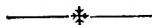


N633 PHILOSOPHIC ATHEISM.



GOD OR NO GOD?

I.

It has been long my conviction—arrived at, I may say, against my deepest prejudices and the oldest tendencies of my mind—that Atheism is not merely a logical position or mental state, but as logical as any. It appears to me that, approach the subject from which side we will—the purely intellectual or the moral—philosophy leads inevitably up to Atheism. I can fully sympathise with the millions who look upon Atheism as a monster of absurdity and immorality, for I once had the same ideas and feelings myself, and no more dreamt of journeying to Atheism than to the moon. I have discovered several things in recent years which I formerly deemed impossible; among others, that Atheism is not in the least like what popular prejudice represents, and that Theism is as unfounded as Transubstantiation. Every argument yet produced in evidence of divine existence fails even to satisfy a previous believer. Judging from my own experience, I should say that the most unshaken faith in a God is found in him who never argued; the reasoner, even on the very smallest scale, starts doubts on the subject that can never be solved or destroyed. Once pass beyond the bounds of that innocent state of spontaneous faith, possible only to early life or to imbecility, and wrestle with a doubt respecting a God's existence, and I question if the struggle will ever terminate entirely, except in Atheism or death. It is true, Orthodoxy promises you peace and rest, a solution of your difficulties, to be found in certain arguments, which, if rightly conducted, will infallibly lead up to satisfaction. Alas! how fallacious the promise and the hope! I spent many years in following this will-o'-the-wisp; but neither logic, prayer, nor faith, nor all together could give settled satisfaction. This is not surprising, when the matter is fully examined. Let us see.

The teleological argument is no doubt the oldest of the so-called proofs of divine existence; it is, at least, as old as Xenophon's *Memorabilia*, and seems to have been used by

Socrates. The argument, which is based upon a fallacy, runs thus:—"We see in works of handicraft and Art evidences of Design and adaptation of means to ends; we see similar marks of design, &c., in Nature; and as evidences of design in Art imply a designer, so do they in Nature." This, if logical, would be an exceedingly "short and easy method" of settling the dispute; but there is really not one point of analogy between Art and Nature, regarded either as a whole or in detail.

1. But for our education or experience in handicraft, &c., we could not possibly suspect anything like it in Nature. We could never have gathered the conception of design even from a work of art, were we not able, in some cases, at least, to see both the means and the end, and to watch the one resulting in the other. Now who can say what is the end of Nature in any one department, to say nothing of the final cause or ultimate aim of the whole? This I shall return to by-and-bye; at present I merely point to the want of analogy between an art production (whose whole theory and action, inception and results, we can grasp) and any particular part of Nature of which we know little or nothing beyond the barest phenomena.

2. The analogy fails in another and more serious point. We have seen and can see the maker of any human production. The identical man may be out of our reach, but we have thousands like him all around us continually; and though we may never have seen a given work in course of manufacture, yet we have seen artificers at work upon other artificial productions; and as all artificial things have certain points of resemblance, by the observation of which we can readily pass from the known to the unknown, we have little or no difficulty in recognising as a work of art even an article we never saw before. Now where is the analogy between this and any natural thing? In Nature the artificer has never once been seen, nor any one of his fellows; we never saw any one making a single natural product. Where, then, is the analogy? To establish it you must show us some natural thing in course of production, and the maker himself, or some part of him, must be seen at his work. Let this be done and our disputes end; but until we see some one making things in Nature—I don't say all things, but some—we have no right to institute an analogy between a thing we know to be made and one that may not be made at all.

3. It is idle to say that the "Great Artificer" is invisible; that begs the question. First prove your Artificer, and then we must perforce admit his invisibility until we see him. We see all around us the processes of Nature going on—the revolution of the planets, and alternations of day and night, storm and calm, summer and winter. We see all this, but we never see the maker.

4. Not only have we never seen the Artificer of Nature, we may further say that we have never seen Nature's Art. Is there not necessarily a distinction between the two departments of Nature and Art? And is not that distinction essential? It is the height of linguistic impropriety to apply the terms of Art to the subjects and phenomena of Nature. We have the best of proofs that artificial things are *made*. Nature was never made; it is not in any sense a manufacture, it is an eternal existence as a whole, and its various phenomena are growths, not Art productions. To say the contrary is to abuse language and bewilder the reader. I ask any intelligent man to take a coat and a sheep, and say if there be any analogy between them. The animal was not *made*, it *grew*; the coat did not *grow*, it was *made*. The materials of the coat also grew; the act of putting them together was the making of something that did not and could not grow, any more than the sheep could have been made. To talk, therefore, of animals being *made* is not less incorrect than to speak of coats, boots, chairs, &c., *growing*. A wise man will try to avoid such confusion of language, while the wisest will see in natural phenomena nought but pure growths, and will thus escape the mena of looking for a maker where none is possible. Theology and false philosophy have done much to confuse people on these matters, but there can be nothing more incorrect, in the present state of human knowledge, than to speak of the making or creation of the earth or of any natural thing in it. Therefore it is not reason that desiderates a maker or creator, it is faith that both demands and supplies one or more, according to its whims or circumstances.

5. But more serious objections remain. If nature does manifest design we can discover the fact only by discovering both the means and the end. This must be apparent at once. In Art, did we not know why things are made, the notion of design would be impossible; I don't say in every case. We cannot tell why some things have been made,

they puzzle us ; but these exceptions prove the rule, for if we were not accustomed to recognise the end or object in the majority of cases, we could never feel either curiosity or doubt respecting the end to be answered by the few exceptions. Now where is the man who will pretend to tell why Nature was created? Consider its vastness, its intricacy, how small a speck of the whole is known to us, and the immense periods occupied in some of its processes. Who can guess the meaning and the end of such immense and intricate changes? Only the most consummate rashness would venture to attempt an explanation here. And if we cannot tell the final cause of the whole, by what right do we pretend to explain the design of a part? Every part must contribute to the total results, and must therefore be subordinate to the whole, and without knowing the final upshot, the end and aim cannot be guessed. Let the bold theologian show us Nature's means and her ultimate aim, or confess that, like the rest of us, he is in total darkness respecting them.

