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GOD AND REVELATION.

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P R E F A C E

THE writer of the following pages does not for a moment suppose that he has brought forward any fresh arguments tending to throw doubts on the existence of a God who loves and governs, or to discredit the belief in dogmatic Christianity.

All that he has aimed at accomplishing is to set forth in plain and unmistakable language the objections entertained to the popular creed by those who recognise in nature not a supremely benevolent Creator, but rather a Spartan mother, whose purposes may in the main be good, but who seems to attain her ends by merciless means, regardless of the sufferings of her children; and in revelation, the progressive thoughts of man in his strivings to attain a knowledge of the infinite.

Nothing, assuredly, would give him greater satisfaction than to be convinced of the existence of a Being who "in perfect wisdom, perfect love, is working for the best"; but after much anxious thought on the subject he is driven to the conclusion that however much there may be in nature which fosters and supports this view, there is much more which discountenances and conflicts with it.

He is not, however, prepared to say that he would hail with equal satisfaction the proof of the truth of the

Christian revelation as enunciated from so-called orthodox pulpits, or as taught in church creeds, or Westminster confessions of faith. And why? Because it seems to him that if it indeed be true that "strait is the gate, and narrow the way that leadeth to life eternal, and few there be that find it", then the prospect—and what a prospect!—before all but a small minority is truly appalling: *i.e.*, if the popular theology be true.

Still it must be acknowledged that the question is not one of liking or disliking, but one of fact to be determined by the evidence available in the case. The second part of this essay is therefore devoted to the consideration of the question whether there are reasonable grounds for concluding that the Christian revelation, as generally understood and interpreted, is a direct and stereotyped revelation from Almighty God; and if not, whether those are to be condemned, who, disregarding the moral law, act on the aphorism "Let us eat, drink, and be merry, for to-morrow we die".

GOD AND REVELATION.

It is impossible for those who study the religious problems of the day to avoid recognising the fact that, not only is there an ever-increasing number whose views on religious subjects widely diverge from our Church creeds—that dogma is losing its hold on the educated class—but that the very existence of the Deity is being called in question by many highly-cultivated and thoughtful minds.

It seems to be generally recognised that the old Deistical view of the last century is no longer tenable, and that, as a matter of fact, there is no logical halting-ground between an infallible Church or book, on the one hand, and complete—I won't say Atheism, but—confession of ignorance—on the other.

No doubt the existence of *the* Deity is strenuously denied in some quarters—that is, the *Deity of the popular theology*. The late Lord Redesdale, not many years ago, in view to the prevention of the admission of Atheists into Parliament, strove to introduce a Bill, the preamble of which ran as follows: "Whereas it is expedient that provision should be made against Atheists taking part in the legislation of the country, be it enacted as follows: That from and after the passing of this Act, every peer and every member of the House of Commons in taking his seat in Parliament shall, before taking the oath of allegiance and subscribing the same, in accordance with the provisions of the Act of Parliament of 1866, make and subscribe the following declaration, viz.: 'I do solemnly and sincerely declare and affirm that I believe in Almighty God'." The Bill was very properly rejected without a division, the then Bishop of

London deprecating its introduction on the rather strange ground that it would exclude Agnostics, whom he did not wish to exclude, as well as Atheists, whom he did. And the only interest the subject now evokes is that it affords a curious illustration of the loose and inaccurate way in which people sometimes express their thoughts. It does not appear to have occurred to the author of the Bill that any definition of the term was required, or that any possible doubt could arise in anyone's mind as to what he was called upon to subscribe to.

"I believe in an Almighty God." These are momentous and solemn words; but words are, after all, but intellectual counters, and by no means invariably convey the same meaning to all who hear them. What would an Agnostic say to them? Could he conscientiously make such a declaration? He might—the Bishop of London notwithstanding—for an Agnostic does not, so far as I am aware, deny the existence of a Supreme Being. Though he may say he does not know, he assuredly recognises some power or force in the universe, to which in his ignorance he may, if he be so inclined, apply the term "Almighty God". Nevertheless, a conscientious thinker not in accord with the popular theology, if pressed for an answer, would probably ask for an explanation of the sense in which the words are used. He might fairly rejoin that people's views differ considerably as to the meaning of the term, and enquire whether he was called upon to subscribe to a belief in the God of the Old Testament; or in Matthew Arnold's "power which makes for righteousness"; or merely in some unknown and inscrutable power which has proved adequate to the production of all phenomena; or in the Deity of Professor Flint, viz., a self-existent eternal Being, infinite in wisdom, power, and holiness, righteous and benevolent, the maker of heaven and earth, and all things therein.

For the purpose I have in view, I shall assume that this last definition describes the nature and attributes of the Deity intended, and shall therefore now proceed to enquire what evidence nature affords for the existence of such a Being.

I must, however, start on my enquiry with an assumption, which, I suppose, no one with whom I have discussed these subjects will care to dispute, viz., that

there is a power behind phenomena, by which all things are sustained and governed. (Whether this power forms part of the universe, or whether it is distinct from and stands outside of it, as it were, and governs the universe, I do not know, nor do I think it would be profitable to enquire.) This being granted, I shall at once proceed to the consideration of the question whether this power is intelligent, as we understand the term, or merely mechanical or unconscious. The argument for intelligence or mind is briefly this: We see and know that mind exists; our own minds and the minds of others with whom we are brought into contact excludes the possibility of doubting the fact; hence it may be fairly argued that as nothing but mind or intelligence could have produced mind, the cause of our known minds must have been an antecedent mind; or, to put it in other words, "intelligent beings now exist, but as intelligent beings did not always exist, intelligence began to be, but as nothing from nothing can come, as intelligence cannot come out of non-intelligence, the cause of intelligence or mind must itself have been intelligent".

Endeavors have been made to answer this in various ways. Mr. Mill says: "If the existence of the human mind is supposed to require as a necessary antecedent another mind, greater or more powerful, the difficulty is not removed by going back a step. The creating mind stands as much in need of another mind to be the source of its existence as the created mind. An eternal mind is simply an hypothesis to account for the minds which we know to exist. Now it is essential to a true hypothesis that it should remove the difficulty and account for the facts, but this it does not do." And again, it has been argued that we don't know, or at any rate are not justified in dogmatically asserting, that nothing but mind could possibly produce mind. Where is the proof, it is asked, that nothing can have produced a mind excepting another mind, or that intelligence must spring from pre-existing intelligence? It has also been suggested that there may be, for aught we know to the contrary, a power in the universe as much transcending mind, as mind transcends mechanical force or motion. Although we are totally unable to conceive such a power, nevertheless we are told it may exist. The rejoinder is this: It is not intended to explain mind in the abstract, much less to explain the existence of an eternal

mind; what I have to account for is the existence of my own individual mind, which I *know* to have had a beginning in time, and, though it may possibly be true that mind may be due to some other cause than mind, and that intelligence may in some way or other have sprung from non-intelligence, I have no right, by all the rules of sound logic, to resort to a remote or improbable hypothesis for a solution of the difficulty when a nearer and more probable one is close at hand, viz., the hypothesis that the human mind has been caused by some other mind more powerful than its own; nor is the argument vitiated because I can form no conception how the original mind was formed, or whether it was even formed at all. While admitting that it is not possible to *demonstrate* the existence of an eternal mind, I yet hold that, looking at all the facts which come under our observation, it is much easier to think of the power which has given rise to all phenomena as intelligent, than to think of it as non-intelligent, or as possessing some power superior to intelligence. A power superior to and excluding intelligence is an unthinkable hypothesis, and to assert the possibility of the existence of something to account for a fact which we know, that something being in itself unthinkable, is, it seems to me, unnecessarily travelling out of our way to encounter a difficulty.

The argument for the existence of an intelligent power is further supplemented by the argument from the existence of life on this planet of ours. It is admitted, by all who are competent to pronounce an opinion, that a time was when life did not exist on our earth. Whence came it then? As nothing from nothing can come, as life cannot spring out of non-life, life must have been produced by some pre-existing intelligent power. The whole force of the argument depends on the truth of the premiss that life requires, for its explanation, antecedent life; whether, in short, nothing but life could have produced life.

That life has arisen out of dead matter has never yet been proved. Bastian thought he had demonstrated the fact, but his proofs were shown by Professor Tyndall to be fallacious. Tyndall, however, and other eminent physicists do not deny that life *may* have arisen at some time or other out of non-living matter. Nature's laboratory is very different from the chemist's. The earth was at one

time undergoing chemical processes which have no parallel in the present day. Professor Huxley says somewhere: "If it were given me to look back through the abyss of time geological I should expect to see the evolution of living from non-living matter." And Tyndall writes: "Evolution in its complete form postulates the necessity of life springing out of non-life, but the proofs of this are still wanting." Still however it is pretty clear that Tyndall is himself a thorough evolutionist, believing not only in the possibility of life springing out of dead matter, but in the certainty of its having done so. Both these distinguished professors with many others who think with them may be wrong in holding such opinions; nevertheless in the face of such authority we are not justified in dogmatically asserting that life could not by any possibility have sprung out of non-life. Virchow, the great German physiologist, even when rebuking Hæckel for his extreme materialistic utterances never ventured to assert the impossibility of life proceeding from non-living matter: all that he presumed to assert was that the proof of its having done so is still wanting.

As pertinent to the present inquiry it may be asked "how did smallpox and other cognate diseases arise?" In the present day, and as far as our experience carries us back, we know that they require for their development the pre-existing germ, but how came this pre-existing germ? If you reply, it was latent in matter from the very commencement of things from the time the earth began to cool, and to become fit for the abode of living creatures; then I rejoin, life too may have been latent in inorganic substances, only requiring favorable conditions to bring it forth. One hypothesis is about as difficult to grasp as the other. Bishop Temple, in his Bampton lecture for 1884, says: "Then came a time when the earth became ready for life to exist upon it; and the life came, and no laws of inorganic matter can account for its coming. As it stands this is a great miracle." Here, it appears to me, is an assumption without a particle of proof; in other words our ignorance is employed to play the part of knowledge. Because we do not know distinctly, or even remotely, how an alleged transaction has taken place, it is assumed that some miraculous agency must have been at work to produce it! But this by the way.

If, then, it be admitted that life may have originated in some other way than by creative intelligence, or by what we call a miracle, the existence of life on the globe at the present time does not materially strengthen the argument for the existence of a creative mind. Should it be replied that, admitting for the sake of argument, life did spring far back in the world's history from non-living matter, a supreme power must have endowed non-living matter with the power to develop the germ of life, I reply: "Certainly there must have been some power or force at work to enable it to do so;" and it seems difficult to avoid the conclusion that this power possessed intelligence.

The next argument which may be adduced on behalf of the existence of an intelligent creative power is the well-known argument from design which Paley has so effectively used. Whichever way we look, to the infinitely great or the infinitely small, we may define the whole as of judicious contrivance or design. Now design, argues Paley, predicates a designer, and shows that he who contrived or designed things had consciousness or intelligence. The answer is that in case of human contrivance or design, such as the manufacture of a watch or a telescope, no doubt a designer is predicated. But why is this? Because we have a prior knowledge that watches and telescopes are made by man. When the African traveller Campbell shewed his watch to a group of savages, they started back in alarm, conjecturing from the sound and motion of the works that it was a living and supernatural thing. Like the poor children of the desert, we, her more civilised sons, attempt to explain the unknown by the known. We have some experience, at any rate, of the laws which preside over the action of physical forces, but we have no corresponding knowledge of the relations existing between a supreme Being and effects of nature of which we can take cognisance.

Paley remarks: "I know of no better method of introducing so large a subject than that of comparing a single thing with a single thing: an eye, for example, with a telescope. As far as the examination of the instrument goes, there is precisely the same proof that the eye was made for vision as there is that the telescope was made for assisting it. They are both made on the same principle, both being adjusted to the laws by which the transmission

and refraction of rays of light are regulated. For instance, it is necessary that the rays of light, in passing through water into the eye, should be refracted by a more convex surface than when it passes out of air into the eye. Accordingly we find that the eye of a fish, in that part of it called the crystalline lens, is much rounder than the eye of a terrestrial animal." "What plainer manifestation of design can there be", asks Paley, "than this dissimilarity?" Paley, of course, attributes the difference of structure between the eye of a fish and that of a man to the immediate action of the Deity, manifested in special creation, whilst, as the author of "A Candid Examination of Theism" points out, we in the present day are able to ascribe it to the agency of certain laws, to wit, inheritance and variation, survival of the fittest, and probably of other laws as yet undiscovered. Again, Paley alludes, as evidence of design in nature, to the ingenious mechanism of the venomous snake. Take the cobra, for instance. The fang of the cobra is a perforated tooth, loose at the root; in its quiescent state lying down flat on the jaw, but furnished with a muscle which enables the reptile to erect it. Under the root of the tooth lies a small venom-bag, the contents of which are replenished from time to time. (How the poison is secreted is not known.) When the tooth is in an erect position, and the animal is ready to strike, the root of the tooth presses against the bag, and the force of the compression expels the poisonous fluid with a jerk through the hollow tooth into the minute puncture made by its point. This is all exceedingly clever and ingenious, no doubt; and if cobras had been created with the deadly contrivance as we now see it, there would have been some force in Paley's argument. But I suppose no naturalist would maintain this. Snakes and creeping things, like everything else, have followed the laws of evolution, and the ingenious mechanism which we admire is the result of those laws. The truth is that the theory of evolution, unknown or but dimly discerned in Paley's day, has much weakened the force of the design argument. It may, however, be remarked in passing that although the evolution theory was then unknown, Paley alludes to a system (apparently maintained by some in his day) which he terms "Appetencies". A short description of this system is that pieces of soft ductile matter, being endowed with propensities or appetencies for particular

actions, would, by continued endeavors carried on through long series of generations, work themselves gradually into suitable forms, and at length acquire, though perhaps by obscure and almost imperceptible improvements, an organisation fitted to the action which their respective propensities led them to exert.

Paley, of course, makes short work of this theory, and, anticipating the line of argument adopted by theologians of our own day, remarks: "This theory coincides with the Atheistic system, viz., in doing away with the necessity for final causes"; just what was said of Darwin's theory about a quarter of a century ago. Recently, however, it has been discovered (see Bishop Temple's Bampton Lectures for 1884) that the doctrine of evolution redounds more to the honor and glory of the Creator than its opposite—the special creation theory. What would Paley have said to this, had a contemporary of his own so spoken of the system of appetencies? But we are learning to know better, or rather the evidence for the truth of evolution being too strong to be ignored, theologians are beginning to discover that it is not only a highly religious doctrine, but, most surprising of all, in harmony with revealed religion. But this by the way. The truth appears to be, that, if it could be shown that the special creation theory were the true one, *e.g.*, that man, with all his wonderful organisation, was specially created as he now is, some six, or even 60,000 years ago (the time matters not), then I think we must admit the force of the design argument; but if, on the other hand, the evolution theory in its extreme form be the true one, viz., that man has been evolved through countless ages from non-living matter, or even from a very low form of life, the design argument is much attenuated, if not deprived of all cogency. It seems to me, however, that when all is said that can be said in favor of evolution, intelligence must have been at work in the beginning to set things going, as it were. Take the case of the human eye for instance. It seems inconceivable how so delicate a structure as this organ could have come into existence without intelligence as its primal cause. Admitting that the eye was developed through countless ages by rays of light impinging on the most sensitive part of the original organism from which it sprung—or in any other way that

evolutionists consider the feat was accomplished, the question still remains, "By what power or process was the first impetus given?" It is all very well to say, Given force, matter and the law of gravitation everything must have happened that has happened. But why must? Who gave the law of gravitation? Does not a law point to a law giver? For my part, I think it much easier to think of intelligence at the bottom of things than to think of everything having arisen by unconscious mechanical law. Probably Bacon was right when he said, "I had rather believe all the fables of the Talmud and the Alcoran than that this universal frame was without a mind"; but there is an immense leap from this admission to the conclusion to which Paley seems to arrive in his 23rd chapter, when he says, "Contrivance, if established, appears to me to prove everything which we wish to prove, amongst other things it proves the personality of the Deity, as distinguished from what is called nature, and sometimes a principle." What has been proved—or, rather, rendered highly probable—is that the universe which includes and surrounds us is the life-dwelling of an Eternal mind; but when we proceed to clothe this wondrous power with certain attributes, which, we think, must necessarily belong to it, *e.g.*, omniscience, omnipotence, perfect benevolence, holiness, and the like, and invest it with a personality, then I assert that the statement is not borne out by the facts coming within our cognisance; but this point will be discussed further on. In any case, if my argument hitherto has been fallacious, it is of no great consequence as far as the purpose I have in view in writing this essay is concerned; it is a matter of speculative interest to me whether the world we inhabit owes its existence to intelligence and contrivance, or to certain forces or laws which are non-intelligent or unconscious.

What really concerns me to know is this: Whether a Being exists with whom I am in any way *en rapport*; whether, in short, there exists an all-wise, all-powerful, benevolent, and moral governor of the universe, who takes an intelligent and loving interest in the creatures He has brought into existence. A Being such as this is generally postulated by theologians (though a *judicial* character is usually assigned as well), and we are moreover told to think of him, as a personal God. But it may be fairly asked, prior

to discussing the evidence for the existence of a Being possessing the attributes just enunciated, What is meant by a personal God? Press theologians on the point and they give an uncertain sound. Many, doubtless, think of God as a person—that is to say, a person with bodily parts and organs like ourselves, and with a mental organisation akin to our own—and I have no doubt that the *earlier* Biblical writers so thought and spoke of God, and that many so think of him even in the present day seems hardly open to question; nevertheless, the educated portion of mankind shrink from thus materialising the Deity, and yet if you ask them what they mean by a personal God the answer is by no means clear. They may, and generally do, define a personal God as a being without bodily organisation, in whom cognitions reside and in whom volitions flow; in other words, a Being who possesses a mental organisation differing in *degree* from our own—one, in short, who thinks, wills, and acts—but as we know or can know nothing of mind apart from bodily organisation, the definition fails to enlighten us much. The fact is, when we consider the matter closely it is by no means easy to think of a personal God without thinking of him as a person. We know nothing of personality apart from bodily organisation, and nothing is gained by defining a thing unless you make it more comprehensible by the process. A definition is not an explanation. I therefore hold that the use of the term "personal God" is a misnomer. But setting this aside as of no moment, what we want to know, as I have said before, is whether the power by which all things exist possesses any of the attributes I have enumerated; whether it is possible to think of it, or Him, as in any way caring for what He has brought into existence. This is the real question at issue, in which I take a lively interest; and I wish in the first instance to consider it apart from any question of revelation, and to ask myself the question—and if possible find an answer to it—whether nature affords any evidence, and if so, what evidence for the existence of such a Being.

