

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

CHRISTIANITY AND AGNOSTICISM.

A Correspondence between a Clergyman of the Church
of Scotland, and George Anderson,
Agnostic ; London.

Price Twopence.

BRADFORD :
PRINTED AND PUBLISHED BY J. W. GOTT,
2, UNION STREET.

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No 46

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ANDERSON, George, philanthropist.
B. 1824. Anderson was a self-made man
who prospered in business and very
generously supported advanced movements.
He was a personal friend of Bradlaugh,
Holyoake, and Watts, and one of the
founders of the Rationalist Press Associa-
tion. The first issue of cheap reprints by
the Association was made possible by a
generous gift from him of £2,000. He
gave with equal liberality to hospitals and
other charitable institutions. *D.* Aug. 12,
1915.

M. McCabe. Bios. dict. mod. Rationalists.

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When, towards the close of it, Mr. Anderson suggested that it should be published, the reverend gentleman objected ; therefore, his name and address have been omitted, and the term "Clergyman" substituted.

One or two short paragraphs in the Clergyman's letters which were merely complimentary, and which named localities that might have betrayed his identity, have been withheld.—K. E. WATTS.

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Christianity and Agnosticism.

A Correspondence.

I.

Dear Sir,—

Your note in reply to my appeal for funds for church building I have received. I thank you for your frank statement, and for the leaflet you kindly sent, with neither of which I agree.

I admit that everyone is entitled to have his own views on religion as well as on other matters. I know that many men have difficulty in connection with Christianity, but certainly your opinions have at least the merit of being somewhat novel, if "to compete" against the foreigner is the one vocation of a British subject. There may be some truth in what you say from your point of view, though I think few will agree with you that Christianity makes a man less capable to compete honourably with foreigners or any others. I regret I had not the pleasure of seeing you when in London. I know you are liberal towards other objects, and generous in giving for charitable purposes, and I believe, though you may not be aware of it, that you owe much of that kindly disposition to the fact of the influence of Christianity upon you. You gave up Christianity forty years ago; you cannot therefore be young. If you believe in a future state, I trust the religion you profess gives you some comfort.

I am quite satisfied with Christianity. I try to walk in the light, leaving alone unknown things. May I ask you to read again the Sermon on the Mount? (Matthew's Gospel, chapter v.)

Pardon me for troubling you with this letter.

Yours faithfully,

CLERGYMAN.

II.

Dear Sir,—

Yours of the 25th inst. received. I am sending you a book called *Force and Matter*, which treats of such doctrines as I believe in. You can return it to me any time within a year, and if you wish to acquaint yourself further with the views that are accepted by the intelligent portion of mankind, read Huxley's *Essays*, and Darwin's and Laing's works, all of which I am willing to lend you if you care to read them.

I reject your eternal hell doctrine as an infinite cruelty. I also reject your *virgin*-born son as being contrary to all experience. It is only a re-hash of similar stories from religions older than Christianity.

I reject your Hell and Heaven stories because they teach that which is contrary to all knowledge and to nature's laws. I love my fellow-creatures, and I wish that all would-be mentors would not confuse young minds with those imperfect doctrines which often perplex them and render them unfit for the business of life, but would teach them something of *this* world instead.

I know that Christianity is less aggressive than it was three hundred years ago, but that is only because it is less powerful. The doctrines are the same, and human nature is the same; but science is taking the place of Christianity, and society is more humane.

GEORGE ANDERSON.

III.

Dear Sir,—

I am much obliged to you for your letter, and *Force and Matter*, which I will read. I have read Huxley's *Essays* and some of Darwin's works, but would like to read them again when I have time, so shall be pleased to accept your kind offer.

It seems to me that one of your great difficulties is belief in the so-called "miraculous." I am sure you believe in Christ as an historical personage; you cannot help doing so if you accept history at all. You must also acknowledge that no religion has produced such moral

and intellectual results as the Christian religion has. How do you account for that fact if Christianity is a delusion?

I suppose that a man of intellect like yourself will acknowledge that some of the greatest men in this country accept Christianity. The best scientific men of the present day admit that the spiritual is of greater force than matter.

Science is advancing. The discovery may yet be made that there is a higher law which covers the sphere of the miraculous, so that what you regard as contrary to law may be in accord with it. There is much to be said for the questions you raised in your last note, but men of science are still making advances. They acknowledge that there are numberless questions in the domain of matter that they cannot understand—how many more in that of mind or spirit?

May I ask you to read Dr. A. B. Bruce's *Apologetics* (published by R. & R. Clark?) I am sorry I have not got the book, and I cannot afford to buy it. You can, and I think it only fair that, if I read the books you recommend, you should read those that I suggest.

Kindly let me have your views after you have read the *Apologetics*.

Yours truly,

CLERGYMAN.

IV.

Dear Sir,—

I quite deserve to be rebuked for my writing. I shall do what you desire when reading *Force and Matter*.

The book I recommended for your perusal is *Apologetics, or Christianity Defensively Stated*, by A. B. Bruce, D.D. (publishers, R. and R. Clark, Edinburgh).

Thanks for "Caledonian Society Report." I send you by this post for your acceptance a course of lectures published by me some years ago. They do not bear upon the subject in which we are both interested at present, but, if you have nothing special to do, you might look into them. I think they will at least entertain you, if they fail to convince.

After you have read the leaflet inside vol. i.—viz., the review of the book—may I ask you to send it back to me in enclosed stamped envelope, as I have only one or two copies left, and I wish to keep them by me?

Yours faithfully,

CLERGYMAN.

V.

Dear Sir,—

I brought home your book of lectures last night, opened it about eight o'clock, and finished it at five minutes to three this morning; and, were I to write a folio, I could not give a stronger testimony to the enjoyment I derived from its perusal. It tells once more the old story how Christians prosecute, and I think their actions are the logical outcome of their doctrines. "He that believeth not shall be damned." "For what shall it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul?"

Hence to skin a man, or to burn him to death, is as nothing to eternal hell fire. In this country, in the present enlightened age, we are tolerably certain to die with our skins on; but that is only because science has humanised the people, and I hope it will continue the process until there is liberty for one and all to speak their honest thoughts: then we may expect greater progress, and much increased happiness for mankind. I would like your book to be read by every Scotchman, for it gives in a condensed form facts that one could otherwise only gather after an extensive course of reading. It also shows the pluck of Scotchmen, and their determination to persevere until they obtain their rights.

I was a lad in Scotland in '43, and remember the "non-intrusion" agitation; and as the English are now in a worse position than the Scotch were then, I think that the mental superiority of the Scotch over the English must be admitted.

Yours,

GEORGE ANDERSON.

VI.

Dear Sir,—

Thanks for your note just received with leaflet returned. I am pleased that you propose to read my book. I read your lecture, for which accept my thanks. I consider it excellent, and quite enjoyed and profited by it. I agree thoroughly with what you say as to the efforts men should put forth to acquire knowledge. It is unwise in my opinion, to be too dogmatic on any question unless one is as sure as of the axioms of mathematics, for so much is yet to be known. I therefore guard myself against speaking too strongly either for or against Christianity, as there are many things that now seem impossible which by fuller knowledge, we may come to understand.

My wife read your lecture with great pleasure. Pardon me for stating it, but she said: He must be a good Christian who wrote that lecture."

Yours faithfully,

CLERGYMAN.

VII.

Dear Sir,—

I am glad you enjoyed the reading of my lectures. You appear to appreciate the Scotch intellect and perseverance. How do you account for these? I gather from your remarks that you think the superstition of Christianity retards intellectual progress. There are no people in the world so superstitious as the Scotch in this respect.

Does it not strike you as strange that their religion does not dwarf their intellect? It seems odd that such superstitious people should be so far advanced in learning and in all the sciences, and should be able to hold their own in competing with the foreigner.

I have read your reply to Cardinal Manning with great interest. It bears a second reading. Your arguments are very fresh, and from your point of view unanswerable.

I am reading *Force and Matter*. It is a remarkable book. The laws of natural philosophy are clearly put. One of the things insisted on is, that matter is eternal. Will you kindly define to me what is meant by "eternal?"

You do not seem to believe in anything that is not in accord with "knowledge" and "experience." If you insist that matter is eternal, then you must regard that quality as knowable, or in accord with experience; if not, you believe in a thing that is not knowledge. You accept "eternal" as something you cannot understand, yet you believe in it, and you say there is that something in matter. Is it not as easy to believe in something eternal outside matter? Is it not as easy to believe in the existence of God apart from matter? If you believe in a being you cannot define, why not in a soul? But if you say that the so-called soul is matter, then the soul is eternal too, and, the brain being eternal, may it not in another and similar form have possession of its present sensations of pain and pleasure? You appear to me to believe in a kind of material soul. Well, what matters it whether it is material or not? If it is eternal, and can consequently carry with it out of the world all its sensations, may not the brain be transformed into something else than mere earth and grass? We have not yet discovered all the forces and combinations into which matter can be changed. It seems to me that the difficulty which puzzles most people gathers around the word "eternal." We have not solved the problem by evading this.

Yours truly,
CLERGYMAN.

VIII.

My Dear Sir,—

I am very much obliged for your great kindness in sending me the two periodicals, also the volume by Mr. Gould. I am anxious to read every book that gives useful information, and I shall read these as soon as my time will permit. I have nearly finished *Force and Matter*, and I agree with the premises laid down. They are full of natural philosophy and science, with much of which I am familiar. I do not, however, always agree with the conclusions of the writer.

I have stated already my difficulty with regard to the conception of "eternity." Materialists trace things up to

that point. They tell us that matter is eternal; they believe that, and yet they also say that they cannot believe what is not in accord with knowledge and experience. Is eternity in accord with knowledge and experience? If then, they say "no," and yet believe in it, why not believe in God? and why have so great a difficulty in believing in the existence of a soul, which none of the senses can discover? Are we justified in thinking that all that exists is discoverable by our few senses? If matter and mind are identical, and if matter is eternal, does not that agree with the view of the immortality of the soul? I am not concerned whether that which I call soul, and you call matter, is matter or not, if it is eternal, and may, as far as we can see, retain all its powers under different conditions.