If we cannot discover the end and means of Nature in her immensity, let us try on a smaller scale. Take the solar system. Was it designed, or is it the result of accident?—that is, the interaction of the materials and forces of the system? If designed, why are some planets so much farther from the sun than others? All might have been accommodated at distances much more nearly equal. As it is there is a great waste of light and heat. If two thousand millions of globes, each equal to the earth, were placed round the sun, side by side, and all at the same distance (from 90,000,000 to 100,000,000 miles), they would form a complete (omitting interstices) shell, with the sun in its centre. Now with the present expenditure of light and heat, the sun would light up and warm the whole interior of that enormous shell as brilliantly and intensely as he does the earth at present. Think of what this means. The sun which could, with the present emission of energy, amply supply with light and heat an area of 100,000,000,000,000,000 square miles and more, actually supplies about 50,000,000 square miles! In this estimate I omit all the planets except the earth, for their aggregate receipts of light and heat are a trifle compared with the solar waste. If, then, the solar system does manifest design, it is not design executed by either wisdom or economy.

Then consider how unequally the distances of the planets

are arranged. How hot must Mercury or Vulcan (?) be ! how cold Uranus and Neptune ! Besides, some of the planets have satellites, others none, as far as yet known. Where is the design here ? Our earth has but one satellite, though it is well known we could do with more. What ! do we not need moonlight as much when it is absent as when it is shining ? If one moon is good, it is my firm belief that two would be twice as good.

Leaving the earth as a mere planet, let us descend to particulars, regarding it as a home for man and other animals. Look at the distribution of light and heat. In the tropics the people have far too much of both ; in the temperate regions, the alternations are dreadfully severe ; but in polar regions they are simply monstrous. A long day of six months' duration is by-and-bye replaced by a night of equal length ! Does that show design and wisdom ? Then consider the cold—land and sea frozen to an extent to us almost incredible. What is the object ? Is it to test the enduring powers of seals and polar bears ? or to give the Esquimaux an opportunity of displaying his voracity upon blubber and his dexterity in travelling over the snow ? Is there one good thing accomplished by such exaggerated cold ? Will the natural theologian explain ? He sees the "hand of God" and the "footsteps of deity" everywhere, his eyes are so completely opened that he sees "good in everything." He might, therefore, enlighten us a little on these mysteries of nature. I have never yet heard of an Esquimaux praising God for his wisdom and goodness as displayed in Arctic nights and snows. They are people of a milder clime, and whose civilisation enables them to defy the malice of Nature, that praise the blessings of so extreme a cold.

Winds and rains show equal want of design. One country is devastated by storms, another is panting for a breeze ; one land is flooded by excessive rains, another is parched and famine-stricken for want of water. During the recent famines in Bengal, Bombay, and China, England was flooded. Is this design ?—this wisdom ? Let a water company follow the example of Nature, and flood one part of a town week after week, while the rest is parched and dusty as a desert, and your very Tories will demand reform. Where and what is that supernal wisdom, which cannot be imitated, except at the expense of common sense ? What good thing is ever accomplished by a flood ?—by a famine ?

by a hurricane? If the arrangements and processes of Nature manifest wisdom, the best and most regular actions of men are foolish in the extreme.

Now since we cannot discover the end or aim in the above cases, and multitudes more that time forbids me to mention, how can any one pretend to be able to discover design in them? And—

6. If we cannot discover the object or final cause of Nature's details, how can we discover it in any large department—say in the whole earth? Why was this planet made?—for the sake of man? Let us adopt that supposition, and then proceed to test it by human experience. If the earth was really made for man's sake, if man is the final cause of its creation and arrangement, I think he has abundant reason to grumble, being at once so honoured and so grossly outraged and insulted. He has no choice—it is not left to him to take this world or some other. He enters it as he enters into being; Nature throws him up like a waif tossed to shore by the waves. If he can endure her treatment and dodge her malicious blows, he survives; if not, he dies before he fairly lives. Let him survive, for what does he live? Ignorance, superstition, want, cold, hunger, fever, accidents, tempests, volcanoes, wars, and death! This the final cause of the world! What!—the lord of the estate knocked about in this fashion! He for whom all was made treated with contempt, get his bones broken, his blood corrupted, his person maltreated by the ill-arrangement of his natural and only home! How grotesque! How silly is theology! Was it worth while to expend all this care, pains, and thought in the production of man, if he was to be treated after all like the most worthless of beings?

It is here that theology most completely collapses; after going to the expense of producing what theology regards as the final cause of the world, the final cause is treated as of no conceivable value! Either, therefore, man is not the final cause of the world's creation, or the wisdom displayed in creation ends in a wretched farce. And if we cannot find the ultimate end aimed at, by what right can we assume that Nature shows any marks of design? And, further, is it not preposterous to speak of a *final* cause, or ultimate aim, in an endless series of natural and inevitable events? The natural theologian is neither scientist nor philosopher; he is a man of faith; and faith can find its basis anywhere—except in the region of fact and experience.

7. If Nature in one or most parts manifests design, we must be prepared to find it in all ; for every event of Nature must be as much designed as any that may be named. This consideration the divine quietly and conveniently ignores. He recognises design and divine goodness and wisdom in all agreeable things ; the rest are *explained* or overlooked. It is our duty, however, to correct his mistakes and bring up his omissions.

Let us grant then that Nature does undoubtedly manifest design. (1) A hurricane that spreads devastation over large tracts of the globe must be designed for that purpose. Smashing houses, rooting up trees, sinking ships, and drowning or killing men and animals are the chief works performed by those storms. Let the divine show the wisdom and goodness of his deity in them. (2) The eruption of Vesuvius that buried Pompeii and Herculaneum must have been intended for that work ; and the earthquake that swallowed up Lisbon was equally designed for that purpose. (3) The malaria that rises from the swamp and breeds a yellow fever epidemic, is designed for that ; else why does it exist ? What else does it accomplish ? The evaporation that by-and-bye distils in the fruitful shower is not more natural than the rise of the poisonous effluvia that cause the death of thousands. (4) The coals stored up in the earth's strata were originally intended for—what?—to torture poor men, women, and children in extracting them, to exhale gases that should explode and kill the daring intruders into Nature's preserves, to burst steam boilers, and to drive machinery by which workers are maimed or crushed to death, to manufacture cannon, torpedoes, and other deadly instruments. And those coals perform evil deeds with as much earnestness and effect as good ones ; a fire made of them will boil the kettle for tea or burn a child to death with equal indifference. What were they designed for ? Only stupidity can assert that they were designed for good, and not evil.

