homer, Horace, Virgil, Dante, Milton, and Shakespeare, are as natural as the growth of a plant, the falling of the dew, or the evolution of a world. The potency of nature is everywhere shown, and its beauties and wonders catch the eye on every side. The poet who has revelled in these, painting them in words which have stirred the emotions to their profoundest depths, making the objects themselves stand out in clear outline to the reader, fascinating and enrapturing his mental vision, is the poet of nature, who finds in the external universe immense food for his highest powers. Even that higher development of the poetical genius which deals, as Shakespeare did, with the thoughts, feelings, and passions of men, does but depict another phase of nature, profounder and more sublime, but nature still. Milton too, who was the poet of the so-called supernatural, has but transferred the passions and impulses of men into another sphere—imaginary, it is true, but copied from the world of fact; for imagination itself cannot escape beyond the bounds of the natural. It is said that the poet "gives to airy nothings a local habitation and a name"; but his "airy nothings" are simply copies of real things, and the location he assigns to them is always a natural one. Shakespeare's supernatural characters are but men—men, it may be, with more exalted powers and higher attributes than are possessed in the world of fact; but they are no less men for that, and the exaltation of their powers is always in the direction of nature. The philosopher whose profound thought shall live while humanity remains upon the earth never goes beyond nature in his deepest penetration into the secret springs of the universe and of man.

The highest attributes which we can imagine are Nature's, for from her we obtained our ideas of what its possibilities are. Our thoughts are in nature and of nature. Our ideas are pictures of her revelations to the mind of man; our sublimest conceptions are but reproductions in mental visions of her doings.

Such is the natural; now, what is the so-called supernatural? In alluding to the "order of nature," Mr. Ballard says:—

It is based, and can only be based, upon that which causes it to be order, and not chaos. If that cause be nothing, then nature is self-ordered, which puts an end to reasoning. If that cause be something, it must at least be something independent of—that is, beyond—the nature which is ordered. That is, it must be supernatural. If, then, there be a "nature" to be recognised, it is because of the order which manifestly prevails. For the very conception of nature excludes chaos.

Now, to use Mr. Ballard's own words in reference to an expressed opinion from which he differs, "more and greater fallacies could hardly be packed into as many words" as those which compose the above paragraph. It is assumption upon assumption, without even an attempt to prove one of them. Surely, with our knowledge of the animal and moral world, it is absurd to allege that there is no chaos in nature. Why should the "cause be nothing" if "nature is self-ordered"? The question is, If the "cause" is not in nature, where is it? Upon this Mr. Ballard is silent. Further, where is the evidence that, if the "cause be something," it must be "independent of—that is, beyond—nature. That is, it must be supernatural"? Truly such fallacies do put "an end to all reasoning." To solve such theological puzzles would need a miracle; but reason discards them as wild speculations which have no basis in fact. It is quite

true that the "order of nature" is based upon that which causes it, for in nature we see cause and effect co-related everywhere. But we know nothing of a supernatural cause, inasmuch as, if it exist, it transcends knowledge. Besides, how can a finite effect be produced by an infinite cause, which the theory of the supernatural implies? Does the infinite in its effect become finite? Effect is probably nothing but transferred force; and can an infinite force in its transference become finite? Before a writer dogmatizes about something "independent of and above" nature, and positively alleges that something to be "supernatural," he should be able to differentiate between nature and that which is said to be "independent of and above" it. If there is a sphere higher than nature, and yet often breaking through nature, nature itself must be limited by something, and the question that at once arises is: By what is such limitation fixed, and what is the boundary line which marks it off and separates it from the supernatural? But, further, supposing such a line to be discovered and to be well known, so that no difficulty could arise in pointing it out, a still more difficult problem presents itself for solution—namely, how can man, who is a part of nature, and able only to come into contact with nature, push his knowledge into that other sphere, which, being non-natural, cannot be at all accessible to a natural being? If the supernatural region be synonymous with the unknowable, it clearly cannot concern us, simply because we have no faculties with which to cognise it, and no powers capable of penetrating into its profound depths. In this case, as far as we are concerned, there is practically no supernatural, for none can operate on that sphere in which man lives

and moves and displays his varied, and in some respects marvellous, powers. Professor Huxley thought that every discovery in science pushed the supernatural farther from us, by extending the boundary of human knowledge of nature.

Mr. Ballard endorses Dr. Wace's opinion that the history of Christianity cannot be explained upon natural grounds. To some extent this is true, for many events recorded in the Bible are incapable of *any* satisfactory explanation. Take the account of the creation of man, his fall, and the orthodox notion of his redemption through the death of Christ. Who can explain these figments upon the hypothesis that they relate the actions of an omnipotent, all-wise, and good God? They are inexplicable from a natural standpoint, since no human being would wish to be responsible for any one of them; for the good reason that the first represents a palpable failure, the second a glaring act of injustice, and the third a cruel and unjust sacrifice of the innocent for the guilty. To believe such occurrences to have been the work of a good God who could have avoided them, but did not, may require a miracle, while the disbelief of them is so evidently reasonable that in this the twentieth century the more intelligent minds, both in and out of the Church, manifest their utter unbelief in the literal accuracy of the stories. The theory of evolution, the avowed unbelief that death originated in the sin of Adam, and that on the cross Christ satisfied the demands of his Father, have replaced the belief in special creation, the orthodox idea of the Fall of Man, and the vicarious doctrine of the Atonement. Then no reasonable explanation has been given of the alleged virgin birth; of the temptation of Jesus by the devil; of Christ



riding into Jerusalem upon a colt and an ass; of saints who slept in their graves, rising and entering the holy city; of Jesus allowing a legion of devils to enter "about two thousand" swine, causing them to run into the sea and be choked; and of Christ, after partaking of broiled fish, ascending bodily "up into heaven," although St. Paul says "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God." Who really believes in these Christian stories to-day? Very few, except some illiterate, but no doubt sincere, professors of Christianity. And yet Mr. Ballard says: "The miracles of unbelief would be immeasurably more 'difficult' in all respects than those of belief."<sup>1</sup> Oh, Consistency, where is thy blush?

Those who cannot accept the claims put forward on behalf of Christianity have often pointed out as an historical fact that the testimony of the early adherents of the Christian faith is not to be too much relied upon in consequence of their lack of knowledge, and of the critical faculty of investigation, inasmuch as sincerity is no guarantee of truth. Ability to correctly understand what we see is required to make the belief in it valuable. Mr. Ballard, however, in dealing with the moral aspect of Christianity, appears to consider that lack of mental ability does not deteriorate the value of the supernatural claims. On the contrary, he deems it a proof of the miraculous, for he says:—

If from out the uninspired bosoms of men most ignorant and superstitious there should spring a system of morality so sublime as to elicit in after ages the profoundest admiration of the greatest minds, and wring out of noblest hearts the confession that it was above their highest aspirations after goodness...it becomes manifest that, the facts being as they are, the withdrawal of the supernatural as an

<sup>1</sup> P. 211.

explanation of the origin and development of Christian morality serves only to intensify the miracle.<sup>1</sup>

Here is another instance of how easy it is to mislead people who have theological proclivities. For a writer of Mr. Ballard's ability to urge what is alleged in the above citation "serves only to intensify the miracle" of Christian belief. Where is the system of sublime morality to which he refers? If in the New Testament, then its ethics are attributed to Christ, not to his uninformed and superstitious followers. But Mr. Ballard should remember the morality, such as it was, that Christ taught did not originate with him; it emanated from the human mind long before his time, and he only adopted the ethical teachings which he found already in existence. Moreover, judged by the standard of modern requirements, many of the moral inculcations of the New Testament are too vague and impracticable to be of service to-day. Hence it would be a miracle to find them now in force, except in a few isolated instances where attempts are made to partially adopt them.

So far as we can reasonably judge, morality was of natural origin, and has been developed by natural means. It came not from heaven, but from earth; not from God, but from man. Its sanctions belong to no supernatural religion, but arise from that natural force which springs from cultivated human nature. Lecky tells us that in Greece and Rome prior to the advent of Christianity a sense of duty, a love of truth, an exaltation of virtue, and a recognition of the brotherhood of man were as greatly manifested as at any subsequent period

<sup>1</sup> Pp. 239-40.

by the Christian Church. Speaking of Rome, he writes:—

The habits of men were unaffected, frugal, honourable, and laborious. A stern discipline pervaded all ages and classes of society; the will was trained to an almost unexampled degree to repress the passions, to endure suffering and opposition, to tend steadily and fearlessly towards an unpopular end. A sense of duty was very widely diffused, and a deep attachment to the interests of the city became the parent of many virtues. . . . On the one hand, we find a system of ethics, of which, when we consider the range and beauty of its precepts, the sublimity of the motives to which it appealed, and its perfect freedom from superstitious elements, it is not too much to say that, though it may have been equalled, it has never been surpassed.<sup>1</sup>

John Stuart Mill, in his work upon *Liberty*, points out:—

What little recognition the idea of obligation to the public obtains in modern morality is derived from Greek and Roman sources, not from Christian. . . . other ethics than any which can be evolved from exclusively Christian sources must exist side by side with Christian ethics to produce the moral regeneration of mankind.<sup>2</sup>

Dr. Temple, the present Archbishop of Canterbury, writes:—

It is in the history of Rome rather than in the Bible that we find our models of precepts of political duty, and especially of the duty of patriotism. . . . To the Greeks we owe the corrective which conscience needs to borrow from nature.<sup>3</sup>

The highest and most practical ethics that ever illuminated the world came from natural sources unassociated with the much-boasted-of Christian supernaturalism. Have we not the grandest and most consistent examples of moral lives in such characters as Socrates, Plato, Pythagoras, Euclid of Megara, Epictetus, Marcus Aurelius, and many others,

<sup>1</sup> *History of European Morals*, vol. i., pp. 236-7 and 308-9.

<sup>2</sup> Pp. 29 and 30, People's Edition.

<sup>3</sup> *Essay on the Education of the World*.

who will survive through all time as ethical exemplars? What better ethical gems can be selected from the New Testament than the following, which are taken from Rhys David's *Buddhism*?

"Never in this world does hatred cease by hatred—hatred ceases by love; this is always its nature." "One may conquer a thousand men in battle, but he who conquers himself is the greatest victor." "As the rain breaks in on an ill-thatched hut, so passion breaks in on the untrained mind." "Let no man think lightly of sin, saying in his heart, It cannot overtake me." "As long as sin bears no fruit, the fool thinks it honey; but when the sin ripens, then indeed he goes down in sorrow." "Let us live happily, not hating those who hate us." "Let a man overcome anger by kindness, evil by good... the stingy by a gift, the liar by truth." "Let a man speak the truth; let him not yield to anger."<sup>1</sup>

With Buddha, be it remembered, ethical teachings were not merely empty words; they enforced practical, personal improvement. Even the Rev. Dr. Caird admits this when he says:—

Now, it is the singular merit of Buddhism, whatever view we take of the ultimate end to which it pointed as constituting the salvation of man, that the way by which it taught men to reach that end was simply that of inward purification and moral goodness.<sup>2</sup>

Also Max Müller, in his lecture on "Buddhist Nihilism," writes:—

One hardly trusts one's own eye on seeing Catholic and Protestant missionaries vie with each other in their praises of the Buddha; and even the attention of those who are indifferent to all that concerns religion must be arrested for a moment when they learn from statistical accounts that no religion, not even the Christian, has exercised so powerful an influence on the diminution of crime as the old simple doctrines of Rāpilavastu.<sup>3</sup>

Such are a few samples of lofty and sublime moral teachings taught and practised in non-Christian times

<sup>1</sup> Pp. 128 and 131.

<sup>2</sup> *The Faiths of the World*, p. 52.

<sup>3</sup> P. 132.

by those who made no profession of the Christian religion.

Among the first indications we find in human history of the supernatural feeling is fetishism—the worship of trees, rocks, animals, etc. If, however, fetishism were only such as is here described, it would be naturalism, not supernaturalism, inasmuch as a tree, a stone, an animal, a fish, or a bird is each a something pertaining to nature. Such worship, however, was given primarily, not to the tree, etc., but to an imaginary something supposed to be latent or hidden in the perceptible object adored. In this manner there gradually grew up among primeval men the notion of a non-natural—that is, a supernatural—world, a world of spirits, of beings which lay, as it were, at the back of all phenomena. In subsequent ages, as general education spread and scientific knowledge increased, the desire grew to substitute the belief in the natural for faith in the old, doubtful speculations as to the imaginary supernatural.

