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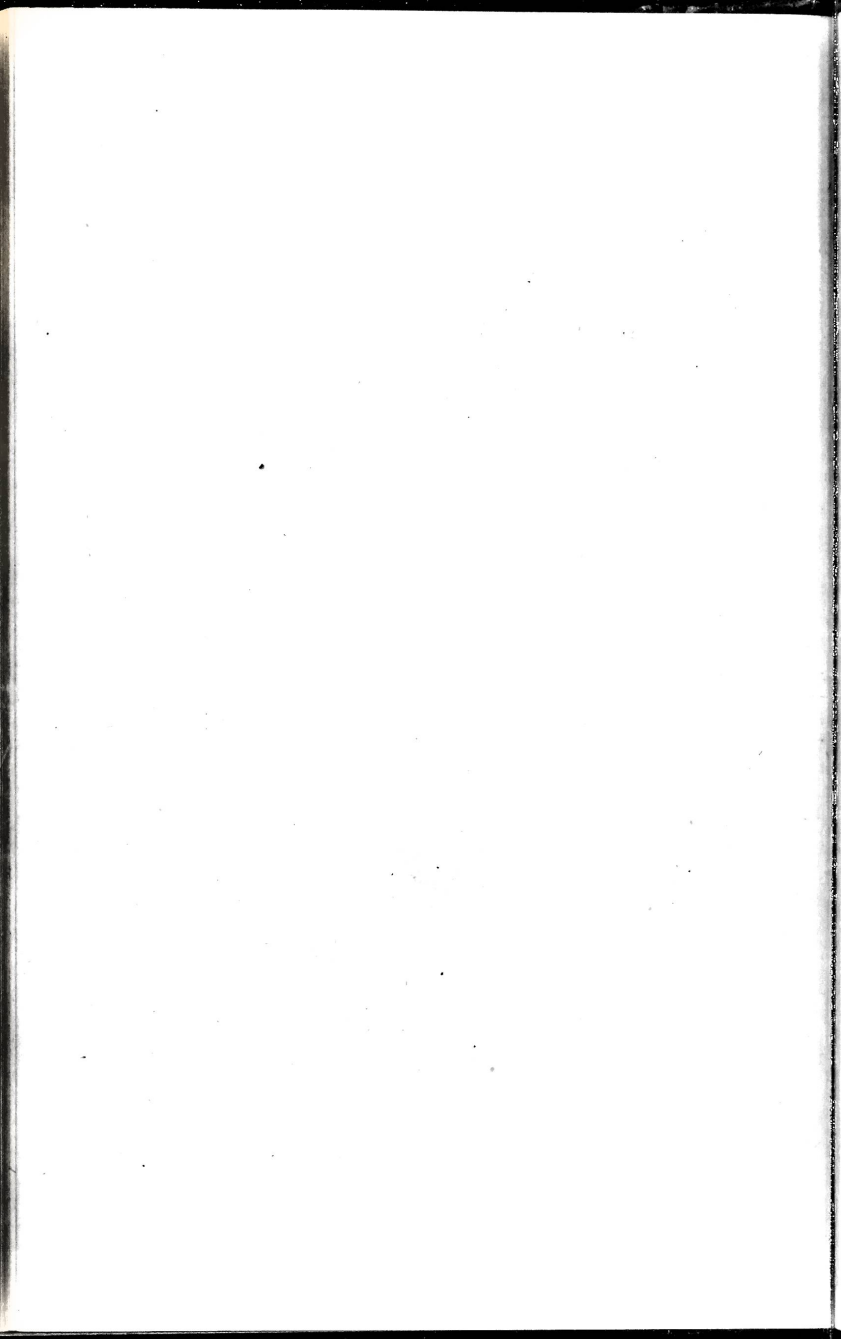
DR CARPENTER AT SION COLLEGE;
OR, THE
VIEW OF MIRACLES
TAKEN BY
MEN OF SCIENCE.



PUBLISHED BY THOMAS SCOTT,
NO. 11 THE TERRACE, FARQUHAR ROAD, UPPER NORWOOD,
LONDON, S.E.

1874.

Price Sixpence.



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THE following correspondence originated from the sending to a Divinity Professor the copy of a notice which appeared in *The Index*, a short time since, of a lecture delivered by Dr Carpenter at Sion College, on "The Reign of Law," particularly in relation to the efficacy of prayer, before an audience two-thirds of which consisted of clergymen. As exception has been taken to the notice referred to by some who were present at the meeting, on the ground that it was not strictly accurate, it may be well to give the reader an *authoritative* summary of the Doctor's line of thought, by way of introduction to the general discussion of the subject which succeeds. No report of the lecture appeared in the English press at the time, and no formal minutes were kept of the proceedings by the officials of Sion College. It may just be premised, further, that while the lecture went to show that there was no proof of the uniformity of law observable in the physical universe being in the least altered by prayer, Dr Carpenter left his hearers to infer, by natural sequence, that no evidence exists of the course of physical nature ever having been interrupted preternaturally from any cause whatsoever. This latter principle underlies the whole argu-

ment of the lecture, and interlaces Dr Carpenter's thought throughout. It may be otherwise defined thus. The structure of the Universe seems, from all that can be known of it, to be incompatible with the occurrence of physical miracle; and the investigation of this principle will be chiefly kept in view by the present writer.