If design shows itself in one part of Nature, we must expect it in all parts. (5) Theologians recognise design when Nature turns out a Newton, they are silent when she produces an idiot. And yet, there may be as great an expenditure of force and pains in producing the one as the other. Is the idiot designed or not ? It is idle to lay the blame upon parents or adventitious circumstances—the forces and conditions that resulted in that idiot are as truly natural—

as much a portion of the original plan as those were which culminated in the philosopher. How will the divine secure his dogmas in face of this? And what is the final cause of an idiot?

(6) I once read of the birth of an animal—a dog, I think—perfect and beautiful in all things, except in one respect—it lacked its head. Let us pause! In this case Nature worked as carefully as she ever does—bones, muscles, blood-vessels, skin, hair, and everything were carefully made, and all for what? A being that could not live. Did Nature, or Nature's author and ruler, know that the head was wanting? If so, why was the work not stopped, or the defect supplied? Now, either this dog was designed, or Nature worked independently of her maker; if it was designed, it reflects the highest discredit upon the designer, and the keenest ridicule. We have all heard of the wright who built a waggon in an upper room, never once considering how it was to be got out after it was finished. Is this case any more ridiculous than that of Nature turning out a dog that had no head? Verily, those who use the design argument employ a sword with two edges, a weapon that cuts its owners far more than their enemies. I beg the reader to consider that in speaking of Nature "making" and "working," I merely use the language of theology.

(7) A year or two since I visited a curious little museum kept by an old sailor in Stockton-on-Tees, and among other "queer" things I saw two that impressed me. One was a little piggy Siamese twins. They were perfect, as far as I could see, but fastened together, breast to breast, by a short tube, so that walking would have been an utter impossibility. The other was more curious still. It was a lamb, single as to the head and neck, but double from the shoulders backwards. There were eight legs and eight feet, and the two bodies slightly receded from each other the whole length behind the shoulders. One might have thought Nature would have been content without sporting or blundering further; but no. From the double shoulders of this compound animal there grew an extra pair of legs, which stretched backwards and slightly hung down between the two bodies. They were fully grown, and had their front parts turned upwards. I am writing from memory, but can vouch for the general correctness of what I say. Now, what could Nature mean—if she really meant anything—by producing such monsters? Twin pigs that could never have

lived, and a compound lamb dreadfully overdone with bodies and limbs! Was it divine wisdom that produced these, or did blind Nature, operating by necessity, give rise to them? Let theologians say.

8. Many things in Nature are designed and adapted to produce pain, if designed at all, and they never do or can produce anything else. I may mention, as examples, excessive heat and cold, stings of insects, poisons of serpents, scorpions, &c., bites of beasts—many diseases, such as inflammation, cancer, and others. Perhaps one of the most dreadful is childbirth. What pangs, and how perfectly objectless! There is not one good thing, as far as I can learn, ever accomplished by any of the above. Indeed, if I am not much mistaken, ninety-nine per cent. of all the pain in the world is worse than useless. Theologians say that, under given circumstances, "labour is rest and pain is sweet"; but you should not understand them literally. As a French proverb says, "One can regard evils with equanimity—when they are another's." Theologians are no more fond of pain than the rest of us, and they despise it most thoroughly when they don't feel it. They may preach up the benefits of pain as long as they please; pain is pain, call it by what names you may, and the world has a deal too much of it to endure. If it was ever intended to do good, the world's designer miscalculated, and should long since have tried to work on some other plan.

It has been asserted by some who are anxious to defend their fancied deity, that animals which are devoured by beasts and birds of prey feel no pain. Their own Bible might have confuted them. Did Jonah feel no sort of pain in the whale's belly? And does not Paul say, "The whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now"? Perhaps a bite from a tiger, or even from a dog, might bring those divines to their senses. One thing is certain, the animals that are eaten up by others show all the signs of pain that man shows except those of speech, and none but the perverse can doubt that they really feel pain. The question to be answered is, Was pain designed? If so, what can be said of its designer? Did he ever feel pain, or would he like to?

9. Turn we next to another class of topics. What is to be said by a believer in design respecting parasites? I believe the true parasites cannot live except in or on the other living beings they inhabit. Which way shall we read

Nature's declaration of design in these cases? Must we read it, "Parasites were designed for other animals," or "Other animals were designed for their parasites"? This is a puzzle, and no divine can explain it. Leaving the less important parasites, let us ponder for a moment the case of *trichina spiralis*. This minute worm cannot live except in an animal body. In the muscles of a pig or of a man he can make himself very comfortable, though he gives great pain to his guest and living habitation. The tapeworm is worse still—the very thought of it is sufficient to give one the horrors! But to the point—Is man designed as the habitation of the trichina and tapeworm? If so, which is the greater, and which, after all, is the final cause of this world—the man who protects and feeds the tapeworm, or the tapeworm that dwells in and lives at the expense of the man? I think it cannot be doubted that the worm has the best of it. The man he inhabits is tortured with a horrible disease; the worm has every want supplied, and is as happy as his nature and conditions permit. It seems then, that not man, but the tapeworm, or some other human parasite, must be the great end of this world's creation! What an issue and a fate for the celebrated "argument from design"!

Having shown that the design argument, when fairly conducted to its logical conclusion, leads to the interesting discovery that human parasites are the final cause of the existence of the earth, I must next proceed to attack Theism in other directions. I do not think the above conclusion in the least flattering to human vanity; but that reflection by no means militates against its correctness. I suppose no one will deny that the less, where adaptation prevails, is subservient to the greater. It cannot be denied, the theologian affirms, that Nature manifests design, and it will not be pretended that man is benefited by the trichina, or tapeworm; it is equally impossible to deny that these most interesting beings, like princes and priests, are furnished gratuitously with everything they desire by and at the expense of man. If those parasites are of a superstitious turn, no doubt they spend much of their time in chanting "Te Deums" to the Bountiful Parent of All Good, who has created such a delightful world as a human body for them to dwell in.

