

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

“THE DYER’S HAND:”

A DISCOURSE

PRECEDED BY

THE WAY TO GOD:

A MEDITATION,

DELIVERED AT

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BY

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# ORDER OF THE SERVICE.

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HYMN 12—*Words by* DYER.

“Greatest of beings, source of life !”

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## READINGS.

### I.—LOVE.

IN listening to an extremely familiar passage from the first letter of Paul the Apostle to his Corinthian congregation, which I shall purposely put into extremely unfamiliar words, in order to divert your minds from the mere sound to the sense conveyed, it is as well to recall the context. Much confusion, as was natural, prevailed in all the early christian congregations as soon as the founder's back was turned, and the necessity of correcting it gave rise to those letters which are the earliest and most authentic records of the christian movement that we possess. Among other troubles in Corinth, every man seems to have thought himself as good a teacher as any other, save of course the founder Paul, who therefore strove in his first letter to convince them of their mistake and induce them to work as *parts* of a commonwealth of which there was only one real head, Jesus himself, in whose ideal image Paul always sank his own personality. For this purpose, he first applied the well-known analogy of the body and its members, and then went on to the following purport (i. Cor. xii., 27, to xiii., 13) :—

“You form collectively Christ's body upon earth, and each of you individually is one of its members. Some of us by God's disposition are apostles, others preachers, teachers, sign-workers, healers, directors, speakers in various tongues. Are all apostles, or all preachers, or all teachers, or all sign-workers, or all healers? Can all speak in various tongues, or can all interpret what is spoken in unknown tongues? It is certainly the duty of each individual to do his best to be fitted for the best offices, but I will shew you a far superior method.

“If I were to speak all human and divine languages, and had not *love*, my words would be worthless tinkling. If I had the highest powers of preaching, if I understood all mysteries, had

gained all knowledge, or had mountain-moving faith, but had not *love*, I should be a mere nothing. I might bestow all my goods to feed the hungry, or deliver my body to the torturer, yet without *love*, I should have done nothing. *Love* is long-suffering and kind. *Love* knows neither envy nor jealousy, makes no display nor boasting, behaves decently, insists not on rights, checks anger, suspects not evil, has no sympathy with injustice but much with truth; hides, believes, hopes, endures everything.

“*Love* is never wanting. Preachings shall fail, languages shall cease, knowledge shall die out; (our knowledge is partial and our preaching power is partial, and their partial character will not cease till perfection appears. When I was a child, I spake, I thought, I reasoned as a child, but when I became a man I put aside my childish ways. In the same way our vision now is an enigmatical reflection, but hereafter we shall see face to face. That is to say, my knowledge is now partial, but hereafter I shall know as I am known). The power that we now possess, then, will pass away, but whatever else fails, three things abide, belief, hope, *love*. And the greatest of these is *love*.”

## II.—DESIGN.

Brief extracts from the three first chapters of Dr. William Paley's "Natural Theology," (originally published in 1802) for the purpose of shewing the nature of his argument. A large quantity of intermediate matter has been omitted for brevity, but nothing is added.

“In crossing a heath, suppose I pitched my foot against a *stone*, and were asked how the stone came to be there: I might possibly answer, that, for anything I knew to the contrary, it had lain there for ever; nor would it perhaps be very easy to shew the absurdity of this answer. But suppose I had found a *watch* upon the ground, and it should be inquired how the watch hap-



pened to be in that place: I should hardly think of the answer I had before given—that, for anything I knew, the watch might have been always there. Yet why should not this answer serve for the watch as well as for the stone? Why is it not as admissible in the second case as in the first? For this reason, and for no other, namely, that, when we come to inspect the watch, we perceive (what we could not discover in the stone) that its several parts are framed and put together for a purpose; for example, that they are so formed and adjusted as to produce motion, and that motion so regulated as to point out the hour of the day; that if the different parts had been differently shaped from what they are, of a different size to what they are, or placed in any other order than that in which they are placed, either no motion at all would have been carried on in the machine, or none which would have answered the use that is now served by it. This mechanism being observed, (it requires indeed an examination of the instrument, and perhaps some previous knowledge of the subject to perceive and understand it; but being once, as we have said, observed and understood,) the inference, we think, is inevitable, that the watch must have had a maker: that there must have existed, at some time, and at some place or other, an artificer or artificers who formed it for the purpose which we find it actually to answer; who comprehended its construction, and designed its use.

Nor would it, I apprehend, weaken the conclusion, that we had never seen a watch made; that we had never known an artist capable of making one; that we were altogether incapable of executing such a piece of workmanship ourselves, or of understanding in what manner it was performed; all this being no more than what is true of some exquisite remains of ancient art, of some lost arts, and, to the generality of mankind, of the more curious productions of modern manufacture.

Neither, secondly, would it invalidate our conclusion, that the

watch sometimes went wrong, or that it seldom went exactly right. The purpose of the machinery, the design, and the designer, might be evident, and in the case supposed would be evident, in whatever way we accounted for the irregularity of the movement, or whether we could account for it or not. It is not necessary that a machine be perfect, in order to shew with what design it was made : still less necessary, where the only question is, whether it was made with any design at all.

Neither, lastly, would our observer be driven out of his conclusion, or from his confidence in its truth, by being told that he knew nothing at all about the matter. He knows enough for his argument : he knows the utility of the end : he knows the subserviency and adaptation of the means to the end. These points being known, his ignorance of other points, his doubts concerning other points, affect not the certainty of his reasoning. The consciousness of knowing little need not beget a distrust of that which he does know.

Suppose, in the next place, that the person who found the watch should, after some time, discover that, in addition to all the properties which he had hitherto observed in it, it possessed the unexpected property of producing in the course of its movement, another watch like itself (the thing is conceivable) ; that it contained within it a mechanism, a system of parts, a mould for instance, or a complex adjustment of lathes, files, and other tools evidently and separately calculated for this purpose.