Dr Carpenter began by expressing his entire agreement with Dr Chalmers and other theologians who have known what science means in regarding "the laws of nature" as simply *our* expressions of the uniformities observable in the phenomena of the universe. The lecturer referred specially to Dr Chalmers's sermon, entitled "The Constancy of Nature: a Testimony to the Faithfulness of God." He showed that the whole of our action in the world proceeds upon the assumption of this uniformity; and whilst he did not question that the Deity *could* depart from it if he so determined, he did emphatically question whether we had any ground to expect that he ever *would*, in accordance with human entreaty.

"If the whole scheme of creation," argued Dr Carpenter, "has been devised with a view to the highest happiness and welfare of God's creatures, any departure from that scheme must be *for the worse*. And so, if I ask God for something that I think would be better for *me*, it must be at the expense (even supposing that *I* should really be the better for it) of some one else. But any one who *really believes* in the *infinite paternity* of God would shrink from importunity for any change that he may desire for himself; just as much as a child who trusts implicitly in the wisdom and affection of an earthly father will abstain from importuning him, when told that what he asks would be bad for him."

"To importune God for any departure from his uniform course of action seems to me tantamount to saying either that *we* know better than *he* does what

is good for us, or that, knowing that *his* way is *best in the end*, we prefer the immediate gratification of our own selfish desires."

"In earlier times pestilences were supposed to be punishments inflicted by the vengeance of an offended Deity, who was to be propitiated by prayers and sacrifices. *Now*, we regard them as the result of habitual violations of the laws which God enables us to read in the course of nature; and when such occur, we set ourselves to find out the misdoing and endeavour to correct it."

The Doctor then narrated a very remarkable case, which occurred at Baltimore in the Cholera Epidemic of 1849. "Though the Poor-House," he said, "was supposed to have been free from any special liability to its attack, and there was no prevalence of cholera in the town, yet at two or three miles distance from Baltimore, and in an open salubrious situation, there was a most fearful outbreak in this Poor-House, thirty dying in a day out of about eight hundred. This was traced to a defect of drainage, which was at once rectified, and immediately the plague was stayed." With reference to this Dr Carpenter asked:—"Does any gentleman in this room believe that, if all Baltimore had gone down on its knees for a week, God would have been moved to avert the visitation?" His argument was that, "in regard to the course of nature, it is for the man of science to study the uniformities of the *Divine* action, and to bring down *his own* into accordance with it." He drew, however, "a broad line between the action of Deity in the *physical* universe and his spiritual agency on the mind of man." "The religious experience of ages," he said, "sanctions the idea that prayer for enlightenment to *know* the will of God, and for strength to enable us to do or bear it, has an effect—*how* or *why* we cannot tell; and to this view he gave his entire assent. "Such prayer," he maintained,

“is in accordance with the deepest religious instincts, and is expressed in the noblest passages of sacred literature.” “But, in regard to the work of life,” he contended “that *laborare* (on the highest principles of action) *est orare*.”

One clergyman said, at the close of the lecture, that if Dr Carpenter’s position were correct he might as well shut up his church. He said: “I ask God for things I want, and I expect to get them.” But this did not seem the general impression, which was, that “prayer does not change the course of nature, but that, in the ordination of Divine Providence, Prayer is a *condition* of our obtaining what we ask.”

In a letter written afterwards by Dr Carpenter to a friend, containing comments on this latter view of prayer, he says: “This is as much as to say that if we did *not* ask we should not receive (yet we are told that material blessings are bestowed alike on the just and the unjust, on the thankful and the unthankful). I should call this the *mechanical* theory of Prayer. It puts us in the condition of children just learning to talk, who are made to say ‘Ta!’ for a cake or a sweetie; and it seems to me to lower the *spiritual* value of prayer to the *material*, instead of raising the *material* to the *spiritual*—or, as Miss Cobbe said to me, to bring God down to *us*, instead of trying to lift ourselves to God.”

“Mr Llewellyn Davies expressed his general accordance with me; and I had subsequent communications from other clergymen to the same effect. I believe that liberal and thoughtful men generally would accept these conclusions, if not trammelled by the letter of Scripture. Many have revolted at the parables of the Unjust Judge and the Importunate Widow, and of the Friend who yields to importunity what he will not give to friendship; as conveying a low idea of the Divine Fatherhood. Their best interpretation has, I think, been given by Robert Collyer

(of Chicago), in an admirable sermon entitled "Knocking at the Gate of Heaven,"—their lesson being that nothing good or great can be got without *persevering effort*."

Letter from the Rev. Dr —, Professor of Theology, to
Mr M—.

— College, 14 March, 1874.

My dear Mr M—,

If the report [from *The Index*] of which you have kindly sent me a copy be correct . . . there must have been a most melancholy exhibition of bigotry, narrowness and fanaticism. . . . What a god in knowledge Dr Carpenter must be to be able to use such words as:—"Nature represents a kingdom of orderly evolution which has *never* been invaded by *anything* preternatural or supernatural, and all liturgies, litanies, collects, and prayers that were ever uttered *never had influenced*—*never could influence*—the course of this universe, nor mankind, nor a *single individual* in the slightest degree."*