II.

BUT leaving this subject, let us next survey the doctrine of cause and effect. This doctrine I accept, though I deny emphatically that it logically conducts us to a first cause or to a final cause. I suppose the materials and forces of the universe—that is, the complete round of existence—to be eternal. I shall not just now attempt to prove the doctrine, or even to give any reason for my faith in it; the reader will please observe that I merely assume it here for the sake of argument. Whether it be true or not, no one can deny that we find ourselves in the very midst of an exceedingly long series of causes and effects. We also find ourselves in the very midst of infinite space, partially occupied, though possibly not entirely so; we are, further, in the very midst of infinite time or duration. I shall not stop to discuss the nature of these two infinities, but assume that most people are agreed respecting their existence, at least.

Now let me ask the theologian if he can put his finger upon the central point in space, or tell us how far off is the circumference or limit of space in any direction he may prefer. To say that this demand is absurd is no objection to it, for I make it for the purpose of exposing another absurdity, exactly parallel, though not quite so obvious. I may assume, I think, that none but an enthusiast, a circle-squarer, or a maniac will try to find either the centre of space or one of its limits.

Next, I ask, will the theologian find for me the middle, the last, or the first moment (or any other unit of time) in eternal duration? I need not press this either, since all must see its absurdity as soon as it is fairly propounded. But why cannot my demands be met? The reason is, Space has no centre, no limit; Time or duration no beginning, no end. We cannot conceive that, though we travelled in one direction for ever, we should ever come to a spot beyond which there was no space, or that we should be any nearer its limit than we now are. It is the same with time or duration; there never was a first moment, there never can be a last.

Well, is it not equally absurd to speak of a First Cause and a First Moment? There were former moments and former causes; but a first is inconceivable in either case. Had theologians set up a First Moment in capital letters, thrown round it an air of mystery, and spoken of it with

bated breath, it would have been worshipped; temples and churches would have started up by thousands, and the priesthood would have grown rich upon devotion's offerings; gushing songs would have been composed to the Great First Moment, the Fount of Eternity, the Source of Being, and the Ever-adorable Mystery! I am afraid it is too late now; but had theologians begun in time, the Great First Moment would have brought them a world of wealth and influence. They have accomplished their purpose, however, by inventing and parading their Great First Cause, a fiction equally absurd with the Great First Moment.

The bewilderment of the theologian is really one of the most amusing features in the history of our race. He cannot account for the succession of events, or of causes and effects, as he sees them occurring around him; so he deliberately concludes that there must have been a Great First Cause, and this hypothesis seems to content him. But sober reason can never rest in such an assumption; for (1) Why suppose a First Cause? The sole reason is to account for phenomena you cannot otherwise explain, and which you think are explained by your assumption. Really, then, the First Cause is but a phrase invented to hide human ignorance, a mere fiction to save appearances, and to keep men from confessing frankly that they do not know what lies beyond the circle of their knowledge. (2) But it won't serve them. To say there is a First Cause is equivalent to the confession, "I don't know anything at all about the matter, and am too idle to inquire further." To assume the existence of a First Cause certainly does shift the difficulty one degree farther back, and affords a fictitious explanation of Nature's phenomena; but it is not logical. A is a mystery you wish to explain; B explains it; but what explains B? C will do it. True; but can we stop at C? "Yes, if we call it the First Cause," say you. But how can you know that D does not precede it?

Besides, as all must admit, if there really is a First Cause, the mystery of its existence must be far deeper than that of all other existences combined. It is not philosophical to explain a phenomenon by something still more inexplicable; to attempt it only deepens the mystery. What then must be said of the attempt to explain an inexplicable chain of causes and effects by the assumption of a great First Cause, which is infinitely more inexplicable still? The attempt may be the result of credulity and ignorance; most certainly

logic never led people to it. The mind can no more rest upon a so-called First Cause than it could on a pretended First Moment; in each case it demands what preceded the one, and what caused the other. This difficulty is not obviated by calling the fiction God, or printing it in capitals; investigation may be forbidden for a time, but at length the human mind demands a sight of your First Cause, walks round, and finds an unexplored region at the back of it. Once tell us how your First Cause rose without a prior cause, and you will teach us to dispense *with all causes*; for if the infinite First Cause holds his being without cause, surely the finite phenomena of nature may be allowed a similar privilege.

Besides, if the infinite is without cause, why look for cause and effect anywhere? The doctrine is exploded if theologians are correct; and thus, in the discovery of the First Cause they demonstrate that no cause was needed, and they and their system fall together in the very success of their undertaking. If the doctrine of cause and effect be true, every cause must be the effect of some prior cause; if they find a cause that is not an effect, an uncaused cause, the doctrine they start with cannot be true; and thus success in either direction is destructive of their position. If the doctrine of cause and effect be true, no First Cause is *possible*; if it is not true no such cause is *required*. Let them take which horn they please.

III.

IF Theists find no support from the Design Argument, and if their First Cause is shown to be a very late effect—of ignorance, what have they else to rest their faith upon? There is one more refuge to which they may run, but it can prove nothing but a temporary shelter, for the pitiless “hail” of modern thought “shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and the water” of common sense “shall overflow the hiding-place.” The case of orthodoxy, whether we begin at one end or the other, needs but to be stated in plain words to be refuted. Not willing to ascribe any inherent power to what is known and familiar to everybody, they credulously credit some totally unknown substance with all possible power, and assign to it the task of imparting to matter all its attributes and qualities. It is impossible, say they, that “blind,” “dead” matter should

move itself, and assume all the beautiful and wonderful forms we see. The world could not have made itself; there are to be seen in it beauty, splendour, intelligence; these could not have originated in *mere* matter; they must have been bestowed by a being who himself possesses them." All this is specious but hollow, prime faith but not logic.

