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STEPPING-STONES TO AGNOSTICISM.—No. 1.

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

ECCE DEUS!

OR,

A NEW GOD.

BY

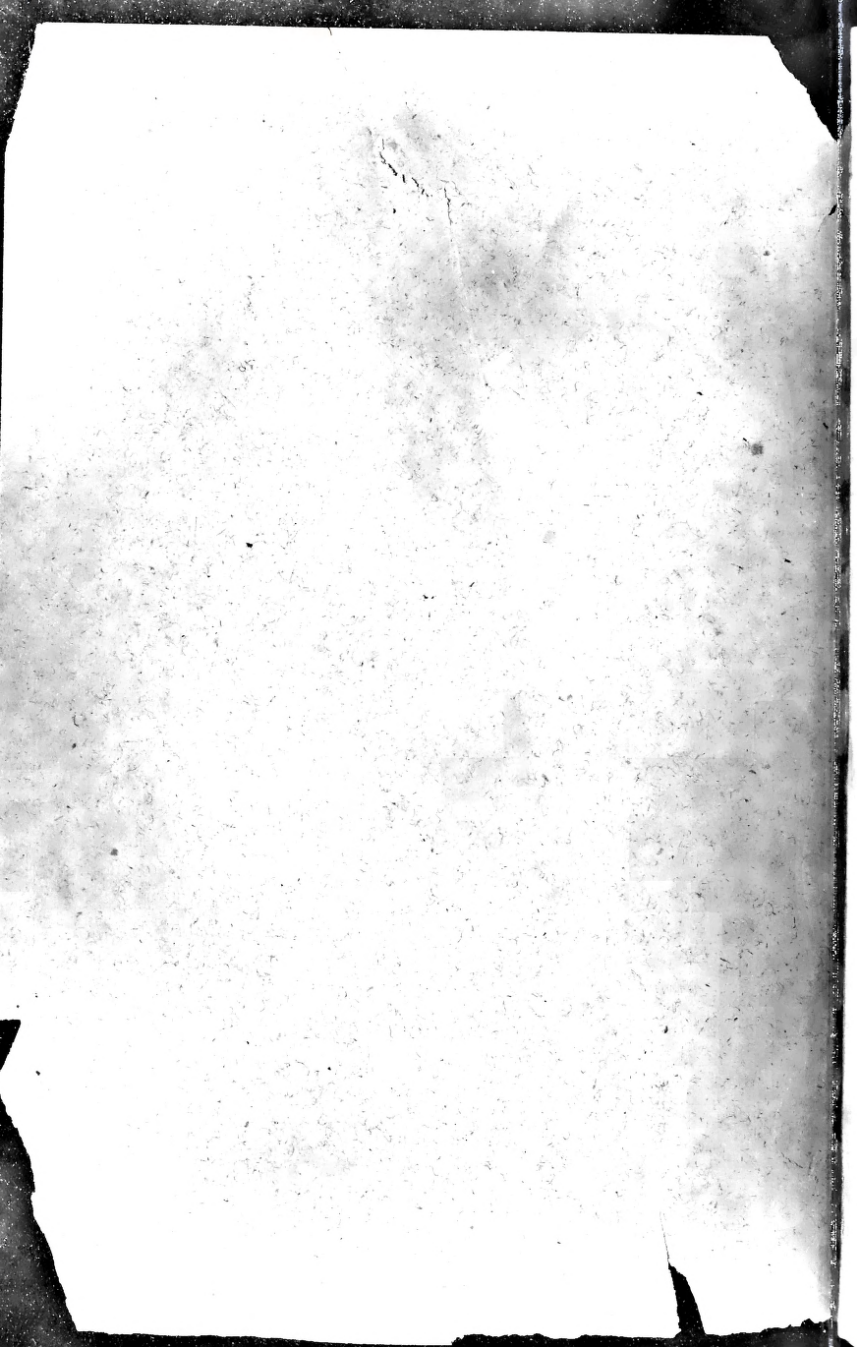
F. J. GOULD.

