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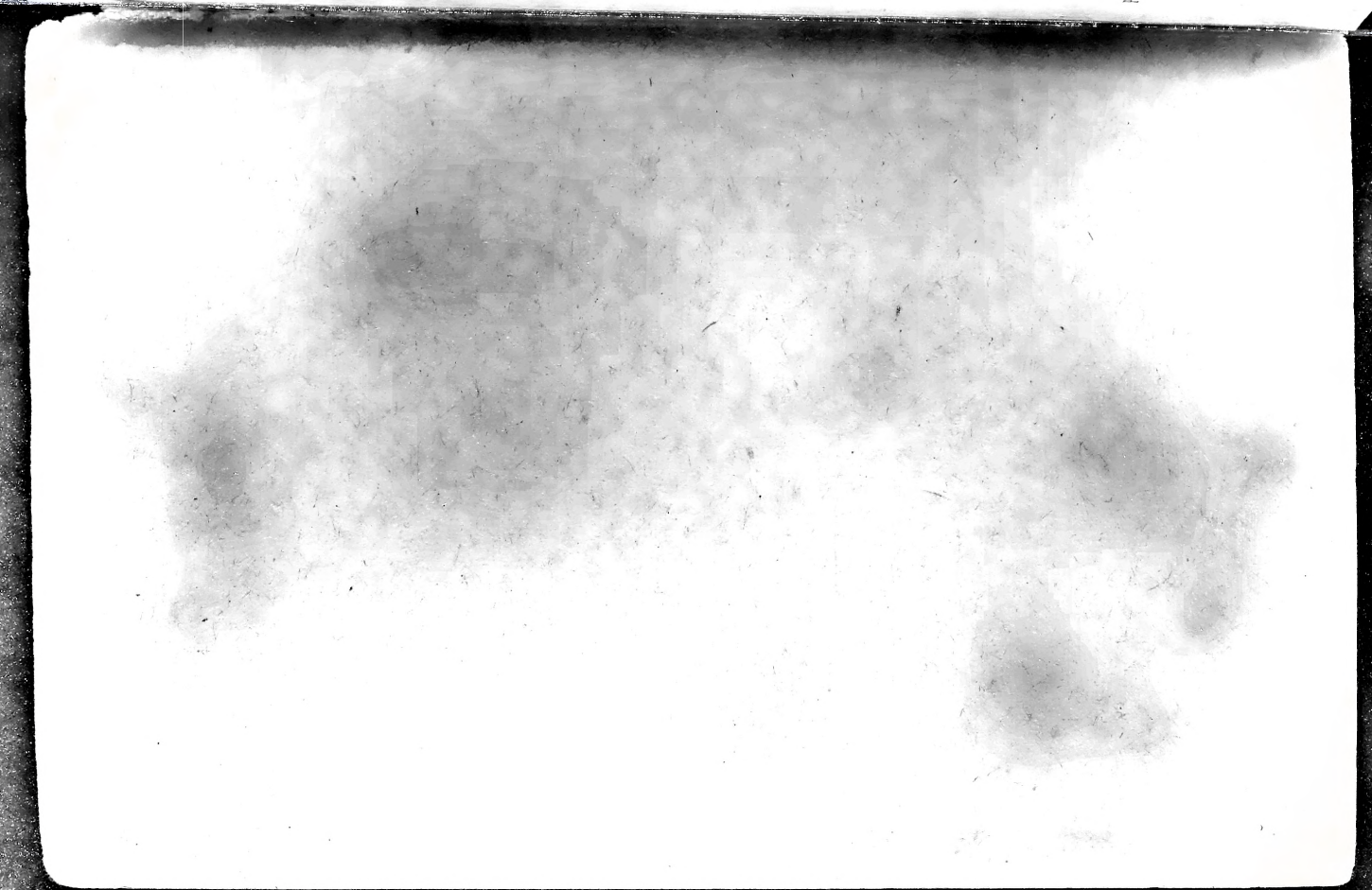
The Grand old Book

G W Foote



THE

GRAND OLD BOOK

A REPLY TO

THE RIGHT HON. W. E. GLADSTONE'S

"THE IMPREGNABLE ROCK OF HOLY SCRIPTURE"

BY

G. W. FOOTE.

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PREFACE

THERE is something exhilarating in Mr. Gladstone's vivacity at an age when most men are but the relics or shadows of their former selves. His restless energy, and his unflagging interest in so many pursuits, are at least the indications of a wide sympathy and a strenuous intelligence. But nature, while endowing him with a magnetic and commanding personality, did not include originality in his intellectual gifts. As a statesman he has always followed the thought of his age, and as a theologian he lags behind it.

The late Dr. Döllinger placed Mr. Gladstone in the front rank of English theologians. "I do not think," said the great German scholar, "that you have in your Church any superior to him." But this statement should probably be taken with a large grain of salt. When one Grand Old Man praises another Grand Old Man, who happens to be his personal friend and admirer, we must allow a liberal margin for the warmth of sentiment. For our part, we should say that Mr. Gladstone *does not* shine as a theologian, although his style is prelatical enough for an archbishop. His early work on Church and State was cut to mincemeat by Lord Macaulay. His famous pamphlet on the Vatican Decrees was courteously, calmly, but most remorselessly, reduced to shreds and tatters by Cardinal Newman. His recent tilt with Colonel

Ingersoll was an egregious and almost ignominious failure, while his controversies with Professor Huxley have shown the futility of the methods of parliamentary discussion in the domain of science and scholarship.

Assuredly there are better theologians than Mr. Gladstone in England, but they are too discreet to risk a battle for their faith. Mr. Gladstone rushes in where they fear to tread. He is filled with a sense of security because he does not understand the real nature and force of sceptical objections. What is admirable, is not his fitness for the task, but his irrepressible courage. Even this has been questioned by cynics, who point out that whereas his previous defences of orthodoxy have been made in reviews where he might be replied to, his latest defence has been made in a religious magazine where reply is impossible.

Mr. Gladstone's articles in *Good Words* have been collected, and published after revision and enlargement in the form of a volume, called "The Impregnable Rock of Holy Scripture." This is a sufficiently sonorous title, which would sound well from a pulpit, but it lies open to an easy criticism.

If the Rock of Holy Scripture is impregnable, why is it so earnestly defended? Who is anxious about a really impregnable position? All its occupants have to do is to sit still and watch the enemy with amusement. The moment fire is opened on the besiegers, the impregnability of the position is surrendered—as the position itself *may be* at the end of the battle.

Mr. Gladstone may reply that his object is not so much to repel scepticism as to reassure belief; not so much to thin the ranks of the enemy as to prevent

them from being swelled by deserters from the impregnable citadel. But his appeal cannot be so restricted. It is necessarily made in the hearing of both forces, and in so far as it fails to answer the arguments of scepticism it will loosen the allegiance he seeks to confirm.

In replying to Mr. Gladstone's defence of Scripture, a critic is entitled to lose sight of his eminence as a statesman. There is equality of citizenship in the democracy of thought, and there are no authorities in the republic of reason. Nor does a writer's eminence in one department of mental activity give him a right to be deferred to in another. Whoever publishes his opinions, of necessity challenges criticism, and it is the business of a true critic to be overawed by no man's greatness, but to canvas his views and arguments as fearlessly and impartially as if they were advanced by the humblest and most obscure controversialist.

This principle must be the justification, if any justification is needed, for the freedom with which the present writer has expressed himself in opposition to Mr. Gladstone. If he has ever trespassed beyond an allowable freedom, he begs pardon of Mr. Gladstone and the reader. At the same time he ventures to suggest that mere politeness is a virtue in which knaves often excel; that it may be medicinal to speak plainly when the flatterers of a great man mislead him; and that the world is so much in need of truth—the one sure friend of humanity—that a single grain of it should outweigh all the dross with which it happens to be surrounded.

THE GRAND OLD BOOK.

CHAPTER I.

PRELIMINARY VIEW.

WITH an admirable and engaging ingenuousness Mr. Gladstone tells us, at the outset, what are his qualifications for the task he has undertaken. He does not understand Hebrew, but that is a trifling disadvantage in the present stage of controversy. There are very few persons who understand Hebrew, and some of them understand nothing else. Nor will the inspiration of Scripture, with the masses of thoughtful people, stand or fall on the discussion of Hebrew texts. In this country they think in English, and must be saved or damned in English. The question will be decided, so far as they are concerned, not on grounds of archæology or minute scholarship, but on the broad ground of science and common sense. Whitman's advice to every reader is, "Dismiss what affronts your own soul," and men can and will do this while the pundits are wrangling over textual obscurities and subtle problems of syntax and style.

Secondly, Mr. Gladstone believes, what is true, that "there is a very large portion of the community whose opportunities of judgment have been materially smaller than his own." But this is only saying that the one-eyed man will be king among the blind. Thirdly, he has devoted a great part of his leisure during forty years to "the earnest study of pre-historic antiquity

and its documents in regard to the Greek race," and here he flings in the perilous statement that "the early Scriptures may in the mass be roughly called contemporary with the Homeric period." But the most profound study of Greek antiquities would scarcely confer any special fitness for a judgment on the antiquities of a people so dissimilar as the Jews. The real fact is that Mr. Gladstone has the same qualifications, perhaps a little heightened, as ordinary educated Englishmen. He is at the mercy of specialists like the rest of us, and only argues from the obvious results of their labors.

A much less acute man than Mr. Gladstone would see that those obvious results have effectually disposed of the doctrine of plenary inspiration. It is not surprising, therefore, that he warns the Spurgeon-Denison school against their danger. He sums up the difficulties of their position under seven heads. He says "there may possibly have been"—

1. Imperfect comprehension of that which was communicated.
2. Imperfect expression of what had been comprehended.
3. Lapse of memory in oral transmission.
4. Errors of copyists in written transmission.
5. Changes with the lapse of time in the sense of words.
6. Variations arising from renderings into different tongues, especially as between the Hebrew text and the Septuagint, which was probably based upon MS. older than the compilers of the Hebrew text could have had at their command.
7. There are three variant chronologies of the New Testament, according to the Hebrew, the Septuagint, and the Samaritan Pentateuch, and it would be hazardous to claim for any one of them the sanction of a Divine revelation.

"That in some sense," Mr. Gladstone says, "the Holy Scriptures contain something of a human element

is clear, as to the New Testament, from diversities of reading, from slight conflicts in the narrative, and from an insignificant number of doubtful cases as to the authenticity of the text." This admission is honest, but is made with considerable discretion. "An insignificant number of doubtful cases" is a very *judicious* expression; while "*slight* conflicts in the narrative" is perhaps a trifle more than judicious. There are three contradictory accounts, for instance, of such an extremely important event as the conversion of Saint Paul; and although the inscription on the cross of Christ was written in Greek, as well as in Latin and Hebrew, the Holy Ghost inspired the four evangelists (in Greek) so accurately that they copied it in four different ways. These instances are only a sample of a monstrous mass of "*slight* conflicts." We must further add that "diversities of reading" is a very mild expression of the fact that there are a hundred and fifty thousand various readings of texts even in the Greek manuscripts of the New Testament.

This does not exhaust Mr. Gladstone's admissions. He refers, with apparent approval, to Dr. Driver's article in the *Contemporary Review*, in which it is shown "with great clearness and ability that the basis" of continental criticism is "sound and undeniable." Then he writes as follows:

"It has long been known, for example, that portions of the historical books of the Old Testament, such as the Books of Chronicles, were of a date very far later than most of the events which they record, and that a portion of the prophecies included in the Book of Isaiah were later than his time. We are now taught that, according to the prevailing judgment of the learned, the form in which the older books of the Old Testament have come down to us does not correspond as a rule with their titles, and is due to later though still, as is largely held, remote

periods; and that the law presented to us in the Pentateuch is not an enactment of a single date, but has been formed by a process of growth, and by gradual accretions."

Mr. Gladstone says that these are "disturbing announcements," and they would be far more "disturbing" if he made them as complete as he might find warrant for in the pages of Dr. Driver, Canon Cheyne and Archdeacon Farrar. Nevertheless, the Grand Old Man does not lose *his* equanimity. He was brought up a believer, he has lived a believer, and he will die a believer. So far from being dismayed, he is in a perfect state of jubilation. The more the old Book is turned about in the kaleidoscope of scientific criticism, the more it shifts into new forms, the better he likes it. If the old arrangement showed it was inspired, the new arrangement shows it still more. He rejoices to think that no "weapon of offence" has "yet been forged" which can impair the "efficiency" of Scripture for "practical purposes." Let destructive criticism do its worst, we "yet may hold firmly, as firmly as of old," to the impregnable rock.

Such words sound like and are a challenge "to accept the Scriptures on the moral and spiritual and historical ground of their characters in themselves, and of the work which they, and the agencies associated with them have done and are doing in the world." But this is the introduction of a fresh argument. For the present at any rate, Mr. Gladstone is bound to argue in the light of Cardinal Newman's aphorism, "A true religion is a religion founded on truth; a false religion is a religion founded on falsehood."

Mr. Gladstone goes even farther. He is ready to be on with the new love as soon as he is off with the old one. He surmises that "this destructive criticism, if

entirely made good, would, in the view of an inquiry really searching, comprehensive, and philosophical, leave as its result not less but greater reason for admiring the hidden modes by which the great Artificer works out his designs." In other words, the Lord may have been keeping us in a fog for two thousand years in order to make us appreciate the change when he brings us into the daylight. But this is not the method adopted by human parents towards their children; and any Board School teacher who followed it would be soon amongst the unemployed.

The argument indeed—if it be an argument—is a *pawky* one; for, if Mr. Gladstone thinks the new view of the Bible is likely to *increase* our faith, why does he not accept it unhesitatingly? His attitude is really that of a man who has made up his mind to cling to the Bible in any circumstances, and he is obviously writing for readers who are filled with a similar determination.

Mr. Gladstone is so far, indeed, from yielding without reserve to the conclusions of destructive criticism, that he warns his readers against an excessive alarm. "Those conclusions," he says, "appear to be in a great measure floating and uncertain, the subject of manifold controversy, and secondly they seem to shift and vary with rapidity in the minds of those who hold them." Then, with the dexterity of the old parliamentary hand, he introduces a lecture by Mr. Margoliouth, the Laudian Professor of Arabic at Oxford, who thinks it possible to reconstruct the Semitic original of the Book of Ecclesiastes, and who is for giving Rabbinical Hebrew a greater antiquity than is usually assigned to it. This would, of course, involve a greater antiquity for Middle and Ancient Hebrew, and by such means

the Pentateuch and the "historical" books might be made a century or two older than is allowed in the current chronology. Here, then, says Mr. Gladstone, there is "war, waged on critical grounds, in the critical camp"; and he thinks the spectator will be "the more hardened in his determination not to rush prematurely to final conclusions."

This bit of dexterity is perhaps an effective piece of *ad populum* rhetoric. But is it worthy of Mr. Gladstone? His friend, Professor Max Müller, in the first volume of his Gifford lectures, utters an anticipative protest against this infatuation. "To say that critics disagree among themselves," he remarks, "and that they need not be listened to till they agree, is one of those lazy commonplaces which no true scholar would dare to employ." It is true that Mr. Gladstone does not quite go to this length, but that is where his observations will lead the orthodox reader.

We have called Mr. Gladstone's attitude "infatuation." It is a strong word, but is it not justified? No one doubts that critics disagree. But do they not also agree? Is it not a fact that, in the mass, they move farther and farther from the orthodox position? Certainly they debate many points as they progress, but they keep moving in the same direction; and it is worse than idle for Mr. Gladstone to obscure this fact by directing attention to their discussions along the road. He forgets that perfect harmony is not to be expected. It has not been arrived at in regard to the Greek classics—for instance, Homer—which have been discussed with the greatest freedom, as well as by the keenest intellects, ever since the Renaissance; and how could it be hoped for in regard to the Bible, which has only been scientifically studied during the last half

century? Another difficulty is that most of the critics have eaten orthodox bread, and have thus been deterred from free and fearless movement by the severe law of self-preservation.

