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NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

CHRIST'S TEMPTATION.

BY

“HUMANITAS.”

*Author of “Is God the First Cause?”, “Follies of the Lord’s Prayer Exposed,”
“Thoughts on Heaven,” “Jacob the Wrestler,” “Mr. Bradlaugh and the
Oath Question,” “How the British House of Commons treated Charles
Bradlaugh, M.P.,” “Charles Bradlaugh and the Irish Nation,”
“Socialism a Curse,” “Jonah and the Whale,” etc.*

[William Platt Ball]

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MY REASON FOR WRITING THIS PAMPHLET.

WERE I asked why I wrote this pamphlet, I should reply, in self-defence. I should say that the intolerance and injustice practised in the name of the religion it assails forced the task upon me. I should say that, as those who like myself cannot accept the religion it attacks, are every day and upon all sides, politically and socially, deprived of their common citizenship, it becomes my duty to do what in me lies to remove or at least lessen its power. And this, I think, can best be done by exposing the monstrous fables and delusions upon which it is built.

With regard to the matter here dealt with, I challenge and defy any person, lay or clerical, and especially those coming under the term *Trinitarian*, to put a reasonable or common-sense construction upon it, as set forth in the Testament. If this can be done, let it be shown.

Perhaps the Rev. G. F. Handel Rowe—to whom I must grant the quality of courage in essaying to grapple with a thinker of Annie Besant's powers—could say something for his two friends, Christ and the Devil, as set out in the text in question. He doubtless makes both of them do duty for him as occasion may require. Especially may he be encouraged to do so, seeing that it is a New Testament business—having *specific* references to the Old, and therefore, according to him, *pure Christianity*.¹

I notice that he more than once sorely laments the non-adoption—or, at least, the only partial adoption—of the

¹ It is instructive to observe the wholesome dread with which your modern Christian champions regard the Old Testament—not to mention the *Thirty-nine Articles*. If Annie Besant's able debate with the rev. gentleman in question did nothing more than force the exposition of this repugnance, it would do a great deal. "Holy Bible, book divine," etc., etc., is rapidly losing all meaning.

principles of Christianity. The lament is to be found in his first article, and in his last. In his first, he remarks: "Were these Christian teachings put into practice, society would be speedily reformed", etc. And he repeats it with more or less change throughout. It is quite possible that he intends the lament to apply to the teachings and precepts which immediately precede it when made. But I take it that if we are to adopt Christianity, or judge of its teachings and results, we must do so as a whole; in which case, whilst I admit that he is so far right as to society being speedily reformed, I contend that it would be a kind of reforming *not* "devoutly to be wished".

We had a fairly close application of Christian principles during the early and middle ages—especially the latter—when nearly the whole of Europe was literally saturated with it, and which culminated in the truly awful power (bloodily used) of the Church. It is likely the Rev. Mr. Rowe will hold that only to have been *Romanism* and not Christianity. In that case, and without stopping for an answer to the question: Where then was Christianity during these centuries of ecclesiastical tyranny and suffering practised in its name? I will simply remind him that most people regard it as the history of the Christian Religion. Perhaps he can find another name for it. Mosheim may be all wrong. But in reference to his lamentations as to the non-adoption of Christian teachings, what a wretched case he makes out for God and Christianity! Christianity, according to the gospel of the Rev. Mr. Rowe, is a "Divine arrangement" forced upon God by the "fall" and consequent collapse of his original plans—which he "discerned beforehand"—and which now, after being before the world nearly two thousand years, is likewise a failure [which again he "discerned beforehand"!]. It is quite possible that he, God, may be at this moment concocting some other "Divine arrangement" to counterbalance the failure of the latest; and which he may also "discern beforehand" will likewise be unsuccessful. I, for one, fear I shall need a great many lessons in the teachings of Christianity, as given by the Rev. Mr. Rowe, before I shall profit much thereby. I also think the History of the Christian Religion would have to be reversed and re-written in order to be read in the light of his remarks, and to make sense of very many

of them. Does he think the fearful record—written in letters of blood and fire, of hate and intolerance, including the work of his own Church during its comparatively short existence—can be wiped out by a few quotations and platitudes about Christians contravening their religious professions? But perhaps I intrude my remarks, for, without a doubt, he is in far more able hands than mine. I may, however, be tempted to mention him again before I am through with this paper.

In dealing with my present subject, I shall adopt the pretention put forward by Christians generally, that the Gospels are the “Word of God”; that, although they purport to be—with the exception of that ascribed to Luke—but the written testimony or narrative of what the writers experienced, and as such needed not to be inspired, they were yet written under *inspiration*, and are to be regarded “as the work of Jesus Christ himself”.¹

Of course it is hardly necessary to state that I do not adopt this as the *truth*; but simply as a ground-work or condition upon which to found my objections and contentions.

My object will be to show the complete unreasonableness of the story; to demonstrate that it bears the stamp of folly on the face of it, and that it is not worthy the credence of rational beings.

I shall follow the text as given in the New Testament, forming part of what is known as the Douay Bible; although, indeed, there is no material difference in the story as there told, and in that given in the *Authorised Version*.

I shall also notice the critical and explanatory notes made by the compilers in reference to the text, and in dealing with which I shall probably have much to say. Perhaps I ought to explain that, as a number of these learned and rev. compilers have taken part in the production of this edition, and as each in his turn has something to say for himself, or unsay for the Bible—some of the notes also being only in the shape of quotations from other authors, saints, etc.—I therefore desire when using the word *expounder* to be understood as referring to that par-

¹ Preface to “New Testament” in “Douay Bible”.

ticular one whose note is in question, without necessarily particularising him.

It is remarkable that these notes of so-called explanation have been found to be so necessary as to actually occupy, in very small type, almost as much space as the Gospel itself. I think this argues badly for the pretended simplicity and completeness, or sufficiency, of the Gospels. Simple—in a certain sense—they undoubtedly are; but your modern compilers find it much more necessary to illumine, or put, or try to put something like commonsense into the “Word of God” than did your ancient ones. The rack and the stake were the all-sufficient reply to doubts and objections in those *too* much Christian times. But now-a-days, even Christians themselves crave for better things. Hence half the matter to be found between the covers of God’s modern book is not what he put there, nor what he said (as anciently held), but what is put there and said for him—the thing said frequently being either by way of extenuation or downright falsification. I had occasion to notice this rather largely in a former and more important work.¹ Indeed, I should be within the limits of the truth if I said your present Bibles are written by your Darwins, your Ingersolls, your Huxleys, your Bradlaughs, your Büchners, your Besants, and your Footes. These and such as these it is who now practically write your “Inspired Word”. Of course, what is supposed to be the original text is given, but the *meaning* of it is now fixed by those I have mentioned. The Bible is by no means now to be taken as saying or meaning what it really does say and mean—and for daring to doubt which unhappy wretches were, without regard to age or sex, made to “taste the fire”—but is, rather, a set of puzzles and pegs upon which to hang new and varied renderings to suit the demands of the age and the march of science. And this is as true of the Roman Church, which “cannot err”, as it is of the “erring” and changing sects of all ages.

To give some idea of what the “Inspired Scriptures” are worth at the present day, I will crave patience whilst I quote a passage or two from the Preface—I call it *apology*—which the revisers of the Bible as by law established, in its latest and most fashionable attire, thought fit

¹ “Jacob the Wrestler.”

and necessary to make. I allude to what I have elsewhere called the newly cobbled Word of God, by which I mean the "Parallel Bible".

The revisers of this latest proof that there can be no book containing *the truth* for all time, in speaking of the difficulties attending their task, after stating that the first portion of their work was to revise the Greek text—which they only seem to have done in part—say that "a sufficiently laborious task remained in deciding between *the rival claims of various readings*" [italics mine in this and following quotations] "which might properly *affect the translation*" (p. 8). Again, on the same page: "Many places still remain in which, *for the present*, it would not be safe to accept one reading, to the absolute exclusion of others"! They then go on to state that, in these cases, they have given the various readings where they *thought them sufficiently important*"! This is reading between the lines with a vengeance! It is reading between the lines and all round the margin too! But is it compatible with inspiration, with a book written by God, or "as the work of Jesus Christ himself"? I think I may safely say that it is fairly free from any such compatibility. And may we hope that the time will arrive when it *will* be "safe" to accept some "one reading" as the true one, and thus be able to finally purge "God's word" of its false readings? The notion, though, perchance and alas! hopeless, is still a logical one.

We are further told that the alterations which they have made in the authorised version "may be roughly grouped in five principal classes". The classes are then given. "First, alterations positively required by change of reading in the Greek text. Secondly, alterations made where the authorised version appeared either to be *incorrect*, or to have chosen the *less probable* of the two readings. Thirdly, alterations of obscure or ambiguous renderings into such as are clear and express in their import. . . . Fifthly, alterations rendered necessary by *consequence*", [italics in this case not mine], "that is, arising out of changes already made. . . .". Add to this another statement on the same page, which says: "Our task was revision, not re-translation", wonder what the result *might* have been had their task been re-translation, and then exclaim with me, So much for inspiration!

But these few quotations only give the faintest idea of the difficulties which stand in the way of the doctrine of inspiration. They will, however, serve; and are valuable as being admissions made by those who have doubtless done their uttermost to meet and overcome those difficulties.

It would further appear, from other parts of this damaging apology, that what I will call knotty and troublesome points were decided by a majority; in which case, if the majority did not chance to be the wisest—which sometimes happens—we may still have the wrong reading. If my readers will pardon the plebeian comparison, I would say that this old-time book is like a very old pair of boots, and, metaphorically speaking, is not only in constant need of being newly soled and heeled, but of being furnished with fresh uppers. It also resembles the boy's knife which had been furnished with new blades many times, and also newly hafted, but which he stoutly maintained was still the same knife.