## CHAPTER IV.

### THE NATURE OF UNBELIEF

THE idea sought to be conveyed by Mr. Ballard's book is that belief in Christianity is more reasonable than unbelief. The author admits "that the New Testament sets before us great and, indeed, unfathomable mysteries. These, in the light of our ordinary experience, may well present 'difficulties' of acceptance."<sup>1</sup> His contention, however, is that to disbelieve the teachings of the book involves still greater difficulties. The fallacy of such a claim will be shown in a subsequent chapter of this work. But before this is done it may be necessary to indicate the nature of unbelief, and to correct a few of Mr. Ballard's misrepresentations. It is not long since that it was usual for professed Christians to brand unbelief as a crime, to persistently look upon it as a sin against God, and to condemn it as an enemy to society. It was the custom of the clergy to declare from orthodox pulpits that unbelief was the great bane of the age, and that what mankind required was a stricter adherence to creeds and dogmas, of which it has been said, "Reason stands aghast, and Faith itself is half confounded." The unbeliever was regarded as a man who voluntarily or wilfully rejected the light of truth; who indulged in error, knowing it to be evil; and who,

<sup>1</sup> P. 32.

consequently, deserved no mercy of any God, and no consideration upon the part of his fellow-man. And even Mr. Ballard—who, as a rule, is fair towards his opponents, and does not withhold all credit from them—writes that unbelief “ unquestionably exhibits mental obliquity,” and that the “ rejection of Christian truth ” is “ irrational.”<sup>1</sup> No proof is given of the necessary connection between unbelief and a deviation from ethical conduct, and the value of Mr. Ballard’s opinion is considerably lessened by his assertion that unbelief means the “ rejection of Christian truth.” It is only the error in Christianity that unbelievers reject, for they are ever ready to—

“ Seize on truth where'er 'tis found,  
On heathen or on Christian ground.”

It is, however, encouraging to know that, although these erroneous notions still obtain in a lessened degree among the non-intellectual professors of Christianity, the more highly-developed intellects of all sections of the community are beginning to recognise the fact that unbelief has ever been the emancipator of the human mind, the liberator of human thought, and the precursor of advanced civilisation. It is also acknowledged that, allied with unbelief, there have been a fidelity of conviction, a grandeur of conduct, and a brilliancy of action that add a lasting honour to the fame of unbelievers in all ages and in every clime. Professor Tyndall remarks :—

If I wished to find men who are scrupulous in their adherence to engagements, whose words are their bond, and to whom moral shiftiness of any kind is subjectively unknown ; if I wanted a loving father, a faithful husband, an honourable neighbour, and a just citizen, I should seek him and find him in the band of Atheists to

<sup>1</sup> Pp. 25, 33.

which I refer. I have known some of the most pronounced among them, not only in life but in death, seen them approaching with open eyes the inexorable goal, with no dread of a hangman's whip, with no hope of a heavenly crown, and still as mindful of their duties, and as faithful in the discharge of them, as if the eternal future depended upon their later deeds.<sup>1</sup>

John Stuart Mill says :—

It is historically true that a large proportion of infidels, in all ages, have been persons of distinguished integrity and honour. . . . Persons in greatest repute with the world, both by virtues and attainments, are well known, at least to their intimates, to be unbelievers. . . . It can do truth no good to blink the fact, known to all who have the most ordinary acquaintance with literary history, that a large portion of the noblest and most valuable moral teachings has been the work, not only of men who did not know, but of men who knew and rejected, the Christian faith.<sup>2</sup>

Hector Graham writes :—

I have associated with a great number of Agnostics in my time, and am constrained to admit that I have always found them happy, honourable men. . . . I put the question seriously : How many Atheists destroy themselves ? Hardly any. How many thorough unbelievers are found in gaol ? How many promote bogus societies and victimise the fatherless and widows ? Alas ! the press too often show us that the promoters of such societies and companies have been looked upon with respect and adoration, and have been Christians of an eighteen-carat stamp.<sup>3</sup>

And it is significant to note that Mr. Ballard in his book candidly says, notwithstanding his above reckless statements :—

It were alike discourteous and vain to ignore, or treat as trifles, the strongly-expressed convictions of unbelievers who have been sometimes as distinguished for intellectual ability as for moral probity.<sup>4</sup>

So far from unbelief being a miracle, as Mr. Ballard alleges, it is a necessary condition of the human mind, inasmuch as it is purely natural. The

<sup>1</sup> *Science and Man*, pp. 27, 28.

<sup>3</sup> *Weekly Sun* of March 25th, 1894.

<sup>2</sup> *On Liberty*.

<sup>4</sup> P. 199.



Christian is an unbeliever to the Mohammedan, the Buddhist, the Parsee, and other religious devotees, as they are all unbelievers to him and to each other. The question here is not which of these systems, or whether any one of them, is true; the point to be observed is that the advocate of each disbelieves in the dogma of the other, showing that unbelief is a necessity, since the various faiths are all, in some respects, antagonistic. The Agnostic is, of course, an unbeliever, but so is the Christian. The fact is, both the Agnostic and the Christian disbelieve in what the other teaches. Why, then, does the Christian consider himself justified in applying to the Agnostic an epithet to which he objects when applied to himself? Probably the Christian will reply that his opinions are true, and those of the Agnostic false. But that is just the point in dispute, and which there is no right to assume; and, besides, might not the Agnostic justify the use of the word in the same way? To talk of unbelief being miraculous is absurd, for it does not pretend to explain everything. Its functions have reference to "explanations" given by theologians. If these are evidentially satisfactory, belief follows; if they are not, unbelief is the result. Besides, while human nature is constituted as it is, both belief and unbelief are the legitimate consequence of the exercise of man's intellectual faculties. Belief should be the result of conviction, conviction of evidence; and no one can believe either without or against evidence, or disbelieve in the face of evidence sufficiently strong to carry conviction. No man can avoid the possibility of unbelief so long as he lacks three qualifications which, at present, do not exist. In the first place, he

must be infallible; secondly, he must be strictly honest; and, thirdly, he must have a perfect system. With regard to the first, no man can profess seriously to claim infallibility but the Pope of Rome; and his claim is not only never attempted to be made good, but we are told that it must be accepted without any proof whatever. In fact, infallibility could only exist in connection with omniscience, because to be certain that one could have made no mistake it would be essential that he should have a perfect knowledge of everything that is in any and every part of the universe. If there be any one fact or circumstance with which he is unacquainted, this very fact or circumstance may contain an additional truth not present to his mind, which, if known, would considerably modify existing views. The second qualification is, that men in promulgating their views should be mentally honest. But it is only stating a well-known truism to say that all men are not honest, particularly in theological matters. Insincerity is the great curse of the Church, too many of its members endeavouring to make people think that they believe creeds and doctrines in which, in reality, they have no practical faith whatever. Unless, therefore, we could be quite certain, beyond a shadow of a doubt, as to the conscientious honesty of the teacher, even his infallibility, did he possess it, would prove of no avail. As regards the third qualification—perfection, the evidence for its non-existence is too palpable and the possibility of its attainment too remote to be worth discussing. There is but one state of the human mind in which unbelief could have little or no place, and that is in a condition of total ignorance. Perfect knowledge would, of course, remove all unbelief of truth; but

X even with it there would be unbelief as regards error. Total ignorance would not disbelieve, because in that case there would be nothing present to the mind in reference to which unbelief could be exercised. Therefore, in spite of all theological condemnation to the contrary, unbelief is no mere miracle, but a legitimate consequence of intellectual activity, and to banish it from the world would require more of what is termed miraculous power than all the supposed supernatural faiths combined can command. X

X Mr. Ballard says that it is "in constructiveness that unbelief has ever failed, and fails still."<sup>1</sup> This is an erroneous statement, based upon a misconception of the province of unbelief. Its failure is not greater than that of belief, inasmuch as it is not the functions of either *per se* to construct anything. Belief may tend to the construction of a particular theory or system, but the constructive work is done by reasoning on the basis of belief. As regards unbelief, its office is to rid the mind of error so that it shall be free to receive new truths. It leaves its possessor without bias and prejudice. It allows the human mind full scope to grow and advance in wisdom, because man does not for one moment believe that he has reached a perfection beyond which it is impossible to proceed. In connection with unbelief, there is always a certain amount of suspension of judgment—that is to say, there is such an absence of dogmatism that any new discovery of science, any fresh thought in philosophy, or any better and clearer ideas in religion, are always welcomed as an addition to the stores of knowledge X

X  
X  
X  
1 P. 381.

already in possession. A calm repose rests on the mental powers; there is, to use the words of Harriet Martineau, a "clearness of moral purpose," which "naturally ensures" a "healthy activity of the moral faculties." The unbeliever, not being biassed by any settled views which he thinks came from heaven, is ever ready to learn and to be taught. There is about him a lofty liberty which is essential to all true belief or disbelief.

There is no lack of historical proof that unbelief has never failed in the performance of its real functions, which are the abandonment of error and the preparation for the reception of truth. Buckle rightly observes :—

It may be said that to scepticism we owe the spirit of inquiry which, during the last two centuries, has gradually encroached on every possible subject; has reformed every department of practical and speculative knowledge; has weakened the authority of the privileged classes, and thus placed liberty on a surer foundation; has chastised the despotism of princes; has restrained the arrogance of the nobles, and has even diminished the prejudices of the clergy. In a word, it is this which has remedied the three fundamental errors of the olden time—errors which made the people, in politics too confiding, in science too credulous, in religion too intolerant.<sup>1</sup>

Lcky also writes :—

Nearly all the greatest intellectual achievements of the last three centuries have been preceded and prepared by the growth of scepticism. . . . The splendid discoveries of physical science would have been impossible but for the scientific scepticisms of the school of Bacon. . . . Not till the education of Europe passed from the monasteries to the universities, not till Mohammedan science and classical Freethought and industrial independence broke the sceptre of the Church, did the intellectual revival of Europe begin.<sup>2</sup>

Thus the lesson of history is that unbelief in the old has ever preceded the introduction of the new.

<sup>1</sup> *History of Civilisation*, p. 308.

<sup>2</sup> *History of European Morals*, vol. ii., pp. 205, 219.

Christianity itself came based upon the disbelief in Paganism, and the Pagans, feeling outraged at the proposed change, called the first Christians not only unbelievers, but even Atheists. Martin Luther disbelieved in the mysteries and mummeries of Roman Catholicism, and the result was what is called the Protestant Reformation. Copernicus and Galileo disbelieved in the Bible cosmogony, with its theory of the heavens; and their scepticism gave birth to correct views upon the great science of astronomy. Modern geologists reject the Bible story of creation, and the consequence is more faith in Nature's records than in the absurdities of the Bible. Christianity owes its very existence to unbelief. If Christ and St. Paul had not rejected many of the teachings of Paganism and Judaism, the religious change which it is alleged occurred two thousand years ago would, in all probability, never have taken place. In philosophy the same thing has happened over and over again, as also in the political world. Thus unbelief has ever been the herald of change and improvement, while belief has too often produced that superstitious conservatism which eschews all advancement, frowns down every new discovery, taboos all change, keeps its anchor firmly fixed in the errors of the past, and considers mildew more sacred than sunshine, and decay preferable to the opening violet shedding its fragrance in the morning air.

## CHAPTER V.

### CHRISTIAN BELIEF A MIRACLE

THE Rationalist regards the word "miracle" as synonymous with the term "mystery," it being used in reference to what the human mind cannot understand. Hence much in the Old and New Testaments which is beyond man's comprehension is designated as "miracle." In the Gospel of St. John we read that certain persons "could not believe," because the Lord had "blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts, that they should not see with their eyes nor understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them" (xii. 40). It is also stated that to some it was "given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God"; but unto others "all these things are done in parables, that seeing they may see, and not perceive, and hearing they may hear, and not understand, lest at any time they should be converted, and their sins should be forgiven them" (Mark iv. 11, 12). Now, if the object of Christianity be the forgiveness of sins and the diffusion of knowledge, to believe the above to be true would no doubt require a miracle. Mr. Ballard writes :—

If, therefore, it be reasonable because of "difficulties" to incline to reject Christian doctrine, it is equally reasonable to shrink yet more emphatically from un-Christian or anti-Christian substitutes for that doctrine. In a word, *Christian facts being as they are*, we are helplessly shut up to the miraculous. The only rational choice is between the miracles of the New Testament and the miracles of unbelief.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Preface to first edition, p. xxiv.