The word "infatuation," as applied to Mr. Gladstone's attitude, is further justified by a cursory view of the problem which the critics are solving. The Old Testament, if we except the so-called Apocrypha, is the whole extant Jewish literature before the time of Christ. Probably there were hundreds, posssibly thousands, of other writings, but they have all perished. The consequence is that comparative Hebrew is a very different study from comparative Greek. All the Jewish books treat of one subject—religion. This dreadfully narrows the field of research. And it is still further narrowed, as well as obscured, by the absence of a mass of *contemporary* writings in any one age, that would throw light upon each other. Thus the study of comparative Hebrew is almost entirely *internal* to the Bible, and its difficulties are immense. Were not the critics testing the foundations of the greatest historic religion, their labors—so recondite, so painful, and so minute—would be a frightful waste of human energy.

Well, these critics, working at such a task, which is not half finished, are not quite harmonious. But with what an ill grace does this come from a politician like Mr. Gladstone! The Irish problem, for intricacy and obscurity, is nothing to the problem of the date and authorship of the Old Testament books. Yet although it has been before Mr. Gladstone ever since he entered Parliament; although it has been a burning question during the fifty years of his public life; and although the data for a solution were always at hand; he has

only "found salvation" at the eleventh hour. He might reply, of course, that he has always been moving in one direction. But that is precisely what may be said of the body of destructive critics.

The very illustration Mr. Gladstone gives of the "floating and uncertain conclusions" of these gentlemen is damnifying to his argument. Wellhausen, in editing the work of Bleek, accepted "in a great degree the genuineness of the Davidic Psalms contained in the First Book of the Psalter," but he has since abandoned this position, and he "brings down the general body of the Psalms to a date very greatly below that of the Babylonic exile." Now if Wellhausen had first held the Psalms to be modern, and afterwards held them to be ancient, he would have served Mr. Gladstone's purpose. But Wellhausen's movement has been in the opposite direction. Like other Biblical critics, the farther he goes the farther he leaves the orthodox position behind him. Surely the old parliamentary hand must have nodded when he introduced this fatal illustration.

But Mr. Gladstone's girds at the critics are, after all, only reassuring asides to his readers. He does not seriously contest that the Bible must henceforth be regarded in a new light, and he sets himself to the task of showing that the grand old book is still as safe and sound as ever. To this end he calls upon his readers to "look broadly and largely at the subject of Holy Scripture." "I ask them," he repeats, "to look at the subject as they would look at the British Constitution or at the poetry of Shakespeare." But this overlooks the vast difference between revelation and the productions of human genius. We may respect the British Constitution as fairly good in the circumstances. We

may revere the work of Shakespeare in spite of its imperfections. But does Mr. Gladstone mean that we can adopt such an attitude towards the revelation of God? It is idle to tell us that God's method with us is "one of sufficiency not of perfection." The Bible is no more sufficient than it is perfect. It may, of course, be sufficient for those who read into it the mental and moral discoveries of later ages. But taken as it stands it is clearly insufficient. Neither slavery nor polygamy, for instance, does it ever mention with the slightest disapproval. We have outgrown both, not by means of the Bible, but in spite of it. On the other hand, the "sacred volume" contains a host of cruel, brutal, and filthy passages, which a wise and good Being would never have inserted in a revelation which he intended for future ages of refinement. This is a truth which Mr. Gladstone perceives, and he attempts to drown it in a torrent of rhetoric.

"Even the moral problems, which may be raised as to particular portions of the volume, and which may not have found any absolute and certain solution, are lost in the comprehensive contemplation of its general strain, its immeasurable loftiness of aim," etc., etc.

What is this, however, but a palpable evasion of the sceptic's argument? Loftiness of aim is obvious in the works of Plato, Aristotle, Marcus Aurelius, Spinoza, and other great writers; and "immeasurable" is simply a question-begging epithet. Besides, no one contends that the Bible was written for the purpose of teaching immorality. Then, as to "comprehensive contemplation," we suspect it means seeing what you want to see, and missing everything else. A prisoner in the dock, charged with murder, and clearly proved guilty, might demand to be tried by a "comprehensive contemplation"

of his whole life, and offer to produce a hundred witnesses to show that on ever so many other days than the one on which he committed the crime he was an honest and respectable citizen. But the plea would not prevent a verdict of Guilty.

It is a pity that Mr. Gladstone did not give a few illustrations of this "broad view" and "comprehensive contemplation." He does, however, deal slightly with the Book of Genesis.

"With regard to the Book of Genesis, the admission which has been made implies nothing adverse to the truth of the traditions it embodies, nothing adverse to their antiquity, nothing which excludes or discredits the idea of their having formed part of a primitive revelation, simultaneous or successive. The forms of expression may have changed yet the substance may remain with an altered literary form, as some scholars have thought (not, I believe rightly) that the diction and modelling of the Homeric Poems is comparatively modern, and yet the matter they embody may belong to a remote antiquity."

Now it is difficult to think that Mr. Gladstone, when he wrote this passage, had the details of the problem in his mind. If the Book of Genesis was written many centuries after the time of Moses by unknown hands, it is certainly open for any person to assert that its statements *may* nevertheless be true. There is no limit to the license of affirmation. But where is the evidence? We venture to say there is not a tittle. On the contrary, there is the strongest *negative* evidence against the assertion. Never once, in the history of the Judges, or the reigns of the early kings, including David and Solomon, is allusion made to the mythology of Genesis, any more than to the Mosaic law. Mr. Gladstone has therefore not only to produce some

positive evidence of his "may be," but to dispose of the strong negative evidence to the contrary. For the rest, "traditions" are not revelation, nor is their truth proved by their "antiquity"; and a primitive revelation is an idle dream in the light of Evolution.

Nothing is clearer than that the mythology of Genesis and the chief part of the Mosaic law belong to the post-exile period. The Jews were never an inventive people. They did invent the synagogue, which is the original of the Christian church or chapel; but what else can they claim as theirs? They contributed to Christianity its spirit of fanaticism and its apparatus of the Sunday meeting-place. All the rest was contributed, directly or indirectly, by Babylon, Persia, Egypt, and Greece.

We can only stand aghast at the concluding statement that "the operations of criticism, properly so called, affecting as they do the literary form of the books, leave the questions of history, miracle, revelation, substantially where they found them." This is equivalent to saying that writings which come into existence hundreds of years after the events they record are as good as contemporary documents. It is like saying that traditions about Julius Cæsar, written down for the age of Charlemagne, would have the value of Suetonius, the Speeches and Letters of Cicero, and Cæsar's "Commentaries." It is, further, an assumption, which is unspeakably monstrous, that the gossip of centuries is excellent evidence of the truth of a miracle.

We must likewise point out the wild rhetoric of the assertion that "the Bible invites, attracts, and commands the adhesion of mankind." It does not command the adhesion of Mr. Gladstone's first political lieutenant,

Mr. John Morley. It does not command the adhesion of 160,000,000 Hindus, 155,000,000 Muhammedans, and 500,000,000 Buddhists. It does command the adhesion—such as it is—of 350,000,000 Christians. And that adhesion is "attracted" by the well-nigh irresistible force of early training, and "invited" by the political and social ostracism—if not the active persecution—of every open dissenter. With such advantages "Jack the Giant Killer" might command the adhesion of mankind.

Mr. Gladstone refers to the scepticism or indifference of the working classes. There is an impression that they have largely lost their hold upon the Christian creed. But, while admitting that this is to some extent true, Mr. Gladstone denies that, amongst us, they have "lost respect for the Christian religion, or for its ministers; or that they desire their children to be brought up otherwise than in the knowledge and practice of it." Their perversion simply means that "their positive, distinct acceptance of the articles of the Creed, and their sense of the dignity and value of the Sacred Record, are blunted or effaced." But this is a grandiose way of saying that they are neither Bibliolators nor Christians.

Curiously enough, Mr. Gladstone does not find this scepticism or indifference among the "leisured and better provided classes." Surely he must be basking in a kind of fool's paradise. It may be that his acquaintances are chary of troubling him with heterodox opinions. Even Mr. Morley may eschew Diderot and Voltaire in conversing with his orthodox chief. Yet it is clear that educated society is honeycombed with scepticism. And Mr. Gladstone has an inkling of the fact. Why else should he refer to "the wide dis-

paragement of the Holy Scriptures recently observable in the surface currents of prevalent opinion"?

It is, indeed, to rebuke and diminish this "wide disparagement" of the Bible that Mr. Gladstone assumes the *rôle* of Defender of the Faith. He believes this disparagement to be founded on "suppositions" which are "erroneous," and he sums them up under five heads for the purpose of refutation.

I. That the conclusions of science as to natural objects have shaken or destroyed the assertions of the early Scriptures with respect to the origin and history of the world, and of man, its principal inhabitant.

II. That their contents are in many cases offensive to the moral sense, and unworthy of an enlightened age.

III. That our race made its appearance in the world in a condition but one degree above that of the brute creation, and only by slow and painful but continual progress has brought itself up to the present level of its existence.

IV. That men have accomplished this by the exercise of their natural powers; and have never received the special teaching and authoritative guidance, which is signified under the name of Divine Revelation.

V. That the more considerable among the different races and nations of the world have devised, and established from time to time, their respective religions; and have in many cases accepted the promulgation of sacred books, which are to be considered as essentially of the same character with the Bible.

A sixth "supposition" is indicated, namely, that the Old Testament books are not contemporary records, but "comparatively recent compilations from uncertain sources." This has, however, been partially dealt with already, although, as will be seen hereafter, Mr. Gladstone returns to it in a subsequent chapter.

These five "suppositions," set forth *in extenso*, are what Mr. Gladstone promises to demolish. The wider suppositions of Atheism or Agnosticism are "foreign"

to his "present purpose." Each of the fatal five has "a literature of its own, which may be termed scientific." Mr. Gladstone deems it necessary to say, therefore, that while he hopes his remarks will be "rational and true," they will not be "systematic and complete, but popular and partial only." And, in a certain sense, the description must be admitted. Mr. Gladstone's treatment of destructive criticism and its results is certainly not "systematic and complete." But it is "popular," in its resemblance to partisan harangues on political platforms, where the speaker voices the prejudices of his audience, and is confident that all his illogicalities and evasions will be taken in a lenient spirit. Nor can it be disputed that his treatment is "partial." It is not too much to say that Mr. Gladstone's method, apart from his literary style, is that of the street-corner champions of orthodoxy. He betrays hardly any acquaintance with the works and the points of the chief destructive critics. Even Rénan's *Histoire du Peuple d'Israel*, a recent and as yet uncompleted work, at once learned and brilliant, and presenting some of the best results of Biblical scholarship, is utterly neglected; while, on the scientific side, such authorities as Darwin, Haeckel, Lyell, and Huxley, are almost absolutely ignored, and appeals are made to purely orthodox authorities like Dana and Dawson, without the least suggestion to the half-educated reader that his ignorance and credulity are thus egregiously imposed upon. This may, indeed, be the sort of argumentation which is suited to party politics; but who will seriously defend it as anything but reprehensible when applied to the subject of the present discussion?

How far Mr. Gladstone's purpose is served by these

methods we shall see as we proceed. Meanwhile we must notice a point in his view of the spread of scepticism in our midst. Mr. Gladstone is struck by the fact that the "poor" who first welcomed Christianity are now so indifferent to it. He says it "affords much matter for meditation." But he has himself unconsciously solved the problem. He remarks that there were few obstacles in the way of the poor becoming Christians in the primitive ages. "They had by contrast," he says, "more palpable interests in the promise of the life to come, as compared with the possession of the life that now is." Precisely so. They eagerly embraced the fine promises of Christianity, and, as happiness seemed impossible for them on earth, they welcomed the prospect of it in heaven. Those who mourned and those who hungered were to be comforted and filled—in the sweet by-and-bye. But the "poor" have found out the trick; and now, instead of yearning for the celestial shadow, they are trying to secure the earthly substance. On the other hand, the wealthy are averse to change. Many of them have as much "faith" as the present writer, but they support Christianity as the strongest conservative agent. They resemble old Lord Eldon, who denied being a pillar of the Church, and exclaimed, "No, I am a buttress, I prop it up outside."

Here we leave Mr. Gladstone standing on his impregnable rock. It has been disintegrated by all sorts of mines and explosives during the past century; Science, scholarship, morality, and common sense have all been busily at work; and, although there is no great outward solution of continuity, and the rock will last Mr. Gladstone's time, the collapse is approaching.

Mr. Gladstone hears the rumbling and cracking, or he would not strive to reassure the faithful; and those who are familiar with the agencies at work know that the "impregnable rock" bears within itself all the elements of ruin. Even its temporary defence must be attempted on other principles than Mr. Gladstone's. A writer like the Rev. Charles Gore, the editor of *Lux Mundi*, sees very clearly that a new theory of Inspiration is the only means whereby the growing dissatisfaction with large portions of the letter of the Bible, even within the most orthodox Churches, can be wholly or partially allayed. By thus altering their theory so as to cover almost any amount of difficulty, the more astute champions of the Bible may weather their present embarrassments, although their security can only be short-lived. But Mr. Gladstone's method of defence is perfectly futile, and could never have been selected if he had possessed a fuller acquaintance with the real state of the controversy.

CHAPTER II.

THE CREATION STORY.

THE Creation Story is a subject which from the Christian point of view is of the highest importance. This story stands at the very threshold of the Bible, and if it be a fiction it inevitably throws discredit on all that follows. But this is not all, nor even the worst. The story of Creation is inseparably connected with the story of the Fall. They stand or perish together. And if the Fall is to be regarded as a myth, what becomes of Christianity? The Christian scheme of salvation is unintelligible without the antecedent doctrine of the fall of man. It is the Garden of Eden which gives meaning to Gethsemane, the curse upon Adam and Eve which gives meaning to the tragedy of Calvary. Without the Fall, and the ensuing curse, the Atonement is a baseless dogma, and the Incarnation, the Crucifixion, and the Resurrection are but tremendous mistakes.

The Creation Story opens the first of the five books commonly thought to have been written by Moses, although, as Professor Max Müller says, no scholar believes anything of the kind.* Even Mr. Gladstone himself, who honestly disclaims any pretension to Biblical scholarship, does not venture to speak of Moses as an author. He designates the writer of the Creation Story as "the Mosaist or the Mosaic writer," and thus leaves the whole question of

* *Natural Religion*, p. 56.

the date and authorship of the Book of Genesis to settle itself as it can. Nevertheless he speaks again and again of the Creation Story being a revelation to "primitive man." This is a very misleading phrase. Some readers will think it means Adam; or Cain, Abel, Seth and the rest of the first human family, according to the ethnology of Genesis. Others will think it means the family of Noah, and still others the Jews of the Exodus, while another class of readers will think of the "primitive man" of Darwinism, and wonder whether Mr. Gladstone fancies the Creation Story was "revealed" when our far-off ancestors were dodging the mammoth and disputing snug quarters with cave bears and hyenas. It is difficult to believe that so acute a man as Mr. Gladstone did not catch a glimpse of this perplexity. We cannot help thinking he felt the phrase to be a very convenient one, as suggesting a good deal without affirming anything, and helping his argument without involving the necessity of defence.