The conclusion which the *first* examination of the watch, of its works, construction, and movements, suggested was, that it must have had, for the cause and author of that construction an artificer, who understood its mechanism and designed its use. This conclusion is invincible. A *second* examination presents us with a new discovery. The watch is found, in the course of its movement, to produce another watch, similar to itself ; and not

only so, but we perceive in it a system or organisation, separately calculated for that purpose. What effect would this discovery have, or ought it to have, upon our former inference? What, but to increase, beyond measure, our admiration of the skill which had been employed in the formation of such a machine! Or shall it, instead of this, all at once turn us round to an opposite conclusion—namely, that no art or skill whatever has been concerned in the business, although all other evidences of art and skill remain as they were, and this last and supreme piece of art be now added to the rest? Can this be maintained without absurdity?

Yet this is atheism.

This is atheism; for every indication of contrivance, every manifestation of design which existed in the watch exists in the works of nature; with the difference on the side of nature of being greater and more, and that in a degree which exceeds all computation. I mean that the contrivances of nature surpass the contrivances of art in the complexity, subtlety, and curiosity of the mechanism; and still more, if possible, do they go beyond them in number and variety; yet, in a multitude of cases, are not less evidently mechanical, not less evidently contrivances, not less evidently accommodated to their end, or suited to their office, than are the most perfect productions of human ingenuity.



# THE WAY TO GOD.

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## A MEDITATION.

“LITTLE CHILDREN !” said the dying Elder, “Little children ! Love one another.” “If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar ; for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also.” (1 John iv., 20, 21.)

The way to God is through the heart of man !

Not by metaphysical subtleties, where man turneth his eye inwards to see outwards, can he hope to reach God.

Not by theological subtleties, where man vainly strives to fix in words what his mind has failed to grasp, can he hope to reach God.

Not by creeds and anathemas, where the empty words of theology are crystallised into a charm or a curse, can man hope to reach God.

Not by fasting and penance, where man would fain purchase future bliss by present pain, and mount to heaven by trampling down earth, can he hope to reach God.

Not by fervent prayer, where man vainly beseeches God to modify eternal laws for temporary ends, can he hope to reach God.

Not by deep and persistent scientific research, where the head is awake but the heart sleeps, can man hope to reach God.

The way to God is through the heart of man!

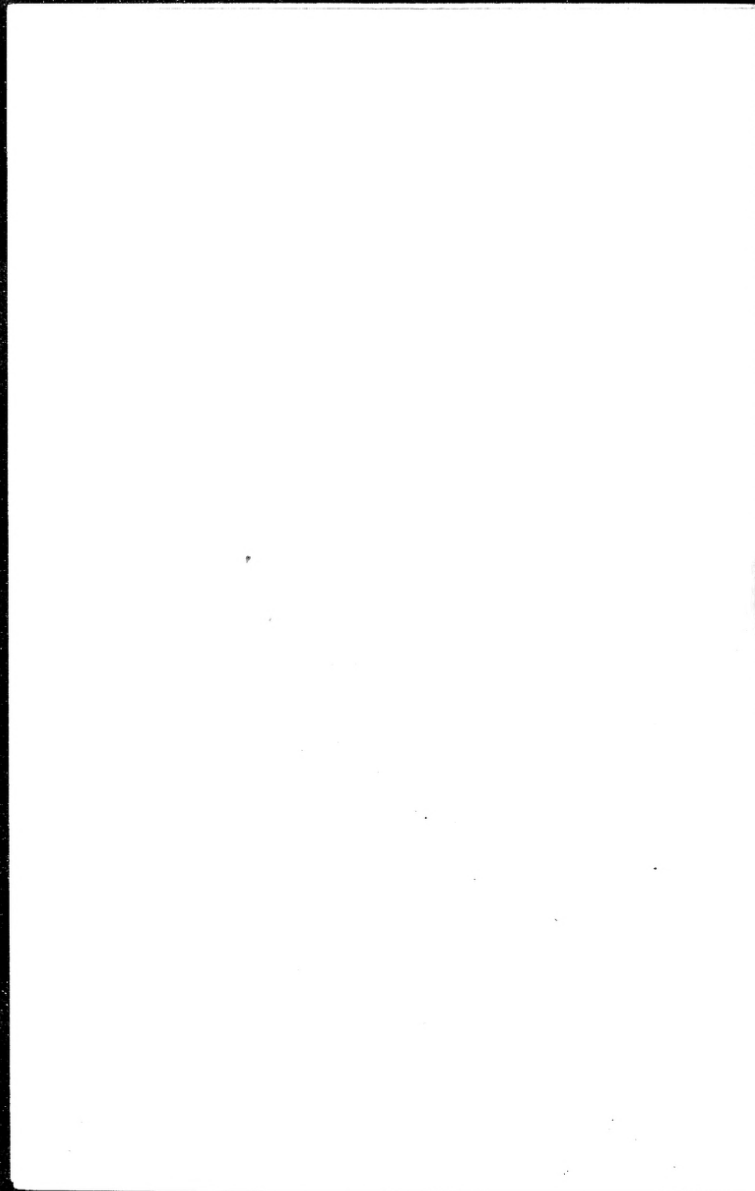
By mixing with his fellow-men; by learning the wants of all; by working within his limited circle towards the general well-being; by identifying himself with his race; by feeling that he is above all, and through all, a man, manly, and is only as a man capable of effecting aught; by gathering into a focus those scattered beams of human sympathy which we know as love; by giving practical direction to vague aspirations for improvement; by living for himself but as a part of others, and for others as for himself; by reaching the heart of his fellow-men; thus only can man hope to reach God.

If man look beyond the present life and indulge in dreams of a future eternity of well-being, let him not think of saving his own soul without his brother's, let him not expect to enter heaven by a password, let him not contemplate for a moment the revellers at the lightsome feast within, and the teeth-gnashers in the darksome pit without. The heart of man rejects the contrast, and through the heart of man alone can man reach God.