The evidence generally adduced in support of the existence of a moral being, or governor of the universe, is the evidence afforded by the moral nature of man. It is said that a cause cannot be less than its effects, and it is argued that if a moral nature exists in man, it must have been

implanted by a power higher than man, and the Being who implanted it must also be moral. Now if it be true, as it probably is, that all the moral feelings have been evolved from the simple feelings of pleasure and pain, inherent I presume in the lowest living organism, then logically it is not necessary to credit an intelligent Being—the author of all things—with possessing moral feelings akin to our own, any more than it is to credit Him with our vices. A cause need not be like its effect. It may be as well in this connexion to quote J. S. Mill, and Professor Huxley. The former says “there is not an idea, feeling, or power in the human mind, which requires to be accounted for on any other theory than that of experience”. Huxley says “with respect to the development of the moral sense out of the simple feelings of pleasure and pain, liking and disliking, with which the animals are provided, I can find nothing in the arguments of those who deny this to be so which have not been satisfactorily met”. I am not therefore prepared to admit that the moral nature of man proves the existence of a Being possessing analogous feelings. There *may*, however, be a parentage for morals, and it may consist in the endowment of every sentient creature with the simple feelings of pleasure and pain, out of which our moral feelings have been gradually evolved. The moral nature of man and conscience are, if not interchangeable terms, so closely allied, that the present question will be elucidated by the consideration of what conscience really is, and how far it is a reliable guide to our actions in life.

Conscience is spoken of as the voice of God, in the soul of man. Theodore Parker tells us that there is a small voice within us, which if we obey *will always guide us aright*. (The italics are mine.) Another writer, Mr. Armstrong, says “Let me tell you how it seems to me how I have made acquaintance with God. I find that at certain moments of my life there is that within me which I can best describe as a voice—though it is but a metaphor—addressing me, and largely influencing my conduct. I call the source of that voice which I fancy speaks to me ‘God’. I call the source of all those monitions and warnings which rise within me ‘God’. I find when my mind is bewildered and in doubt that somehow or other when I address that Being there comes to my soul a clear, shining light, and

I see things plainer and more beautiful than before. I apply to him in pain and in sorrow, and the pain and sorrow become light, and I am instantly assured that God is there to comfort and console. I pray to him in weakness when my strength fails, and what is the result: a new strength comes to me."

Now so far from denying the reality of these impressions, I am the first to admit their genuineness; but I believe they are the result of the reflex action of prayer on the mind. A Roman Catholic prays to the Virgin Mary (see Crown hymn-book) as well as invokes the saints, and a new strength comes to him. The curate of Ars (whose biography is one of the most interesting ever published) was in the habit of spending hours on his knees invoking his favorite saint, St. Philomine, and a new strength came to him too. I have seen a Mahomedan criminal ascend the scaffold, supplicating his prophet in his hour of extremity, and assuredly a new strength came to him also, and who can doubt that pious Hindus derive consolation from invoking one or more of the persons of the Hindu trinity? This being so, I fail to see that Mr. Armstrong's argument is of much weight.

As regards what Theodore Parker says about the conscience, I observe that it may prick us when we act contrary to what we believe to be right; but unfortunately it does not supply us with an index to what is right. It may, and often does, lamentably err. A South Sea Islander feels no qualms of conscience in killing and afterwards eating his victim, nor a Thug in strangling his. It is or was part of his religion to do so. Should the latter's conscience prick him at all, it would be if, in a moment of weakness, he allowed his victim to escape. As Mr. Lecky has well observed, "Phillip II. and Ferdinand and Isabella of Spain—zealous Roman Catholics—inflicted more suffering in obedience to their consciences than Nero or Domitian did in obedience to their lusts." One man's conscience leads him to Rome, and another's to Geneva. Calvin's led him to burn Servetus, and the early Pilgrim Fathers committed the most abominable cruelties in obedience to their consciences, especially in the way they dealt with reputed cases of witchcraft. Mrs. Gaskell's story of Loué the Witch is a true account of the horrible atrocities that can be committed by upright and honorable

men for conscience sake. In short, it seems a mere waste of time to adduce arguments to show that conscience is an uncertain and sometimes erroneous guide. It is a product of the evolution of the human mind, and expands and grows with knowledge and experience. We merely attribute it to the still small voice to God because we already believe in a God. Those who have been brought up without any such belief have, of course, no feelings of the kind. As the late G. H. Lewis remarked, "could we suppose a man born with inherited aptitudes, left solitary on an island before having had access to any of the stores of knowledge accumulated by his race, he might acquire a rudimentary knowledge of cosmical relations, although, without language or any access to the store of the experience of others on which to proceed, there would necessarily be little in him above that of an animal. Of mere intelligence there would not be a trace." To such a person as here described there would be neither moral intelligence or any conception of a divine Being. To my mind the fact that conscience is often a blind and misleading guide is a strong argument against it being the voice of God speaking to us, as many have declared it to be. Just conceive for instance, what a tremendously powerful support for the existence of a moral law-giver would be afforded if conscience were indeed an infallible guide. If by simply inquiring within we could ascertain the right or wrong of things, we should then be able triumphantly to appeal without fear of contradiction to this circumstance as an irrefragable argument for the existence of a moral law-giver.

It appears to me that the conscience argument, to prove the existence of a moral Being with moral feelings differing in *degree* only from our own, is not only of no moment, but actually tells with some force against those who use it. There are hundreds and thousands of people in the world whose consciences are always pricking them for acts of omission and commission of a most trivial character, in which others of a more robust mental organisation see no harm whatever. I repeat again, at the risk of being accused of wearisome reiteration, that a certain line of conduct, or mode of action, is considered right or wrong according to one's preconceived beliefs, arrived at partly by inheritance and partly by education.

Mr. Armstrong remarks: "Conscience is simply the voice of

God, which says, 'Do the right, do not do the wrong'. It does not in any way say what is right and what is wrong. That which I call the right, is the gradual development and evolution of history, and is largely dependent on climate and other external surroundings. The idea of right and wrong is purifying and clarifying in the course of history. The conception of what is right and wrong is better now than what it was a hundred years ago. Many of the things then considered laudable are now considered base, and *vice versa*." Quite so. But why, then, persist in calling it (conscience) the voice of God in the soul of man? Is it not rather the re-echo of our own beliefs, partly inherited and partly acquired?

It has been suggested to me that if the Ruler of the Universe had made conscience an infallible guide in all cases—alike to the ignorant savage and to the educated man—this would have been to make him as it were a God, knowing good and evil. As to this I cannot say; but given a God—a moral Governor and Ruler of the universe—who wishes to impress his law upon his creatures, I see nothing absurd or contrary to reason in the idea of his making conscience a true and infallible guide in all circumstances, and in all our relations in life, alike to the savage as well as to the civilized man. Under this view of the case knowledge might be, as it now is, progressive, without clashing with the prerogative of conscience. A savage might be endowed with the innate idea that it was wrong to steal or murder, without interfering with his capacity for gradually acquiring a knowledge of the arts and sciences. He might be left to his own devices in regard to so small a matter as the preliminary knowledge required for striking a light, and yet be intuitively aware that it is wrong to scalp his neighbor.

So far, then, I have endeavored to show that conscience is the result of several factors working together, and that its prickings are not due to the working of God's spirit in the mind of man, but to natural causes, easily explainable, and that invariably to follow its dictates may, and does often, lead to grievous error.

Do I seem then to say that we are to turn a deaf ear to the voice of conscience, when it tells us not to steal, or lie, or slander our neighbor? By no means. Conscience is a real thing, whatever may be its parentage. At any rate,

we know that amongst civilized races there is not only nowadays a tolerable unanimity of opinion that certain acts are wrong and hurtful, but the higher minds amongst us know that they are not only hurtful to the community, but also to those who are guilty of them. This is true whether we accept the utilitarian or intuitive theory of morals. In a properly instructed and cultivated mind, a violated moral instinct avenges itself in regret and remorse. Is conscience to be treated as of no account because we occasionally hear of startling individual aberrations, or because when the race was in its infancy, or more ignorant than it is at present, it (conscience) led men to commit acts which we now look upon with horror? Certainly not. The law of evolution holds good in morals as in other things, and the conscience grows and expands in the individual as it does in the race. But to pursue this question further would carry me beyond the scope of this essay; all I have endeavoured to show is that conscience is not the direct voice of God in the soul of man, but the product of the evolution of the human mind, and that the existence of moral feelings in man is no proof of the existence of similar feelings in the mind of the Deity.

The next, and to my mind most important, stage in the discussion is, whether the intelligent power whose existence we have shown to be highly probable possesses attributes, such as perfect love, perfect wisdom, and unlimited power. If he has not all three, the outlook for us poor mortals is not very promising. If he possesses the two former without the latter, however much he may have the will, he may not have the power to help us; and if he possesses the last only, without the two former, the case seems even worse still. The subject is a very large, and, even amongst orthodox theologians, a confessedly difficult, one to deal with. The problem of course is how to reconcile the moral and physical evil we see in the world with the existence of a Being of perfect wisdom, perfect love, and perfect power. Though the contributions to apologetic literature under this head have been enormous, and would fill libraries, the problem remains nearly as dark as ever, and the more candid of the writers are obliged to acknowledge that it is so. Curiously enough, Professor Rogers, with a very different object in view, permits himself to write as follows in his answer to Newman's Phases: "He (God) sends his pestilence, and

produces horrors on which the imagination dares not dwell, not only physical, but indirectly moral, often transforming man into something like the fiend, so many say he can never become. He sends his pestilence and thousands perish—men, women, and the child that knows not its right hand from its left, in prolonged and frightful agonies. He opens the mouths of volcanoes and lakes; and boils and fries the population of a whole city in torrents of burning lava.” Professor Rogers, himself a Theist of the orthodox type, supposes himself to be addressing Theists, and his object is not of course, to disprove the existence of an allwise and loving God (for that he takes for granted), but to show that nature’s difficulties are just as great as those of revelation. He argues, in fact, on the lines of Bishop Butler and his school, that nothing in the Christian revelation appearing to reflect on the goodness of the Creator can really do so, while nature itself presents the same if not greater difficulties. In other words, if a Being of infinite love and infinite power can boil and fry a whole population in burning lava, where is the difficulty in believing that he will boil and fry thousands and millions for ever and ever in hell fire. John Henry Newman also asks, “How can we believe in a good God when the world is what we see?”, and yet he answers the question somehow in the affirmative. It has been well said, that such writers adopt a very dangerous course, and suggest more doubts than they solve. Admitting their premises, it is not easy to deny their conclusions. If the God of nature can be called very good, there is no reason for denying that quality to the God of revelation, although the vast majority of mankind will be tormented in hell for ever. But does the world we inhabit afford satisfactory evidence of goodness, as *we understand* the word? I am by no means blind to the many harmonies and beneficent arrangements to be found in nature. The sun rejoices us with her light and warmth,¹ the trees bear fruit for our use. The streams refresh us with their sparkling waters;

¹ The earth receives but the 2,170 millionth part of the sun’s heat. A little more, or a little less, would be fatal to the existence of life on the planet. Were the sun’s heat doubled to-morrow we should be exposed to a temperature of over 500 degrees; that is to say a heat sufficient to melt lead, and to convert all the waters on the earth’s surface into steam.

thousands of forms of colors and sounds are blended into combinations, which, varying for ever, are for ever beautiful. The planet which we inhabit moves in regular course round the sun at the rate of 1140 miles a minute, and this goes on year after year, and yet no collision takes place. And so all things proceed, as if a master's hand were at work; but look on the reverse side of the medal. I confess that I recognise with something of the Pessimist's view the discordancies and malevolencies of nature. Appeal, if you will, to the experiences of a city missionary, or medical officer in a poor London district, and ask him what he has to say to the miseries which come under his daily observation. Multiply his experiences a hundredfold, and you will then have but a faint idea of the sin, misery and wretchedness existing in London during the short space of twenty-four hours; and London is after all but a very small portion of the habitable globe. I have been reading an article called "Poverty, Clean and Squalid", by Archibald Brown, an East End clergyman, which makes one almost sick with sorrow that such things should be. Here are a few extracts.

"Have you ever thought, reader, what it must be to wake of a morning, not only without a shilling in the house, but without an idea where to find one? To start the day without breakfast, to tramp miles to find work, and then tramp miles back without having got any—to see the wife take some of her scanty under-clothing to the pawn shop to get something for the children—to battle with hunger until chairs, tables, blankets, and beds have all gone in the conflict? Have you ever grasped the idea of the anguish suffered through those weary days? and yet all this and much more is being endured by *thousands* as I write. Squalid poverty"—the writer adds—"is a revolting picture. . . . The blunting process has been complete. Hope has died out, self-respect has been starved to death, and the man and woman sink to the level of their surroundings. Whole districts seem socially damned. The people corrupt one another and drag one another down. My visits to such places are generally made at night, with a box of wax vestas to find where the stairs are, and light me into these dens, for I find it better to visit them at night. But, oh, the squalor! Dirt on the floor, dirt on the walls, dirty rags on dirty people, and one indescribable collection of filthy sacks and rotting rugs for the shake down or bed. Do you wonder if the people who reside in such dens, live morally dirty lives and die squalid in soul as well as body? Under the coverlet of night what a fermenting butt of misery and muck lies simmering in London. A

stunted moral and physical manhood is inevitably the result of certain conditions of existence; so writes a scientist. His words are true, and we have named the conditions. And to all this misery must be added the slow starvation process which thousands are undergoing, owing to want of the common necessaries of life—food and fuel—augmented by the present severe weather, which has now lasted more than a fortnight. January, 1886.”

This is the actual experience of an East End minister, remember, who has no object in exaggerating matters. I would ask you to reflect for a moment on the amount of misery which an all-powerful Being standing in the relation of a father to his people might remove if he had the desire to do so. Take the Indian famine of 1878-79 as an illustration. This was probably attended with a greater amount of suffering than any other single event of history. It is computed that four millions of souls perished during its continuance. It was not only, it must be remembered, the mere physical pain of slow starvation that had to be endured, but the more grievous mental torture involved in witnessing the sufferings of others—wives and little children, tender babes at their mothers' breasts, all perishing day by day, and their natural protectors unable to help them. And mark this: all this suffering might have been prevented by a few seasonable showers of rain, which came not, though prayers were offered up for them week after week in all the churches throughout the length and breadth of the land. Then try to realise in imagination the sufferings of the early Christians under Nero, the far more grievous tortures inflicted by the high priests of religion on reputed heretics,¹ the judicial burnings, hangings, and disembowelings that were committed for many centuries in Europe alone—nay, the sufferings of the present day. I read the following in to-day's newspaper: “The snowstorm is making itself felt in more ways than one. Not merely are our streets in a condition dangerous

¹ Torquemada's victims alone amounted to 114,401, and of these 10,220 were roasted to death. Spain's total of victims done to death by the Inquisition amounted to 323,362. In addition, 3,000,000 of Jews and Moors were expelled from her soil, and many thousands of them died of privation. In the ninth century the Empress Theodora put to death 100,000 heretics. 14,000 Huguenots at least were slain in the massacre of St. Bartholomew in 1572.

to life, but there is in our midst a constant amount of semi-destitution, to the miseries of which the snow must be perfectly appalling. . . . At the present moment there are, it is said, no fewer than 5,000,000 of men, women, and children who are absolutely starving."—Jan., 1886.

But, after all, what is this compared with the sum-total of suffering now existing in the world? Reckoning the population of the world at 1,200,000,000, it would be no exaggeration to say that at the present moment, whilst I am writing these lines, there are at least 10,000 human beings undergoing the extremest amount of suffering that the human body is capable of sustaining, longing for the death that is so long in coming, and many hundreds of thousands, more probably, whose condition is not much better. Why is all this suffering permitted, if a God of infinite love and tender pity really reigns on high? Should I be told that the Almighty, having endowed man with free will, is not responsible for the result, I reply, in the first place I am not so sure of this. If the Almighty is omniscient, it seems to me He is responsible; besides, we have high authority for saying he is the author of evil as well as good. In the second place, I rejoin that even if I concede the point and admit that God is not bound in justice to interfere in man's inhumanities to man, how are we to reconcile the great catastrophes of nature, every year claiming their hecatombs of victims, with the existence of a God of love and mercy.

I have already instanced the Indian famine—one out of many. I would cite the great Bengal cyclone of 1876—and there have been several minor ones since—which claimed its hundreds of thousands of victims.

Mr. Voysey instances the fire at Santiago, in Chili, in 1864, where a church was struck by lightning and destroyed, containing 2,000 human beings in the very act of prayer, most of whom perished by suffocation or were burnt alive. Then, in 1881, an earthquake occurred at Chio, in Asiatic Turkey, when in the town itself only fifty houses were left standing, whole lines of streets having disappeared. On all sides, we are told, from the ruins were heard cries of distress, voices supplicating assistance, which in most cases were in vain, the buried victims being left to perish. In short, as a recent writer puts it, "Nature impales men, breaks them on the wheel, casts them to be

devoured by wild beasts, burns them to death, crushes them with stones, starves them with hunger, freezes them with cold, poisons them by quick or slow venom of her exhalations, and has hundreds of other hideous deaths in reserve, such as the ingenious cruelty of a Nero or a Domitian never surpassed. All this Nature does with the most supercilious disregard of mercy and justice."

This thought has often occurred to me. If, indeed, there is a God who has a mind akin to our own, and mercy and justice signify the same things with him as they do with us, how is he able to bear the shrieks of thousands of men, women, and children that daily and hourly, from all quarters of the world, ascend to the "mercy seat on high", and will continue to ascend as long as life endures? Does he experience any of the feelings that would arise in the heart of a man? If so, they must, humanly speaking, exercise a disturbing influence on his mind. But to ask such a question is to answer it. To imagine such a thing is to introduce an anthropomorphic conception of the Deity which is impossible to entertain. If, on the other hand, Dean Mansel is right in asserting that with the Deity justice, mercy, and goodness differ not only in degree, but in kind, from the realities which go by these names amongst men, then how can we possibly feel that we have a father in heaven who is touched by our infirmities? The problem is insoluble from whichever side we view it, and we can but echo back the poet's mournful cry—we are but

"Children crying in the night,
Crying for the light,
With no language but a cry".

If we turn to the brute creation, do we find a happier state of things? I trow not. Beneficent arrangements are to be found no doubt, but what of the malevolences? Nature—as some writer puts it—has most elaborately adapted the teeth of the shark, the talons of the eagle, the claws of the tiger, the poison-fang of the serpent, to strike, to torture, and to destroy. Theologians have, of course, made many attempts to justify the ways of God to man as well as to the brute creation, and if they fail in their efforts it is for no lack of ability in marshalling their facts, but from the inherent weakness of the cause they are defending.

The arguments generally adduced in explanation of the evils of life are those I am about to consider. I am not aware that there are others, though many of them, in the hands of a skilful apologist, are capable of considerable amplification, and may be made to look more plausible than in the guise I am able to present them.

First, then, it is said :

(a) Pain is necessary for our protection and safety; our very lives depend on our susceptibility to pain—*e.g.*, if falling down were not painful children would never learn to walk upright; if contact with fire did not cause pain a person might lose his life before even he knew that he was being burned.

(b) All our knowledge has sprung out of our pain; our sufferings have been a perpetual stimulus to our minds to acquire knowledge. We should never have made so much progress in the arts and sciences if we had not experienced many tumbles in climbing the ascent leading to knowledge.

(c) If there were no pain, there would be no pleasure. None of us can compute how much of actual pleasure is derived from contrast with pain. To enjoy pleasure at all there must be alternations of pain. For instance, a man after recovering from a severe attack of gout experiences by contrast a greater amount of pleasure than he did before the attack commenced.

(d) Pain enlarges our sympathies, and teaches us patience; it excites some of the noblest faculties of the human mind; there would be no sympathy and love were it not for sorrow and suffering which called them forth. (N.B.—This argument is susceptible of great amplification.)