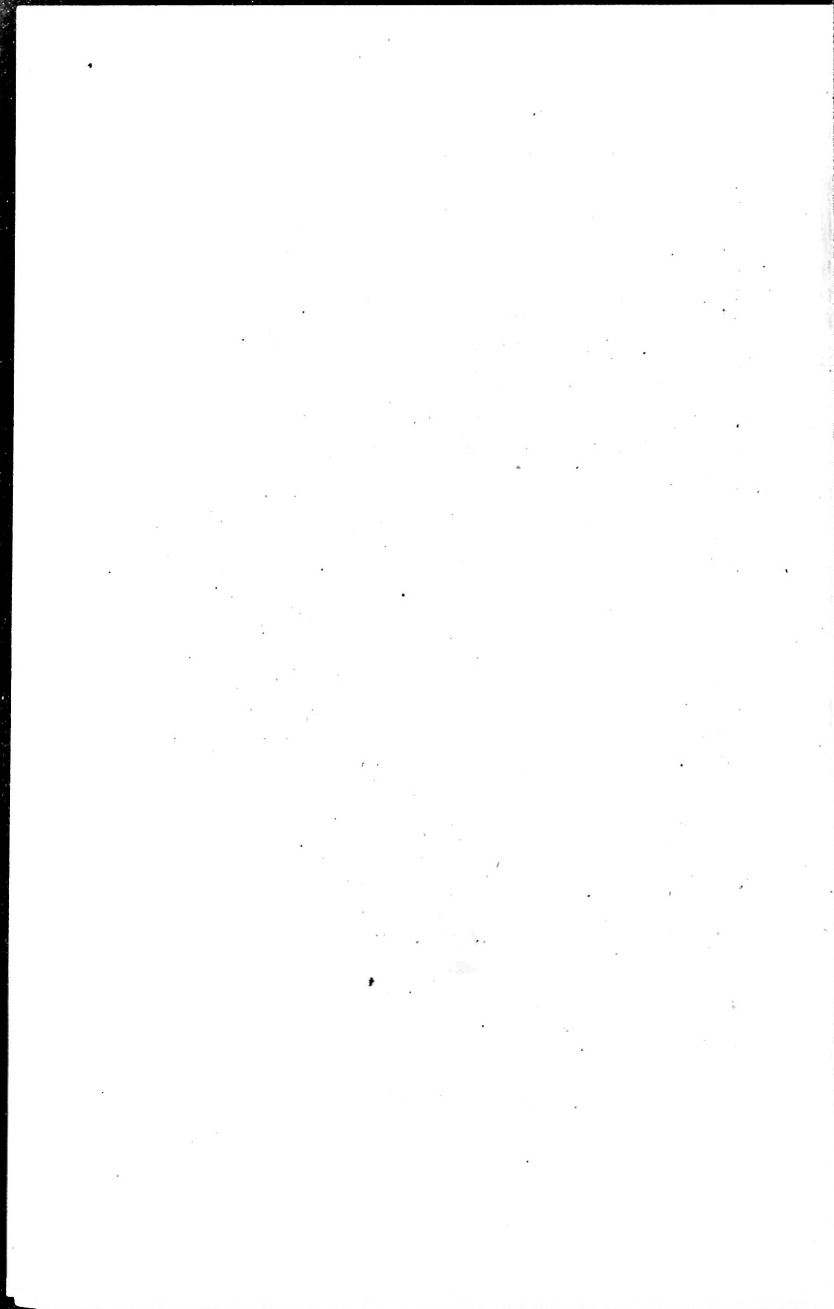
I shall possibly, upon a future occasion, have a good deal to say upon this question of inspiration. In the meantime it appears to me that God, in order to make a thorough and lasting job of it, would have not only to inspire the first medium or writer, but all those who took part, or who ever will take part in its production, down almost to the "printer's devil". This, of course, in every language in which it is or may be produced for all time, because it would be obviously foolish for him to impart to one individual what is intended for mankind, without making certain that it shall not be blurred, changed, or rendered obscure by those who have to manipulate it. Further: it would be necessary for all peoples to be in a state of preparedness to receive it. Inspired matter is as any other matter to those who cannot regard it as inspired. A revelation is not a revelation to those who cannot receive it. If God in his "Divine Providence", or by reason of its absence—which amounts to the same thing—has decreed or allowed millions of people to grow up and be grounded in certain principles which forbid or preclude the possibility of the acceptance of his Inspired or Revealed Word, then, so far as they are concerned, it is no revelation. Or, in other words, he has decreed that such shall be the case: that is, he decrees one set of conditions which annul another. And, if all be true, he has decreed that

countless millions shall be eternally damned by reason of such result.

I will, before taking up my subject proper, just notice one or two of the concluding remarks of these revising apologisers, made partly by way of extenuation for their own shortcomings, and partly for that they did have to mend God's word.

They say, amongst other foolish things addressed to "Almighty God", "that such a work can never be accomplished by organised efforts of scholarship and criticism, unless assisted by Divine help". To which I will but add: such a work "assisted by Divine help" ought to be easy and sure without the aid of scholarship, or even the power of criticism. But they further tell God—although they did not mean to do so—that in spite of the "Divine help", "blemishes and imperfections will assuredly be found" in their work; and that all their endeavors "must fall short of their aim"! Why must they, when assisted by "Divine help"? Is not God, God? And will he not help in the work of mending his own book, when implored to do so by those upon whom he has "providentially" put the task? Truly, gentlemen, you are very inconsistent; you speak of your failings and your imperfections in the fulfilment of your task, and call your God, upon whom you have called for assistance, "Almighty God", in one and the same breath, forgetting that, according to your own prayerfully written and deliberate statements, he is either unwilling or unable to help you! I really do not know, reverend and learned gentlemen, whether to be more sorry for you or for your God.

Let me now, after this slight bout with the revisers, make a fair beginning with my subject.



CHRIST'S TEMPTATION.

THE story, in its naked and *un-expounded* simplicity, is to be found in the fourth chapter of Matthew, from the first to the eleventh verses. Its calls upon the reader's faith are something enormous. It is of that kind of reading which must be read absolutely without the aid of reason. There is no room in the story for anything but pure and unleavened child-like faith. It is so supremely ridiculous as to be almost beyond discussing. THE DEVIL TEMPTS God! That is the key-note. O wonderful story! O marvelous, devil-tempted Omnipotence! O most self-sacrificing Almightyness, who wouldst not deign to accept at the hands of thine arch enemy that which it was not in his power to give! Let us, proud and grasping mortals, bow our heads to the dust in face of this sublime self-abnegation. Let it be trumpeted forth to the "four corners of the earth", and dinned into the ears of the "poor heathen", that our God—the Christian God (or a part of him, if you choose)—actually refused to throw himself off a pinnacle, and to accept the earth as a gift from the Devil! Get behind me, Devil, whilst I tell from "Holy Writ" what is at once the story of your own discomfiture and a God-like example of not accepting as the price of an unpleasant job that which you already own.

The story runs thus:—

"1. Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert, to be tempted by the Devil.

"2. And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterwards hungry.

"3. And the tempter coming, said to him: If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread.

"4. But he answered: It is written: Man liveth not by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.

"5. Then the Devil took him up into the Holy City, and set him on the pinnacle of the temple.

"6. And said to him: If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down. For it is written: That he hath given his angels charge over thee, and in their hands shall they bear thee up, lest perhaps thou hurt thy foot against a stone.

"7. Jesus said unto him: It is written again: Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.

"8. Again the Devil took him up into a very high mountain: and showed him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them.

"9. And said to him: All these will I give thee, if falling down thou wilt adore me.

"10. Then Jesus said to him: Begone, Satan, for it is written: The Lord thy God thou shalt adore, and him only shalt thou serve.

"11. Then the Devil left him; and behold angels came and ministered to him."

It is worthy of note that Mark, in his account, makes no mention of the fasting. He does mention Christ having been driven into the wilderness by the Spirit, and also speaks of the pretended temptations, and of angels having ministered to him; but he seems to have been quite ignorant of the feat of fasting. According to his account, the reader is bound to suppose that Christ did not fast during the forty days, but that he was simply *driven* into the wilderness by the Spirit; that he kept company with wild beasts; that he humbugged the Devil; and that, by reason of all this, he was under the necessity of being waited upon by ministering angels. That, in all conscience, is sufficiently grotesque without the introduction of the fasting business! But it is really amazing what queer things these Divinely chosen people are made to do and to say!

John the Baptist, who is put down as the immediate precursor of Jesus Christ, had a liking for the deserts. His clothing must needs be of camel's hair, and his food locusts and wild honey. Of course, he may have possessed a "sweet tooth", and so have had a predilection for honey, but it is difficult to suppose that, even by the aid

of the grasshoppers, he could have satisfied the cravings of hunger upon it. His Master, coming after him, does not exactly take to the desert on his own account, but gets pushed or driven into it by the *Spirit* (i.e., the third person of himself), takes to wild beasts, and, according to two of his inspired biographers, eats *nothing*, humbugs the Devil, and gets himself ministered to by angels.

In a kind of preface to S. Mark's Gospel, he is said to have been "the abridger of S. Matthew", but to have added "several particular circumstances", and to have "changed the order of narration, in which he agrees with S. Luke and S. John". Likewise to have "narrated two histories not mentioned by S. Matthew"; also "some miraculous cures"; and to have "omitted many things noticed by Matthew".

Now, without stopping to compare and examine all this minutely, I will remark that it is very like saying he wrote a different account of the same supposed circumstances. But it is more odd when you are told that these differences from Matthew make him agree with Luke and John; and still more so when you are further told that "most commentators follow the order of S. Matthew".

It is further admitted that it is not known at what period, and in what language, Mark wrote his gospel, nor that the oldest copy must have been written in the sixth century. They go further in making their uncertainty manifest by admitting that they are not agreed as to who he really was; and also go very near admitting that there are grounds for supposing that he made use of Matthew's gospel. Well, if he did, he certainly took great liberties with it. All, however, appears to be pretty much guess and supposition. Nevertheless, it must be regarded as of "Divine authority", and "written by inspiration"! Guessing and supposing is all very well in its way, but to be damned for not guessing right, or because somebody else guessed wrong, is quite too much.

In referring to Luke, it is singular to find the *second* temptation—that of sticking Christ on the top of a pinnacle—is given as the *third*. The expounder gets over the difficulty by coolly making use of the remark which I have already noticed:—"Most commentators follow the order of Saint Matthew". I believe he only intended that to apply to the order of the temptations; but after his other state-

ments, that Mark's differences from Matthew make him agree with Luke and John, I think I am entitled to use it as muddling the whole. These commentators and expounders—under the grace of God—consider they are at liberty to pick and choose in the matter, using this portion and rejecting that; or even to suppose that both may possibly mean something other than the thing stated. They vainly hope that by so acting they will succeed in producing some sort of harmonious whole which shall be acceptable; and think that, while killing the principle of inspiration in detail, they can show that it lives in general. But they, good souls, may do as they please: *they* may mutilate their book; but woe betide the "contumacious heretic" who does but dare to doubt or change one tittle of it! What a bad case for inspiration! If, however, when the inspired writers differ, the faithful may have their choice, I claim that, in the same spirit, the non-faithful may also have theirs; and, if needs be, reject both.

We are told by the same authorities that Luke only wrote his gospel as he heard it. So that, so far as Luke is concerned, his gospel must be hear-say only. But seeing that they hold all to have been inspired, we are bound to suppose that it is inspired hear-say; and that it differs from other inspired matter—or rather, from other inspired accounts of the same matter which are *not* hear-say! I do not think the Roman Church can object to this view, because it holds tradition to be equally as true and sacred as Holy Writ itself. Tradition frequently becomes doctrine, which you *must accept as the truth*—the doctrine of the "immaculate conception" to wit: which means that Christ was not only born without the taint of "original sin", but his "virgin mother" was also *conceived* and *born* without such sin!

Let us, in passing, look for an instant at that doctrine. It appears to me that if it, and the reasoning it implies, were driven to their legitimate end, it would kill the notion of original sin altogether; because if it becomes necessary to make Christ's mother immaculate—free from all sin, original and otherwise—it becomes more necessary to make her parents—both mother and father—free also; and so on down to the "beginning". Thus, in order to give logical birth to the doctrine of the *immaculate conception*, you must murder that of *original sin*. Of course the miracle-monger

can say no: it was an easy matter for God to produce Mary from her tainted parents without herself partaking of the taint. This is in fact what the Church of Rome does teach. But there is a nicety about it that is well worth looking at—some really superb theological reasoning. It is held that the immaculate conception, or the conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary “without the stain of original sin, refers to her soul, not to her body”, for the reason that a “human *body* is not in *itself* capable of guilt”. The Catholic Church teaches that in all other human beings, the soul, when united to the infant body—yet unborn—necessarily contracts the stain of original sin. I do not think it is made quite clear as to when this union—or *fusion*, as it is elsewhere called—of the body and soul takes place. It is commonly held that the *soul* is the *life*; but in a work which I have before me,¹ Mary is said to have had sanctifying grace, etc. bestowed upon her at the very instant her soul was infused into her body, which it further states was “in the very first instant of her existence”. It would appear from this that the *fusion* spoken of takes place at the time of conception. The question as to what precise moment may be set down for the infusion opens up some curious considerations. In any case we have the *body*, which is material and cannot sin, so affecting the *soul*, which is immaterial, pure, and immortal, as to contaminate it with original sin. A lump of “clay”, incapable by “*itself*” of sin, but charged with enough of the *original* stuff to blast a pure soul—which, by the way, is held to control the body! It would thus appear that man is a kind of human Seidlitz powder, and does not effervesce into a regular original-sin-being, as per God, until properly mixed. And this it is which did *not* take place in the case of the *Blessed Virgin*. God so contrived her mixing—“*through the foreseen merits of Jesus Christ*”—that the fusion of her body and soul did not produce the regular result, *i.e.*, “a child of sin”. According to this teaching—WHICH IS CATHOLIC—God, in his great mercy, gave the soul of *one* woman a pure tenement, and blasted the souls of *every other human being* with foul ones!