IT IS BETTER TO DREAM OF A NOBLE GOD THAN TO BELIEVE IN
A BAD ONE.

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ECCE DEUS ! OR, A NEW GOD.

If an almighty and supremely good God were to reveal himself to mankind to-day, all Scepticism would vanish away by to-morrow. The world stands in sore need of Almighty Justice and Almighty Love. Oppressed nations, trembling slaves, the fatherless and widow, the leper, the cripple and the blind, the unhappy Lazarus that lies at the gate of society : all these murmur a ceaseless prayer for a God. He never answers. "Peradventure," like ancient Baal, "He sleepeth and must be awaked." What man or woman can read Oliver Goldsmith's description of the deserted village without feeling the dint of pity in his heart? But what is a deserted village compared with an unhappy world, upon which, one might almost think, the stars have looked for ages with compassionate eyes, because our struggling race has lived and bled and wept and died, and never a God stepped down from heaven to offer one cup of water, one word of hope, one smile of love, one gift of grace. Never? You, Christian reader, will perhaps thrust a Bible into my hands, and assure me that God has indeed visited us and given us living water, eternal hope, infinite love, and ineffable grace. Ah, if that were true, I should not need to pore over the pages of a book to find God. He would meet me face to face in every nook and cranny of this broad world, every bush would blaze with His glory, and every human countenance reflect His beauty.

The Christian believes in a God ; the Sceptic yearns for one. Then why, with this desire possessing his heart, will not the unbelieving Sceptic kneel beside the believing Christian, and adore the same God ? Because

the God of the Bible is lacking in dignity and nobility, lacking in generosity and love, lacking in wisdom and power. Dignity, nobility, generosity, love, wisdom, power—these are, or should be, the marks of a great man; how much more, then, of a great God? The Christian God eats, He drinks, He smells, He laughs to scorn, He mocks, He roars, He utters oaths, He gesticulates: this is not dignity and nobility. The Christian God is jealous, He is angry, He is furious, He hates, He curses, He executes vengeance, He drowns, He burns, He starves, He smites, He desolates, He rains down fire from heaven, He opens fatal chasms in the earth, He feeds the perpetual fire of Hell: this is not generosity and love. The Christian God is continually thwarted and hindered by the Devil: this is not wisdom and power. Search the Scriptures, and see whether these things be so or not. Perhaps you reply that they are merely figurative expressions, pictures, or rough poems, furnishing a kind of ladder by which man may climb up to a knowledge of God. Very well; I agree that, if God is to be apprehended at all by the human mind, it must be by means of figures and symbols. But why not choose the higher, the more graceful, the more stately symbols—symbols which stand for the grander, and not the baser, side of man's nature? Jealousy, and fury, and hatred are feelings of the baser sort, and should not therefore enter into our conception of God. Eating and drinking are necessities to the most imperious monarch or the most saintly prophet; but when we think of a great man we leave his eating and drinking quite out of account, and fix our eyes upon far loftier acts and qualities. Our thought of God should be, so to speak, all of gold. The image should be free from common and unclean iron and clay; free from all that is brutal and vulgar. Our conception of God should be, like the Passover Lamb, without spot or blemish; without passion, without vengeance, without harshness, without grossness; full of dignity, love, wisdom, and power.

Take up the Bible and consider this brief history of the Christian God:—He made the universe, the earth, and man; and all was apparently fair and good. Adam and the woman ate—

“Of that forbidden tree, whose mortal taste
Brought death into the world and all our woe.”

The miserable pair were exiled from Eden, the Tempter was cursed, the earth was cursed, murder was committed, Cain was cursed, the whole human race was destroyed except eight persons. God chose Abraham and his posterity to be a peculiar and sacred people ; He burned Sodom and Gomorrhah to the ground, He plagued the Egyptians and ruined their country, He harried the sacred people in the desert with pestilence, earthquake, fire, and vipers ; He smote the seven nations of Canaan with hailstones and the sword, annihilated the Amalekites, scourged the Israelites with war, sickness, and famine ; blasted a magnificent army of Assyrians in one night ; sent His people into slavery, and raised up prophets who cried woe and desolation upon every land and nation under the sun. And still, after all these ghastly scenes of suffering and penance, Satan was unconquered, and still stood—

“ Like Teneriffe or Atlas unremoved.”