Again, he asserts :—

If Christianity be rejected because its miracles seem incredible, the miracles which unbelief is “compelled to posit” in their place are far more incredible, both as to quantity and quality.<sup>1</sup>

Here we have the usual theological assertions in lieu of facts. The truth is, unbelief in itself has no miracles nor difficulties to “posit,” inasmuch as it does not attempt to account for anything which reason cannot grasp. Samuel Laing says :—

Science traces everything back to primeval atoms and germs, and there it leaves us. How came these atoms and energies there from which this wonderful universe of worlds has been evolved by inevitable laws? What are they in their essence, and what do they mean? The only answer is, It is unknowable.<sup>2</sup>

So with unbelief. It recognises that there is much the human mind cannot fathom; but it refuses to pretend to believe in theological conjectures for which there is no apparent evidence. It avoids difficulties through shunning wild speculations. Unbelief has no mysteries, for the good reason that it refers only to what a person cannot believe in consequence of lack of evidence; while belief has to recognise, in Mr. Ballard's own words, that there are “great, and indeed unfathomable, mysteries.” How that which is “unfathomable” can prove of any evidential value to Christianity is truly difficult to conceive. It is purely an assumption to suppose that unbelief has any “substitutes” for doctrine. It is natural law that has provided the only “substitutes” required, which are facts instead of mere imaginings. It is not correct to say, so far as Rationalists are concerned, that we are “helplessly shut up to the miraculous.”

<sup>1</sup> P. 32.

<sup>2</sup> *Modern Science and Modern Thought*, p. 289.

Belief in Christianity may impose such boundaries ; but unbelief leaves man free to roam where his reason directs in the limitless universe, and to base his conclusions upon the known facts of existence. Besides, the absence of belief in Christianity is supposed to incur certain penalties, which unbelief ignores, believing that honest dissent from a particular theory or doctrine should not involve any penalty either in this or in any other world. The unbeliever agrees with Dr. Mozley that "the majority of mankind owe their belief to the outward influence of custom and education rather than to any strong principle of inward faith," and therefore he prefers the state of intelligent unbelief to that of belief, whose foundation is custom and traditional teachings.

By the phrase, "The Miracles of Christian Belief," it is not contended that *all* uncritical belief is miraculous. Much that goes under the guise of belief is merely indifferent assent, to which reason and investigation have never been applied. There is nothing extraordinary in genuine belief, provided the thing believed in is reasonable. The wisdom and consistency of either belief or unbelief must depend upon that to which it has reference. And here it should be noted that there is a marked distinction to be observed between reasonable belief and personal knowledge. We may, and do, have faith in that of which we have no real or actual knowledge ; for we are compelled to exercise such faith in every-day life upon numerous topics. The point to be remembered is that, if we are judicial or rational, we shall be careful that our belief is not opposed to knowledge. We may, and do, believe in countries which we have never seen ; in the existence of persons with whom we have never come into



contact ; in countless things of which we have had no actual experience ; but, if we are wise, we shall always be on our guard against taking for granted that which seems highly improbable, to say nothing of the impossible. There can be no objection to faith based upon reason and experience ; but without these faith is simply credulity. Nothing is more easy to the uncultivated or infant mind than to believe. Savages and children will believe the greatest absurdities. But, for well-informed adults, it is very hard to disbelieve what they believe, and believe what they disbelieve ; to accept as true what their whole experience assures them is not true. Hence, to the properly-trained, educated, and impartial disbeliever in Christianity, the belief in its impossibilities and perplexities would be what orthodox terms a miracle. This being the fact, the fundamental requirement of the Christian faith—uniformity of belief—is unreasonable, because to some it is not possible. Human beings are so differently constituted, their environments are so varied, and their education so dissimilar, that for them all to believe the same thing would be contrary to natural law and to general experience. Take the children of Roman Catholic parents, who are, in the morning of their lives, trained under the influence of Catholicism ; so long as they are under that influence they can never honestly believe in any other religion. Neither could the offspring of Rationalists, who had not received any theological instruction, accept as true the orthodox faith. Yet, despite these well-known truths, Christianity says all must believe one thing, or be punished for their disbelief. Christ is reported to have said : “ He that believeth and is baptised shall be saved ; but he that believeth not

shall be damned" (Mark xvi. 16); "He that denieth me before men shall be denied before the angels of God" (Luke xii. 9). St. Paul also exclaims: "If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed" (Galatians i. 9). Peter, when "filled with the Holy Ghost," announced that Christ alone could rescue man from the consequences of wrong-doing. "Neither is there salvation in any other; for there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved" (Acts iv. 12). Against such Christian teachings as these it is useless to quote the sensible advice, "Prove all things; hold fast that which is good" (1 Thessalonians v. 21). If the belief in Christ is that "which is good," and if "there is no other name whereby we must be saved," where is the utility of going through the farce of attempting to "prove all things"? To remove the difficulty here involved would, no doubt, necessitate a miracle, or something else of which we are equally uninformed. Even the mysterious doctrine of free-will does not remove the difficulty, because we are told: "For *it is* God which worketh in you both to will and to *do* of *his good pleasure*" (Philippians ii. 13); "Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think anything as of ourselves, but our sufficiency is of God" (2 Corinthians iii. 5); "For who maketh thee to differ *from another*? and what hast thou *that thou didst not receive*? Now, if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory as if thou hadst not received it?" (1 Corinthians iv. 7); "Nay, but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto

honour, and another unto dishonour?" According to the teachings here set forth, the power to believe is not in man, but in God. Therefore to condemn an unbeliever for not doing that which is not in his nature to do is both unjust and unreasonable.

To prove that the belief in Christianity is not in accord with human reason and ratiocination, it is necessary to ascertain what that belief demands. Among other things that a consistent Christian has to believe are the following:—(1) That the universe was created and is governed by a personal Being called God, who is infinite in power, wisdom, and goodness; (2) that the account as given in Genesis of the origin of man and his fall, through the sin of Adam, is true; (3) that the only means of securing salvation is through the death of Christ; (4) that a personal devil was created by God for the purpose of tempting his children; (5) that the Bible is a faithful record of the will and requirements of the Christian Deity; (6) that those of the human family who do not believe these teachings shall be punished in some future state of existence. Such are a few out of many instances that could be cited to show the improbable nature of Christianity. These, however, should be sufficient to indicate to the intelligent mind that the Christian faith is beyond comprehension.

It is not overlooked that many *professed* Christians practically disbelieve the whole of the above-mentioned demands, although they are all based upon the authority of the Bible. Their reason rebels against the absurd and cruel description given of God in the Old and New Testaments; the fallacy and injustice of the Mosaic account of man's origin and fall; the alleged vicarious sufferings of Christ; the glaring

fiction of a God-created devil; the notion that the Bible is an unerring record, and that the unbeliever will be punished in "the world to come." The very fact of the more intelligent professors of Christianity giving up so many of the once-considered essentials of the faith affords ample proof that the religion of the Cross cannot be made to harmonise with modern thought. The striking difference between what is proclaimed from Christian pulpits and what is practised by the preachers and their followers should be patent to all impartial observers. This lack of sincerity, however, upon the part of so many professed Christians clearly not only indicates the existence of a widespread hypocrisy, but also shows how difficult it is for some persons to have an honest belief in Christianity. It may be well, perhaps, to remind those who say they believe, but do not act up to their profession, of the fate of the "evil servant" mentioned in the New Testament, of whom it is said he "shall be beaten with many stripes," and his lord "shall cut him asunder and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." "Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin" (Luke xii. 47; Matthew xxiv. 51; James iv. 17). "Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin." "For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins" (John viii. 34; Hebrews x. 26).

## CHAPTER VI.

### BELIEF IN THEISM A MIRACLE

IF there be such a thing as a miracle, that term can be appropriately applied to Theism, for its perplexities are like "the peace of God which passeth all understanding." Mr. Ballard, in his chapter, "The Realm of Physical Science," presents his first, and no doubt his principal, "miracle of unbelief." He affirms as a Christian doctrine,

that there is one God, personal and almighty, the Creator of all things, the great Final Cause of the whole universe, no less than of this tiny fraction of it which we call our Earth.<sup>1</sup>

He admits, in reference to the "conception" of such a Being :—

It is only natural that we should be baffled in every attempt we make to realise it. To that extent it may be acknowledged that Christian faith is difficult.<sup>2</sup>

Still he holds that this faith furnishes "a sufficient hypothesis" of the origin of all things; that the only alternative theory is "that all things must have caused themselves to be as they are, for no cause outside themselves is alleged or allowed"; that "ultimately the material was nothing and the method was chance"; that unbelievers are thus committed to the hypothesis that "chance, working upon nothing, has produced this universe"; that "the universe must either have

<sup>1</sup> P. 49.

<sup>2</sup> Pp. 49 and 50.

involved mind in its origin or not," and that, "if we desire to be rational," we must accept one of these two hypotheses. Here Mr. Ballard grants that "it is only natural that we should be baffled in every attempt to realise" the conception of God. This is quite true; but, then, where does the "miracle of unbelief" come in? That which is natural needs no miracle. Mr. Ballard acknowledges that upon this point "Christian faith is difficult," which is the very thing unbelievers allege. True, he says, unbelief involves still greater difficulties, for the reason that it does not allow for a "cause outside" nature, but assumes that ultimately the material was nothing, and the method chance, which, "working upon nothing, has produced this universe." While desiring, as unbelievers do, "to be rational," it is not necessary for us to accept either of the two hypotheses Mr. Ballard suggests. Unbelievers do not attempt to explain the manner of the alleged origin of the universe, because experience proves that we have no datum for such a task. Hence, when Christians theorise upon what they cannot know, and dogmatically assert that their theory is the only correct one, Rationalists find unbelief the proper attitude to take towards such speculations, which have no authority in demonstrated fact. Mr. Ballard does not say whether he believes that God created the world out of nothing or out of pre-existing materials. If the latter, these must have been eternal, or there must have been a prior creation; and is not the former an impossibility? How could an infinite make a finite—*i.e.*, could an infinite cause produce a finite result? Or, in truth, how could there be space or time for the finite when the infinite occupied the whole of both? Further, before we can

reasonably accept the theory that God created the universe we have to think of a time when there was no time—of a place where there was no place. Was this possible? If it were, where was God at that particular period, and how in “no time” could he have performed his creative act? Besides, if a being really existed who created all things, the obvious question at once is: “Where was this being before anything else existed?” “Was there a time when God over all was God over nothing? Can we believe that a God over nothing began to be out of nothing, and to create all things when there was nothing?” Moreover, creation needs action; to act is to use force; to use force implies the existence of something upon which that force can be used. But if that something were there before creation, the act of creating was simply the re-forming of pre-existing materials. Here, it may be asked, is it logical to affirm the existence of that of which nothing is known, either of itself or by analogy? Now it cannot be alleged that anything is *known* of the supposed supernatural power of creation. There is nothing miraculous in disbelieving the above Theistic assumptions; while to believe them certainly does not appear to the present writer as being consonant with rational thought. The point which it is desired to here enforce is not whether Theism be true or false, but rather to indicate the difficulties which the belief in its teachings involves. Until these difficulties are removed it is premature to talk of the “miracles of unbelief.”

It is quite true that for every effect there must be an adequate cause. This is self-evident, for if the cause were inadequate the effect would not happen. But it does not necessarily follow that we know the

cause of all the effects we see. Besides, it is not correct to say that unbelievers contend that "everything that exists has a cause." Even Christians do not believe this, for if they did they must also believe that their God must have been caused. Without dogmatising upon the subject, Rationalists admit the possibility of the universe having always existed in some form or other. Surely, if a God of whom nothing is known always existed, the same may be said of the universe, of which much is known. The belief in a self-existing universe is quite as logical a conclusion from the indestructibility of matter as the belief in an uncaused, self-existing God, external thereto. "Cause" and "effect" are relative terms, expressive of the interminable changes in phenomena; and, in reference to the universe, no limit in time or extent is fixed by the scientist who does not use the term "cause" as signifying the ultimate source of all existence. It is to me an insurmountable difficulty to understand how an infinite being could possibly have been the creator of all things, for the obvious reason that, if he is infinite, he is everywhere; if everywhere, he is in the universe; if in the universe now, he was always there. If he were always in the universe, there never was a time when the universe was not; therefore it could not have been created. If it be said that God was not always in the universe, then there must have been a period when he occupied less space than he did subsequently. But "lesser" and "greater" cannot be applied to that which is eternally infinite. In the words of Professor Huxley:—

The whole analogy of natural operations furnishes so complete and crushing an argument against the intervention of any but what are called *secondary causes* in the production of all the phenomena of the



universe that, in view of the intimate relations between man and the rest of the living world, and between the forces exerted by the latter and all other forces, I can see no excuse for doubting that all are co-ordinated terms of nature's great progression, from the formless to the formed, from the inorganic to the organic, from blind force to conscious intellect and will.