Let not man seek to know the counsels of God. Man is of the earth, earthy ; it is at once his badge and his star. What future may be in reserve for our race none can forecast. If those who have searched most widely are to be followed most readily, we have been evolved from very humble beginnings, and may have a much nobler hereafter. But the future depends on the present as the present on the past. No nobler hereafter is possible, if the present fail in its part. That part is to develop present man ; not to despise him as worthless, and fix all thought on the super-human. Here is our work, and through it our future. The heart of man, is man's noblest organ on earth. Through the heart of man alone, can he hope to reach God.

“ Little children !” said the dying Elder, “ Love one another !”



## “THE DYER’S HAND.”

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WALKING through a street in Kensington some time ago, I saw a man without his coat, and with his shirt-sleeves tucked up to the elbows, talking quietly with another man, now putting one hand in his pocket, now stroking his chin with the other, evidently in utter unconsciousness or forgetfulness that his exposed hands and arms were different from other men’s. But to me at a distance there was something frightful in seeing such ordinary living motions performed by hands and arms which had that green tinge we learn to associate with putridity. That shiny green arm, those dead-like fingers that moved with such unnatural life, were a shock to all my sense of the fitness of things. As I came near, the mystery cleared itself up in the most prosaic fashion—as all mysteries are apt to do. I passed before a dye-house, and had been watching the dyer.

Instantly there came full on my mind that (hundred and eleventh) sonnet of Shakspeare, of which a few

words are so familiar, though the context is little known. Shakspeare laments and excuses his "public manners" as due to the "public means" by which Fortune had provided for his life, and exclaims:—

Thence comes it that my name receives a brand,  
And almost, thence, my nature is subdued  
To what it works in, like the dyer's hand.

That dyer's hand, tinged with the most ghastly and inhuman hue, generated by the dye-vat in which it had worked, and yet moving all unconsciously as if nothing ailed it, was by a single stroke of Shakspeare's pen raised into being the most significant symbol of men's thoughts and feelings, "subdued to what they work in," the inherited environment, the geographical environment, the social environment, which colour them so completely that they live in total unconsciousness of their own peculiarity, though they are acutely conscious of the different tinge imparted by a neighbouring dye-vat.

Oh, how few are there among us—are there indeed any among us?—I don't mean among the handful of people here assembled, but among the whole circle of humanity,—who can say, as Shakspeare said, that their nature is only "almost" subdued! How many of us can from our own hearts, from our own knowledge that we *are* dyed and must be cleansed, echo the fervent wish of the poet, and exclaim:—

Pity me then and wish I were renewed ,  
 Whilst like a willing patient, I will drink  
 Potions of eisel\* 'gainst my strong infection ;  
 No bitterness that I will bitter think,  
 Nor double penance, to correct correction !

No! dyed through and through, green-blooded to the heart's core, and not merely on the surface of our skin ; we persist in thinking green-blood to be the only blood, and are shocked at the unnatural redness of another's. We may laugh at that lady in the story who was struck with the remarkable fact that wherever she went, whatever society she entered, whatever subject she discussed, no one was in the right but herself ; yet the only difference between her and most of us is, that she ventured to say so ; we are silent, but only think the more steadfastly with the Mahometan carpenter, who replied to Francis New-

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\* Also spelled *esile* and *eysell*, meaning *vinegar*, a common disinfectant. Old French *aisil*, *aissil*, *aizil*, *arzil*, *esil*. The form *aisil* has even crept into Anglo-Saxon, which, however, has the older form, *eced*. All are supposed to come from the Latin *acētum* (vinegar). Shakspeare puts "drinking eisel" among practical impossibilities. See Hamlet, Act 5, scene 1, speech 106,

Shew me what thou'lt do !  
 Woo't weep ? woo't fight ? woo't fast ? woo't tear thyself ?  
 Woo't drink up eisel ? eat a crocodile ?  
 I'll do't.

man's attempts at conversion: "God has given you to know much, but not the true faith."\*

The dye which tinges our every thought and feeling is most general and most "fast," hardest to be discharged by argument, or to assume a different hue, when it is rooted in the language which we speak, and has thus become ingrained in thought. We learn then inevitably to think under its influence. The whole inheritance of preceding human thought comes to us tinged with the same dye. The very threads by which we would weave the tissue of our own meditations, instead of being susceptible of every hue, so

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\* The story thus reduced to an allusion, is worth giving at length: "While we were at Aleppo I one day got into religious discourse with a Mohammedan carpenter, which left on me a lasting impression. Among other matters I was peculiarly desirous of disabusing him of the current notion of his people that our Gospels are spurious narratives of late date. I found great difficulty of expression, but the man listened to me with much attention, and I was encouraged to exert myself. He waited patiently till I had done, and then spoke to the following effect:—'I will tell you, sir, how the case stands. God has given to you English a great many good gifts. You make fine ships and sharp penknives, and good cloth and cottons; and you have rich nobles and brave soldiers; and you write and print many learned books: (dictionaries and grammars :) all this is of God. But there is one thing which God has withheld from you and has revealed to us, and that is the knowledge of the true religion, by which one may be saved.' When he thus ignored my argument (which was probably quite unintelligible to him),



that the pattern may shine bright and pure, beautiful and true, as we conceived it was conceived, are so dulled by their previous dye, that the result, true as it may look to our jaundiced eye, is false to every one whose vision is truer. The few, the very few, who, conscious of the radical unfitness of their material for the effect they would produce, seek to mould it by limiting the signification of current words, or inventing new to embody their new thoughts, preach too often to the winds, or worse,—not understood at all, or misunderstood,—so that the thinker soon finds reason to wonder, not that man knows so little, but that he knows anything, not that a man so often misconceives another's thoughts, but that he ever approaches to a conception of what they really are. I am using no hyperbole, I am stating a sober conclusion which

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and delivered his simple protest, I was silenced, and at the same time amused. But the more I thought it over the more instruction I saw in the case. His position towards me was exactly that of a humble Christian towards an unbelieving philosopher; nay, that of the early Apostles or Jewish prophets towards the proud, cultivated, worldly-wise, and powerful heathen. This not only showed the vanity of any argument to him, except one purely addressed to his moral and spiritual faculties; but it also indicated to me that ignorance has its spiritual self-sufficiency as well as erudition; and that if there is a Pride of Reason, so there is a Pride of Unreason."—*Phases of Faith; or Passages from the History of My Creed.* By Francis William Newman. Sixth edition, 1860, p. 32.

years of thought and observation have forced upon me, and which, having often previously stated I find as I live, only more reason to adopt,—when I say that probably no man does understand any other man. The vision of our mind's eye is too deeply affected, the dye upon our mind's hand is too ingrained, our language is clothed with too patched a harlequin suit, for us clearly to express or clearly to seize what is expressed. Only those who have aimed at precision, and have hopelessly failed, or have laboured conscientiously but vainly to enter into the thoughts of one who himself has aimed at precision, can fully comprehend how utterly our nature is subdued to what it works in, like the dyer's hand !