Do you really think Dr Carpenter *knows* the entire history of nature and humanity from the beginning down to this time, so exactly as to be able of knowledge to affirm that? If he do not, such a statement, *scientifically* considered, is the product either of ignorance or fanaticism. If this be what is called "Truth, whatever be the consequences," the so-called scientists are as self-deluded as they are fanatical—viewed from the point of view of sober science. The paper you have sent has supplied me with another proof that there are no men more narrow and incapable of reasoning outside their own limited department than the "scientists." They are constantly protesting against metaphysics, philosophy, faith, &c., and yet they are perpetually making a system of the universe out of the wee bit of earth to which they have devoted special attention. Speaking solely from a scientific point of view, I maintain that statements like Dr Carpenter's are as unscientific and fanatical as the crudest assertions ever enunciated by a preacher. There is now far more real scientific sobriety and caution in *believing* than in *unbelieving* circles. Fanaticism is fast becoming—as has been foretold—the specialty of those who do not believe. Excuse me expressing myself plainly. I do so as a thinking man, not as

* These words are cited from the notice in *The Index*.

a Christian teacher. Wishing that you yourself may soon again pass from darkness to the true light of life in Christ,

I am, &c., _____

 Letter from Mr M—— to Dr ——.

B——, 19 March, 1874.

My dear Dr ——,

. . . The report of the proceedings at Sion College, which I forwarded you, is substantially correct on the main points, though faulty in omitting to record that one-third of the audience was composed of laymen, in erroneously stating that bishops were present, and in making too much of the protests uttered by the clergy. Moreover, it puts the argument of Dr Carpenter too baldly, and without due qualification. The lecturer did not deny the *possibility* of Deity effecting a *physical* miracle or acting discordantly with the uniform operation of material law, though he asserted that *there was no ground to expect that the Deity ever would depart from that uniformity in accordance with human entreaty*. Again, in justice to the Doctor it should have been stated in the report, that he admitted prayer to be efficacious in the *spiritual sphere* as far as to enable us to obtain "enlightenment" respecting "the will of God" and "strength to *do* or bear it."

Now one point is clear. Dr Carpenter practically recognises interference with the uniform operation of the laws of nature as a conception at variance with the perfect wisdom and beneficence he would attribute to the Deity; for he says in his own account of the lecture written to a correspondent: "If the whole scheme of creation has been devised with a view to the highest welfare of God's creatures, *any departure from that scheme must be for the worse*." In this view I entirely concur, notwithstanding the epithets with which you gratuitously bespatter the lecturer and the scientific laymen present who shared his opinions. As for some of the worthy clergymen present, their uneasiness under the statements to which they listened is far from unaccountable. They are not accustomed to be contradicted by their people, and perhaps many of them had not imagined that it was possible for their fond traditions and devout faith in the miraculous, to receive so rude a shock from the inexorable conclusions of science. Such conclusions tended to disturb their faith, which is usually felt by them to be consoling and strong in proportion as it is *not* subjected to the test of historic criticism and to the anti-supernatural analyses of science.

While virtually at one with Dr Carpenter on this head, I should be disposed to define my position *without* his qualifying considerations. He admits that whatever the Deity may have the power to *will*, there is no proof that he has ever performed a miracle in answer to human entreaty,—and I would venture to add that there is no *real* proof that he ever performed a miracle under any other condition. I believe *nature* to be a system of orderly evolution, and in the very essence of the constitution of the universe, the possibility of what is popularly understood as supernatural or miraculous interference with its laws is necessarily precluded. Nature would cease to be nature, and the universe to be the universe, on any other supposition. This is the inductive view of the matter, which one, unsophisticated by theological bias, instinctively arrives at, as the result of intelligently observing the structure, phenomena, and laws of the universe. And in this view we are impregably supported by the experience of the greatest thinkers of modern days and by the testimony of all *verifiable* history, as distinguished from incoherent, contradictory, and half-mythical records which belong to unscientific and superstitious times, and which relate, for the most part, to communities notoriously credulous and unacquainted with the simplest facts of natural science. Niebuhr has played considerable havoc with some pleasant stories in the early history of Rome; and, much to the dismay of those who have been indulging similarly happy illusions affecting the professed biographies of Jesus and his apostles, Strauss, Bauer, Schenkel, Meredith, Scott, and others have demonstrated many historical statements in the four Gospels to be not only irreconcilable with each other, but incapable of proof. The authenticity of these Gospels touches the very core of the question of miracles, for they are claimed to be an inspired history of a supernatural revelation from God; and for this reason I must ask your permission to submit a few remarks on these venerated documents in connection with this subject.

Pagan, Jewish, and Christian writers alike, nearest to the days of Jesus and his apostles knew nothing of the four gospels. Moreover, as to the writing spoken of in the alleged works of a certain Christian Father, under the title of 'Memorials of the Apostles,' there is no proof that these 'Memorials' ever existed; no trace of them can be found; and it is quite possible that the single reference to them in early Christian literature may be spurious. But even granting that such 'Memorials' were genuine and authentic, there is nothing to show that they were identical with the Gospels in the main, or that they substantiate the claims of the latter. In no