(e) Pain and death are often the results of our own vices and imprudences, and we have no right to expect the Creator to intervene, for that would be to tamper with man's free will.

(f) Pain is much exaggerated; pain occupies a comparatively small portion of a man's life: the greater portion of human existence is passed in painlessness, or in actual enjoyment; even in exceptional cases of a long life of pain, the time after all is as nothing compared with eternity.

(g) Pain and suffering may be for our good, though we

know it not. How many things which at one time were thought to be evil, have turned out blessings? It may be argued that as human beings, full of tenderness and compassion, especially parents, find themselves compelled to inflict pain and sorrow on those they love; similarly, our heavenly father may find it necessary to inflict pain on those whom he loves, for their good.

(h) Pain or death is, after all, only the pain or death of the individual: the mere fact of many hundreds or even thousands being overwhelmed in the same calamity does not increase the actual quantity of pain endured by each individual. We have therefore no right to appeal to the evidence afforded by a catastrophe like an Indian famine or cyclone as an evidence of want of love, any more than we have to a catastrophe in which *one* life only is involved. On the contrary, it has been argued that a body of men collectively meet death much more philosophically than a single individual does.

(i) Death after all may be nothing more than a change of life under different conditions, and may prove a blessing instead of a misfortune.

(j) Catastrophes, like a famine, or an earthquake, or a pestilence, are in the long run beneficial to the human race, as they decrease the population, which would otherwise inconveniently increase, or they may serve other useful ends, although we may be unable to discern them.

(k) Pain, as regards the animal world, is not so excessive as we imagine; and in the case of animals it may be intended to serve some good purpose. Paley says "it (meaning the destruction of animals by one another) is rather a merciful arrangement than otherwise, as if the beasts were left to die of old age, the world would be filled with drooping, superannuated, half-starved animals, who would linger and die after all a more painful death than if killed by other animals".

Now, in considering the foregoing, it appears to me that most of them are quite beside the mark. I am not prepared to argue that the existence of some pain in the world is incompatible with the belief in divine beneficence. We will take the case of a boy who, when climbing a tree, misses his hold, tumbles to the ground, and sustains a compound fracture of his leg. This is very painful to him, no doubt. But is the accident any impeachment of the divine

love? It is true that the law of gravitation might have been altered in the boy's behalf, or his bones might have been made impervious to the shock, or he might have been endowed with the foreknowledge of what was going to happen, and so have been prevented from climbing the tree. But because none of these things were done, shall we impute a want of beneficence to the Deity? Similarly if I build my house over a cesspool, or sleep in the wind, or do any other foolish act, have I a right to complain if I suffer in consequence? I think not. Experience will teach me that nature's laws cannot be defied with impunity, and I shall if I am wise abstain from such acts in future. Can, however, such horrors as the Indian mutiny, or the seething mass of human misery that exists in every large town all over the world, be disposed of by a similar line of argument? Not altogether. The innocent child when tossed on the point of the bayonet of the mutinous siphæe, before its mother's eyes, was guilty of neither ignorance nor folly. Similarly, the condition of many of our London poor is owing to no fault of their own. An article by Cardinal Manning, headed "The Child of the English Savage," reveals a depth of cruelty to children which would be incredible were it not vouched for on the best authority.

Charles Kingsley, writing of the Indian mutiny, says:—

"I can think of nothing but these Indian massacres; the moral problems they involve make me half wild. Night and day the heaven seems black to me, though I never was so prosperous and blest in my life as I am now. I can hardly bear to look at woman or child. They raise some horrible images from which I can't escape. What does it all mean? Christ is king, nevertheless! I tell my people so. I should do, I dare not think what—if I did not believe so. But I sorely want someone to tell me that he believes it too."

He may well ask the question, "What does it all mean?" if an omnipotent and benevolent Being rules the Universe!

Should I be told that man having been endowed with free will, God cannot interfere to frustrate that free will, though indescribable miseries may result from his non-interference, I reply, "Suppose I admit the justness of the argument—which I do not—there still remains the great catastrophes of nature to be accounted for, which have nothing to do with man's free will. I see a column

in this morning's newspaper headed with the words "Disastrous floods; great destruction of life and property all over Europe". Who is responsible for these floods and the miseries they have caused? The details in some cases are too harrowing. How are these things to be reconciled with the existence of a God of love? Man here is passive. It is nature that is actively at work to mutilate and destroy, and is not nature's God responsible for the result? The argument adduced in (*g*) is quite inapplicable to such cases of apparently ruthless barbarity. Pain in certain cases may be beneficial, though in others it hardens. But what has this to do with the wholesale slaughtering of nature? Again, the parallelism—even in the case of ordinary every-day suffering—drawn between the acts of an earthly and heavenly parent will not hold good. It may be necessary for the former to inflict pain on his children. But why? Because he has, or thinks he has, no other means of effecting his object. If he had, I should maintain his mode was a cruel one. It is with him but a choice between two evils. The case, however, is different with a Being of unlimited power and with full choice of means; and, therefore, to my mind, the one case affords no analogy to the other.

The argument in (*h*) does not appear to me to be of much cogency. We are not considering the case of the sufferer so much as the Being who caused the suffering. A case of suffering where millions are involved, seems to me to make the indictment all the heavier against the Being who caused or permitted the suffering, than if one single death only resulted.

In reply to (*i*), I would remark that the explanation put forward is purely hypothetical; such evidence as we possess is insufficient to make it even probable. In the first place, even if true, it fails to account for the difficulty, for happiness conferred hereafter is not a sufficient justification for the infliction of torture here. If all deaths were natural deaths, without pain and without suffering either to oneself or to one's belongings, there might be something in the argument; and if it be indeed for a man's good to be removed to another world, why should it be necessary, in the felicitous words of Professor Rogers, to fry him first in red hot lava, or scald him to death in boiling water, or to torture him by withholding the means

of sustenance till he dies from exhaustion? Besides, looking at the case from another point of view, what grounds have we for supposing that the sufferer's condition will be improved in the next world? The teachings of our orthodox pulpits point to a very different conclusion. Should you reply, that we are not tied down to the orthodox view, and that you believe that "good shall somehow be the final goal of ill", I rejoin: "I cannot prove that your optimist view is wrong, but judging from what goes on here you are very unlikely to be right". After all, this is only another phase of the blessings in disguise argument. Mr. Voysey writes in this connection: "Though the facts are beyond dispute, there is not a tittle of evidence to prove any malicious, merciless, or cruel design, or any criminal carelessness, on the part of the great destroyer; on the contrary, there is everything to prove that since *death is a blessing to every individual as well as to the race* [the italics are mine], the slaughter of many thousands at one time by the periodic or exceptional convulsions of nature is a sign rather of beneficence than of malignity". Everything to prove that death is a blessing! Well, in a sense it may be. It may be better for those overwhelmed by the calamities of life, to sink as Byron has it, into the barren womb of nothingness, than to live out a life of misery here; but this is not the sense intended by the writer. He speaks of death as God's messenger, sent to call us to our home above. If it is so, where is the proof? And supposing for argument's sake that it is so, is this a sufficient justification for the infliction of ruthless cruelties here? The slaughter of many thousands a sign of beneficence? The slow slaughter of 4,000,000 in the great Indian famine a sign of beneficence! I will believe it when the earth's motion is reversed, or the stars fall from heaven, but not before!

As regards (j). Here again we have an appeal to our ignorance. Admitting that some ultimate benefit to the race does come out of a catastrophe like the great Indian famine of 1858-1859: is this an adequate excuse for its infliction? Such lame and inadequate explanations are to me simply exasperating. Surely we have a right to expect a merciful and all-powerful Being to gain the desired end by some less revolting means. It cannot surely be necessary to boil and fry or starve to death thousands of human

beings in order that some good may result to the survivors! Besides, why should nature require patching and mending at all? Does not this imply a defect in the artificer?

Consider once more the immense amount of suffering caused by the existence of venomous reptiles—snakes, scorpions, centipedes, and the like—not only to man, but to animals. Paley endeavors to make light of the affliction. He says, in effect, that the bite of the rattlesnake (he probably had not heard of the cobra) is not often fatal; that they (venomous reptiles) are seldom found in places or countries inhabited or frequented by man, and that if man invades their territories, he must take the consequences. Of course this is utter rubbish. Around almost every native village in India hundreds of venomous reptiles abound, which invade the dwellings of the inhabitants and cause much havoc amongst them. What would Paley have said had he known that there are annually 20,000 deaths reported from snake-bite in *India* alone, and probably many more unreported! After this it were bathos to say anything about the number of cattle, sheep, etc., destroyed by similar means. Is the existence of these things in a world where man has not too much room for his own needs, no impeachment of the divine love? Do they not rather make us question the beneficent arrangements in nature which theologians are so fond of parading for our benefit?

As regards the reply given in (*k*), I observe that it is miserably inadequate and untrue. It is not a fact, within my experience, that animals suffer little pain in their lives, or that their deaths are generally painless ones. A pack of wild dogs only obey their natural instincts when they hunt down a sombhur to death. A cat instinctively tortures a mouse to death. The boa-constrictor often paralyses his victim with fear before he embraces him in his deadly coil. A hunting cheta commits terrible havoc amongst deer and other ruminants. Rabbits suffer greatly from the stoat and weasel tribe. It was only this morning that, hearing a great cry (almost human it seemed to me) as of an animal in pain in the plantation behind my house, I went to see what occasioned it, and found a stoat hanging on to the back of the head of a young rabbit, the latter making frantic but unsuccessful efforts to shake off its assailant.

I have more than once witnessed, in India, a crow-pheasant manipulating a frog of the largest size, merely tearing out and eating its entrails, the agonising croak of the animal during the operation being horrible—far worse than when in ordinary course, a frog is slowly disappearing down the throat of a snake, or even a larger frog. It was always a source of wonder to me that nature should be so needlessly cruel. A dog takes a positive pleasure in hunting down a hare. Cattle, both in their domesticated and wild condition, suffer tortures from the foot and mouth disease; numbers of animals undergo lingering deaths from attacks of parasites; in fact, wherever we look, we see more or less of suffering in the animal world. I shall be told in reply that the pain is more apparent than real. I see a writer in one of the quarterly reviews cites several instances in support of this view, asserting, that a leech may be divided in the middle while it is sucking blood, and be so little disturbed by the operation that it will continue to suck for some minutes afterwards; that the dragon-fly will devour its own tail and fly away afterwards as briskly as ever; that insects impaled with a pin will eat with as much avidity as when free and unhurt. It is stated that on one occasion a scientific collector impaled a carnivorous beetle with a pin, that it somehow managed to get loose, and, in spite of the pin in its body, devoured all the other specimens in the case. The story of Dr. Livingstone and the lion is pressed into the service of natural theologians. That distinguished traveller relates that when he was seized by the lion he felt no particular pain; that the shock produced a stupor similar to that felt by a mouse after the first shake of the cat. How Dr. Livingstone could have been aware of the mouse's sensations it is difficult to say; but most people will, in spite of the learned doctor, still continue to think that the mouse has a very bad quarter of an hour indeed, after being seized by a cat.

How far the other instances given by the quarterly reviewer are correct I am unable to say; but no one doubts that where there is feeble brain organisation and little or no nervous system, there is correspondingly little pain; but all warm-blooded animals must and do feel acutely, and the higher we ascend in the scale, the more suscepti-

bility to pain do we find. It is impossible for apologists to deny all physical suffering in the animal creation, but they try to minimize the amount as much as possible, asserting that the pains are a trifle as compared with the pleasures and enjoyments of life. This is a question which every one must answer for himself—for my part, I am unable to agree with the apologists, or to admit that, even if the assertion be true, it is a sufficient explanation of the sufferings which none can deny. In short, let theologians argue as they will, there is no denying the fact, as Physicus points out, "that we stand in the midst of a wonderful and beautiful, but also of a terrible and cruel, world, and a world moreover in which pain and cruelty, the slaughter of the weak by the strong, and their decay and death by their own imperfect organization, are not accidental defects, but are of the very essence of the development of life on the globe, and go back ages before man's appearance on its surface. So far as life and the improvement of life are the outcome of the struggle for existence, the organic world seems to have its roots in suffering. In such a view evil is no longer to be dismissed as a temporary incident, but as a tremendous reality, bound up with the very constitution of things."

I may be told that it is exceedingly presumptuous of me to presume to sit in judgment on the acts of the Almighty, and that I am not a competent judge in the matter. To this I reply that I am not sure they are the acts of the Almighty—certainly not of the Deity of Professor Flint—besides, I am asked to pronounce an opinion, when the facts of nature are favorable, and exhibit beneficent design (for this is the whole scope and purport of writers of natural theology), but when they appear unfavorable, or malevolent, I am told I am presumptuous if I dare to pronounce an opinion upon them. I am also informed that I have not the necessary knowledge—and that if I were behind the scenes—I should judge very differently. To which I reply, that I am competent,—as far as my knowledge extends,—to form an opinion on what goes on before my very eyes, and to doubt my own competency in this respect is like doubting the multiplication table because I am ignorant of the differential calculus. Is it a mark of reverence to say that black is white when black it appears to me to be? Besides, the argument, as an argument, appears to be worthless, because it might be, with

equal cogency, pressed into the service of a believer in one of the Pagan Deities in justification of an act (which appeared to us cruel or immoral) popularly assigned to that Deity.

The author of "A Candid Examination of Theism" says:—

"If natural selection has played any large share in the process of organic evolution, it is evident that animal enjoyment being an important factor in the natural cause must always have been furthered to the extent in which it was necessary for the adaptation of organisms to their environment, and such we invariably find to be the limits within which all enjoyments are confined. On the other hand, so long as the adaptations in question are not complete, so long must there be more or less suffering. Thus, whether we look to animal pleasures or animal pains, the result is just what we should expect to find on the supposition of those pleasures or pains having been due to necessary and physical, as distinguished from intelligent and moral, antecedents; for how different is that which is, from that which might have been. Not only might beneficent selection have eliminated the countless species of parasites which now destroy the health and happiness of the higher organisms; not only might survival of the fittest, in a moral sense, have determined that rapacious and carnivorous animals should yield their places to harmless and gentle ones; not only might life have been without sickness, and death without pain; but how might the exigencies and the welfare of species have been consulted by the structures and habits of one another."

Is it any explanation of the mystery to be told in reply that our knowledge is partial, and could we but see the whole, the objections would probably disappear?; or is the difficulty minimised by the contention that we are looking at a work which is not yet finished, and that the imperfections we see may be a necessary part of a large but yet only partially carried out design? I think not. The *argumentum ad ignorantiam* is a favorite one with theologians; but it convinces no one. Besides, the great catastrophes of Nature can hardly be called imperfections. Furthermore, supposing that the miseries of life *do* possess an occult quality of promoting good in the far off future: what then? Does the end, according to our moral code, justify the means? Hidden good often comes out of human misdeeds and crimes, but that does not prevent

them from remaining misdeeds and crimes; and, in like manner, if in the order of nature good comes out of the mass of misery and injustice with which the world teems, that does not lessen the significance of the fact that the method by which the supposed good is attained is a method of misery and injustice.

Should I be told, as I have been told before now, that all the misery which surrounds us, physical and moral, is the result of the transgression of our first parents, I reply that the difficulty is only removed one step farther back. The Creator of the Universe, supposing him to be all-powerful and possessing all knowledge, is equally responsible for the result. Besides, as regards the brute creation at any rate, the earth has yielded up her secrets, and we know that animals existed, preyed upon one another, and died, under much the same conditions as they now live and die, ages before man's appearance on the globe.

In concluding this part of my essay, I would quote the words of a living Roman Catholic writer, not because they by any means afford a satisfactory explanation of the difficulties I have been considering, but because the writer sees, as clearly as I do, the malevolences of Nature, and because also his explanation is largely imbued with the merciful spirit of the age, which seems to find expression in the words of Lord Tennyson:—

“Behold we know not anything;
We can but hope that good shall fall
At last far off—at last—to all,
And ever winter turn to spring.”

The writer referred to says:

“I can no more reconcile the evil and misery in the world with the existence of a beneficent creator than you can. It is one of those overwhelming and heart-piercing mysteries that encumber human life. But is not the Christian explanation upon the face of it more reasonable than any other? Sin entered into the world, and death by sin, and does not the teaching of all religions echo back the eternal law? Here of course we all throw back upon another of those unsolved and insoluble mysteries that surround men on all sides—the mystery of free will, as to which I do not see how we can get further back than St. Augustine's teaching; that a world in which a moral order or period of probation was established, wherein

rational creatures should work out their own eternal destiny by their own merit, is more excellent than one containing no such order, and that the existence of the moral order implies liberty to sin, as a concomitant of liberty to do right."

And, adds the writer—

"of this I am confident, and it seems blasphemous to doubt it, that the eventual condition of every soul will be such as is best for that soul—the best that is possible for it, as being what it is, and what it has made itself to be. This is the larger hope, which we may not only faintly trust but assuredly believe—the one ray of light in the great darkness."

This is all very well as far as it goes, and is a remarkable admission, as coming from a Roman Catholic,¹ but the mystery of free will affords little assistance to the mind overwhelmed by the great catastrophies of nature, or aghast at the apparently needless sufferings of the brute creation. In truth, the mystery is, as Mr. Lilly himself admits, insoluble.

The conclusion of the whole matter appears to be this. To one who, on independent grounds, say on the dictum of an infallible church, or an infallible record, believes in spite of indications in nature to the contrary, in an all-wise, all-powerful, and all-merciful Deity, it may be possible to avoid facing the dilemma, and to rest content with the assumption that the two horns of the dilemma may be made to meet, in some inconceivable way; but in the absence of such grounds, and should he care to exercise his reasoning faculties at all on the subject (a task he is invited to undertake by the numerous writers on natural theology from Paley downwards), he can hardly avoid the conclusion that the power which the universe manifests to him is non-infinite in its resources, or non-beneficent in its designs.

¹ Very different from the view taken by the Rev. Father Furness (a Roman Catholic writer), who speaks of hell being paved with the skulls of infants only a foot long.

PART II.

I have said, it may be possible for one who on independent grounds, believes in the existence of an all-powerful, all-wise, and all-merciful Deity, to avoid facing the dilemma, etc. ; but, on carefully considering the matter, it seems questionable whether any authority whatsoever would suffice to win our intellectual assent to a proposition which is, as I believe, contradicted by the evidence of our senses.

Moral and physical evil confront us on every side—much of it probably remediable—but much more entirely beyond our control, for which the Creator of the Universe is directly responsible. Nevertheless, in spite of this fact, *if* we are satisfied that He has made a revelation to man, we must believe that in some way or other He cares for the creatures He has brought into existence (else why would He make a revelation at all?). He may not be all-powerful, or He may be deficient in benevolence ; nevertheless we may be sure that He exists, and we are bound to accept what He has been pleased to reveal to us—and reject it at our peril—provided always that we are satisfied that it emanates from a Being who governs the world.

There are some who assert that they know intuitively that God exists (as Theodore Parker expresses it, the voice of God in the soul of man), but they only arrive at this conclusion because they have imbibed the idea at some period or other of their lives. If a child of Christian parents were taken away from its home when only a few months old, and brought up by a race who had no ideas of God, or a future state, the child would remain as ignorant as its foster parents of these beliefs. It has been said that no races or tribes exist whose minds are a complete blank in regard to the existence of a Supreme

Being. Be this as it may, it is beyond dispute that the ordinary savage's religion (if such it can be called) consists merely in a belief in a Fetish or Devil of some kind, whom he seeks to propitiate by offerings and sacrifices, but this is a very different thing from a belief in an intelligent Personal Governor of the Universe—a conscious Supreme Power with whom we can enter into personal relations.