X We pass over Mr. Ballard's absurd and erroneous statements that unbelief implies that the "universe, including ourselves," was produced by "chance working upon nothing," and "that in the beginning matter made itself." Such reckless allegations might have been expected from an illiterate street preacher; but it is surprising to find them penned by such an able writer as Mr. Ballard undoubtedly is. What sceptic has ever urged that anything was done by "chance"? Nature, so far as we know, is governed by "fixed and unalterable laws." As Professor Tyndall, in his lecture on "Sound," remarks: "If there is one thing that science has demonstrated more clearly than another, it is the stability of the operations of the laws of nature. We feel assured from experience that this is so, and we act upon such assurance in our daily life." X He also says, in his Belfast Address: "Now, as science demands the radical extirpation of caprice and the absolute reliance upon law in nature, there grew with the growth of scientific notions a desire and determination to sweep from the field of theory this mob of gods and demons, and to place natural phenomena on a basis more congruent with themselves." Inasmuch as unbelievers do not posit any "beginning" of the universe, it is simply folly to charge them with saying "matter made itself." These are the wild, unfounded utterances of the enthusiastic theologian, not the calm and accurate averments of the thoughtful student.

If Mr. Ballard's views of Theism are correctly recorded in his book, we shall find, as we analyse his assertions more closely, that his belief has reference to something which is quite beyond human comprehension. He speaks of an "infinite, but personal, God," who "logically and completely accounts for all."<sup>1</sup> It is then assumed that this infinite God is outside of nature, and that his existence is proved by design. Sir William Hamilton, who was an orthodox Christian, has shown that what is absurdly called "the infinite" is simply the indefinite; therefore it has no meaning when applied to a personal God. Is it seriously contended that the infinite "is essentially simple, unchangeable, impassable, and one"—that is, that it cannot be divided? If so, Sir William Hamilton has demonstrated the fallacy of such a contention in regard to duration. His argument in substance is: Eternity and infinity are one, for eternity is infinity of duration. Now, there is an eternity of the past and an eternity of the future—that is, an infinite duration in the past and an infinite duration in the future; and these are divided by the present—that is, the supposed infinity is cut into two parts. And here is the *reductio ad absurdum*. Either these two parts are infinite or they are finite. If infinite, then there are two infinities, one *succeeding* the other; if finite, then two finites can make an infinite. To affirm that there is an infinite Being apart from the universe is to distinguish it *from* the universe, and to contend for two existences. Before, however, this can be done successfully it has to be proved that nature is limited. To *assume* a limit to the universe

<sup>1</sup> P. 63.

is not *evidence*, because no proof has been given of its limitations. To postulate an "infinite Being" distinct from the universe vitiates the law of thought, inasmuch as the definition does not express likeness, and it negates relation. Of course, it is not here asserted that there is no such Being, but only that we lack evidence of his existence. The unbeliever's position is that nature is ; that, so far as we can ascertain, it is destructible only in its various forms. Is it not, therefore, possible that this nature is the "something" of which endless existence may be affirmed? Besides, how can a Being who is distinct *from* the universe manifest his power *in* the universe? If he does influence nature, it is only when he becomes a part thereof, and then he is no longer distinct from it. If God is infinite, in the sense of being everywhere, he is, as already stated, in the universe. If he is not in the universe, his sphere is non-existence. In that case, where does his power commence, and in what way is it superior to that possessed by Nature? Where is it made visible to us? How are we to distinguish between natural power and God power? Further, if God be distinct from Nature, where is he? And what exists between his dwelling-place and Nature—that is, are the two (Nature and God's abode) connected? If yes, by what? If by a void, what is that? Again, if it be contended that an intelligent power can and does control matter and force from outside the universe, it should be shown how this outside power can be separated in thought from matter and force, and yet at the same time be a perceptible existence. At the most this can only be inferred. Matter being infinite—that is, unlimited—in extension and duration, the "non-matter"

cannot exist apart from it. Neither can it be ascertained how far (if there be any relation) the one is independent of the other, or how the presence of "non-matter" can be even inferred, except by its influence on matter. Is it possible to conceive of the universality of both matter and "non-matter"? To logically affirm the existence of an "infinite Being" apart from the universe, not only must the universe be deprived of many of its properties, but it must be assumed that this supposed "infinite Being," who is said to be distinct from the universe, could operate from without, and at the same time be within the universe. Remembering the difficulties (or miracles) that these questions suggest, it is not surprising that Dr. Knight, in his work, *Aspects of Theism*, should write thus: "The God of the logical understanding, whose existence is supposed to be attested by the necessary laws of mind, is the mere projected shadow of self. It has, therefore, no more than an ideal significance."

The so-called argument from design has long been given up by prominent Theists. William Gillespie wrote:—

This argument can never make it appear that infinity belongs in any way to God; for by no rule in philosophy can we deduce an infinite existence from a finite effect.

Professor Newman says: "Design, represented as a search after causes until we come to a first cause, and there stop, is an argument, I confess, which in itself brings me no satisfaction." Theistic writings teem with refutations of this stronghold of natural theology. No conclusive answer has yet been given to the fact that, if the universe bears marks of design on account of its "wondrous construction," etc., the

same remark can be applied to an "infinite personal God" who should be still more wonderful. If the latter has always existed without a designer, why not the former? An American writer puts the following very pertinent question :—

Did God design the universe? If so, his plans must be eternal—without beginning, and therefore uncaused. If God's plans are not eternal—if from time to time new plans originate in his mind, there must be an addition to his knowledge; and, if his knowledge admits of addition, it must be finite. But if his plans had no beginning—if, like himself, they are eternal, they must, like him, be independent of design. Now, the plan of a thing is as much evidence of design as the object which embodies the plan. Since the plans of deity are no proof of design that produced them (for they are supposed to be eternal), the plan of this universe, of course, was no evidence of a designing intelligence that produced it. But since the plan of the universe is as much evidence of design as the universe itself, and since the former is no evidence of design, it follows that design cannot be inferred from the existence of the universe.

Mr. Ballard assumes that the universe and man are incapable of producing that which we know to exist, and that the present "order of things" could not be the result of certain molecular movements of the elements in nature. Therefore he argues that a belief in "an infinite Being distinct from the material universe" is necessary to account for things as they are. But supposing the belief was well founded, that would by no means settle the question. Taking things and events as they are, it may fairly be asked, are they such as may be reasonably ascribed to a God who is infinite in knowledge, power, and goodness? If he control the universe, then he is responsible for earthquakes that swallow up entire villages, destroying thousands of helpless creatures; for storms at sea which cause good and bad to find a watery grave; and for individual organisms that are imperfect and

blighted. There are thousands of human beings born into this world of whom only few survive, as they appear under such conditions that they prematurely perish; there are thousands also of organisms who live in and upon each other. One half of animal life consists of parasites—that is, animals that fasten themselves to the bodies of other animals, and live by sucking their blood. Those which prey upon men are mentioned by Herbert Spencer in his great work, *The Principles of Biology*. These parasites are adapted to their peculiar mode of life, and are the cause of great pain and suffering to the organisms upon which they feed. Besides this, throughout all past time there has been a constant preying of superior animals upon inferior ones—a perpetual devouring of the weak by the strong. Now, this supposed infinite Being either did or did not arrange that these things should take place as they have done. If he did so arrange, where was his goodness? If, on the other hand, he did not arrange these things, then, in that case, there was a power in the universe that was not his. Such are a few of the many difficulties and perplexities attending the belief in the existence of a Supreme Being, who is infinite in knowledge, power, and goodness. While it is not contended that no such Being exists, it is alleged that we are unable to form any conception of him. Further, it is urged that if, as Mr. Ballard states, a miracle is required to disbelieve the claims put forward on his behalf, the logical belief in them would also necessitate something, as Shakespeare says, “more than natural.”

## CHAPTER VII.

### A STILL GREATER MIRACLE

MR. BALLARD, like many other professed Christians, appears to be under the impression that Rationalists should not object to the mysteries that are in Christianity, for the reason that nature, including man, is full of the mysterious. If, then, it be asked, since we object to mystery in the one case, why do we not do so in the other? the answer is, that the Rationalist's objection is not merely to that which is mysterious, but to the demand that we should *believe* that which we do not understand. To attempt to enforce assent to what is unknown is both foolish and unjust. Granted there are mysteries in nature, and that there is much connected with mankind which we cannot comprehend, we are not punished because we do not profess belief in the one or the other. Yet, as regards the Christian mystery, unbelief is supposed to entail the severest and most unjust penalties. But would it not be a miracle indeed for a man to believe that of which he has not the slightest idea? And is it not strange, if the belief in the Christian faith is necessary for our welfare in this world and for our happiness in some other, that its meaning and injunctions should not be sufficiently clear for us to know what they are? It is not reasonable to infer that an infinite God would arrange a system full of mysteries which he must have known the human

intellect could not grasp, and then punish that portion of mankind who cannot believe what to them is practically without meaning. Such an inference would not be rational even in reference to fallible man, much less as regards an infallible God.

What greater miracle could be imagined than to believe in a Deity of whose nature no sensible conception can be formed, and whose character, as depicted by his own "inspired" writers, is revolting in the extreme? The impossibility of genuine belief in such a God is shown by the fact that Theists of average intellectual ability persistently avoid any attempt to defend him. It is worthy of note that, in all public discussions upon the God question, the very Deity whom Christians should defend if they were consistent they deliberately ignore. Even Mr. Ballard, who has much to say about "One God personal and almighty," is silent as to what the Bible states about him. The reason of this is, no doubt, because the nature and character ascribed to God in the Scriptures are so contradictory and repulsive that it is impossible to harmonise them with reason, justice, and human ideas of what is right. Pleas, even if defective, are put forward on behalf of "advanced" Theistic notions; but to induce a prominent orthodox clergyman to hold a brief for the Bible God would be the greatest of all miracles. And yet this is *the* Deity in whom Christians, to be logical, should believe. If they cannot do this, they ought to be honest and admit that their "Father in heaven" is indefensible. Be it observed, this is not a question of Atheism, but whether or not the belief in Christian Theism is reasonable. For aught we know to the contrary, some supreme power or powers *may* exist, but what it



or they may be we know not. It is, however, certain that the Bible description of God is too absurd for thinking people to believe in without the intervention of some miraculous force which is not in evidence.

Let us now briefly consider the nature and character of the Christian's God as portrayed in the Old and New Testaments. According to St. John, God is a spirit; and St. Luke informs us that a spirit has neither flesh nor bones. Other parts of the Bible allege that God has both flesh and blood. Thus he is described as an immaterial Being who is composed of material parts, a somebody, or rather a nobody; having no legs, yet walking about in the Garden of Eden; having no hands, yet fashioning man from dust; having no lungs, yet breathing into Adam's nostrils; having no tongue, yet cursing the serpent. He is represented as being invisible, yet Jacob saw him "face to face," also "the Lord spake unto Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend" (Gen. xxxii. 30; Ex. xxxiii. 11). He is said to be everywhere, although he had to go down to Sodom and Gomorrah and to the Tower of Babel to ascertain what was taking place (Gen. xi. 5, xviii. 21). We are told he was unchangeable, yet he changed his mind, and "repented of the evil which he thought to do unto his people" (Ex. xxxii. 14). It is stated that he was impartial, yet he made the Jews "to be a special people unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth" (Deut. vii. 6). It is evident, too, that he was very fastidious, for he forbade those who were lame, or had a flat nose or a blemish in the eye, to "approach to offer the bread of his God" (Lev. xxi. 17-21). Moreover, he appears to have been possessed of an evil and mischievous spirit, which

influenced others in a most dangerous manner, as the history of Samson testifies (Judges xiv. 6, 19). The Christian's God is further represented as being three-fold in his nature. The Creed of St. Athanasius states: "The Father is God, the Son is God, the Holy Ghost is God. And yet there are not three Gods, but one God." According to the Articles of the Church of England, the Son was begotten from all eternity, and therefore was as old as his Father. The Holy Ghost, says the Nicene Creed, proceeded from the Father and Son, and yet was the father of the son. This last statement is confirmed in the New Testament (see Matthew i. 18). Here it is alleged that there are *three* Gods, yet only *one*; that the son existed from all eternity, although he was begotten; and that the Holy Ghost, who was his father, proceeded from the son. This is the very essence of absurdity, which no one could really believe without the aid of a greater miracle than any yet recorded.