I shall read with pleasure the book you sent me. May I ask you to read *Anti-Theistic Theories*, by Professor Flint (Baird Lectures, 1877; Blackwood & Sons, publishers)?

I am sorry I cannot send it to you, but it is not my own. My wife is interested in your book, and especially in yourself; she insists upon me expressing her wish to have your portrait, if convenient for you to send it. I have marked some parts of *Force and Matter*, but at present I am so occupied with my own work that I have little time for private reading, and I am not much inclined to controversy, I am a firm believer in the Christian faith, and in the person of Christ and his teaching. There are many things in connection with Christianity that I differ from, many of its doctrines that I do not accept; but I would never think of staking the whole question on small issues, and I entirely *disagree* with you in giving any importance to such trifling advertisements as you were kind enough to send me. In my opinion, the large question of the Christian faith and its power ought not to be judged on small issues.

Please read M. Janet's reply to *Force and Matter*.

With kind regards,

I am, yours sincerely,

CLERGYMAN.

IX.

Dear Sir,—

Yours of yesterday in reference to reading books just to hand. If any one asked me to read a book on new discoveries in arithmetic, based on the assertion that $3 + 3 = 10$, or $3 \times 3 = 10$, I would not waste my time by doing so; I certainly would not buy the book. That is my position in regard to Christianity. It makes statements which I disbelieve, and it gives no proof of their veracity. You know fairly well my tone of mind. If you can loan me, if only for a week or two, any book that you think I ought to read, I will gladly look into it on the strength of your recommendation.

Herewith I send you a Christian book which the Roman Catholics put into the hands of children. It is called *A Sight of Hell*. I view such teachings with horror and disgust, for they frighten the little ones, stunt the growth of their intellect, and fill our asylums with idiots.

Yours,

GEORGE ANDERSON.

X.

Dear Sir,—

In your letter of January 25th you write that you cannot understand why I think that Christianity makes us less able to compete with foreigners in business. I will explain. Continental boys are not dosed daily with religion in schools, as British boys are. Dogma, miracles, and mystery do not occupy their time; hence, on leaving school they know more of what is required in this world than our boys do, and their minds are not confused by divergent ideas incapable of proof, and which all their knowledge of this life and its duties contradicts. As the terrors of an everlasting hell form part of the belief of our boys, they become mental cowards, and are afraid to think. This dwarfs their intellect, and makes them less able to compete with boys more secularly trained. But please note, I do not confine these remarks to your Church. All religious teaching has the same effect in certain degrees.

You think that my liberality towards "other objects" is due to the influence of Christianity upon me.

I cannot agree with you upon this point. If I assist a man or an object, it is always for the purpose of increasing comfort, or furthering progress in human affairs. I never do so as a bribe to heaven to save my soul, nor to escape the eternal miseries of your hell.

You hope the religion I profess gives me comfort. I know of no religion that I consider good enough, so I don't profess any. I thank you for your kind hope, however, and wish to state that I feel very comfortable except in this, that I would that more were of my opinions. I see so much misery amidst so much luxury that I would like to increase the latter, and, if the former must exist at all, to see at least a more equal division. I find beautiful and grand ideas in most religions, but they are all blended with the preposterous.

The Hindoos had their Trinity of Brahma, Siva and Vishnu before Christians adopted the idea. Think of the Hindoos' glorious wide-flowing river of sacred water (the Ganges) and compare it with the small vessel of holy water used by the Christians. At the last eclipse of the sun the Hindoos thought it was the end of the world; they rushed into the sacred water, that they might be floated into eternity on its holy bosom. We laugh at this, yet we tell them of men carried up into the air in chariots of fire. Which is the more absurd?

Religions also teach morality, but morality is not religion—that is ethics, and the ethical part of Christianity which is good was previously taught in China, and some moral precepts that have since been added are wholly unworkable, such as "Give all you have to the poor"—a kindly-meant sentiment, which, if acted upon, would disorganize society and ruin any one who attempted it, for no doubt his relations would take steps to have him housed in a lunatic asylum.

A subsequent letter of yours I hope to reply to in a day or two. I wish, however, you would again read my reply to Cardinal Manning, for I feel you have not gathered a clear idea of my philosophy of matter and its attributes

Yours,

GEORGE ANDERSON.

XI.

My Dear Sir,—

I sent you yesterday a copy of Dr. Bruce's *Apologetics*, which I borrowed. You can keep it for a month. I am sure you will give the book a fair reading. Thanks for little book received, *A Sight of Hell*. I quite agree with you that it is a scandal to have such literature put into the hands of youth ; but in religion, as in business, there is too much fraud. That does not, however, detract from what is valuable, honest, and true in both.

My wife thanks you very much for your portrait. We are both delighted with it, and trust it will be a long time before we shall have to add the omitted date on the back. It is a pity that London is so far away. I would like so much to have a talk with you ; letters are of so little use. If you are travelling in the summer time, would you not like a tour through the Highlands? We would be so pleased to have you with us here ; and you would, I am sure, enjoy the beautiful scenery. I shall send you another book when you have read Bruce's.

Yours faithfully,

CLERGYMAN.

XII.

Dear Sir,—

I must apologize for my delay in answering your letters, but I hope to make good my leeway. Your letter of February 18th I now reply to. You ask how I account for the intellect of the Scotch and their knowledge of the sciences, although they were so very religious. I account for it thus : they lived in a comparatively poor country, with a harsh climate, which compelled them to consider ways and means more seriously than if they had lived in Southern Italy, for instance. They had also a rich neighbour, who tried to enslave them and thrust its religion upon them, all of which tended to develop their thinking faculties. The Scotch undertook the education of every girl and boy one hundred years before other nationalities, and it has been within that period that their scientific progress has expanded. They had also cheap coal and iron ; without these prosperity would have been

difficult. Moreover, they have never hesitated to leave the land of their birth, when they thought that by 'so doing they could improve their worldly position. These are all secular agencies, and to me they account for the progress of the Scotch people, in spite of superstitious teaching. My own case was similar. I had heard of London, and I longed to see it. I accepted a contract that would occupy two or three months, fully intending to return ; but during those months I changed my mind and remained, and my experience has justified my decision. There may be, too, something in the fact that the breed is considerably intermixed—a condition of things to which I believe Scottish lasses have no objection.

You ask me for a definition of "eternal." We have now arrived at an important point where we should clearly understand each other, and I feel from some of your questions that you do not comprehend my position. By "eternal" I mean that which will continue without end—*vide* the Christian hell as recorded in Scripture, and as applied to matter—that which ever has been, and ever will be. I cannot prove either proposition, but my knowledge of matter dictates this inference : We see matter changing in form—never any lost, never any coming into existence "out of nothing." Hence I look on it as without beginning or end, just as if I were riding on a circular railway, and, after passing the same fixed objects many times I would conclude that it had no end, but was a circle. I think the assumption is as rational in the one case as in the other, although only in the case of the railway could I get down and prove it. Those who object to the eternity of matter say : "Oh, no ; matter was created." I reply : "My friend, I do not understand 'creation,' never having seen the process. Please explain." I am then referred to very old books, written thousands of years ago, and to the general assent of mankind. I respond that I don't want to be told by books—I could write a book stating the contrary. I don't believe all I read even in modern books, still less in doubtful ones, written in an ignorant age by no one knows whom. Besides, old books which I have read give quite different accounts of both creation and creator. Some say that the world is flat like a plate, so that, if you

reached the edge, you might fall off. Others say it is borne on the back of a turtle, but they do not suggest what the turtle rests on. So old books are to me wholly unsatisfactory.

The remainder of your letter refers to "soul" and "matter," which I will reply to anon. Will you again read my reply to Cardinal Manning, commencing at page 8, so that you may not quote views I do not hold?

Bruce's book to hand with thanks.

Yours,

GEORGE ANDERSON.

XIII.

Dear Sir,—

The conclusion of your letter of February 18th contains several arguments *re* God, soul, and eternity, which are not based upon anything I have written. Permit me to again explain.

I believe matter to be eternal for reasons already given, but I do not believe "matter" to be one thing and "eternal" another.

Eternal is only an attribute. Attributes have no physical existence. I have said that which is called soul is an attribute of brain, but I have not said that brain, *as brain*, is eternal, although as matter it is. Matter is ever changing, forming new compounds in which its previous character is lost, although the matter is not. Your fire poker, a piece of bright iron, if left to the influences of damp and air, becomes resolved into an oxide of iron, having no resemblance to a poker. Strike the poker against the tongs, and you have a musical sound which in the condition of an oxide does not exist. You might call the sound the soul of the poker, but I call it an attribute only; and attributes vary with the condition of matter, the latter being the only existence.

Yours,

GEORGE ANDERSON.

XIV.

Dear Sir,—

Replying to yours of January 31st, as to whether Christ was an historical character, I am not strong upon that point either *pro* or *con*. The Hindoos had their trinity before the alleged time of Christ, and the stories of both religions have many similarities—indeed, “trinity” is a common conception—good, better, best; bad, worse, worst; length, breadth, and thickness when measuring solid bodies, etc. Critics are agreed that our Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, cannot be traced beyond the middle of the second century of our era. During these one hundred and fifty years there is no doubt there were many who aspired to be religious leaders, and, as there were no printing presses at this period, what these mentors might have said would become a matter of legend only. Whoever wrote those books merely voiced the opinion of the times, and, as they contain many statements that would only be laughed at if told of events of to-day, I am most strongly inclined to consider them fabulous. I have more certainty as to the existence of Julius Cæsar, the Roman Governor, than of Jesus Christ. However this may be, I consider it of small account. We should judge writings by what they contain, not by the authorship—submitting all to the test of reason.