Our first observations, as children, are directed to objects of sensation. It is only by storing up our hazy memories of individual impressions that we, in course of time, very clumsily and defectively group together the immediate results of sensation into aggregates, which seem to us the same as those indicated by the words we hear from others. Subsequent knowledge, which in its full force is the lot of but a few special observers, teaches us that every one of those individual sensations is altogether vague and wanting in precision ; and that we cannot thoroughly depend even upon regaining the same sensations in ourselves, —nay, I may almost say, that we can only thoroughly depend upon never regaining them. All natural

philosophers know,—I am saying nothing new, I am merely repeating the very alphabet of science,—that sensations do not repeat themselves, that when they are registered by the most cunning devices of man, each registration differs from its fellow, and that we can deal only with averages and not with individuals. There are some of the fixed stars, whose position it is so important for science to determine, that they have been observed by hosts of the most competent men through many years. Yet we know that it would be more surprising for any two determinations to agree than for all to differ, and that what we conventionally assign as their real place is only an average drawn by most refined methods of calculation from an examination of discrepant data, and though assumed to be true for the present, is acknowledged to be liable to subsequent correction. By means of these positions thus assigned, an observer learns to determine his own personal liability to error,\* and knows that that liability itself fluctuates with the state of his health; nay, with the length of time since he was roused from sleep, or since his last meal; and he then contrives to allow for such errors in subsequent observations. Yet merely seeing a point of light, like a fixed star, disappear behind an opaque bar, such as a telescopic cobweb, is an observation of extreme simplicity com-

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\* Known as his "personal equation."

pared with those by which we obtain the most ordinary notions of external objects in common life. And if each observer is known to differ from others, and even from himself in a matter of such extreme simplicity, what trust can we have that our individual sensations are comparable with our neighbours, and still more that our groupings of those sensations accurately, or even approximately, correspond to those of our neighbours, in the extremely complex determination of the commonest objects which form our environment?

But these are only starting points. The greater part of our thoughts and reasonings are occupied with matters which cannot be made the subject of direct observation. It is only in its rudest condition, therefore, that our language consists of mere names of groups of sensations, such as man, tree, house, land, water, give, take, black, white, light, heavy, and so forth. To give some sort of vent to our bursting thoughts, to convey them however vaguely and indeterminately, we are forced to resort to those half-felt, imperfect, often wholly inadequate, misleading analogies, which we call metaphors. A term used in our own individual sense, according to our own individual experience for some object or act appreciable by direct sensation, is transferred to another merely meditational object or act, some inward feeling, which we know to have no real connection with the first, but which we vaguely connect with it, as we vaguely see human

features in a bright coal fire. And then we boldly use that term when speaking to others without any security either that their sensations derived from the external objects were originally the same as ours, or that their inward connection of those sensations with the thought and feeling which we desire to excite in them, may, will, or can have any resemblance to our own. And thus the maze of language goes on to confusion worse confounded, the dye in our vats becomes more and more muddy, and the hand that stirs them more and more hopelessly bemessed.

When the Elohist or Jehovist spake of God's eye, God's hand, God's outstretched arm, God's image, he had in his mind, no doubt, a real tangible, living eye, hand, arm, and image. The God of the Jehovist really walked in the garden of Eden in the cool of the day, and Adam and Eve could really hear his voice, and attempt to hide—to hide!—from him among the trees (Gen. iii. 8). When the God of the Elohist created man in his own image (Gen. i. 27), the Elohist himself, as has been truly said, created God in the image of man, and so thoroughly in that image, that the God of his creation was, like a man, weary with his own work of creation, and had to rest on the seventh day from all the work which he had made (Gen. ii. 2). To us, now and here, and to the more intelligent preachers throughout Christendom, such words are mere transparent metaphors, by which we vainly



endeavour—how vainly but few consider—to prefigure the unfigurable. But they are all dangerous. They are so thoroughly human that they unconsciously sway the mind to accept God as a mere exaggerated man. The pygmy that can barely descry the giant's toes seeks to dogmatise on the giant's whole structure. The dyer's hand finds its own colour in what the dyer wantonly dares to term a hand. The finite raises its own mental scale to gauge the Infinite!

The Infinite! How easy to say; how hard to conceive! On this day, in thousands of pulpits throughout our own land, and in other thousands of Christian congregations, men will be standing up and telling of God's infinitude, arguing from his infinite power, his infinite wrath, his infinite mercy in allowing his infinite wrath to be infinitely appeased by the infinite sacrifice of himself in a finite form at the hands of Roman soldiers instigated by Jewish priests and a Jewish rabble, before his own infinite self, and running over the other changes of infinity which fall so glibly from their tongue, but which have absolutely no root in their intellect. Nay, of that they are proud. They can know all about the powers, the acts, the results of infinity. They can tell you what infinity, so far forth as being infinity, can, will, and must do, without having even the shadow of a conception to put behind the word. The mathematician and the natural philosopher have to deal constantly



