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# VIA CATHOLICA:

OR,

## PASSAGES FROM THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF A COUNTRY PARSON.

### PART I.

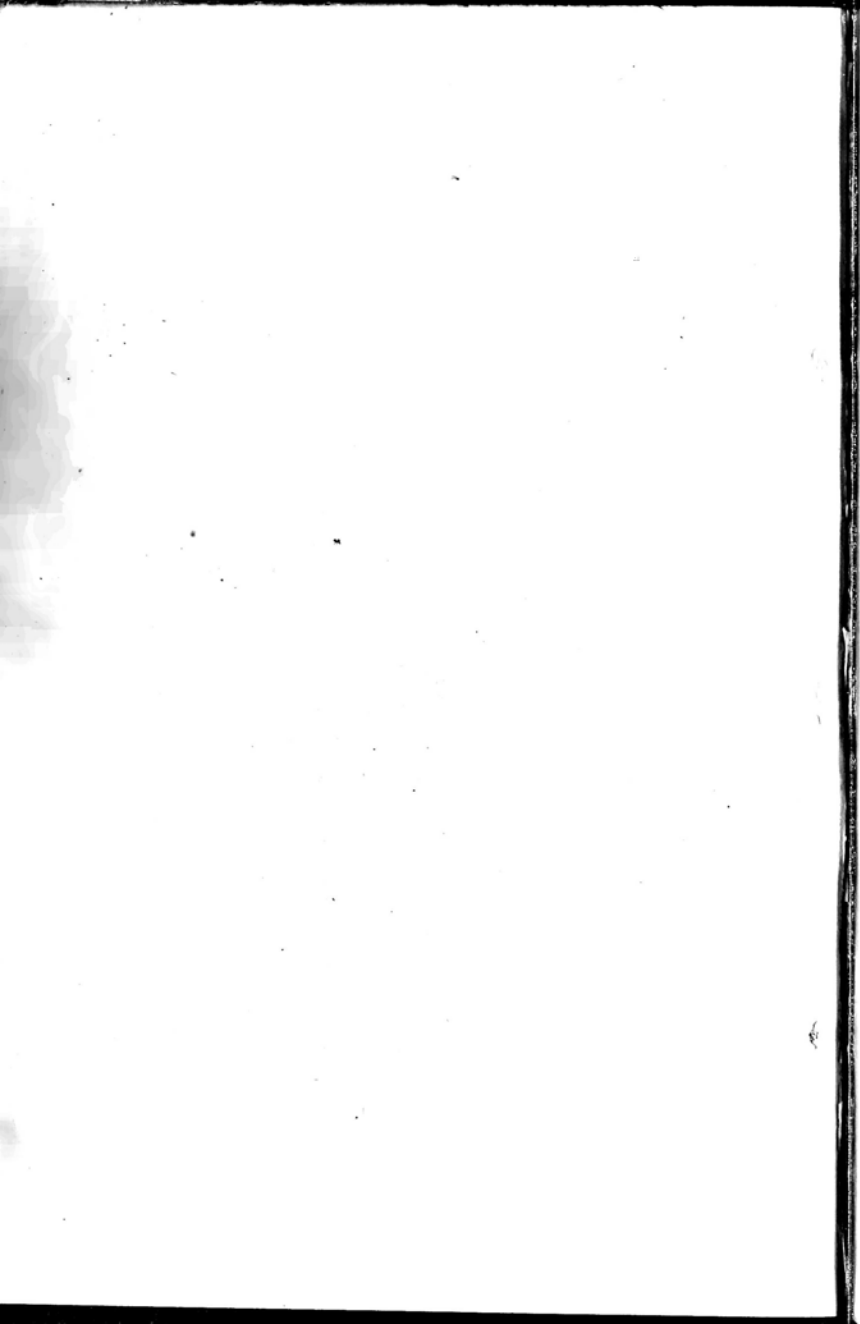
*Ἐπεὶ οὐχ ἱερῆιον οὐδὲ βοέην  
Ἀρούσθην, ἃ τὲ ποσσὶν ἀέθλια γίνεται ἀνδρῶν,  
Ἄλλὰ περὶ ψυχῆς Δέον Ἔκτορος ἱπποδάμοιο.*

*Il. xxii. 159.*



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## VIA CATHOLICA.

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THE important difference between the views maintained in this work by the Clergyman, a portion of whose biography it gives to the public, respecting the nature of Jesus, and those which I entertain on the same subject, seems to call for some statement from me, of my reasons for circulating the work notwithstanding. They are as follows :—

1st. It appears to me to present the arguments *against* the so-called orthodox Christian doctrines, as well as those in their *support*, in a pithy form, with great fairness, and therefore *may help honest inquirers to judge for themselves*, which is my great desire, and the main end and aim of my work.

2nd. The tone of thought prevalent throughout it, is well adapted to encourage in all classes, and especially in the clergy, the disposition to inquire thoroughly into the real origin and meaning of the Bible. Now I regard the want of this disposition as the most crying religious evil of our day.

To promote the correct knowledge of *Facts* in religious matters is what I have ever most earnestly striven to do. If this is effected, I am willing to leave *opinions* to justify themselves, being perfectly

sure that *the Truth can take care of itself*, when it is *honestly* sought for.

An extract from a letter, written to me by the author of this work, will aid in making my own position with regard to its publication more clear.