You write that I must acknowledge that no religion has produced such moral and intellectual results as Christianity. I am not aware that man is now more moral than in past ages. To my mind, the scoundrelism of the present exceeds anything in the past. Take up any leading newspaper, and what does it contain? Reports of bubble companies being floated, regardless of whom they rob, and in a year or two coming to a disastrous end; officers of friendly societies decamping with the cash; solicitors struck off the rolls through misapplication of the funds of their clients; pious Jabez Balfour absconding with the hard-earned savings of the poorest bank depositors, deceiving the poor dupes by his church-going hypocrisy;

the drunkenness, wife beating, seduction of children, spread of infectious disease, avaricious grasping after fortune without toiling honestly for it, quarrels of nations in their efforts to outwit each other for possession of territory to which they have no right, and from which they intend, should success crown their efforts, to shut out the rest of mankind. Oh, no, pray banish that oft-told fable from your mind ; it is not true. Intellectual advancement I admit, but that has been in spite of Christianity, which exerted all its power against mental progress, even persecuting its pioneers. From the time of Constantine, the chief Christian shop has been cruel to all but its own customers ; even the sects that have sprung from its false roots have persecuted each other, and continue to do so indirectly. No shopkeeper would succeed in a country town, however good the quality and reasonable the price of his wares, if it were known that he did not attend some conventicle. The intellectuality of this age is due to the greater knowledge of nature that pervades it—that makes it more human while less religious ; consequently the burning of witches, warlocks, and even unbelievers, is not permitted, and the Church endeavours to trim its sails to the modern breeze.

The creation was not accomplished in six of our days ; we have misunderstood Scripture. It means six long periods of time ; “ a thousand years are to the Lord as one day.” This paltry subterfuge is used to delay the downfall of the nonsense formerly preached from Genesis.

If the shades of Galileo, Darwin, and many others of that ilk, can look down and read our thoughts of to-day, how they must rejoice at the change their writings have effected, and at the fact that we now enthrone them after having displaced Moses and the Prophets.

Yours,

GEORGE ANDERSON.

XV.

DEAR SIR,

Excuse me for not thanking you earlier for your kind attention in sending me Gould and Darwin. I have read vol. i. of former with interest. Thanks also very much for box of pens—a kindly hint to write better. I will try to do so. I have been very busy of late, and have had no spare moments.

Referring to yours of March 9th, you say rightly that you cannot prove the eternity of matter. You cannot prove an existence without beginning and without ending; but you believe in it. My contention is this: It is impossible for our finite minds to understand what is meant by a thing being eternal—matter, for example; but we have the power to believe it. Now, if you believe a thing you cannot understand, that you have no knowledge of by the senses, why not believe in the existence we call God? To me, it seems as easy to believe in the existence of God as in the eternity of matter. I have tried again and again to understand a thing without a beginning or an ending, and I have failed. Can you grasp it? I therefore say, it is as easy for me to believe in the existence of God and his eternity, although I never saw him, as it is for you to believe in the eternity of matter.

Knowledge and experience teach us that everything is done by some force, some energy. You ask: Who made God? I cannot tell, but I can more easily believe in a Supreme being of intelligence than I can in matter, which you say has no beginning, but possesses the qualities or powers necessary to develop itself with such perfection as we perceive in the human frame and in the physical universe.

I have once more carefully read your reply to Cardinal Manning. I agree with most of what you say. The arguments you use do not shake my faith in the future existence of our intelligence, whether that be through the mere condition of matter, or of the separate existence of the soul or mind. I am quite of opinion that science and

religion will become more and more reconciled, and that Materialists and Spiritualists will modify their views, and cease to see eye to eye as to the existence of a supreme, intelligent, and beneficent Being, who is behind and before all things. We are babes in knowledge, but after we leave the body, or if you prefer it, when this material man has had his personality changed by death, we shall know far more than we do now.

I quite understand what you mean by soul or mind as a mere attribute of matter; but we do not know all the circumstances which may go to create that condition. There may be something better in store for us than to be transformed into gases, or into grass or herbage to feed animal life.

I find it quite impossible to conceive that a powerful mind like your own should evaporate into insignificance of this description. I do not agree with your view of religion retarding intellectual progress. As a matter of fact and history, Christianity has done more to advance education and the sciences than any other faith, and history knows that our school people owe more to religion for their education than to any other cause. Every one knows that the Scotch Reformation has been the revival of learning, as it was the awakening of the intellect. I know I shall not induce you, by any arguments I may advance, to become a Christian. There are many things I cannot understand, but Christianity has for me a power that nothing else possesses, to cause me to live the best possible life for myself and for the good of others, and gives more satisfaction with regard to the great future. I daresay you will smile at my simplicity when I tell you that I am praying to the eternal God to lead you to believe in Jesus Christ. I have no doubt the Scotch mother to whom you owe so much has often prayed for you, and taught you from the Bible, which you seem to know so well. I have a great desire to see you, for I believe that there is much good and kindness in your nature, and far more of the spirit of Christ than in many who profess to be his followers. I am led to understand that you have a son in charge of your office. Pardon me,

if I say that I am curious to know whether you train him in the same views as you hold yourself.

You think it strange that I should wish to have your life prolonged. For one thing, I think that we should wish good and useful lives to be extended. Then I wish to see you—that is a selfish motive, you will say; and, thirdly, I would like to know where you are going, before I would wish you to depart.

What a curious thing matter must be that it can act, think, will, and be happy. What a pity it does not develop more rapidly, that we might have a longer time to study by living longer. It is scarcely worth while for us to come into existence to have it end and become a blank so soon, as far as mind or intellect is concerned.

I am afraid I have trespassed too much upon your time in inflicting such a long letter upon you. I trust you enjoyed your holiday in Ireland, and that you have returned home full of vigour in body and mind.

Yours truly,

CLERGYMAN.

XVI.

DEAR SIR,—

Yours of April 1st received. I think we waste time over the word "eternal," of which you ask my definition. I take the dictionary meaning—without beginning or end. That meaning I apply to matter, but not to its attributes, which are ever changing, while matter remains in one form or another. You say, I believe in the eternity of matter, although I cannot prove it. I do so because it is more logical. Matter is: we take cognizance of it by all our senses. It is ever with us; we cannot divest ourselves of it even in imagination; we cannot put a particle of it out of, or bring into, existence; and as we have never seen an instance of what is called "creation," it is more logical to think that it has ever been than that there was a time

when it was not. You assert that it is as easy to believe in the existence of God as in the eternity of matter. Here you place an adjective and a noun on an equality. I have never treated the term "eternal" otherwise than as an adjective. If you had said, "It is as easy for me to believe in the existence of God as for you to believe in the existence of matter," I would have asked you for some of your proofs. You say you have ever failed to think of a thing without beginning or ending. Then your everlasting God has no existence, and you must accept Materialism as a consistent belief. Still, you maintain that you can easily believe in a Supreme Being of intelligence, but you have no evidence of intelligence, supreme or moderate, except as an animal attribute. The dog, the horse, the man, are all intelligent in various degrees, the better educated they are, the more intelligent they become; but intelligence is not a thing—it is only an attribute applicable to animals and to matter; and although we have had thousands of doctrines over hundreds of years, we have no instance of the continuance of intelligence after the dissolution of the material body.

After impressing upon me the fact that it is as easy for you to believe in the existence of God and his eternity as it is for me to believe in the eternity of matter (the noun and the adjective again on equal ground), you say that knowledge and experience teach us that everything is done by some force—some energy. I agree with this remark, and now apply it to the following one. You have never seen God, but I have seen and handled matter. Is it your belief that your God is material—hence his force and energy? But this is not the common belief, for it is written that he has neither body, parts, nor passions.

This is as concise a description of "nothing" as I have read; yet by the same authority he is represented as kind, revengeful, and personal. He showed himself to Moses. He has prepared a heaven for a few, and a hell for the many. One would only expect such inconsistent statements to emanate from a lunatic asylum, but they are all in the Gospel, hence the world is mostly mad. You tell me that you believe in the future existence of the soul or mind—

you should first prove its *present* existence before you launch it into futurity. However, give me your evidence, for I would like to believe it, as life is sweet. You have a willing pupil, who will not trouble you to ransack the writings of the ancients. A few references to current examples will suffice.

You are of opinion that religion and science will become more reconciled. So am I. I have seen considerable approachment in my time. Religion has joined science as to the form of the earth. Religion, at least outside Italy, does not believe that Etna and Vesuvius are two of the mouths of hell. Religion and science in Europe and America generally agree that our globe has existed for hundreds of thousands of years instead of six or seven thousand. Although this is a money-making age, and many things are now possible that were not a few hundred years ago, you would find it very difficult to engage a carpenter or mason who would contract on proper conditions to supply you with a ladder, or any other means, by which you could climb into heaven. Astronomy says it is too far away. Telescopes have been brought into use, and earnest students have looked miles upon miles into space, and have only found stars, stars, stars with no glimpse of heaven to reward their search.

Oh! yes, we are approximating. Our present judges do not believe in witches, and to burn them on account of their opinions is quite beyond the pale of possibility. Superstition cannot fly at our throats as it once did; science has clipped its wings. It is now kept in the background, except on rare occasions, such as when we allowed an English Bishop to unveil the statue of Darwin in the Natural History Museum. Of course, superstition sometimes makes itself heard yet, as it did recently in Rome, when a Catholic wrote a book entitled *Happiness in Hell*, which the chief representatives of Jesus Christ in Rome and elsewhere said no good Catholic must read. I read the book on what I considered the Pope's recommendation, as doubtless thousands of others did; and I daresay the Pope's interdict was considered by the author a good advertisement.

I had intended to write more, but I must close for the present. Your other points are only side issues, which I may return to when I have time.

Yours,

GEORGE ANDERSON.

XVII.

DEAR SIR,—

In continuation of my letter of April 9th, I note that you say it is a matter of fact and history that Christianity has done more to advance education and science than any other faith. I agree with you in this, for I do not know that any of the faiths have ever advanced science, while I do know that Christianity has retarded it. Christians (so-called) have advanced science, not, however, as Christians, but as scientific men. Christianity has been so ferocious and so powerful that men of science, who had no ambition to become martyrs, have used it as a mantle. Christians have acted as if all unbelievers were so through mere perversity, and not through honest conviction; and, as all who do not believe will be damned, they have cut short the life of the unbeliever, and all for the glory of God and the saving of their own miserable souls. But a better knowledge of human capacities has taught us that belief is not to be obtained at will or by force, that disbelief is quite as honest as belief, and in consequence we have become more humane. This humanity has not been brought about by Christianity, but in spite of it; and this better understanding of the nature of man has been accomplished by unbelievers. And to the believer what does Christianity offer? An eternity of idleness, save for playing on a harp and singing the praises of the Lord. What a puerile conception of the Author of the universe it is, that he should be pleased to hear for ever ringing in his ears the praises of moths like us.