God became man ; He was derided, insulted, rejected, crucified ; He proclaimed salvation to mankind, but chose only a fraction of the race, threatened to consume the world in a final fiery catastrophe, and closed His revelation with a book full of fearful imprecations, volcanic horrors, volumes of smoke from the accursed Abyss and the livid flames of Hell.

If you seek the cause of unbelief, study this history of the Christian God, for the cause is there. The Bible is the mother of Scepticism.

Some Christian may reply : “ The record of human grief is indeed terrible ; but, after all, the course and constitution of Nature itself would lead us to expect the infliction of pain. If you make mutiny against the laws of Nature, you will rue your disobedience ; as, for example, if you are a gluttonous man, you will suffer the throes of indigestion ; if a wine-bibber, the horrors of delirium tremens. The God of Nature is the God of the Bible. Hence the Bible record of his dealings with man reflects the method of Nature.” If this be so, the matter is not mended, unless, with Pope, we have that

large faith which maintains "Whatever is is right." Every drop of an honest man's blood cries out indignantly that the constitution of things is not right; that Nature oftentimes does us wrong, and that it is our duty, at a thousand different points, to resist Nature, and wring justice from her unkind and reluctant hands. This is the verdict of Mr. John Stuart Mill. "Nature," he says in his well-known essay on that subject, "is replete with everything which, when committed by human beings, is most worthy of abhorrence," and "anyone who endeavoured in his actions to imitate the natural course of things would be universally seen and acknowledged to be the wickedest of men." And he instances, among other illustrations, that "no human being ever comes into the world but another human being is literally stretched on the rack for hours or days, not unfrequently issuing in death." If, then, the God of the Bible is the God of Nature, He is doubly condemned. I, as a Sceptic, refuse to bow the knee to either, because both are unmerciful and unrighteous. Cannot I, cannot you, imagine a happier constitution of Nature? Ought not you and I to toil and wrestle that we may hasten the brighter day? If God is the Author of Nature, then every effort of man to reform Nature is a stroke of a blasphemous hammer against the handiwork of God. To suggest that the constitution of Nature is not perfectly wise and just must also be a sin. The learned Bishop Butler severely condemns any such suggestion as "vain and idle speculations," "folly and extravagance." Of course, if you read his famous "Analogy," you will see that his grand aim is to excuse the blots on the Bible by pointing to the bloodstains which Nature has left on the earth. In spite of Bishop Butler's frowns, I invite you to imagine a God worthier of worship than the God he worshipped, and whom he was obliged to defend. Bear with me while I indulge in a "vain and idle speculation." Let me create for you the image of a New God. It will at least make clear to you what kind of divine being the unbeliever would willingly render homage to, and why his heart will not do obeisance to the God of Christianity.

Suppose, then, the great Epiphany or Manifestation of

the New God has just taken place. He surveys man and Nature, and is unable to pronounce them "very good." Will He weep as Christ wept over the doomed Jerusalem? Nay, it is not for infinite love, wisdom, and power to weep. It is the work of a God to relieve, not to weep; and He will not rest on the Sabbath or any other day until universal salvation is an accomplished fact. Delay is not His attribute. God's mill will not grind slowly. He will fulfil the promise which has so long mocked the world,—“The God of Peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly.” His first act will be to destroy the Devil, not in a long succession of battles, but at once and forever. Why not? Is there any advantage to be gained by prolonging the struggle? Is any amusement to be found in watching the combat between God and Satan, as if it were a brilliant tournament, and the more the rivals clash their arms, the more loudly the spectators applaud? Such a combat might be sport to immortal and ethereal beings; but alas! it is death to us. The divine voice will resound through the universe: “I am God, and there is none else.” He will have no divided sovereignty. He will tolerate no prince of darkness. Every world he creates will be an Eden, in which no serpent can ever leave its fatal trail. If the Almighty Power of God embraces all things, the Devil can have no resting-place for the sole of his foot. Do you believe that divine goodness could fashion an author of evil, and breathe the breath of life into the monster's nostrils? Do you believe infinite love would affix His divine seal to a charter which gave Satan the lordship over horror, pain, and sin? This would be indeed the basest of Infidelity. To believe in a Devil is to revile God, to blaspheme His name; it is, in effect, to deny His existence. Our new God, then, will immediately and finally annihilate the Devil.*