with the ever-increasing and the ever-diminishing, and many of our preachers (very far from all) have had to bend their minds when young to such considerations. But with most of them it has been mere cram, stuff to be blurted out in an examination, and then forgotten. Yet here, and here only, have we the least hope of arriving at any practical conceptions of a matter which all religious teachers are apt to treat with easy, self-complacent confidence. The course of my own studies during many years, from opening manhood to the present day, has often brought me face to face with this problem of infinity, so well known to all real mathematicians, in the simplest of all relations, number and space. I have been compelled to give it long, continuous, and reiterated consideration; to ponder over it for weeks and months at a time; to read and study what the best heads had written of it; to endeavour by every means in my power to catch some clue to its real nature; to render my thoughts precise by writing and re-writing; to see how, at least, the effects of infinity might be safely inferred, or its laws partly divined; to comprehend, if it be possible, the infinite in the finite, the description of an endlessly increasing path with an endlessly increasing velocity in a strictly limited time; to see in my mind's eye the relations of various orders of the infinitely great and the infinitely small; in short, to bridge the great gulf between the discontinuous and

the continuous. I need scarcely tell you that I have not done what I have found no other man has done, but I have had a deep conviction of the limits of human power forced upon myself. The matters with which I dealt were not those highly complex, ill-defined, worse comprehended conceptions which form the staple of theology. They were the very simplest conceptions which the human mind can form with any approach to precision. And the result? Did I seem to come nearer to the goal? Nay, was I not rather like the voyager who day after day sees the same hard circle of horizon limiting his vision, till he misdoubts the very motion of his ship? Or like the mountaineer who briskly begins his route to top the crest before him, and, that reached, finds only another and steeper there he had not previously divined, and, topping that, another and another, till poor "Excelsior" falls exhausted by the way? And this, where the road has been marked out with so much skill by minds far above my own, minds which are the very guiding stars of all human thought.\* What, then, of matters where all is guess, where no road is known, where the trackless ocean spreads without a compass, where the traveller is involved in the deepest gorges without power to see or to divine how to scale their precipitous cliffs? When shall we learn the lesson of the Titans, and

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\* Such as Newton and Leibnitz.

know the fate of those who would scale heaven by piling the Pēlion of presumption on the Ossa of ignorance?\*

But while we all, at least I hope all whom I address, acutely feel the purely metaphorical application of terms implying human form, or any part of the human form, to the inapproachable object of all human thought, yet we are apt, even the wisest and best of all mankind are apt, to be led astray by human language,—the inheritance derived from men who held to a literally humanesque personality of the Deity,—when the terms do not imply bodily form, but the best and least corporeal functions of humanity,—thought, will, love. We may be, I believe we are, speaking the highest and noblest thing which man can say of God, when we declare that God is Love; but let us never forget that such language is purely anthropomorphic in its origin, and must be held purely metaphorical in its application. If we seek to drive it home, to make God Love as we alone know love, we do not raise man to God, but degrade God

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\* The Titans are here, as usual, confounded with the Giants who were said to have scaled heaven. "Thrice," says Virgil, *Georgics*, book I., vv. 281-3, "thrice they endeavoured to pile Mount Ossa on to Pēlion, and roll the woody Olympus on to Ossa; thrice father Jove with his lightning threw down the mountains they had reared." See also Ovid's *Metamorphōsēs*, book I., vv. 152-5.

to man. What is the love we know, the love which alone we can have in mind when we apply the term, as the outcome of all the best we can conceive, to the Inconceivable itself? Turn to that glowing description of love by the noble Paul, that passage to which every heart instinctively reverts which has once beaten at its sound, and see how thoroughly human, how utterly un-Godlike, it is in its every part. Reject the negatives, which constitute the main portion of the description, as the painter cannot suggest light but by the accumulation of shade, and see with what reality we can say that God, like love, suffereth long and is kind, rejoiceth in or with the truth, beareth all, believeth all, hopeth all, endureth all (1 Cor. xiii. 4, 6, 7.) A man, dependent man, may do this. But how can we even magnify long-suffering, kindness, delight at the discovery of truth, endurance, belief, hope, into any conception of God which is not purely human? Let us know that it is only our own helplessness which leads us to say that God is Love! and that these words are but the faintest possible glimmer of that far-off light which we hope we may forefeel, but certainly can never actually perceive. Let us beware of pushing home an analogy which has already led to the revolting conception of a devil, of a power antagonistic to the Unassailable, to account for what our human conception of love cannot contain. Mark how limited is that conception! Strong between one

man and another, love weakens as the circle widens. In the family and clan it often mixes up with feelings of merely personal dignity. Towards the nation, even when strongest and purest, its character is wholly and completely changed. And when extended to the whole of mankind, it dwindles down to a very faint glow indeed. Often mixed with this love is the strongest antipathy, the haughtiest contempt, the most transparent selfishness. Look at the international relations which have convulsed Europe and America, even within the memory of the youngest adult here present! But extend your heart to the lower animals, to the living but insentient vegetable, to the inorganic kingdom, and, by slow degrees, love dwindles to nonentity. Then think what part the whole of this earth, with all that it contains, plays in that great universe of bodies which the telescope reveals, compared to many of which our whole solar system is as nothing, nay, perhaps, our whole stellar system but insignificant. But all these are God's; all these may, like the earth, swarm with a life, an intelligence, a love, unlike the earth's indeed, but, if any twilight notion we can form of God be even remotely correct, as much bound up with God as our own puny selves. And then, straining our minds to grasp this mighty conception, let us again ask ourselves what resemblance can that Love which we call God, have to that human conception which alone fills our minds



when we utter the word Love on earth? It is not to disparage, but to appreciate, not to lower, but to elevate, not to put aside God as a loveless, emotionless stone of an Epicurean deity, but to widen our minds and hearts to some vague panting hope that the Ineffable may warm us into some power of feeling what we can neither conceive nor utter, that I venture to call your attention to the utter inadequacy of man's noblest formula : God is Love !