Is matter so "dead" and "blind" a thing as they represent? Do not divines discredit matter to enhance the greatness of their fictitious deity? Those who divest their minds of prejudice find in matter food for ceaseless wonder; and it is quite gratuitous to tell us matter cannot think, feel, &c. How do you know? Matter has shown such marvellous properties, single and combined, that he must be reckless who will venture to say that he knows all its attributes. The facts of nature—the glowing of suns, the ceaseless revolutions of planets, the endless currents in the air and sea, the ever changing face of the sky, the resurrection in spring, the marvels of vegetation and animal life—all proclaim the power of matter, and rebuke the ignorance of those who call it "blind" and "dead." What! a thing that is in eternal flux, ever changing into shapes and motions more enchanting than all romances—this thing "dead" and "blind"! Because its *mode* of life is different from yours, dare you say it does not live at all? Because it sees not as you do through lenses, does it therefore not see at all? In sooth, you are fine judges of such profound mysteries!

We see the magnet attract steel; we see chemical action day by day; we observe the mutual attraction of the earth and bodies near its surface; this experience is our sole reason for supposing that the magnet and the earth do attract, that elements possess chemical cohesion. In organised bodies, on the other hand, we see all the phenomena of what we are pleased to call "life," and in the higher ones of intelligence. Why ascribe magnetism to that piece of soft iron, if you won't ascribe life to the tree or the man? The magnetism is an essential attribute of the magnet, the life is such of the man. Why suppose there is a living being who bestows the life, unless you also assume a magnetic being to bestow the magnetism? Really orthodox talk on this subject is mere trifling. They say that a being cannot bestow an attribute itself does not possess. Very well; if that be so, their God must be a curiosity.

Let us suppose that they are correct ; then their God must have had, in his own person, all the qualities now possessed by all matter—weight, size, colour, shape, taste, odour, extension—he must be solid, liquid, and gaseous ; freezing, boiling, burning ; must be magnetic and non-magnetic, gravitating, attracting, repelling ; must be both resting and moving, living and dead, blind and seeing, intelligent and foolish, good and bad, beautiful and ugly, rough and smooth, etc. These are but a few of the qualities we observe around us, they must be native or imported, belonging essentially to matter, or else imparted by some other substance which possessed them all before. The Deist may charge me with trifling and flippancy ; but I am merely delivering his own doctrines, and trying as best I can to show their real absurdity.

IV.

I do not think logic or common sense requires more than is given above, but orthodoxy is so slippery, so protean in its shapes ; so unscrupulous, so plausible, and gifted with such astonishing powers of turning and twisting, that I feel impelled to track it into another region still. The best way to deal with divines is to admit (for argument's sake) their fundamental principles or assumptions, and then proceed to show their logical consequences. Now, the orthodox assure us that there exists a being whose nature is infinite, whose presence is everywhere ; and these terms they use in their absolute or unlimited sense—at least they did in my orthodox days. Be it so, then ; there is one infinite being ; he must have or must be an infinite substance, no matter *what* that substance may be. Now every substance or being must necessarily occupy some space, since no real being can exist which is not more or less extended ; and every being must fill space exactly commensurate with itself ; indeed, we have no means of ascertaining or conceiving the size of anything except by ascertaining or conceiving the quantity of space it fills, that is, its extension in one, two, or three directions.

If the above be correct, an infinite being cannot occupy less than infinite space ; all possible space must be so full of it that nothing more could be introduced anywhere ; for if there be but space enough left for the insertion of one atom, molecule, or the smallest possible division of sub-

stance, the being we are supposing must be less than infinite, which is contrary to the hypothesis. Now since an infinite being fills by itself or by its own substance all possible space, there can be no space left to be occupied by any other being or substance whatsoever, and thus we are inevitably led to the interesting discovery that there is no existence, no being, except the infinite one; that the orthodox God is alone, is everything, that nothing but itself exists or *can* exist, for there is no unoccupied space for it to fill. The divine, therefore, is reduced to this dilemma; either he must give up his infinite substance or all other substances; he must renounce his God, or deny existence to Nature, including himself. If we say that it is past denying that we and other beings do really exist, and that we occupy space commensurate with our substance—that being so, we occupy *some* of that space which an infinite being must have occupied if he had existed; therefore no infinite being exists. There is but one refuge for the divine from this conclusion, namely; to say that all Nature is but a part of God; though I do not suppose that any one will permanently abide in such a mental condition.

But let us allow the theologian his infinite God, and doing so, let us analyse the conception. An infinite God! Such a being must be an absolute *solid*, for all space must be filled to its utmost capacity by its substance. It must also be immovable. It would take infinite time for an infinite being to move, *no matter at what rate he did it*. In an absolute solid there can be no internal motion; in an infinite being no external motion is possible, for there is no space except what it already fills absolutely. Such a being could not feel, think, will, or act in any way; for it would take a whole eternity for a throb to pass through it. The thinking faculty or apparatus must be either located in a particular part, or else diffused through the whole; in either case thought would be impossible, except only a mere part of the being thought. There is no act, mental or physical, possible to any being but what takes time in its performance, and the said time must bear a certain ratio to the size, structure, organisation, or nature of that being. An infinite one, therefore, could not perform the most simple or elementary action without spending eternity in doing it, even on the supposition that it could do it at all.

An infinite God, then, must be helpless, thoughtless, motionless; as void of sense as a block of marble. The

conception is a conglomeration of the wildest absurdities ; nay, it is not a conception, since none ever conceived it—it would take eternity to do so. The word God, as used by Pagans, generally meant something ; in orthodoxy it stands for nought, a label covering the very darkest corner of the human mind, a word without meaning, a symbol symbolising nothing.