Further, some of the acutest minds of this or any other age, lack any such intuitive knowledge. They, it is true, acknowledge some power or force in the universe—an eternal energy from which all things proceed—but confess their utter ignorance of its attributes. I think, therefore, we must dismiss the idea that God has intuitively revealed himself to mankind.

As regards the evidence afforded by nature for the existence of a Supreme Being, I have already discussed the question in the first part of this essay, the conclusion arrived at being that there is reasonable evidence to establish the existence of an intelligent Power, but that is all. We must therefore turn to revelation, and examine the evidence on which it rests, in view to ascertaining whether it affords us reasonable grounds for believing that it emanated from a Being who rules the universe, who is also all-powerful, wise, and good. Although history records more revelations than one, I shall content myself with considering the Christian revelation, being willing to accept Paley's dictum, that if the Christian religion (that is the revelation of the Christian religion) be not credible, no one with whom we have to do will support the pretensions of any other.

Paley, after supposing or assuming more than he has any right to assume, asks, "Under these circumstances, is it improbable that a revelation should be made? Suppose God to design for mankind a future state, is it unlikely that he should acquaint him with the fact?" To which I reply, By no means; but then I deny the premiss on which the whole argument is based. We have no right to assume certain alleged facts, viz., the existence of a Moral Governor and Ruler of the Universe, who designs a future state for man, and then to argue from these facts for the probability of a revelation. I conceive the more legitimate way of dealing with the question, if we are to argue at all on

probabilities, is to take the Christian revelation as it stands, and then ask ourselves the question, Is it probable?

What, then, is this Christian revelation? or of what does it consist? If I read my Bible correctly, we are told that some six or seven thousand years ago (the time is of no great consequence) the Almighty planted a garden in Eden (wherever that may have been); and there caused a full-grown man suddenly to rise out of the ground, endowed with intellect, speech and conscience; that this man being cast into a deep sleep, an incision was made in his side, from which a woman was formed; that after a time the woman—in spite of God's injunction to the contrary—beguiled by a serpent, partook of the fruit of a particular tree, and persuaded the man to do so too, in consequence of which act of disobedience, they (the man and the woman) were driven out of the Garden of Eden, and made to work for their daily bread. That Adam lived for 930 years, and begat children,¹ but his descendants become so hopelessly bad, that God regretted that he had made man, and determined to destroy both man and beast from the face of the earth, excepting Noah and his children, and their wives and families; and this intention the Almighty carried out by means of a flood, which covered the whole earth—that is to say, all the high hills that were under the whole heaven—and so all life was destroyed except Noah and his family, and the beasts that he had taken with him into the ark. Nevertheless, this wholesale purification failed to improve the moral character of man, for the race lapsed into wickedness again, till at length, after some thousands of years, God, according to a purpose which he had formed before the foundation of the world, incarnated himself in the person of Jesus Christ, the second person of the Trinity, who, after a ministry of about three years (query: was it one?) on the earth, was crucified by the Roman

¹ Charles Bray says:—"For God to make a Paradise out of which he knew his new-made creatures would be very shortly driven, was a mockery, a delusion, and a snare. But it may be said that Eve must have been left free or there would have been no virtue in resisting. What, left free to destroy herself and all her race? Surely no such fatal gift could be safely entrusted to so frail a creature, particularly as God knew perfectly well how it would all end. And then, again, if on the day of her disobedience she had surely died according to promise, no great harm would have been done, for she would not then have brought a curse on her whole posterity."

Power, at the instigation of the Jewish nation, but with the foreknowledge and consent of God the Father, in order that he (Jesus Christ) might be a propitiation for the sins of the whole world; in other words, that the first person of the Trinity might consistently, with his attribute of justice, forgive the sinner, who accepted the second person of the Trinity as his Saviour. As Milton says:—

“ Man losing all,
 To expiate his treason had nought left
 But to destruction, sacred and devote,
 He with his whole posterity must die;
 Die he, or justice must,
 Unless some other able and as willing pay.
 The rigid satisfaction death for death.”

This, or something very like it, is the revelation which we are called upon to believe. I ask is it *primâ facie* probable? I am not denying that it possibly may be true; all I say is, that it is not the sort of story that commends itself to our intelligence. Tertullian says of it: “Credo quia incredibile,” that is, “I believe it because it is too improbable for anyone to have invented it.” At any rate, it is not too much to say that the whole story of the creation of man, the deluge, and the ark, conflicts not only with the scientific knowledge of the present day, but the doctrine of the atonement (softened down though it may be by modern apologists) with our sense of right and wrong; for how, it may be asked, can it consist with justice to allow guilt to be transferred from the guilty to the innocent? I do not say it is all impossible; all I do say is, that before we give in our adhesion to the story, we are entitled to demand the strongest possible evidence that God has really revealed it. Paley says: “I remember hearing an unbeliever say that if God had given a revelation He would have written it on the skies.” Allowing for metaphorical language, I think He would. Were an earthly potentate to send a messenger to his subjects charged with a message improbable in itself, but of paramount importance; the contents of which, if neglected, would entail utter ruin upon them and their descendants, we are entitled to say that it would be incumbent upon him so to accredit his messenger, that no reasonable doubt be left in the minds of any of his

subjects as to his (the messengers) authority and mission. Similarly, I think we are entitled to expect an equally explicit attestation of the heavenly message.

Paley observes that if the evidences of revelation were overpoweringly strong, it would have the effect of restraining our voluntary powers too much, and would call for no exercise of humility and faith. It would be no trial or thanks, he says, to the most sensual wretch to forbear sinning if heaven and hell were open to his sight. The same line of argument has only to be used in the hypothetical case I have cited above, to show what nonsense it amounts to. The fact is, not only is faith magnified above its deserts, but it is put in the wrong place. If God has unquestionably spoken, reason is silenced. It is superseded by faith. But the question is whether God *has* spoken, and until that question is decided, there is no legitimate scope for the exercise of faith. To do so before would be to make faith and credulity interchangeable terms. Take the incarnation of the Supreme Being. This is a mystery which my intellect cannot fathom, but I rightly accept it on faith, if I am sure that it has been revealed. Similarly, as regards the Romish doctrine of transubstantiation, my intellect may be quite unable to fathom the mystery of the transformation of the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ, but if I believe the doctrine to be taught by divine authority, then I am bound to accept it on faith; and so again a Mussulman is morally bound to accept the Koran as his rule of faith, in spite of its inherent improbabilities, if he is satisfied that it has been written by the inspiration of the Almighty; but it is too much to ask him or anyone else to exercise faith in the message before he is satisfied that God has spoken through Mahomed, in the pages of the Koran. And so it is in regard to the Christian revelation. If I am sure that God has spoken either through the medium of an Infallible Church, or in the pages of the Bible, I bow my head, and accept the revelation he has been pleased to make; but I must know first of all that he has really spoken, or else I shall only be guilty of credulity in accepting it.

As I shall probably be told that sufficient evidence does exist to convince any reasonable person that the Christian revelation is a direct revelation from Almighty

God, I shall now proceed to consider the question, as briefly as I can.

First of all, the Roman Catholic Church claims not only to be the true Church of God, the infallible interpreter of God's revelation to man, "but the depository of a mass of unwritten tradition handed down in unbroken succession from the time of St. Peter (the alleged first Bishop of Rome) to the present day, which it is incumbent on its followers to believe. It is also very exclusive, for it teaches that none beyond its pale can be saved.

Admitting that it was within the compass of divine power to have communicated to the world the certitude that the Roman Catholic Church is the one true and infallible Church; as a matter of fact, such a communication has not been made. The Roman Catholic Church may claim to be the mouthpiece of Almighty God, and the Pope, his vice-regent on earth, but when we ask for her credentials, she has none to show. She may appeal to the Bible and tradition, but it is obvious, that to those who believe neither in the infallibility of the one, or the truth of the other, this is no proof at all. If we meditate upon her past history, we shall hardly be tempted to take her word for her assumptions. Her previous character is too bad. It is impossible to deny that she is directly responsible for the horrors of the inquisition which claimed their hundreds of thousands of victims. She, or rather the head of the Church, ordered a medal to be struck in commemoration of the massacre of St. Bartholomew. M. Bouzique writes :—

"Of all the persecutions which the Roman Catholic Church has carried on against religious liberty in France, none has a more odious character than that which followed the revocation of the Edict of Nantes. The crusades against the Albigenses, the slaughter of the Vaudois, the massacre of St. Bartholomew itself, may in part be referred to the barbarousness of the time, but the Dragonades surpasses them all in horror."

The history of French Protestantism, from the end of the seventeenth century to the end of the eighteenth, presents one long history of bloodshed and horror. The same writer remarks :—

"The Protestants of every condition, age, and sex, given up as a prey to the violence of a fanatical soldiery, to the hateful

passions of the Roman Catholic clergy, had to suffer all the afflictions and tortures, all the horrors and infamies that could be devised by the grossest brutality, united to a cruelty the most exquisite."

The whole of this system of robbery, brutality, and murder, which ancient paganism cannot parallel or approach, had its source in three base authorities—Louis XIV., Père la Chaize, his confessor, and Pope Innocent XI. The latter, instead of interposing his authority to put a stop to these horrors, writes to his obedient son, Louis XIV., on the subject of the revocation of the Edict of Nantes, as follows :—

"Our very Dear Brother in Jesus Christ,—Among all the illustrious proofs that your Majesty has given of your natural piety, there is none more striking than the truly worthy zeal of the most Christian King, which has led him to revoke all the ordinances rendered in favour of the heretics of his kingdom, and the provision he has made by very wise edicts for the propagation of the orthodox faith; as we have learnt from our very dear son, the Duke d'Astrées, your ambassador at our Court. We have thought it our duty to write to you this letter, in order to give an authentic and durable testimony of the eulogies which we bestow on the fine religious sentiments which your spirit manifests; and to congratulate you on the load of immortal commendations which, by this last act, you have added to all those which, down to this time, render your life so glorious. The Catholic Church will not forget to mark in its annals so great a proof of your devotion to it. I will never cease to praise your name. But, above all, you may safely expect from the divine goodness the reward of so fine a resolution, and to be assured that for that result we shall continually put up the most ardent prayers to that same goodness. Our venerable brother the Archbishop of Fano will say to you the rest, and in cordial earnestness we give your Majesty our apostolical benediction.

"Given at Rome the 13th November, 1685."

And this from a man who professed to be a follower of Jesus Christ, and the head of God's infallible Church on earth!

At the time when the act of revocation was issued, the king was living in adultery with Madame Maintenon, who had not long succeeded her predecessor in adultery, Madame Montensan. A worthy son of the Church indeed!!

The sale of indulgences, under the authority of Leo X., was a disgrace to any church, and was one, if not the chief cause, that brought about the reformation. A certain dealer in indulgences (Bernardin Sampson) unblushingly declared he could forgive all sins, and that heaven and hell were subject to his power. He maintained that he could sell the merits of Christ to anyone who could buy them for ready money. He boasted of having levied enormous sums from the poor as well as the rich. Did the Pope take any steps to stop this blasphemy? No; he directly encouraged it, in order that the money so levied might replenish his exhausted coffers. A worthy follower of Christ indeed!!

In 1493 Pope Alexander VI. issued a bull laying down the axiom that the earth was flat. In the 13th century Pope Boniface VIII. interdicted dissection as sacrilege.

The Church burnt Giordano Bruno for promulgating the opinion that the earth revolved round the sun. Galileo narrowly escaped the same fate, after being harried and worried to death's door, and made to recant his so-called errors.

Not only have many of the Popes been grossly immoral in their lives—some of them, for instance the Borgias, monsters of iniquity—but they have been the determined enemies of all progress, as well as of civil and religious liberty; even so recently as the reign of the last Pope (Pius IX.) a syllabus was issued, the 78th and 80th propositions of which declare, "Cursed be he who holds that in Catholic countries the free exercise of other religions may laudably be allowed, or that the Roman Pontiff may, or ought to come to terms with progress, liberalism, and modern civilisation."

For my part I share the opinion of those who hold that the Roman Church only lacks the power to be as great a tyrant over the liberties and consciences of the people as she has been in the days of the past; and that were the Roman Catholic religion predominant over the length and breadth of the land, real progress would be impossible.

As Dr. Beard says, in answer to the Bishop of Salford, "You bring a bad character with you. You revive memories most adverse to your claims. You speak as a lamb now, but if you gain power, you will resume your inborn pro-

pensities, and become the very wolf we expelled from England many years ago." Does anyone doubt that this would be so?

Again, the Church prides herself on her unchangeableness; she declares that her teachings have been the same yesterday, to-day, and will be the same for ever. But this is not true. As Dr. Beard says, "Without denying the fundamental truths of Christianity, she disfigured and mutilated them so as to render them scarcely recognisable. The unchangeable Church changed every century, until she had transmuted the simple and sublime religion of Christ into a complicated mass of unparalleled absurdities."

Roman Catholics would probably deny this, but I ask them, Was not the Bible a sealed book which laymen were forbidden to read? Is it, or is it not true, as Dean Stanley says, "that the Eucharist was up to the 13th century administered to infants in the Roman Catholic Church, and that total immersion was also practised by the same Church up to the same period"? If true, does the practice exist now? Recently we have had the doctrine of the Infallibility of the Pope added to the list of beliefs which the Roman Catholic Church imposes on the consciences of its followers, to say nothing of the immaculate conception of the Virgin Mary.

If it be asked how it is that the Roman Catholic Church has satisfied the consciences and claimed the allegiance of such men as Newman and Manning, who were once aliens from its fold, I reply, "I cannot say, further than this, that there is no accounting for religious beliefs". With Newman, I suppose his logical mind saw the necessity for an infallible interpreter of God's word. If I understand his writings correctly, he seems to say that there is no logical halting place between Atheism on the one hand and an infallible Church on the other. I do not dispute his immense learning and his dialectical skill, but what is it all worth when he is ready to surrender his intelligence and judgment to a belief in such an absurdity as the miracle of the liquifaction of St. Januarius' blood? I have not his "Apologia" by me to refer to, but I distinctly remember when reading his controversy with Charles Kingsley that while admitting that any Roman Catholic was justified in rejecting the miracle if he chose, he (Newman) thought it rather more likely to be genuine

than otherwise!¹ Putting Newman aside, why do the Popes permit such a jugglery as this to take place year after year if they really are what they claim to be?

Others there are again, who, tormented with doubt, seek rest for their souls in the arms of an infallible Church. They allow their intellects to go to sleep, that their hearts may have food, and comfort, and rest. Once make the final plunge, and everything else is so easy! The Romanist points to the 140 sects into which Protestantism is divided, and asks triumphantly, "Can the truth be here?". The Church invites its hearers to come to it, and promises them a solution of all their difficulties. If only you can believe in the one infallible Church, your difficulties may be made to vanish. How much depends on that little word "if"!

I have referred to the lives and teachings of the Popes as evidence against the claims of the Church. I think this is important, because we must not forget they are selected by the whole body of the Cardinals after solemn prayer that their choice may be guided aright. Is it credible that if the Almighty had really established a visible church on earth, he would have permitted the election of such creatures for his viceregents as many of the Popes have been, *e.g.*, Paul II., Sixtus IV., Innocent VIII., Alexander VI., and Julius II.—some of them steeped in every form of vice known to the most depraved imagination?

I have said that the Roman Catholic Church appeals to the Bible and tradition in support of its claims. But allowing, for the sake of argument, that the Bible is inspired, can the Church's claim to be the head of Christ's Church on earth be made out from it? Mr. Spurgeon, than whom, I suppose, no one has a better textual acquaintance with the Bible, evidently thinks not, for he

¹ Since writing the above, I see from an extract from the *British and Foreign Evangelical Review* that Newman says, "I think it impossible to withstand the evidence which is brought forward for the liquefaction of the blood of St. Januarius, and for motion of the eyes of the Madonna. I firmly believe that portions of the true cross are at Rome and elsewhere. I firmly believe that relics of the saints are doing innumerable miracles daily. I firmly believe that the saints in their lifetime have before now raised the dead to life."

permits himself to write as follows of the Roman Catholic Church :

“ We think too much of God’s foes, and talk of them with too much respect. Who is this Pope of Rome? His Holiness? Call him not so, but call him his blasphemy, his profanity, his impudence! What are he and his cardinals and his legates but the image and incarnation of Anti-Christ, to be in due time cast with the beast and the false prophet into the lake of fire?”

Mr. Spurgeon may not be a competent authority on the claims of the Roman Catholic Church, but no man knows the Bible better than he does, and he certainly fails to find any support for the Church’s claim in its pages. Besides, he is not exactly alone in his opinion, though the use of such forcible language may be quite exceptional.

What, then, is an individual of average intelligence to do who is in search of a belief? To embrace the Roman Catholic religion; to cast in his lot with Mr. Spurgeon, or any other of the numerous dissenting bodies; to join the English Established Church as by law established; or to associate himself with Mr. Voysey’s Free Church; or with the Unitarian body? It were hard to say, *i.e.*, if he insists on having a definite creed of some kind. Excepting the Romanists and the Theists (in which I include the Unitarians), most churches hold that the Bible contains the sole rule of faith. I shall therefore proceed to consider the claims that it has to be considered the infallible word of God. Before doing so, however, it may be as well to notice some, at any rate, of the different theories that have been formulated from time to time in regard to the inspiration of the Bible. In my younger days one, and only one theory was generally admissible. *viz.*, that the writers of the several books of the Bible were mere amanuenses, writing at the dictation of the Holy Ghost, and that no mistakes were possible; in other words, the theory maintained was that of the verbal and plenary inspiration of the Bible. You hear it still in almost every orthodox dissenting chapel in England; it is the doctrine taught by evangelists of the Moody and Sankey type; it is held by the Salvation Army, but it is losing its hold on the educated portion of our orthodox divines.

The late Dr. Baylee, one of the first Hebrew scholars of his day, and a man of very considerable intellectual ability, whom I had the pleasure of meeting when he filled the office of Principal of the Birkenhead Theological Training College, says in a manual written for the use of his students :

“The Bible cannot be less than verbally inspired—every word, every syllable, every letter, is just what it would be had God spoken from Heaven, without any human intervention. Every scientific statement is infallibly accurate—all its history and narratives of every kind are without any inaccuracy.”

The late Bishop of Lincoln, when Canon Wordsworth, used almost identical language, but I have not his book to refer to. Burgin writes, “The Bible is none other than the voice of him that sitteth upon the throne. Every book of it—every chapter of it—every syllable of it—every letter of it, is the direct utterance of the Most High”; and scores of other writers might be quoted who use almost identically the same language.

The uneducated masses who believe in the Bible at all hold this view, but of late years the ground has shifted a little, and educated and cultivated minds, influenced unconsciously perhaps by the liberalism of the age no less than by the advancing tide of knowledge, have to some extent broken away from the old moorings. We hear less nowadays of verbal and dynamical inspiration of the Bible, and more of the human element it contains.