But the dyer's hand is still more apparent in the moulding of another conception, which it was my principal object to bring before your notice, and which will occupy the rest of the time for which I can venture to claim your attention. Every lip is ready to speak of God's "design;" of God's will, purpose, intention, final cause, motive; of the reasons which induce him to make things as they are; of the plan of the universe and the changes or amendments ("new dispensations" is the favourite term) which he has introduced into it; of his scheme of redemption (which, by-the-bye, seems to be conceived as occasionally thwartable); of his contrivances to produce certain effects; of his elaborate system of rewards and punishments to keep the world in order (which, however, altogether fails because he has not succeeded in keeping the Devil in order); of his mechanical knowledge in availing himself of the properties of bones and tissues in organisation; and so



on, and so on, from the philosopher to the clown, from Darwin, whom the necessities of language oblige to speak of the purpose, intention, use of certain organs, to the poet's "pampered goose," who finds man created to feed him. Now, before we proceed to consider this preposterous nonsense, which would not be worth a moment's thought if it had not such a profoundly distorting effect on our mental vision when directed to the greatest of all subjects, let us inquire what is the human meaning of the principal word throughout this Babel, which I have placed first in order, because it is the key to all the rest. What is the human meaning of "design"? Clearly, it is only by knowing human design that we can infer creative design, and a little consideration will shew that there cannot be even a remote analogy between the two. To *design* was originally *to mark out, to trace out*, as the boundary of a city was traced out by a plough, but it very early acquired in Rome, where the word is indigenous, that metaphorical meaning in which it is generally employed. A man designs a machine—Paley's watch, for example—what has he done? He has himself, or through his predecessors, discovered the laws of geometry, the properties of circles, the power exerted by a metal spring in uncoiling, the difference of that power according to the thickness and length of the spring, and the kind of metal composing it, especially the tempering of the metal, and

the isochronous vibrations of thin and highly tempered springs, with various other properties of toothed wheels and levers, which I need not stay to describe. Now observe, he has *discovered* all this, he has *invented* nothing as yet. What he wants to do is to make a rod, the hand of his watch, move round in a circle at a rate bearing an exact relation to the rate at which the earth revolves on its axis, which revolution he has also discovered, not invented. Seizing, then, on the fact of the isochronous vibration of a hair-spring when properly weighted and properly jogged, he puts these parts together so that these properties (which he did not make, nor invent, but only discovered), acting according to the laws of geometry and mechanics (which again he did not make, nor invent, but only discovered), may really produce the required result. Observe, too, that his knowledge of the laws of this action is imperfect ; there are certain properties of expansion and contraction with heat, which he has not become sufficiently familiar with, or known how to bring into destructive opposition ; there are certain difficulties in cutting geometrical figures truly in metal which he cannot entirely overcome ; so that his watch is at best a very imperfect affair requiring daily correction by observations—themselves more or less imperfect—on the presumably invariable motion of the earth. This is human design. All man's part is to find the materials, the laws of their action, and the laws by

which they can be connected ; nothing else whatever. He puts them together, and we say that that grand abstraction, "nature," does the rest. Now, if we apply this to God, we see that some other god must have made the materials, and their laws, and the laws of their connection, and that he merely puts them together ! What a degrading conception ! The great God, the expression of utter boundlessness, a mechanical drudge, a piecer of other gods' goods ! Shame on man that he ever inculcated such a doctrine ! Shame on those natural theologians who would found our very reason for believing in the existence of God on such transparent fallacies, which can be knocked down like nine-pins by the first bowl of a cunning atheist !

But the conception recurs again and again. Even natural philosophers, as distinct from natural theologians, become occasionally involved in its meshes. Professor Tyndall, in the second of his series of lectures on Heat and Light, which he delivered at the Royal Institution in 1872, brought forward a notable instance, widely accepted, and hesitatingly admitted by even the founder of that Institution, Count Rumford, for the purpose of shewing how utterly fallacious and presumptuous it is, like Phaethōn to guide the horses of the Sun. Water, as every one who has learned anything about its properties is aware, is liquid at ordinary temperatures, and

as it is cooled down to about 40 deg. Fahrenheit, regularly and gradually contracts like the column of mercury in the thermometer. But then a change ensues. Increase the cold towards freezing and the mercury continues to contract, but the water expands, till at freezing it becomes solid ice, occupying much more space than the water whence it was generated, as most householders have learned from broken water-pipes. Hence, as the water cools to 40 deg., it sinks to the bottom of any pond, lake or river, because it is heavier, but after 40 deg., and up to and after its becoming ice, it is lighter and floats on the top, presenting a pad against the cold, and hence keeping the water liquid below, and preventing the whole mass from becoming one solid lump, destroying all possibility of life within it. The importance of this property to the inhabitants of temperate and arctic regions is manifest. Without it these climes could not be inhabited by man or any other animal, as now constituted. No other liquid was known to possess the same properties. What so natural, then, as to say that God in his providence *designed* this solitary exception from the universal law of contractility by cold, for the benefit and preservation of man? And men *have* said so one after another. The fact is so striking, the relation to man, in regions where ice can form, so clear, that the boldest denier of God's providence—generally somebody extremely ignorant—would be shaken

when its bearing was made clear. But in the first place, the fact clearly could not affect those parts of the world where ice never forms, and in the second place, at a time when the present arctic and temperate regions bore tropical vegetation, this law also did not affect them, though as yet man was not to be found on the face of the earth; and, lastly, this is *not* a solitary exception. When bismuth is sufficiently heated it becomes fluid, and as heat is withdrawn that fluid also first contracts and then expands, although no relations between this phenomenon and the life of man can be traced. The whole argument was, therefore, one from ignorance to ignorance, and its present value is to shew how dangerous, nay, how illogical, how thoughtless it is, from an isolated circumstance, which could only have local value, to infer a general proposition of a totally different character about a totally unknown relation. The preacher who is reported to have found a special providence in the fact (which he deemed universal) that great rivers flowed by great cities, did not more burlesque the ways of God to man than he who founded an argument for God's special care of our race on that other remarkable and more real property of water.