Passing that by, we come back to what I said the miracle-mongers might plead, *viz.*, that it was an easy matter

¹ “Catholic Belief,” by the Very Rev. Joseph Faa Di Bruno, D.D.

for God to produce Mary through the medium of her tainted parents without herself being tainted. But upon the same line of argument, he could have done a like thing with regard to Christ and his parents, and therefore the doctrine of the immaculate conception becomes a mere superfluity. It is simply an endeavor to get over one difficulty by proposing a greater. Apart from this, however, can it be contended that Christ, who, being God, was necessarily pure, became *more* than pure by being brought into the world through the body of a specially-manufactured immaculate virgin wife? Out upon such vile trash! The plain fact is, the immaculateness of Mary was manifestly an afterthought. This foolish church thought it could produce what it conceived to be purity, through an impure medium, *i.e.*, a pure "Christ child" through the medium of an impure woman—by which I mean a woman "tainted with original sin"—providing always that her husband took neither hand nor part in the matter! The Church first drew the line at poor inoffensive Joseph. Later on it dawned upon the Church that Christ's mother, whose flesh and blood he had become, should also be pure. Being committed to her, it thought it was in a dilemma; something must be done: what more easy than to work, or assume, a miracle? Hence the "Immaculate Mary" rubbish. I suppose that, had Christ been under the necessity of having an earthly father, in the same sense as ordinary mortals, the Church would have had to manufacture some sort of an *immaculate conception* on behalf of unlucky Joseph. As it is, they insist upon his wife remaining a virgin both before and after marriage, in order that his only child should not be contaminated! And to cap all, Christ's genealogy is traced through Joseph and his house down to Abraham, capital (of the *humility* type) actually being made out of the supposed fact that two out of four of his female progenitors mentioned were adulteresses!

I feel that I have digressed very considerably from my subject, but really every line is so suggestive of thought, that I find a difficulty in confining myself strictly to it.

Turning again to the gospels and to that "according to Saint John", we find that writer to be more ignorant upon the matter of the temptations than Mark. He not only knows nothing about the temptations themselves, but is altogether oblivious of his Master having been either

“driven” or “led” for forty days and nights into the wilderness. This oversight or oblivion on the part of John is most singular. *His* gospel is not set down as being mere hearsay; on the contrary, he was, upon the authority of those whom I will take the liberty of calling the learned and reverend editors of the Bible, one of the most loved and constant companions of Christ. So much so, that Christ is said to have confided the care of his mother to John at his own death. (It may be remarked that, according to all the gospels, he paid her but scant attention himself during life.) But surely this particular evangelist should have known something of what happened to his “Divine Lord” during his forty days and nights absence in the wilderness, instead of being quite unaware of such absence—he does not appear to have so much as dreamed of it! So far as John’s gospel informs us, we are bound to assume that he not only did not know of its occurrence, but that it did not, and could not, have occurred; for he actually carries the history of Christ’s doings right on without a break; telling how John the Baptist and certain disciples saw and conversed with him *the day after* the baptism; how they followed him, and many other things leading up to the “marriage feast”, at which the feat of changing the water into wine is said to have been performed. Whereas, according to Matthew and Luke—Luke most emphatically—Jesus was led into the wilderness to be tempted immediately after baptism. This is evidently another case in which the faithful may take their choice. It is a case of abridgment of one evangelist by another with a vengeance. John not only abridges Matthew, but allows less than no time wherein to do forty days and nights fasting, to say nothing of the three mighty temptations at the hands of Old Nick.

It is true that these Bible compilers and expounders give John but a poor character as to his learning and scholarship generally—admit that he was not a lettered man, etc.—but of course show how he more than made up for his ignorance in this respect, by his great and “supernatural light”, “by the depth of the mysteries”, “by the super-excellency of the matter”, “the solidity of his thoughts”, “by the infused wisdom with which the Holy Ghost filled him”, and much more. This is all very pretty, and, taken in a lump, might be devoutly supposed to mean

something very marvellous, serving of course as a counter-balance for lack of learning; but it does not fill up a gap of forty days and nights, nor give space for that period of time where none is allowed.

If Smith said that his master went out on a certain day right away into the wilderness or woods, to begin a large and special piece of work, and was not seen for forty days and nights, during which time certain things happened to him; and if Brown said that the said master was at home during the same period, doing certain other things; and if then Jones explained the difference between the two statements by saying that Brown abridged Smith; we should probably think that Smith and Brown were fools, and that Jones was a liar. But this is exactly what happens between Matthew, John, and the expounder. We will, however, leave this portion of the case by simply asking the thoughtful if it recommends itself to their understanding—is it worthy of their belief? Will they take upon trust, matters professing to touch what is called their *eternal salvation*, but which are so loose and contradictory as to be a mere joke when applied to the ordinary business of life?

Let us continue the careful examination of the subject, as given in Matthew and already quoted in full, commenting upon it as we proceed.

The first verse announces that "Jesus was led by the spirit into the desert, to be tempted by the devil".

Now, bearing in mind that Jesus was one portion of the "Godhead", or the "second person of the Holy Trinity"—in short, was, and is God—the question, How then could he be tempted? forces itself upon us. Can God be tempted? especially by the vilest of his vile subordinates? The supposition involved is so stupendously foolish as to be beneath argument! The idea of subordinate or limited power tempting *all* power is, indeed, a sublime joke! Why, the expounder himself (foolishly) admits—or, rather, points out—in a note that, "so restrained is the devil's power, that he could not go into the swine till Christ permitted it". And yet, in another, he childishly talks of Christ's "victory over the enemy of our Salvation": that is, the victory of the source of all power, over a limited and restrained portion thereof! A holder of restrained power tempting the fountain of power! Well

might Mr. Bradlaugh¹ ask the question which I have repeated:—

“Can God be tempted?”. That, reverend sirs, is a problem for you to solve; that, clerical mice, is a nut for you to crack, and one, I promise you, that will not be easily disposed of.

I am, of course, aware that some—the Unitarians, for instance—hold that Christ not having been God, but simply a man—a chosen *human* instrument, might, and could be tempted; although I doubt if they would now seriously hold that he was tempted, as set forth in the Testament. But even taking their view, the temptation is a mere farce; it can be nothing more; because Christ, whether God or man, being God's medium and intended Savior of the world, would, or certainly ought to, be something more than a mere shuttlecock in the hands of the devil, otherwise, how shall he accomplish his task? How shall he overthrow the power he is sent to combat, if he is in danger of being overthrown by that power? I presume it was not a matter of chance or experiment as to whether he really became the Saviour or not? And if there were no danger of overthrow, where the temptation? It is a joke, whichever way you look at it. On one hand, we have a temptation which directly supposes the possibility of succumbing; and on the other, we are bound to suppose that there could be no possibility of his being made to succumb; because in the latter case God would be simply blasting his own desires. Of course, a Trinitarian *cannot* hold that Christ might have failed; and I doubt if a Unitarian will be found to do so. Hence, according to both, the temptation is as I have called it—a farce. All Christians must, I think, hold that Christ was above temptation. If not, they would, as I have pointed out, have to hold that he might, by succumbing to the devil, have turned the stones into bread, or have worshipped him at the price mentioned; or have thrown himself off the pinnacle and broken his neck, thus cheating the Jews of their crucifixion, and the world of its salvation.

Referring for a moment to the wretch whom the expounder—not I—dragged in, and who carried in his own person enough devils to drive mad and drown “two

¹ See his excellent pamphlet, “Our Gospels, Whence and How?”

thousand" inoffensive pigs; I ask: Is it not degrading at this time of day to be under the necessity of discussing for one single instant the question of a legion of devils—called by the expounder *Satan*—leaving the body of a man and entering those of pigs! Lo! the pigs "were stifled in the sea". But I presume the devils, who were possibly good swimmers were saved. Being devils, we cannot well suppose they were drowned. Possibly God, or Satan, their more immediate master—which amounts to the same thing—had further need of them. But of what consequence are the lives of a herd of swine, compared with the whim of a legion of devils who had a sudden fancy for pork? But seriously; what monstrously far-fetched fable is it we have before us. Legion of devils in one man—a herd of swine peaceably feeding; devils howl to Christ—not to the pigs—and say they know him; devils crave permission to enter the pigs, which is granted; pigs rush into the sea; bubble and squeak! and all is over! Let us cross ourselves!

I have a picture before me of this truly sublime and very much Christian subject. It ought to do the Rev. G. F. H. Rowe's heart good; especially if he, like the devils in question, should have a weakness for pork. Every feature is founded upon *New Testament* authority. Christ is represented as if in the act of accommodating the legion of devils, by granting their prayer:—"Send us into the herd of swine." Some of his followers who are in the background appear a little uneasy at what is going on; they do not seem to quite relish the looks of the lately "possessed" one, who is crawling at Christ's feet in a partially nude and bewildered fashion. I may remark that to be suddenly delivered of two thousand devils—which is giving each devil a pig—is no joke; and would be quite enough to bewilder any man. The now mad and be-devilled pigs, which, after the devils had entered into them, were "with great violence carried into the sea", are represented toppling over the distant cliffs into the water like a swarm of mice. The picture is one of a series intended to instruct the young in the "Divine truths" as contained in the New Testament. Therefore I, as one of those whom the above-mentioned rev. gentleman has invited "to study afresh the teachings of Christianity", in return, and with much gratitude, invite him to study this

particular portion thereof. I should like to ask him if the pigs were *providentially* disposed of, or whether pigs are outside the range of providence? and if so, why? Perhaps it would be better if I used his own phraseology, and asked him if the suffocation of the herd of swine was the result of one of God's "Divine arrangements"? And if the wretch who dwelt for an indefinite period "in the tombs", and whom "no man was able to bind, . . . not even with chains", and who "was always day and night in the monuments and mountains, crying and cutting himself with stones", etc., was excluded by "Divine arrangements" from the exercise of his free will? And if not by "Divine arrangements", by what arrangements? The entire happening was either by reason of the "Divine arrangements", or in spite of them. And so with all happenings, including the "results of the exercise" of what is called *free will*. And, in either case, exit the ideal Christian God. The Rev. Mr. Rowe's theory of "Free will" and "Divine arrangements" would compel God to be eternally dancing attendance upon the devil, in order to block him with new "Divine arrangements", as occasion might require or circumstances permit—with the proviso that, by reason of his omniscience, he is enabled to do much of his dancing beforehand. How very God-like!

The discussion of the question of free will and predestination, although enticing, is plainly beyond the scope and intention of this pamphlet; perhaps we may, so far as it relates to this particular *demoniac* and the swine, harmlessly allow what would very likely be Mr. Rowe's own view to stand: viz., that he, God, had no hand in the matter, but simply "discerned beforehand" that the man would be *possessed* as described, that he made his arrangements accordingly, and thus had the pigs at hand ready to have the devils popped into them, which he knew beforehand would please them—I mean the devils, the pigs don't count. The sea likewise being there was also handy in turn to pop the pigs into. That is a very nice and comfortable arrangement for everybody—except the pigs—and I have no doubt is fraught with deep and sublime meaning, and is, of course, and above all, deeply Christian. I admit there is just a little difficulty involved in this view, because it forces you to hold that God of his own choice, *created* the earth and all its creatures, having power to produce it

upon any plan or fashion he pleased; but that he is nevertheless *not* responsible for the result of such *creation*. I will further admit that one might be tempted to think that it would be easier—though not always so held by the law—to hold that a human being who cannot discern all things beforehand, and whose work must necessarily partake more or less of the nature of experiment, might not be responsible for the result of his work. I will even admit that some might be tempted to profanely regard applying such a principle to God as a joke. But then we must remember that a little faith judiciously mixed with prayer will make all this right.