When God surveys the world, He will regard all men and women as his sons and daughters. He will have no

* It is instructive to note how, on the approach of the Sceptic, Christian apologists take the greatest pains to conceal the Devil from view. Let the reader take the trouble to search through Butler's "Analogy" for allusions to the Devil, and he will probably be astonished at the result.

chosen people, no favourite nation. He will never say : "Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated." There shall be no Jews and Gentiles. There shall be no saved and unsaved. There shall be no blessed and cursed. There shall be no heirs of the kingdom and outcasts in darkness. There shall be no sheep and goats ; no bulls of Bashan in the pasture of God ; no wandering stars in His firmament ; no tares in His field. There shall be no Heaven and Hell. The pitiless sentence, "Depart from me," will never be pronounced. Every creature whose breast can feel a pang of sorrow, or whose eye can light up with a ray of gladness, shall be the child of God. If God were to come among us to-day, He would find (alas ! how easily they are found) the staggering drunkard, the burglar, the profligate, the swindler, the tyrant, the hypocrite, the Pharisee. From these He will not hide His face ; He will interpose no pillar of cloud. Their names shall not be blotted from His Book of Life. With irresistible winsomeness He will gain their hearts. Before many days elapse they will respond to His smile, and a voice from the eternal Holy of Holies will say : "These are my beloved children, in whom I am well pleased." Not one single square inch of the globe will be left in possession of the powers of darkness, not one single creature left neglected. Else, if it were possible for God to summon a general assembly of the human race, and, with the innumerable multitude before him, to ask, "Is there, in the whole world, one being who is not good and happy?" and if, out of some dim forgotten corner, one poor wretch could creep forth in his rags and answer, "Yes ; I, and I only, am still sinful and still sad," that one feeble reply would be sufficient to impeach the wisdom of the Creator !

Our new God will alter that system which is the admiration of the theologians ; He will alter the "course and constitution of Nature." The black clouds may still gather in the sky, the thunder crash, and the lightning glitter ; but the lightning and the hail will never blast the life of man or beast. No doubt the Christian reader will exclaim : "What an absurd world you are creating, one in which lightning will not harm, fire will not burn, water will not drown—an impossible world

altogether"! To which exclamation two replies may be made.

(1) The Christian ought not merely to conceive of such changes in the constitution of nature; but, if he is sincere, he already believes these changes have on certain occasions actually been wrought. The God of the Bible handles the elements with the greatest freedom. A hundred men who attempted to arrest the prophet Elijah were struck by fire from Heaven; but the lightning left Elijah unscathed. That is to say, God could guide the electric bolts in whichever direction He pleased. When Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego were flung into Nebuchadnezzar's furnace, fire did not burn them. When Jesus and Peter walked on the sea of Galilee, water did not drown them. What God could do for a few individuals He could do for all. If you are a Christian, you have no right to say that God could not protect us from all possible dangers. You may object we should then be living in a world of miracles. Let it be so: what then? We should gain, and God could not lose. Miracles cost nothing to an Omnipotent God.