The view taken by Dr. Harold Brown, Bishop of Winchester, is this :

“The inspiration claimed for the Bible is infallible so far as it relates to things pertaining to God, and fallible in matters of history and daily life. Thus, some portions of the Bible are given by organic inspiration, God Himself speaking through the medium of man’s organism; other portions are simply the expression of the author’s own sentiments, it may be under the influence of a general inspiration, or by the exaltation of his natural faculties.”

The difficulty, adds the Bishop, of enunciating a definite theory of inspiration, consists exactly in this—in assigning the true weight respectively to the Divine and human elements. And a difficulty it remains, for the learned Bishop does nothing to clear it up; he leaves us with a Bible containing a mixture of fallible and infallible state-

ments, and tells us that those statements which refer to God—which are just those we have no power to test the truth of—are the words of Almighty God himself; and that those statements referring to natural phenomena, of which we are capable of judging (at all events, to some extent) are simply the opinions of the writers, and therefore fallible. The conclusions of such men as Cardinals Newman and Manning are logical. The believer in a special infallible revelation, if he be rational and logical, is driven to find an infallible interpreter for his infallible book.

The Rev. M. F. Sadler, Prebendary of Wells and Rector of Honiton, (belonging to the Evangelical School) writes :

“There are undoubtedly great difficulties attending the enunciation of any clearly defined theory of inspiration—as, for instance, whether it is verbal, plenary, or dynamic; whether all the various books of the Bible were written with equal divine assistance. Whether all parts of it have the same authority for all purposes, as, for instance, whether all its statements may be quoted with equal confidence on matters of doctrine, matters of fact, matters pertaining to civil history or natural science. Again, the question of inspiration is practically allied with considerations respecting the present state of the text of the original—its translation and its interpretation.”

He goes on to say :

“God must have exercised such a superintendence both over the minds and pens of the Evangelists that they are to be implicitly relied upon for the account they give of *Christ*. The exact nature of the superintendence we may be unable to define, but that it was of such a sort as to enable the children of God to exercise unbounded faith in the narrative, as giving them a reliable view of the person, work, power, and pretensions of Christ seems beyond doubt. What we are as sure of as our own existence is that if there be any Holy Ghost, he was in the four men (the Evangelists) cognisant of, and taking into account every sentence they wrote, superintending and controlling every plan they formed, recalling to the memory of two, if not three, the partially forgotten words, or their source; so ordering that the Church should have need of all of them, and not be able to dispense with any one of them, and, what is more, not be able to weave the fourfold story into one, but each must be read separately, one by one, one after another, so that each child of the kingdom may have the more deeply engravened on his heart every divine lineament of the features of the king in his beauty. In order to do this, the inspiring divine intelli-

gence in the Evangelists so order matters that they are not exempt from *mistake of time, and place, and arrangement*. Even if they are so exempt, that exemption is to us as if it were not, for we cannot reconcile their seeming discrepancies, and never shall in this world. But these very discrepancies and divergencies are under the cognisance of the Holy Spirit, distinctly permitted by him, inasmuch as they were not corrected, but allowed for manifold purposes, as, for instance, in a vast number of cases, to assure us that we have the true meaning—one report supplying the comment to the other; in other cases allowed, I believe, for the express purpose of preventing our weaving the four narratives into one, and so cheating our souls of that multifold realisation of Christ's personal life which is in the sight of God of such moment to our spiritual life."

This seems to me great rubbish; but the writer at any rate recognises and admits very freely the human element in the Bible, but his mode of accounting for its being there is truly wonderful.

Mallock, the author of "Is Life worth Living?", writes as follows:

"What then has modern criticism accomplished on the Bible? The Biblical account of the creation has been shown to be, in its literal sense, an impossible fable. Stories that were accepted with a solemn reverence seem childish, ridiculous, grotesque, and not unfrequently barbarous; or if we are hardly prepared to admit so much as this—this much at least has been established firmly—that the Bible, if it does not give the lie itself to the astonishing claims that have been made for it, contains nothing in itself, at any rate, that can of itself be sufficient to support them. This applies to the New Testament just as much as to the Old, and the consequences here are much more momentous. Weighed as mere human testimony, the value of the Gospels becomes doubtful or insignificant. For the miracles of Christ, and for his superhuman nature, they contain little evidence that tends to be satisfactory—and even his (Christ's) daily words and actions it seems probable may have been inaccurately reported, in some cases perhaps invented, and in others supplied by a deceiving memory. When we pass from the Gospels to the Epistles, a kindred sight presents itself; we discern in them the writings of men not inspired from above, but with many disagreements amongst themselves, and influenced by a variety of existing views, and doubtful which of them to assimilate. We discern in them, as we do in other writers, the products of their age and circumstances; and if we follow the Church's history further, and examine the appearance and growth of her great subsequent dogmas, we

can trace all of them to a natural and non-Christian origin. Two centuries before the birth of Christ, Buddha is said to have been born without a human father. Angels sang in heaven to announce his advent; an aged hermit blessed him in his mother's arms; a monarch was advised—though he refused—to destroy the child, who, it was predicted, should be a universal ruler. It is told how he was once lost and found again in the temple, and how his young wisdom astonished all the doctors. His prophetic career began when he was about thirty years old, and one of the most solemn events of it is his temptation in solitude by the evil one. And thus the fatal inference is drawn that all religions have sprung from a common and earthly root."

And these reflections emanate from sincere believers in Christianity, the last only being a Roman Catholic, whose aim and purpose are doubtless to exalt authority at the expense of the Bible; nevertheless, in my opinion, there is much truth in his contention.

In this connection Mr. Gladstone remarks :

"It is perfectly conceivable that a document penned by the human hand, and transmitted by human means, may contain matters questionable, uncertain, or even mistaken, and yet may by its contents as a whole, present such moral proofs of truth divinely imparted, as ought to command our assent and govern our practice."

This is, of course, quite possible, but the question is whether it is true; and if true, how are we to ascertain where the human element ends and the divine begins?

I will now pass on to consider what claim the Bible has to be regarded as divinely inspired.

Let us consider the Old Testament writings, in the first instance.

We have in the first and second chapters of Genesis an account of the creation, which, if true, would no doubt go far to convince us that the writer of that portion of it, at any rate, was under the inspiration of the Almighty when he wrote it. Now nothing in polemical writing has struck me more forcibly than the discussion between Mr. Gladstone and Professor Huxley on the cosmogony of Moses, which has lately appeared in the *Nineteenth Century*. Does any human being gifted even with a minimum of ratiocinative power, doubt for a moment on which side the victory lies? Is not Professor Huxley's last reply perfectly crushing?

For my part I was under the impression that the question "whether the cosmogony was or was not opposed to the conclusions of science" had been definitely settled nearly a quarter of a century ago by one of the writers of that now almost forgotten book, "Essays and reviews," but it appears I was mistaken, for of late the question has cropped up again, but I believe only to result in the further discomfiture of the reconcilers.

A Dr. Kinns has during the last year or two been lecturing and writing on Genesis. His book fell into my hands some little time back, and the impression it left on my mind was that though it contained some interesting facts in natural history, it utterly failed in its purpose, which was to shew that the Mosaic record of the creation was scientifically correct. Judge therefore of my surprise on reading some remarks of the Lord Chancellor at the conclusion of a lecture on Genesis, delivered by Dr. Kinns.

Lord Halsbury said :

"It was a matter of congratulation that a man like Dr. Kinns should be able to show that the Bible and the words of science had in them the same inspiration. Philosophaters—for they could not be called philosophers—spoke of Dr. Kinns as having no right to speak on such subjects as science; but all the first men of science were with him."

Is this so; or, rather, is it not absolutely false?

Professor Huxley in his later article remarks :

"My belief is, and long has been, that the Pentateuchal story of the creation is simply a myth. I suppose it to be an hypothesis respecting the origin of the Universe which some ancient thinker found himself able to reconcile with his knowledge of the nature of things, and therefore assumed to be true."

And is not this opinion endorsed by the vast majority of scientific thinkers?¹

Professor Drummond, the author of "Natural Law in the Spiritual World," and orthodox, I believe, as orthodoxy goes, says :

"That the championship of a position (by Mr. Gladstone), which many earnest students of modern religious questions have seen

¹ I see that Professor Dana, the American geologist, states it to be his opinion that the first chapter of Genesis and science are in accord. It would be satisfactory if he informed us how he arrived at this conclusion.

reason wholly to abandon, cannot but excite misgivings of a serious kind,"

and adds :

"To theological science the whole underlying theory of the reconcilers is as exploded as Bathybius."

The present Bishop of London takes somewhat different ground in his Bampton lectures for 1884. He says :

"It is quite certain that the purpose of revelation is not to teach science at all. Where the creation is mentioned, there is clearly no intention to say by what process [what!] it was effected, or how long it took [what!] to work out the process."

The obvious reply is, that although the purpose of revelation may not have been to teach science, nevertheless we should expect facts—whether intended to teach science or not—when stated in an inspired record, to be correctly stated, if mentioned at all—not for instance, that grasses, herbs, and fruit trees were created, or brought into existence, before there was any sun by which their life might be vivified and supported. Later on the Bishop speaks of the narrative as an allegory, though he is careful to add that there is nothing in the allegory that crosses the path of science. If this means that the statements put forth are scientifically correct, nothing can well be more inaccurate, and the Bishop must feel that this is so, or else why should he emphasise the fact that the purpose of revelation is not to teach science?

Dr. Temple apparently does not feel himself able to deny the truth of the theory of evolution, even in regard to *man*, for he says :

"His (man's body) may have been developed according to the theory of evolution, but at any rate it branched off from other animals at a very early point in the descent of animal life,"

and adds, in conclusion,

"We cannot find that science, in teaching evolution, has yet asserted anything that is inconsistent with revelation, *unless we assume that revelation was intended not to teach spiritual truth, but physical truth also.* [The italics are mine.]

I would ask, what is the use of adding this note of caution if the evolution theory is not opposed to scriptural teaching as regards the creation of man and animals?

Surely this sort of argument is worse than useless. The question is whether the Bible states fact or fiction. Apologetic Christian writers nowadays for the most part turn their attention to the task of showing that the Darwinian theory (which is now too well established for them to put on one side) is not Atheistic; they argue in fact that this theory redounds more to the honor and glory of the Creator than does the older theory of special creation. A recent writer observes :

“The attitude of orthodoxy towards the new discoveries in science goes through three stages. First we are told that they are false and damnable (this is exactly what we were told of the Darwinian theory of descent some 20 or 25 years ago); next that they are deserving of cautious examination; lastly, that they are, and always have been, matters of general notoriety, and are without any bearing whatever on religion or morality.”

The theory of evolution is rapidly passing into the third stage.

But apologists forget that the question isn't whether this (the Darwinian) theory does away with the necessity for a first cause, but whether it is not vitally opposed to the revelation of the Bible. Dr. Temple thinks not, on the ground apparently that revelation was not intended to teach physical truths. Not intended to teach physical truths indeed! But this is not the question. It is whether the story of the creation of man and animals, as narrated in Genesis, is opposed to what we now know to be true. As Mr. Laing observes :

“It is absolutely certain that portions of the Bible, and those important portions relating to the creation of the world and of man, are not true, and therefore not inspired. It is certain that the sun, moon, and stars, and earth were not created as the author of Genesis supposes them to have been created.”

And as regards man, we have good reason for believing that he has progressed from a state of the rudest savagery towards civilisation and morality, and that his existence dates back probably to the last glacial period—probably 200,000 years. This being so, how can these facts be reconciled with the theory of Adam's fall, which is the foundation of the whole superstructure of redemption and regeneration?

If, however, anyone should deny, as possibly he fairly may, that man's great antiquity has not been proved, I would ask him to turn to the first chapter of Genesis, and see whether it be possible to square the theory of the evolution of man, and animals with the statement of their mode of creation in Genesis. If he can do this, he will have performed little short of a miracle.

It is all very well for Dr. Temple to remind us that the object of the Bible is not to teach us science, and that where the creation of man is mentioned, there is clearly no intention to say by what process this creation was effected. As I have already pointed out, when questions involving science are touched on in an inspired narrative, we should expect them to be correctly stated; and that when we read that man was created a living soul about 6,000 or 8,000 years ago, endowed with speech and intellect; that statement does not mean, and cannot mean (unless words have no meaning at all) that he was, countless ages back, evolved from some lower form of life, and gradually progressed from the rudest savagery to his present comparatively high state of civilisation. The special creation theory, or the evolution theory (either the one or the other), may conceivably be true, but it is only trifling with language to maintain that they are not fundamentally opposed to one another; and to assert that the Biblical account of the creation is in harmony with the Darwinian theory is, in my opinion, to talk nonsense.

Mr. Gladstone does not even touch on the question as to whether the creation of man, as stated in Genesis, is in accordance with scientific knowledge of the present day: all he attempts to show is that the fourfold division of animated creation, as stated in Genesis, viz.:

1. Water population;
2. Air population;
3. Land population of animals;
4. Man;

is substantially correct.

But Professor Huxley shows that this is not even the case.

It is not, however, merely in regard to the story of the creation alone that we are unable to signify our assent. There are many Biblical stories which, while they cannot be demonstrated to be false (like the story of the creation,

for instance), are almost more incredible, *e.g.*, the story of the universal deluge and the ark, and the many impossibilities the narrative involves. Also such stories as the following.

(1) The plagues of Egypt (Exodus iv.). Moses casts his rod on the ground, and it becomes a serpent; on seizing it by the tail, it becomes a rod again. The repetition of the miracle before Pharaoh and his servants; and, most strange of all, the ability of Pharaoh's magicians to perform the same wonder; and then the climax: Moses' rod (serpent, I presume) swallows up all the others.

(2) The extreme improbability, not to say impossibility, in its physical results, of the story narrated in Genesis xix., 33 to 36.

(3) Samson catches 300 foxes and ties their tails together, with a firebrand between each (Judges xv., 4), and sends them amongst the Philistines' corn, to destroy it.

(4) His slaughter of a thousand men with the jawbone of an ass (Judges xv., 15).

(5) The raising up of Samuel by the witch of Endor (1 Sam. xxviii.).

(6) The cursing in the name of the Lord by Elisha of mocking little children who knew no better, and the destruction of forty-two of them by bears in consequence (2 Kings ii., 24).

(7) The story of the building of the tower of Babel, and the reason assigned for the confusion of tongues.

The list might be extended almost indefinitely, but *cui bono*? If these miracles are credible, others of the same nature are so too; if not, it is only a waste of time to add to their number.

It is not that I deny the possibility of divine interference in the affairs of men, but many of the miracles of the Old Testament have an air of grotesqueness about them, that stamps them as mythical. Is anything gained by calling them parables, as Mr. Laing apparently does? or allegories, as they are termed by the New Jerusalem Church? One can at any rate understand the utility of some of the New Testament miracles as a manifestation of God's power, and as evidence of the divine mission of the person who performed them; but this explanation will not hold good with regard to many, at any rate, of those related in the Old Testament.

Whatever else may be true—whatever theory of inspira-

tion we may hold—we *know* that these wonderful narratives did not and could not have happened as related; and all the persuasive eloquence of the most eminent of Christian apologists will hardly persuade us that they did. But do they believe them themselves? I can hardly credit it, though it is difficult to say what a man may not believe if he gives his mind to it—Cardinal Newman being an instance in point. Then, again, does any human being not tied hand and foot to traditional modes of thought believe that the Almighty held those long conversations with Moses related in the 25th and following chapters of Exodus, or that he was turned from his purpose (Numbers xiv., 12) because of the arguments of Moses (verses 13 to 16 of the same chapter)? I know it is the fashion to say, “Oh, these words don’t mean that: they mean something else”; but if words have any meaning at all, they mean here exactly what they say. The very idea is inconceivable! How are we to explain it all? Will Dr. Harold Brown’s theory meet the case, viz., that the Bible is infallible as far as it relates to God, but fallible in matters of history and daily life?

There is another difficulty in regard to accepting the Old Testament as the word of God, and that is the difficulty of recognising *parts* of its moral teaching as having emanated from a God of holiness and purity. I have by me the Rev. J. H. Titcomb’s lecture on this subject, published at the request of the Christian Evidence Society. He says:—

“No one can possibly shrink more than I do from these divine injunctions which the Old Testament records concerning the massacre of whole cities and peoples. I stand in imagination amidst those scenes of terrific slaughter, and as I listen to the shrieks of helpless women and children, mercilessly sabred and speared, I lift up my eyes to heaven, and exclaim, ‘Can this be thy work, O merciful Father? Surely, oh surely, these murderers have mistaken their self-barbarity for a divine commission!’”

“Such, I suppose,” the writer adds, “are the first instincts of every feeling heart in this day of nineteenth century civilisation.” Well, how does he get over the difficulty? In this way. The nations thus given over to slaughter were *hopelessly* corrupt (an assumption which I notice all Biblical apologists make, without much evidence to support it), and therefore it was the most merciful course to annihilate

them, with *their women and children*, because, argues the writer, these children if spared would certainly have grown up like their parents, and perpetuated the same contagion. The case must be desperate indeed if it be necessary to resort to such an apology as this, and yet it admits of no other, excepting, probably, the true one, viz., that the writers fell into the error of attributing to God the barbarities of man. Is not this explanation, on the face of it, a thousand times more probable than that a benevolent Being—a moral Governor of the Universe—ordered the slaughter of women and little children by the thousand!

As regards the treatment of the Midianites, when Moses ordered the slaughter of all of them—save the virgins, whom the Israelites were permitted to keep for their own depraved purposes. The apologists explanation is, that Moses, in this instance, acted on his own responsibility: that Moses was inspired to record it, but not necessarily to give the order. It is true that the Bible does not say that the Almighty ordered it, but He certainly does not condemn it, and if we read the 31st chapter of Numbers, verse 25, to 30, it will be seen that the historian makes the Almighty not only tacitly acquiesce in the arrangement, but issue explicit instructions as to the distribution of the booty taken from the Midianites, of which the 32,000 virgins formed a part (see verse 35). A canon of criticism which Dr. Titcomb lays down a little later on may meet the difficulty. It is "that the Jewish writers were frequently in the habit of attributing to God himself the evils which He permitted in his providence"; but, on the other hand, it creates another, and we naturally ask: "How are we to know when the biblical writers are giving us their own views, or writing under the guidance of Gods holy spirit?" To me the difficulties of accepting the whole of the Old Testament as genuine history are simply insurmountable. For my own part, I feel as satisfied as I do of my own existence that many of the stories therein related are not true. If, however, we admit one half of the Bishop of Winchester's canon of criticism, viz., that the writers are fallible in matters of history and daily life, the task of the reconciler ought to be at an end; as to the other half, there is no proof whatever that it is true.

But, after all, it has been urged that we need not trouble ourselves about Old Testament history: what specially

concerns us is the New. Let us therefore turn to it, and see what grounds there are for accepting it as the inspired word of God, written for our instruction and guidance in all matters relating to our spiritual well-being.

First of all, it is not known with any degree of certainty when or by whom the four Gospels were written. The three first are manifestly not independent narratives, but compiled from a common source. Froude thinks, that though the synoptics may have had no communication with each other, they were supplementing from other sources of information a central narrative which they all had before them. As regards Matthew, there can be no doubt he wrote primarily for the Jews, and actually makes Christ say: "I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel." The question as to the time he wrote hardly admits of a definite answer, because of the way the work originated. Matthew wrote the substance of his gospel in Aramœan, probably before the destruction of Jerusalem. It was afterwards translated into Greek; but the date of our present gospel Dr. Samuel Davidson assigns to about the year A.D. 105; Luke's to the year 110; Mark's to about 120, and John's to about A.D. 150; but in no case have we sufficient evidence to show that any one of the gospels contains the evidence of an eye witness.