I have been seated in my garden, when a cloud of gnats were hovering round my head, and have wondered if I would be happier if I knew they were praising me. No. I would say: "You fools, mind your own affairs; make

each other happy ; I can get along perfectly well without you." But why should your God punish me because I disbelieve the absurd stories I am told about him? I have never, so far as I know, injured him. I have never spoken an unkind word to him or of him. I don't trouble him with my little wants and sorrows. I don't even ask any favours of him. I have helped many sufferers who have not been as fortunate as I have been. I don't pray for them—that is easily done. I accept nature as it is organised, and choose what I consider its better parts, for I see nothing perfect. Then why should I be damned? I cannot believe that a God of Justice would act so brutally. He would rather say: "Come in; give him a harp, Peter." I would reply: "Thank you, but I am on my way to the Mohammedan paradise; I like that better. There is something to be done there—beautiful gardens, sweet smelling flowers, luscious fruits, noble people, and, above all, no torments. You reign there too. Au revoir."

No, the Christian Conception of heaven is poor indeed. The whole scheme has been built on human pride and the wish to enslave mankind. We praise and bow down to the land-lords and all the big-wigs, and they employ preachers to teach obedience to the masses, who raise their daily bread. It is very sad, and I pity the preachers, who know better, as many of them must do. I am told hell is not so prominent in sermons as it was even in my young days, when I saw young women brought out and laid upon the grass fainting from the effects of mission sermons in the Highlands. We are advancing, and I earnestly hope that the clergy will preach ethics, and gradually draw people to believe that every bad thought, every bad action, brings suffering, seen or hidden, and a conscience smitten with remorse. I advocate no sudden overthrow of Christianity; it has hitherto been the one guide, and we can only slowly provide a substitute; but do not bring your sons up to the Church, for it is a decaying institution.

In a subsequent letter I may describe how I brought up my family, with not one of whom have I ever had the least trouble.

Yours,

GEORGE ANDERSON.

XVIII.

MY DEAR SIR,

I apologise for my long silence. I have been away through the Highlands for some time examining schools in religious instruction, and I have also changed my residence. This has kept me very busy, and my correspondence has been neglected. I send you per same post Darwin's *Voyage*. I have read it with very great interest, and I shall be pleased to have his *Descent of Man*. Many thanks for Mr. Roman's letter. I should like to keep it, but will return it if you desire. I have read and re-read it. There is much in it from which I dissent—for example, his view of the history of Moses; but there is also much that indicates honest thought. I like his closing remarks immensely, viz.: "Rather keep on doubting and living a life in preparation for that happier state, even though we may be disappointed." Such belief is a powerful lever in civil government. I am sure you will appreciate that good advice, and I trust from the bottom of my heart you will give due weight to it.

Though I have neglected writing to you, you are very often in my thoughts, and I am really interested in you. I cannot think that you yourself believe that "with death it means eternal end," as your aged friend says. You think much. I am inclined to believe too much. There are in nature thousands of things we cannot understand, but which we believe. Why not act on the same principle in religion? Our very existence is an unfathomable mystery, and we must be content with knowing only in part. There is, to my mind, no way of combatting the beneficial influence of Christianity. It has done more good to the human race than any other religion; as a civilising influence no one can gainsay its paramount place. No doubt it has many blemishes, and has been in many ways hurried into superstition; but that must be allowed, because of the slow progress that man makes towards the higher life. I think no one can read the sayings of our Lord, such as the "Sermon on the Mount," without feeling that there is something divine in them. No man could utter such words, and live such a life as

Jesus is represented to have lived, without supernatural power. Excuse my running wild in these lines.

I must now close. I trust you are well. I have had no paper nor any remarks for a long time. I should have also said that I am busy with my new church. I believe in my work, and, because I do, I give myself wholly to it, and feel satisfied that I am doing the right thing.

With kindest regards,

Yours sincerely,

CLERGYMAN.

XIX.

DEAR SIR,—

Your silence has been so long that I was wondering whether you had decided to discontinue the correspondence; but you give a sufficient reason. Darwin's Cruise arrived a few days ago, and I sent you his *Origin of Species*—his *Descent of Man* is lent out at present.

I am not prepared to endorse all his doctrines—I am not sufficiently educated to do so; but, so far as I have read his works, I think his arguments are most reasonable. The Bible touches on many of the same points as he does, but in such an unsatisfactory manner that I reject it as the production of ignorant men of an ignorant age. The wonder is that in these more enlightened and humane times people are not ashamed of it, with its barbarous cruelties and indecencies, instead of holding it sacred. Nothing proves more strongly the lasting effects of impressions made in early youth, for I feel that you would not dare to read many parts of it from your pulpit. You and I differ entirely as to the civilizing character of Christianity. Its history proves its influence to have been pernicious. While it had power it persecuted, burnt, and murdered all who differed from it. Spain is the most Christian country in Europe, and the most backward; and its amusements are the most vicious—for instance, its bull-fights where delicate, high-born women attend on a Sunday afternoon to see an

old horse disembowelled by an artificially enraged bull, while the eyes of the horse are covered that it may not see the bull's approach. "It is only an old horse." Poor creature! Poor ill-used help to man!

Read the American history of Spain; how she robbed, tortured, and enslaved the Aborigines, until, after years of cruelty, most of them died, and then she imported slaves from other lands to do her work. She even brought Columbus home a prisoner because he did not send her enough precious things to satisfy her greed, and he, poor man, died without redress. You can find all this in Robertson's Histories. And the Christian Pope of the day gave America to the Portuguese and the Spaniards. think of the impudence of the man. He knew no more of America before its discovery by Columbus than a Scotch jackdaw, yet he gave it to them. Why? Because they were Christian supporters.

Christianity is not so bad to-day as it was then, but that is because it lacks the power. Secular and scientific knowledge have drawn her fangs, but the spirit of persecution is so strong in her that Roman Catholics, members of the Church of England, and Presbyterians now persecute each other, within the law, all struggling to grasp the "loaves and fishes." And this persecution is in accordance with its principles. "What shall it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" What indeed? What is earthly profit against eternal damnation? And Christians think that disbelief is mere perversity, and criminal persecution a virtue, if by it they can save souls. Your order has much to answer for to mankind for preaching such abominable doctrines. But do not suppose I lay all the blame to Christianity; certainly not. In the first place, it is due to the selfish nature of man; and, secondly, to the dreadful doctrines he has been taught. Scientific men never damn those who differ from them; they investigate further, and the result is progress. I presume you have read Livy's *History of Rome*. The people then were more religious than they are now; they never entered upon anything of consequence without first consulting the gods (this was previous to Christianity). The result was

continuous wars and robberies, such as your own Bible stamps with approval.

You ask me to believe ; but believe what? Something that someone else says, of which he can give no proof, which is contrary to my own judgement, and which all my experience contradicts. Take the matter of eternal life. I should not mind—in fact, would prefer—that it could be proved, on the same principle that I wish to live to-morrow, and would not object if that to-morrow were to go on indefinitely ; and, if such is the order of our being, it will be so whether I believe it or not, and in that case I trust I may be better employed than I should be in the monotonous eternity that Christians hold out. I prefer the teachings of the Koran, which are more in accordance with human nature.

You mention Mr. Roman's letter, and ask to keep it. You may do so. There is an essential difference between Mr. Roman and myself. My disbelief is on a philosophical basis ; his evidently is not. He has doubts ; I have none, and he thinks he will do what good he can and chance it. Had he been brought up in India or China, he would most likely have acted on the same principle, and have been a Hindoo or a Buddhist.

I look on all religious systems as deceptions which close the book of that nature I love, but do not worship, for it is not perfect, and sometimes performs its work in anything but a satisfactory manner. The efficacy of prayer I hold to be *nil*, save to tranquilize the mind of the one who indulges in the process. He who prays and does not act is a fool. The doctrine of the power of prayer has been upheld by your Church. (See Combe's *Constitution of Man*, people's edition, page 93.) The best thing you can preach is morality. Children should be taught the rudiments of science, something of their own anatomy and physiology, something of their own skin and the duty of keeping it clean, something of the love of animals including man, something of the love of truth, of help to the unfortunate, of tolerance, of sobriety in all things, of the history of man all over the world—his defects should be pointed out, and religious teaching should be banished

until the children can judge of it for themselves—then you would make clever men and women, able to compete successfully in the battle of life, for we do not lack capacity. As it is, other nations who are more rationally taught are supplanting us in our previous specialities, and, unless we send our manufactures abroad, as a nation we cannot live.

I have sent you Ingersoll's *Mistakes of Moses*, which I think will interest you. I should like to have your opinion as to the facts contained therein.

Yours,

GEORGE ANDERSON.

XX.

DEAR SIR,—

I send you the *Literary Guide* for July, and have marked five articles which I would like you to read. Should you take exception to any of them, mark the portions, tear them off, and post them to me, that we may exchange views.

You will find views in the *Guide* similar to those I have expressed in my letters to you, and which are, in my opinion, such as will, in the fulness of time, rule the world of thought, and take the place of those unproveable, absurd, and contradictory notions that were hatched in the days of ignorance, dividing mankind into hostile camps, in which they fought to their mutual destruction.

Dr. Wallace, M.P. for Edinburgh, stated in Parliament last week that we shall come to secular education in our schools. This has long been my opinion, but the Churches know that, unless they can secure the young child before he can *think* on what he is taught, he will never accept their teachings about the unknowable.

Yours,

GEORGE ANDERSON.

XXI.

MY DEAR SIR,—

I am much obliged for your kind wishes, and especially for your offer to send Science Primers for the use of our young people. I have five Sabbath schools in connection with my church. I should like to read a copy of them first, although, believing you to be an honourable man, I quite accept what you say that there is nothing in them *pro* or *con* on religion, so please send me a few to begin with. I am never afraid of scientific knowledge. The articles in the *Literary Guide*, which you so kindly sent, I have read, and with much I agree. I shall, after another perusal, return some of them marked as you wish.