But (2) God could make the world happy without miracles. Let me again point the Christian to his Scriptures. According to the Bible, God made the world perfect and good; but it is not usual to describe the process of creation as a miracle. The Bible also prophesies a revolution in nature. "The wolf," says Isaiah, "shall dwell with the lamb; and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox; and the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder's den." This is indeed a miracle, that the animal tribes should be at peace with one another in the manner Isaiah describes. But surely it is not unlawful to imagine that God could have so ordered the system of nature when He first planned it that there should have been no necessity for bloodshed and warfare among the brutes. If He can do so at the

end of the world, He can do so at the beginning. But, if a God created the world at all, He created the various orders of animal life, man included, in such a lamentable fashion that there has ever since been going on among them a perpetual struggle for existence, in the course of which the weak succumb and the fittest survive. "The survival of the fittest"! The very phrase condemns either God's power or God's love. Why did He not make them all fit to survive—all rejoicing in His light, and all wandering unmolested in the boundless Paradise of His grace? If you, as a Christian, dare to assert that God could not have done so, you are false to your own creed; you deny the omnipotence of the Being you worship.

Our new God will possess the strength of a God as well as the name. We shall not need to excuse Him, and explain Him in elaborate books of apologies and analogies and evidences. All nature will praise Him and reveal Him. We shall never look at moon or stars, at sea or land, at animal or plant, at fowl or creeping things or fishes, or the hyssop that springeth out of the wall, without reading in them a charming bible. There will be no scene of horror to turn away from with a shudder. All creatures, and man himself, will find their food, and supply all their physical wants, without mutilating or destroying their fellow-creatures. No man, no beast, shall ever know the sight of blood. Earth shall never be stained by one drop. It shall never redden the soldier's sword. The smell of the blood of bulls and goats will not please the nostrils of our God. He will not need to be reconciled to His children by the blood of the cross. His vesture will not be dipped in blood, nor will blood issue from His vengeful winepress. The blood of man will not be spilt by accident or disaster. God will endow man with such quickness of sense and thought as will put him on the alert against all perils, and will allow no perils to threaten him from which he cannot so guard himself. From natural dangers such as volcanoes and earthquakes, either man will be protected, or they will disappear from the economy of nature. The earth, no longer a valley of the shadow of death, will be a temple dedicated by God to the use and innocent

pleasure of man. We shall hear no more of "providential escapes." What a ghastly conceit is that which leads the fiftieth man to thank God for his "miraculous preservation," while his forty-nine companions lie gaping at Heaven, stricken down by a frightful death! No; under the sceptre of our God there will be no providential escapes, because there will be no providential calamities. All things will proceed with eternal harmony. Creation will mean beauty, and life will mean happiness. Love will twine flowers round the porch of every man's home. Smiles and laughter will turn daily toil into daily cheer. God will be glorified in the sports of children, the contentment of men and women, and the peace of all nature. There will be music in the stars, and joy in the whole earth. Such will be the story of every day so long as the world lasts. There will be no "Infidelity" then, for Infidelity could not live in such an atmosphere. Or, if it were possible that for one brief moment a sceptical thought could enter the mind of man, and make him say in his heart "There is no God," the next moment his own eyes, his own ears, would testify against him. God would hasten to unroll before him such splendour, art, and majesty in the world about him, above him and at his feet, that his scepticism would be crushed out for everlasting, and he would laugh as men laugh at a foolish dream. Or again, if it were possible that some Christian bishop or missionary, some theological waif, some strange survival from the nineteenth century, could address God, and appeal to Him to cast the Infidel into Hell, the Father of all might make this answer: "Thou fool! if this man is an Infidel, he is so either from ignorance or from an evil heart. If from ignorance, the only remedy is knowledge. I must convince him by enlightening him. I must prove my existence to him by the unimpeachable witness of Nature. I, who gave him an ear, must cause him to hear the voice of Nature whispering the Divine secret. What knowledge could he derive from Hell-fire, except indeed this: that I who made him had power to torment him? And if he is an Infidel by reason of an evil heart, then I must convince him by my incessant generosity and goodness. If, with his full faculties of mind and body,

he denies my existence, how can he be persuaded to reflect on the subject when his every limb is writhing in the pains of Hell? He might indeed acknowledge the superiority of my strength. But what would that avail? I, who gave him his being, should regard him as a failure. He, in his turn, would regard me as a devil."