It is idle for the divines to appeal to spirit ; for an infinite spirit must be a substance of some kind, and must fill infinite space, and must be infinitely powerless. Besides, What is spirit ? “ Breath, wind,” say I. “ Nay,” replies the theologian, “ it is something more refined ; it has no weight, shape, colour, taste, smell, or sound.” Exactly so ; it is abstract. To find spirit I give the following receipt :— Take a man, remove his physical being—all that you can weigh, touch, taste, smell, see, or burn—in a word, all that is material. Next remove from him all that you can possibly conceive ; persevere and exhaust the subject completely. Well, all that is left is spirit. Yes ; that imponderable, immeasurable, intangible, inodorous, invisible, tasteless, soundless, and *inconceivable nothing*—this purest of abstractions—is the spirit or soul. The believer is heartily welcome to his “ find.” If his God is a spirit, we can only say, as Paul said of other Gods : “ Now we know that an idol is nothing in the world,” or, in the language of Jesus, we may say to the most devout : “ Ye worship ye know not what ”—in fact, Nothing.

If I am not vastly deceived, on all lines of intellectual inquiry, the orthodox belief leads inevitably to absurdity. I shall be glad to be corrected if I am in error, and if some one who is able will take the trouble to grind my notions to powder, I shall take it as a favour. I hate wrong ideas ; they are amongst the foremost of human evils. Will someone, therefore, do his best to enlighten me, as I am sincerely trying to enlighten others ?

V.

I AM not sufficiently vain to suppose that what I have written previously on this subject has been exhaustive ; I have merely touched some of the more important intellectual difficulties that surround and interpenetrate the Theistic position, and have endeavoured to show how absurd is the orthodox belief. Just now I shall turn from

the purely intellectual aspects of the subject and point out a few of the Moral difficulties which meet the Theist—difficulties he either ignores or explains in a very unsatisfactory way.

The Theist proclaims a God who is infinitely good—goodness itself, in fact; whose “tender mercies are over all his works,” who is Humanity’s Great Father, and whose nature is Love. Now all this might have continued undisturbed in the world’s creed, if, unfortunately, the facts of every-day life did not ceaselessly protest against such false doctrines.

If infinite goodness really existed, such a thing as evil would be impossible. I suppose no one will deny the existence of evil; even the most thorough optimist must sometimes be in doubt as to the correctness of his creed, except he be too stupid to reflect. A fit of the gout, sciatica, or a cancer would, I should suppose, convert the most devout optimist into something more or less rational.

In the esteem of most men both physical and moral evils exist in far too great plenty. Let us therefore reflect. 1. If I had the power I would remove every evil out of nature and leave only what is useful and good. This I cannot do for lack of ability. Give me the power and I will undertake the task. But if I have the power to remove one evil and don’t do it, you have the best of reasons for saying that I am not so good as I should be. Now the orthodox preach a God who, they solemnly assure us, is infinite in being and in all his attributes; his power and knowledge are absolutely infinite, and his goodness equal to either. But this must be false, for such a being could never have suffered to exist any evil whatever, even for one moment. A being infinitely good must will the existence of nothing but good; if he has all power and knowledge these must be subservient to his will—if he be sane. But evils do exist: these are the result (1) of his design or arrangement, for nothing could slip in unawares to him; or (2) he had not power to prevent nor is able now to destroy them; or (3) he is careless about their existence, and so does not wish them to be destroyed; or (4) he desires their existence, and actively favours their continuance. Which of these hypotheses is correct? No matter which; any one of the four is fatal to orthodoxy. If he arranged for evils in the original creation, or introduced them subsequently, he must himself be evil in the direct ratio of his knowledge and

power ; that is, on orthodox showing, he must be infinitely evil, for he is infinitely knowing and able. Did a being of boundless power and knowledge create evils, or create materials and forces that in their "workings" must evolve evils? The orthodox creed fairly implies this, though believers shrink from its open and blank avowal. So be it—the conclusion is inevitable, that he who made Nature, supposing it ever was made, and had full knowledge of what he did, must be solely responsible for all that Nature evolves. Evils and goods are equally his offspring, not begotten by momentary impulse, but after an eternity's (*a parte ante*) deliberation. But herein lies a contradiction ; goods and evils, or in the abstract, good and evil, are diametrically opposed and incompatible. Therefore, an infinite being could not will both goods and evils, except alternately ; and in that case they could not exist simultaneously, for infinite power would instantly execute any wish such a being might have ; the moment he willed evils goods would cease, and *vice versâ*. If the orthodox prefer to suppose a God who wills both goods and evils simultaneously, I will not at present contend with such an absurdity.

Again, no Theist would aver that evils crept into Nature or sprang up in its midst without his God's knowledge or power to prevent, as that would involve the conception of ignorance or weakness. Nor could the orthodox suppose that he without whom "a sparrow falleth not," and who "numbereth the very hairs of your head," could be careless of the existence of evils—that would un-God the deity at once. Lastly, to suppose the creator and ruler of Nature to desire the existence of evils, argues such a wicked or malicious state of mind as really to shock the most callous dogmatist in the world. What, therefore, can the Theist say? Evils exist. How can he hold the doctrine of an infinitely good, powerful, and wise God, with these undeniable facts so constantly around him?

Of course, most believers resort to the fiction of a future life, and thus create a Utopian world to redress the wrongs of this ; but that does not explain, it merely evades the difficulty. For the question is, not the *continuance* or *redress* of evils, but their *existence*. If the Theist could prove that evils existed but for one moment, he would still have to reconcile their existence with his God-theory—the length of time is quite another affair. If, again, the believer

could demonstrate that all evils would be redressed and fully compensated, either here or hereafter, still that leaves the real point untouched; for the question is, How does he reconcile the existence of infinite goodness with the existence of evils? Compensation may make amends, it never can undo. Evils exist and the children of men groan under them. Bitter are the tears that daily run down sorrow's cheeks; deep are the pangs and woes of humanity. What! can they be compensated? Never. An eternity of unmitigated bliss would not obliterate the furrows ploughed by some woes that last but for an hour; if it could, what of the *existence* of the evil, no matter how short its life?

It seems to me beyond dispute that logic and common sense require the Theist to prove that no evil exists or ever did, or else give up his belief in an infinitely good God. To talk of his "permission" of evil for wise but mysterious reasons is mere shuffling. He who "permits" a known evil he has power to destroy or prevent is so far guilty of wrong; but with an Almighty God, to "permit" is to do, since there is no power but his existing, and hence the evil that results from his so-called "permission" is as actively produced by him as any other thing he ever effects. When man "permits" he merely declines to check the operation of certain forces not his own; when Almightiness "permits" he as actively works as he ever does.