The proof of design is now generally sought for in organisation, and not in the inanimate world. Paley "pitched his foot" unconcernedly against the "stone" he found on the heath; for anything he knew, as he



says, it might have lain there for ever. When he was writing this, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, geology was practically an unknown science, or he might have found a history in the stone which would have led him to the conception of epochs of creation preparing the way for man, gravel collected here to be subsequently dug up, coal gathered there storing up the sun's heat for man's benefit hereafter, perhaps the very mammoths would have been found made to yield ivory or bone manure for future generations. Again he was no chemist, or he might have dwelled much on the chemical constitution of his stone, and its remarkable adaptation for man's future habitations. He was no natural philosopher, or he might have dwelled on its specific gravity, and the wonderful contrivance by which, though water is lighter and more mobile than rock, the dry land could appear for man's existence. In short, he was only a not very learned theologian, who, recommended by his bishop to turn his thoughts to the argument from design, crammed up his subjects, and, more or less correctly—never with the grasp of real knowledge—wove them into a treatise, with the valuable assistance, as we have lately learned, of a French book on the same subject.\* He was a good plain writer, and, his half

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\* This last piece of information has been added since this discourse was delivered. The information was given in the *Academy* or *Athenæum* at the end of 1875 or beginning of 1876, but unfor-

knowledge enabling him to skim over all difficulties, he has produced a seductive book, which has done an immense amount of harm in deteriorating our conceptions of God, and in leading Englishmen to notions thoroughly anthropomorphic in content, though avoiding anthropomorphism in appearance. But the problem of design in older times, when organisation was less understood, was treated with especial reference to the subordination of the inorganic to the use of man. The Elohist, ignorant that rain was formed in clouds but slightly distant from our earth, placed the "extension," (as the Hebrew word means which we translate "firmament") called "heaven," to divide the seas from the rain; and put the sun above us in this same firmament to rule the day, and the moon to rule the night (when it was visible), and that wondrous multitude of other suns, among which our own is only a third or fourth rate body, he brought in parenthetically, as "the stars also," their chief "use" being, of course, "for signs and for seasons, for days and for years," that is, for man to reckon seed time and harvest by. The continual addition that God saw that it was "good," naturally implies that it was effected for a

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tunately I neglected to make a note at the time, and have been unable to recover the reference. It was stated, however, that the resemblance between the French work and Paley's was very close, and that even the incident of the "watch" is due to the French original. August, 1876.



certain purpose or design beneficial to man (Gen. chap. i.) All this has gradually gone out. Copernican astronomy dissipated the reference of all celestial bodies to man. Geology and natural philosophy ousted design from inanimate objects. But organisation remained, and remains a stronghold.

Who can regard the human eye, the lens, the retina, the chamber through which the beams pass, the diaphragm of the iris, the varying aperture of the pupil, without, in these photographic days especially, being forcibly reminded of the object glass, the sensitised plate, the camera, the movable diaphragm? And as all these latter are known to be the works of design, based upon laws of light as regards its refraction through glass, and its chemical action, what is more natural for the mind just receiving the idea, than to jump to the conclusion, that, as man adapted the camera, so God adapted the eye to the laws of light? True; *but* for the laws of light the eye would not see. We might almost feel inclined to say that light was invented for the eye. But the Elohist having placed light at the earliest epoch (before the sun and the stars, indeed, whence comes all the light, even the so-called artificial light that we know), no theologer would hit upon this conception, which is not a bit more extravagant than that the sun was made to rule the day, which, therefore, must have existed before the sun. But here, as in the moral government of

the world (which religion had to supplement by a devil), we run great danger, if we press the argument home, of imagining the Unerring to be as great a bungler as poor, designing, fractionally informed man. If the eye was "designed" for sight, why should so many exquisite "contrivances" exist for defeating that object? Why should this man be born blind, why should an Egyptian sun make that man sightless, why should the focal power of the lens be often—generally, I may say—so ill adapted to the position of the retina, that no distinct image can be formed till man's knowledge of the laws of optics has taught him the effect of lenses of glass, and how to grind them? The man is yet alive who first found what form of lens should be given to remedy a not uncommon, but hitherto unsuspected defect existing in his own eye, and now generally known to oculists. If the Jews could ask, in order to explain a certain man's blindness, "Who did sin, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" are we right in parodying the answer, and replying, "Neither has the Astronomer-Royal sinned, nor his parents; but he was born with astigmatic vision,\* that the works of God should be made

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\* A point of light is seen in correct vision as a single point, but in astigmatic vision (*a* not, *stigma*, a point), it is seen as a line of very perceptible length. If any one looks at himself in the hollow or projection of a bright silver table-spoon he sees the effect of astigmatism, which prolongs or shortens objects, as his

manifest in him?" (John ix., 2, 3.) Do not such phrases grate on every soul attuned to God-like harmony? And what shall we say of the colour-blind for whom no cure has been devised, but who as railway porters on land, or as the look-out at sea, may imperil or destroy hundreds of lives in a moment by confusing green with red?\* The man most capable

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own face, according to the position in which the spoon is held. The Astronomer-Royal, Sir George Biddell Airy, when a professor at Cambridge, used to relate to his class (of which I was a member) how he detected the nature of the error in his own eyes, and calculated the proper shape of the lenses (cylindrical and not spherical) for his spectacles to correct the defect, and how he found it impossible for years to get any optician who would undertake to grind them. Now the malformation is well known and studied, and several oculists (as Liebreich, Bowman, &c.) are prepared to measure the error, often very complicated, and order the construction of proper lenses. It is also found that many eyes, with correct vision when young, became astigmatic with age. Dr. Liebreich considers this to have been the cause of the extraordinary vertical lengthening in the drawing of objects introduced into Turner's latest pictures.