The Christian believes in God and Hell: a startling and impossible contradiction. Every lost soul that passes through Hell-gates is an additional proof of God's incapacity to rule the world. The God of the Bible asserts his authority by pointing to Hell. It is as if a physician should endeavour to convince us of his medical skill by showing us the graves of his patients. If God can do nothing more for the reformation of the wicked, it would be better to blot them out of existence altogether than permit them to remain as tokens of his moral feebleness. Singular God! while men wish to forget their failures, He takes pleasure in their contemplation. The kings of the earth like to be surrounded by captured banners and jewels, the trophies of victory. The King of Heaven chooses to gaze for all eternity upon the wretched spectacle of Hell. He burns men for their crimes; but in so doing He kindles a fire, in the fierce light of which all creation can read the story of His defeat. Our new God will reverse this policy. He will not rest satisfied with bringing salvation to earth. He will hear the cry of His children in Hell. They have heard that earth has been illuminated with bliss and peace; and they pray that Hell also may be blessed. The gates of Hell shall be broken down, and there shall come forth the mightiest, the strangest, the saddest, and yet the gladdest procession that mortal eyes have ever seen: thousands and millions, rank upon rank, army after army. Some of them have breathed the sulphurous air of Hell since the early days of our race: some began to breathe it only yesterday. Wise men are there, who dared to think the Bible was not worthy of a great God. Foolish men are there, whose foolishness the Bible never enlightened. Bad men are there, whose vices proved how often the Bible has failed to influence human nature. All come swarming back eagerly to the earth, amid cries of welcome and songs of rejoicing:

the wise to learn more wisdom, the foolish to become wise, the bad to become pure, and all to enjoy the privilege of every child of God, the pleasures of sweet Home.

Our God will need no great white throne. His throne will be placed where he hears a cry of distress, a sob, a sigh ; where he sees a pale cheek, a dim eye, a wasted hand : and there He will hold His royal court until the blush comes back to the cheek and brightness to the eye. Will He ask for temples erected to His honour ? If men delight to raise the tall cathedral, with its many spires and painted roof and rainbowed windows, He will not say them nay. But not one stone of the masonry shall be laid until the restoration of man is complete. He will not accept the tribute of costly churches and gilded altars while one single human being goes badly clothed, or badly shod, or badly fed. Our God will need no prayers ; for He will know what things we have need of. We shall say we are His children ; and that will be our whole prayer. He will dissolve all priesthods. The very existence of a priesthood is a libel on the love of God. He will want no middlemen between Himself and the children whom He loves.

How eagerly Christians press us to commit our souls to the keeping of their God : a God who cannot be trusted to preserve our bodies. The promises of the God of the Bible are tainted by a terrible suspicion. He promises men heavenly food ; but He does not give them their daily bread. He promises them that they shall see scenes of ravishing beauty ; but many of them are born blind. He promises that they shall hear the songs of angels ; but many of them are born deaf. He promises that they shall walk along the burnished terraces of Heaven ; and many of them are born cripples. He promises that they shall understand all mysteries ; and many of them are born with diseased brains. If He plays our bodies false, why should we surrender to Him our souls ? Our new God, on the contrary, will watch over the birth of each child. Wherever, all over the wide globe, there is a cradle, there will God be ; shielding the babe's pink face with the curtain of His everlasting tenderness, and soothing it with Divine