So much for the nature of the Christian's God; now what is the Bible description of his character? This inquiry affects the very foundation of orthodox Christianity; for all adherents of the popular faith must, if they really believe what they profess, endorse the Biblical account of "Our Father who art in heaven." It is true that many professed Christians do not believe that their Deity was guilty of the crimes, weaknesses, and inconsistencies ascribed to him by the Bible; while others seek to justify his reported conduct upon the assumption that finite man cannot judge of "divine" justice and goodness; it is urged, therefore, that the objectionable doings recorded of God in the Bible may be "divinely" right, although they are opposed to human ideas of morality. The

fallacy of this notion was shown by Professor Jowett, who, in his sermon on "God is Love," remarked: "If it be said that God's ways are not man's, then the fatal principle of a double morality is introduced, and he who represents God's character as above any affinity with man's launches into an uncertain sea of speculation that may swallow him up—is as a person sawing off the branch on which he sat, thereby severing himself from all that upheld him." Besides, is it not folly to ask us to worship a being if we can have no conception of his attributes? If justice and truth with us mean something else with God, what guarantee have we in any instance that we are obeying his will? The character of the Bible Deity is set forth for our emulation. "Be ye holy as I am holy," "Be ye perfect, even as your heavenly Father is perfect," is the language of Scripture; but how can we emulate him unless we are enabled to understand what his character is? And to threaten punishment for not believing in a being whose character we cannot understand is to encourage blind belief rather than the honest convictions of judgment. Mr. Ballard condemns Atheism in no measured terms, and yet the attitude of most intelligent professors of Christianity towards the Biblical delineation of Deity is purely atheistic. Why is this? The answer is obvious. His nature and doings as specified by the "inspired" writers are so perplexing and revolting that it is impossible to reconcile either the one or the other with reason and ethical philosophy.

The Bible depicts Jehovah as one who knows not how to act with propriety towards those over whom he rules; who busied himself by laying snares to entrap them, sending trials to weary them and

temptations to entice them, and then inflicting torture upon them for doing that which it was impossible for them to avoid doing. He is represented as unjust, inasmuch as his general rule was to punish the innocent for the crimes of the guilty, destroying a whole nation for the alleged sins of a part, slaying seventy thousand human beings for the crime of one man, and, further, prompting that one man to commit the crime which incurred such wholesale slaughter. He is described as threatening death to his first human child for one offence; as destroying the whole human race, one family excepted, in the most heartrending and reckless manner; as commanding his servants to commit human slaughter without the slightest reserve; as killing both old and young—mothers, tender infants, and maids—and hardening the hearts of poor victims that they might come out to battle to be utterly destroyed. His conduct towards Adam and Eve, as reported in Genesis, has not one redeeming feature. He placed them in a paradise, where everything is described as being calculated to please the eye, cheer the heart, and enrich the mind; which made the sufferings that they had afterwards to endure the more painful and severe. He implanted within them the instinct of love, and the holy feelings of conjugal and parental relationship, and then caused the birth of a child who was doomed to be a fratricide, making the parents the progenitors of myriads of human beings, each one of whom would be the inheritor of their curse. A cruelty that is more ingenious, if possible, than all the rest—the very woman whom God sent as a helpmeet and a solace to the man is made the cause of all his woe, the curse of the world, the introducer

of evil, and the desecrator of the earth. "Better, far better," Adam might have said to Deity, "had it been that you had made me spiritless and unintelligent as the lowest and most despised of the brute creation than to have endowed me with rational curiosity and an inquiring mind, which, in combination with the allurements of the companion you gave me and the temptations with which you surrounded me, have been the cause of my moral degradation and physical suffering."

Even the manner in which the Christian Deity is said to have acted towards his chosen people reflects no credit upon him. It is necessary to bear in mind that the acts performed by the Jews may fairly be taken as God's, for their government was a theocracy; he was their ruler and guide. He made them a nation, and gave them Moses as a leader. The Jews were God's peculiar people; they were also, as their history testifies, a terror to those with whom they came in contact. From the day on which Miriam celebrated their safe passage through the Red Sea, to the time when the sun is said to have darkened at the crucifixion, they were destroyers of human life, and the instruments of God's wrath on their neighbours. They were sometimes even blamed by their God for not slaying their fellow creatures. Saul, one of their kings, had his kingdom taken from him because he failed, after a war which had produced much carnage, to tear in pieces before the God of mercy Agag, his royal captive. Saul having declined to perform this inhuman act, Samuel, God's priest and prophet, "hewed Agag in pieces before the Lord," and thereby gave a "divine" sanction to as brutal an act of human slaughter as was ever recorded. But now

comes the crowning point of all. God, it would appear, had not had enough of the cruelties performed by his favourite race, so he gave them another victim to torture and to kill. Hitherto they had practised those cruelties on human creatures, but now God gives them himself to crucify and to slay. The absurdity of this deed was great, but the cruelty of it was greater. It was certainly a fitting culmination to the whole story—a story steeped in blood from beginning to end—the story of a body of divinely-inspired and misguided marauders, who robbed and killed from their foundation as a nation to the end of their national existence, who, when they found themselves coerced by the strength of the great Roman empire, and could no longer make war on men, impiously, as it were, scaled the very walls of heaven, dragged down the Deity from his throne, and crucified their Creator in the world he had created. Then the Deity, as depicted in the Bible, “appears on earth in the shape of a man, born of a woman, the son of a carpenter, found in a stable, nursed in a manger, driven about by those very Jews from place to place, having nowhere to lay his head, scourged, tried, and condemned to death for disturbing the public tranquillity, expiring on the cross, and being entombed in a sepulchre.” Is it not mockery to ask us to believe that such a being is “our Father which art in heaven”? Where, in the whole range of unbelief, is there such a marvellous tax upon the human mind as the belief in these Christian absurdities and horrors imposes? The atrocities committed and the reckless bloodshed caused through obeying the injunction, “Thus saith the Lord,” which frequently occurs in the Old Testament, are terrible to contemplate.

Mr. Ballard regards unbelief as miraculous. But what of the belief in such a deity as this? It is incredible that any one whose susceptibilities have not been blunted by a crude theology could accept as true the Bible picture of its God. It would truly be the greatest of all miracles for the intellects of the twentieth century to endorse this combination of folly and inconsistency with that which is utterly incomprehensible. The conduct of the Christian Deity, as recorded in the Bible, sets at defiance all just and humane considerations. It may be well asked, in the words of Colonel Ingersoll :—

Is it in accordance with reason that an infinitely good and loving God would drown a world that he had taken no means to civilise—to whom he had given no Bible, no gospel, taught no scientific fact, and in which the seeds of art had not been sown; that he would create a world that ought to be drowned; that a being of infinite wisdom would create a rival, knowing that the rival would fill perdition with countless souls destined to suffer eternal pain? Is it according to common sense that an infinitely good God would order some of his children to kill others; that he would command soldiers to rip open with the sword of war the bodies of women—wreaking vengeance on babes unborn? Is it according to reason that a good, loving, compassionate, and just God would establish slavery among men, and that a pure God would uphold polygamy?

The rational answer is most emphatically No. Therefore, instead of heeding such primitive and crude conjectures as those formed of the God of Christianity, the unbeliever prefers to adopt the advice of the poet :—

“ Know then thyself; presume not God to scan;  
The proper study of mankind is man.”

## CHAPTER VIII.

### PERPLEXITIES OF CHRISTIAN BELIEF

THE very foundation of orthodox Christianity is the belief that, about six thousand years ago, Adam and Eve fell from a state of purity through a transgression upon their part. In consequence of this act, it is alleged, mankind became depraved, and "the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Genesis vi. 5). It was, therefore, deemed necessary to devise some plan whereby the human race could be redeemed from the result of the conduct of our "first parents." Hence the Christian scheme of salvation was originated, although the New Testament states that the plan of redemption was arranged "before the foundation of the world" (Ephes. i. 4, 7; 1 Peter i. 19, 30).

The perplexing nature of this groundwork of Christianity may be seen by a careful study of the following questions, with the comments thereon:—(1) Did God intend the fruit in the Garden of Eden to be eaten? If yes, then in partaking of the said fruit Adam and Eve were complying with God's will; if no, they acted in defiance of God's intentions, and the evil desires which he had given them predominated over the better part of their natures. Besides, if God is omnipotent, how could Adam and Eve have acted in spite of his wishes? To say that God permitted



them to do so is to implicate him in the cause of man's degradation. Moreover, a good God could not sin himself, and therefore to give permission for man to sin would be to allow him to do that which was impossible with God. (2) Who created the serpent? If God, then was he not responsible for whatever happened through the machinations of this "more subtil than any beast of the field" (Genesis iii. 1)? If, on the other hand, the serpent was not created by God, then God was not the creator of "every living creature that moveth." It is no answer to say that Adam and Eve were free agents, and were at liberty to choose the good and refuse the bad, because, even if it is admitted that they had a free will, it is said that at that time they had no knowledge of the difference between good and evil. In fact, they were so innocent that they "knew not they were naked." Now, while their minds were in this ignorant condition, where was the utility of threatening them with death (Genesis ii. 17), a state of which they knew nothing? (3) How could Eve have known that the "tree" was to be desired *before* she possessed the knowledge which could cause the desire? This would have been putting the effect before the cause; to believe that to be possible would certainly be a most astounding miracle. Further, although God told Adam "In the day thou eatest" of the tree of knowledge "thou shalt surely die," he did not die. The serpent was much nearer the truth in saying to the woman: "Ye shall not surely die" (Genesis iii. 4). (4) Are we to accept the statement as correct that "God saw everything that he had made, and behold it was very good" (Genesis i. 31)? If so, how, and by what power, did the serpent become so depraved

that he spoiled the "good" work of God and brought ruin upon the whole human race? "Therefore, as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation" (Romans v. 18). (5) If the Bible be true, are we not indebted to the devil for giving to our "first parents" knowledge, and inspiring them with a sense of modesty? According to the account in Genesis, before the devil appeared they felt no shame through being in a nude state. (6) Supposing Adam and Eve did transgress, is it just that we should be punished on that account? By what moral law can we be made responsible for actions over which we had no control? A more palpable fiction was never recorded; and if it appeared to-day for the first time, the belief in it would be considered as much a miracle as any marvel mentioned in the Bible or accepted by the early Churches. And yet these difficult and obscure teachings are the very foundations upon which the "national religion" of this country rests.

Supposing the statement made about Adam to be true, it is evident that his original purity and holiness were of little service to him, inasmuch as he yielded to the first temptation that came in his way. Men of the present day, whose natures are said to be tainted with their first parents' crime, and whose inclinations are, therefore, to do evil, are expected to withstand temptation, however often it may present itself. Yet the very man made by God himself, into whose mind no taint of sin had entered, and whose heart was filled with goodness, love, and truth, could not resist the temptation to partake of a little fruit, although he was supposed to know that by yielding to it he was breaking God's command. Holiness is, indeed, worth

but a trifle if it cannot stand a more severe test than this. Purity that could be so easily lost would not be considered in modern times as the genuine article. But the theory is utterly absurd, for no one can pass suddenly from innocence to crime; there must be the inclination to sin before the actual commission. Whence came this inclination in Adam? To say that he experienced it is to admit that he was not perfectly holy; to say that he did not is, as before stated, to make the effect precede the cause. The truth is that the description in the Bible of Adam's state before the Fall is clearly not one of a high degree of intelligence and morality, but one approaching very closely to barbarism.