Of Christ's temptation, I have seen it urged—indeed it is the common Christian cant of the matter, and is held more or less from the hoary old Church of Rome (*gory* would be a better word), down through all the shades and grades of the white-chokered fraternity generally, that, although Christ was God, he was also man: and that it was in his character and nature of man, that he suffered and was tempted. God suffered as man and not as God? That, in reality, is saying he *was* God, and that he was *not* God. It is contending that, because God *is* God, therefore he can be God and *not* God at one and the same time. If you hold that God can do all things, even to the annulling his own Godship, and still remain God, argument must cease; the matter becomes pure nonsense. But it is nevertheless being consequently urged. Indeed, the folly and contradiction involved in the Christian faith, especially in connection with its God, is something unspeakable. In this matter of Christ's temptation it is held that God, in one form, not only permitted, but willed that God in another form—which at the same time was not God—should be tempted by a power which God in either form could have easily crushed! Where then, "in the name of God"—excuse the borrowed phrase—was the temptation? If God is God he can be nothing else; no matter what form he may assume, whether it be that of a supposed maker of a world, or a Savior of one. Of course, I am not contending for any such thing as the existence of a God: I am simply showing the folly of the Christian conception, and the impossibility of his being tempted. My contention is that God must necessarily be God—his Almightyness notwithstanding—in any guise; whether it

be that of a man, a fish, or any other thing. Hence the "God-man" was God; and hence his temptation was all fudge. But we will leave the supposed fact, and go to the manner of it.

The second verse innocently tells that, "when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterwards hungry". (!) The difference between Christ and an ordinary mortal who persevered in the attempt would be that he would *not* be hungry: he would be defunct. Foolish people have from time to time, humbly or presumptuously—whichever you like—endeavoured to imitate him. As far as I know, the celebrated Dr. Tanner came nearest to performing the feat. But after all, fasting in specially tempered apartments, with careful watching by skilful doctors, is only a feather-bed kind of fasting, and can in no way be compared with a fast performed out in the open desert, and watched only by wild beasts. Christ may be fairly said to have beaten all comers in the matter of fasting. And it must be borne in mind that he could have accomplished another forty days and nights as easily as those which he had already got through, had he been so minded. Nevertheless, it seems—regarding him as a man—not to be surprising that he "was afterwards hungry". But taking the other view—that held by nearly all Christians, viz., that he was God—it really *does* become a little surprising. I venture to think that a hungry God is something of a novelty. The idea is quite worthy of being Christian. And the expounder to some extent adopts it—that is, he gives the God character to Christ. In another note on the subject, he innocently remarks that "Jesus wished to manifest a certain corporeal weakness arising out of his continued fast, that the devil might venture to tempt him," etc. So that he really was hungry; and his hunger was the result of his fasting. You see that although he desired to cheat the devil into what he knew would be a fruitless attempt at temptation, he nevertheless desired it should be a *fair* kind of cheat. The weakness manifested should arise from the continued fast, that the devil might *venture* to tempt him. Here we have, upon the expounder's authority, a temptation within a temptation. Christ actually tempting the devil to tempt Christ! "Very God and very man"—as the Church hath it—tempting the very devil to tempt, through him, the entire

Trinity! for one portion could not be tempted without the other.

Look a little deeper into the picture here presented, and what have we? We have God No. 1 in heaven—well, he is there when at home; or, as the expounder elsewhere puts it, he is there particularly, and everywhere else generally, and, I presume, *not* hungry. And we have God No. 2, who is not a separate God, but part and parcel of God No. 1, “led” or “driven” into the wilderness by God No. 3 (who is portion of Gods Nos. 1 and 2), being either hungry, or pretending hunger, in order to induce the vilest enemy and subordinate of Gods 1, 2, and 3 to tempt the entire trio! And it was to maintain “the truth” of this God-twaddle “inviolable”, that the fiendish Inquisition raised its black head, and fires were lit up in all parts of the Christian world, to be fed by the noblest and best of the human race.

The expounder, in one of his notes, takes occasion to recommend fasting as being good by way of mortifying the flesh in order to strengthen the spirit against temptation, etc., forgetting that he had just previously pointed out that it was by the appearance of the weakness—whether real or pretended—occasioned by the fasting that Christ hoped, and succeeded in inducing poor Old Nick to tempt him. Truly these opposite statements are quite fit to be considered inspired.

Now, whether Christ was really hungry or not, and whether fasting in general is good or not, one thing is quite certain. The good people of the Church, particularly the clergy, mostly manage to make their fasts come as near being feasts as their means will allow. If I, or you, gentle reader, chanced to be a *Catholic*, and felt a desire to taste a bit of flesh meat—felt that a cut from the joint would be relishable—and partook of it, say a few minutes before the hour of twelve on the night of what is known as a *fast day*, we should thereby commit mortal sin. But if our more discreet, and of course more obedient neighbour waited till the clock struck the hour, and then satisfied his craving, he would be free of the sin: thus perchance escaping hell by a few minutes. I don't think the fact of the clock being wrong—unless he knew it—would count against him; the Church in that case would be satisfied with the intent. It simply requires implicit

obedience. Again:—If it happened to be a *fast day*, or day of abstinence, on which only one full meal is allowed, every means are taken to make that meal as *full* as possible; thus making the fast or abstinence as near a sham as may be. But, although on these days you may not take two full meals, you may, in addition to the one allowed, take a *collation*. This of course makes it very comfortable for those of collation means. One full meal, and a collation, in reality means, one fairly good meal, and—to be vulgar—one “good blow out”. But with the poor folk the matter is different. The collation allowed would most likely be a treat for “Sunday’s dinner”. I have seen many eating their red herring, and taking their tea—if it deserved that name—without either milk or sugar, and their bread without butter, on these days of fast and abstinence. True, they mostly do it with a bad grace, but they dare not for their very *souls*, if genuine Catholics, break the fast, unless specially permitted to do so by the priest. I do not exactly condemn these poor folks, either rich or needy, for this: they are bred up to it, and made to act in this inconsistent and shuffling manner whether they will or not. The poor and needy at any rate must not be blamed if hunger tempt them to act inconsistently. They, in all conscience, fast, to their sorrow. Yet, according to the tenets of this fasting Church, we are bound to suppose that many a poor and un-contrite wretch finds his way into hell with nothing but a bit of dry bread and reasty bacon “on his stomach”, whilst his more devout and well-to-do fellow-believer floats mellifluously into heaven upon his choice fish and sauce, with all those other condiments in which the souls of your fat and oily ecclesiastics delight, and which go to make up a dinner as served at the table of my Lord Bishop of Holy Church.

In verse 3, we learn that, “the tempter coming, said to him: If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread”; thus showing the hungry ruse to have been quite successful. It is in connection with this verse that the expounder remarks that Christ wished to display this particular “corporeal weakness.” Of course every verse and every line teems with the folly of God being tempted by the devil. But taking what may be termed an *infernal* view of the matter, and which ought to some extent be a Christian view—because Hell and

Heaven may be said to be the two ends of Christianity—it is only natural that the devil should be anxious to put some kind of test upon Christ in order to satisfy himself that the real “Simon Pure” had come. It is only reasonable to suppose that he should be anxious to know with whom he had to contend, so as to be in a position to judge as to how far his doings on the earth were to be affected. He was naturally solicitous for his kingdom here, as well as the one below; and thought it not amiss to try this newcomer's skill as a necromancer and miracle-worker, in order to see if he could pit his own powers against him.

It is quite clear that Satan had not seen nor heard anything of the opening of the heavens, and the loud voice proclaiming “this is my beloved son,” etc., together with the dove business. Neither had any of his imps; or, if they had, the duty of reporting to headquarters had been sadly neglected—which circumstance I do think rather unaccountable; because, having so many devils at his command that he was able shortly after to tell off an entire legion for the benefit, and to do duty on the person of one man, it is only reasonable to think that he, if too busy himself, would have had some one or two on duty at the river Jordan upon such an important occasion. However this may have been, Christ did not satisfy him by doing the miracle required; but replied: (verse 4) “It is written: Man liveth not by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.” Here we evidently have the man part of God telling the devil that he could live pretty much without food, providing he could procure enough of words out of the mouth of the God part of himself! Well, the idea is certainly novel; but it does not satisfy us poor mortals. Words are but a windy diet. So far, I think the devil had the best of the argument.

The expounder has a very curious note in reference to this statement that the words which proceed out of God's mouth form part of man's diet; which shows I was not so far from orthodoxy, in speaking of Christ's ability to live on them, as some might be inclined to suppose. He says, “the words were spoken of the manna,” and refers the reader to Duet. viii. 3, which certainly does mix the manna and the statement about the words strangely up together. But does the expounder really mean that this miraculous

bread came out of God's mouth? If he does not, I do not see how the statement made by Christ can have reference to it. Bear in mind, the text does not say one word about manna, nor anything else edible: it speaks of words, or, "every word". I admit that the statement in Matthew might be held to have reference to the latter part of that referred to in Deuteronomy: indeed it is simply a repetition of it; but it is difficult to see how either refers to manna.

The expounder goes on to say that the passage also means—in fact, its sense in this place is—"that man's life can be supported by anything, or in any manner, as it pleaseth God". It is rather difficult to quite catch the meaning of the note as a whole; but if it means that man's life can be supported upon anything, or in any manner, and sustained in any fashion which pleaseth God, I cannot help being profanely surprised that it has not pleased him to support the lives of those who in thousands, and in tens, and in ones, have sunk into the grave of starvation with all its accompanying horrors and woe; and the lives of those who have perished wholesale by flood, pestilence, and earthquake.

Will the Rev. Mr. Rowe hold that God's "divine arrangements" do not interfere with the free will of such as these?

The only rejoinder to my amazement is that it "pleaseth God" *not* to support their lives, but to massacre them. This he sometimes does by sudden upheavals, shocks, rushings, and displacements of what has, in mock humility, been called his footstool; and sometimes by slow and painful processes.

Mark, I am not saying these things: therefore do not take shelter under what you will presumptuously call my profanity. It is you, reverend and non-reverend snufflers, who prate of what "pleaseth God" and the rest. I but apply your own preaching. If it pleased God to feed by miraculous means a horde of the worst and most inconsistent butchers that even fable tells of, it also pleases him to allow countless thousands to perish who are bent on noble enterprise. If it pleaseth him to bless this creature, it also pleaseth him to blast this other. If it pleaseth him to feed this man, it also pleaseth him to starve this poor little shivering and helpless child, or that heart-broken

woman. If it pleaseth him to save from fire or wreck such a man or woman, it likewise pleaseth him that such another man or woman shall perish in their endeavour to rescue their wife, their husband, their children. If it pleaseth your God that an animal shall bound with life and vigor, it also pleaseth him that another shall gore and rend it with tooth, horn, and fang, and that all shall be infested with its own parasite, and that each in turn shall succumb to disease and death in more or less painful form. If it pleaseth him to warm into life and beauty by means of the sun, it also pleaseth him to scorch up and kill by an excess of its heat, or to shrivel and perish by reason of its absence. If it pleaseth him to moisten the earth with the "dew of heaven", it at the same time pleaseth him to deluge portions of it with flood and storm, and to afflict, to choke with sore and ulcer, the young, the innocent, the old, the weak and helpless, either by an excess or by the quality of this same dew. And so on *ad infinitum*. These are the deductions which must be drawn from your own premises. If your God scatters light and peace and joy with one hand, he deals out misery, darkness, wrong, disease, and death with the other. And just as the sun must shine on all, so must the black cloud envelope all.¹ God smites the weak and the deserving as ruthlessly as he does the strong and the guilty. The lines which say that "God tempers the wind to the shorn lamb," are a delusion. They are the out-pourings of a benevolent but unobservant mind. Our "shorn lambs" die of exposure and want.