melodies. No stunted and deformed babe, no freak of nature, no puny and ricketty infant with the chill of death already glazing its hollow eyes, will ever enter the world. If such a God needed to be defended against a Sceptic, every child would furnish an argument from design in His favour. Its happy face, its sparkling eyes, and healthy limbs would tell more eloquently of a benevolent Creator than ten thousand times ten thousand priests. As the young generation grow up, they will find in a smiling and fertile earth a full supply for all their needs, not indeed to be obtained without labour, but by such honest and moderate and cheerful labour as will furnish pleasant exercise for the body and recreation for the mind. If a poet or a Socialist clairvoyant comes to us and prophesies a golden age like this, we smile, and reply that the picture is pretty, but the realisation impossible. But how easy for God to accomplish! That which perhaps the human race will never be able to do, God could do in one day's work. A joyous revolution would change the whole aspect of nature, and the chronicler of the Divine work would close the record with the simple words, "And the evening and the morning were the first day." Nor, in providing men with sound bodies, will God forget the sound mind, the intellect, the heart, or, if you like to call it so, the soul. Men will not catch each other by the coat-sleeves, and make commonplace inquiries about the state of each other's souls. God will inspire every man's heart. Men will not thirst for the water of life. They will thirst for knowledge, and God will satisfy their thirst.

All over the earth men will unfurl the snow-white flag of peace. They will consider war not only a brutality, but an absurdity. Why should they go to war? There will be no creeds to beget divisions among them. The names of Catholic and Protestant and Moslem and Buddhist will be forgotten. No commander-in-chief or army chaplain will blaspheme the name of our God by asking His aid in the task of cleaving skulls, or blackening the timbers of a homestead. When all men are the children of God, there will be no hatred between races. When the cup of all men's happiness is full, they can gain nothing by conquest.

Suppose it were possible for the Devil to rise again from the dead and visit this new paradise, would he plan another attack on the peace of mankind? Hopeless attempt! The fortress he once captured so readily would now be impregnable. Where could the Devil find a footing? Vice cannot exist where the blood is pure and the mind has been taught to dwell on worthy subjects. There can be no avarice where knowledge is counted the greatest riches, and knowledge is free to all "without money and without price." There can be no struggle for existence where all have enough. Satan would turn away in despair, and acknowledge that to wreck the virtue of such a world would require more subtlety than that of the Serpent, and more force than the crimson temptation of a forbidden fruit.

Such, then, is the Divine Figure whose advent would dispel all Scepticism. It will be generally admitted that Christian society worships a quite other Deity in the God of the Bible. To that God we Agnostic dissenters are unable to take the oath of allegiance. The multitudes of Christendom may sing their *Te Deum* to him, as the multitudes on the plain of Dura prostrated themselves before the proud image reared by the King of Babylon. We stand aloof, choosing rather to bear the reproach of heresy than to adore a God who is less noble than He whom our imagination can portray. Perhaps the day may come when all the throbbing forces of evolution in this mystic universe shall unite in one mighty effort and produce a living God worthy of our worship. From world to world, from star to star, from heaven to heaven, the tidings will fly, "Unto us a God is born: a God who will not foretell a kingdom of peace and goodwill, but establish it now and forever." Ah! then indeed we should burn our doubting books in the market-place and bend our stubborn knees in reverence. We, too, could raise a hymn as we looked at the new world through our tears. Is this a fancy? Yes, it is a fancy; but it is better to dream of a noble God than to believe in a bad one.

Let us close with a brief summary of the arguments which theologians have advanced in proof of the exist-

ence of God. Strange are their names. If only their value corresponded with their bulk!

1. *The Ontological Argument.*—We can form a clear idea of God as the Infinite and Perfect Being. To this idea we must attach the notion of existence; for we can clearly conceive God as existing, and whatever we can clearly conceive about anything must be an attribute of that thing. Hence existence is one of God's perfections—that is, God exists. This astonishing argument is thus stated by Anselm (died 1109 A.D.): "We have a conception of a Being than whom there is none more perfect, the All-perfect one; but a Being than whom there is none more perfect cannot exist in the intelligence only: he must also exist in reality. For let us suppose that he exists only in the intelligence. Then something greater than he can be thought—viz., this Being as existent, which is greater than the same Being non-existent. So that the very Being than whom a greater and more perfect cannot be thought is a Being than whom a greater and more perfect *can* be thought, which is an absurdity. There exists, therefore, both in the intelligence and in reality a Being than whom a more perfect cannot be thought, and this Being is God." The same kind of discourse might be held about a horse, an ass, or a dragon; for, unless we consider it as existing, we could not think of the real or fancied creature at all.