instance do the Fathers for the first 150 years mention Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John, or quote words which can, beyond dispute, be verified as of the authorship of the "Evangelists." There is no proof that the Gospels, in their present shape, or in any real shape, were known to the Fathers during the period above stated. *Not till the time of Irenæus (A.D. 180) does the doctrine of the Divine origin of the Gospels begin to be propounded and believed, and even then Christians were greatly divided as to which Gospels, and how many, were worthy their acceptance.* Nor can it be denied that the second century was pre-eminent in Christendom for "pious frauds" in connection with the "sacred" records of the church,—these frauds being shamelessly practised and justified because calculated to advance the material and external interests of the Christian faith. A hundred years from the death of the oldest apostle was surely a sufficiently long space,—under such lax ideas of honesty as then prevailed among Christian writers,—to bring to maturity a considerable crop of fictitious narratives; and it is well known that tales of this kind abounded in those times, respecting Jesus and his immediate followers. A distinguished Church of England theologian writes:—"Books, countless in number, were written [in post-apostolic times], professing to give a history of Jesus and his apostles. The authorship of these was attributed to Christ himself, or to some of his apostles and their companions: *our four Gospels were selected from this countless number.*" By whom were they selected? When were they selected? Why were they selected? Let Mosheim answer these questions. "As to the time when, and the persons by whom, the books of the New Testament were collected into one body, there are various opinions, or rather conjectures, of the learned; *for the subject is attended with great and inexplicable difficulties to us of these latter times.*"*

What then can really be known of how and by whom these selected gospels were composed? Is there no unmistakeable source of information open to us as to when and how they came into existence, and when and how the original autographs of them were lost? Such autographs are unknown to history. The very earliest MS. of the gospels the world has, as yet, had access to, is dated no further back than the beginning of the fourth century.

Even orthodox theologians of repute saw away the branch to which they cling, by the admissions which facts compel them to make concerning the impenetrable obscurity and, I might add, the strong doubtfulness in which the origin of the gospels is shrouded. The late Dean Alford, in his 'Critical

* Eccles. Hist., vol. i., p. 93.

Introduction to the Greek text of the New Testament,' writes: "THE CHRISTIAN WORLD IS LEFT IN UNCERTAINTY WHAT ITS SCRIPTURES ARE as long as the sacred text is full of various readings. *Some one MS. must be pointed out to us which carries the weight of verbal inspiration or some text whose authority shall be undoubted, must be promulgated. But manifestly neither of these things can ever happen. To the latest age the reading of some important passages will be matter of doubt in the church, AND THERE IS HARDLY A SENTENCE IN THE WHOLE OF THE FOUR GOSPELS IN WHICH THERE ARE NOT VARIETIES OF DICTION IN OUR PRINCIPAL MSS., BAFLING ALL ATTEMPTS TO DECIDE WHICH WAS ITS ORIGINAL FORM.*" A frank concession truly for a learned exegetical theologian who, notwithstanding, strangely adhered to the notion that the gospels were miraculously inspired!

Canon Westcott, who has bestowed, if possible, even more attention upon the question of New Testament canonicity, speaks in yet more decisive terms on this point. "It is certainly remarkable," he says, "that in the controversies of the second century, which often turned upon disputed readings of the Scripture, *no appeal was made to the apostolic originals; the few passages in which it has been supposed that they are referred to, will not bear examination.*"* Orthodox critics themselves being witnesses, therefore, there is no evidence that the gospels were written by those whose names they bear; there is a total absence of *contemporary* testimony in their favour, and no proof whatever in the next two generations, that the books were veracious, or written by the persons to whom they are ascribed. Canon Westcott himself admits that clear quotations from the gospels do not occur till the time of Irenæus (A.D. 180), Clement of Alexandria (A.D. 220), and Origen (A.D. 250).

The accepted doctrine of the New Testament, as containing a supernatural revelation, then, seems simply "to have had its origin in *tradition* for at least the first hundred and seventy years of the Christian era; for the following one hundred and thirty years it was a matter of *speculation*, among men whose ignorance was only equalled by their superstitious credulity; and, finally, it was *decreed* to be a divine truth by a majority of votes in one of those turbulent assemblies of bishops, which too often had to be dispersed by military force, after terrible rioting, which was sometimes attended with bloodshed."

Until the third Council of Carthage (A.D. 397) numerous gospels and epistles were in circulation and use among the Christians, all claiming equally to be of inspired authority.

* Art. Smith's Dict. of the Bible, vol. ii., p. 506.

By the bishops assembled at that Council a catalogue of the books to be chosen and recognised as canonical, was drawn up and passed, because found to serve best the ends of the theological party then in power. All other books that seemed to clash with the dogmas of this ruling party were promptly burned.* After much episcopal wrangling at the Council on the subject, the *number* of gospels to be included in the Canon was limited to four, with the consent of the majority of the bishops, for the following ingenious reason, which proved to be irresistibly conclusive to their orthodox minds! Irenæus *was reported to have said, two centuries before*: "It is impossible that there could have been more or less than four. For there are four climates, and four cardinal winds, and the church is spread over the whole earth; but the gospel is the pillar and foundation of the church, and its breath of life. The church, therefore, was to have *four* pillars, blowing immortality from every quarter, and giving life to men." Hence we happen to have inherited four gospels instead of forty or fourscore!