Suggestion, however, was not enough; it had to be supported by something positive, for the antiquity of the Creation Story is indispensable to Mr. Gladstone's argument. But the difficulties of such a theory are immense. Supposing the story to have been "revealed" to Moses, whether written down by him or transmitted orally, it is astonishing that not a mention of it occurs in the whole of the Jewish scriptures outside the Book of Genesis, with the single exception of the Fourth Commandment. This first piece of revelation, this primary message of the divine Father to his children, this record on which the whole institution of the Sabbath is said to have been based, was treated by Hebrew writers, century after century, with an un-

broken conspiracy of silence. Such is apparently the fact, and it is too hard for flesh and blood to credit. Mr. Gladstone sees this, and he argues that "there are signs in subsequent portions of the volume that this tale of the Creation was regarded by the Hebrews as authoritative and important." But what are these "signs"? Surely they are the most marvellous "signs" that ever signified nothing. Mr. Gladstone finds them in Job xxxviii. and Psalms civ. and cxlviii. He discreetly refrains from quotation, and we will follow his example, though for a very different reason. We merely ask the candid reader to turn to those chapters, and see whether he can find the remotest allusion to the Creation Story without putting on Mr. Gladstone's spectacles.

Mr. Gladstone may be a master of fence, but he cannot resist the pressure of facts. The Jews were never an inventive people, and it is now established beyond dispute that their cosmogony was borrowed. Some of it was the common possession of the Semitic people, but most of it was derived from Babylon, whence the Jews also took their weights and measures, their period of work and rest, and other basic elements of their post-exile civilisation. That something is due to the *shaping* of Hebrew writers we are far from disputing; but the Creation Story, the Fall, and even the Flood were all writ large in the stone records of mighty empires long before they were embodied in the Jewish scriptures by an hierarchy which was able to pass off new teachings as the voice of antiquity.

Not only does Mr. Gladstone fail to advance a single valid argument in favor of the Creation Story, but he practically treats it as a fiction. He remarked some time ago, in his discussion with Huxley, that the Story

was not a treatise but a sermon. Since then he has been working out this line of defence, and he now discloses it in a state of perfection. "The conveyance of scientific instruction," he says, would not have been "a reasonable object for the Mosaic writer to pursue"—a statement with which we agree, for the Mosaic writer had none to convey. His object, it appears, was two-fold. He did not say so, but apparently Mr. Gladstone has some occult information as to his intentions. First, he wished—or God wished through him—"to teach man his proper place in creation in relation to its several orders." Secondly, he wished to "make him know and feel what was the beautiful and noble home that he inhabited, and with what a fatherly and tender care Providence had prepared it for him to dwell in."

Let us examine these reasons. We will take the second first. The Mosaist's object—that is, if the story be inspired, God's object—was to show how the world had been prepared by the Heavenly Father as a dwelling-place for his children. Now it seems to us that Mr. Gladstone has lost all historic perspective in this statement. The earth is *at present* very largely made fit for man to live in, although, even in an old country like India, thousands of persons yearly fall victims to tigers and snakes. But so far as the earth *is* made fit, it is perfectly clear that man himself has done the work. He felled the forests, drained the swamps, tamed the buffaloes, broke the wild horse, domesticated the wolf, and bred sheep from a savage stock. The Genesaic story of the animals passing in meek review before Adam as the lord of creation, is a pretty picture, but a pure work of imagination. Primitive man was "monarch of all he surveyed" only while he looked upon his squaw and his offspring, and

the rough walls of the natural cave, or artificial hole in the ground, where his highness lay sheltered from his prowling subjects, who were seeking to dine on his regal person. His faculties were sharpened through a wild and terrible struggle for existence, and finally he triumphed; but surely it is idle, in face of these facts, to talk of the "fatherly and tender care of Providence" in preparing his dwelling-place.

Even if the facts were otherwise, it is strange that God should have given this lesson as to his "fatherly and tender care" for his children to a few semi-savage and fanatical Jews, who kept the "revelation" strictly to themselves, and never imparted it to the mighty civilisations of Egypt, India, Phœnicia, Carthage, Persia, and Assyria, to say nothing of the more modern Greece and Rome.

But if the Mosaist's first object was unhappy, his second object was absurd. Man did not need a revelation to teach him "his proper place in creation." He did not require to be told that he was superior to fishes. Knowledge and vanity assured him that he was at the top of the scale, although his "dominion" was exceedingly precarious. When Ovid was versifying the old Pythagorean philosophy he naturally placed the creation of man at the end of the process.

> A creature of a more exalted kind
> Was wanting yet; and then was Man designed:
> Conscious of thought, of more capacious breast,
> For empire formed, and fit to rule the rest.*

We utterly dissent, therefore, from Mr. Gladstone's view that "primitive man" needed to or did receive "a conception, thoroughly faithful in broad outline, of what his Maker had been about on his behalf." Nor

* Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, bk. i. Dryden's Translation.

can we read without a smile his assertion that "the simplest phrases," were so necessary "that the Maker condescended "even to represent himself as resting" after his work. The Hebrew, we understand, really says that he "took breath."* This rendering is a still more "simple phrase" than *resting*, and still more illustrates the condescension of the Maker.

Following out his theory, Mr. Gladstone regards the six days of creation, not as days of twenty-four hours, nor as geological periods, but as "Chapters in the History of the Creation." True, the text speaks of "evening and morning" in connection with every day, but that is only a rhetorical device to emphasise the distinction between the chapters; and just as day does not mean day, so evening and morning do not mean evening and morning. Mr. Gladstone, however, overlooks a very important point. Is there any evidence that the Jews ever looked upon the "days" of Creation in this light? Did they not understand the expression literally? Was it not the literal sense which gave its sanction to the fourth commandment? Are we to presume that God "condescended" to use "simple and familiar" language for the sake of a handful of ancient Jews, at the cost of misleading populous and more civilised nations in future ages, or was this a necessity of Almighty Wisdom?†

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* Sir William Domville, *The Sabbath*, p. 54.

† The old commentators, such as Gill, Clarke, and Patrick, honestly took the Bible to mean what it says. They had no doubt that God made the universe in six days of twenty-four hours. Bishop Pearson, in a work which is still a standard in our universities, dated the creation "probably within one hundred and thirty generations of men, most certainly within not more than six, or at farthest seven, thousand years ago" (*Exposition of the Creed*, vol. i., p. 121). Dr. Kalisch, a Hebrew scholar of the highest standing, declares that "to interpret the term day as a period, or an indefinite epoch," is "inadmissible," for "the metaphorical use of the word is rendered impossible by the repeated phrase 'and evening was and morning was.'" (*Commentary on Genesis*).

Mr. Gladstone makes the extraordinary assertion that "no moral mischief ensues because some have supposed the days of creation to be pure solar days of twenty-four hours." Certainly the belief in a literal six days' creation does not prompt a man to pick pockets or commit adultery. But is there no "moral mischief" in hindering the progress of science, upon which so much of our well-being depends? Is there no moral mischief in the persecution of those who are afterwards seen to be our benefactors? Was there no moral mischief in the intimidation of Galileo? Was there no moral mischief in the murder of Giordano Bruno? Was there no moral mischief in the early prejudices of Sir Charles Lyell against what he subsequently recognised as truth, or in the insults heaped upon him when he proclaimed it to the world? Was there no moral mischief in the bigotry with which the clergy as well as their fanatical dupes treated the teachings of Darwin? Is there no moral mischief in wasting the working man's precious day of leisure, every week, in obedience to a Sabbatarian law which is founded on the literal Story of Creation?

We would also observe that Mr. Gladstone is extremely vague, and, in so far as he is clear, inaccurate, in his remarks on the Sabbath. "It seems also probable," he says, continuing his *lessons* of the Mosaist, "that the Creation Story was intended to have a special bearing on the great institution of the day of rest, or Sabbath, by exhibiting it in the manner of an object lesson." Now in the whole of the early Jewish history there is no trace of a Sabbath. We find it in the Mosaic Law, which is a post-exile concoction, but not in the annals of the Judges and Kings. Indeed, the very reference in the Fourth Command-

ment to "the stranger within thy gates," shows that it was not delivered to desert nomads, but to a people settled down in Palestine and dwelling in walled and fortified cities. For these reasons, or partly for these reasons, Paley maintains that God "blessed the seventh day and sanctified it" by a sort of historical anticipation. But Mr. Gladstone would have us believe that "Assyrian researches" have revealed traces of some primitive "institution or command." This is, however, the veriest perverseness. What Assyrian researches have shown is that the number seven was held sacred by the masters of the Jews, and that they had a Sabbath, or day of rest, long before the chosen people. Here again the Jews were not inventors, but borrowers; and the primeval sanctification of the Sabbath is one of the many impostures of their priestly annalists.

The Egyptians had a periodic day of rest; namely, one day in every ten; but it appears that they were also acquainted with the seven-days division of time. The Assyrians, the Romans, and other ancient nations had likewise their periods of rest and work. And why? For the simple reason that the leaders of a civilisation based upon slavery discovered the necessity of a periodic rest to the laborer. Without it his energies decayed. And that the time of rest, whatever it was, should be associated with mythical events, was only natural in a society in which every part of life was under a religious sanction.

It is also clear that the sacredness of the number seven, in Assyria as in scores of other parts of the world, sprang out of natural reasons. Moon-worship precedes sun-worship because man's attention is excited by the changeable rather than the regular. It was discovered that the full lunation occupied twenty-eight

days. That number was halved, and the result was fourteen. That number was halved again, and the result was seven. But this number could not be halved, or divided in any way; it was indivisible and mysterious, and therefore sacred. Then there were the seven planets, from which the days were named, and this not only doubled but squared the sacredness of the number seven. But behind this there is something older and more vital. The covering of the generative organs is often neglected by the males among savages, but scarcely ever among the females. That covering was the beginning of decency, and it arose from the fact of menstruation. Now the sexual periodicities throughout the whole animal world, including the human race, run in seven days or multiples of seven days. Let this truth, therefore, be connected with the indivisible quarter of the moon's total phases, and the number of the planets, and you have an importance, a mystery, and therefore a sacredness attaching to the number seven, which could never attach to another number. This is the reason why the number seven appears and reappears in all religious systems. It is found among savages, and it asserts its ancient and august claims in the teachings of Theosophy, which talks learnedly, but after all superstitiously, of the sevenfold nature of man. Thus religion is like the mythical snake of eternity. Extremes meet, and the head and the tail are united.

There is still another aspect of the question. It is shrewdly observed by Rénan, in his *Histoire du Peuple d'Israel,* that the Sabbath *could* not have arisen among nomads. Except when they shift their tents, and travel to fresh pastures, they have nothing to do but to sit and watch their flocks and herds. One day is

exactly like another, and a day of rest would be unintelligible. It is obvious, therefore, that the story of the primeval sanctification of the Sabbath, and its injunction in the Mosaic Law, belong to a much later period than the Exodus. They belong, in short, to the post-exile period. Every fact supports this theory, and there is not a single fact which contradicts it.

Now let us return to the centre of Mr. Gladstone's argument. Everything turns upon his convenient theory that the six days of creation are not six literal days, but six "chapters in the history of the creation." By this means he seeks to overcome the difficulty of the fact that the order of creation in Genesis does not properly correspond with the teachings of Evolution. The Mosaic writer, it appears, anticipated the modern fashion of writing history, of which we have the first great example in Gibbon. His order is not strictly chronological, but in accord with his subject matter. Thus "in point of chronology his chapters overlay." So that, if light exists three days before the creation of the sun, the explanation is that the Mosaist simply puts them in different chapters, not for chronological reasons, but for a special purpose. And what was that purpose? Mr. Gladstone says it was "to convey moral and spiritual training." He goes to the length of saying that "the conveyance of scientific instruction" would not have been "a reasonable object for the Mosaic writer to pursue." An ordinary person might suppose the Deity capable of imparting scientific instruction as well as moral instruction, and the Jews capable of receiving the one as well as the other. Mr. Gladstone's theory implies a very serious limitation of God's power, or a no less serious misconception of the causes of human progress. Is not science as necessary

as morality? Is there much use in desiring the welfare of mankind without the knowledge of how to promote it? Will a good-hearted doctor do a patient any service if he is lacking in skill? Buckle, indeed, contended that civilisation was entirely owing to the advance of the intellect, and very much the same contention was advanced by Macaulay. But here is Mr. Gladstone arguing that "moral and spiritual training" is most necessary, while mental training is so unimportant that the Deity wisely refrained from taking the trouble to assist us in that respect.

We have already said that Mr. Gladstone's interpretation of the "six days" as "six chapters" is arbitrary. Neither the chosen people, nor their inspired teachers, ever understood their cosmogony in that sense. They existed before the days of antagonism between the Bible and Science, when new meanings have to be discovered in every part of God's Word. They took the language of Genesis, as the Church of England presents its Articles, in the plain, grammatical sense of the words. It is too late to rescue the Mosaist in Mr. Gladstone's manner. The "six chapters" theory is worthy of the old parliamentary hand, but he himself perceives its inadequacy, or why does he endeavor to show that the chronological order of creation is after all in harmony with the conclusions of modern science? Will it be believed that after pressing his super-subtle argument through thick and thin; after declaring that day is not day, and morning and evening not morning and evening; after claiming that the Mosaist sacrificed chronology for the sake of shaping his chapters so as to convey a moral and spiritual and not a scientific lesson; will it be believed that, after all this, Mr. Gladstone goes on to argue

for so close an agreement between Genesis and Science that nothing short of inspiration is adequate to account for it? Yet that is precisely what he does. "The Creation Story in Genesis," he asserts, "appears to stand in such a relation to the facts of natural science so far as they are ascertained, as to warrant our concluding that they first proceeded, in a manner above the ordinary manner, from the Author of the visible creation." Or as he expresses it in his concluding sentences, "to warrant and require thus far the conclusion that the Ordainer of Nature, and the Giver or Guide of the Creation Story, are one and the same."

This is clearly a complete change of front. The "six chapters" theory is virtually discarded as useless, and Mr. Gladstone proceeds to defend the scientific character of Genesis. The Creation Story was a scientific lesson after all, only it was skilfully disguised. Moses anticipated Darwin; in fact, Moses is the original author and Darwin is only the commentator. Such is the true character of Mr. Gladstone's theory, and in arguing it he flounders, as might be expected, in a morass of bad science, bold assumption, and wild exegesis.

According to Genesis, the earth was at first "without form and void," a description hard to realise, and "the spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters." Now Mr. Gladstone is aware that "the Hebrew word for earth means earth, and the word used for water never means anything but water." How then is this to be explained away? Why easily. The Hebrew word always means water, but the Mosaist meant something else. He meant that the world was at first *fluid*, and as the people he wrote for only knew of one extensive fluid, namely water, he called it water to suit

their comprehension. But in reality he was adumbrating the nebular hypothesis. That, at any rate, is what Mr. Gladstone argues, and we will not venture to refute him. We can only stare with astonishment at his coolness—not to use a harsher word; and we suspect that the writers of the Creation Story, if they could live again and read Mr. Gladstone's article, would be quite as astonished as we are.*

The Mosaist, it seems, not only sketched (in a very occult manner) the nebular theory, but showed how "the *chaos* passed into *cosmos*, or, in other words, how confusion became order, medley became sequence, seeming anarchy became majestic law, and horror softened into beauty." But *chaos* is not a doctrine of science. It belongs to the old Pagan cosmogonies. The laws of nature obtained in the fiery cloud whirled off from the sun precisely as they do now it has cooled down into a solid planet. According to Mr. Gladstone's science, if we may reason from analogy, there is *cosmos* in a cubic inch of cold water, and *chaos* in a cubic foot of steam.