2. *The Cosmological Argument*, which points out that "all things of which we have experience are contingent—that is, they are changeable; they are dependent on some other thing or things; they do not contain in their own nature the necessity of existing; they are effects of some cause; and they can be imagined as ceasing to exist. But the universe is made up of all these contingent things added together. Then the ground of its existence must be a substance which is not contingent, but whose existence is necessary and eternal. In other words, it is the Great First Cause or God." If this be so, and God is the Great First Cause, the Infinite and Complete Being, where is there room for any finite thing, which is not God, to come into existence? Why not, before such mysteries, keep silence with the Agnostic?

3. *The Teleological Argument, or Argument from Design.*—The universe, we are assured, bears the marks of an unseen but intelligent Designer. By natural means certain natural ends are accomplished. The eye sees; the ear hears; and who can doubt that the eye was made to see, and the ear designed to hear? Alas! who then designed the blind eye and the deaf ear? Who mingled pain with pleasure, and evil with good, in the cup of life? Who designed the Devil? In vain do Paley and all his school tell us of the exquisite build of a bird's feather, or the nice mechanism of the human hand. Yes, yes; but your pompous teleology will not account for a broken heart, or the sorrowful sighing of the innocent prisoner. Perhaps indeed, as has been well pointed out by Mr. J. S. Mill, there may be a good God whose hands are partly tied by the cord of some awful, universal Fate. He would suppress wrong if He could. He will suppress it in some far-off victorious future. "The only admissible moral theory of Creation," says Mill, "is that the Principle of Good *cannot* at once and altogether subdue the powers of evil, either physical or moral; could not place mankind in a world free from the necessity of an incessant struggle with the maleficent powers, or make them always victorious in that struggle, but could and did make them capable of carrying on the fight with vigour and with progressively increasing success." There is a chime of hope in that thought—a sweet, low music of faith. Only, if such is to be our creed, let us prattle no more of an "Almighty God, all whose works praise Him, and all whose works are perfect."

4. *The Anthropological Argument, or the Witness of Man's Mind, Heart, and Conscience.*—Above all others, Kant has insisted upon this. He regarded the idea of Duty, the inner voice of conscience that says "Thou shalt" and "I ought," as a clue to, a proof of, the Divine Being. Supposing this to be so, this sacred feeling of Duty, this moral index of the heart, will not point us to the God of the Bible. For when we read the story of his deeds, his destruction and his wrath, the conscience revolts, and exclaims: "These things ought not to be." And, let it be added, it can be

shown, and has been shown in the works of Mill, Spencer, and others, that the growth of the moral law can be explained without deriving it from supernatural revelation.

If God can only show Himself to us through the lattice of obscure arguments such as these, if He cannot incarnate Himself in a universe of concord and virtue, let us cease the weary search. No longer let us scour land and sea in quest of jewels hidden in the rainbow of Deity. The old creeds can no longer serve us. Yet let us not sit weeping beside the sepulchre of dead beliefs. The earth, which is not yet divine, may perhaps be made so ; or, if our race is destined to expire without ever seeing the face of God, then let it die in the noble attempt to render earth a kingdom fit for His presence. There is rich gold in the soil of earth. Much of it already glitters on the temple of civilisation, placed there by the hands of good men and women who went before us in the march of life. Every art, every triumph of thought, every gift of literature, every skilled device for healing and help, has been the work of man. This at least is true : that the world is diviner now than in the days of our forefathers. They, from their graves, call to us to make it yet more divine.



THE TRIAL OF THEISM:

ACCUSED OF OBSTRUCTING SECULAR LIFE.

re

BY G. J. HOLYOAKE.

Synopsis of Contents:—

Theistical Witnesses—The Conversion of Thomas Cooper
 The Paleyan School—Testimonies Against the Argument
 Design—Clearness the Criterion of Truth—Understand-
 ing a Condition of Belief—The Eternal Problem of Evil—
 Phases of Theism—Difficulties of Theism—Theistical Ne-
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