Rationalists require no miracle to enable them to disbelieve in such an ancient fable. The story of the Fall, with its ambiguous incidents, is simply a reproduction of myths which were current among the Greeks, Egyptians, Persians, and Babylonians thousands of years before the time when the writers of the Bible wrote their account. The Hindoos had their "tree of life," which, it was said, contained "juice" that imparted immortality, and the tree was guarded by spirits. Dr. Kalisch admits that the myth was "no exclusive feature of the Hebrews," and Professor Jowett regarded it as "a grand Hebrew poem." Philo, who is said to have been contemporary with Jesus, accepted the story of the Fall in an allegorical sense. St. Augustine did the same, and Origen wrote: "What man is found such an idiot as to suppose that God planted trees in Paradise like an husbandman? I believe that every man must hold these things for images under which a hidden sense is concealed." We note that these writers did not state

the nature of the "hidden sense" which they alleged was concealed. Most of the leading representatives of the "Higher Criticism" to-day regard the Bible story of the Fall as an allegorical narrative. Dean Farrar writes:—

Christians are not called upon to believe that there was an actual garden, an actual talking serpent, actual trees of which one bestowed the knowledge of good and evil and the other an immortality of life. Such an interpretation was rejected two thousand years ago by Philo, and it has been rejected by many Christian interpreters since—and even by English bishops like Warburton and Horsley. The Bible is a book of Eastern origin, and can only be understood by the methods of Eastern literature. Now, there is no other Eastern book in the world which we should have dreamed of understanding literally if it introduced speaking serpents and magic trees. Even the Rabbis, stupidly literal as were their frequent methods, were perfectly aware that the story of the Fall was a philosopheme—a vivid pictorial representation of the origin and growth of sin in the human heart.<sup>1</sup>

Now, without disputing that this is the more rational view to take, the question arises, How does this allegorical theory affect the very foundations of Christianity? Dr. Ingleby, in his book, *On Law and Religion*, says: "The Christian religion without the Fall of Man has no *locus standi*. It requires, as its very foundation, that man should have been created in the image of God, a perfect and even divine being, and that he should of his own free will have thrown off his allegiance to his Creator by some act of disobedience." This, we submit, is the only logical position to take from a Christian standpoint. There is no miracle that could be worked in modern times that would induce scientists and Biblical critics to believe that the Bible narrative is a record of fact. Their unbelief upon this point is based upon reason,

<sup>1</sup> *The Bible : its Meaning and Supremacy*, p. 226.

and upon a knowledge of the slow but continual advancement of the human race. The history of man has been one of progression, not of retrogression. Sir John Lubbock, in his famous speech at Dundee at the annual meeting of the British Association, arrived at the following conclusions after an elaborate review of the whole argument: (1) That existing savages are not the descendants of civilised ancestors; (2) that the primitive condition of man was one of utter barbarism; (3) that from this condition several races have independently raised themselves. He then adds:—

These views follow, I think, from strictly scientific considerations. We shall not, however, be the less inclined to adopt them on account of the cheering prospects which they hold out for the future. If the past history of man has been one of deterioration, we have but a groundless hope of future improvement; but, on the other hand, if the past has been one of progress, we may fairly hope that the future will be so too; that the blessings of civilisation will not only be extended to other countries and other nations, but that even in our own land they will be rendered more general and more equable, so that we shall not see before us always, as now, multitudes of our own fellow-countrymen living the life of savages in our very midst, neither possessing the rough advantages, and real, though coarse, pleasures of savage life, nor yet availing themselves of the far higher and more noble opportunities which lie within the reach of civilised man.

If it be true that the "Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground," as stated in the Bible, he was but a poor, weak, helpless mortal, destitute of all the elements of personal progress. His elevation, physical, intellectual, and moral, so far as it has gone, is the result of natural law, not of supernatural agencies. Is it not unreasonable to suppose that a good and an omnipotent God should allow any other power to thwart his plans, and to render his work of no avail?

The sequel to the comedy of the Garden of Eden

was the tragedy of Calvary, which in theological phraseology is called the Atonement. Here we have to encounter perplexities which it is impossible for the ordinary mind to understand. According to the Biblical story, Adam's nature, in consequence of his having made one mistake, became depraved, and the taint of original sin was communicated to all his posterity, making it necessary for God to secure the salvation of mankind by the sacrifice of his first-born Son. Now, admitting for the moment that it was impossible for God to avoid sacrificing his own child, except at the cost of universal destruction, should not the sacrifice have been made immediately after Adam's supposed transgression, so as to have prevented a single generation going to the grave with the curse of original sin unremoved? But, according to the story, thousands of years were allowed to elapse and numbers of generations to live and die ere the reparation was made. The truth is, if an atonement were necessary at all, Christ should have given his life as a ransom for a "fallen world" as soon as it became necessary. If none could be saved except those who believed in Christ, the question arises: What has become of the millions of human beings who passed away prior to his birth, and what will be the fate of those who are now alive who have never heard, and who probably never will hear, of "Jesus of Nazareth"? If it be said that the former were saved by anticipation, and that the latter will be pardoned on account of their ignorance, where was the requirement of the atonement at all? Moreover, if the death of Christ were necessary to redeem the world, it was unjust upon the part of God to have delayed it as long as he did. If, on the other hand, the crucifixion

of the Saviour were not imperative to restore a lost race, then it was a cruel act for a father to give his son to be tortured and executed amid the exultation of a disappointed and fanatical people. Besides, if it were desirable and praiseworthy upon the part of God to send his son to save the world, how is it that when he did arrive so many nations were kept in ignorance of his mission and purpose? Even the Jews, God's peculiar people, had no knowledge whatever that a part or "Person" of the divinity was about to expire on the cross. Does it accord with human reason to believe that a just God would make the innocent suffer for the guilty? Justice has been defined as consisting "in rendering to everyone according to his moral deserts—good if he be good, and evil if evil—for the purpose of promoting goodness and discouraging guilt." If Christ, therefore, was without sin, as stated in the New Testament, was it not unjust to make him suffer for the misdoings of others?

The inconsistency of this Christian teaching is as perplexing as are its cruelty and injustice. We are told that the death of Christ was ordained before the foundation of the world, and we are likewise informed that man was created perfect and immortal. The inconsistency is here so glaring that it is really marvellous how it can ever pass undetected. If it were ordained that the Son of God should die for the redemption of the world, the transgressions of Adam and Eve were only a part of God's plan, and certainly did not merit any curse. The free-will delusion does not remove the difficulty, for, if man had any choice in the matter, and had chosen differently, God's plans would have been thwarted. The scheme implies that

man was so made that he could follow but one course—the course which should ultimately lead to the sacrifice of Christ. Thus the fourth Gospel tells us that Christ knew from the beginning that Judas would betray him. Further, if the mission on earth of Christ would have been fruitless unless he was crucified, then, instead of denouncing Judas, he should be considered by Christians as a necessary adjunct in the tragedy. If the death of Christ was preordained, so also was the “fall of man,” for one depends upon the other. If this be true, it was impossible for man to be created perfect. Again, notwithstanding Christ is represented as having made full and complete satisfaction for all sin, that we might secure a share of what he died for, we are to lead a life of sacrifice and penitence, whether it agrees with our honest opinions or not. If Christ *did* pay the debt for our sins, why should we be called upon to make a second payment? Another inconsistency is between the statement that God sent his Son to save the whole world and the conduct of Christ while upon earth. If universal salvation were the object of Christ’s advent among men, his mission has been a decided failure. Christ, however, never attempted to achieve this result, for, while thousands were dying without the knowledge of his existence, he, instead of going among the heathen nations imparting what information he had, remained in his own insignificant country.

Christians profess to believe that the Godhead is composed of three persons of one substance, power, and duration. If this is the case, the first person could have no virtue which the other two did not possess. Thus, supposing that in this scheme of



salvation infinite justice demanded that an atonement should be made to God the Father, a like plea could be urged on behalf of God the Son and God the Holy Ghost. For as the three persons are indivisible, the "transgression" was against all equally. But, as we are not aware of any atonement having been made to the last two persons of the Trinity, the redemption is incomplete. Besides, if the three persons were one in substance, could a part be wrathful and a part merciful? If God and Christ are not distinct, the one could not be vengeful and the other forgiving at the same time. In fact, there is no forgiveness whatever in the scheme, for the first person demands payment before granting pardon, the second exacts belief as the condition of securing salvation, and the third refuses forgiveness for sin against himself under any circumstances. The same difficulty is manifested in the death of a part of the indivisible Godhead. If Christ alone died and remained lifeless in the grave for three days, he was not equal in eternity to his father; if, on the other hand, the whole of the Deity expired, then we have the idea of a dying and dead God, and the world for a time subsisting without a God to govern it. To say that it was only the manhood of Christ which suffered is to advance another difficulty by allying humanity with divinity, and destroying the perfection of the whole. For where the human element is there cannot be perfection.

Now, unless an extraordinary miracle can be performed whereby these perplexities can be removed, it appears to us to be the height of folly and injustice to demand belief in them, and to threaten "endless punishment" to those who cannot accept such absurd and contradictory teachings. It is, unfortunately, too

true that, from a Christian standpoint, "wide is the gate and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat; because strait is the gate and narrow is the way which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it" (Matthew vii. 13, 14).

## CHAPTER IX.

### BELIEF IN CHRIST

NOTHING in Mr. Ballard's book is more fallacious, and, to the superficial thinker, more misleading, than his pleadings on behalf of Christ. Ignoring the weak points in his character, and omitting to notice any of his objectionable teachings, Mr. Ballard assumes that the "Founder of Christianity" was unique in all the higher virtues, and that he gave to the world the sublimest morality and the most practical rules for human conduct that the world has ever known. This is the very opposite to what appears to us as being the fact. It has been repeatedly shown that there is nothing original in Christ's ethical teachings. As R. W. Mackay writes:—

To the truths already uttered in the Athenian prison Christianity added little or nothing, except a few symbols which, though well calculated for popular acceptance, are more likely to perplex than to instruct, and offer the best opportunity for priestly mystification.<sup>1</sup>

The Rev. Dr. George Matheson, in his lecture on *The Religions of China*, states: "The glory of Christian morality is that it is not original."<sup>2</sup> That the highest moral inculcations obtained prior to the advent of Christ is evident from what Lecky says of the ethical condition of the Romans. He writes:—

The habits of men were unaffected, frugal, honourable, and laborious. A stern discipline pervading all ages and classes of society, the

<sup>1</sup> *The Rise and Progress of Christianity*, pp. 19, 20.

<sup>2</sup> P. 84.

will was trained, to an almost unexampled degree, to repress the passions, to endure suffering and opposition, to tend steadily and fearlessly towards an unpopular end. A sense of duty was very widely diffused, and a deep attachment to the interests of the city became the parent of many virtues.... On the one hand we find a system of ethics, of which, when we consider the range and beauty of its precepts, the sublimity of the motives to which it appealed, and its perfect freedom from superstitious elements, it is not too much to say that, though it may have been equalled, it *has never been surpassed*.<sup>1</sup> [The italics are mine.]

Herbert Spencer, in his *Synthetic Philosophy*, also gives ample evidence that truth, chastity, and honour were active virtues among peoples who had no knowledge of Christ or of his system.

Probably no Rationalist will deny that Jesus had some excellent qualities; that he possessed traits of character superior to those shown by many of his day; and that some of the teachings ascribed to him are commendable. The same, however, can be said with equal truth of the founders of other religions, and of their inculcations. Take, for instance, Buddha and Mohammed. Nothing can be urged in favour of Christ that cannot as legitimately be applied to them. Even personal worth, so enthusiastically claimed for Jesus by Mr. Ballard, is not confined to his hero, as the following historical proofs will show. Buddha exclaimed:—

I am going to give light to those enshrouded in darkness; to open the gates of Immortality.<sup>2</sup>

Let all the sins that were committed in the world fall on me that the world may be delivered.<sup>3</sup>

Buddha preached to all alike, high and low, rich and poor. He taught the brotherhood of man.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *History of European Morals*, vol. i., pp. 237, 308-9.

<sup>2</sup> Beal's *History of Buddha*, pp. 24-5.

<sup>3</sup> Müller's *Hist. Sanscrit Literature*, p. 80.

<sup>4</sup> Bunsen's *Angel Messiah*.