Yet on the foundation of this arbitrary, conflicting, and unproveable collection of narratives, you and your orthodox friends expect Dr Carpenter to believe in the miracles ascribed to Jesus and his colleagues, and you charge the Doctor with "narrowness, bigotry, and fanaticism" because he rejects all past accounts of miracles as improbable. We, who are called rationalists, disbelieve in miracles (1) because it is of the nature of supernatural interposition, were such to occur, to introduce confusion and ruin into the whole indissolubly connected chain of causes and effects throughout the Universe; and (2) because there does not exist in support of religious miracles, or any other sort of miracles, any proof to satisfy a mind free from traditional or sentimental fetters, and bent on reaching *fact* by the only legitimate method—the inductive method. I should be willing to leave it to any twelve unprejudiced men of thought and judgment to decide whether fanaticism lies in believing in miracles on the sandy foundation of "pious frauds," obscure superstitions, and conflicting statements, pertaining to an age and a people remarkable for credulity and ignorance; or whether it lies in rejecting tales of the miraculous, and trusting to the uniform "Reign of Law" as essential to the well-being of the Universe at all times and in all regions. If the question be which side lays itself open to the imputation of fanaticism, I should imagine the charge would most apply to those who are satisfied to believe in stories of miracles which are said to

* Draper's Hist. of the Intel. Devpt. of Europe, vol. i., pp. 301-302.

have happened nearly 2,000 years ago, on the authority of very remote, incoherent, and unverifiable hearsays, coming down from peasants living in ignorant times. The real fanatics are surely those who, while so readily taking in those crude narratives of far-off days, could not be convinced of the *supernatural* occurring now, by almost any amount or kind of testimony. How shall we characterise so singular a mode of reasoning, except as fanatical? Proof for an alleged miracle in the nineteenth century, before it could be received by the orthodox, must be indisputable; but the most hazy, myth-woven, and incongruous evidence is quite sufficient in their view to support the affirmation of many miracles having taken place among illiterate enthusiasts in the first century.

“Do you really think Dr Carpenter *knows* the entire history of nature and humanity from the beginning down to this time so exactly as to be able of knowledge to affirm that? [viz., that a miracle never happened.]” Such is your question; and it contains an intended *quietus* for the rationalist which won some Evangelical fame for John Foster sixty years ago, and the reply has been already given. *There is no proof* that the regular course of nature has ever been departed from, and yet the proof ought to be demonstrable in proportion to the extraordinary phenomena to which you invite our credence. Nay, your question can be matched by another. Do you really think that the planet Jupiter has the alternation of day and night like our Earth? Do you really think that Neptune is influenced by the law of gravitation like this “wee bit of earth”? Can you say you *know* such to be the case? Have you personally been close enough to these stars, and had such opportunities of studying their movements, that you can *demonstrate* the assertion, *of your knowledge*, respecting them? Have you seen day and night on Jupiter? Do you possess *tangible* evidence that the laws of gravitation extend to Neptune? You *know* you cannot point to the clear evidence of your senses in proof of these things; and yet you are prepared to assert emphatically that the phenomena I have described belong as much to other planets as to our own. You have the *analogy* of material law within the range of your personal observation to guide you, and the tested conclusions of science deepen your sense of the *universality* and *uniformity* of law in its operations. But suppose I were to hurl at *you*, for your supposed assertions about Jupiter and Neptune, the ecclesiastical thunderbolt you aim at Dr Carpenter and other men of science—whose pure, life-long and successful devotion to the study of nature merits for them the profoundest respect—for their denial of miracles, what then? And yet men of science have simply reached their conclusions as

to the order of nature excluding the occurrence of miracles, by the same inferential kind of reasoning which might lead you to venture statements about something going on hundreds of millions of miles away. There is, however, this difference. While theologians and men of science in the case supposed would equally base their reasonings on their convictions of an universal *Cosmos*, Dr Carpenter and his friends have had much more experience than professors of theology in observing the processes of nature, a higher scientific culture and a more extensive and subtle apparatus for conducting scientific research. Consequently I should feel quite as much justified in accepting the statement of Dr Carpenter in his challenging the proof of miracles, as I should in accepting your version of certain natural events happening in very distant parts of the universe. What think you now of the severe judgment you have passed on scientific men as applied to yourself, *mutatis mutandis*? "If he do not [*i.e.*, know, by a personal inspection, all departments of the Universe from the beginning, &c.] such a statement [*i.e.*, as the one the Doctor makes against the occurrence of miracles], *scientifically* considered, is the product either of ignorance or fanaticism. . . . The so-called scientists are as self-deluded as they are fanatical. . . . No men more narrow and incapable of reasoning outside their own limited department."

Of course theologians (I suppose on Paul's principle of him that is spiritual being at liberty to judge all things) are eminently capable of estimating accurately the profound analysis of science, *their* "department" being so proverbially expansive—especially where creeds, like high walls, attract their gaze to the vast range of metaphysico-theological inscriptions written in these creeds—and shut out the region beyond! A Pisgah-like prospect certainly, compared with the "limited" vista of science *which* has the grave disadvantage of being encompassed by no stereotyped creeds—inventions so admirably adapted to enlarge human thought and inspire a bold and wholesome love of "truth, regardless of consequences!"

I have seen, in my time, a good deal of philosophico-theological gymnastics performed round that word "experience," as used by Hume in relation to the subject of miracles. But I have yet to find the dilemma in which that philosopher put his supernaturalist critics, *effectually* answered by them. "It is more probable (said he) that human testimony should be false than that a miracle should be true;" or as Paley repeats Hume's objection:—"It is contrary to *experience* that a miracle should be true, but not contrary to experience that testimony should be false." This objection to miracles

advanced by Hume before science had so completely disclosed to us the uniform orderly development of nature as it has since done—I say again has never been really confuted by theology, but, on the other hand, has been confirmed by the ever-accumulating verities of science.

Both on the principles, then, of true philosophy—the philosophy of scientific fact—and on the principles of scholarly historical criticism, the fairly intelligent mind of our day, apart from traditional prejudices, cannot but have a predisposition to trust the order of the universe as an uniform whole, and as all-sufficient for every need of our race, and to disbelieve in the *aberglaube* of supernaturalism.