With regard to the existence of light three days before the sun, Mr. Gladstone tells us that it simply means (observe how he knows what the Mosaist *meant* but did not *say*) that the sun became visible in that

* It is amusing to turn from Mr. Gladstone's labored argument that *water* should only be regarded as fluid, to an old sermon by Archbishop Tillotson on "The Being of God Demonstrated by Reason." Tillotson, of course, had no fear of the nebular astronomy before his eyes. He points out that Thales was "the first who asserted that water was the beginning of all things." He brings in Aristotle as saying that the gods were represented as swearing by Styx, because water was supposed to be the principle of all things. But the clinching proof is that "The Brachmans, Indian philosophers, did also agree that the world was made of water; which *exactly corresponds with Moses's account of the creation.*" Mr. Gladstone finds a very different idea in Moses, because the exigencies of science have changed since the days of Tillotson. Thus, as Luther said, the Bible is a nose of wax, which every man twists as he pleases.

stage. The earth's photosphere, or something, cleared away, and "the visibility of the sun was established" —when there was no one to see it! The "light-power" became "concentrated by the operation of the rotatory principle," and —— But how on earth are we to go on? Our gravity is not equal to Mr. Gladstone's. We require an interval for laughter.

It must not be supposed, however, that Mr. Gladstone is broaching a novelty in this far-fetched exegesis. Nearly fifty years ago the same vagaries were ridiculed and corrected by Priaulx, who wrote as follows on the "light" which Jehovah called from the primitive darkness:—

"What this light might be, has naturally exercised the ingenuity of those learned commentators, who are as familiar with the creation and the counsels of God, as though they had been present at the one, and were often called upon to take a share in the other. With some this first light is but a dim glimmering, a sort of twilight or darkness visible; with others it is the bright Shekinah or the glorious presence; while with a third party it is that light, run wild probably, which is hereafter to be collected into sun, moon, and stars. It is a light without a sun,—so much we know; and such a light both Menu and Zoroaster tell of. According to the one, Brahme has but to appear and the gloom is dispelled; and according to the other, light is the dwelling place of Ormuzd, co-eternal with him; Ormuzd in fact himself is light. Moses held then on this point certainly no singular, and probably none but popular, opinions."*

Priaulx's book is a monument of learning, patience, candor, and sagacity. Had Mr. Gladstone studied it, or even read it cursorily, it would have saved him from many blunders and absurd speculations—and the book was written fifty years ago! The fact is, apparently,

* Priaulx, *Questiones Mosaicæ*, pp. 14, 15.

that Mr. Gladstone has taken a brief for the Bible, and argues it like a special pleader. He betrays no knowledge of the leaders of scepticism and their writings, but seems merely to have dipt into orthodox writers like Dana, Stokes, and Dawson, for points that would tell sufficiently with the jury before whom he is pleading—a jury which believes his side of the case already, and does not need to be convinced but only to be reassured.

But let us return to the Mosaist and his story. Modern science has told us the truth about the stars. Outside our solar system there are other and mightier systems. But it was natural for the Jews to regard the stars as dots of light. The sun and the moon were the "two great lights," and the stars were thrown in with an "also." But "relativity is the basis of the narrative," and the Mosaist wrote like an ignoramus, not because he was not as wise as Herschel, but because his readers were too thick-headed to learn the truth. He was like the gentleman in the play, who "could an' he would." At least this is a fair summary of Mr. Gladstone's argument.

The Mosaist also tells us that not only grasses, but the later fruit trees, grew before the sun shone upon the earth. The nonsense was exposed by Professor Huxley,* but Mr. Gladstone has not profited by that discussion. Assuming that the sun, in the Creation Story, can be shuffled in before the earth, and that our planet was veiled in vapor, he argues that "there were light and heat, atmosphere with its conditions of moist and dry, soil prepared to do its work in

* Professor Huxley says it is "the apparently plain teaching of botanical palæontology that grasses and fruit trees originated long subsequently to animals" (*Nineteenth Century*, Dec. 1885).

nutrition," and so the Mosaist is saved by the skin of his teeth. But the argument is really too barefaced. Fruit trees are not a part of the world's primitive fauna. They are probably later than man himself.

Mr. Gladstone strains his faculties in vain to reconcile the Creation Story with palœontology. He cannot work in reptiles and marsupials, so he says they did not come within the Mosiast's "moral and spiritual" purpose. Then there is the difficulty that fish and fowl are created on the same day, while geology shows they are separated by millions of years. But day does not mean day. The Mosaist simply puts them in the same chapter, and he puts the fowl after the fish, and that is the right order! Of course it is the right order; but how much inspiration was required to enable a Jew to see that fowl were superior to fish in the scale of existence?

After all this special pleading, the credit of the Mosaist being saved at every point by incessant assumption and forced logic, Mr. Gladstone advances to his triumphant conclusion. The Creation Story is a perfect miracle of scientific anticipation, and if God did not write it who did? But it will be observed that the old parliamentary hand is silent as to the creation of man. "As the objector is silent," he says, "I remain silent also." The objector silent, indeed! Whatever objector has Mr. Gladstone in his mind? The account of Adam and Eve is the most difficult, and the most ludicrous, part of the Creation Story. Up to that point the writer preserves a certain grandeur, however mistaken; but the narrative of Adam's production from dust, and Eve's production from one of his ribs, to say nothing of the farce of the Fall, and the six thousand years' chronology,

is positively food for mirth. For nine years the great Darwin has lain in his grave, yet Mr. Gladstone writes as though the Newton of biology had never been born. Still Mr. Gladstone's "silence" is not without its eloquence. It shows that the champion of the Creation Story must avoid Darwinism. In the light of that great doctrine, which has revolutionised the world of thought, the Creation Story is an old fable, the drama of Eden a Semitic fiction, the Fall a fallacy, and the foundation of the Christian creed a mere fragment of oriental mythology.

Mr. Gladstone has an astonishing postcript to his chapter on the Creation Story. Assuming what is opposite to the teaching of Evolution, and disregarding the many traces of Jewish polytheism in late portions of the Old Testament, he argues that it was the Creation Story which, a thousand years after Moses, placed "the chosen people in a state of security from this insidious mischief." Genesis set God *outside* his creation, distinct, unapproachable, supreme; and this laid a firm foundation for the Incarnation. But this is really arguing backwards. It is deducing the truth of the Creation Story from the doctrine of the Atonement. Surely Mr. Gladstone must see the illegitimacy of such an appeal, if he is making it to unprejudiced minds. Probably, also, he will see on reflection that the Semitic mind, mainly owing to its environment, has a general tendency to Monotheism. Christianity, when permeated with Aryan thought, set up a new Polytheism under the disguise of the Trinity, and fortified it with a subordinate pantheon of saints; while it was left for Mohammedism, which like Judaism is a Semitic faith, to hold up the banner of the one indivisible God.

CHAPTER III.

THE FALL OF MAN.

MR. GLADSTONE'S third chapter is disappointing. He fulfils none of the promises with which he set out. No attempt is made to answer the sceptic's objections. We have simply a theological essay, restating the orthodox view of the Bible, and abounding in evasions and assumptions. A certain pomposity of style, familiar to Mr. Gladstone's readers, gives his article a fictitious air of importance; but in substance it is remarkably poor, and its argumentation is such that if it were displayed on any other topic it would expose him to derision. What else, indeed, can be said of one who, so many years after Darwin's death, writes as though Darwin had never lived; of one who, in an age in which Evolution has overrun every field of research and speculation, writes as though Evolution had never been heard of? If, on the other hand, Mr. Gladstone knows something of Evolution, and simply ignores it, he might give points in ludicrousness to the proverbial ostrich with its head in the desert sands. Why on earth—we say it in all seriousness—does not a confidential friend break through the ring of flatterers, and save a statesman, in whose reputation we are all interested, from himself and the editors with cheque books who are anxious to trade upon his name? Mr. John Morley could hardly do it; his heterodoxy would throw suspicion on his advice. But there is Professor Stuart. He knows a thing or two, and his scepticism

is only ankle-deep. Could he not contrive to drop a whisper into Mrs. Gladstone's ear, and even in a round-about way spare us the necessity of laughing at one we would fain reverence? For risibility is an imp who will not be baulked; when he scents antics he will take a ticket for the spectacle.

The very opening of Mr. Gladstone's third chapter is what is vulgarly called "a caution." In face of all he has written before he says it is "likely that the Creation Story has come down from the beginning." He even talks of "the corroborative legends of Assyria." Nay, he declares, with a wonderful equanimity, which we are unable to emulate, that "we now trace the probable origins of our Sacred Books far back beyond Moses and his time." In other words, Mr. Gladstone, at this time of day, fancies the antediluvian patriarchs were actual and not mythical personages, who had the Creation Story revealed to them, and passed it down to their descendants.* Despite the fact, too, that all savages—and the ancient Jews were savages—trace their descent from a common ancestor, for the simple reason that they cannot understand any but a blood relationship; despite the fact that Romulus, the mythical founder of Rome, for instance, is now seen to be as real a character as Tamoi of the Brazilians, or Unkulunkulu of the Zulus†; Mr. Gladstone takes Abraham quite seriously, regards his "call" as a fact

* The Principal of Pusey House, the Rev. Charles Gore, who is better informed and more sagacious on this matter than Mr. Gladstone, gives up (practically) the historical character of all the Bible narrative before the time of Abraham. He asks whether the "earlier narratives" are not "of the nature of myth," and whether "those great inspirations about the origin of things" are not "conveyed to us in that form of myth or allegorical picture, which is the earliest mode in which the mind of man apprehended truth."—See article on "The Holy Spirit and Inspiration." in *Lux Mundi*, p. 357.

† Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, vol. i., pp. 399-405.

like that of the last clergyman who had a call to a richer living, and bravely declares that "Of all great and distinctive chapters in the history of the human race we have here perhaps the greatest and the most distinctive." Why, the very circumcision which Jehovah fixed as his special brand upon the Jews, beginning with Abraham, is older than the earliest trace of the Jews in history. It was practised on religious grounds by the priestly caste in Egypt. It was common among the Semites, of whom the Jews are a branch. It has been found in various parts of the world that had no communication with each other, such as South Africa, the South Pacific Islands, and Mexico. Jehovah's trade mark was a plagiarism, a violation of an old patent, and he would have been nonsuited in any action he took to assert his exclusive rights.

But let us come to Mr. Gladstone's account of the Fall. He starts with setting up an "Adamic race," of whom we suppose he implies that Adam was the first progenitor. Now the science of ethnology is pretty well established, but its records will be searched in vain for any Adamic race. Mr. Gladstone has developed this race from the depths of his inner consciousness. Elsewhere he speaks of the Fall as "introducing us to man in his first stage of existence—a stage not of savagery but of childhood." Such a remark is *childish*. There never was such a stage of humanity. Not childhood, but sheer savagery, was the original state of every people in history.* Mr. Gladstone may talk

* "The evidence that all civilised nations are the descendants of barbarians, consists, on the one side, of clear traces of their former low condition in still-existing customs, beliefs, language, etc.; and on the other side, of proofs that savages are independently able to raise themselves a few steps in the scale of civilisation, and have actually thus risen." Darwin, *Descent of Man*, p. 146.

as he pleases, but on this question he is no greater authority than the man in the street. Behind history lies anthropology, and the verdict of anthropology is decisive. Man is of animal origin. He was neither made from earth nor dropped from the skies. This is *proved.* Even Dr. Wallace can no longer withhold his assent. Despite himself he now admits that the evidence for man's "descent from some ancestral form common to man and the anthropoid apes" is "overwhelming and conclusive."* Thus the Adamic race, and the primitive state "not of savagery but of childhood," are both figments of theological imagination. They would vanish to-morrow if they were not maintained by the Black Army in the interest of their dogmas.

Mr. Gladstone sums up the purport of the Old Testament as "a history of sin and redemption." Of course the second depends upon the first. Man is an awful sinner, a fallen being. That is the first statement of Christianity, and it is a falsehood. Evolution proves the ascent, not the descent, of man; that he has risen from a low estate to a high one, and from small things to great. On the other hand, the least knowledge of human nature shows us that man is not half as black as the parsons paint him. It is absurd to talk of "the preponderance of moral evil in the world." Human society could not exist under such conditions. Nor is it sensible to ask, "Are we as a race whole, or are we profoundly sick?" We are neither the one nor the other. Man is neither an angel nor a devil. But there is surely a preponderance of good in his composition. His heart is better than

* Dr. A. R. Wallace, *Darwinism*, p. 461.

his head. No doubt there is a sad spectacle for the philanthropist in the oppressions of the world, for the honest man in its crimes, for the good man in its vices, and for the truthful man in its lies and hypocrisies—after all these millenniums of religion. But what the world at large does not see, what the newspapers do not report, is deeper and more common than these things; and the homes of the people, where they really live their lives, are perpetually made fragrant by the "little unremembered acts of kindness and of love." And sometimes a splendid deed of heroism, wrought by one great heart, thrills the hearts of millions, expands our moral horizon, and shames the whining of dastard priests.

What is sin? That must be answered before we discuss redemption. Mr. Gladstone calls it "a departure from the will of God." Later on he describes it more fully as "a deviation from the order of nature, a foreign element not belonging to the original creation of Divine design, but introduced into it by special causes."

But how came man to depart from the will of God? How can there be a departure from the order of nature? Who introduced a foreign element into God's creation? What special causes lie outside the sphere of Omnipotence? To say that man's free-will "frustrated" God's "attempt" is to say that God did not foresee the result of his own action, or that he deliberately endowed man with a faculty that would lead him astray. "Foreign element" and "special causes" are polite circumlocutions for the Devil. But who made the Devil? The only answer is—God. Finally, therefore, the Christian has to face these dilemmas. Either God can stop the Devil or he cannot. If he

cannot he is not all-powerful, if he will not he is not all-good. Either God knew the Devil would pervert Adam or he did not. If he did not, he is deficient in foresight; if he did, he had no right to be angry at the inevitable.

Mr. Gladstone speaks of "the revolt of man's lower nature against its higher elements." How came there to be "lower elements" in a divine production? Higher and lower can only be explained by evolution. The lower is the blind animal passion inherited from our brutish progenitors. The higher is the governing reason and conscience developed in countless ages of social growth.

With regard to the story of the Fall of Man in Genesis, Mr. Gladstone takes a position commonly called sitting on the fence. He "deals with it as a parable," but adds "I do not mean to make on my own part any definitive surrender of the form as it stands." But the Fall is either history or romance. There can be no medium. If it be a parable, it is absurd to talk of it as a fact; if it be a fact, it is idle to talk of it as a parable.

Adam and Eve are placed in the garden. They are the work of an Omniscient Designer, but they are incapable of knowing good from evil. They cannot appreciate a moral code. God "has laid upon them a law of obedience." Like stupid, wilful parents he says "Don't do that, because I tell you not to." He does not give them a comprehensive view of their duties to each other. His law is "simply a rule of feeding and not feeding." He governs them through their stomachs. What a noble view of our first parents! What a tribute to the wisdom and goodness of God!

The law of obedience involves the law of punishment.

In eating what he is told not to—that is, in gratifying the appetite God gave him—man becomes "a rebel," and is justly punished as such. But is there any justice in the case? Is not everything arbitrary? Man does what his nature instigates, and God chooses to chastise him. God is witness, counsel, judge, and executioner, and gives penal servitude for life for a first offence.

Mr. Gladstone wastes his time in trying to show the similarity of punishment and consequence. One is arbitrary, the other is natural. If I put my hand in the fire, it burns me. That is consequence. It is indifferent to morality. There is no discrimination. The hand may be an honest man's or a scoundrel's. If I think for myself under the Inquisition I am burnt at the stake. That is punishment. The two may run parallel, but they have no connection. If I steal I injure my fellow men and debase my own nature. That is consequence. If I am found out I am sent to prison. That is punishment.