To put it into blunt language: either God is God all round; or he is not God. Making the devil do duty for the dark side of the world is but a poor device. And the wretched begging of the question which finds utterance in the miserable plea that "God does all for a wise end," etc., etc., is even worse. Nor will your "good tidings of great joy" serve as a plaster for the world's sores. Up to the present moment only a few of the world's inhabitants have had an opportunity of embracing it, and many millions of those who have had the opportunity, are unable to do so, while millions more practically ignore it. When it *did*

¹ I really think I go too far when I admit that the sun shines upon all. Thousands there are at all times into whose hovels the sun's rays never penetrate. There the black cloud *always* reigns.

reign supreme it became a scourge. In short, it is a failure, which, of course, your God "discerned beforehand." For myself, I say that your God, and your "pleaseth God" theory is for the most part cant and pretence; or it is a blind belief in the remnant of an exploded theory which was the outcome of dark and ignorant times.

It is really difficult to say, going back to the text, which portion is most heavily laden with folly. It is perhaps impossible to conceive anything more supremely ridiculous than the matter related in the next verse (5). It says that, "the devil took him up into the holy city, and set him upon the pinnacle of the temple."

The devil is evidently becoming impatient. If his devilship could not induce God to work a miracle for the devil; why, the devil will work a miracle for God! And so the devil took God up bodily and set him upon the pinnacle of the temple. Did he dowel him on; or did Christ accommodatingly assist the devil by sitting quietly and miraculously upon the pinnacle? Or was it by the power of the devil, pure and simple, that he, God, thus sat? Truly a real live God in the flesh must have formed a novel and curious finial to a pinnacle! But what did the devil sit upon? His thumb, or another pinnacle? Or did he potter about the roof and shout up to Christ as he sat upon his lofty perch? Or again, did the devil remain in mid air standing upon nothing? Evidence is lacking.

Forgive me, or at least bear with me, Christian friend, when I express my contempt for such vile rubbish. I do not wish to be what you term *profane* for the mere sake of profanity—a charge frequently brought against such as myself. If something truly God-like were submitted to me, I should perforce have to give to it such devotion as my intelligence demanded. But to be asked to worship a God stuck upon a pinnacle like some kind of steeple jack, accommodatingly holding on in order to go through the farce and mockery of being tempted by a power which your "ordained" instructors in the same breath assert had no power to tempt him, is too supremely ridiculous, and can only awaken my pity for those who are sufficiently imbecile to do so.

If I am to worship, it must not be a God whom you have manufactured and endowed with all the follies, the hates and jealousies which afflict yourselves. Pardon me when

I say you have disfigured your God with your own imperfections—nay, you have done more: you have made him the personification of all the worst and most foolish parts of yourselves gone mad. You will make him wade through oceans of blood to please a favorite, or a favored people; you will make him change the laws of nature, and his own will, to please yourselves; and you will stick him upon a pinnacle to please the devil. Then you will curse and smite me because I cannot worship your incongruous monstrosity, which is but a night-mare—a creature of your own disordered brain.

Pay attention for a moment to what our good friend and guide—the man of notes—has to say about the pinnacle item. He says that, “it was probably upon the parapet that the devil conveyed Jesus”! But why *probably* upon the parapet? If Christ chose to be placed upon the top of a pinnacle assisting the devil in the performance, or permitting the devil to do it without his assistance, I think the modern expounder, Christ’s humble priest as he is, should be content to let it be so. Why should he suggest something different from that which is stated in what he elsewhere affirms is “God’s word”? The reason is not far to seek: the pinnacle looks just “a wee bit” *too* “unco”, and he is ashamed of it—as well he might be—and thinks the job could be better done on the parapet. He may have which he likes. If he thinks his God looks less ridiculous on the parapet than on the pinnacle, why let him not mount the pinnacle. If he chooses to *unsay* the “written Word,” by all means let him do so. The folly of the entire story makes the mere detail as nothing.

He further remarks that, if we ask in what way the taking up was done, St. Gregory answers “that Christ might suffer himself to be taken up and transported in the air by the devil,” etc. Well, if Gregory said so, that ought to be quite sufficient. St. Gregory was styled one of the Four Doctors of the church, by reason of his great wisdom; and he is, moreover, represented as having *divine truth* whispered into his ear by a dove. [Do not smile, “ye scoffers,” parrots can talk, and why not Gregory’s dove whisper?] It is highly probable that the said dove whispered, amongst other things, this particular bit of information anent Christ and the pinnacle. But if I remember rightly, St. Gregory was, as well as being cruel, an

unscrupulous zealot, and therefore what he says upon the subject need not necessarily have much weight. Besides, it did not need a Gregory to say anything so foolish: your modern saints could have said it quite as well as he did.

We learn from verse 6, that Satan, after setting Christ upon the pinnacle as related, began to tempt him a second time, and to quote Scripture to him by way of cajoling him into doing the thing asked.

Reader, and especially *Christian* reader—if I am sufficiently fortunate to have such—*do* try and realize this picture. Imagine your God, or the “Son” of your God, your “Redeemer”, perched upon the point of a pinnacle, with the devil perched upon some other point; and each pelting the other with quotations from Scripture. Is it not sublime? Can you call to mind anything culled from any sort of heathen mythology more ridiculous? Do you honestly and candidly, as reasonable creatures, believe that it occurred? Come, shake the priest off your backs and answer: do you think that your God went through the mockery of being tempted by the devil on the top of either parapet or pinnacle? Nay, is it not an insult to your intelligence to ask belief in such tomfoolery? Think of these things, I beg of you, and the result, if nothing else, must be less unkindness to those who have thought it their duty to reject and expose them. I for one have no fear for *Atheists* studying afresh the principles of Christianity as recommended by the Rev. Mr. Rowe; but I urge that Christians ought also to do the same thing.

I must again say, that I do not think our friend the devil was altogether to blame for the part he took in the matter. He was only testing the genuineness of the man who had the temerity to style himself the “Son of God”, and accordingly told him, if he were such, to cast himself down, and added (verse 6) “for it is written: That he hath given his angels charge over thee, and in their hands shall they bear thee up, lest perhaps thou hurt thy foot against a stone”. God hurt his foot against a stone! It would be as reasonable to tell us that he was in danger of hurting his mouth against a black pudding! Bear in mind we are not to ignore the folly just because the devil happens to be spokesman.

God, however, was not to be persuaded to do anything so foolish as to pitch himself off the pinnacle in order to

please the devil, for we are told in the next verse (7) that, "Jesus said to him: It is written again: Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God". (I shall use that reply as my authority for speaking of the man on the pinnacle as God.) You see, God may tempt the devil, and fool him by his hungry appearance to essay his (God's) temptation, and tell him whilst so engaged that he must "not tempt the Lord thy God"! This is surely a wonderfully dove-tailed piece of business, and quite *beyond our frail comprehension*; therefore if I get a little mixed in dealing with this three-sided deity, I may fairly claim to be pardoned.

I think the reply given to the devil sounds, at least, very like the God portion of the man Christ speaking. It also appears to me that there is considerable advantage in thus being able to assume the character of God, or man, which this triple-headed divinity has bestowed upon himself; because if the God-man is not equal to the emergency, the God-god comes to the rescue. However that may be, the answer was a good one, and showed that if the devil could quote scripture against God, God could also quote scripture against the devil. It reads very like a game at scripture "tit for tat" played "sky high" between the "King of Kings" and "Old Nick".

Before going to the third and last temptation, I must just wonder for a moment how the devil got Christ down again from the top of the pinnacle. Did he "transport" him down? Or, did Christ slide down after having unhooked himself? Again we do not know, and the Scriptures do not tell us. They all seem anxious, from Gregory down, as to how the devil managed to get him up, but they don't seem to care a button how he got down again.

Verses 8 and 9 inform us that, "Again the devil took him up into a very high mountain: and showed him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them, And said to him: All these will I give thee, if falling down thou wilt adore me". St. Luke says the thing was done "in a moment of time".

Now these verses, constituting as they do what is called the *third temptation*, are so completely laden with folly that one scarcely knows where to begin pointing it out. The folly is all over them. The whole idea teems with it. The notion of God Almighty being bothered about in this

fashion by the devil to undergo a mock temptation is so excessively ridiculous, that I nearly repent me for having spent my time in seriously contraverting it. But having gone so far, I will continue to the end.

We must suppose, then, that in this instance the devil did not "transport" Christ. As the journey was only to the summit of a very high mountain, one was as well able to *foot it* as the other. Mark, the mountain had to be a *very high* one, or it would not have served the purpose. Having arrived there the devil became showman, and *actually showed Christ all the kingdoms of the earth at one time!* and offered to give them to him in return for his adoration!

Now, the idea of the devil offering to give to God what he already possessed as an inducement to worship him, is so utterly preposterous as to make difficult any serious treatment of it. The folly is so intense that it is well-nigh overwhelming. Indeed the idea of Satan showing Christ all the kingdoms of the earth at one time—in a lump as it were—to tempt him, is worthy of a schoolboy showing his fellow schoolboy a large heap of gooseberries or big apples in order to induce him to do something he did not wish to do. Nay, the idea set forth in the text is even worse, because, to make it a parallel, the boy to whom the gooseberries were offered would have to already possess them; and would be further required to know that it was his own property which was being offered to him as an inducement to do something he had no intention of doing. Can folly go further than this? And yet it is "Holy Writ". It is a portion of what God did, and put up with, in furtherance of his great scheme of salvation. Christ at that time may be said to have been in training, with Old Nick as his trainer, for the heavy work which he had cut out for himself. The expounder shows in many ways that he takes a similar view to this, although his wording is naturally somewhat different.

Now, if the devil showed—or rather, endeavored to show—to the *man* Christ all the kingdoms, etc., it would necessarily be a failure. If Christ looked or tried to look at them with his corporeal or *man* eyes, he could not see them. In fact, the higher the mountain, after reaching a certain altitude, the less his chance, because human eyes are limited organs. So that, had the world been flat, I think it will be conceded that Christ would have required

CHRIST'S TEMPTATION.

powerful vision, and an extremely fine day, and very favorable atmospheric conditions generally, to have accomplished the feat. But, unfortunately for the story, the world is round: how, then, did the devil manage to show him the whole of its surface at one time? The text says he did it! Did he, the devil, work a miracle to that end? Or did God again work one on the devil's behalf? How people can be sufficiently imbecile to bow their heads to this, and express a belief in it because snuffed out in weary and monotonous tones by a priest, or by a soapy and white-chokered young fop, is truly beyond my comprehension.

But suppose we take the other view of the case, and adopt the idea that Christ, being God, *could* of course see round corners, and was therefore in a position to be *shown* all the kingdoms of the earth at one time: what have the miracle-mongers gained? Nothing. The folly is simply heightened, because, being God, there was no occasion for the "very high mountain" at all. What a piece of sublime—or rather *infernal*—superfluity for the devil to make God tramp to the top of a high mountain, when he could have shown him all he desired at the bottom of it! And this is leaving out of sight the foolishness of the supposed necessity of the showing, either with or without the aid of a mountain.

It is, of course, possible that the devil did not know with whom he was dealing, and that, despite his inexhaustable fund of deceit and cunning, God succeeded in hoodwinking him: indeed, this is, I think, the correct reading. God, I presume, in his "inscrutable wisdom", and for the better salvation of the world, *divinely arranged* to humor the devil (and amuse mankind) by allowing him to think that it was by his own power and will that he stuck him—God—upon a pinnacle, and trotted him up a mountain, so as to offer him what could in reality be no inducement to him to do something he had no intention whatever of doing. And this is the rubbish, for openly denouncing and refusing credence to which, a man in the nineteenth century is imprisoned and practically outlawed.