When any class of men take it upon them to assert that something miraculous took place somewhat frequently, 2,000 years ago in Palestine among a few obscure Jewish peasants, of whom contemporary history says nothing, and of whom trustworthy history takes no account for more than a century afterwards; when any class of men insist on our faith in this preternatural interference on the authority of the most unsatisfactory evidence ever produced—evidence which never can be verified; when any class of men maintain that our escape from eternal misery or eternal annihilation, as the case may be, depends on our reception of vague and unverifiable allegations about events avowedly contrary to the known laws of nature and to the sum of trustworthy human experience, and more particularly in the most enlightened ages and countries, then unquestionably a very grave *onus* of proof rests upon these believers in miracles. For my part I unhesitatingly own that I regard miracles as impossible, unnecessary, and superstitious, and while I see startling presumption in any party proclaiming the necessity of believing in them on a basis so frail—not to say illusory—as the authority on which they are made to stand, I find everything harmonious with reason and with accredited and sober human experience in the position of those of an inductive habit of mind who disbelieve them.

Your mode of treating the subject calls to one's mind the legal exigency in which the policy is resorted to of *abusing the plaintiff's attorney*. You denounce the honest truth-seeking "scientists," as you call them, who have no creed to maintain for pay, and who have consequently vastly less temptation than theologians in the Christian sects have, to stick to a dogma because it is the shibboleth of a party. We have had enough of denunciation and reproach from orthodoxy. What we want is honest and earnest discussion from your side; not elaborate metaphysical dialectics or effusions of pious sentiment, which are quite irrelevant, but calm, logical *statements*

of fact in reply to the historical and scientific statements of fact put forth by learned sceptics. Yet if we invite you to answer Dr Carpenter and Professor Tyndall with science for science, you choose either to evade the real point at issue or to assume a scornful attitude and refuse our reasonable demand as if it were malicious and profane. If we ask you to reply to Spinoza's 'Tractatus Theologico-Politicus,' or Strauss's 'Life of Jesus,' or Colenso's 'Pentateuch,' you simply point us to Neander's 'Life of Christ,' or 'Aids to Faith,' or to the paltering lectures of the "Christian Evidence Society," and you go your way, reminding us that our "stale objections" have been "answered over and over again." But we will continue to proclaim our dissatisfaction till the whole question of the Christian miracles is dealt with by you in a purely inductive fashion, and the scorn or pity you affect towards "scientists" and "unbelievers" we will only regard as marks of a weak cause. I recommend to your attention the reply of Herder, in his 'Survey of Spinozism,' to the habitual carping of priests at science in all ages. He argues truly that just in proportion as physical science has progressed, men's ideas of God and nature have been purified and raised, and the old fancies of "the faithful" respecting the universe as subject to blind and arbitrary control, have been dispelled. "The forces of nature," he says, "are eternal as the God-head in which they inhere. *All is, was, and ever will be* in conformity with beneficent, beautiful, necessary law, twin-sister of eternal power, mother of all order, security, and happiness."

How different this view from the persistent attempts of the guardians of ecclesiastical interests everywhere, who can with difficulty be got to speak kindly of the most disinterested and reverent attempts to unveil the operation of natural law, unless the scientific student happen to profess unquestioning belief in their metaphysical speculations at the same time. It has rather been the habit of orthodoxy to refer to the framework of life around us as God-forsaken, or as containing, at best, a cold, marred, distant, and unsatisfying revelation of the First Cause; and this disposition of priests to undervalue revelations of universal law through science has usually been associated with a tendency on their part to be most dogmatic and earnest about things that are most inscrutable—most confident in their hair-splitting definitions of what is most indefinable. One of your ablest theological colleagues, I remember some time ago, charged disbelievers in his view of the supernatural with "imprisoning God within a vast and immoveable system of natural laws." A strange and, I fear I must say, an ungrateful conception for any man to have of the system of

the Universe as based upon law,—so constant, progressive, and infinite in its evolutions. Might we not, with some propriety, reply: “Orthodox theologians have imprisoned God in a narrow creed, and represented him as if he were a mere impersonation of dogmatic theology, or a President of an Ecclesiastical Assembly?” Any one who considers the movements of the Almighty as unnaturally *restrained* because *directed* by invariable laws, indicates a state of mind very becoming, perhaps, a retained counsel defending a case in which he has some substantial interest; but, in my judgment, neither philosophical nor religious. The very principle of undeviating uniformity which you and your friends oppose, the loftiest scientific minds unite in acknowledging to be the highest mark of infinite wisdom and goodness. Without it prudent forethought in the conduct of human affairs would be impossible. Have you ever been conscious of any experience material, intellectual, or spiritual that can be proved to be above and beyond the direction of fixed natural law? Your birth, your education, your physical and mental growth, the formation of your religious convictions, the influences you have exerted and received in your intercourse with your fellow creatures; your work as a Christian teacher—have not all these things been under the dominion of natural law? And have you felt the more on that account your legitimate freedom and happiness limited? Well, then, you have but to project your finite experience, in these respects, upon an infinite scale, to form some idea (remote, I admit, but sufficiently clear for the purpose of the present argument) of how compatible the control of eternal and fixed law is with the freest movements of the First Cause.