Adam and Eve did not injure each other, nor did they injure God. Consequently they did not sin. A child does not sin in eating what he is told not to, unless he knows he is stealing or depriving someone else of food. He means no harm, and the action does not deteriorate his nature. Is it not absurd, then, to affirm that God's treatment of Adam and Eve is "in accordance with the laws of a grand and comprehensive philosophy"? Mr. Gladstone says that sceptical objections to the Fall are "the product of narrower and shallower modes of thought." We reply that his "grand and comprehensive philosophy" overlooks the most obvious facts.

Mr. Gladstone calls the Fall "a gigantic drama." It seems to us a petty farce. The people who lived in

the ages of Miracle Plays took it seriously, but what educated man of the present age—unless he keeps a dark room for theology in his brain—can regard it without smiling? Of course imagination can make anything gigantic. It can turn a white rag into a ghost, or a donkey's head into the Devil. But imagination is powerless to exaggerate when you see the objects as they are.

Mr. Gladstone's imagination tells him that the Fall "wisely teaches us to look to misused free-will as the source of all sin, and of all the accompanying misery." It is rather cool to assert this in the face of St. Paul, St. Augustine, Martin Luther and John Calvin; in face of the Church of England Articles and the Westminster Confession of Faith. If an unbeliever treated the Bible in this way, putting his own private interpretation on every text, heedless of the settled interpretation of the Churches, Mr. Gladstone would stigmatise him as ignorant or insolent. We do not say a man has no right to his private interpretation. We claim it for him. But we say that when he is opposed to a great historic school of interpretation he is bound to give his reasons. This Mr. Gladstone avoids. He simply dogmatises. The proper answer, therefore, is to defy him to show a single allusion to free-will in the story of the Fall, or a single text in favor of free-will from Genesis to Revelation.

Let us follow Mr. Gladstone still farther. "The original attempt," he writes, "to plant a species upon our planet, who should be endowed with the faculty of free-will, but should always direct that will to good, had been frustrated through sin." How this happened, or how it could happen if God were all-wise and all-powerful, is not explained. Mr. Gladstone introduces

"sin" as though it were an entity. Sin is a quality of actions. To make "sin" the *cause* of actions is an absurdity. The ultimate question is—*why* did Adam go wrong? To that question Mr. Gladstone never addresses himself.

God's "original attempt" having been "frustrated" —somehow, by somebody—the all-wise and all-powerful ruler of the universe set about a remedy. His operations were so slow that, fifteen hundred years afterwards, the world was so hopelessly corrupt that he lost patience and drowned the lot, with the exception of eight persons, not one of whom was worth saving. Afterwards the Almighty began to work in a small way. He chose the most insignificant people on earth, visited them occasionally, and gave them a little heavenly illumination. Why he chose the Jews is a mystery. Mr. Gladstone admits the choice was not what reason would expect. It was not made on moral grounds. The Jews were distinctly inferior to the primitive Greeks, as Mr. Gladstone proves at considerable length. And finally, when the Redeemer came, after nearly two thousand years of preparation, the chosen people crucified him between two thieves, as a warning to other gentlemen in the same line of business. Nay more, after the Redemption has been actively operating for another two thousand years, there is still "a preponderance of moral evil in the world." Thus the Almighty and Omniscient God is able to make a world and pronounce it "good," but utterly unable to keep it good, or to repair it when it falls out of order. Indeed the longer he tries to improve it the worse it gets. All this is asserted or implied in Mr. Gladstone's argument. It is a queer compliment to God, and a flat contradiction to his

attributes. Either God is very weak, or the Devil is very strong, or man is very "cussed." We leave Mr. Gladstone to say which. Meanwhile we must observe that his exposition and vindication of the story of the Fall is a shocking example of how devotion to an inherited creed will make even a great man wallow in absurdity. Tycho Brahe, the great astronomer, kept an idiot, and watched his lips for words of inspiration. Mr. Gladstone, the great statesman, finds infinite wisdom in an old Jewish story, which is less moral and entertaining than "Jack the Giant-Killer." Not even the genius of Milton could invest it with grandeur. He who lavished his sublimity on the inmates of hell, and his beauty on two unsophisticated human beings in a lovely garden, turned a prosaic moralist and a pedantic quibbler in his efforts to "justify" the theology of the Fall.

CHAPTER IV.

THE PSALMS.

THE poetry of the Old Testament is to be found in parts of Isaiah and Ezekiel, in the Song of Solomon, in the Book of Job, which is simply a dramatic poem, and in the Book of Psalms. The last is a collection of sacred chants used in the Temple worship. All of them abound in Chaldee words, which is a proof that they were at least redacted at a late period of Jewish history.* The ascription of most of them to David is an arbitrary absurdity. Every scholar is aware that the superscripture of the Psalms is misleading. Just as the national collection of Proverbs was ascribed to Solomon, because of his traditional wisdom, the national collection of Psalms was (chiefly) ascribed to David, because of his traditional love of music. But the *royal* authorship of these collections is now discarded by every scholar of the slightest standing.

When and where the various Psalms were written is not and never will be known. Bleek may think this, and Canon Cook may think that, with respect to particular portions, but opinion on this subject is little else than conjecture. It is only a speculation that the Psalter contains any Davidic element. Mr. Gladstone is anxious to maintain its antiquity, but it is idle to cite the "authority" of this or that orthodox or semi-orthodox critic, while the equal "authority" of heterodox critics may be cited in opposition.

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* Rev. Dr. Giles, *Hebrew Records*, p. 201.

Certainly, if the historical books of the Old Testament are to be relied upon, David *could* not have composed the finest Psalms. His people were on a level with the Zulus, and he himself was on a level with Cetewayo. The finest Psalms were beyond his mental and moral scope. If his hand is to be traced in the collection, the murderer of Uriah, the bloody and remorseless victor of the Ammonites, is most likely to be detected in the cursing Psalms, for which Mr Gladstone pens a sophistical defence.

Whether the Psalms are relatively ancient or modern cannot decide the question of their inspiration. Nor does it avail to say that they are "unparalleled," or that they are "the prime and paramount manual of devotion" to Christians as well as Jews. Christians have been *trained* in the use of the Psalms. Yet their inadequacy for the expression of Christian sentiment is proved by the vast collections of hymns in use among the various denominations. On the other hand, the excellence of the Jews in the composition of devotional pieces is by no means miraculous. Among the Greeks and Romans, as Mr. Gladstone observes, the "rise of intellect was the fall of piety." Such a calamity did not befall the Jews, There was never a "rise of intellect" amongst them. Piety was therefore the exclusive object of their cultivation. They were without science, art, philosophy, or secular literature; all of which made heavy drafts on the mental powers of the Greeks and Romans. Consequently the whole of their genius ran in one narrow channel, and ploughed it deeply. If therefore the Psalms are "unparalleled" there is nothing supernatural in the fact, unless it is miraculous for a nation to excel in the one direction to which it bends its whole faculties.

But, after all, such terms as unparalleled and unapproachable, in these matters, are terms of taste, sentiment, or prejudice, rather than of scientific precision. Translation, too, counts for a great deal. The Psalms were translated by masters of simple, vigorous, poetical English. To compare with the best of them, a fine passage of the Vedas, or of Æschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, or Pindar, must be translated by a Max Müller or a Matthew Arnold. Mr. Gladstone selects the "marvellous" forty-fourth Psalm, and declares it to be "lifted as far above the level of any merely human effort known to us as the flight of the lark, 'hard by the sun,' is lifted above the swallow, when it foresees the storm and skims the surface of the ground." But see how tastes differ, and on what a narrow ledge of personal preference Mr. Gladstone builds his towering structure of dogma! This very forty-fourth Psalm, which he regards as immeasurably above all merely human efforts, seems to us distinctly inferior to many a passage of uninspired literature. Not to cite Shakespeare—the sovereign soul of this planet—let us go back to an old Greek and take the following *religious* extract:

"Oh! that my lot may lead me into the path of holy innocence of word and deed, the path which august laws ordain, laws that in the highest empyrean had their birth, of which Heaven is the father alone, neither did the race of mortal men beget them, nor shall oblivion ever put them to sleep. The power of God is mighty in them, and groweth not old." *

Undoubtedly the forty-fourth Psalm is more stormy and popular; but the Greek poet puts intellect and measure into his piety, and is more edifying and inspiring. Mr. Gladstone, of course, is entitled to his

* Arnold's translation, *Essays in Criticism*, First Series, p. 222.

preference; but a difference of taste is hardly the ground for a supernatural distinction.

"John Bright has told me," Mr. Gladstone says, "that he would be content to stake upon the Book of Psalms, as it stands, the great question whether there is or is not a Divine Revelation. It was not to him conceivable how a work so widely severed from all the known productions of antiquity, and standing upon a level so much higher, could be accounted for except by a special and extraordinary aid calculated to produce special and extraordinary results."

John Bright never expressed himself in *that* way. But supposing he communicated the substance of this paragraph to Mr. Gladstone, what in reality does it prove? John Bright was nurtured on the Bible and Milton. What was his acquaintance with "all the known productions of antiquity"? Did he ever read the Vedas, the Babylonian Hymns, the Egyptian Book of the Dead, or the Greek poets? He had little taste for Shakespeare, and he praised some very mediocre versifiers of his own generation. Perhaps he was "a very capable judge of the moral and religious elements in any case," but who in a state of sanity would accept his dictum as to the *inspiration* of a particular writing?

Submit the Psalms to a Hindu and he will tell you they are human compositions. He is not to be imposed upon by such writings. He knows what is inspired. He has heard more convincing arguments in favor of the inspiration of the Vedas than any Mr. Gladstone offers on behalf of the Psalms.

"As soon as the Vedic religion became systematised, and had to be defended against the doubts of friends and foes, the Brahmans elaborated an apologetic philosophy which seems to me unsurpassed in subtlety and acuteness by any other defence

of a divinely-inspired book. The whole of the Veda was represented as divine in its origin, and therefore beyond the reach of doubt. It was not to be looked on as the work of men, but only as seen by inspired poets."*

The fact is that Mr. Gladstone will only prove the inspiration of the Psalms to those who are already convinced. His arguments are excuses rather than justifications. Rhetoric is substituted for logic. Appeals to orthodox emotion serve instead of definition and evidence.

Mr. Gladstone's defence of the imprecatory Psalms is an elaboration of the latest plea of hard-pressed Bibliolators. "They are not the utterances of selfish spite," says the editor of *Lux Mundi*, "they are the claim which righteous Israel makes upon God that he should vindicate himself."† In the same way Mr. Gladstone furbishes up the Hebrew Old Clothes. He takes this verse, for instance:—"And of thy goodness slay mine enemies, and destroy all them that vex my soul, for I am thy servant."‡ And this is how he defends it:—

"The Psalmist pleads that he is engaged in the service of God; that in this service he is assailed and hindered; that, powerless in himself, he appeals to the source of power; and that he invokes upon the assailants and hinderers of the Divine work the Divine vengeance, even to their extinction."

Now this is the very essence of fanaticism. When a man calls on God to extinguish the life of a fellow man, he is only one step from murder; the wish is there, and only the opportunity is lacking.

It is refreshing to turn from Mr. Gladstone's observations to the "Holy Willie's Prayer" of honest

* Max Müller, *Natural Religion*, pp. 233, 234.

† P. 350.

‡ Psalm cxliii., 12.

Robert Burns. The hero of that poem talks like the Psalmist, and defends himself on the lines of Mr. Gladstone, but the poet depicts him as a fanatical hypocrite.

We are told that Jesus Christ forgave his enemies and bade us do the same. How is it possible, then, for a Christian to recognise the voice of God in the following curses which the writer of the hundred-and-ninth Psalm pours upon his enemy?

"Let his days be few, and let another take his office. Let his children be fatherless, and his wife a widow. Let his children be continually vagabonds and beg: let them seek their bread also out of their desolate places. Let the extortioner catch all that he hath; and let the strangers spoil his labor. Let there be none to extend mercy unto him: neither let there be any to favor his fatherless children."

More infamous words never came from the mouth of man. If this indeed be the language of inspiration; if this is how a pious man may speak when under the influence of the Christian Deity; we had better return to the glad and gracious paganism of Greece, and worship the kindlier deities of its lovely Pantheon. Or let us adore the friendly Penates, whose worship, as Shelley said, is neither sanguinary nor absurd.*

Mr. Gladstone seems to have misgivings as to the soundness of his defence of these imprecatory Psalms. He falls back, therefore, upon a hackneyed stratagem. Just as he bade us take a "grand and comprehensive view" of the science of Genesis, he now tells us that "the Psalms, like other productions, are to be judged by their general character." True, if they are *human* productions, but not if they are *divine*. Such a plea can only be advanced on behalf of a being who is a

* Letter to T. L. Peacock, July 17, 1816.

mixture of good and evil, wisdom and ignorance, strength and frailty. It is virtually asking us to make a debit and credit account, and strike a balance; and while this is just and natural in the case of a man, it is absurd and even blasphemous in the case of a God.

CHAPTER IV.

THE MOSAIC LEGISLATION.

MR. GLADSTONE'S fourth chapter is on "The Mosaic Legislation." Its object is to show that the Pentateuch is older than the "negative" critics allow, and that in any case the hand of Moses is obvious in the Law which is called by his name.

Incidentally he makes some very questionable statements. For instance, he speaks of Moses as the person by whom the books of the Pentateuch "profess to have been written." If he means that this authorship is asserted in the very texture of the books we think he is mistaken, and if he means that the name of Moses is affixed to them he is guilty of triviality. "We are not told," says Professor Max Müller, who is not a destructive critic, "that Moses consigned the Old Testament to writing." Again, he declares that "no scholar would suppose that Moses was even the author of the Pentateuch. 'The Books of Moses' were to the more orthodox Jews the books telling of Moses, not the books written by Moses, just as 'the Book of Job' was the book containing the story of Job, not a book written by Job."*

Mr. Gladstone also asserts that "the existence of Moses is even better and far better established than that of Lycurgus." Whether that be so or not is of little consequence. "With regard to Lycurgus, the

* *Natural Religion*, p. 556.

lawgiver," says Plutarch, "there is nothing whatever that is undisputed." Surely Mr. Gladstone does not think the "negative" critics have agreed to stand sponsors for this ancient Spartan. He will find that Lycurgus is given up as a legendary character by the most sober historians. What Mr. Gladstone thinks it "irrational" to do is actually done by Sir G. W. Cox in a *General History of Greece* for the use of colleges. He need not be surprised, therefore, if the still more "irrational" act of treating Moses as legendary is performed in the more advanced schools of criticism.

It would be well for Mr. Gladstone to explain the statement that "in the case of Moses we have much evidence independent of, and anterior to, the institutions in their historic form." Where is this "much evidence" to be found? Certainly not in profane history; as certainly not in the Jewish historical books, which ignore Moses and all his works.

There seems no limit to the license of affirmation on the orthodox side. Let a Christian write for orthodox readers, in a magazine where he cannot be replied to, and he will apparently invent as much as he can palm off, or restate without the slightest qualification any number of time-honored falsehoods, however frequently they have been challenged and exposed.