St. John may or may not have written the gospel which bears his name. Volumes have been written on this subject alone; but the general consensus of opinion is against him. At any rate, it is certain that the latter presents a marvellous contrast to the clear addresses to be found in the Synoptics. If Jesus spoke in the simple way described in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, it is almost impossible to conceive of his having uttered the long metaphorical discourses contained in the 4th. But this is not a point I wish to press. Even if St. John be the author of the 4th Gospel, the difficulties which encumber our path will not be removed one hair's breadth.

What I wish to consider is this: Whether the *internal* evidence of the four Gospels is of such a nature as to incline us to accept the statements of the writers as true statements. As I have said before, the theory of the verbal inspiration of the Bible has nearly died out, but still it may be not amiss to note a *few* of the verbal inaccuracies to be found in the New

Testament, showing at any rate that whatever other ideas about inspiration may be true, the verbal and mechanical theory will not stand the test of criticism.

- (1) *Purification of the Temple*.—Did it occur shortly before the crucifixion (see Matt. xxi., 12), or was it at the commencement of the ministry of Jesus (John ii., 13).
- (2) *Recognition of Jesus as the Messiah*.—Was Jesus at once *i.e.*, at the commencement of his ministry, recognised as the Messiah by John the Baptist (John i., 29, 39-45), by Andrew, Simon, Peter, Philip, and Nathaniel, or are the synoptics correct in saying that none of the disciples (not even John the Baptist) arrived at that conviction till a comparatively late period of Jesus's ministry (see Matt. xi., 2, 3, also xvi., 14-17).
- (3.) *The anointing of the feet of Jesus*.—When was it done and where. Luke says (Luke vii., 11 and 37) it occurred early in the ministry of Jesus in the house of a Pharisee in Nain; that the anointer was a sinner—that is, a woman of immoral character. Matthew says (Matt. xxvi., 6) the scene took place in Bethany, in the house of Simon the leper. John says (John xi., 2; xii., 1) that it occurred in Bethany six days before the Passover; he does not actually say in whose house it took place, but the reader is entitled to infer from the context that the event took place in the house of Lazarus, for we are told that Martha served, and that the anointer was Mary, the sister of Lazarus, who was certainly not a sinner in the sense intended to be conveyed by St. Luke.

The last Supper.—Was it the Passover feast, or was it not? The Synoptics positively assert the former. St. John the latter. (Matt. xxvi., 19; Luke xxii., 15; John xviii., 28; xix., 31).

Crucifixion of Jesus.—Was Jesus crucified at the third hour (9 a.m.), and gave up the ghost at the ninth hour (3 p.m.)—(Matt. xxvii., 46; Mark xv., 23), or is John right in asserting that at 12 noon Jesus was still before Pilate?

The thieves on the Cross.—Did one only, or both the thieves, revile Jesus. Matthew says both did; Luke only one. (Matt. xxviii., 44; Luke xxiv., 43.)¹

The bearing of the Cross.—Did Jesus himself bear the cross to the place of execution (John xix., 17), or was it carried for him by one Simon (Matt. xxvii., 32).

No advantage is likely to accrue by extending the list of contradictions that are to be found in the New Testament; but for those who wish to see all that can be said in this connection, Thomas Scott's "English life of Jesus" affords the necessary medium—a work below that of Strauss in erudition; but what it loses in this respect is more than made up by incisiveness and clearness of style—a work, I may add, which though written 14 years ago, has never yet been answered in spite of challenges to the Christian Evidence Society to undertake the task.

Of course, answers *have* been found to these and other contradictions by so-called orthodox theologians, but these harmonisers of the text of the Bible have, in my opinion, made matters worse than they found them, and simply injured the cause they have at heart by the obvious weakness of their arguments.²

¹ Canon Farrar says: "Here we might suppose that there was an irreconcilable contradiction. But though the Evangelists sometimes seem on the very verge of mutual contradiction, no single instance of a positive contradiction can be adduced from their independent pages. The reason of this is partly that they wrote under divine guidance, and partly that they wrote the simple truth. The first two synoptics tell us that both the robbers during the early part of the hours of the crucifixion reproached Jesus; but we learn from St. Luke that only one of them used injurious and insulting language to Him."

Now I have a great respect for Canon Farrar's bearing and acumen, but what are they all worth when he condescends to the use of language like this? What meaning does it convey to anyone's mind when read in conjunction with the biblical texts bearing on the subject? The 1st Evangelist says the thieves cast the same in His teeth; Mark, that they that were crucified with Him reviled Him. Luke, on the other hand, that *one* of the thieves only did so, and that the other rebuked his fellow malefactor for his presumption. The discrepancy is hardly worth mentioning, but Canon Farrar's attempt at harmonising the two accounts is truly wonderful. It simply shows how utterly untrustworthy are those as guides to others, who have a preconceived theory to support.

² Origen held that there were three anointings, as others have held

It would surely be better—in the interests of Christianity I mean—to abandon untenable positions and concentrate one's whole strength in defending the main fortress. A Christian may regret that he has not an infallible record to refer to, and argue that the probabilities are all in favor of the infallibility of a book revelation which proceeds from God, but if he has not got it he had better accept with a good grace what Mr. Gladstone says may be conceivable, viz., that the Bible may contain matter questionable, uncertain, or even mistaken, and yet as a whole present such moral proofs of its divine origin as to command our assent. Whether it does so will be considered further on.

We come now to consider questions involving something more than mere mistakes of time and place, that is, statements of events which, if they did not occur, go far to impeach the credit of the writers who narrate them as faithful—though not necessarily dishonest—historians.

(1) Matthew records the flight of Joseph and Mary with the infant Jesus into Egypt almost immediately after his birth, where they remained, we are told, till after Herod's death. Luke, on the other hand, not only makes no mention of the fact, but informs us of the birth and the circumcision on the eighth day, followed by the presentation in the temple at Jerusalem, where, after a peaceable performance of all things ordered in the law of the Lord, they (the parents and the young child) depart from Jerusalem and return to their own city, Nazareth. It is not only that there is no mention of the flight in Luke, but Luke's account appears to exclude it. The two narratives must be read together to appreciate the force of this.

Again, the account given in Matthew of the massacre of all the young children in Bethlehem under two years of age is not only not alluded to by Luke, but is extremely improbable in itself. Herod no doubt committed many acts of cruelty during his reign, which Josephus narrates with no intention of sparing his character; and yet the Jewish historian makes no allusion to the massacre of the

there were two purifications; but acts and words do not repeat themselves. The same objections in each case to the work of the woman would not be raised by the lookers on; nor is it possible that Jesus would defend the act in each case by the same arguments.

young children. The event is not absolutely impossible, but it is so improbable as to entitle us to refuse our assent to it, when we reflect that it rests on the authority of a writer who misquotes prophecy in order apparently to enhance the credibility of the narrative. It need hardly be pointed out that the prophecy in Jeremiah (xxxii., 15) refers not to children slaughtered at Bethlehem hundreds of years after the prophet's death, but to persons taken captive at Rama, near the tomb of Rachel, who is represented in the prophecy as weeping for her children; but these, Jeremiah adds, shall return, and her sorrow shall be turned into joy. How, then, can it possibly be made to refer to Jesus of Nazareth? (See Matt. ii., 17.)

Similarly in regard to the temptation of Jesus. The narratives of the Synoptics spread it over a period of forty days, and inform us that Jesus was taken by the devil through the air and placed on a pinnacle of the temple.

The story is extremely difficult to credit from whatever point of view we regard it. Thomas Aquinas, I think it is, who refers to this wonder in support of the then prevailing belief in witchcraft. He says: "If the devil had the power of transporting Jesus through the air, why deny him the power of transporting an old woman through the air on a broomstick?" So improbable does the event seem that many orthodox commentators have enunciated the theory, that the occurrence was merely subjective, and had no real existence in actual fact. But why I especially allude to this narrative is that the fourth gospel not only makes no mention of it, but leaves no room for it. Within a week after his baptism, Jesus is described as surrounded by disciples in Galilee, while according to the Synoptics he is fasting in the wilderness, not having yet gained a single disciple.

Casting out of devils.—Many instances of this are given in the Synoptics, but the case referred to in Matthew viii. 28, *et seq.*, makes more demands on our faith than the others.

In the first place we read that devils, inhabiting human frames, address Jesus and deprecate their being cast out at all; but if it must be so, then they ask permission to be allowed to go into the bodies of a herd of swine; and we know the fate that attended the latter in consequence of the request being acceded to. The story to my mind is simply

incredible and impossible. It indicates either that Jesus shared the common opinions of his day in regard to demoniacal possession, or that the New Testament writers have made him responsible for their own views on the subject. It has been said by apologists that Jesus only accommodated himself to the understanding of his audience: that personally he did not believe in demoniacal possession. But how is this to be reconciled with the statement of his that "this kind only goeth out by prayer and fasting"? There are some people I know who, even at the present day, maintain that demons inhabit the human body. With such persons I cannot argue. Let them hold their opinions if they like, but they must not expect me to listen to them.

The extraordinary prohibition of Jesus to his twelve apostles (Matt. x., 5) not to go into the way of the Gentiles or into any of the Samaritan cities, but rather to the Jews—a most improbable order to have emanated from Jesus himself; especially in view of the fact (John iv.) that Jesus himself was in an early period of his ministry hospitably entertained by the Samaritans, and dwelt two days in their city, receiving their acknowledgement—or at any rate of some of them—of his Messiahship. In the 23rd verse of the former chapter we read that Jesus informs his disciples that they shall not have gone over the cities of Israel till the son of man be come. Surely this is an anachronism. Jesus, at the time he is reported to have said this, had not even informed his disciples of his death. Any allusion to his second coming would have been unintelligible to them. It seems to me certain that the words were attributed to him, long after his death, by a writer who failed to see the incongruity of the speech. Another anachronism is to be found in the words: "From the days of John the Baptist until now". If the Baptist had been dead some years the remark would have been intelligible, but seeing that he was in prison at the time, we must conclude that the speech was put into Jesus's mouth long after the Baptist's death. A third is to be found in Matt. xxiii., 35, Baruch, or Barachias, was not slain till thirty-five years after Christ.

The miracle of the reduplication of the loaves and fishes.—If the miracle recorded in the 14th of chapter of Matthew really occurred, it seems incredible that the disciples should have replied when their Master observed that he could not send the multitude away fasting (Matt. 15), "Whence

should we have so much bread in the wilderness as to fill so great a multitude?"—rather would they not have entreated Jesus to do again what he had shown himself already able to perform?

The miracle at the pool of Bethesda (John v.). This I take it to be one of the most extraordinary and improbable narratives in the New Testament. The account seems to me to involve the belief (1) that there was a certain pool of water in the populous city of Jerusalem which had some miraculous power imparted to it through the instrumentality of an angel, by which arrangement the first person (and the first person only of the multitudes who were congregated on its brink) who managed to struggle into it was cured of any infirmity he might happen to be suffering from; (2) that the troubling the water was a periodic affair; that is to say, we are given to understand that an angel was in the *habit* of coming down from heaven from time to time to impart miraculous restorative power to the water of the pool.

If the writer had informed us that Jesus imparted the power for a particular purpose, and on a particular occasion, the narrative would have been neither more or less improbable than many others of the miracles attributed to him; but the periodic performance of the miracle by an angelic visitor, with all its concomitant improbabilities, is really too great a tax on our faith. Visits of angels to men were so common before and even after the Christian era, that they appear to have excited no surprise. But can we in the 19th century take the same view? Can we in the least realise the possibility of multitudes of sick people anxiously waiting in the porch for the coming of an angel, who was to impart certain restorative power to the water of the pool? Positively, I cannot. In short, it makes miracles the normal condition of things, and as such they were regarded by those who lived and wrote in the first century of our era. Of course there are people living in the latter end of the 19th century who see nothing incongruous in the fact of an angel visiting this earth and interfering in its affairs; but such people seem to me to live in a different atmosphere of thought altogether from ordinary mortals, and anything you may say opposed to the traditional view seems to have no effect on them.

The cursing of the barren fig-tree.—This is the only puni-

tive miracle ascribed to Jesus, and has certainly exercised the judgment and divided the opinions of even orthodox commentators. Is it credible, I ask, that Jesus should cause a fig-tree to wither up because it had no fruit upon it *out of season* (Mark says "the time of figs was not yet"); or is it likely that Jesus should have *expected* to find figs upon it at an unseasonable time of the year?

Many explanations have been offered for this apparent anomaly. It has been said that the act was simply a symbolical one, designed to impress on the minds of the disciples that every tree which brought not forth good fruit shall be hewn down and cast into the fire; others, again, have considered it as symbolical of the Jewish nation. But there are no grounds for either assumption. The remarks of Jesus after the event have no reference to anything of a symbolical character, but refer altogether to the power of faith which, if they possess, would enable the disciples to do a far greater wonder than the cursing and withering up of the fig-tree.

The miraculous event immediately after the crucifixion of Jesus.—Mark and Luke tell us that there was darkness over the whole land for the space of three hours, and that the veil of the temple was rent in twain, but Matthew (xxvi. 51) goes further, and says, "The graves were opened, and many bodies of the saints which slept arose, and came out of their graves after his resurrection, and went into the city and appeared unto many".

It positively takes one's breath away when such a phenomenon as this is gravely propounded for our acceptance! What even are orthodox believers to make of it? In respect to this stupendous event Canon Farrar remarks:

"It is quite possible that the darkness was local gloom which hung densely over the guilty city and its immediate neighbourhood, and as an earthquake shook the city, and split the rocks, and as it rolled away from their places the great stones which closed the cavern sepulchres of the Jews, *so it seemed to the imagination of many* [the italics are mine] to have disimprisoned the spirits of the dead, and to have filled the air with ghostly visitants who, after Christ had risen, appeared to linger in the holy city."

This explanation may be better than insisting on the literal performance of the miracle, but it has its dangers too, for if we apply a similar canon of criticism to almost

any other of the miracles—even to the crowning miracle of all, that of the resurrection—it will evaporate into thin air, leaving nothing behind but the theory of a subjective vision, which is, I think, all that Paulus and writers of the rationalistic school ever contended for.

The resurrection of Lazarus.—This, perhaps the most marvellous and certainly the most circumstantially detailed event of any recorded in the New Testament, is not even alluded to by any of the synoptics. We have only John's word for it. How are we to explain the silence of the synoptics, if the event really occurred? They wrote *much* nearer in point of time to the alleged miracle than did the author of the 4th Gospel, and yet they say nothing about it, although—mark this!—it is represented as the point on which the subsequent catastrophe turned! It brought about the secret meeting of the Sanhedrim; it led that body to plot and scheme for Christ's apprehension; it must have been more talked of and generally known (had it occurred) than any other event in the history of Jesus; it ultimately led to his arrest; and yet the synoptics are wholly silent about the matter!

Many absurd and far-fetched explanations have been offered for their silence, one being that the event was too well-known to everyone to need any record—an argument, as Scott observes, which would apply equally to the narrative of the crucifixion. The fact is, their silence cannot be explained on any reasonable hypothesis. I know there are some minds on whom such an omission made no impression, so tied down are they to traditional ideas; but to me their silence is almost conclusive as to the non-performance of the miracle, for I cannot on any other ground account for their failure to mention it.

In addition to the foregoing, there is another difficulty which has to be explained. I allude to the apparent omniscience of the Evangelists. On the theory that they were merely amanuenses, writing down events at the dictation of the Holy Ghost, the difficulty vanishes. But we *know* that they were nothing of the kind. How then are we to suppose they came by the knowledge of events which happened when they could by no possibility have been present: for instance, how did they get their knowledge of what transpired between Jesus and the devil during the

temptation ; or the angel Gabriel's speech to Mary, and her reply to him ; or Mary's hymn, commencing, " My soul doth magnify the Lord " ; or the speech of Pilate's wife to her husband about Jesus ; or the conversation that passed between Herod and the daughter of Herodias concerning John the Baptist ; or Jesus' prayer in the garden of Gethsemane when his disciples were asleep ?

As it is by no means my intention to give a complete list of the difficulties which stand in the way of accepting the theory of the infallibility, or even the inspiration of the Bible, I will now pass on to the consideration of the famous speech of Jesus in Matt xxiv., and its counterpart in Mark xiii. and Luke xxi. After describing the destruction of the Holy City, and the woe that shall come upon the people, he goes on to say, " Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened . . . and they shall see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory ; and he shall send his angels with the sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect, &c., &c.," adding (in Matt. xxiv., 24), " Verily I say unto you, this generation shall not pass away till all these things be fulfilled " ; and again, in the 44th verse, " Therefore be ye also ready, for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of Man cometh ". This discourse, as given in Matthew and Mark, is to all appearance as plain as any statement can be : it asserts positively not only that the temple and city should be destroyed within a very short time, but that the world should come to an end, and the final judgment of all mankind be completed within the lifetime of that generation, all that was uncertain being the exact day and hour. More than 18 centuries have passed away, and Christ's second coming is still delayed. All sorts of desperate attempts have been made to explain away these statements, but they have failed ignominiously. Either one or the other alternative must be accepted : either Jesus uttered the prophecy or he did not. If he did, subsequent history has falsified the prediction ; if he did not, we have another instance of the Evangelists making their Master responsible for words he never uttered.

Mr. Hatton, an orthodox commentator (one of the very few who look difficulties fairly in the face), says : " That the prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem is greatly confused with the vision of spiritual judgment of all things is clear

enough, and it is remarkable that two quite distinct statements as to time are jumbled up together in the oddest confusion. It is impossible that two such statements could have been made in the closest juxtaposition without a clear distinction between the provisions to which they refer. The gathering of the armies, the slaughter, the famine, and the destruction of the city—all this is to take place within that generation; but the final judgment with which the disciples certainly confused it, was, apparently almost within the same breath, declared to be absolutely indeterminate and reserved by God amongst the eternal secrets." That is to say, Mr. Hatton thinks the disciples misunderstood Jesus; but if they misunderstand him here, they must have misunderstood him on other occasions too; for there are other texts which go to show that Christ prophesied as to his speedy second coming, and these are in no way mixed up with the destruction of Jerusalem, *e.g.*, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, there be some standing here which shall not taste of death till they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom." "Ye shall not have gone over all the cities of Israel until the Son of Man be come." "If I will that ye tarry till I come, what is that to thee?" "Hereafter shall ye see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven." That Christ's disciples all confidently entertained the erroneous expectation of Christ's speedy second coming, and entertained it on the supposed authority of their Master, there can be doubt whatever, says Greg; and this I think is as certain as anything can be, short of mathematical demonstration.

Professor Plumptre, the Dean of Wells, comments on the prophecy as follows:—

"How are we to explain the fact that already more than 18 centuries have rolled away, and the promise of his coming is still unfulfilled? It is a partial answer to the question to say that God's measurements of time are not as ours, but that which may seem the boldest is also the truest and most reverential. Of that day and hour knoweth no man, not even the Son, but the Father; and therefore He (Christ) as truly man, and as having therefore vouchsafed to accept the limitation of knowledge incident to man's nature, speaks of the two events, as poets and prophets speak of the far-off future."