Max Müller said<sup>1</sup> that "love and charity were the bases of Buddha's faith," and that "no religion, not even the Christian, has exercised so powerful an influence on the diminution of crime as the old simple doctrine of the Ascetic of Kapilavastu."<sup>2</sup> Another noteworthy writer has remarked that "the secret of his (Buddha's) success was the reverence he inspired by his own personal character. Thousands gathered around him, and he became the real centre of Buddhism."<sup>3</sup>

Speaking of Buddhism, Arthur Lillie says: "It was the first time a universal religion had been thought of."<sup>4</sup> The same writer says that the following are some of the results due to the efforts of Buddha:—

1. The most formidable priestly tyranny that the world had ever seen crumbled away before his attack, and the followers were paramount in India for a thousand years.
2. The institution of caste was assailed and overturned.
3. Polygamy was for the first time pronounced immoral and slavery condemned.
4. Woman, from being considered a chattel and a beast of burden, was, for the first time, considered man's equal, and allowed to develop her spiritual life.
5. All bloodshed, whether with the knife of the priest or the sword of the conqueror, was rigidly forbidden.
6. Also, for the first time in the religious history of mankind, the awakening of the spiritual life of the individual was substituted for religion by the body corporate. It is certain that Buddha was the first to proclaim that duty was to be sought in the eternal principles of morality and justice, and not in animal sacrifices and local formalities, invented by the fancy of priests.
7. The principle of religious propagandism was for the first time introduced, with its two great instruments, the missionary and the preacher.<sup>5</sup>

Mr. Ballard attaches great importance to the early propagation of the Christian faith. But, according

<sup>1</sup> *The Academy*, May 3rd, 1884.

<sup>2</sup> Müller's lecture on *Buddhist Nihilism*, p. 132.

<sup>3</sup> William's *Hinduism*, p. 102.

<sup>4</sup> *Buddha and Early Buddhism*.

<sup>5</sup> *Buddha and Early Buddhism*, pp. v., vi.

to trustworthy writers, the Mohammedan faith spread more rapidly than Christianity. Sir W. Muir writes :—

Among the religions of the earth Islam must take the precedence in the rapidity and force with which it spread. Within a very short time of its planting in Arabia, the new faith had subdued great and populous provinces. In half-a-dozen years, counting from the death of the founder, the religion prevailed throughout Arabia, Syria, Persia, and Egypt....In comparison with this grand outburst, the first efforts of Christianity were, to the outward eye, faint and feeble; and its extension was so gradual that what the Mohammedan religion achieved in ten or twenty years it took the faith of Jesus long centuries to accomplish.

Referring to Mohammedanism, James Freeman Clarke says :—

Dark superstitions prevailed, the mother of dark vices. And now, in thirteen years of preaching, a body of men and women had arisen who rejected idolatry; worshipped one great God, lived lives of prayer; practised prayer, benevolence, and justice, and were to do and to hear anything for the truth.<sup>1</sup>

Even J. W. H. Stobart, B.A., who wrote his *Islam and its Founder* for the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, is candid enough to admit that—

Judged by the smallness of the means at his disposal, and the extent and permanence of the work he accomplished, no name in the world's story shines with a more specious lustre than that of the prophet of Mecca....Judged by the standard of human renown, the glory of what mortal can compare with his.<sup>2</sup>

Mr. Ballard cites several eminent writers who have given favourable opinions of Christ, but he has not furnished any evidence to show that those opinions were based upon facts. It would not be difficult to cite the views of prominent men in reference to Christ the very opposite to those quoted by Mr. Ballard. For instance, Professor Huxley asks :—

<sup>1</sup> *Ten Great Religions*, p. 466.

<sup>2</sup> P. 228.

Are we to accept the Jesus of the second or the Jesus of the fourth Gospel as the true Jesus? What did he really say and do? And how much that is attributed to him in speech and action is the embroidery of the various parties into which his followers tended to split themselves within twenty years of his death, when even the three-fold tradition was only nascent? . . . If a man can find a friend, the hypothesis of all his hopes, the mirror of his ethical ideal, in the Jesus of any or all of the Gospels, let him live by faith in that ideal. Who shall, or can, forbid him? But let him not delude himself that his faith is evidence of the objective reality of that in which he trusts. Such evidence is to be obtained only by the use of the methods of science as applied to history and to literature, and it amounts, at present, to very little.<sup>1</sup>

F. W. Newman writes of Christ thus :—

Enigma and mist seem to be his element; and when I find his high satisfaction at all personal recognition, and bowing before his individuality, I almost doubt whether, if one wished to draw the character of a vain and vacillating pretender, it would be possible to draw anything more to the purpose than this.<sup>2</sup>

The Rev. James Cranbrook observes :—

Our own idealisations have invested him (Jesus) with a halo of spiritual glory that by the intensity of its brightness conceals from us the real figure presented in the Gospels. We see him, not as he is described, but as the ideally perfect man our own fancies have conceived. But let any one sit down and critically analyse the sayings and doings ascribed to Jesus in the Gospels—let him divest his mind of the superstitious fear of irreverence, and then ask himself whether all those sayings and doings are in harmony with the highest wisdom speaking for all ages and races of mankind, and with the conceptions of an absolutely perfect human nature, and I am mistaken if he will not find a very great deal he will be forced to condemn.<sup>3</sup>

The Rev. Charles Voysey wrote thus of Christ :—

He had faults which neither I nor my readers would venture to imitate without loss of self-respect. His mind gave way, and he was not responsible for what he said.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Nineteenth Century*, No. 144, p. 186.

<sup>2</sup> *Phases of Faith*, p. 154.

<sup>3</sup> *Founders of Christianity*, preface, p. 5.

<sup>4</sup> *Fortnightly Review*, January, 1887.

Renan says that Christ had

no knowledge of the general condition of the world; he was unacquainted with science; he was harsh towards his family, and was no philosopher; he went to excess; sometimes his intolerance of all opposition led him to acts inexplicable and apparently absurd; and bitterness and reproach became more and more manifest in his heart.<sup>1</sup>

John Stuart Mill, in referring to Christ's morality, states:—

I do not scruple to say of it that it is, in many important points, incomplete and one-sided, and that, unless ideas and feelings, not sanctioned by it, had contributed to the formation of European life and character, human affairs would have been in a worse condition than they now are.<sup>2</sup>

Even the New Testament tells us that Christ's own friends thought he was "beside himself"; and the Jews considered he had a devil, and was "mad" (Mark iii. 21; John x. 20).

But the opinions of individuals either *pro* or *con*. are, after all, of but little value. Of far more importance are the following questions: Can it be shown from the four Gospels that Jesus ever initiated any great secular reform? What philosophic truth did he propound? What scientific fact did he explain? What social problem did he solve? What political scheme did he unfold? What system of education did he advocate? Upon these points the New Testament gives us no information. It is not an answer to say that to deal with these subjects was not his mission. It is of small concern what eminent men thought of Christ and his teachings, unless it can be proved that his conduct could be wisely emulated and his injunctions usefully obeyed. But even the very people who so extravagantly extol Jesus thoroughly

<sup>1</sup> *Life of Jesus*, pp. 78, 81, 83, 174, 274, and 278.

<sup>2</sup> *Liberty*, pp. 28, 29.



realise that to do this would be impossible. Would anyone to-day, if it were possible, attempt to imitate the conduct of Christ as portrayed in many parts of the New Testament—such, for instance, as his treatment of his mother (Luke ii. 49; John ii. 4); his driving the merchants from the temple (John ii. 14–16); the manner of his riding into Jerusalem (Matthew xxi. 1–9); his cursing the fig-tree (Mark xi. 13, 20, 21); and his endeavour to extract devils from the human body, and permitting them to enter into “about two thousand” swine, which caused them to be “choked in the sea” (Mark i. 34; v. 13)? His yielding, after refusing help to the woman of Canaan before she confessed her faith in him—telling her: “It is not meet to take the children’s bread, and to cast it to dogs”—was simply granting to the profession of belief what he denied to the wants of humanity? Such narrow-minded conduct does not harmonise with intellectual freedom, or with the true principles of the brotherhood of man. Who really believes in his teachings sufficiently to be induced to practise self-mutilation (Matthew v. 29, 30; xix. 12); to regard the duties of this life as of secondary importance (Matthew vi. 25–34); to hate one’s relatives, and even one’s own life (Luke xiv. 26); to accept a premium for deserting wife, children, etc. (Mark x. 29, 30); to “lend, hoping for nothing again” (Luke vi. 35); to “give to every man that asketh of thee” (Luke vi. 30); to “forgive your brother until seventy times seven” (Matthew xviii. 21, 22); to “resist not evil”; to “swear not at all”; to “love your enemies,” and to “labour not for the meat which perisheth” (John vi. 27)? As Lecky points out in his latest work, *The Map of Life*—

We should hardly write over the Savings Bank, "Take no thought for the morrow, for the morrow will take thought for itself"; or over the Bank of England, "Lay not up for yourselves treasures on earth," "How hardly shall a rich man enter into the kingdom of God"; or over the Foreign Office, or the Law Courts, or the prison, "Resist not evil," "He that smiteth thee on thy right cheek turn to him the other also," "He that taketh away thy coat let him have thy cloak also."<sup>1</sup>

Professed Christians have no real faith even in the New Testament credentials<sup>2</sup> of belief, for they persistently ignore them. It is there stated that the signs which were to follow genuine belief were: "In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; they shall take up serpents; if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover" (Mark xvi. 15-18). Now, why are not these experiments tried at the present time? Simply because they are opposed to reason and to human experience, and to accept them as facts would require greater credulity than the intellect of the twentieth century will sanction.

Mr. Ballard puts belief in Christ as absolutely the "one thing needful" to promote the welfare of the human race. But it is by no means clear what constitutes such belief. Are we to believe in Christ as a man or as a God; in his teachings, or in the salvation of man through his death on the cross? Besides, belief should be the result of evidence, and many honest inquirers are unable to discover any evidence that would justify them in believing that Christ was perfect. He was subject to human weaknesses, such as hunger, passion, and lack of wisdom. Dr. Barry, speaking on behalf of the

<sup>1</sup> Pp. 214-5.

Christian Evidence Society, says: "A character is perfect which meets all the conditions and fulfils all the relations of humanity." Tested by this standard, Christ was in no sense perfect, for there were several conditions of life he failed to meet, and many relations of humanity that he never filled. The New Testament does not inform us that he was a husband, a father, or a statesman. A man who has not filled these relations of life is not in a position to give practical and satisfactory lessons thereon. It is, of course, possible for an ordinary man to give advice about duties he has not performed, but it is highly probable that such advice would be untrustworthy, because it would be devoid of that authority which practical experience alone can give. It is the want of this experimental authority which renders Christ's precepts unreliable. The language he used to the Scribes and Pharisees would not be considered refined by cultivated minds at the present time. To address those from whom you differ as "fools, vipers, serpents, and blind guides" would not be deemed the most gentle manner of rebuking those whom you think are in error. Lacking a true method of reasoning, or a uniformity of character, Christ exhibited an example injudicious to exalt and dangerous to emulate. At times he was severe when he should have been gentle. When he might have reasoned he frequently rebuked. When he ought to have been firm and resolute he was vacillating and cowardly. When he should have been happy and joyful he was sorrowful and despondent. Although preaching faith as the "one thing needful," he lacked it himself when he required it most. Hence, on the Cross, when a knowledge of a life of integrity, a consciousness of the

fulfilment of a good mission, a conviction that he was dying for a good and righteous cause, and achieving the object of his life—when all this should have given him moral strength, we find him sorrowful, and giving vent to utter despair. If Christ had taught men how to avoid most of the miseries of life; if he had revealed the mysteries of nature; if he had shown how the evils of poverty could be avoided, and how the claims of capital and labour could be properly adjusted, he would have proved himself a practical reformer. But he did nothing of the kind. His usefulness was impaired by his dominant idea that this world is but a state of probation fitting mankind for another and a better home.

Even as to the important question of man's salvation the prospect, according to the New Testament, is not very bright; for therein we are told that he cannot be saved unless he come to God by Christ; but also that he cannot come to Christ unless the Father draw him (John xiv. 6; vi. 44). This means that if God draws us, we must go to him through Christ and be saved; and if he does not we are to be damned for not doing what to us is impossible. Here is a theological puzzle that reason cannot solve, whatever a miracle may be able to accomplish. It is also difficult to believe that, if a just God exist, he will inflict penalties upon anyone for honest unbelief; yet in Matthew it is recorded that at the last day he will separate the sheep from the goats, and that to the latter he will say: "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and all his angels." The locality to which the goats are to be sent is described in Revelation as a lake which burneth with fire and brimstone; where the worm dieth not and the fire is never quenched.