We must also say that Mr. Gladstone is playing to the gallery in his remarks on the differences among the "negative" critics. "Speaking at large," he says, "every imaginable difference has prevailed among the critics themselves as to the source, date, and authorship of the books." This is like the objection that the Bible chronology must be true because the geologists are not agreed as to the precise age of the earth's strata, although to a sensible man it is quite enough

that they *do* agree on an immense antiquity. Similarly, the "negative" critics of the Pentateuch are not agreed as to the date and authorship of every part; for it is one thing to produce a forgery, and quite another to unravel it, more than two thousand years afterwards, so as to be able to say, this was written by such a hand, and that was written at such a time. But there *is* a point of agreement among these critics, and it is a very important one. As Mr. Gladstone says, they have brought the Books of Moses "gradually towards later epochs: to Samuel, to the age of David, to the severance of the Kingdoms, to Josiah, to the Captivity, and those who followed it." How absurd, then, is the statement that it is "difficult to learn whether there is any real standing ground which the present negative writers mean not only to occupy but to hold." They occupy and hold *this* ground—that the Pentateuch is not the work of Moses. This is established by a thousand reasons, linguistic, historical, and sociological. *Who* wrote the various parts, *when* they were written, and *where* they were written, are different and difficult questions. They are partially answered; but even if they should never be answered completely, it is certain that Moses was not and could not have been the author.

Suppose we take the case of the forged Parnell letters. Reasonable men might have been perfectly satisfied that Mr. Parnell did not write them without discovering who did. The negative evidence might have been overwhelming. The positive evidence was furnished, under pressure, by the forger himself. But suppose Pigott had died before he could be cross-examined, instead of blowing his brains out afterwards; it might never have been possible to ascertain all the

details of the forgery, yet the forgery itself might still have been incontestible. In the same way we may satisfy ourselves that the Pentateuch was the work of many hands in many generations, without being able to put the forgers in the witness-box and wring from them a full confession.

There is one point, however, on which Mr. Gladstone is entitled to praise. Contending, as he does, that "the heart and substance" of the Mosaic Law is authentic, he repudiates all sympathy with temporisers like Mr. Gore, the clever editor of *Lux Mundi*. These writers plead for a possible "Mosaic germ" of Jewish legislation, but allow that it was developed through centuries by the priesthood, which ascribed its own work to the ancient Jewish leader.* Now Mr. Gladstone remarks that "Those are doubtless perfectly sincere who represent this as a method of progressive revelation. But there are also those who think that such a progressive revelation as this would for over two thousand years have palmed upon the whole Jewish and Christian world a heartless imposture." On another page Mr. Gladstone urges the impossibility of regarding such an imposture as harmless. "If the use of his [Moses's] name was a fiction," he declares, "it was one of those fictions which are falsehoods, for it altered essentially the character of the writings to which it was attached."

This explicit statement is very much to Mr. Gladstone's credit. Yet it would not be difficult for Mr. Gore to show that Mr. Gladstone has his own way of evading the hardest task of his position. Mr. Gore puts forward a comprehensive theory, which, if accepted, provides

* *Lux Mundi*, pp. 352, 353. (Seventh edition).

for all difficulties. He works on wholesale principles. Mr. Gladstone employs another theory, which is open to as grave objections. He would have us believe that "it is the legislation, for which in the sacred text itself the claim is constantly made of being due to direct communication from above, while no corresponding assertion in general accompanies the historical recitals." This, he appears to think, enables him to ascribe any quantity of Bible blunders to the "probable imperfections of the text." But if imperfections crept into one part of the text, is it impossible that they crept into the other? If the historical text is corrupt, may not the legislative text be also corrupt? Is it conceivable, Mr. Gore might urge, that a God of infinite wisdom and power would make a positive and exact revelation of his will, without taking the precaution to preserve it in its original purity; or would he allow it to be associated, nay interwoven, with human writings, and thus inevitably to share the suspicion and discredit of such productions in future ages of scientific criticism? And if, Mr. Gore might continue, you abandon the plenary inspiration of the text, as you obviously do, you are bound to formulate another theory of inspiration or let the text go altogether. To pick and choose at your own pleasure is arbitrary. Formulate your theory, and let us see whether it differs essentially from mine.

Such a challenge Mr. Gladstone would be bound to accept; and if he did so he would probably discover that Mr. Gore's theory—which, by the way, is not original—is the only one that will leave a Protestant any hold on the Pentateuch as inspired; a slender hold, it is true, but the only one possible in the circumstances.

Mr. Gladstone advances five arguments to prove the antiquity of the Mosaic Law, and we shall proceed to discuss them. But before doing so we must make this observation. Not one of his arguments would carry the Law back to the time of Moses. They might, if they were sound, carry it back beyond the Captivity, but this is many hundreds of years from the death of the supposed lawgiver. It appears to us, indeed, that Mr. Gladstone is playing on his readers' lack of historic perspective.

First Argument.—The early ages of the Jews were purer and nobler, and less idolatrous, than the later; it is therefore "a paradox, and even a rather wanton paradox, to refer the production of those sacred Mosaic books, which constituted the charter of the Hebrews as a separate and peculiar people, to the epochs of a lowered and decaying spiritual life."

Surely Mr. Gladstone has read Jewish history upside down. Where in the narrative of the wandering in the desert, of the rule of the Judges, and of the early Kings, shall we find this heightened spiritual life? Look at the hideous story of the Levite and his concubine in the Book of Judges, and see what kind of private and public life existed in the "good old times." Then turn to the best parts of the Book of Isaiah, and see the immense improvement in every respect. If the Mosaic Law shows a high spiritual culture (which for the moment we neither affirm nor dispute), as Mr. Gladstone alleges, it was more likely to have originated in the later than in the earlier ages of Jewish history.

Second Argument.—From about 300 B.C. the Jews paid great reverence to the sacred text, and took painful precautions to preserve its integrity. Is it possible, therefore, that the ostensible editors were really the

authors? And was there not "something like hallucination on the part of a people that accepted such novelties as ancient?"

This is a skilful, but not very ingenuous, appeal to the ordinary readers of to-day, who may well doubt the possibility of such an imposition being now successful, and who have neither the knowledge nor the imagination to weigh the probability of its success in a very different state of society, when there was no printing-press and no general circulation of literature, when the masses were grossly ignorant, and all the knowledge that existed was monopolised by the theocracy.

Let us take a couple of illustrations of how people can be the victims of "something like hallucination"—one from profane and one from sacred history.

During the mediæval period the Arthurian legends grew up in Western Europe. They were most circumstantial, as works of imagination are apt to be; witness the marvellous details of Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* or his *History of the Great Plague*, or, in our own day, the minute Dutch painting of Dickens. When we read the Arthurian legends in Sir Thomas Mallory's great book they seem like actual occurrences. It requires an effort to realise that they are purely romantic; and they have still enough life-blood in them to give an air of reality to Tennyson's more shadowy *Idylls of the King*. Centuries ago those legends were real history. They were as true as Gospel. Now we know they are products of imagination. The famous Round Table was the dream of poets' brains. The gallant knights and lovely ladies were fictions. Arthur himself seems never to have existed. Like Willian Tell, another purely romantic

creation, who has figured so prominently in Swiss history as an actual hero, Arthur has melted away in the light of modern criticism. Nor is it anything but foolishness to lament the "loss," for if history becomes more scientific, the poetry of the old legends remains as an imperishable possession.

Our second illustration shall be taken from the New Testament. In the Epistle of Jude a quotation is made from "Enoch, the seventh from Adam." Now this quotation is really taken from the Book of Enoch, a work which is ascribed by some authorities to the first, and by others to the second, century before Christ. That is the highest antiquity claimed for the book by any competent scholar. Yet here, in the Epistle of Jude, we have a Christian writer of probably the second century after Christ, citing the work as written by the Enoch who lived before the Flood. In other words, a work not four hundred years old, and perhaps not three hundred, was honestly taken to be older than Moses, older than Abraham, older than Noah. Was not this "something like hallucination"? And if a Christian writer could be so deceived, was it impossible for Jewish readers to be the victims of a less colossal deception?

Before dismissing this second argument we must remark that Mr. Gladstone exaggerates its basis. He asserts that the Massoretes, or official guardians of the Hebrew text, were a body "without a parallel in the history of the world." They counted the words and the very letters of the text, and Mr. Gladstone calls on the negative critics to say whether this "profound and exacting veneration" is consistent with the Books of the Pentateuch being recent concoctions.

Mr. Gladstone's statement, as to the unparalleled

character of the Massoretes, was challenged in the *Jewish Chronicle*. But one of Mr. Gladstone's foibles is infallibility, and although he is obviously mistaken, he declares in the Preface his belief that his readers "have not been misled." With respect to the Hindus, he says, "I understand it is stated that they counted verses, words, syllables, and letters; but it does not appear that this statement is one historically authenticated."

We beg Mr. Gladstone's pardon, but it *does* appear to be historically authenticated. Speaking of the Vedic hymns, Professor Max Müller says that they "must at a very early time have become the subject of the most careful study. Not only every word, but every letter and every accent were settled in the teaching of the schools, and the only marvel is that so many irregular forms should have escaped the levelling influence of teachers from generation to generation." The Prâtisâkhyas "show us with what extraordinary minuteness the hymns of the Veda had been analysed." "In the hymns themselves," he observes, "the poets speak of their thoughts as *God-given*—this we can understand —while at a later time the theory came in that not the thoughts and words only, but every syllable, every letter, every accent, had been communicated to half-divine and half-human prophets by Brahma, so that the slightest mistake in pronunciation, even to the pronunciation of an accent, would destroy the charm and efficiency of these ancient prayers."*

Now Mr. Gladstone admits that he has not "the slightest pretension to speak with authority upon this subject," while Professor Max Müller is a specialist of

* *Natural Religion*, pp. 297, 558.

European fame in this department of study. The reader will therefore have little difficulty in forming a judgment.

Third Argument.—If the Jewish hierarchy composed the Pentateuch, and ascribed it, or at least the legislation, to Moses, the forgery was unaccountably unscientific. The books are "rather crude and irregular," they "have not that consistency which belongs to consecutiveness of form." Yet the priests had "unbounded freedom of manipulation," and there was every condition to "favor the production of a thoroughly systematic and orderly work."

Now this argument proceeds on two false assumptions; first, that the whole Pentateuch was concocted at one time by one set of hands—say like our Revised Version of the Bible; secondly, that the priests were skilful enough to anticipate the severity of modern criticism. The first assumption would be scouted by the whole school of "negative" critics; the second would be derided by every person with a grain of common sense.

The fact is, the forgers were skilful enough for their own necessities. They had merely to deal with the circumstances of their own time. And if the circumstances had not changed, as they did not until the modern invention of printing, and the growth of exact knowledge, the forgery would still hold its ground. It imposes on ordinary people still, and apparently it imposes on Mr. Gladstone. But it did not impose on Spinoza, who viewed it as a man of genius, a mathematician, and a scholar; it did not impose on Colenso, who examined it with more than the minuteness of Sir Charles Russell's examination of Pigott; it does not impose on the great textual and historical critics

of Germany, Holland and France; nor does it impose on English writers like Dr. Robertson Smith and the editor of *Lux Mundi*. We may add that it did not impose on the critical sagacity of Voltaire and Thomas Paine.

Fourth Argument.—The exclusion of the doctrine of a future life discredits the idea of the Law being framed immediately before or after the Captivity, as the Jews had then become familiar with the "idea of a future life and an Underworld, as held both in the East and in Egypt."

But was not Moses "skilled in all the learning of the Egyptians," and was not the belief in a future life a profound conviction among the Egyptians long before his birth? Why then did *he* exclude it from the Law? Mr. Gladstone says it was because he wanted to draw a sharp line between the Hebrews and other nations. But why could not the same motive prevail with the post-exile hierarchy? Do we not know that they were passionate Judaists? Were they not the nurses of a patriotism far narrower and intenser than that which obtained in the age of Solomon?

Fifth Argument.—The Samaritan Pentateuch is a proof of the antiquity of the Mosaic Law. "How is it possible," Mr. Gladstone asks, "to conceive that it should have held as a Divine work the supreme place in the regard of the Samaritans, if, about or near the year B.C. 500, or, again, if at the time of Manasseh the seceder, it had, as a matter of fact, been a recent compilation of their enemies the Jews?"

This argument, if valid, would not carry the Pentateuch back to the time of Moses, which is what Mr. Gladstone undertakes to prove. At the utmost it could only establish the fact that the Pentateuch was in

existence before the Captivity, when the old Hebrew character was in use among the Jews; and it does not require all the statistical power of Mr. Gladstone to see that a book might exist 700 years before Christ and still not exist 1,500 years before Christ. We are accustomed to cutting big slices out of ancient chronology, but really the years followed each other one at a time, and many things happened in the course of twenty generations.

Mr. Gladstone's argument, however, is fallacious. The Samaritans were not harder to impose upon than the Jews, and however great their hostility, they had a common interest in Moses and the founders of the race.

Mr. Gladstone is curiously silent about the strong objections to the antiquity of the Samaritan Pentateuch. We have no space to enter upon them here, but they are of a very pregnant character, and Mr. Gladstone has perhaps shown a wise discretion in avoiding this awkward branch of the subject.

Having gone through Mr. Gladstone's arguments, which we have drawn out in numerical order for the sake of clearness, we proceed to remark that they are all of an *a priori* character. He judiciously evades all the positive facts of the case. He does not touch a single internal difficulty. He does not explain, for instance, how "the stranger that is within thy gates" was inserted in the Fourth Commandment while the Jews were desert nomads dwelling in tents; nor does he give the slightest hint as to how the Mosaic Law *could* have been carried out in the desert, or why it was so utterly neglected during the rule of the Judges, and plainly violated during the reign of the early Kings. No one but a priest was to presume to offer sacrifice;

yet we see David sacrificing, and at the opening of the Temple we see Solomon officiating as High Pontiff.

The only concessions to rational criticism that Mr. Gladstone deigns to make are these. There is a "probable imperfection of the text"—a phrase wide enough to cover anything—and numbers may have gone wrong in transcribing; which again is a convenient method of reconciling the wildest contradictions, and simply involves the re-editing of the Pentateuch.

We have read that a famous *grande dame* (not one of Brantome's *grandes dames de par le monde* let us hope) has written to thank Mr. Gladstone for the great comfort and support she has derived from his defence of the Bible. We do not envy him such praise. When a man of his standing enters the lists, it should not be to make a reassuring display to his lady friends in the grand stand, but to grapple in deadly earnest with a serious foe. This he has not done. He had enough of Professor Huxley, and too much of Colonel Ingersoll. For this reason, perhaps, the articles collected in the volume we are criticising were contributed to *Good Words*. It is a party magazine and no reply is permitted. He wins an easy victory who stalks into the arena alone and fights an imaginary opponent. He may gain the applause of those who wear his favor, but men of honesty and discernment will lift their eyebrows at the spectacle.

CHAPTER V.

THE CORROBORATIONS OF SCRIPTURE.

MR. GLADSTONE'S sixth chapter is on "Recent Corroborations of Scripture from the Regions of History and Natural Science." In the preliminary section he refers to evolution as "confirming the great argument of design"; but as, in this respect, he differs from John Stuart Mill, and even from Darwin himself, his mere *ipse dixit* counts for nothing. Mr. Gladstone also observes that "the doctrine of birth-sin, as it is sometimes called, is simply the recognition of the hereditary disorder and degeneracy of our natures; and of all men the evolutionist would be the last to establish a title to object to it in principle." Here again Mr. Gladstone shows a curious ignorance of evolution. Darwinians do not believe in the "degeneracy" of human nature; on the contrary, they assert its slow but constant improvement. They do not teach the *fall* of man, but the *rise* of man. The Darwinian law of heredity and the Christian doctrine of original sin have absolutely nothing in common; and whoever asserts that they have, understands neither the one nor the other.