Before quitting these two verses, we must see what our friend the expounder has to say upon the matter contained in them. It would seem that he, poor fellow, fully recognizes the difficulty of the position; for, in a note in refer-

ence to "all the kingdoms," etc., he actually says: "We cannot comprehend how this could be done from *any mountain*, or seen with *human eyes*." (Italics mine in both cases.) "Therefore many think that it was by some kind of representation, or that the devil showing a part, by words set forth the rest." To this I may first remark that, if you reject every statement which your Bible makes because it cannot be comprehended, and is at variance with common sense, you will not have much of it left. But *why* could they not be seen from "any mountain", or by Christ's eyes? Is not God, God? Can he not see the zenith and the nadir at one and the same time? Could he not have made his vision to travel round the plane of the earth, and so have taken in every kingdom and its glory at one glance? Or, could he not have made his sight to pierce the globe, and, coming out of its crust at every point so have taken in the spectacle of all the kingdoms at one time? Or again, could not the devil who had the power of *transporting* Christ through the air, etc., have done the business for him? Both one and the other are said to have done many much more wonderful things. Really, reverend sirs, I am surprised at you; and am inclined to bestow upon you some scriptural admonition:—"O ye of little faith". How dare you place your "*some think*" and your "*probably*" before the plain statements of Holy Writ! Your notes, Sirs, taken as a whole, are simply very weak attempts to make your inspired Bible fit in with the lesser faith of to-day. Why do you not stick to your text and enforce it as you did when your grim and merciless church did to death such men as Galileo, Bruno, Servetus, and hosts of others? Or, if you cannot do that—which, thanks to the march of science and the spread of learning amongst the people, you cannot—and feel yourselves to be wrong, why not be honest, and frankly admit your error? Why do you not candidly say that this foolish story was written when the world was thought to be a flat plane; that a mere speck of it only was known to the writers and that they erroneously thought it possible by means of a high mountain to see all over it at one time. Such a method would certainly have the merit of candour, and be more honorable than giving a few verses in *large type* of what you have called "revealed truth", and then explaining it away

by means of columns of closely printed notes of so-called explanation. Take the present case as an instance. The text says in so many words that the devil took Christ—who is held to be God—up into a very high mountain, and showed him all the kingdoms of the earth at one time; and the priestly expounders—some of them ranking as saints, say point blank that the thing could not be done, but persist in holding that it is nevertheless the “divine truth,” “God’s word”, etc., etc. And perchance, in the next breath will tell you of the necessity of *faith*, without which you must be damned. So much for priestly consistency. But after all, they do but bow to the inexorable necessity: they do but put God and his book aside, to do homage to the teachings and the power of the INFIDELITY of modern times. Albeit, they do their bowing awkwardly, and push their deity aside quite unceremoniously, but they do it, and do it in the vain hope of retaining their hold upon the people, whom they can no longer keep in slavish ignorance.

But to return to the thread of the story. Christ did not do the thing asked of him. He did not fall down and worship the devil, but knocked him down with another quotation from his own book. (It is worth remembering that all these quotations were written by himself when in shape No. 1.) He said (verse 10): “Begone, Satan, for it is written: The Lord thy God thou shalt adore, and him only shalt thou serve”. This final quotation seems to have finished Mr. Devil, for the next verse tells us: “Then the devil left him; and behold angels came and ministered to him”. We are not told what the angels did for him—*how* they ministered to him. Had it been simply a man who had been suffering hunger and temptation, and exposure for such a period, there could be no surprise felt at his need of help. Regarding him as such, we can readily understand that he sorely needed some kind of ministrations: possibly a warm bath and some beef tea, with just a “tint” of whiskey or some other description of stimulant, judiciously administered, would have been a wise treatment. After his long fast, his three bouts with the Infernal one, consisting in the first instance of the mental and bodily anguish consequent upon the cravings of hunger, coupled with the knowledge of the possibility of surrendering and eating stones in the shape of bread

[without the possibility there could be no temptation]; and in the second place, of being taken up in a rush—*transported*—through mid-air, and made to balance himself upon a pole—pardon me, I mean pinnacle; and thirdly, being brought down again and, without breathing time, made to tramp up a very high mountain, etc., etc.; it is only reasonable, as I say, to suppose that he *did* stand in sore need of some sort of refreshment, and some rest. The suffering of body and mind consequent upon all this violent and novel exertion, made upon an empty stomach of forty days standing, must have been no joke, and would have told heavily upon any ordinary constitution. We are not informed, however, how it affected Christ, beyond the remark that he was *hungry*. Perhaps it is possible for a God-man to be hungry only, and not otherwise affected under the circumstances related. Be that as it may, the Scriptures do not tell us whether he got anything to eat or not, but simply that angels came and ministered to him. I am inclined to think—and I have the extreme satisfaction of knowing that for once the expounder will agree with me—the *ministry* mentioned hints at something much less substantial than a good meal, the hunger mentioned notwithstanding. But why should it? If he suffered in a corporeal form, he, of course, had his corporeal functions and wants, which must have sadly needed attention.

But if he is to be regarded as God, the matter becomes very different. It is difficult to see how in that case the services of the ministering angels were needed. They, like the very high mountain, would be a superfluity. And this brings to my mind another very curious reflection, which, it must be borne in mind, is founded strictly upon Testament and Church teaching:—We either have Christ, who was God No. 2 (called “the second person of the Holy Trinity”), being ministered unto through the medium of angels by God No. 1 (called “the first person of the Holy Trinity”); or, we have God pure and simple under the form of Christ (who was also “Very Man”, as well as “Very God”), ministering to himself through the medium of aforesaid angels! What *can* be said for such astounding trumpery? Small wonder that your modern Bible-makers twist and contort the text in order the less to affright the ever-growing intelligence with which it is confronted.

Whatever part God may have taken in *writing* the Bible of old, he certainly has little to do with fixing the *meaning* of the modern ones. That work is practically done for him by what are called his avowed enemies, and sealed and said amen to by his ordained ministers when further resistance becomes useless. True, they will damn said enemies for their pains, but themselves being ordained ministers—and ministers *not* ordained—stand in no need of being consistent in such matters. It is enough that they are, in some fashion, *ministers*.

The expounder informs his readers that the three temptations with which we have been dealing, "comprise the three principle sources of sin: 1, sensuality; 2, pride; and 3, concupiscence"; and says we may hope to conquer the first by "fasting and confidence in Divine providence; the second by humility; the third by despising all sub-lunary things as unworthy a Christian's solicitude". Now, I am bound to admit that these *sins*, as he calls them, are defects of character, more or less noticeable, developed in various individuals, and that they should be curbed and kept within reasonable bounds, or even completely subdued, although I much doubt his method of doing so. Of course it must be borne in mind that it is an *excess* of these traits in man—such as what are known as the animal passions, pride, and love of dominion, which are known by the above designations, and which ought to be curbed. Without a reasonable amount of these traits, the excess of which is pernicious, we should not be human beings.

High feeding is doubtless calculated to inflame the passions; but this, if necessary, can be regulated by a generally judicious and temperate diet; not by a glut to-day and a fast to-morrow; nor by a prescribed *regulation* fast, whether required or not. And to talk of having "confidence in Divine providence" as a cure for sensuality is to talk nonsense. It has no meaning; and, moreover, according to Bible authority, some of the greatest sensualists were the greatest believers in "Divine providence". According to the testimony of the Church itself, its own clergy *were* eaten up with the "sin of concupiscence"—if, indeed, they are not so at the present day.

Humility, reasonably practised, is good, but there is such a thing as the *pride* of humility; and, without advocating the excessive love of pleasure and power, it is

possible and right to go through life, enjoying as much of both as is reasonable; holding your head erect, and asserting yourself with becoming dignity, rather than praying and crawling through it—but still acting the tyrant with those who differ from you, as I have seen done by those who profess to be governed by this praying church, which, nevertheless, is itself as brimful of the “sin of pride” as it can possibly be. The pride of power is stamped on it in letters of blood. It sticks out all over the meanest official, and is blazoned upon the tinsel trappings of every priest as he overawes his credulous devotees when officiating at the altar, or on his face as he sternly or superciliously looks for homage from those who are under his control, as they pass on their way in the public places. If this church is to be held as an example in this case, it is an example *not* to be followed. And these remarks apply with more or less force to every church. They are all saturated with a certain sacerdotal pride, which, to those who are not of them, is quite fulsome. There is as much pride in the white choker, the clerical billycock, or the tall hat and thin umbrella of the “heretical” and canting Methodist preacher, as there is in the gaudy mitre and crosier of the Roman bishop, or the curled and broad-leaved hat and orthodox gaiters worn by the bishops of the Church as by law established. A monk is as proud of his shaven pate as was a fop of his ringlets in the last generation, or as is the same genius of to-day of his closely-cut and centrally parted bit of hair.

I myself have been in frequent contact with the clergy of both churches and many sects, and have found them as anxious to look their best—especially before ladies—as the greatest “mashers” of the day. Bear in mind, I am not condemning the reasonable desire to look well in any class or calling, but the pretence and cant and *professed* humility, which is mostly but a cloak worn along with the other clerical garments.

But of all cant, I think that which deals with what the expounder would make out to be a lesson in the wisdom and necessity of despising all sublunary things is possibly the worst and most bare-faced. It is certainly very mad talk. Do Christians despise sublunary matters? Take something which they either singly or collectively think belongs to them, or to which they can lay claim, and you

will quickly receive your answer. There is not much of the giving-your-cloak-to-the-man-who-steals-your-coat doctrine about their practice. But should they, intellectually and morally speaking, hold worldly things in contempt? Ought mankind in general to do so? Christians as well as others know they should and ought not. Then why endeavour to explain a foolish passage of Scripture by such pretence? No ascertained good thing in the world is beneath a good man's solicitude. Everything in Nature, from a pebble up to the mightiest rock, sea, or mountain, from the simplest form of life up to the noblest and best organisation, is fit matter for the solicitude of all good men. From the simplest thing made up to the latest result of human ingenuity, all is worthy of the solicitude of a Christian. And be it noted, none set a higher value upon the good things of the world than do Christians themselves. They may despise them by profession, but they hold fast to them in practice.

Talk of Christians setting no value upon sublunary matters! Why, if you have a house of business in a Catholic country, or are known to be a Catholic, you are literally besieged with priest, nun, and lay brother, all begging for money. You have sheaves of bazaar and lottery tickets regularly sent you, and price demanded whether you will or not. Some functionary—often a paid professional beggar—from every church in the city or town, makes his regular call for his "dues" or his "rent". The parish priest in every town and village levies his charges upon his parishioners in a most inquisitorial manner; none can escape. He contrives to make himself acquainted with everybody's means, and does not allow the poorest to escape. If you go to chapel—which you must do, or be damned—you are compelled to pay the (practically) fixed price for sanctuary, reserved seats, body of church, etc., according to position or occasion, just in opera or music hall fashion. The money box is shaken in your face as you enter the porch by a man who, from long practice, can make it say: *Go in without paying if you dare.* The sums of money taken from the rich and poor alike, of all countries, and annually sent to Rome and laid at the feet of the Pope, in the shape of *Peter's pence*, is something enormous: of which more presently.

It is worthy of note, too, that their religious houses,

many of which I myself have visited, are as a rule chosen with an eye to taking advantage of all sublunary considerations. They are generally built in the best and most beautiful parts of the town or city in which they are situated. They are not, of course, blameable for this, but for the cant and pretence as to despising things sublunary. If you went back to the church and its doings in the days of its luxury and power, as it existed in the early and middle ages, you would be better able to form an idea of its estimate of things belonging to the world. And if you turn to the Episcopal, or state Church of England, matters are in these days even worse: the enormous sum of £135,900 being annually swallowed up as salaries alone, by twenty-seven bishops!