There are two things upon which, in my opinion, you are unduly severe. First, "Christianity." I think you emphasize too much the superstition and cruelty associated with the religion of Christ. They are no more the fault of Christianity than the nonsense that has so often been associated with science is the fault of science as such. Christianity, as a system, has its side of evolution. It had to fight its way against the tyranny and superstition of Rome for centuries. I am surprised that one who knows history as well as you do can fail to see and acknowledge that Christianity has done more to elevate woman, to civilize man, and to cultivate the human intellect than any other system or creed. I do not think it is fair to insinuate that pure Materialists have been the only or chief promoters of scientific research. I presume you will allow that some of the best scientists of all ages acknowledge the Christian faith, and admit that there is no real antagonism between science and Christianity in its enlightened form. If you will excuse me for saying so, I am of opinion that you take too narrow a view of Christianity, and do not give it sufficient credit for the good results it has produced in the world.

The other point on which I specially differ from you is this: I think you make too much of science. You appear to me to suppose that all difficulties must be solved by science alone. There are numberless obstacles that can be raised along the lines that you have so often and so well discussed. But do we not meet with as many and as great ones on other lines? That matter should have in itself the power, skill, intelligence, and wisdom which are displayed in the universe, and in the human body and mind, is to me a greater difficulty to believe than that there is a Supreme Being. I suppose that you would find it as impossible to intelligently conceive of matter arranging itself with such consummate skill, such perfect balance and accuracy, without any mind or any power behind it, as you would find it to believe in the existence of the soul. Why should you take it for granted that science has made sufficient discoveries within the last quarter of a century to justify you in overthrowing the view of the Christian faith maintained by such great minds in the past and present ages? Is it fair to take it for granted that science has discovered all that can be discovered? May not science prove yet more clearly than it has done that there is no inconsistency between belief in God and the most advanced scientific facts. I cannot really make out whether you believe in a Supreme Being at all, or in the existence of the soul or mind as distinct from the body, or as being at least capable of existing apart from the present material body. From some of your statements I am sorry to be disposed to think that you have no faith in these. You kindly said to me some time ago that you would tell me how you brought up your family. I have no right to ask the question whether you taught them your own views, but I should like to know.

If you believe in the existence of a Supreme Being outside matter, then I do not see that it is so difficult for you to face other obstacles. There are facts as certain, ascertained by inference, as those that you arrived at by experiments. You do not need to put everything under the microscope or the dissecting knife in order to be certain. There are many facts in connection with religion that you can arrive at by inference. I go back to the beginning of our correspondence. You said you believed in the eternity

of matter. I say it is impossible for the human mind to conceive of anything without a beginning, yet you believe it. Yes, science forces you to believe it, for you say: "Is it not as easy, or easier, to believe in the existence of a Supreme Being created like matter, with intelligence and wisdom?" If you believe in an uncreated entity, why not in the larger and, to my mind, the likelier theory? I must honestly say that I would like you to have broader and fairer views on this question. You have not sufficiently explained to me how you can believe in the eternity of matter and not in the eternity of a Supreme Being. Yet I am unwilling to think that you do not believe in the existence of God, and hold the opinion that human existence ends here. I earnestly trust you will reconsider your position. I do not wish to continue arguing on these points. You and I will find plenty of material to support our arguments for and against Christianity and the existence of a Deity, but I find life too real and serious to occupy my time in discussing questions on which I believe we cannot see eye to eye. It would be a great pleasure to me to have a personal interview with you, but this cannot be unless you should chance to be in this direction. If so it would afford me great pleasure to receive a visit from you.

What do you say of the late Mr. Gladstone? You will no doubt acknowledge that he had a powerful mind. See what comfort and peace he felt on his death-bed. Do not think that I am presuming too much when I express the hope that, when your journey is nearly ended, you will go back in heart and soul to those old truths that have produced such splendid men in our land, many of them well known to you. Then you will find in the beautiful words and perfect life of Jesus Christ, as well as in his wonderful death for sinful mankind, that rest and peace, in view of the great future, that others have experienced. This is indeed my prayer for you—that Almighty God will lead you to faith in him.

I have allowed my pen to run loose. Please excuse.

With kind regards,

I am,

Faithfully yours,

CLERGYMAN.

XXII.

Dear Sir,—

In a concluding paragraph of your letter of July 6th you write that we cannot see eye to eye, and that you find life too serious to occupy time in discussing, etc. That is in accord with a similar sentiment I have held for some time—namely, that, *pro* or *con*, Christianity may be deleted from our correspondence—and, if so, I do not see the use of continuing it. It was your desire that I should become a Christian. You have preached at and prayed for me, but you have only seen one side of the shield. I have seen both, and the Lord has not heard your prayers; I leave that to be settled between you, for up to now I am, as I was, a disbeliever in the miraculous. In my first letter I gave you my reasons for dissenting from various points of your faith, including your virgin-born Christ; but you have not dealt with them. Indeed, how could you, on a matter contradicted by all experience? Your silence reminds me of an incident that occurred when I was spending a few days at Naples. On going into the smoking room of the hotel one day after dinner, I found about a dozen gentlemen, one of whom was doing all the talking, while the others were smoking. He was a middle-aged man, evidently from America. He was telling the others what churches he had been to, and he was pitying those poor ignorant Catholics who worshipped images, and he related how he had seen them kissing the feet of the sculptured saints. Being the last comer, I did not care to speak, unless none of the others did; but, as no one replied, I said: "Perhaps some of those people could point at something in your belief which they consider equally as unsound." "Oh, no," he at once retorted; "I prove all things, and hold to that which is good." I said: "I suppose you are a family man." He nodded assent. "Well," I continued, "suppose your wife were to say to you one morning at breakfast: 'My dear, I am much

afraid there is something wrong with daughter Mary: I don't like her symptoms.' You would exclaim: 'Impossible, I will have her up to the library and question her.' You would call your valet to send in your daughter. When she arrived you would say: 'Mary, your mother is seriously alarmed about your condition; her quick eyes have discovered that something is wrong.' Mary would hang her head, but say nothing. You would entreat her to make full confession of her weakness. She would still be silent, but most probably give way to tears. You would say: 'Mary, I insist upon knowing who is the author of your trouble.' She would then faintly say: 'Father, it is the Holy Ghost.'" I paused half a second and said: 'Would you believe her? No; and yet you believe a similar story told about a Jewish girl, who is alleged to have lived nearly two thousand years ago.'" I paused dramatically. He made not one word of reply. I looked round to see if anyone else would; but no. Some smiled broadly, but no one spoke. The American shortly after rose and left without saying "Good evening, gentlemen." He was quite right to take his defeat in silence, and far wiser than to have tried to argue in such an impossible position. He was going to the Holy Land; I hope I gave him something to think about on the way.

You said that Ingersoll was flippant; I know what you mean. Christians can be flippant and abusive in their references to Freethinkers; but the moment their faith is attacked by sarcasm they call it flippancy. I have faith in sarcasm; it strikes prejudices, it stings, it makes fools think. In my opinion, Ingersoll reasons admirably and humorously; he can make people laugh, and laughter is a good antidote to folly.

You have twice asked how I brought up my family. I had two daughters and four sons. Up to the age of nine or ten they were at local schools, and at home, where religion was not considered a fit subject for youthful minds, so there was no instruction for or against it. When they went to boarding-school I insisted that they were not to learn catechisms, psalms, etc., but to have the time that is usually devoted to this branch of study for play, for I remembered the trouble such things had been to me. I

have happily forgotten them all now except "that the chief end of man was to glorify God and to enjoy him for ever." My eldest son I sent to University College School, London, where he met boys from different parts of the world—this itself was education. One of John Bright's sons was there at the same time. The other three boys and the two girls I sent to Madras College, St. Andrews, as they became of proper age. I found the boys had seven or eight classes to attend, each of about an hour's duration, out of one room into another. I thought these were too many, so I struck out one class, held about mid-day, which I deemed they least needed, and they had that hour to play. I gave the boys bicycles, and sometimes they would ride from St. Andrews to Leven, where their eldest brother was learning mechanical engineering. Each of my boys I sent to learn a mechanical trade. While they were at St. Andrews, I arranged at the hotel for a groom to take both boys and girls riding on Saturday afternoons. The two girls and the youngest boy I afterwards sent to Germany. The girls' education was already what is called finished, but they went for the study of music and languages, the boy for natural philosophy and chemistry under Bunsen. They were there a couple of years. The boy came home and went to King's College, London, and the girls I took to Italy—to Florence first, afterwards to Rome. I used to join them during their holidays, taking them to Switzerland, Venice, Pisa, etc., where they saw the immortality of man in architecture, sculpture, and painting. My eldest son had gone to Chili to construct, and afterwards manage, a gas works; my elder daughter followed him. He died while engineer of the gas works, Santiago. My daughter took to teaching music, English, French, German, and Italian; she made two hundred a year, and was welcomed in the best society, where her riding proved an advantage, as all good people ride there. In the course of time she married. My younger daughter went out to her sister after her mother's death. My elder daughter's husband died, and she took to teaching again, assisted by her sister. She, too, became the wife of a Scotchman, and they all live together. My youngest son is now my right hand in my office. Of my other two sons, one has been twelve years

in Corsica managing my gas works there, the other is engineer and secretary in a gas works near London. All are married and have children. I may say that they have given me no trouble ; and, if I had their bringing-up to do again, I fail to see where I could alter it with advantage. As to their religion, I have never troubled my head about it, and I fancy the subject has not given them much concern, although some of them, I believe, conform to a few of its forms, which I have never done.

A minister of the English Church called on me shortly after I had taken possession of a house in the country, to tell me that my house had a seat in the church. I took him indoors, showed him my shelves of books, told him that here and in the fields I spent my Sundays, uncorked a bottle of port (of which we both partook), and chatted harmoniously. Some months after the men of the near village called to ask me to take the chair at their bean-feast. I agreed. They had engaged a band of music from a neighbouring village. I asked them why they did not have a band of their own. They appreciated the hint, and came to me next week to head the parish subscription. I said ; "No, no; you must go to the big-wigs who have been longer established here than I have, then come to me." They did so ; got enough money, bought instruments, and secured a bandmaster from the nearest barracks. In a few months they could play very well indeed ; and, after a while, they used to come marching in at my gate, pose themselves in the circular carriage-drive in front of the house, and play capitally. They had got something better to do than spend their evenings at the ale-house, and I hope they became better men and saved the money they formerly paid for a band to play at their village festivals. In my opinion, this was better than praying for them.