Can anyone whose natural feelings have not been hardened by familiarity with a cruel and absurd theology really believe this to be true? Is it possible to conceive that the time will arrive when the heavens shall frown on a ruined world; when the sun shall lose his effulgence and the moon refuse to give her light; when, amid the "wreck of matter and the crash of worlds," those who are bound to us by the ties of nature shall be banished to a burning lake, for no other reason than because they were unable to believe in Christ? This may be orthodox teaching, but to Rationalists it appears to be opposed to reason and justice, and to the dictates of our common humanity.

## CHAPTER X.

### BELIEF IN A FUTURE LIFE

IN reference to a belief in a future life, Mr. Ballard writes as if immortality were a demonstrated fact instead of a mere speculative opinion. We here detect a radical weakness, which is frequently apparent in Mr. Ballard's book. He is constantly raising false issues; thereby, no doubt, misleading the uncritical reader. For instance, he pleads for the existence of God, but he is silent concerning the Christian Deity, the very one he should confine his attention to. A hundred gods may or may not exist, but as a Christian defender Mr. Ballard should deal with that God whose nature and attributes are delineated in the Bible. A similar error is apparent in his confounding religion in general with Christianity in particular. To demonstrate the truth of religion in its etymological sense does not necessarily prove the validity of the Christian faith; and yet most of the orthodox exponents contend that the two—religion and Christianity—mean the same. In like manner Mr. Ballard deals with the question of a future life. Assuming that there are "two great facts—namely, humanity's yearning for immortality and the Christian's answer to it"—he states that this alleged answer is the only true and satisfactory one that has been given to the world. Notwithstanding this bold assertion, he makes no attempt to

prove from the New Testament what the Christian doctrine of a future life really is; and he appears to overlook the fact that therein is taught the brutal punishment by hell-fire torments (see Matt. v. 22, 29, 30; x. 28; xxiii. 15, 33; xxv. 41, 46; Mark iii. 29; ix. 43, 44; Luke x. 15; Rev. xiv. 10; xix. 20; and xxi. 8); that at the last judgment "before him [Christ] shall be gathered all nations; and he shall separate them one from another as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats; and he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left." Thus mankind are to be divided into two classes only—the blessed and the cursed, the believers and the unbelievers; and to the latter Christ is to say: "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels." Finally, the Bible states that it is only the elect that are to be saved, while the majority of the human race are to be punished "for all eternity"; that the non-elect are powerless to secure their own salvation; that of ourselves we can do nothing; that it is God who worketh within us; and that many of the human family were ordained to condemnation before they were born (see Romans viii. 29, 30; ix. 21, 22; 2 Cor. iii. v.; Eph. ii. 8; Phil. ii. 13; 2 Thess. ii. 11, 12; Jude 4).

No "miracle" is necessary to enable us to disbelieve such Christian teachings as the above. Apart from the perplexing point as to the eternity of hell torments, rational unbelief would say that *any* suffering in such a place would be cruel and useless. The true object of punishment should be to reform those who are punished, and to deter others from wrongdoing. The punishment threatened by Christianity achieves neither of these results, inasmuch as it

affords no opportunity for repentance, and offers no facility for improvement, for if a person should once get to hell, there he must remain for ever. Neither can it be truthfully said that the sufferings in the "bottomless pit" would exercise a beneficial influence upon those on earth. That the belief in hell torments is not a deterrent from crime the history of criminality clearly proves. Nearly all our worst criminals have been taught this doctrine. The fear of the law has evidently been more efficacious in the prevention of crime than all the hell fire that could ever be imagined. Besides, if it were possible for the "tortures of the damned" to be witnessed, would such a sight inspire the spectators with obedience to a God who caused such barbarous cruelty? Here the rejected of heaven are represented as enduring tortures the extent of which no human mind can fully conceive and no pen adequately portray. The end of perhaps a happy life is to be the beginning of everlasting misery. The joy and sunshine of a mundane existence are to be followed by clouds of wretchedness and the endurance of perpetual agony.

Mr. Ballard says that God was the creator of all things; he must, therefore, have created the devil. God, we are told, is all-wise; he must, therefore, have known the nature of the being he was creating, and the havoc his handiwork would make among the sons and daughters of men. God, it is said, is all-good; then how could he have been the cause of so much evil of which it is supposed that the devil is the principal agent? God is alleged to be all-powerful; why, then, did he not destroy the devil when he was defeated in heaven, instead of turning him upon the earth to continue his evil doings? God is described



as a being of love; how is it, then, that he planned a scheme by which most of the human race are doomed to an eternity of heart-rending suffering, "where the worm dieth not and the fire is not quenched"? Does it accord with reason to believe that our "heavenly Father" would do that which an earthly parent would recoil from? Is it moral to inflict infinite punishment for a finite act, even if that act is intentionally performed? Is it benevolent to burn men and women "forever," some of whom have been guilty of no other crime than being unable to recognise the orthodox notion of "truth as it is in Jesus"? This may be the theological idea of what is right and useful, but it is a conception of justice at which unperverted humanity stands aghast. Here we have difficulties (or "miracles") attending belief which far surpass those of unbelief.

Neither do we see how the alleged advantages of the Christians' heaven can compensate for the cruelties of their hell. The question here is not whether such a heaven exists, but rather whether, if it does, it is an abode in which it would be pleasant to spend "endless time." It may be urged that the language of the Scriptures upon the subject of heaven is figurative—which we do not deny. But what is it figurative of? Language should make the subjects to which it refers clear to the reader instead of obscuring their meaning. Christ on several occasions refers to the kingdom of heaven in parables, but from these we obtain very little information as to its real nature. This is not at all surprising when we are told that he spoke in parables so that those who heard him should not understand (Mark iv. 11, 12). It is true that on another occasion Jesus

located heaven by saying the kingdom of heaven was "within you"; but this is as difficult to understand as the parables are, since he also states: "In my father's house are many mansions.....I go to prepare a place for you." For persons to get these mansions within them would be a stupendous performance. There is, however, one parable about heaven (Luke xvi. 19, 31), which tells us of "a certain beggar" and of "a certain rich man"; the one was in heaven, the other in hell, and they were within hearing, seeing, and speaking distance of each other. From heaven the rich man is beheld being tormented in hell.

Now, to think that anyone could be happy while contemplating such suffering would be an outrage against our common humanity. One great source of our happiness on earth is the 'liberty to select our companions, and to be permitted to relieve the victims of injustice and cruelty. To be shut up, therefore, in heaven with those who can look upon others being tortured in flames of fire, and who will not relieve them, must be a source of indescribable misery. This parable receives confirmation from St. John, who states (Rev. xiv. 10) that a certain person "shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb." And this is the Christian's idea of ultimate happiness. When a wish is expressed to be with Jesus and the angels, as it frequently is by orthodox believers, they surely cannot understand the sights and experiences that are in store for them. Let us hope it is true that "Eye hath not seen nor ear heard.....the things which God

hath prepared for them that love him." Milton says that it is "better to reign in hell than serve in heaven"; but, in our opinion, it would be decidedly better to do neither. Both institutions deserve to be lost in total oblivion, for the belief in their existence is no factor in the progress and elevation of mankind. Humanity would have two evils the less to overcome if hell were to cease from troubling and if those who preach about heaven were at rest.

Mr. Ballard very carefully avoids the scientific and philosophical aspects of the question of a future life. In fact, he says: "It is manifestly impossible to accredit the Christian hope of immortality to science .....there was no science, in the modern sense, at the time of the Christian era."<sup>1</sup> This fact, however, affords no adequate reason why science has failed to render any support to the Christian notion of immortality. Science is our great teacher, and yet it has nothing to say in favour of a future life. If space permitted, a formidable list of scientific testimony could be given in corroboration of this statement. Even the late Professor Fiske, who was a believer in man's immortality, in his lecture on "Life Everlasting," frankly admits that, from the standpoint of reason and experience, we are no more justified in supposing that consciousness will exist after death than we should be in believing that water would exist apart from oxygen and hydrogen. Certainly it seems paradoxical to speak, as some theologians do, of the happiness of heaven, and at the same time to assert that the senses through which all sensations enter are not present. To experience any sort of happiness

<sup>1</sup> P. 306.

necessitates our possessing senses that enable us to feel, see, and understand.

Mr. Ballard does not tell us what the soul is, and what its relations are to the body. Büchner, in his *Last Words on Materialism*, says: "The soul is not an independent entity, but an expression used in a period of scientific ignorance and superstitious ideas" (p. 27). No doubt this is correct, for it accords with the opinion of other scientists. Mr. Ballard surely knows that organisation is necessary to life, and that life is essential to consciousness. How, then, can conscious existence remain when the two—organisation and life—are gone? Besides, all sensation depends upon the nerves, for, as George Henry Lewes observes, "Without a nervous system there could be nothing like what we know as feeling." Does not Mr. Ballard believe his Bible when it says, "The very day man goeth to the grave his thoughts perish"?

Mr. Ballard jumps to conclusions, instead of seeking to arrive at them by a reasoning process. His belief is influenced by the opinion of "the immense majority, not with the minority" (p. 280). But some of the greatest delusions that ever misled the human mind have been accepted as true by the majority. And to-day it is only the minority of the human race who profess a belief in the Christian theory of immortality. Still, says Mr. Ballard, "the fact remains that the world of humanity is full of the general hope and expectation of another life beyond the present." Supposing this is so, where is the evidence that the hope and expectation will be realised? Many persons are always hoping for greater happiness and a larger share of the comforts

and necessities of life than they possess, yet thousands live and die without their hopes having been gratified. But is it feasible to long or desire for that of which we know nothing? I think not, for to do so would be to avoid facts, and to rely upon groundless imagination.

## CHAPTER XI.

### CONCLUSION

I HAVE now briefly replied to some of Mr. Ballard's principal arguments against unbelief. Of course, a complete answer could not be made in the course of a hundred pages. Nevertheless, my object has been to show that, whatever difficulties may be apparent to some people in reference to unbelief, it is far more difficult to believe that the claims put forward on behalf of orthodox Christianity are based upon fact and upon the dictates of human reason. While it is frankly admitted that many truths are associated with the Christian faith, it is also true that the system contains much that is erroneous and impracticable. For instance, the boast that Christianity has transformed human thought and feeling to such an extent that governments, laws, and social customs have been revolutionised through its influence must be regarded as opposed to the facts of history and the lessons of personal experience. The New Testament nowhere states that the object of Christianity was to produce a political and social condition of society such as secular reformers are striving to secure to-day; and, further, we fail to discover in the book any practical injunctions for the attainment of a proper position by woman, or for anything comparable to the moral and social progress which has been made during the last fifty years. It does not

follow, because advancement has gone on side by side with the profession of Christianity, that the improvements acquired are the result of its teachings. Before such a claim can be verified it must be shown that modern improvements are in harmony with Christian precepts. This is just what cannot be done, in spite of the assertions of enthusiastic orthodox professors. Upon scientific, educational, and social questions the reforms effected or desired and sought for have no relation to Bible teachings, unless it be a negative one.

It may fairly be urged that, if the object of Christianity were to secure modern reforms, it should contain the elements of secular progress; this, however, is not the case. Among the necessary requirements of all individual and national advancement are primary consideration for the duties and essentials of this life, scientific studies, educational pursuits, freedom from the enforced adherence to traditional beliefs, and the lessening of poverty. The New Testament, however, has no provision for the attainment of any of these objects. On the contrary, many of its teachings, if acted upon, would either retard their development or prevent it altogether. Further, if the object of Christianity were what its adherents allege it to be, why was so little progress made prior to the last century? Until that period but little opposition was offered to the prevailing faith, the Governments bestowed upon it ample patronage, it was backed by strong military power, and it had the willing submission of the people; yet it failed to give the nation justice and political rights, or to allow it freedom upon religious questions. Besides, how is it that for centuries Christianity did not

improve upon the science, morals, and philosophy that obtained before its existence? Moreover, how is it that when Christians had supreme power they used it in opposition to these very essential agencies of all progress? The answer is: The object of Christianity was not so much to teach people how to live as how to die.

The philosophy of Rationalism sanctions the study of all religions and the acceptance of the good in each. It emphasises the necessity of exposing and warring with error, and of defending and practising truth. Its motto is:—

“Bound to no party, to no creeds confined,  
The world's our home, our brothers all mankind.  
Do good, love truth, be just and fair withal;  
Exalt the right, though every ism fall.”



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