Never has it been our misfortune to read a more extravagant piece of special-pleading than Mr. Gladstone's section on the Assyrian and Hebrew myths of the Deluge. He does not dispute that the Assyrian tablets deciphered by the late Mr. George Smith were "composed more than 2,000 years B.C."; that is, five

hundred years before the alleged date of Moses. Yet, in the face of this chronology; in face of the lack of all reference to the Deluge in the Jewish historical books before the Captivity; in face of the great influence which contact with Babylon indisputably exercised on the Jewish people; Mr. Gladstone asserts that the Hebrew and Assyrian flood-stories are "derived through independent channels," that "the one comes through a powerful and civilised empire, the other through an obscure nomad family." Surely Mr. Gladstone must see that he is begging the whole question. He has first to establish the fact—if it be a fact—that the flood-story was known to the pre-Mosaic Jews; whereas he has nothing but assumption to show that it was even known to the pre-Exile Jews.

Everything Mr. Gladstone has to say on the subject is based on this simple trick of begging the question. He starts from a premiss, which is the very proposition in dispute, and at the finish he blandly desires his opponents to admit his conclusion.

First, he says the Jewish account of the Flood is monotheistic; which, by the way, it is not, for there are two accounts purposely disguised in our English version, in one of which the deity is called by the single name of Jehovah, and in the other by the plural name of Elohim. On the other hand, he says, the Assyrian account is polytheistic; and he argues that the simpler form is nearer to the original source. But does not Mr. Gladstone see that all this is consistent with the position of the "negative" critics, who assert that the Jewish flood-story was borrowed from Babylon when the Jews were monotheistic?

Secondly, he asserts that the absence of local coloring in the flood-story of the Jews is natural if it

was derived from a simple nomad people like Abraham, his ancestors and his posterity. But is it not just as natural on the theory that it was doctored by the later Jewish priests for their own people? Would they not cut away everything that gave the story a foreign air?

Even, however, if Abraham and his family picked up a knowledge of the flood-story while they hovered on the skirts of the Chaldean civilisation, or brought it away with them from "Ur of the Chaldees," there is no disputing the fact that the legend existed among the Chaldeans before the basis of the Jewish nation was laid.

Let us now see how Mr. Gladstone disposes of Professor Huxley. Does he reply to Huxley's arguments against *any* such deluge as is related in Genesis? Not a bit of it. He declares with a not too ingenuous modesty that he has "no capacity to handle" such a controversy, although Huxley's argument against a partial deluge, in any wise resembling the Bible story, was level to the most ordinary intelligence, and based on geographical and physical truths which are taught to school-boys. Mr. Gladstone does not refrain, however, from sneering at Huxley's "magisterial" tone; and for the rest, he plays off against him the authorities of Mr. Howorth, the Duke of Argyll and Sir J. Dawson. But Mr. Howorth's evidence only shows that there were catastrophes in the earlier ages of the earth, which no one need dispute; and Dawson, in one of his Religious Tract Society pamphlets, distinctly argues that the Deluge was only one of the many disasters that have happened in geological history.* What on

* "The cataclysm," says Dawson, "by which these men were swept away may have been one of those submersions of our continents which, locally or generally, have occurred over and over again, almost countless times, in the geological history of the earth."—*Revelation and Science*

earth has this to do with the flood which occurred in the historical period, a huge mass of water kept standing on the sloping plains of Mesopotamia, an ark containing specimens of all forms of life, and the destruction by miracle of all the human race with the exception of eight persons?

Mr. Gladstone is a better writer than the ordinary Christian apologist, but his method of controversy is no whit superior. He thinks to settle disputes by quoting *opinions* from orthodox and semi-orthodox scholars. But this is not the way to end controversy, or to establish any satisfactory conclusion. Nor is it exactly honest to neglect to inform the reader that the scholars quoted *are* orthodox or semi-orthodox, and to refrain from indicating the great authorities whose opinions are of an opposite character.

Is it not astoundingly cool of Mr. Gladstone to say that "the Hebrew story of the Deluge has long been supported by a diversity of traditions among nations and races of the world"? What he should have said is simply this, that flood-legends are almost universal. That they "support" the Hebrew story is a monstrous misstatement. The probability, in our opinion, is that all these flood-legends are connected with traditional reminiscences of inundations in prehistoric times, when men were without the resources of science, and were the helpless victims of calamity. Mr. Gladstone cites Lenormant as contending that these flood-legends point to some "cataclysm that took place at a spot near the primeval cradle of humanity," though the phrase "a spot" is not in the original French, and seems

(Religious Tract Society), p. 43.—Thus the positive certainty of Genesis turns to a "may have been," and the miracle of the Flood becomes a natural and common occurrence.

introduced on the usual principle of orthodox translation. But neither Mr. Gladstone nor Lenormant knows the "spot" where humanity was first cradled, and if there be any truth in the modern scientific teaching as to the antiquity of man, there is a vast interval between the oldest myths and legends and the ape-like progenitors of the human race.

Mr. Gladstone talks as though the flood-story were accepted as "history" by the generality of Christian scholars and scientists. But it is not so accepted by Professor St. George Mivart, the Catholic; by the Bishop of Carlisle and Archbishop Farrar, of the Church of England; or by many a critic in the ranks of Nonconformity. The tendency is to explain the story as a legend, with a spiritual lesson, or to whittle it down to the proportions of a local flood; and we may ultimately learn that Noah's Flood is an exaggeration of a village deluge that washed away three kittens and a blind puppy.

Much unprofitable "learning" is devoted by Mr. Gladstone to showing how the human race descended from Shem, Ham, and Japheth. Even if these names are symbolic of the white, yellow and black races, they do not give the Bible any claim to inspiration; for these great diversities were well-known, and the legend, whenever it was developed, would naturally follow them. But the American and Australian races were *not* known, and precisely as the Bible leaves them out does Mr. Gladstone leave them out. He quietly sacrifices two continents for the sake of the Pentateuch.

With respect to the Sinaitic journey of the Jews, nothing could be more simple than the remark that the names of places, the distances, and so forth, prove the narrative of Exodus to be "a contemporary record

of the events to which it relates." Is Mr. Gladstone so innocent as to imagine that the Jewish writers of the sixth, seventh, and eighth centuries before Christ were unable to obtain any information about the frontiers of Egypt and the coast of the Red Sea? Did not Solomon marry an Egyptian princess? Were not the Jews fighting in alliance with Egypt when the hosts of Sennacherib were destroyed? It really seems as if nothing were too childish for a Christian apologist to advance on behalf of the Bible.

The last "corroboration" of Scripture is that the world, in the late Dr. Whewell's opinion, will end with a catastrophe. Mr. Gladstone is informed on "high authority" that this is the "established conclusion of astronomers"; and this is also "the emphatic declaration of the inspired Word." Peter prophesied it. And where? Why in the Second Epistle of Peter, which scholars do not allow to be his at all! Yet on this basis Mr. Gladstone proclaims that "the Galilean fishermen knew what all the genius and learning of the world for thousands of years failed to discover." For our part, we have a great distrust of Mr. Gladstone's "high authority." In any case, this questionable "established conclusion of astronomers" has no relation to the prophecy of Peter, for this gentleman did not mean the absolute destruction of the earth (as we read his words), but rather a renovation of it, as the dwelling of righteousness. The writer of the second epistle of Peter refers to a supernatural catastrophe, which was to occur shortly, or at any rate before the end of the human race; and only the most Jesuitical special pleading could torture this into harmony with any scientific speculations as to the ultimate fate of our globe.

Sir Isaac Newton was a great scientist. He also wrote in defence of the Bible. Where are those writings now? Ask the amateurs of curious literature. Mr. Gladstone is a great statesman. He also writes in defence of the Bible, and we believe that his apologies will share the fate of Newton's. They display what is too often "the last infirmity of noble minds."

CHAPTER V.

GLADSTONE AND HUXLEY.

In his concluding chapter Mr. Gladstone breaks a lance with Professor Huxley, whom he calls "the Achilles of the opposing army," and in whom we venture to say Mr. Gladstone has not yet found the vulnerable point.

Professor Huxley has argued that the Mesopotamian plain was an unfortunate spot for Noah's Flood, since it slopes to the extent of nearly six hundred feet, and a body of water high enough to carry the Ark—to say nothing about covering all "the highest hills under heaven"—would rush down in a furious torrent, and the fate of the floating menagerie may be left to imagination. Now Mr. Gladstone has made inquiries of "an engineer who is in charge of a portion of one of our rivers," and he is informed that "a fall of one in 3,420 would probably produce a current of two miles an hour." And if "instead of taking an ordinary English river we remove the banks, and suppose the stream indefinitely widened, the fall remaining the same, the rate of the current would not be increased but slackened."

Upon the strength of this "information" Mr. Gladstone reads Professor Huxley a solemn lesson in circumspection, advising him to be more "precise" in future, and not to call a placid stream "a furious torrent." It does not occur to Mr. Gladstone, who is confessedly ignorant of physical science, that he is

taking a dangerous course in giving the author of *Physiography* instruction in "elementary hydraulics." A little reflection would show him that he has forgotten an all-important point. He takes into calculation the fall of the stream and the banks, but omits *the other end.* The current of a stream, which is continuous until it joins the sea, is only superficial; while a body of water, such as Professor Huxley contemplates, would move in bulk at the lower end with terrible force.

It is not Professor Huxley, therefore, but Mr. Gladstone, who needs to be told that he "should take reasonable care to include in his survey of a case all elements which are obviously essential to a right judgment of it."

Like an old parliamentary hand, Mr. Gladstone avoids answering Professor Huxley's question as to how such a depth of water was kept *standing* for several months on a sloping plain. This question, which is far more important than the velocity of Noah's Ark, is quietly ignored.

Mr. Gladstone is equally discreet with respect to the miracle of the demoniacs and the swine in the New Testament. He has a wonderful faculty, in these discussions, for pursuing side issues, to the complete neglect of the central points of the problem. This may be the art of a rhetorician, but it will not convince "the opposing army," or make a favorable impression on impartial spectators.

A discussion as to the Gardarean swine took place between Professor Huxley and Dr. Wace in the *Nineteenth Century*, and Mr. Gladstone remarks that on this occasion the Professor "touched lofty ground indeed," as though only clergymen or Christian laymen had a right to approach it.

"Mr. Huxley, as a physiologist," says Mr. Gladstone, "disbelieves in demoniacal possession." True. And does Mr. Gladstone *believe* in it? Well, he will not say. "Such a physiological judgment," he mock-modestly declares, "it is not for me to discuss." But that is the vital point at issue. It is that alone which gives the story the slightest interest to people living in the nineteenth century. If demoniacal possession be a fact, the science of this age is woefully mistaken; if it be not a fact, Jesus could not have ordered devils to leave the possessed at Gadara. In that case the evangelists put into his mouth words that he never uttered. If they did this in a single case they may have done it a hundred times, and their credibility is gone for ever.

This was clearly set forth by Professor Huxley, and it must be obvious to Mr. Gladstone. We therefore conclude that, when he ignores the devils and fastens his attention on the pigs, he is aware that demoniacal possession is indefensible. But what is obnoxious to reason is often embraced by faith, and Mr. Gladstone appears to accept the story of the devilled swine of Gadara by the operation of what he calls "the organ of belief," which seems to be a faculty that enables him to cling to superstition in spite of his intellect.

Mr. Gladstone allows that Professor Huxley "very properly touches the question of the injury inflicted by the destruction of the swine, which was due to our Lord's permission." Nevertheless he falls into a furious passion, which is ill-disguised by the temperate form of his speech.

"So then, after eighteen centuries of worship offered to our Lord by the most cultivated, the most developed, and the most progressive portion of the human race, it has been reserved to a scientific inquirer to discover that he was no better than a

law-breaker and an evil-doer. It is sometimes said that the greatest discoveries are the most simple. And this, if really a discovery, is the simplest of them all. So simple that he who runs may read, for it lies on the very surface of the page. The ordinary reader can only put the wondering question, how, in such a matter, came the honors of originality to be reserved to our time and to Professor Huxley."

Were Mr. Gladstone better acquainted with "negative" criticism, he would know it was not reserved for Professor Huxley to discover that the drowning of the Gardarean swine was a "wanton destruction of other people's property." The objection has been common for generations. Nor is it easy to pardon Mr. Gladstone for raising the *odium theologicum* against his adversary. Professor Huxley did not charge Jesus Christ with being "a law-breaker and an evil-doer." He distinctly declared his disbelief of the story. It is those who believe it that are concerned to reconcile the destruction of the swine with the common ethics of civilised society.

The reconcilement attempted by Mr. Gladstone is extremely curious. He says the country of the Gadarenes was "apparently part of the land of the Girgashites, one of the seven Canaanitish nations, and was subject, therefore, as a matter of religious obligation, to the Mosaic law," which prohibited the use of pork. Mr. Gladstone is so sure of this, that he charges Professor Huxley with not having "encumbered himself with the labor of inquiring what anybody else had known or said about it." Such a charge is positively grotesque. Professor Huxley is a careful student and an omnivorous reader, and has since shown a perfect familiarity with *all* that is "known or said about" the city of Gadara, which he gives excellent reasons for regarding as a Greek city. Mr. Gladstone himself

allows that "some commentators" are of the same opinion, thus exposing his own dogmatism on a controverted subject.

Mr. Gladstone's contention is that the Gadarenes, being (somehow) under the Mosaic law, had no right to keep pigs, and were simply treated like smugglers caught with brandy-casks. But he forgets two things: first, that Jesus was not a Jewish official, and had no legal right to confiscate swine, or plague them with devils; and secondly, that the Jews were not forbidden to *keep* pigs. Swine were unclean in Egypt, but they existed there; they were unclean also to the Jews, but they as clearly existed in Palestine; and the Jews were allowed to sell unclean meat to the Gentiles, just as they were allowed to lend them money on usury. So far, therefore, from Professor Huxley's reasoning being "hand-over-head," we think it is Mr. Gladstone who is open to the accusation.

Setting aside the subsidiary points of this story, which is told by three of the evangelists, we have to face —and Mr. Gladstone has to face—the central point of demoniacal possession. It is an aspect of the same superstition which gave birth to the injunction in Exodus—"Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live"—an injunction which has cost at least nine millions of lives. It is part and parcel of a great supernatural theory, which existed ages before the time of Christ, and still prevails in savage countries where Christianity is unknown. Looked at in this light, it assumes a tragic importance, and the question arises—Does Mr. Gladstone believe it? If he does not, he should plainly say so. If he does, he is one of those who, "with their backs to the sunrise worship the night."

The "mighty Julius," the first Cæsar, the greatest

of earth's rulers, who swayed the destinies of the civilised world before Christ was born, was far above the superstitions of his age—above the superstition of *all* ages. Could he "revisit the glimpses of the moon," and behold a great English statesman gravely discussing a story of devils being turned out of men and sent into swine, he would wonder what blight had fallen upon the human intellect in two thousand years. And were he to learn that such stories are contained in a book which is regarded as divine, which is placed as such in the hands of our children, which is paraded in all our courts of justice, and is deemed the very basis and security of our civilisation, he would be at no loss to understand why the greatest rulers and statesmen of modern Europe look small and effeminate beside the best emperors of pagan Rome.

CHAPTER VI.

MODERN SCEPTICISM.