If you have not, up to this, found out my position on the subject of the gods, I scarcely know how to enlighten you. I have told you that gods, devils, witches, warlocks, spirits, etc., are but myths of ignorant human imaginings, and are as various as teachings you have received—in fact quite geographical. Born in Rome, Catholic ; in London Protestant ; in China, Buddhist ; in Turkey, Mohammedan—all contradicting and damning each other, hunting and

killing as opportunity affords. Outside their various religions they will buy and sell ; they will join in schemes for the bettering of mankind ; but do not introduce religion of any sort, or they are ready to fly at each other's throats. Talk not to me of the civilizing results of religion, when all history proclaims the direct contrary. Of course, Christians have done much good, but not as Christians, and it is only in secular pursuits that they have benefitted the world. They are ashamed now to kill or skin a man, but it is because the spirit of the age is more secular. Christianity has to retire into the background, while science, which is purely secular, advances to the front ; and an Archbishop of the Church of England is glad to attend at the inauguration of a marble statue to Darwin.

The excuses which religionists make for their former blunders and ignorance are most humiliating. The world goes round and the sun does not travel, as the Church formerly taught ; so the story of the sun standing still until Joshua slew his enemies is a mistake. The world was not created in six days—it was in six long periods of time ; neither was it created about six thousand years ago. Here, again, a long period of time is called a day, for geologists have settled that the world is hundreds of thousands of years old ; and so on in many other cases. Your Bible, too, is an obscene, highly improper book to be put into the hands of youths. I am certain you would not read the thirty-eighth chapter of Genesis to your congregation from the pulpit. I grant there are some beautiful passages in the Bible ; but they should not be mixed up with so much that is objectionable. It requires expurgation—and I wonder some Christians have not the courage to do it. The Roman Catholics know this, for they do not encourage their people to read it. However, with all its blots and false statements, it will be read, and the system will go on for many years to come. There are too many people who earn their living by it, and there is too little independence in those who do so for them to throw it up. Its decay will be a gradual process : but doubtless the day will come when the churches will be turned into halls of science and concert rooms, where people will be able to improve and enjoy themselves : when the fires of

hell will be extinguished, and a heaven be made here : when each and all will revel in the happy present, although they may lament the sorrows of their fore-fathers, caused by pestilential doctrines imposed on them by the ignorance and avarice of their teachers for thousands of years, in all parts of the world. We shall never see the happy day : but it is coming, coming, coming, and all who advance it a step (among whom for fifty years I have been one) have their consolation,

If, in the far-off future, it is in the process of nature that we shall be cognizant of the doings of the men of that period, we shall have our reward; if it is not, still I am content.

Yours,

GEORGE ANDERSON.

XXIII.

DEAR SIR,

I am much obliged for yours of August 4th, and for the full and very interesting account you gave of the history of your family. You must have been a very kind and thoughtful parent, and your children should always feel grateful to you.

You say they were not permitted to learn catechism and psalms at school. Well, that was a mild way of teaching them to avoid the "superstition" of Christianity. I think that at heart, if you will excuse me for saying so, you are not such a disbeliever in Christianity as your statements would sometimes lead me to infer. You recollect that the first question of the Catechism is "that man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him for ever." If you believe that and act upon it, you do well.

I am afraid you misunderstood me when I referred to our not seeing eye to eye about religion. I am not growing weary of our correspondence; I have not given up hope of your returning to the faith of your childhood. I am still praying for you, and I am not discouraged because you are still a disbeliever in the miraculous. If you are a believer in God, that is the first all-important

point. It is the point that I was always wanting to get at, and I must say that you have never been definite on this subject. Sometimes I think you believe in a Supreme Being, and at other times you make statements that lead me to suppose you do not. Now, my contention is this, and I would like you to notice it. You believe, you say, in the eternity of matter. I say, by the constitution of the human mind, it is easier to believe in a supreme intelligence that created matter. Science itself shows most clearly the order and perfection of nature, and it is inconceivable that it could arrange itself without any intelligence to guide it. Now, if you admit the existence of God, which I think you do, I contend that other difficulties will disappear. It is quite easy to raise side issues and discover weak points in connection with Christianity, and hold them up to scorn, as your friend Ingersoll does; but you must grasp fundamental principles. Admit the existence of Deity, and you need not make mountains of other matters.

I do not intend to discuss with you the question of the "Virgin-born Son." I admit, from the secular point of view, there is great difficulty in explaining this; but God, who made all things, is surely able to perform acts that may appear to us to be against the laws of nature. Are we justified in saying we have discovered all the laws of nature? I think, as a scientist, you will allow that there may be laws—many laws—that are as yet unknown to us. There may be a sphere in which the miraculous may appear quite consistent. Do not, I pray, let everything turn upon the miraculous. Leave that out of the question in the meantime, and do not harp upon the inconsistencies of Christianity, nor upon the supposed mistakes in the Bible; you can find plenty to say on these points. Look at the question in its broad outlines, and try and explain the phenomenon of Christ. Can you explain his life and sayings; can you account for his influence? I differ entirely from you as to the effects of Christianity; there is no question as to its benign influence upon the human race. Where has heathenism provided hospitals and homes for the suffering and the poor, as Christianity has done? It is because you are a Christian, though you do not know it, that you so liberally subscribe to these charitable

objects. You cannot, in my opinion, get over the difficulty of the life and sayings of Jesus Christ and his religion unless you ignore the facts of authenticated history.

Will you read the Gospels once more? Read the Gospel of John and the fifth chapter of Matthew. Do not read to find fault, but simply to learn; and I think, if you put away prejudice, you will find that there is much good in the book that you cannot fail to admire.

I am reading Darwin with great interest. All your books make me a still firmer believer in my God, who has ordered all things so perfect and so beautiful.

I am very busy, or I would have answered your letter sooner.

Yours truly,

CLERGYMAN.

XXIV.

DEAR SIR,—

In your last you state that you are not sure whether or no I believe in God.

I think my previous letters have been quite clear on that point. Know, then, that I do not believe in any of the gods I have read of; they are all mere myths.

Ignorance of nature, and the cunning of men who would use these myths as levers to frighten the ignorant into submission, are the creators of the gods. The gods of a beautiful, fertile country, with pleasant surroundings, were more loveable than the Gods of a country of storm, avalanche, and wild beasts. The gods of Greece were the most perfect of any I have read of; but change in the belief of the people annihilated them. The Greeks have adopted other gods, less beautiful—the gods of the Old and New Testament; the former represented as a cruel tyrant, and the latter as the author of an eternal hell for most men.

My opinion is that hell is a priestly invention, and has no existence. Even the clergy are getting ashamed of it, and mention it as the abode of lost souls—another unproved assertion, for what more knowledge do they possess

of the abode of a soul than I do? and I know nothing of souls apart from bodies. You will hear of someone described as a great-souled man; but it only means that he is noble and loveable.

If the clergy are to continue to live, they must come down from that elevation from which the ignorance of man has hitherto allowed them to address us. As a class they know less than ordinary educated men of the day; and what they think they know are deductions from unsound premises, which no investigation supports, and which are, therefore, not believed in by anyone whose opinion is worth having.

I feel, however, that we are wasting time which should be better employed.

Have you put into your schools the *Science Primers* I sent you? That is the kind of information you should disseminate.

I know, to my constant regret, that in the Shorter Catechism "the chief end of man is to glorify God and to enjoy him for ever," for, as a boy of eight, it was inflicted upon me; but I can give you something much better, and far more sensible: The chief end of man should be to do all the good he can to make himself and his fellow-men happy.

What do you say to our correspondence being published? You could appear under a *nom de plume* if you liked.

Yours with every respect,

GEORGE ANDERSON.

XXV.

MY DEAR SIR,—

I am sorry that yours of September 14th has been so long unanswered.

You say you do not believe in any of the gods. I am sorry to hear this; but I cannot help thinking that, in the depth of your heart, you *do* believe.

You make many statements which I regard as rash and unjust. You seem to impute unworthy and base motives to the clergy, as if they invented and perpetuated views

and opinions to suit themselves, and to support their own interests. Now, this I regard as unjust and uncharitable. You tell me that, as a class, the clergy know less than ordinary educated men of the day. I deny this. I do not know what class of clergymen you come in contact with ; but I am astonished that a Scotchman should make a statement so contrary to fact as far as Scotland is concerned, and other countries also, for, as a rule, clergymen are well educated. But these things are side issues, and, from the tenour of our correspondence, I have the impression that your ungenerous views of Christianity have, to some extent at least, arisen from animosity to the clergy, the origin of which is best known to yourself.

I have on several occasions referred to your statements at an early stage of our correspondence, to the effect that you believe in the eternity of matter. Now, I again say that it is much easier for the trained intellect, or for any intellect, to believe in an intelligent Being (whose origin you cannot account for) than to believe that matter, in virtue of its own force, has developed itself into its highest form—that of the human body and mind. If you do not believe in a Supreme Being, it seems to me that it is because you *will* not, not because you *cannot*—for you confess that you believe in the eternity of matter, which seems much more difficult. And if you *will* not believe in God, may it not be that it is because there are some things you do not wish to part with, which you would be obliged to do were you to believe ? It resolves itself into the old question, the words of our Lord : “Ye will not come to me that ye may have life.” You will not love the light. Men love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil. You seem to me to take too much for granted touching your own knowledge and intellect, and those of others who think with you, and too little of the same qualities in those you differ from. A fair mind—one that has power, and lays claim to impartiality—will weigh both sides of any question, will read and think of what is thought and said on the opposite side. Now, I fear that your reading is somewhat exclusive ; that you study those books that are opposed to Christianity, and not those that defend it. I would suggest that you read the other side

of these great questions which we have been considering. I have read both sides. I have read the books and the periodicals you sent me, and I have not swerved in the least from my view of Christianity, and my faith in Jesus Christ as the Saviour of men. Those writers whose books you lent me, with the exception of one or two—and those certainly not the most noteworthy—never make assertions like some of those you make; and it is not because they have no intellect, no perception, nor courage, but because they have fair and logical minds.