The learned dean also seems to think that "the words received a symbolical and therefore a partial and germanent

accomplishment in the manifestation of the power of the Son of Man at and after the destruction of Jerusalem, but await their complete fulfilment till the final advent ”.

What good can there possibly be in telling us that God's measurements of time are not as ours, in explanation of the words of Christ that the existing order of things should come to an end in *that* generation, and that many standing before him should not die till he came in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory to judge the world? And it seems to me equally useless to say that the prophecy received partial accomplishment at the destruction of Jerusalem, because Christianity then began to make way in the world. What is gained either in speaking of Christ's limitation of knowledge in connection with prophetic language? If the dean had said boldly, “Christ's knowledge was limited, and therefore he spoke under a misapprehension as to the *time* of his second coming”; or if he had said he (Christ) “spoke with the licence of a poet” and therefore we must not take his words literally, one could have at any rate understood either half of the proposition; but bracketed together they appear to me to make nonsense. The fact is no explanation is possible, except, of course, that the Evangelists were mistaken, or that Jesus spoke under limitations of knowledge, and therefore erroneously.

If the foregoing considerations do not altogether disprove Mr. Gladstone's theory, viz., “That although the Bible may contain matters questionable, uncertain, and even mistaken, yet it may by its contents as a whole present such moral proofs as ought to command our assent, etc.”, they at any rate detract from its probability to a very considerable extent, for we naturally ask, If the writers were mistaken on so many points, and shared the common errors of their day, what ground have we for supposing that they were exempt from error in matters relating to things of the unseen world, or even spoke under inspiration at all? It has been argued that if we think the evidence sufficient to establish the two great cardinal doctrines on which Christianity rests, viz., the incarnation and the resurrection of Christ, why trouble ourselves about minor matters? What can it possibly signify, for instance, whether certain demoniacs were permitted to go into a herd of swine; or whether an angel came down periodically

to impart certain restorative power to the water of the pool of Bethesda, or whether 5,000 men were fed with five loaves and two fishes, so long as we have an assurance that Christ rose from the dead. If he did, says a well-known writer, "this miracle alone would prove that Christianity is a divine revelation". True, but the evidence on the point must be thoroughly convincing, in view of the fact that it is found recorded in a book which contains numerous errors and inaccuracies on matters of daily life and history.

Of course it is open to anyone to deny that this is so, but surely it is better, even in the interests of Christianity, to admit the fact, as so many Christian writers have done, than to resort to the extravagant hypotheses of the harmonists, who have, in my opinion, done more harm to the cause they have at heart than all the assaults of the unbelievers put together.

The Bishop of Carlyle remarks that the Apostles' Creed speaks of two miraculous circumstances of our Lord's earthly history, and two only: the coming into the world and the going out of it. "He came amongst us", says the Bishop, "by an extraordinary birth. He left us by an extraordinary exit, involving a triumph over death. On these two great facts each Christian expresses belief as a condition of baptism." Although the Bishop does not say so in so many words, I infer from his remarks that a belief in these two occurrences is, in his opinion, alone necessary to salvation. Let us then first consider what grounds we have for belief in the former. It will be noted that the evidence for it rests entirely on certain statements made in Matthew and Luke. Are we prepared to accept so marvellous an event on the *ipse dixit* of writers who have been shown to be untrustworthy in so many matters of detail, especially when we remember that the idea of a virgin-birth was by no means new? (Buddha was credited with a similar miraculous birth, so were many of the ancients—Pythagoras and Plato, for instance.) Matthew weakens the credit that might otherwise possibly attach to his narrative by quoting the occurrence as a fulfilment of prophecy. He says: "Now all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying: Behold a virgin shall be with child, etc., etc." Matthew Arnold remarks: "It becomes certain that in these words

read on Christmas Day, the Prophet Isaiah (from which Matthew quotes) was not meaning to speak of Jesus Christ, but of a Prince of Judah, to be born in a year or two's time." Similarly the Evangelist misquotes, or rather misapplies prophecies, in three other cases in the same chapter. Now, how does the Bishop explain this? Whilst admitting the misquotations, he says: "St. Matthew, apparently looking from a Jewish point of view, did not see things with exactly the same eyes as his English namesake" (meaning Matthew Arnold). In order, the Bishop says, "to enter into St. Matthew's mind, we must remember the education to which the Jewish Church and nation had been subjected. . . . Consequently, when a Jewish disciple came to write the history of the life and ministry of his Lord, whom he entirely believed to be the Messiah, he could naturally find up and down the prophetic books, references—some direct and some oblique, to Him for whose coming these books had unquestionably made preparation. Is it wonderful then that St. Matthew should see in the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ the fulfilment of these magnificent words of prophecy, 'Behold a virgin shall conceive, etc.?' " The reply is: By no means wonderful, but just what we could expect, if we view the Evangelist as an ordinary Jewish writer not exempt from the beliefs and prejudices of his age and country; but very wonderful indeed if we look upon him as an inspired historian, writing under the guidance of the spirit of God. Such an explanation is to me no explanation at all.

There remains, then, St. Luke's account for consideration. The Bishop sets a great store on St. Luke's testimony. He credits him with being (probably correctly so) the author of the acts of the apostles. He says that

"This narrative gives us unsurpassed opportunities of testing the honesty, the intelligence, and the power of observation appertaining to the author". The Bishop refers to the story of the voyage of St. Paul from Palestine to Italy, and his (Paul's) shipwreck on the coast of Malta, and in doing so says: "We must be impressed by a strong belief that St. Luke was a man possessing in a high degree the habit of careful observation which his medical profession demanded and fostered, and also that he had in eminent abundance the valuable faculty of setting down accurately and clearly the things which he observed".

I would observe that, in this history of the very voyage that the Bishop refers to, St. Luke tells us of a viper coming out of the fire, and fastening on Paul's hand. Now surely this was not an anecdote that would have emanated from a physician, highly skilled, and a careful observer of facts as distinguished from fictions? The belief in such reptiles as salamanders (fabulous monsters supposed to live in fire) does not, I think, bear out the character assigned to Luke by the Bishop, especially if we remember that he was supposed to be writing as an eye-witness. Besides, if there is any truth in my previous criticism, Luke was by no means exempt from the mistakes and delusions of the other Biblical writers. In this view, we are not at all likely to accept the story of the incarnation as historical because we find it recorded in St. Luke's Gospel.

In regard to the second miracle, viz., the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Here we have the very keystone of the Christian position. Take it away, and the whole fabric collapses. As St. Paul says, "If Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith also is in vain". It will be noted that the event is related with more or less circumstantially by all four Evangelists; but unfortunately it is impossible to weave their several accounts into one harmonious whole, and none of them harmonise, in my opinion, with that given in the Acts of the Apostles. It is not, however, my intention to give chapter and verse for this assertion. Anyone can satisfy himself on this point by carefully perusing the Gospel narratives themselves. I will merely refer to one single instance. Jesus tells his disciples (Matt. xxvi., 32) that after he was risen again, he could go beyond them into Galilee; the angel repeats the injunction to Mary Magdalene (Matt. xxviii., 7); and we read that Jesus himself (Matt. xxviii., 10) on the first day of the week very early in the morning appeared unto the two Mary's, and enjoined them to "Tell my brethren that they go into *Galilee*, and there shall they see me". Accordingly the eleven disciples went into *Galilee* to a mountain, as Jesus had appointed, and there he appeared unto them (Matt. xxviii., 16); but in the 24th chapter of Luke, we have a totally different account, viz., "That the eleven disciples were gathered together at *Jerusalem* on the first day of the week (1st and 33rd verses), and Jesus stood in their midst" (36th verse). It seems certain that if the

eleven journeyed into Galilee and saw Jesus on a mountain they did not at the same time remain in Jerusalem and see him there too.

There is this, however, to be said, that while the Gospel writers contradict one another in detail, they all agree in the main point, viz., that Christ rose from the dead; but, considering the magnitude of the event, the many points on which they conflict, and that in no single case, not even in that of the writer of the 4th Gospel, can we be sure that we have the testimony of an eye witness, all I am disposed to allow from their unanimity of statement on this particular point is, that at the time the Gospels were written the *belief* in the resurrection was a well-established fact amongst the Christian community. But we derive this information in a much more dependable form from St. Paul's epistles. He wrote at a much earlier date. He stands prominently forward as a true historical character, and we know something about him, which is more than can be said in respect to the four Evangelistic writers.

Here we must pause for consideration. No one, I think, who reads the letters of the great apostle to the Gentiles, can fail to be deeply impressed with the writer's earnestness and truthfulness of character. From a fanatical persecutor of the despised sect of the Nazarenes, he became their firmest supporter. His whole subsequent career was devoted to the cause of the Master he loved so well. "I count all things loss", he says, "for the knowledge of the excellence of Christ Jesus my Lord".

We feel certain that St. Paul is speaking the truth as far as he discerns it, and we know that his four most important letters, viz., one to the Romans, two to the Corinthians, and one to the Galatians, are genuine, whatever the others may be. At the same time, I do not think this excludes the possibility of interpolations in the text at a later date. From these letters we learn St. Paul's whole mind towards Christianity. He was, after his conversion, it is unnecessary to say, a firm believer in the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. He goes so far as to say that if Christ be not risen, Christianity is a delusion, and "we are of all men the most miserable." He claims to have seen Christ, for he says, "Have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord?" (1 Cor., 9); and again, "Last of all he was seen of me, also as of one born

out of due time" (1 Cor. xv., 8); and we may be quite sure that he meant what he said.

Further, we have St. Peter's testimony (see his first epistle, which, however, we are not *sure* is genuine), where he says, "Blessed be the Lord, and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who, according to his abundant mercy, has begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead"—that is, "who hath restored us from the state of temporary despair in which we were after his death to a renewed hope by his resurrection"; and, again, the author of the Acts (supposed to be Luke) makes Peter say that it was essential in filling up the place of Judas "to choose one who had accompanied with the apostles all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out amongst us, beginning from the baptism of John unto that same day that he was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection."

Besides the testimony of St. Paul and St. Peter (if the latter's epistle is genuine) and the writer of the Acts, we have the fact, as Mr. Hatton points out, that although all was confusion and dismay on the morrow of the Crucifixion, yet within two months after the death of Christ the Church at Jerusalem was increasing at a rate at which we have no reason to suppose the number of Christ's disciples ever increased during his lifetime. Mr. Hatton asks:

"How could the blasted hopes of the apostles revive without some great substantial and even physical stimulus? If the person of our Lord was admitted by all to have reappeared amongst them, no doubt these hopes would have revived, but not otherwise. For my part I cannot doubt that the best explanation is that which is alleged to have been, viz., that Christ himself returned to his apostles after his death, and that it was his directing mind which gave them a new and powerful impulse."

There is no doubt much plausibility in this contention, and if resurrections from the dead were in the nature of ordinary occurrences, or even if we had but one previous well authenticated instance of a resurrection of a dead person, we might perhaps accept Mr. Hatton's explanation as the easiest solution of the difficulty; but have we?

The late W. R. Greg seems to think we may account for the belief by supposing that Christ never really

died, but rose from the grave only. The circumstance of his being taken down from the cross much earlier than was customary—he was only six hours on the cross; according to St. John only three—coupled with the fact that Josephus narrates an instance of resuscitation after crucifixion, which came under his own observation, lends some support to this hypothesis. Nevertheless, there are so many difficulties in the way of accepting it that, without pronouncing it absolutely impossible, I think it cannot be admitted as a solution of the problem.

How, then, did the report arise that Christ had risen from the dead if he did not come to life again and appear corporeally to His disciples after the crucifixion? It by no means follows that because we are unable to give a satisfactory answer, the resurrection story must be historically true. Events are happening every day that are quite inexplicable to us on any hypothesis we can frame, but that is no reason why we should refer them to a supernatural origin. How can we account for the belief in the miracles worked by the Curate of Ars, who only died somewhere about the middle of the present century? His miracles, especially those of healing, were vouched for by half a dozen credible witnesses—doctors of medicine amongst their number—some of whom may possibly be alive at the present day. He made more converts than St. Paul probably did, and gave up his whole life to the service of the Church he loved so well.

It is best, I think, to acknowledge that at this distance of time, and with much that is obscure and hidden from our view, we must be content to leave the question as to how the belief in the resurrection first arose, in conjecture, not forgetting that in those days it was no difficult matter to induce a belief in the resurrection of a dead person. Matthew Arnold points out that the resurrection of the just was in St. Paul's time a ruling idea of a Jewish mind. Herod at once, and without difficulty, supposed that John the Baptist had risen from the dead, and in telling the story of the crucifixion, the writer of the first Gospel added, quite naturally, that when it was consummated many bodies of the saints which slept arose and appeared unto many. Renan thinks that it is to Mary Magdalene's impressionable mind that we owe the first report of the resurrection. Who can tell? All

we know is that in a very short time the belief in their Master's resurrection spread amongst his followers, and that it was this belief, coupled with an assurance of his speedy return to judge the world, which made the establishment of Christianity a possibility.

St. Paul's testimony is of a later date. He does not appear on the scene till eight or ten years after the crucifixion, and his most important epistles were not written for certainly ten or fifteen years after that. Nevertheless he distinctly affirms that he had seen Christ. But, we may ask, when, and under what circumstances? Was it on that celebrated journey of his to Damascus? He does not say so in any of his Epistles, but from the narrative in the Acts it would appear likely. At any rate, we have his testimony to the fact. But the question is, what is it worth without the test of cross-examination?

Dr. Carpenter, speaking of alleged supernatural or non-natural occurrences, says :

"Granting that the narrators write what they firmly believe to be true, as having themselves seen, or thought they had seen, is their belief sufficient justification for ours? What is the extent of allowance which we are to make for prepossession (1) as to modifying their conception of an occurrence at the time; and (2) as modifying their subsequent remembrance of it. . . . The result of my enquiries into curious phenomena is such as to force upon me the conviction that as to all which concerns the supernatural, the allowance that has to be made for prepossession is so large as practically to destroy the validity of any testimony which is not submitted to the severest scrutiny."

If this be true in regard to events happening towards the close of the nineteenth century, how much more so in the first century, when supernatural events were looked upon in the light of ordinary occurrences! It must be remembered that the history of religious enthusiasm in all ages supplies us with abundant illustrations of men who have identified the overpowering impressions of their own mind with divine communication, or have taken subjective visions for real appearances of divine persons. (The case of Emanuel Swedenborg is a noted instance in point.) We know that before his conversion St. Paul signalled himself by the persecution of the early Christian converts, and that he took a part in the stoning of Stephen. Is it not conceivable that the dying words of the proto-martyr

may have sunk deeply into his soul, and given him grave cause for reflection? When setting out on that journey of his to Damascus, cannot we imagine his asking himself the question: "Is it not possible that these despised Nazarenes, who so cheerfully sacrifice their lives and their possessions for the sake of their master, may be right after all? If so, then mine must be devil's work." Possibly agitated with thoughts something like these, and overcome with the fatigues of the journey, is there anything improbable in conceiving that cerebral disturbances were induced which led Paul to see visions and hear voices? Such occurrences are by no means uncommon. In this view there need be nothing miraculous in his sudden conversion. Once led to see the error of his ways, he would naturally become as enthusiastic in his efforts on behalf of Christianity, as he previously had been in his opposition to it; in short, Saul the persecutor would become Paul the apostle.

As Renan observes, "Violent and impulsive natures, inclined to proselytism, only change the object of their passion. As ardent for the new faith as he had been for the old, St. Paul, like Omar, in one day dropped his part of persecutor for that of an apostle."

If I remember rightly, the conversion of Ignatius Loyola approximated somewhat closely to that of St. Paul. Differences there were, but we read in his life that the Virgin Mary appeared to him with the infant Jesus in her arms, and from that hour to the day of his death, his conversion was as true and genuine as that of St. Paul.

Colonel Gardiner saw Jesus Christ on the cross, suspended in the air, and this was the turning-point in his life.

Samson Stainforth, a Methodist soldier of Cromwell's army, thus relates his conversion: "From twelve at night till two it was my turn to stand sentinel at a dangerous post. I had a fellow-sentinel, but I desired him to go away, which he willingly did. No sooner was I alone than I knelt down, determined not to rise until the Lord had mercy upon me. How long I was in this agony I cannot tell, but as I looked up to heaven I saw the clouds open and Jesus hanging on the cross; at the same moment I heard the words, 'Thy sins are forgiven thee'."

Lord Herbert of Cherbury, before publishing his deistical work, "De Veritate," heard a similar voice from heaven.

History abounds with instances of persons mistaking subjective visions for real appearances. Roman Catholic literature is full of them, even at the present day. To Roman Catholics they are real; why must we assume that the appearances to St. Paul were of a fundamentally different character? Should you reply, "I think your explanation of St. Paul's conversion very improbable", "Very well," I rejoin, "formulate one for yourself". All I contend for is that it is not necessary to resort to a supernatural hypothesis in St. Paul's case, and to say that the appearances to him differed in *kind* from many we read of in history, and which we know were merely the result of disturbed cerebral action.

I have been told that Paul was not at all the sort of person to see visions. Why? He tells us himself he was weak in body, of presence contemptible, and suffered from a thorn in the flesh, whatever that may have been. He speaks of himself (at least it is presumed he is narrating his own experiences) as having been caught up to the seventh heaven, and there having seen unspeakable things. And yet, however unable we may be to accept his visions as objective facts, how our hearts go along with him when we read the account of his labours, his love and sympathy for his fellow-men, and the entire consecration of his whole life to his master's cause. Can we wonder that he had the rare gift of attracting men towards him. Savanarola, Whitefield, Wesley, and many others who might be named, possessed a similar gift. All thoroughly earnest men who have an intense conviction of the truth of their mission have it more or less. We are hardly, then, surprised, when Agrippa says to St. Paul, "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian". St. Paul's earnestness and eloquence in pleading on behalf of Christianity nearly turned the scale in the king's mind—that is, if we are to believe the account given in the "Acts".

The Rev. C. A. Rowe, in his "Historical evidence for the Resurrection", asserts that there were more than 250 persons living who believed that they had seen Christ alive after his crucifixion. I call this a monstrous overstatement. It rests, of course, upon the 6th verse of the 15th Corinthians; but St. Paul could only have known of the appearance to the 500, from hearsay. Such evidence at the best, is only second-hand. What seems probable is, that a year or two

after the crucifixion, a report gained credence, from small beginnings, that Christ had appeared to a *number* of persons at once; and that in the course of a few years, say within 10 or 15 years afterwards, the legend had assumed a more definite form, and had reached the number of 500.

Did St. Paul when speaking of the appearance of the 500 allude to the ascension? If so, Luke's account of it does not accord with the statement, as we are led to infer from what he says, that the ascension took place in the presence of the 11 apostles only.

St. Paul says Jesus appeared to James, and then to all the apostles; but this is only second-hand testimony. They don't say so for themselves. St. Peter in his first epistle speaks of the resurrection as a well-recognised fact, but he nowhere says, like St. Paul, "I myself saw Christ after his resurrection"; besides there is some doubt as to the genuineness of the epistle. Dr. Samuel Davidson, a distinguished Biblical critic, assigns it to the year 113. The testimony of the writer of the Acts is not that of an eye-witness (as to the resurrection I mean), and there are two instances, if not more, in that work, in which the writer appears to have drawn upon his imagination. One instance I refer to, is that of the slaughter of Ananias and Sapphira—a most improbable incident,—as Sir Richard Hanson in his life of St. Paul justly points out.