Besides, it is sheer assumption to affirm that the unknown purposes of the deity are *wise*. We can never know that a man is wise except from his words and deeds: he whose words and deeds are best we regard as the wisest. Now we can read the character of God only in his deeds, for his voice we never hear. It is only those works that strike us as wise that can argue the wisdom of the designer of nature and its ruler. If some of his deeds are wise, others very doubtful, and others exceedingly unwise, tested by our own and our only standard, we can but conclude that his character is similarly mixed, uncertain, or heterogenous. If the Theist will prove the existence and perfect wisdom of his deity by independent means, then we will readily admit that we have the best of reasons for supposing even the most perplexing and staggering processes of nature are all wise and good, only at present we are too ignorant to comprehend how they are so. But the Theist first proves the existence of his God from these very processes of nature, and then argues the absolute perfection of his character from

the same data ; whereas nature merely presents evidence of an imperfect, unwise, weak, and very evil-disposed or else unfortunate deity. To argue perfection of character from imperfect works ; absolute goodness from a mixture of goods and evils, in which the latter predominate ; and infinite wisdom from a course of action in which wisdom and folly are freely mingled, is to ignore logic and to perpetrate an outrage upon common sense. And that the "constitution and course of Nature" do exhibit evils and goods, and at least as much folly as wisdom, none can intelligently deny.

On the whole I cannot avoid the conclusion that the Theistic belief in a being of infinite goodness is entirely at variance with the evidence. There is not, so far as I am aware, a single fact or logical argument to support it ; while on the other hand, we know for certainty that infinite goodness does not exist, for if it did, evils would be impossible. What should we say in reply to one who asserted the theory of an infinite light ? The only reply necessary would be to point to one dark corner ! this would at once destroy the hypothesis. Just so the existence of one evil is sufficient to destroy all rational belief in infinite goodness. It is surely time for the orthodox, if they wish to escape universal scorn, to bethink themselves, and furnish some reasonable basis for their faith. So far they have done nothing of the kind ; their whole creed is subjective, a genuine picture of their own imagination, but as destitute of objective reality as witchcraft or astrology.

But I shall be told, perhaps, that to destroy the belief in a God is to annihilate the very basis and sanctions of morality ! There are people, by no means insane, who still use this bugbear to frighten people into the orthodox fold. It is curious to note how in every proposed change, the timid and the designing raise the silly cry that reformers are opening the floodgates, bursting the bonds of society, and otherwise ruining the world ! Alas ! how often this world has been ruined by reformers, inventors, discoverers, and others. I suggest that the theologian should go a step further, and declare roundly that, without belief in a God men would not know how to make boots, to till the ground, to eat or drink, to build houses, and so forth. This would be no more absurd than their cry about morality. I once heard a man in serious debate affirm that we should have no era to reckon the flight of time from, but for Christ ! This

I heard myself, and I was the unfortunate being who had to reply to it. I further heard once of a monarchist who solemnly assured a republican, that if we abolished the present form of government we could have no current money! "for," he queried, with invincible logic, "whose head could we put upon the coins but the queen's?"

Many believers are astonished when you tell them that morality, like science, art, money, manners, language, etc., is a purely social growth or production, in fact, no more divine than the art and weapons of war, or the skill and weapons of the poisoner. And yet it would be quite as easy to prove that money came from heaven as to prove that morality did. It is not my intention at present to go into the abstract question of morality, nor shall I attempt a philosophy of ethics; I shall merely show that the Theist has no monopoly of morality, that his theory respecting it is incorrect, and that, whencesoever its sanctions may be drawn, they do not arise from theology. Let us see:

I. The Bible is held by a very large number of European Theists to be a book inspired by God, and a sufficient moral and a religious guide for man. I say they hold these doctrines, that is, have them in their creeds and formulas, but the best of them in real life, ignore the Bible, and walk by higher rules than it contains. As to the divine origin of the Bible, that has never been proved; the so-called evidence is unsatisfactory in the highest degree; and it would be nothing less than a calamity if such a book could be proved to have had any higher origin than other ancient works. It contains the silliest of stories—told, too, with all solemnity—the worst morality in the world; and we are assured it is all divine. Its precepts the churches themselves never think of obeying; its examples they dare not follow, while large portions of it shock and horrify all civilised persons. The best morality of the Bible is commonplace enough, though paraded with such solemnity as to impose upon many tolerably enlightened people. The Bible is certainly not the source, nor can it ever be the standard of the world's Morality.

Let us next see if the Theist can draw lessons or elements of morality from Nature. I speak now of Nature apart from society, and I roundly affirm that Nature knows nought of morality, nor do ethics enter at all into her processes.

1. All through Nature the strong oppresses and eats up

the weak, and the life of one being involves the destruction of another, often of thousands daily. This is not morality, and if done by the arrangement, or even connivance, of a being able to have prevented it, it must be characterised as monstrous iniquity.

2. Nature nowhere, in no way, manifests *government*. An overruling Providence finds a place in creeds—that is, in the fictions of the churches; but it exists nowhere else. Consider these few undeniable facts: (1) Nature has never yet been able to distinguish, in the very simplest cases, between right and wrong, crime and accident, sin and misfortune. For example—if a man jump down a precipice he is dashed to pieces—perhaps he deserves it; but if he should accidentally fall down he suffers to precisely the same extent; yes, if he is wilfully flung down by murderers, it is all the same in the end. Is that justice? Let us compare. A jumps wilfully off a house and is killed; B accidentally falls off, and meets the same fate; C is flung off by his enemies, and is also killed. The three bodies are taken before a coroner, and the jury, after being made acquainted with all the facts of each case, return the same verdict for all three. What should we say if they pleaded that, whereas A, B, and C did all come by their deaths by too precipitate a descent from the top of the house, therefore A, B, and C all alike deserved the fate they met? Such a verdict and defence of it would involve about equal quantities of truth, absurdity, and injustice. But Nature would justify that stupid jury, and they might plead in self-defence that, whereas the three died in consequence of their respective falls, it was evident that Nature regarded them as equally guilty, and they did not in the least desire to improve upon the ways of Nature. Now, if Nature must be taken as the exponent of deity, we can only conclude that deity cannot distinguish between right and wrong, for in the course of Nature, by which he governs (?) the sentient beings of this world, he treats accidents, mistakes, and the greatest misfortunes as if they were the greatest crimes, and oftener inflicts pain upon the innocent than upon the guilty.