With regard to publishing our correspondence, I do not think it is worth publishing on either side. If I thought you had that idea in view when we commenced it, I would at once say No, for that would indicate on your part a lack of honesty that I am unwilling to attribute to you. The only condition on which I would agree is that all my letters *in toto* should be published, and that I should be allowed to correct the proofs; and that all yours should be published in the same way. But I really do not think it would be of any service. I would not care to have my name appear.

I visited two old ladies this week—one ninety-one, the other ninety-four years of age. They were both peaceful and happy in view of death; they firmly believe in God, and they have rest in the thought of the future. May I trust that your old faith will return to you before the end of your life, and that you will experience that peace and joy which have been the heritage of millions in the past, and will be that of millions in the future?

The *Science Primers* I have not yet put into the hands of my young people, but will do so soon.

Would you like to give an examination at the end of the session, and would you care to offer some prizes to the best students?

Excuse this long letter. May I ask you to read the Gospels, and study them impartially?

Yours sincerely,

CLERGYMAN.

XXVI.

DEAR SIR,—

Your letter of October 25th arrived when I was from home. It is the worst I have received from you. Such statements as that I do not believe because I *will* not, and that, to believe, I would require to give up some things I do not wish to part with, are beneath notice, and are not arguments.

Are you not aware that belief or disbelief is not a matter of will? It is a matter of evidence, or the want of it.

The opinion I have expressed *re* the clergy is supported by history. In the time of Henry VIII. and Elizabeth the bishops and clergy became Catholics or Protestants, as suited the pressure of the passing times and the retention of their emoluments.

Henry was the most immoral of all our monarchs, and Elizabeth the most cruel; yet neither was forsaken by the clergy, who at one time bastardized Elizabeth and afterwards crowned her. Henry robbed the Catholic Church of its cathedrals, houses, and lands, wherein the poor were supported. At that time there were no poor rates; the Catholic Church supported the poverty-stricken. There were houses at short distances where the man in search of work could sup, sleep, breakfast, and proceed on his way. This was not charity; it did not pauperise him; it was his immemorial right. But these two crowned scoundrels stole all this and divided it between the aristocracy and the clergy; hence the present poor rate—a legacy from those times to us. Kings, queens, and clergy have improved since then, but only in countries like ours, where secular knowledge has spread. Some countries suffer now from kingly injustice and clerical superstition, as we did three hundred years ago; therefore, still further improvement is required. The clergy are very bitter towards anyone who disputes the doctrines they live by. They are the only body who detest discussion

and free inquiry ; they try to smother free thought in its bud, so that it may not bloom ; hence they catch the child in its cradle. They perform the mummery of baptism ; they "confirm" it ; they marry and they bury it ; and they taboo and impute improper motives, and put outside the law all who question their unproved and unprovable assertions about their everlasting gods.

Why, sir, compared with man, gods are things of a day. The beautiful gods of ancient Greece, the liberal gods of ancient Rome, are all dead. There are yet Buddha, Mohammed, and Christ left ; but they are all consumptive, and death will claim them at last.

You have once more returned to the question of my belief in the eternity of matter, but you have not put forward any arguments ; you have only told me that you think it is easier to believe that an intelligent Being, whose origin you cannot account for, and of whom you know nothing, has accomplished all the developments we find in nature, including man. The God you worship, whom you suppose has done all this, is, according to Scripture, without body, parts, or passions, which, to my mind, appears to be a concise description of *nothing*. You cannot give any description of such a body, yet you ascribe to it intelligence. Where have you ever found intelligence apart from matter ? Intelligence is only a name we give to the mental action of an organized body—a body with a brain ; for all bodies are not intelligent. A lump of granite is matter, but it has no brain ; hence we do not accord it intelligence.

You say that the clergy are well educated. To be merely a clergyman, I do not see what need he has for education ; he has nothing to talk about but mysteries, which he tells you he does not understand, yet asks you to believe. In my opinion, the gift a clergyman most requires is oratory, such as Burns describes in his "Holy Fair."

Clergymen sometimes dabble in secular matters ; but it would be better for them to leave that field alone. Their efforts seldom meet with approval, especially in Scotland, where secular life thinks it can manage its own affairs—which opinion I share. They are best in the pulpit, where

no one dares to contradict them, and where they can be eloquent upon subjects no one understands.

You think my reading has been devoted too much to books antagonistic to Christianity. I think not. I have about 1,000 volumes in my library ; not one in fifty speaks for or against Christianity. Among them is included Alison's *History of Europe* (24 octavo vols.), Scott's Works (12 vols.), Gibbon's *Rome* (12 vols.), Hugh Miller (13 vols.), Jones's *Asiatic Researches* (9 vols.), fourteen volumes of Scottish History and Story, twenty-four volumes of *Tales of the Borders*, Ballantyne's novels (10 vols.), Robertson's *Histories* (8 vols.), Darwin's works (14 vols.) ; several volumes on Geology, several on Astronomy ; poems of Burns, Byron, Shelley, Cowper, Southey, Dryden, Moore ; most of Dickens's novels, Berkeley's Dictionary, and several others, including the original edition of Johnson's in two volumes, which weigh about a hundredweight (these latter I have only glanced at) ; also twenty-four octavo volumes of *Parliamentary History of England*, from the time of Henry IV. to the restoration of Charles II., many books on engineering, and hundreds besides. In addition to these I read the *Times* and *Daily Graphic*, likewise magazines and weekly papers.

I read the Old and New Testaments long ago ; found the former cruel and indecent, and the latter impracticable. I possess, and have read, the Talmud and the Koran. The Koran I consider the most rational of them all. Granting the possibility of a future life, it is the most likely to make converts ; there is something human in its mode of enjoying eternity, far better than for ever singing in praise of the Lord. And what a low, barren opinion of God they must hold who think that everlasting adulation will please him.

I had no thought of publishing when this correspondence began, therefore I kept no copy of my first letter to you ; but, when I saw that you wished to make a Christian of me, I deemed it best to keep copies ; and it was only when I was informing you of the manner in which I brought up my family that the idea occurred to me that I might publish, as I consider this duty to be the most important in a man's career. Should I publish, I will not

name you without your consent. If you decline to give it, I shall not consider it necessary to send you proofs, for I shall not publish for profit, and naturally wish to keep down expenses.

As this will probably be my last letter, I must say that I suspect your dull, one-sided ass has not mended his pace by beating.

I forgive you all your unkind thoughts as to my motives for rejecting Christianity. I know they are mistakes. If I had not been a lover of truth, I might have posed as a Christian; but I detest your faith, and regard it as a hurtful superstition that afflicts mankind—one that has divided those who would otherwise have been mingled into one great brotherhood; and I have had honesty and backbone enough to appear in my true colours, and always, I trust, without giving offence to others.

I am, yours,

GEORGE ANDERSON.

XXVII.

DEAR SIR,

I have gone back in my previous letter to the beginning of our correspondence. You say there you believe in the eternity of matter—that is, you believe in what you cannot, in your own words, understand or explain. This is an admission of great importance on your part. I maintain it is easier to believe in the existence of an intelligent Being who created matter than to believe that matter developed itself.

That being so, I asked the question: "Why don't you believe in what is the easier rather than in the more difficult thing?" You say that this is not argument, and shunt off, in your usual style, to a disquisition upon the Old Testament idea of God. In my opinion this "is not argument." In asking the question, Why don't you believe in the easier conception? I suggested it might be that to do so would involve on your part a sacrifice that you are not prepared to make. You say that belief is not a matter

of will, but of evidence. Belief is founded on the result of evidence. In the act of believing you are influenced by evidence. One may be convinced by evidence that he should do a certain act; but he determines to do otherwise, because he wills to do the one and not the other. He is conscious of his freedom to act, and he does it contrary to the evidence that he should do otherwise.

If a man has no will free to act, where is his responsibility? I still ask the question: "Why do you not believe in the existence of an eternal intelligent Being as well as in the eternity of matter? You give no satisfactory answer to that question. The system of your arguments in all your letters turns upon that you have to stop there, like others who cannot explain how things began to be. You say that you follow Darwin, Huxley, and Tyndall. These gentlemen never make such unfounded assertions as you do.

You will find that my allusion to the clergy was made with reference to a former statement of yours as to the education of the clergy of the present day. You go off to the time of Henry VIII.; this is not an unusual method of yours. I admit, with you, that the state of the clergy was bad then, and it is still, in many places. That, however, is not the point. There is an advance in the Church as well as in science. If you go back to the time of Henry VIII. for your science, you will find it worse, compared with the present, than you find the Church. You kindly give a list of your books; a fairly good library, but certainly not modern as a whole. You say there are none of them for or against religion. Some of those you sent me are decidedly against religion—such as Gould's, Ingersoll's, and literature of that kind. Have you read the other side of the question by authors of the present day?

I have read both sides; but my faith in Christianity, in Christ, in his life and words as given in the New Testament, is not shaken. You tell me you read the Old and New Testaments long ago: they can bear another reading. I would most sincerely recommend you to study the New Testament once more. Read the sayings of Jesus; you will find them beautiful and profitable, and not impracticable, as you assert.

You say that the reading of the Koran has led you to believe it to be better fitted to make converts than the Bible and other sacred books. Why does it not do it? As a matter of fact, the Koran religion is going down, and the Christian religion is making rapid and vast strides. Facts are stronger than assertions.

Christianity has never been so strong and aggressive as at present. Tell me how it is that faith in Christ produces such a marvellous moral change in a man. I have been twenty-five years a minister of the Gospel of Christianity; I have seen drunkards reclaimed; I have seen men and women of all classes, who were a disgrace and a ruin to their homes and to their friends, so much changed that they lived good and beautiful lives for the remainder of their days. These are facts which, it seems to me, your school cannot explain, and they are produced by faith in Christ.