However loth we may be at times to reject Paul's testimony as to the resurrection, we must remember that it is almost impossible to isolate it from the other events narrated in a book which purports to be an inspired record conveying a divine message from God to fallen man. Such a record can hardly contain errors and contradictions on material points without affecting the credit of the whole.

For instance, if we are told that an angel was in the habit of periodically coming down from heaven to impart healing properties to the water of Bethesda, or that Jesus Christ foretold the end of the then existing dispensation and his second coming in the clouds of heaven to judge the world during the lifetime of the generation then living (a statement fully accepted by St. Paul and other Christian converts), and a few pages afterwards we read that Christ rose from the dead and appeared to his disciples in a bodily form, we naturally ask ourselves the question, "If the story of the angel is incredible, or if the statement as to Christ's

second coming has been falsified by the efflux of time, why should we credit the latter, resting as it does on the evidence of writers about whom we know little—whose writings may have been interpolated, who certainly shared the common errors of their day, who were mistaken on other points bearing on the Christian revelation, and who were just as likely to mistake subjective visions for objective ones, as any of the persons I have referred to?”.

We cannot pick and choose as we like. It is all very well to say if the evidence is sufficient to establish the fact of the resurrection, that will carry all else with it. Very good. But is the evidence sufficient? I have endeavoured to show that it is not; and I further maintain that the evidence, such as it is, is considerably weakened by being found in close connection with narratives of events which we feel satisfied never happened, and sayings which were never uttered; or, if uttered, were erroneous. Just remember how easy it would have been to establish the fact of Christ's resurrection once, and for all time. Had he shown himself, as the author of “Supernatural Religion” points out, after his resurrection to the chief priests and elders, and confounded the Pharisees with the vision of him whom they had so cruelly nailed to the cross, how might not the future of his followers have been smoothed, and the faith of many made strong.

Cardinal Newman seems to think that we cannot account for the establishment of Christianity excepting on a supernatural basis. He asks, “Is it conceivable that a rival power to Cæsar should have started out of so obscure and ignorant a spot as Galilee, and have prevailed without some extraordinary and divine gifts?”.

A writer on Christian evidences also observes that the great Roman Empire crumbled to pieces before the power of the Gospel, and the last Pagan emperor when dying exclaimed in accents of despair, “Oh, Galilean, thou hast conquered!”. Julian (the emperor referred to) said nothing of the kind. Professor Rendall, in his Hulsean lectures for the year 1876, after eulogising the character of the Emperor, adds: “The Christians *fabled* how Julian, after receiving the fatal javelin wound, cried out, ‘Vicisti Galilæe’”. I fear this is not the only story invented by the early Christians. As regards, however, the decline and fall

of the Roman Empire, and the establishment of Christianity on its ruins, I would remark that it was falling to pieces from its own inherent decay, before Christianity came in contact with it; and with respect to its conversion to Christianity, there was, no doubt, that in the new religion which adapted itself to the wants and circumstances of the people with whom it came in contact. Lecky says:

“We can be at no loss to discover the cause of its (Christianity’s) triumph. No religion, under such circumstances, had ever combined so many distinct elements of power and attraction. It proclaimed the universal brotherhood of man. It taught the supreme sanctity of love. It was the religion of the suffering and the oppressed. The chief cause of its success was the congruity of its teaching with the spiritual nature of man.”

We may extend the list, and say that one of its chief, if not its greatest attraction—to the suffering and oppressed at any rate—was the overpowering belief in the speedy second coming of Christ to judge the world, and reign with his saints on earth for 1,000 years.

To say that the conversion of the Roman Empire was as literally supernatural as the raising of the dead, is to talk nonsense; but this has been said by Christian apologists. Just as Christianity adapted itself to the needs of the people of Palestine, and afterwards swayed the Roman world, so did Buddhism adapt itself to the wants of the Aryan races with which it came in contact. When the question is asked, “How is it possible to explain the success of Christianity without miraculous and divine assistance?” I would retort: How can you explain the success of Buddhism without similar divine assistance? The latter would be the more difficult task of the two, for what Gautama preached was a gospel of pure human ethics, divorced not only from a future individual life, but even from the existence of a God; and yet Buddhism can boast of a larger number of followers to-day than Christianity can—even if we give the latter the benefit of all her *nominal* adherents. Who can explain this? and yet it is a fact.

It has been argued that Christianity has sufficed to satisfy the spiritual needs of a Bacon, a Shakespeare, and a Newton; that it has subdued and tamed the most savage natures, reclaimed the drunkard and the thief, and proved a blessing and a consolation to thousands of pious souls

borne down by the sorrows and calamities of life. Hence the inference is drawn that it must be divine.

That Christianity has claimed the allegiance of some of the greatest minds of this or any age, I am not in a position to deny. But it must not be overlooked that in the age of Bacon and Shakespeare *miraculous* Christianity did not present the same difficulties as it does to us. A well-educated schoolboy is, in certain branches of knowledge, ahead of the greatest sages of antiquity. Sir Matthew Hale was not inferior in intellect to a modern chief justice, because he believed in witchcraft. As a well-known writer says, "The more enlightened modern who drops the errors of his forefathers by help of that mass of experience which his forefathers aided in accumulating, may often be, according to the well-known saying, 'a dwarf on giant's shoulders'."

But as to the opinions of our leading men of the present day. In considering them as a guide to our own beliefs, I would eliminate the views of all professional theologians and teachers like Bishops Lightfoot and Magee, because, although gifted with great intellectual powers, they write and argue with preconceived views. The whole force of their great intellect is used in support of the beliefs they have been educated in, and for the defence of which they hold a brief. They write in all honesty, but under a prepossession.

As regards the religious opinions of our leading scientific men, they, it is well known, are opposed to any view based on supernaturalism. But it is extremely difficult to get at the opinions of men whose opinions are worth having. For the most part, they keep them to themselves. It would be extremely interesting to know the religious views of, say, 100 of our leading statesmen, men of science, philosophers, poets, and historians, etc. The *Pall Mall Gazette*, who is always interviewing some one or other, and eliciting opinions on divers subjects of interest, might possibly help us here. Amongst the mighty dead, who have rejected supernatural Christianity, I would mention the names of Gibbon, Hume, Adam Smith, Condorcet, Von Humboldt, Goethe, Thomas Carlyle, George Eliot, and J. S. Mill. The latter points out that it would surprise us if we knew the religious opinions of some of our leading men. For my

own part, I have known at least two who have conformed to the religious rites of the Church, and yet have held "sceptical views" on religious subjects. In respect to what are called strictly orthodox views, I doubt whether one educated and thoughtful mind amongst fifty holds them. Who amongst us can truthfully say that he believes all that is embodied in our Church creeds? When we hear one of our Church's dignitaries saying that he derives the greatest comfort and consolation from the Athanasian Creed, what are we to think of his habit of mind? Is not this a very prostitution of the rational faculty?

That the teaching of Christianity has been the support and mainstay of thousands; that it has influenced the conduct, and altered the lives of thousands more, I should be the last to deny. There is that in Christianity, quite apart from its miracles, which satisfies the aspirations, and adapts itself to the wants and circumstances of those brought under its influence. If true Christianity consists, not in the acceptance of certain metaphysical dogmas about the person and work of Christ, and the nature of the Deity, but in the cultivation of that spirit of self-sacrificing love which was the distinguishing characteristic of Jesus of Nazareth, then we need no longer wonder at its claiming the allegiance of our highest and most cultivated minds—and if (as is generally the case) the belief in a future state of never-ending happiness, as a reward for certain beliefs and lines of conduct here, influences the lives of thousands, converting the drunkard, and reclaiming the harlot and the thief, can we wonder at it? Who denies that Christianity has been an intense agency for good? But we must not forget that there is a reverse side to the picture—a religion based on the Westminster confession of faith, and the shorter catechism, has driven thousands to the lunatic asylum. Even in our own day, the doctrine of hell fire is not quite exploded. Father Ignatius, not long ago, preaching in a friend's church, created the greatest excitement and terror (as well he might) amongst his audience by bellowing forth in a voice of thunder the following:

"As I look out into the churchyard I see the graves of hundreds of thousands of former villagers who have gone away. Where have they gone to? Where? Where, I ask?

To hell or to heaven? Which? To heaven? Not half of them. Your father is in hell! your mother is in hell! My dear people, added the preacher, you are not accustomed to be spoken to plainly, and in a matter-of-fact business-like way about your souls. You are talked to as if religion were a sentimental namby-pamby kind of thing."

And Mr. Spurgeon is not far behind Jonathan Edwards¹ in his views of the state of the lost. He says:

"What will you think when the last day comes to hear Christ say, 'Depart ye cursed, etc.', and there will be a voice behind him saying, 'Amen', and as you enquire whence came that voice, you will find it was your mother. Oh, young woman, when thou art cast away into utter darkness, what will you think to hear a voice saying 'Amen'—and as you look, there sits your father, his lips still moving with the solemn curse."

Is not this another and a lamentable instance of how men's minds may become positively perverted, not to say depraved, by adopting and teaching Calvinistic theories of belief? Oh, the pity of it! And yet, I suppose, Mr. Spurgeon is not less humane naturally than his unconverted brethren.

But to all this it may very fairly be replied, "We have nothing to do with certain individual opinions—what does revelation teach?" Well, that is a difficult question to answer. If by revelation is meant the teaching of the Bible, all I can say is, that it is very diverse in its teaching, and this diversity is more clearly seen the more it is submitted to the test of candid examination. I maintain that no single phase of Christianity, High Anglicanism or Evangelicalism, Trinitarianism or Unitarianism—eternal torment or universalism—or conditional immortality—derives exclusive support from the whole of the Bible. Each particular phase will find texts to support it. How is it that the common saying is literally true—that we can prove almost anything from the Bible? How is it that sects the most opposite in doctrine and belief *do* appeal to the Bible for their diverse beliefs? How is it that men go on fighting, apparently for ever, the battle of the texts? The simple and, I fancy, true explanation is that the Bible is written by men writing as

¹J. Edwards says: "However the saints in heaven may have loved the damned whilst here, their eternal damnation will only serve to increase a relish for their own enjoyments".

fallible human beings to the best of their judgment and belief, but holding diverse views, and not always holding the same views at all periods of their lives.

It is hard to say whether the doctrine of eternal torment is or is not taught in the Bible. In some places it appears to be, and in others not. St. Paul seems to me on the whole to have held the view of the total annihilation of the wicked, while Jesus Christ (at first sight, at any rate) appears to have taught the doctrine of everlasting torment; but it may well be, as Matthew Arnold points out, that all the expressions about hell and judgment and eternal fire, used by him, were quotations from the book of Enoch; that he found the texts, ready at hand, which his hearers understood, and employed the ready-made notions of heaven and hell and judgment, just as Socrates talked of the rivers of Tartarus.

In contradistinction to the views of Mr. Spurgeon and others, it is only fair to quote the Rev. H. Allon, a well-known Congregational minister. In his lecture on the moral teaching of the New Testament (published at the request of the Christian Evidence Society), he says, "Whatever perplexity our minds may feel about the possible meaning (possible indeed!) of New Testament threatenings, we may surely trust his love, that it will be nothing from which our human love would shrink". If this be so, we may at once discard the doctrine of eternal punishment, for we may be quite sure that no earthly father, however brutal his instincts may be, would condemn even the worst of sons to an eternity of torment, though it should consist only of mental torment.

But is Mr. Allon's teaching Biblical? I doubt it.

The editor of the *Christian* is very wrath with those who assert the universal Fatherhood of God. He says: "We protest solemnly against this doctrine; first, because it cannot be found or proved from the Bible; secondly, because, like all other errors, it subverts the truth, and also because it does away with the necessity for the substitutionary work of Christ, for no true father needs expiation, and only a judge or a ruler demands satisfaction for the law broken, and is bound by absolute justice to exact punishment; but not so a father, he is ever ready to forgive". There is a good deal of unconscious irony in

all this, but how far it accords with Biblical teaching it is difficult to say.

For my own part, I am inclined to think that the New Testament, on the whole, teaches the eternity of punishment (if not of physical torment), although a believer in conditional immortality, or a universalist, will find much in its pages to support either view. At any rate, when we find men like Canon Farrar and Professor Plumptre denying that the doctrine of eternal punishment is taught in the Bible; and others, like the late Dr. Pusey and the late Bishop of Lincoln (no whit behind the other two in scholarship) declaring that it is, we begin to realise the impossibility of arriving at any decision on the point.

But supposing the Bible does teach the doctrine of eternal punishment; what then? Must we believe it? Not unless we are also prepared to believe in demoniacal possession and witchcraft. John Wesley was not far wrong when he said that to give up a belief in witchcraft was tantamount to giving up a belief in the Bible.

It has, however, been suggested to me that, admitting the fallibility of the Church, and the non-inspiration of the Bible (inspiration is here referred to in the sense generally understood by Christian apologists), is it not possible that there may have been a gradual unfolding of revelation. For instance, in the physical world, secrets of the highest importance to the race to know—discoveries in medicine, in chemistry, in electricity, in sanitation, etc.—have been hidden for thousands of years, and are now only as it were coming to light and benefitting the race (we may even yet be only in the vestibule of knowledge). Is it not possible that a similar law may hold good in the moral world? The planet we inhabit was not fashioned in a day. If the Deity works by slowly evolving processes in one department of the universe, may He not do so in another? Who shall undertake to deny that he is not now, and ever has been, slowly but surely preparing the world for the reception of spiritual truths, and bringing it to a knowledge of Himself. May not all religions that have claimed the allegiance of mankind contain some truths or adumbrations of the truth? and, amongst all the greatest religious teachers the world has ever seen, may not the prophet of Nazareth have received the largest measure of inspiration

of them all, and yet not have been divine in the sense in which Christians generally understand the term?

Granting the existence of a Being who desires to make a revelation to mankind, I see nothing antecedently improbable in the idea. Judging by analogy, it seems to me more likely to be true than the dogma of a final and stereotyped revelation (as contended for by Paley) delivered once for all to an ignorant and barbarous nation, residing in a small corner of the globe, to the exclusion of other nations, which were, to say the least of it, in quite as forward a state of civilisation, and therefore as fit to be the recipients of a revelation as the nation to which it is declared to have been especially vouchsafed; but however this may be, the idea of a gradual unfolding of revelation seems to me, at present at any rate, incapable of verification, and must, therefore, remain an hypothesis at the best.

What, then, is the conclusion to which we have come? This. (1) That nature affords no satisfactory evidence of the existence of a supreme, omnipotent, righteous, and benevolent Being, who is distinct from and independent of what He has created (such evidence as there is rather pointing to the existence of an intelligent Being, who is either wanting in benevolence or wanting in power); (2) that nature failing us, when we turn to the Christian revelation—whether conveyed through the medium of an infallible or inspired Church, or book, or both—for evidence of what we seek, we find it, too, fails to support the desired conclusion.

This may seem to be a melancholy result at which to arrive, and the question may be asked, "What then remains if we have no sure ground of faith—nothing certain and tangible to reply upon?" Are we to eat, drink, and be merry, for to-morrow we die, and are no more seen? If such a line of conduct yielded the highest form of happiness, I should be inclined to answer the question in the affirmative. For intelligent and rational human beings, however, we know that it does not. But for those who are not intelligent and rational, what then? How are we to make it plain to the brutal savage, or even to the purely selfish nature, that virtue is better than vice, and honesty better than dishonesty? Plainly we cannot do so, the world being constituted as it is at present. As a thoughtful writer points out: "It is impossible to construct

a chain of reasoning which shall recommend the grand principle of morality, apart from any question of rewards and punishments hereafter, to beings whose only thought it is to fill their bellies and gratify their lusts." Upon such natures the fear of consequences exercises a wholesome restraint (the fear of hell, as Burns has it, is a hangman's whip to h'aud the wretch in order); but because we cannot do so, does this afford any justification, to those who know better, for leading a life of self-indulgence, regardless of the wants, the rights, and privileges of others, and indifferent as to whether their conduct affects their neighbours injuriously or not? Certainly not. But the question of "why must I do what is right when it apparently conflicts with my own interests to do so" is one which is foreign to the scope and purport of this essay. All that I would remark in this connection is, that it seems to me quite possible to reject dogma, and to believe that much in the Old and New Testament (especially the Old) is unhistorical; and yet to look to Christ as our highest exemplar, and to acknowledge that the ethics of the sermon on the mount will hold good for all time, and that the closer we follow its teaching, the better will it be, not only for our individual interests, but for those of the community of which we form but an infinitesimal part.

As to the question of a future state of existence, by which I mean the continuance in a future life of the individual ego, I should be sorry to dogmatise; but I must say, the difficulties of imagining anything of the kind are enormous. That any fool or idiot (as Charles Bray says) can have the power to bring into existence a dozen beings that shall be immortal, and whose condition may ultimately be one of everlasting misery, is truly a wonderful and horrible conception; besides, if we grant a future life to a Newton and a Shakespeare, must we not do so too to the uncultured savage, whose moral ideas are *nil*, and whose language is not much above the clacking of hens, or the twittering of birds?

As we stand by the death-bed of one inexpressibly dear to us, it seems impossible to realise the fact that we are parting for ever; but if we reflect a little, it may occur to us that after the lapse of years our whole habits and thoughts so change, that a reunion may not be so desirable as it at one time appeared. The child loses

its mother; the child grows into an adult, forms other ties, and becomes in time a grey-headed old man; he has almost forgotten his mother, at any rate has ceased to look forward with rapturous delight to a reunion with her. Similarly the mother, if in another world, has also presumably formed fresh ties and associations, and would fail to recognise her son in the old man, whose mind has presumably changed as much as his body.

As for the argument that without a future state it is impossible to justify the ways of God to man, it has no weight with those, of course, who are not Theists, and even for those who are, the argument seems to be a poor one. Mr. Voysey writes: "I would leave the Atheist far behind in my maledictions against the gross and unspeakable cruelty and immorality of the course of this world, if there were no future state"; and Paracelsus says:

"Truly there needs another life to come!
If this be all—
And other life awaits us not—for one
I say 'tis a poor cheat, a stupid bungle,
A wretched failure. I, for one, protest
Against it, and hurl it back with scorn".

But it seems to me that if God's dealings with man cannot be justified here, they are not likely to be justified hereafter.

Macaulay observes:

"In truth all the philosophers, ancient and modern, who have attempted without the help of revelation to prove the immortality of man, appear to have failed deplorably."

And Professor Huxley says:

"Our sole means of knowing anything is the reasoning faculty which God has given us, and that reasoning faculty not only denies any conception of a future state, but fails to furnish a single valid argument in favour of the belief that the mind will endure after the dissolution of the body."

Nevertheless, it may. At any rate, whether there is a future life or not, it is plainly for our advantage (I mean for those who are civilised human beings) to improve our condition here, and to cultivate those moral instincts, which, whatever may be their origin, have become part and parcel of our nature, to the best of our ability—confident that in so doing we shall be playing our right part in the world,

and at the same time best fitting ourselves for any future state that may possibly be in store for us, and should none await us, then this world's advantages, in their highest sense, will at least have been secured to us.