\* See "Researches on Colour-blindness, with a supplement on the danger attending the Present System of Railway and Marine Coloured Signals," by the late Prof. George Wilson, of Edinburgh, 1855. "The great majority of the colour-blind distinguish two of the primary colours, *yellow* and *blue*, but they err with the third *red*, which they confound with *green*, with *brown*, with *grey*, with *drab*, and occasionally with other colours; and not unfrequently *red* is invisible to them, or appears *black*,"

of passing an opinion on any point of physiological optics, the great physiologist, physicist, and mathematician, Helmholtz, who had devoted many years of study to this special subject, and written a classical work upon it, says, of the human eye, as Professor Clifford has told us (*Macmillan's Magazine*, October, 1872, p. 507, col. 2): "If an optician sent me that as an instrument, I should send it back to him with grave reproaches for the carelessness of his work, and demand the return of my money."\* Is there, indeed, a single organ in the human body ordinarily so perfect that it needs no help from man? On what do our physicians and surgeons live? Was disease part of God's design for the doctor's benefit, or was it a punishment for the patient's sin? And how can we avoid that last old Judaic notion if we see design in everything? Aye, but to give up design is to throw

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p. 129. It is now not usual to consider *blue* a primary colour; a colour-blind friend of my own could not distinguish red from dark blue; I have known others who could not distinguish red from green. "There is every reason to believe that the number of males in this country who are subject in some degree to this affection of vision, is not less than one in twenty, and that the number markedly colour-blind, that is, given to mistake red for green, brown for green, purple for blue, and occasionally red for black, is not less than one in fifty," p. 130.

\* This sentence was added for the second delivery, 18th May, 1873.

everything into the power of chance. Who is this grim goddess Chance that can assume the reins of the world because one man differs from another in opinion? When the Pope and Cardinals condemned Galileo for affirming the world's motion, they were, as it has been happily said, at that instant whirling round with it. Our views of the world and its constitution cannot alter the macrocosm without, but may materially affect the microcosm within. Let us face this Chance, and ask again, who art thou? And in ultimate resort all the best philosophy of the day replies: Chance is the sum of all those laws which we have still to learn. To say that the world is what it is, bating the laws we know, through the laws we know not, is surely nothing terrible, is the merest truism of modern science. But by all means avoid a name which conjures up a foul Python that it would need another Phœbus to destroy.

What, then, can we mean by God's design, or rather by that which we humanly call design? Again, all the best philosophy has its answer ready: we mean solely the conditions of existence, that without which—or that which changed—things would not be what they are.\* Stated baldly thus, it seems a most

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\* It will be at once objected that there is nothing even approaching to the conception of human design in such a statement. Quite true. If we attempted to introduce anything approaching to human design, we should have to suppose that



barren proposition. Most laws of primary importance have that appearance till their consequences are traced. As long as we conceive that God meant every particular state to be what it is, it remains a sin to touch it. We have even now among us a "peculiar people," as they call themselves, who decline to summon a physician in case of illness. I have not heard that they insisted on eating grains of wild wheat instead of bread artfully prepared with unholy leaven from the bruised corn. Directly we look upon things as being what they are, owing to certain conditions of existence, we inquire are these modifiable? and if so, with what result? We experiment, we modify. As the peculiar people—

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an "unconditioned" Creator fell into a profound study resulting in his devising not merely materials, *but their laws*, all fitting into some vast and complicated machine, embracing the whole universe, and having some distinct object which, as well as all the incidents accompanying its action, (the "evil" as well as the "good,") was conceived and intended beforehand, and which he preferred to effect in this way instead of by a single *fiat*. Not venturing to claim that intimate acquaintance with God's mind, which most preachers practically assert themselves to possess, I cannot put forward such an hypothesis. It does not appear to be a particularly edifying conception, and on closer inspection I find it totally incomprehensible. But "conditions of existence" imply no hypothesis. They are a mere statement of what we find, without superadding any imaginary cause, and may be, or rather must be, accepted, whatever cause may be assigned to them.



and others by no means peculiar, I am sorry to say—might declare, we dare to correct God's handiwork. Think of the sheer blasphemy of such a notion! Think how deep that dye must be which could thus obliterate every trace of all that is true and beautiful and good! During an expedition to study the effects of a total eclipse of the sun a few years ago, as the astronomers were preparing to make those observations which tend so greatly to establish oneness amidst the diversity of the universe, some ignorant natives lighted a fire to frighten off the dragon that was consuming the sun, and the whole observations would have been nullified by the smoke had not some English officer seen and bravely stamped it out.\* And we here, here in England, here in London, here in the largest city of the world, speaking a language more widely spoken than any in the world, need a brave officer like him to stamp out the fumes which would thwart the only means we have of even vaguely forefeeling that Being whom no epithet can describe, but which an ignorant crowd believes to be succumbing to the serpent knowledge.

The dye of humanity is on our hand. Wash it as we may, either in the Abana and Pharpar of stately theology that arrogates to itself universal *à priori*

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\* So far as I can recollect, this refers to the total eclipse of the sun on the 12th December, 1871, and the incident mentioned is illustrated by a drawing in the *Illustrated London News* of the time. August, 1876.

knowledge, or in the Jordan of lowly science (2 Kings, v. 10, 12), that lays down as its first principle, ignorance of all not yet discovered—wash it as we may, we cannot wash it clean—but we can know that it *is* dyed, and we can lift it up with a clear conscience, that while panting after God as the hart for the water brooks (Ps. xlii. 1), we have never knowingly let a single drop of the dye fall on our shapeless conception of the Inconceivable. Let us take a lesson from the Greek myth of Semelē. As we can only converse with the Deity through human conceptions, let us be content that they are human, and not entreat a presence which no man can see and live.\* And, in order that our nature may not be more than “almost” subdued to what it works in, let us wear in our “heart of heart,”† never to be forgotten, cherished as a constant warning, as a safeguard against presumption, as the token of self-knowledge, Shakspeare’s badge of the Dyer’s Hand!

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\* Semelē “was beloved by Zeus (Jūpiter), and Hērē (Jūnō), stimulated by jealousy, appeared to her in the form of her aged nurse Beroē, and induced her to pray Zeus to visit her in the same splendour and majesty with which he appeared to Hērē. Zeus, who had promised that he would grant her every request, did as she desired. He appeared to her as the god of thunder, and Semelē was consumed by the fire of lightning.” (W. Smith’s Dictionary of Greek and Roman Biography and Mythology.)

† (*Hamlet*, act 3, scene 2, speech 14.)

## DISMISSAL.

May we each ponder in private, and shew forth in public, that the way to God is through the heart of man !