If English Church and Chapel-goers were to trouble themselves less about what is beyond the sphere of rational *proof*, and were to occupy themselves more with the study of natural law, upon co-operation, with which the true regeneration of humanity depends; if the principles of natural morality had always held sway as the religion of churchism has done; if science and philanthropy had always wielded among the masses as wide an influence as theology and priestcraft have done, there would now be immensely less social vice, physical misery, and intellectual and moral degradation; better sanitary regulations; a nobler bodily and mental organisation in our fellow creatures; a keener appreciation of æsthetics; a livelier sense of mutual obligations between capital and labour, between the governing and the governed, and between parents and children; a wider diffusion of useful knowledge, and a worthier conception of religion.

I should like to refer, in concluding my remarks on the

chief theme of Dr Carpenter's lecture, to a concession which he makes to orthodoxy, and to which I am obliged to take exception. The Doctor admits that prayer is efficacious in the *spiritual sphere*, as far as to enable us "to obtain enlightenment" as to "the will of God and strength to *do* or bear it." This concession is remarkable as showing wherein the lecturer is illogical and unscientific in the application of his principle of natural law. He thinks that there is "a spiritual action of Deity on the mind of the devout petitioner." He accepts the testimony of "the Religious Experience of ages" in support of this supposed *direct* operation of God on the devout mind, and he writes in the letter quoted from at the beginning of this paper, as if he held this direct operation of God as *outside the realm of law*; and yet, while finding it convenient to bow to the authority of "the Religious Experience of ages" on this head, he inconsistently rejects the very *same testimony* in past times, where physical miracle is concerned. To be logical, he ought to yield to the "sanction" of the "Religious Experience of ages" equally for *both kinds* of preternatural interference, or for *neither*; for the testimony is equally weak or strong,—just as we may please to regard it—for both. If "the Religious Experience of ages" may not be trusted by a scientific man when fervently adduced in support of the disturbance of *physical* law, why should it be trusted when it asserts the influence of prayer, in modifying the application of law in *spiritual* matters? I venture to believe that neither in "Sacred Literature" nor in Ecclesiastical History can there be found a single instance in which "Enlightenment" or "strength" was ever realised by Saints—Catholic or Protestant,—as a preternatural result of prayer, and which could not be realised without it. Intense religious susceptibility will readily catch fire, in certain moods of the mind, under any pious act, whether secluded meditation or the strain of a familiar hymn or an impressive sermon; and the glow of the feeling, thus excited, will communicate itself to the intellect and the will, and create a spiritual atmosphere in which spiritual objects will be vividly realised and spiritual purposes vigorously executed. The *reflex* influence of religious enthusiasm when directed by pure desire to *know* and *do* what is deemed right, will always be great upon the mind. But for Dr Carpenter to admit "the *spiritual agency* of Deity in the mind of man," as he expresses it, as if it were *beyond law*, while "the action of Deity in the *physical universe*" as *according to law*, is plainly a begging of the question. "The *mind of man*,"—whatever that may be—is a part of the Universe, and if the Universe throughout be "a system of

orderly evolution," the harmony of the Universe is broken if we allow the *spiritual* department to be *independent* of law and the *physical* to be under law; and surely such a conclusion is quite contrary to the tendency and teaching of science. The simple fact seems to be that Dr Carpenter has studied law as evinced in physical science; but with the characteristic modesty of one who knows his own class of subjects well, but who has not, perhaps, paid the same attention to the quality of evidence furnished by ecclesiastical history in favour of the efficacy of prayer for spiritual guidance, he excusably hesitates, and especially with the solemn array of "the Religious Experience of ages" before him, to affirm, that preternatural events may not have occurred in that *experience*. It is not improbable, however, that had his analysis of *Ecclesiastical testimony* been as thorough as it has been of *physical phenomena*, he would not have been so timid in extending the application of uniform law to the spiritual sphere, and in excluding therefrom the efficacy of prayer as an agent capable of inducing the direct action of the Deity. The early history of all religions, it is now well understood, should be received with extreme caution; first, because sound modern criticism has demonstrated that many of the narratives in the so-called "Sacred Literature" of nations are incapable of positive authentication both as to authorship and contents; secondly, because the "sacred" and "profane" literature alike which details "the Religious Experience of ages," pertains, invariably, to times, places, and societies, in which *imagination* has played a mightier part than *reason*, and in which credulity and priestcraft, with their attendant fanaticisms, have been signally rampant. Indeed, one might safely add, without the least disparagement of any existing sect of religionists, that those who profess to rely on prayer in our time, as influencing the Deity, to impart "enlightenment" and "strength" in the spiritual sphere, are not, as a rule, persons the Doctor would think pre-eminently distinguished for historic and scientific attainment, or for the judicious management of their faculties.