(2) Further, if Nature teaches anything in the cases just supposed, it teaches that murder is an innocent deed, if not a commendable one; for, while the three who are the subjects of accident, suicide, and crime are killed summarily by the forces of Nature, those who murdered the one not only survive him, but possibly, as often happens, actually

enjoy property and pleasures that honestly belonged to their victim. And it must not be forgotten that all natural forces are, if Theists speak truth, forces of God; in fact, mere results of his own will.

This is a point so often ignored that I must spend another sentence or two upon it to impress it on the reader's mind. All that is was created, so Theists say, by an Almighty and otherwise Infinite God. That being so, the forces of Nature are such only by derivation, nay, not derivation even—they are merely the power or powers of God himself, exhibited under certain circumstances or conditions. Now all natural processes must be nothing more than *actions* of deity—he *does* all that is done—if the premises of Theism are correct. This being so, the destructive processes of Nature, and those that give pain, are actions of God equally with those which evolve new life or mantle the face of man with pleasure. If all this is true, we have in Nature a clear, constant, and truthful exponent of God's moral character; and what a character! Justice and wisdom are entirely absent. Indeed, you look in vain to Nature, that is (indirectly) to God, for any one of those qualities esteemed among men, while many of those society everywhere punishes are very painfully and palpably present.

(3) To pursue this somewhat further, we may look for a few moments at some of the frightful evils that have and still do curse the world:

In an earthquake, a flood, or a storm, we see the deity roused to fury and venting his rage indiscriminately upon all who happen to be within reach. Not one of the victims deserves such treatment; as far as we know; certainly the infants don't; yet they are ground to powder, drowned or otherwise killed, as if they were the greatest offenders. Is that government? and moral government? The Turkish manner of *ruling* Bulgaria was a trifle to this!

Again, how deaf the deity is to cries and prayers! In railway collisions, falls of bridges, shipwrecks, and other catastrophes, you may call, no matter how passionately, to the ruler of Nature. He no more attends you than does the wind, the wave, the iron, the rocks that surround you. He might help without the smallest trouble or inconvenience, for he knows all, he hears all, is ever present, and has almighty power—so Theists say. A man who will not help when he sees calamity fall upon his fellows, is next to a murderer, and is justly execrated. Yet he may plead some

seeming or partial excuses. What *could* we say, if we were certain there really existed a God who could look coolly on in the direst calamity that ever befalls men? The thought is so sickening I dare not dwell upon it. Yet that is only one part of the subject. Human calamity! It is all planned and executed by the deity; no wonder he does not move to the rescue. And what *does* he, *can* he gain? It is all for nought! The devil is said to torment for his pleasure; not so the Almighty—he can never *want* a pleasure.

There have been millions of occasions in the world's history when the worst government worthy of the name must have interposed to prevent or remedy mischiefs among its subjects. What priesthood ever existed that did not speak and act in the name, and professedly by the authority of God, the Great Ruler? Where was that ruler when Moses and Joshua perpetrated such horrible villainies in his name? Where was he when the Pope and the Inquisition were perpetrating horrid lies in his name, and burning Jews and heretics for his pleasure? Did he ever interpose to prevent or close a war, or famine, or pestilence? When?

One case stands out in glaring colours as I sweep the horizon of the world's history. A company of fanatics or knaves concocted a scheme for conveying letters to the Virgin Mary in heaven. It was the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, and the church of La Compañia, in Santiago, Chili, was crammed with 2,000 women, deceived in the *name of Deity*, and panting to communicate with the Mother of God. Thousands of lamps lit up the temple, and thousands of yards of muslin festooned the place. Suddenly rose the flames, and played in horrid sport along the drapery. There is a panic, wild and horrible! a stampede for the doors, which are soon choked with quivering, dying humanity, and all exit is stopped. The ceiling catches fire, and streams of molten lead pour down upon their living flesh! The paraffin lamps burst in the heat, and shower down their contents in sheets and jets and wreaths of fire!

What an opportunity for a God! Where was he that he missed it! The people across the street could look through the church windows and see the agonised victims running to and fro in that hell, wringing their hands, and calling upon men, and angels, and God, to save them. Not a person who saw that sight—except Ugarte, the fiend-priest, who saved the Virgin's image and his own carcass, while he left the women to seethe and burn—except him, no other

being in the universe would have hesitated to risk his own life to snatch one of those women from perdition! But, Theist, where was your God? Your great ruler of the world? Your Father which is in heaven and everywhere? Whose tender mercies are over all his works? Did he know? Was he by? O, Sir! you are the blasphemers, not we! You invent a God and give him all power, make him all-knowing, and invest him with absolute and boundless rule—then you write history, every page of which proclaims your deity an infinite fiend! Sir, burn your creed, or destroy history! Confess your errors, or else reconcile the course of the world with the character of your God! At present you outrage our best sentiments. Be ashamed and blush! Your Bible tells us your God at one time could so far demean himself as to order Aaron a brand new suit of holiday clothes, giving minute directions for every article, even to the pantaloons! At another time he stood or sat in stolid indifference, watching the agony of 2000 burning women deceived in his name, whose bodies were roasting in *his own fire*—for that fire would not have burned had he not supplied the power.

I might pursue this subject, but there is no need. I do not pretend to understand Nature; glimpses and broken gleams of truth are all that fall to my share. But what little I do know is all in favour of Atheism. The best light I have leads up that path; the purest and noblest feelings of my nature make me shudder at the God-conception—yea! even for its own sake. I cannot endure the thought that any being exists so great and so wicked as the ordinary orthodox God. The conception is altogether monstrous, unnecessary, and full of mischief; for the history of Godism is also the record of the densest ignorance, the worst folly, the deepest degradation, and the foulest crimes of our most unfortunate and bewildered race.

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