A PORTION of Mr. Gladstone's last chapter is concerned with Scepticism and its causes. After quoting a jubilant sentence from Mr. Karl Pearson as to the decadence of Christianity, he remarks that we have heard this kind of thing often enough before, and immediately plunges into an historical disquisition on Freethought. Bishop Butler's preface to the *Analogy* is cited to show that "a wave of infidelity was passing over the land" in his day; but, according to Mr. Gladstone, it "dwindled and almost disappeared," and at the time of Johnson's social predominance it had "hardly left a trace behind." Now this is a most amazing blunder. The *Analogy* was first published in 1736. Nearly twenty years later were published the philosophical works of Bolingbroke, which were extensively read and very influential. The works of Chubb and other Deists were widely read in more popular circles. Presently the sceptical writings of Voltaire were translated into English; and it was in the very days of Johnson that Hume's masterly essays on Miracles and Religion saw the light. Surely this is a remarkable "disappearance" of scepticism, and the "hardly a trace behind" is positively ludicrous. As a matter of fact, it was just at this very time that Freethought penetrated to the multitude. Henceforth, instead of merely affecting fashionable and literary coteries, it was destined to influence the

working classes, and the movement thus began never abated to the day when John Bright told the House of Commons that the lower classes cared as much about the dogmas of Christianity as the upper classes cared about its practice.

Mr. Gladstone is similarly mistaken about the results of the French Revolution in England. He says it "generated a distinctly religious reaction," which is quite true, though only half of the truth. The Revolution stimulated advanced thought with the same intensity as it stimulated conservatism in Church and State. Wordsworth and Coleridge went one way, but Byron and Shelley went the other way. Paine's *Age of Reason* was devoured by myriads of readers, and a host of Freethought works swarmed from the press of Richard Carlile and his brave colleagues who, amidst calumny and imprisonment, made such a gallant stand for the liberty of the press. From that time to this there has been no real break in the progress of Freethought.

Were Mr. Gladstone's history as correct as it is false, there would still be no force in his contention that scepticism is subject to mutation or hazard, for no great movement of the human mind ever goes forward with an equable pace. The French Revolution was followed by reaction in France, but its ideas did not cease to operate. Restorations took place, and Napoleon the Little's empire succeeded in less than half a century the empire of Napoleon the Great. But after each disaster the Revolutionary idea gathered fresh strength, and the present Republic has been able to maintain itself against all its enemies. Similarly, if English Freethought has had its moments of rebuff and delay, it has nevertheless advanced in the main,

as a stream flows on with varying, but on the whole ever-increasing, volume and power.

We must also smile at Mr. Gladstone's view of the function of scepticism. He imagines it is designed in "the counsels of God" in the interest of faith. Its purpose is "to dispel the lethargy and stimulate the zeal of believers," and to "admonish their faith to keep terms with reason, by testing it at all points." But as scepticism is impossible without sceptics, and sceptics are liable to damnation, it would seem that Mr. Gladstone's deity moves in a mysterious way his wonders to perform. One might imagine that faith could be stimulated and enlightened by a less cruel or perilous method. The poor sceptics are like the fire-flies of Sumatra, which are stuck on spits to illuminate the ways at night. "Persons of condition," says Carlyle, "can thus travel with a pleasant radiance," but—it is very awkward for the fire-flies!

Anyhow, we find Mr. Gladstone admitting, what no man in his senses can dispute, a "strong and wide-spread negative movement among our countrymen during the latter portion of this century." And how does he account for it? Why, in the old-fashioned way, though in a less offensive manner. The main cause of "the growth of negation" is "not intellectual, but moral." Are sceptics, then, less moral than believers? No, says Mr. Gladstone; to say that would be "untrue, offensive, and absurd." "Had I ever been inclined to such a conception," he adds, "the experience of my life would long ago have undeceived me." What, then, does Mr. Gladstone mean? We gather the following points from his rather diffuse explanation.

Unbelievers do not become immoral, because they inherit the advantages of the Christian tradition.

"Many who have abjured Christianity," he says, "know not that in the best of their thought, their nature, and their practice, they are appropriating its fruits." But this argument may be retorted on the Christian. The sceptic might tell him that his practice is determined, not by the doctrines and maxims of his creed, but by the mental and moral atmosphere which is generated by a thousand secular influences of science, art, literature, politics and social life. The Christian tradition was the same three centuries ago as at present, but what a difference in our ethical ideals as well as in the constitution of society!

Mr. Gladstone would parry this by comparing our condition with that of "the Greeks of the fifth century before Christ, or the Romans at the period of the Advent." But this is a most fallacious test. Had the comparison been challenged a century or two ago —still the best part of two thousand years after Christ —it is very doubtful if an unprejudiced arbiter would have given the palm to Christendom. Europe, as a whole, was far less civilised than Greece or Rome; negro slavery existed in English and French colonies, political freedom was almost unknown, the masses were ignorant and degraded, and the brutality of the poor and the profligacy of the rich were almost incredible. Vast progress has been made in the last hundred and fifty years, but to claim this as in any sense a product of Christianity is to fly in the face of history and common sense.

There is more force in Mr. Gladstone's next suggestion, that scepticism has increased because the world has grown more absorbing. The root of "the mischief" he finds in the increase of wealth and enjoyment. "It is the increased force within us of all that

is sensuous and worldly," he says "that furnishes every sceptical argument, good, bad, or indifferent, with an unseen ally, and that recruits many a disciple of the negative creed." This language is invidious, but it expresses a certain truth. This life and the next have always been in conflict. As the one grows the other dwindles. And as science makes this life better worth living, and humanitarianism ennobles it with an ideal glow, the "world to come" fades from our mental vision. In this sense it is perfectly true that secular progress is in itself an enemy to religion.

Mr. Gladstone would have us rectify "this-worldism" by cultivating the "organ of belief," which is probably our old friend "faith" under an *alias;* and he justly regards himself as possessing a higher development of this organ than was found in the late Mr. Darwin. But when Mr. Gladstone goes on to read the public its duties in regard to belief he runs counter to all the principles which guide him in politics. He declares the presumption to be in favor of what is received, and that "it is doubt and not belief of the things received which ought in all cases to be put upon its defence." What a rubbing of hands there would be in Tory circles if Mr. Gladstone talked in this fashion from political platforms! Then again, he tells us that inquiry is an excellent thing, but it should only be undertaken "when it can be made the subject of effective prosecution." What is this, however, but an ill-disguised plea for handing over religion to professional experts? But this is not Mr. Gladstone's policy in other matters. When he stumps the country he appeals to "the masses," and tells them they are the very persons to form a sound judgment. "Multitudes of men," he

complains, "call into question the foundations of our religion and the prerogatives of our sacred books, without any reference to either their capacities or their opportunities for so grave an undertaking." But were a Tory orator to speak thus—as many Tory orators have spoken—of some effete institution, Mr. Gladstone would reply that the people are quite competent to form a judgment on broad issues. And it is just on those broad issues that the "multitudes of men" who think at all do form a judgment. They get hold of certain great ideas in politics, ethics, or religion, and by those ideas they judge institutions, customs, and creeds. Such is the inevitable law of the popular mind, and if Mr. Gladstone's religious hopes are based on the expectation that this law is to be reversed, or set aside, in the interest of Christianity, we venture to say he is building on a foundation of sand.

In a footnote to an earlier chapter Mr. Gladstone draws attention "with deep regret" to the fact that in the French census of 1881 no less than 7,684,906 persons "declined to make any declaration of religious belief." It would, perhaps, be inaccurate to allege that all these are pronounced unbelievers. Some of them may merely hold that the state has no concern with their religious opinions. But a very considerable proportion must remain, who stand outside every form of Christianity. Many are Voltairians, rejecting revealed religion, while retaining a vague Deism. Others are Atheists or Agnostics, who have discarded all kinds of supernaturalism, and largely regard religion as a mixture of mental disease and priestly imposture.

Such is the state of France, the radiating centre of European ideas. England is proverbially slow though tenacious. Our people are more open to practical

appeals than to appeals of principle. Their wits and imaginations are less active than those of the French. But they are daily becoming more accessible to ideas. Their passion for truth is increasing. More and more they ask whether principles and statements *are true*, not whether they are old and venerable, or useful on some ground of compromise where falsehood is reconciled with beneficence. Logic, in short, is gaining a stronger hold on the English mind; and as our people begin to *think*, without respect to the ill consequences that are always prophesied by the upholders of existing institutions, they will investigate *foundations* as the French are doing. Woe betide, then, the hoariest superstitions! Everything will disappear that cannot stand the test of what Cardinal Newman dreaded—"the restless intellect of man." Electric search-lights will play upon every corner of the present under the rule of the past. There will be a flight of a monstrous brood of tyrannous lies to the realm of Chaos and old Night; and man, with clarified intellect and purified heart, having freed himself from the yoke of imposture, and learnt the manly lesson of self-reliance and self-control, will recognise the pinnacled truth which all religions have obscured, that virtue is the offspring of wisdom, and happiness the child of both.

But this process will necessarily be gradual. Revolutions in human affairs are only believed in by those who have read history on the surface, and never penetrated to the great causes of intellectual and moral movements. The advance of Humanity is an evolution. This is the reason why "no one ever sees a religion die."*

* A pregnant remark by the late Charles Bradlaugh, in a public debate with a Newcastle clergyman.

It required centuries to dethrone the gods of Olympus. During the first three hundred years of its propaganda, Christianity only succeeded in converting a twentieth part of the inhabitants of the Roman Empire. And Christianity underwent a change in triumphing; it stooped to conquer; in overcoming Paganism it became Paganised itself. Nor is it even now free from the law it then obeyed. Success has its conditions. Life itself is a constant adjustment. "To live," said Cardinal Newman, "is to change." And Christianity changes in order to exist. Except in the periodical manifestoes of the Papacy, couched in the pompous Latin of a bygone age, where shall we find the note of sovereign authority in its deliverances? It explains, apologises, heightens, softens, and even beseeches. More and more it assumes the tone of a supplicant. And the changed tone is accompanied by an altered teaching. Awkward doctrines may not be absolutely abandoned, but they are minimised, while emphasis is laid on more plausible tenets. In the schools called "liberal," or "advanced," or "forward," the harsher features of the old faith are softened, and sometimes explained away. A new theory of the inspiration of Scripture is taught. To use a phrase of Coleridge's, we are to accept as inspired what "finds" us. Some go to the length of dismissing three-fourths of the miraculous element of the Bible. Nor are the concessions confined to Reason. Conscience is accommodated by various admissions. Religion, instead of being the basis of morality, is declared to be its crown. A good life is allowed to be possible without "faith." Future rewards and punishments are given a new meaning. Heaven is widening, and Hell is contracting. Every doctrine of Chris-

tianity is receiving a fresh explanation. And this is the real victory of Scepticism. It cannot suddenly destroy Christianity, but it abolishes it slowly by a process of dilution. The *name* remains, but the *substance* changes. Christianity is like a sack of salt in running water. Little by little the contents are washed away, although the brand looks as brave as ever. By and bye the sack itself will collapse, and join the flotsam and jetsam of the ocean of time.

Mr. Bradlaugh's aphorism that "no man ever sees a religion die" is literally true, but it has its limitations. No man, except the great general, sees the whole of a single battle; and who can see, in the span of a life-time, the whole of a battle which rages through generations, and perhaps through centuries? Yet history, and imagination working upon its revelations, come to our aid and enable us to see "in the mind's eye" what is invisible to the organ of sense. Thus the long death of a religion may be witnessed, every phase of its dissolution followed, and the point discerned when its epitaph may be written.

The student of history knows that the Christian religion has been breaking up ever since the Revival of Learning. Just as Christianity arose in the twilight of Pagan civilisation, and flourished in the succeeding night, so it began to wane in the young light of a new day. Centuries have since rolled by, and Christianity is still here; and, sustained by this knowledge, the Christian may wreathe his lip with scorn. But did not Paganism survive for centuries the knell of its doom, outliving the bribes and proscription of Constantine and his successors, and lurking in the very magic and witchcraft of the Middle Ages? Smitten as it was before the star of Bethlehem appeared, Paganism

seemed little affected for centuries. Its temples continued to lift their columns in proud beauty, its priests were still numerous and powerful, and everything went on as though the old system were as secure as the everlasting hills. Sacrifices were performed, the victims' entrails were inspected, the oracles gave forth their dubious prophecies, and wealth was poured into the hands of a multitude of priests.

One need not be surprised, therefore, at the present condition of Christianity. It is enormously rich, and its power is apparently tremendous; but the sphere of its influence is in reality ever contracting. The Papacy is shorn of half its power. Freethought is rampant in France and Germany, and spreading like wildfire even in the cities and universities of Spain. In England the State Church feels that its life is threatened. The Nonconformist bodies have crowds of ministers and large incomes, but they are always sounding notes of alarm. They hear the approach of the strong man who is to take their possessions. It is the *mind* of man the creeds have now to face—the Spirit of the Age, whose presence is obvious in a thousand directions. A sermon cannot be read, nor a religious paper scanned, without seeing that all the Churches are aware of the terrible foe who is winding about them like an invisible serpent.

There is but one method of temporary salvation. That method is *adjustment*. Under the stern law of Natural Selection, which governs all—animals, men, gods, and creeds—everything must adjust itself to live. A species may not vary for millenniums, and a creed may change but little for centuries. But when the environment alters, the species, or the creed, must adjust itself—or die.

Mr. Gladstone himself, though stiffly orthodox in comparison with many Christian writers, is obliged to practise this adjustment. Catholics like Professor Mivart are pursuing it with amazing diligence. The Romish Church, indeed, has a great advantage over the Protestant sects, for it infallibly interprets the infallible Bible, and is able to make it suit the exigencies of the moment. Professor Mivart is ready to find Darwinism in the Bible. He is also ready to find that all the absolute Word of God it contains might be written in a waistcoat pocket-book.

This clever trick of Catholic exigesis will not succeed with strong-minded people, who know that infallible Churches are as absurd as infallible Books. Nor will it succeed with those who are familiar with ecclesiastical history, and who know that the infallible Church has often blundered, often contradicted itself, often been torn with internecine strife, and has sometimes put in the papal chair, as God's vicegerent on earth, a very monster of lust, avarice, and cruelty. But the majority of men are not strong-minded, and have little acquaintance with history. They are without that knowledge of the past which Mr. Morley says "saves us from imposture and surprise." It will not, therefore, be astonishing if many of them who are too ignorant, weak, and timid to think for themselves, should accept the Catholic adjustment to the conditions of modern thought, letting the Church decide for them how the Bible is to be read and understood, reposing their faithful heads on the bosom of their Holy Mother, and heeding her dogmatic voice as the perennial oracle of God.

But the Protestant sects are doomed, and their members will ultimately choose between Rome and

Reason. Minds of ordinary calibre cannot be satisfied with apologetics like Mr. Gladstone's, which bring the Bible into harmony with modern thought by a perpetual torture of its language. The reflection *must* arise, that if the Bible does not mean what it *says*, no one can tell what it *does* mean. And no one *can* tell, exclaims the Catholic, except the Church, the living voice of God.

Here, then, is safety for timid and superstitious souls. But the Protestant quits this land of Egypt, with its proud Pharaoh, and its pyramid churches, and its swarming priests, and all the leeks, the onions, the garlic, and the cucumber. He dares the desert in search of a better land. Yet he wanders eternally, subsisting on droppings from heaven, and chance streams in the thirsty soil. Courage fails him at sight of the Promised Land, though tempted by the verdant soil, and the rich dark clusters of the glorious vines. Back he hies to the desert, until the old dread of Egypt returns, and once more he approaches the Promised Land, only to be driven back again by his craven fears. But this will not go on for ever. Many are already returning to Egypt, others are crossing the Jordan, and a clear field will ultimately be left for the mighty struggle between Catholicism and Freethought, in which more will be decided than the fate of the Protestant fetish; for the conflict is between Reason and Faith, the natural and the supernatural, reality and fable, truth and falsehood, day and night, the living present and the dead past, the rights of man and the claims of gods, the priest's dogma and the child's freedom, the tomb of yesterday and "the prophetic soul of the wide world dreaming on things to come."