I must add a word on the concluding sentence in your letter: "Wishing that you yourself may soon again pass from darkness to the true light of life in Christ." The wish I cannot doubt is sincere, but it surely is one of the marks of an arrogant system to assume, as orthodoxy always does, that one is only in a state to have a long face pulled at him, and to be sighed over if his theory of the Universe be not according to the Thirty-nine Articles, the Confession of Faith, or some other sectarian creed. Again, I affirm that in this world of varying religious ideas, where so-called "believers" are more

affected, I make bold to say, by sentimental associations than by deep and rational convictions, and where it is not easy for most men to find time and ability to struggle through the stumbling blocks theologians have placed between them and simple religious truth, it would be a slur on eternal justice that men should be judged in relation to their moral state or their future destiny, by their intellectual apprehension of the things they hold to be religious. I have said elsewhere in this series, and I make no apology for repeating the declaration that I know no infidelity but treachery to conscience, and no orthodoxy but loyalty to conscience. I have felt honoured and privileged at home and abroad by the intimate friendship of men of all the principal sects of Europe and America, and of men standing very sincerely aloof from all, and the impression has been forced upon me by my study of character generally, that in few cases is the ordinary moral conduct of men influenced by their theological theories and Church practices; that while it is the tendency of exciting religious dogmas and ceremonies to spoil the class who yield themselves up absorbedly to them, the mass of well-meaning people happily let creeds and churches sit very lightly on them, and depend most for guidance on those principles of common sense and human morality which imbue well-governed minds in all countries.

You wish that I "may soon pass out of *darkness*." If my own consciousness may be allowed to attest the nature of my changed theological perceptions (unless you suspect "the natural man"—that much abused Pauline phrase—now rules within me!) I can assure you that the *very opposite* of darkness would more fitly describe my condition. I have indeed realised, most fully, in my experience, that description in the Epistle in a sense not intended by the author: I have "passed from darkness to marvellous light," and the light shines brighter and brighter every day. "Life in Christ?" What is it? Where shall I find it? How shall I be sure that in accepting it according to Evangelicals, I ought not rather to have sought it among High Churchmen, or Broad Churchmen, or Unitarians? All these sections of Christians invite us "unbelievers" to share this *life in Christ*, and at the same time involve us in a maze of bitter controversy as to which party has the genuine thing to offer. You tell me to accept the Christ of the New Testament. But is it to be the Christ of the Gospels, the miracle-worker, or the Christ of the Epistles—the atoning sacrifice for human sin? Am I to follow the Christology of the Synoptic gospels or that of the fourth gospel? The Christology of Paul or of Peter? Perhaps you reply that I am mainly to follow the *teachings* of Christ.

But it cannot be proved that the words ascribed to Jesus were ever used by him, and even if they *were*, some of his precepts are for our age utterly impracticable. What Christian citizen in our day pretends to follow carefully the mode of life laid down by Christ? Who "takes no thought for the morrow?" It is only by *taking thought* that the progress of the world can be advanced. Who, among even the most ardent of Christian enthusiasts are willing now "to make themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake?" Perhaps you intend by "life in Christ" moral likeness to Christ. But the question arises, in what are we to be like Christ? Are we to be like Christ in *all* that he did or only in those things we ourselves think good and excellent? Does the Christianity of Christlikeness include cursing fig-trees for not having fruit on them out of their season? Does it include whipping those we think impious with a whip of small cords? Does it include denouncing the inconsistent as "whited sepulchres," "hypocrites" and a "generation of vipers?" Does it include saying to one's mother, when she has failed to appreciate him, "Woman, what have I to do with thee, mine hour is not yet come?" Does it mean that we are to tell women of other districts, when they ask for our benevolence, "it is not meet to take the meat of the children and cast it to the dogs?" Does it include that we are to exercise our powers to destroy 200 swine belonging to an unoffending man? Or does it mean that we are to be so little the friends of temperance as to produce 200 gallons of good wine for our guests *after they have already well drunk?*"* Whatever view, therefore, we take of "life in Christ," we shall meet with grave difficulties in forming a clear and definite idea of what it means, and that consideration, if there were no other, is sufficient to show that a religion so extensively the subject of dispute, and open to such conflicting interpretations, was never intended to be as an organised and a stereotyped system, the supreme, final, and exhaustive revelation of moral and religious truth to mankind. Let it not be understood that I undervalue the elevated tone of spirituality and consecration attributed to Jesus in the gospels. He, at all events, seems, above most, to have lived up to his lights. Human life is incalculably enriched by many of the sayings and doings ascribed to him in the New Testament. But as far as these sayings are wise and good they contain nothing original, and as far as the doings are noble and historically true they are not without parallel. There is something even broader and more in harmony with the devout

* 'The Impossibility of Knowing what is Christianity,' p. 12.

and cultured aspirations of humanity as a whole, than "life in Christ." I accept Jesus only as one of many prophets and teachers necessary to the full discipline and development of my intellect, conscience, heart, and will; but while profoundly grateful for the instructions of all great and good men, I bind myself to accept implicitly and without qualification the teaching of none. Under the guidance of the best judgment and sense I can command, I strive to discriminate and arrive at a just conviction. The higher lights of the nineteenth century enable me to see defects in the utterances and conduct of the greatest sages of antiquity which *their* standard of things—necessarily vague—precluded them from detecting. I believe in the gradual evolution of knowledge and the gradual uplifting of the race in every department, through human agency and in harmony with fixed law. Owing to the natural limitation of men's faculties, right views in one direction will be mixed up with wrong views in another direction, in the most valuable contributions to human enlightenment and progress. But assertion, hypothesis and theory in the advancement of knowledge, are sifted and improved upon by successive great minds from age to age, and thus the revelation of law, in its manifold applications, goes on; man's recognition of the vital importance of law is quickened and deepened, and the general improvement of mankind is the result. Life, according to the most philosophical understanding and practice of law in its varied relations and bearings, is a far more healthful, rational, and useful kind of life than the "life" which is limited by what was thought, said, or done by "Christ," or by any other single man, be he ever so great or good.

Yours, &c.,

M. M.