I consider your insinuations as to the clergy selling themselves for a mere living quite unworthy of a gentleman of your professed intelligence. If you knew many of them, as I do, I am sure you would change your opinion. You would find them neither one-sided nor inclined to discourage inquiry. I am convinced that if you would study the other side of the question as to the being of God, and the literature of Christianity, and if you come more in contact with Christian men, you would change your views.

I am very sorry you seem to think that I have unkind thoughts of you as to why you are not a Christian. My remark was purely in the line of argument, and I still maintain that, as a free agent, you have the power to will and do; and if you do what is more difficult, there must be some reason why you do not do what is easier. Excuse my remark that you did not will to be a Christian because Christianity involves responsibility that you do not care to take upon yourself. Far from having unkind thoughts of you I have the very opposite. I have your portrait among my friends in my drawing-room; I feel the deepest interest in you. I am still praying for you, for I believe in God, and in his power to influence you in your old age. But even God will not force a man to be a Christian against his will. As I have said more than once, I wish so much

to have a personal interview. If you should have time to take a holiday, I can assure you of a hearty welcome in my home. It is quite possible we might understand each other better if we met. Meanwhile, let me again assure you that I have every good and kind thought towards you, and I am not without hope that you will have different thoughts of Christianity before the end of your life.

I am, faithfully yours,

CLERGYMAN.

P.S.—If you mean to publish, as I have kept no copies of my letters, and I would like to see proofs and I would like them to be complete. The sending of proofs to me will not make much extra expense; but, as I have already said, I do not think that our correspondence is worth publishing.

XXVIII.

DEAR SIR,

This correspondence must cease. The object which caused you to commence it has not been obtained nor is it likely to be; hence we but waste time.

I have daily evidence that my belief is in the ascendant, and I have no doubts. Governments, Courts of Law, and business between man and man, are all conducted on secular principles, notwithstanding that old religious nostrums are mixed up with their proceedings.

When we find one has sworn falsely we commit him for perjury, and we know that the man of criminal intent is far more afraid of a policeman than of the all-seeing, ever-present God.

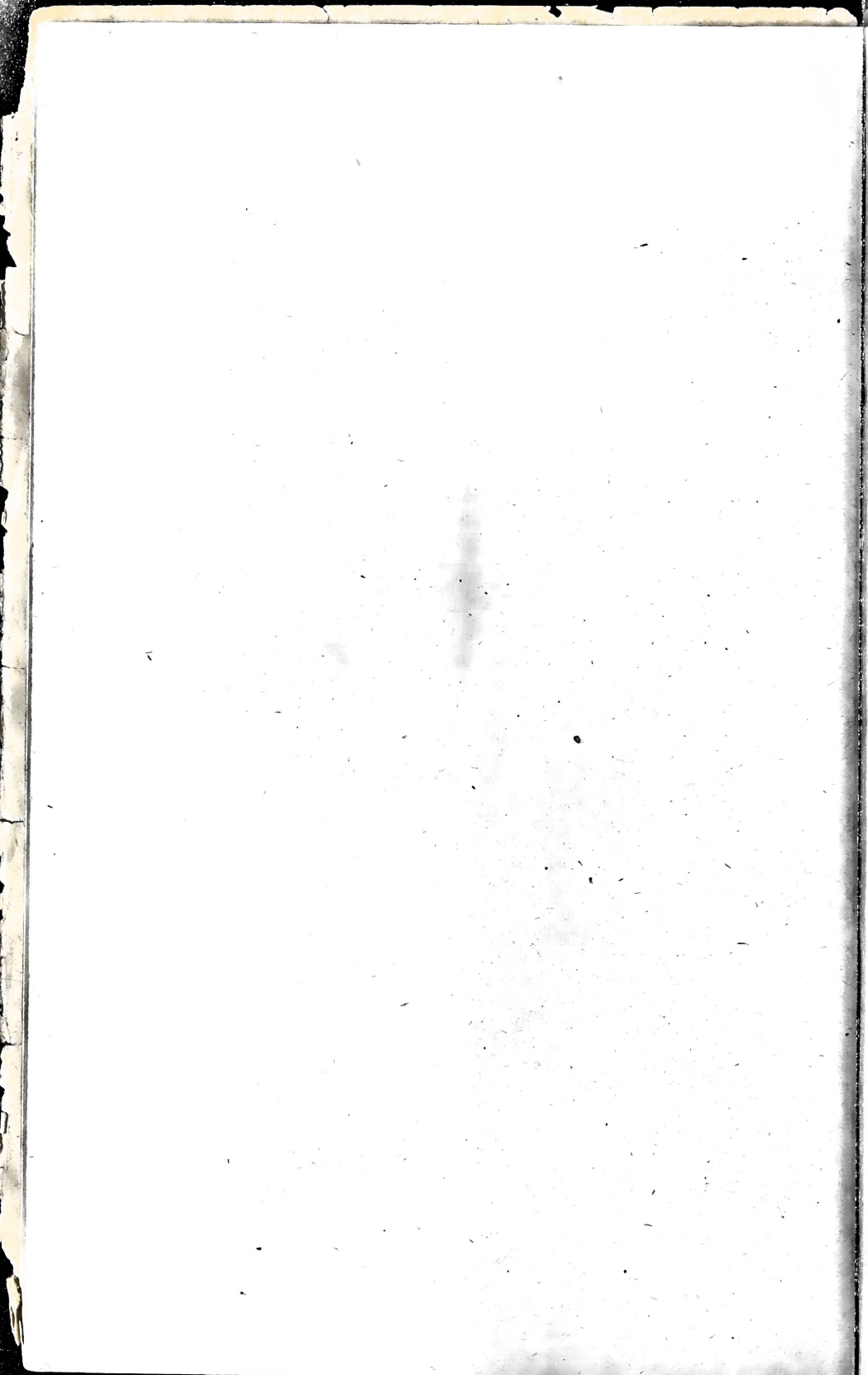
I trust that you will provide for your schools sets of the *Science Primers* I sent you.

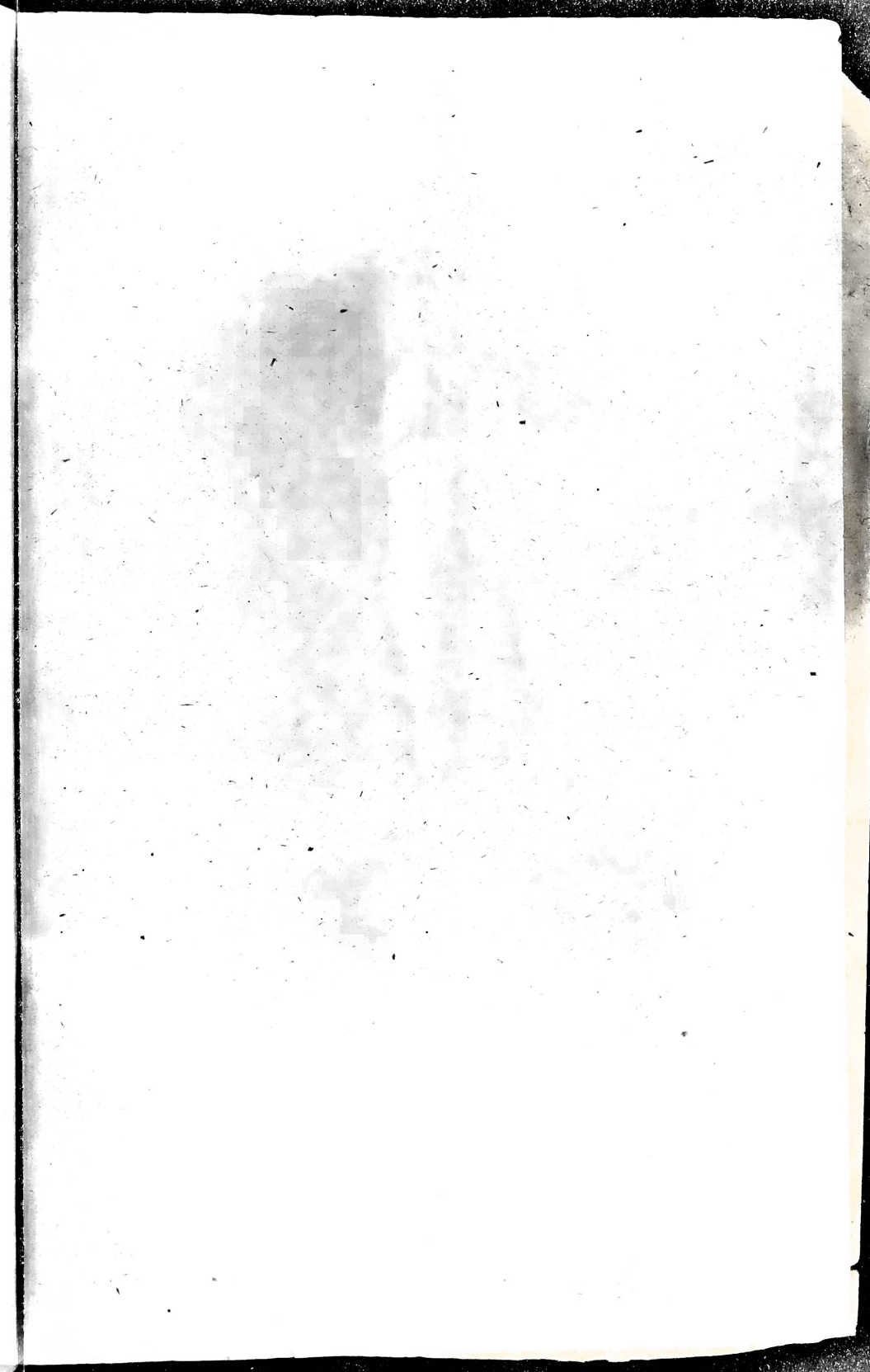
Teach children something of *this* world, and of their own bodies, and you will make them united, intelligent and happy, and pave the way for the world we live in to become a home superior to your fabled heaven.

I believe you are better than your religion, and I do not think that you would burn me everlastingly if you had the power.

I am, yours,

GEORGE ANDERSON.





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