But outside all these considerations, I fail to see how God's pretending to be tempted by the devil can teach any such lesson. If the entire order of the temptations were reversed, there would be some reason for supposing the lessons were set out. If God, who held the things offered and also the power to give, had told the devil that as the price of his worship and obedience they should all be his, and the devil indignantly refused the offer, and so despised these sublunary things as being unworthy *his* solicitude; then we should—bar the folly of the thing occurring between a God and a devil—have had something in the shape of a lesson of self-abnegation and contempt for things sublunary. But to suppose that any such lesson was taught as put in the text, is simply to admit that you have not the smallest power of reasoning. To show the utter folly of the idea, we will suppose the expounder himself to be possessed of a fairly large share of the loaves and fishes—which is indeed probable—that it has “pleased God” to make him lord and master of a large domain. (I have myself known even parish priests to possess not only funded property, but large and well-stocked farms, with young and good looking house-keepers to help to look after them. Indeed your parish priest all the world over has a weakness for the latter.) And let us further suppose that one of his servants—we do not mind whether it be the highest or lowest in authority—should induce him to go to the top of a very high hill, and, pointing to his estate, his houses, his cattle, parks, etc., should say: “All these will I give thee, if

falling down thou wilt adore me"; or, "all these will I give thee, if thou wilt acknowledge *me* to be lord and master". Would he hold that he was thereby tempted; and that his refusal to take his own estate at the hands of his servant, taught a lesson to surrounding owners of estates that he held such things beneath his solicitude, and that they ought therefore to do the same? And, if the idea is preposterous when applied to two men, how much more so must it be when applied to a God and a devil? Nor am I forgetting the wretched and contradictory subterfuge, that as well as being "very god" he was also "very man", and could be tempted in the latter form. All that is simply juggling with words. I say that to suppose God, who, according to your own authority could blast the devil with a breath—but does not—could either in the shape of a Christ, or in any other shape, be tempted by the devil is the extreme of folly; and I solemnly affirm that to seek to foist such folly upon man is to insult his intelligence. The thing is simply beneath contempt. And I say further, that the man who would brand me with the term "blasphemer" for so affirming, is either too idiotic or too vile to bear the form and name of man.

These may be strong words: I admit they are; but when I am scouted and held in contempt, and robbed and wronged by those who for the most part have not taken the trouble to enquire into their own *belief*, but who nevertheless hound me down for not accepting it, my indignation breaks its bounds, and I must express myself.

Before quitting the sublunary aspect of the case, I will glance for a moment at some remarks made by his Eminence, Cardinal Archbishop Manning—[a large cognomen, that, for a humble (?) follower of Peter the fisherman!]
—in a sermon preached by him in the Pro Cathedral, Kensington, upon the present Pope and his immediate predecessor.

The occasion was a begging one. After painting the subjects in true orthodox fashion, and reminding his faithful hearers that on the 10th of January, 1888, the English pilgrims, led by the English bishops, would lay at the feet of the Pope the offerings made in the last month of the year; and stating that it would grieve his heart if they—the offerings—implied what he called "any want of heart or of love on their part", he went into the history of giving

alms to the Pontifical Chair, and lamentingly made use of the following words: "Now that the world was falling away from Christianity, and largely it was, it was beginning to rob the Church", etc., etc. It is pleasant to have it upon such high authority that the world is falling away from Christianity. But he further went on to say: "During the last three hundred years, the world had been stripping the Church, until, at the present moment, all the majestic cathedrals their forefathers built were in the hands of those who could not use them". And he pointed to France and Ireland as examples.

In the main, I will grant him that he is so far right. But then, that is simply one set of Christians robbing another—a thing done ever since Christianity became Christianity, and which throws a strong light upon *how* Christians hold earthly matters beneath their contempt.

But it is in some of his further remarks that we get the true cant—the genuine ring and manner of the Church and its begging box. He says: "If the Church had again entered the lot of its Master, he thought they ought even to thank God. Moreover, where poverty was, Jesus Christ was, and there came trust in the providence of God."

Now, it does seem extremely odd to me that a man of the rank, learning, and authority of the Cardinal should give forth such foolish and even dangerous nonsense. Passing by for the moment his pretended thankfulness to God for the present poverty of his Church—which the whole tone of his speech deploras—and the contradiction involved in thanking God that wrong and robbery has been done by the falling away from the "true Church" I ask, is not his statement an admission that, previous to the three hundred years mentioned—which embraces the period of its wealth and prosperity—his Church had departed from the "lot of its Master", that Jesus Christ was not with it, and that it had no "trust in the providence of God"?

The Cardinal, with all his astuteness, could not have seen the force of the language he was using. He must have fancied he was addressing geese. But after thanking God for the wrong, the heresies, and the schisms, which were, of course, duly anathemised as they arose, and the consequent plunder which impoverished his Church, and brought it back unwillingly to "the lot of its Master", he

actually concludes by making an appeal to his hearers, with all the eloquence and *power* of which a *Cardinal* is capable, to give as much as possible, "to make their offerings promptly, gladly, and proportionally", in order that it might be laid at the feet of the Pope! Clearly it is not his wish nor intention to allow his Church to slip any further into "the lot of its Master", if he can prevent it. Nor to allow it to remain in the position of being able to enjoy the presence of Christ, and to "trust in the providence of God", which he now finds it.

This appeal by the cardinal for money may be taken as a fair example of the shifty, canting method adopted by all clerical beggars. They praise poverty and denounce its absence on one side of their faces, and beg and plead and threaten with both hands open for money on the other.

If, sir Cardinal, you require money—and all sane people know you do—why do you not ask for it candidly and openly? Why do you place your hands together thankfully praising God for your poverty in one breath, and in the next beseech him to fill your coffers? I can answer for you, sir; it is because you are a high priest, and use the language, and move in a way prescribed by a church which is steeped in pretence.

We will now take the following few facts and figures which are taken almost at random,¹ but which, it must be admitted by all, throw a strong light—I call it a lurid glare—upon *how* Christians of all denominations hold things sublunary to be beneath their solicitude. It will be found that all the creeds of the day are steeped to the lips in what I shall take the liberty of calling the *lie sublunary*.

In the House of Lords there are 2 archbishops and 24 bishops: altogether 26 spiritual peers, who constitute an estate of the realm, and whose assent, in theory, is required to give validity to Acts of Parliament. This does not show that the heads of the Church of England Christians, at any rate, are unmindful of matters sublunary. And if we bear in mind the continued and partly successful efforts of Catholics, or Church of Rome Christians, to have their fingers in the political pie, and the fierce and bloody

¹ I am indebted to the "Financial Reform Almanac" for these figures, the substance of which I give; some of the matter being in the same language.

struggle which drove them from it, we shall understand that they are as fully alive to the value of political power as their Protestant brethren.

The following are a few votes given by these "mitred legislators" when exercising their functions as law makers:—

On a Bill to abolish *capital punishment* for stealing from shops goods to the value of five shillings, there voted for it *none*; against it, 7 (year 1810). The bishops—forgiving souls—thought stealing five shillings merited death! What of the proverbial and Testament coat and cloak?

On a Bill to authorise magistrates to provide schools where they were required out of the rates, there voted, 3 for and 15 against (year 1839). The bishops do not like the idea of educating the poor. On a previous Bill dealing with the education of the people, they *did* show their contempt for things sublunary by not recording one single vote either way (year 1807).

On a Bill to render Roman Catholic peers eligible to sit in Parliament, there voted: for, 2, against, 25 (year 1821).

For a similar Bill in the following year, there voted: for, 1, and against, 23.

Another and similar Bill was introduced seven years later, when 10 voted for, and 20 against it.

It is fairly evident that these Church of England ecclesiastical law makers did not hold Roman Catholic sublunary matters to be beneath their solicitude.

On the Reform Bill (1831) there voted: for, 2, and against, 21.

On the same Bill (1832) there voted: for, 12, and against, 15.

Do these votes show they despise sublunary matters? They *do* show that the bishops, though always to be found on the wrong side, yet stand squeezing fairly well; for, although more than one-half still voted against progress, the number for it rose in twelve months from 2 to 12.

The following votes will give some idea of the tolerance in sublunary matters which Christians mete out not only to each other, but to such as Jews and others who differ from them.

On a Bill to enable Jews to sit in Parliament, there voted: for, 3, and against, 20 (1833).

On a Bill to give Dissenters admission to the universities, there voted: for 2, and against, 22 (year 1834).

On a Bill to abolish ecclesiastical tests and restrictions which prevented Nonconformists from the rights and privileges of the universities, there voted: for, 2, against 4 (year 1867). This Bill was tried again two years later, when the voting was: for, 0, and against, 3.

We now come to a Bill which I take to be a crucial one. It directly touches one of the sources of their enormous revenue, and is a good test as to what store these luxurious followers of Joseph the carpenter and Peter the fisherman set upon the "filthy lucre".

The Church Rate Abolition Bill was introduced three times, viz., in the years 1858, 1860, and 1867. How did these shepherds who teach that it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven, vote? Their combined votes for the Bill amounted to—*not one!* Whilst their votes against it were: 24, 16, and 7. In this matter they showed their marvellous self-abnegation. They were determined to retain the money, and, if needs be, the damnation along with it.

In the year 1876 a motion was introduced to permit in church-yards "Christian and orderly" funeral services other than that of the Church of England. There voted for that motion only 1, and against it 16. In the following year it was introduced three times with the following results: for, 1, 3, and 4, against, 15, 11, and 8.

You see, these mitred scoundrels are so indifferent as to matters sublunary, that they will not give to those who differ from them—whether Christian or otherwise—a few yards of mother earth for the purposes of a decent burying.

The last vote which I shall notice is one in which they *did* once again show their contempt and indifference for worldly matters. But then it was not indifference as to their pockets, their bellies, nor their power. It was indifference as to the wanton slaughter of tame birds. A Bill was introduced to abolish pigeon shooting; and, to their shame be it recorded, not one of these sparrow-fall and gaitered humbugs but what held the matter as "beneath the solicitude of a Christian"; for not one of them either spoke or took part in the division (1883).

Possibly they considered the wholesale slaughter of these emblems of the third person of their god-head, specially ordained pastime for the scions of their own houses, and of other houses which bask in their sunshine.

I think I hear some of my Catholic friends say : " Yes, but these are Protestant Bishops ". True, they are: but your Roman ones have done worse and bloodier things.

Passing from these particular men of God, and their votes, and turning for a moment to matters more particularly financial, we find cause for perhaps greater amazement.

It is estimated that the value of the property appropriated to the State Church is £2,000,000 a year; that the annual subsidy of the establishment is £9,500,000; and that the capitalised value of its property is more than £220,000,000. The Tithe Revenues alone, which are public property, bring in £4,054,000 per annum, giving an average benefit to those clergymen who receive them of £342 each. These figures, I think, speak for themselves.

Turning for a moment to the *sale of livings*, we find that over 8,000 benefices are private property, bought and sold systematically; one fourth of the number always being in the market, and as many as 1,497 having been publicly advertised at one time in the " Ecclesiastical Gazette ", a paper specially devoted to Church matters of worldly import! This idea of trafficking in Church livings—of buying a situation in which you will be paid more money for possibly saving fewer souls, just as though the said souls were lumps of pig iron; the more you have to shift the harder the work—is, from a Christian point of view, very interesting, and certainly forms a curious comment upon the teaching which admonishes all to rest satisfied in that station in which it has pleased God to place them. I have no doubt but that the great difficulty experienced by these believers in God is to know *when* they have reached that particular station in which it is pleasing to him they should remain. Be that as it may, all—from the Church of England and the Roman Church, through every mongrel creed down to the Salvation Army—are perpetually moving Heaven and earth in order to draw into their coffers as much as possible of this " source of all evil ".

The following, taken from a very interesting table, will show with what success they ply this portion of their craft.

The table is headed; "Religious provisions made in London, 1851 to 1884," and amongst other matter states that there was pocketed during that period:

For sittings in the Church of England ..	£677,645
„ in the Roman Catholic Church	51,190
„ all other denominations.. ..	507,421
	Total 1,236,256

That, it will be admitted, is not a bad sum for all the breeds and half-breeds of the gay denouncers of this world and its vanities to net in the course of a few years in one city alone. And this for the mere privilege of sitting in the "House of God"!

It is noticeable that the highly paid State Church has in this way netted more than all the other sects put together. It is not content with its enormous State endowments, but must exact additional fees from its followers for their sitting to hear its teachings. And bear in mind that all, whether able to benefit by its teachings or not, are compelled to pay to its support. This I think is one of the most monstrous scandals of the time. The State Church as it now exists is a crying shame, and if the electors of Great Britain do not make it a test question, they will have themselves to blame.

Turning our attention to Wales for a moment, we find that the Episcopal Church holds public property to the value of £300,000 per year, which it pretends to spend in saving the souls of only (according to itself) one-fourth of the population!

In Scotland matters are, if possible, still worse. The National revenues of the State Church of Scotland are about £385,000 per annum, in addition to which it is computed that, since 1845, something like £2,000,000 of voluntary endowments have gone into it, whilst it has by its own showing only 42 per cent. of the population.

It is further stated that in five parishes where the average communicants are $4\frac{1}{2}$, the average endowment of living is £210 per annum. So that it costs the country £210 per year to parson $4\frac{1}{2}$ people! and in one parish the minister gets £400 a year for preaching to the "Laird and his boy". Truly these parsons hold on to the loaves and fishes with much tenacity!

With regard to the cost of parsoning the $4\frac{1}{2}$ people just alluded to, it may be pointed out that, if they live their "allotted time", their journey to heaven, as per Church of Scotland, costs the nation for piloting alone the sum of about £3,300 each. You have then the chances, which are a million to nothing, that they will never reach any such port.

In addition to the National revenues, the Free Presbyterians have in a period of nine years raised the sum of £8,224,132 for religious objects, and the State Church Presbyterians a further sum of £2,588,702 in the same period. And this leaves out of the question what may have been raised by the Roman Catholic clergy and others. It is more than evident that none of them regard sublunary matters—especially in the form of money—as being very much beneath their solicitude.

We will, in conclusion, take just a glance at a little of what was done to smooth the ruffled plumage of the Irish "sky pilots" when the Irish Church was disestablished.

It would appear that all their churches, school-houses, burying grounds, etc., with their liabilities, were vested in a Church Body. Building charges, and a debt of £198,104 on the glebe houses, together with a ten or twelve years' purchase, had to be paid by the Church Body. About £8,000,000 were paid by the State to those of the clergy who wished to commute, and about £500,000 were handed to the Church Body in lieu of private endowments. The sum of £819,000 was given in compensation to officials, and £780,000 to patrons. £30,000 were given to the Commissioners of Public works, to maintain some 137 ecclesiastical structures which were placed in their hands. The sum of £765,813 was paid to Presbyterian ministers and their college in Belfast as compensation for the *Regium Donum*. And a sum of £372,331 was paid to Maynooth College in compensation for deprivation of their Parliamentary grant.

After all these vast sums and many others had been paid over, there still remained a huge surplus. And bear in mind that whilst this almost fabulous wealth had accumulated, and been held by the Protestant Episcopal Church and used for its own special benefit, the vast majority—something like four-fifths of the population—could not make use of it, nor be benefited by it, save of course the *Regium*

Donum and the Maynooth grant. The history of the country during the period referred to is written in two wards: "Famine" and "wretchedness". It is an historical fact that wherever the Church—either Catholic or Protestant—rears its head, it manages to become exceedingly rich, notwithstanding the poverty and squalor with which it is ever surrounded. The name of the interests, the monies, the worldly gains and considerations of these churches is like their devils, "legion".

Now, in regard to these vast sums of money, especially those given voluntarily, it may be urged that there must after all be a something in this religion, to partake of and support which, people are willing to pay so heavily; indeed I have seen the matter so put. But, losing sight of the means resorted to by *all priests* for obtaining these monies, I would reply, first, that you must not always measure the merits of a thing—least of all religion—by the amount paid for it. If you do, you will have to hold some of the worst and most nefarious callings and professions to be highly meritorious. The sum paid for the article Religion does not prove the truth of its fundamentals. If it did, it would prove the truth of many other *religions* besides the one known as *Christian*. Secondly: religion being purely speculative, and therefore incapable of being made right or wrong, true or false by Act of Parliament: no state or government should have the power of imposing the support of it in any form whatsoever upon the people: most certainly not in a form in which the majority cannot receive it. That this principle is thoroughly endorsed is shewn in a vast number of ways by the general revolt against compulsory payment towards the State Church. Looking at the matter in this light, it will be seen that the great bulk of the vast revenues of the Church—Scotch and Welsh, as well as English—is not willingly given, but is extorted by process of law. Of course, these particular remarks do not apply to voluntary payments made by various believers in this, that, or the other. With regard to them I will only further say that they prove the cant and pretence generally of the recipients, who, whilst holding fast to the money, preach the merits of poverty; and it was in this light principally that I introduced the subject.

I have at the risk of being irksome dwelt somewhat upon these enormous sums of money, because I think they

are, although not perhaps having direct reference to the text, yet a complete answer to the cant of poverty peculiar to Christian churches in general, and to the lesson which this particular Church, through its expounder, says the text teaches.

I will, in continuation of this view, trouble my readers by giving them in full, a short—but as I consider it—a most timely and interesting account of the income of the Pope himself. I shall insist upon holding it to have come to my hand in quite a *providential* manner. It is headed, “The Pope’s income, and what he does with it”, and is as follows:—

“A foreign diplomatist accredited to Rome gives the following account of the Pope’s revenue, and of the way in which it is spent. It is derived from three sources. First, the interest of an enormous sum left by Pio Nono to the Pontifical treasury, and invested in the English Public Funds. This interest amounts to about three millions of lire, or about £125,000. Leo XIII. is a great speculator, and subscribes to the Italian Loans in order to sell when the value rises, and invest the profits in the English Consolidated Fund. 2. The proceeds of Peter’s Pence. This branch has suffered greatly in recent years, but, nevertheless, the average amounts to about two millions of lire, or about £83,000 per year. These two sums, which represent £208,000 per year, constitute the ordinary income of his Holiness. It is distributed by the Chamberlain among the Cardinals residing in Rome—about £1,050 per annum for each Cardinal—among the prelates of the Papal Court, the secretaries, the nuncios, the guards of the Pontiff’s body, etc. The extraordinary part of the Papal revenue is derived from the receipts of the Apostolic Chancery. The items include sums received for titles of nobility, Papal decorations, benedictions in the article of death, privileges of the altar, private chapels, dispensations, ecclesiastical titles, and many other things. This department yields about two and a half millions of lire, or £104,000 per annum. The whole annual income of Leo XIII., therefore, reaches the enormous sum of about three hundred thousand pounds.”

This is a pretty statement of the financial matters of the Pope, or head of a Church which teaches that its God and founder, by means of a pretended refusal of what he already possessed, taught a lesson in the necessity of holding things sublunary as beneath solicitude. It is quite plain that he holds nothing of the sort. He, at least, has no liking for that particular lesson: nor for that other pre-

cept of his "Divine Master", which bids him to "take no thought of to-morrow", but to "behold the lilies of the field", etc., etc.

Perhaps it is only fair to mention that Cardinal Manning, in the sermon from which I have quoted, denies that his master at Rome is rich, and states that the sum left him by the late Pope is not so great as is represented. Perhaps it is not. But I think all will admit that "Christ's ambassador on earth" is a much richer man than Christ himself is said to have been. And bear in mind that the cardinal has, as I have pointed out, shown that the Pope is, by means of said riches, proportionally removed from the presence of their Lord and master; and also bear in mind that he has shown a most earnest desire to further remove him from such presence, by adding all in his power to his present riches. As a matter of course, he is not in this altogether unmindful of his own interests. He is not *cardinal* without knowing how much it will serve him to do all he can to keep the Papal pot boiling.

Dwelling for a moment longer upon the subject of the Pope, I see by the daily papers there will be high jinks at Rome upon the occasion of the jubilee. He does not intend to be outdone in the matter of *jubileeing* by our nominal and female head of State and Church. Well, jubilees are becoming fashionable, and why not the Pope of Rome have his innings as well as the Queen of England? Her's was pretty much State and political; and his is considered sacerdotal, although there is to be much State attending it. The successor of St. Peter must not be behind-hand in these matters. Amongst other things it is stated that there is to be a special mass for the benefit of the *select*, *i.e.*, the most favored of the visitors and others, at which the Pope himself will officiate. The mass will be held with *closed doors*, and admission is to be by *ticket*. The price of the tickets is not given, but they are called tickets of *invitation*. The favored and the rich will know how to possess themselves of those tickets, and will, without a doubt, pay heavily in return for the kind *invitation*. Gold is the key that will unlock those closed doors, and buy for its fortunate possessors the untold advantages peculiar to a Pope's Jubilee Mass! Well, this may not be going *quite* all the way to heaven by ticket, but it is certain to be held equivalent to a good start on the journey. One of these de-

voted and faithful geese who lay golden eggs for Popes to suck—his Grace, the Duke of Norfolk—is, it appears, to represent her Majesty the Queen in some fashion or other; but according to report he will lay no less a sum than £10,000 at the feet of the Pope, as his own Jubilee gift—a very large sum to pay for the pleasure of kissing a man's big toe; although, truth to tell, the noble devotee hopes to obtain full value for his money in the shape of *Spiritual advantages*, so that, after all, it is but a mere bargain. It is one of those peculiar bargains made between the rich believer and the astute ecclesiastic, in which the former innocently—nay, ignorantly—but greedily barter his money for untold advantages beyond the grave. Wise Pope to thus remove thyself from the lot of thy Master. Truly, thou wouldst bear the ancient Lombardian sign (three golden balls) upon thy brow, with as much dignity as thou dost the triple crown. The Pope's tiara becomes thee about as well as would the badge of the money lender.

I must confess to a belief that these popes and cardinals must hold their God in much contempt; or they would not act in matters directly concerning him in such contrary fashion. Indeed, nothing appears too contradictory nor foolish to do, or to suppose, in connexion with the Bible God, which, being somewhat Christianised, *i.e.*, made to conform to the *new law*, is their God. I have elsewhere called this a man-made God: I now further say that it is the essence of all the worst materials which go to make up poor humanity, and the personification of its follies; and that he is shewn to be such by his Popes, his Cardinals, his Bishops, his Parsons, his Salvation Army, and *amen* people of all sorts and kinds.

Reader, if I speak irreverently of names and things you hold in reverence, it is because I cannot conscientiously avoid doing so. If I cannot revere what you have set up for me, it is because I hold it to be unworthy the reverence of a moral and intellectual being. This I contend is fully shown by your Bible, which you affirm was written by God himself, but which is only the reflex of ignorant and barbarous ages. Therefore, you must not be surprised at my want of reverence; neither should you blame me for it. The foolish fable we have been discussing in these pages awakens in my mind feelings of

ridicule and contempt. Your old time Bible as it existed in the early and middle ages, exists no more, and you must not wonder if the larger intelligence which now prevails scouts both your book and yourselves in your vain and painful endeavors to make it fit into the theories and facts, for maintaining which your church decreed death when in its dark and gory days of power.

In conclusion, I earnestly and affectionately beg of my fellow-man to read the "sacred writings"; but to remember that reading them with bated breath or with up-turned eyes, and in professional and weary fashion, will not make them other than they are. Nor will frantically screeching the name of Jesus, and howling in frenzied passion nonsense about having the Savior, any more than will mutterings in Latin concerning *his flesh and blood* make the story of his dangling upon the top of a pinnacle, or trotting up a mountain with the devil, whilst going through the farce of being tempted by him, anything but a farce.