“ I am gratified that you like the MS., *barring* my *Christ*, whom I never expected that you would like. Indeed, I am afraid that at present, very few will like him out of my parish. If He attracts any notice at all, He will be crucified afresh, between the two thieves of Preternaturalism, and simple Humanitarianism, of whom each has stolen one side of His supernatural nature, and declared it to be the whole, thus raising it into absurdity, or lowering it to a nullity; an example which no one imitates, and an authority which every one sets aside at pleasure.

“ But I do not despair—if my conception embodies the Truth, as I of course hold, it *will rise again* to find a new Paul and another John, while you may fill the part of a nobler Thomas, who, from the pure love of truth, entertained the Lord unawares.”

The author takes the intermediate position of distinguishing the Catholic *ideas* from their supposed historical proofs, and strives to show, that the failure of the last does not necessarily involve the abandonment of the first. He thinks that in many cases, as is proved by his own, the greatest obstacle to free inquiry, now existing, namely the fear of its consequences, may thus be removed.

I have only further to add a few observations on the contents of the three chapters “On the Incarnate Deity,” to be published in Part II.; for to my mind, the clever and subtle reasoning of the author in this portion of his work, does not rest on stable ground.

We may justly argue that the intellectual and

moral faculties with which our Creator has endowed us, though imperfect and fallible, are not false and deceptive, and that therefore truth and goodness, as imperfectly recognised by us, are identical *in kind* with the perfect forms of truth and goodness as existing in him.

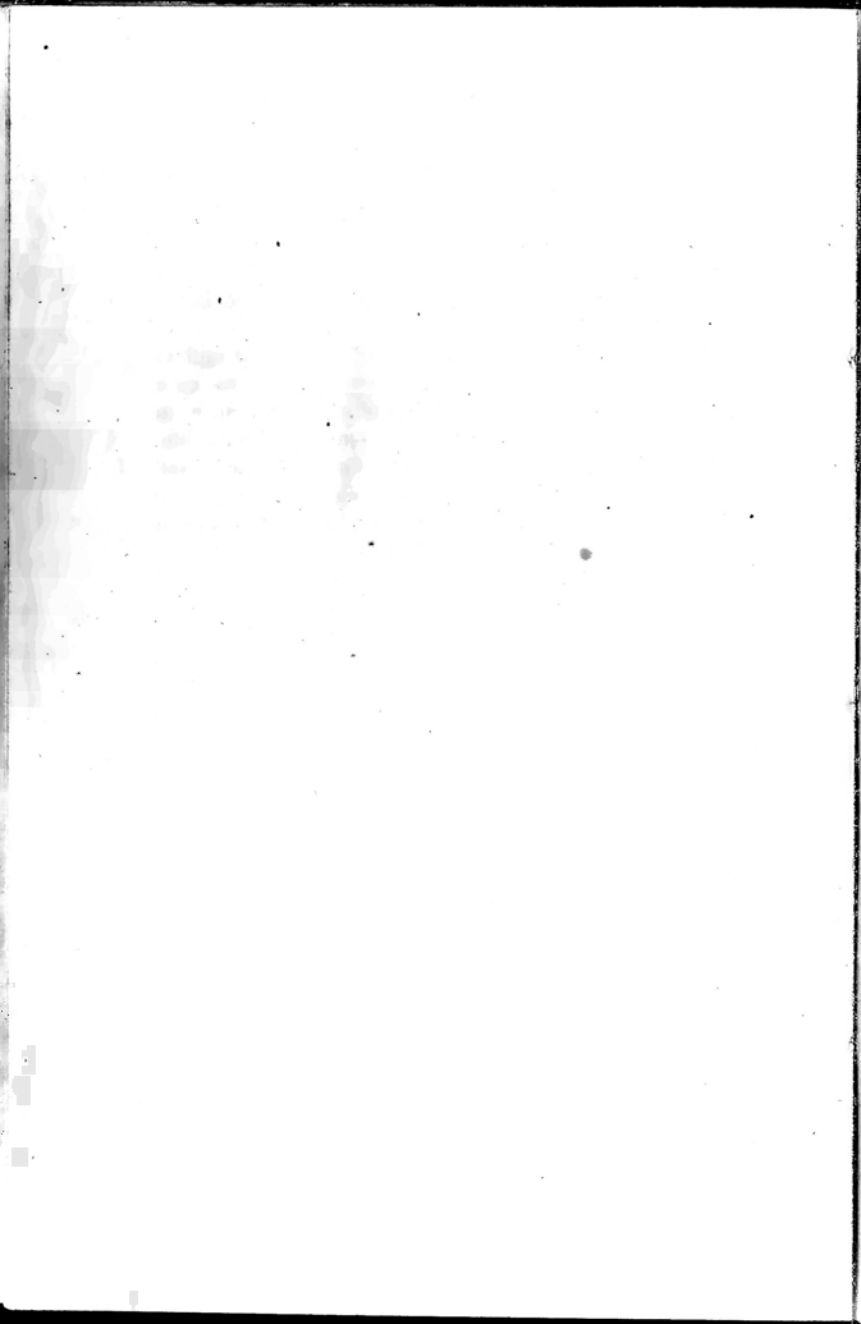
If divine truth and goodness differ radically and *in kind* from human truth and goodness, then, we have no capacities to know anything of God, and faith in him and what we call his attributes has no foundation.

Morally and intellectually, we claim to bear a real likeness to him whose offspring we are, but here the likeness ends. We can affirm no analogy between created mental structure, and self-existent being.

No analysis of the will, emotions, and rational powers in man, can yield one ray of trustworthy light respecting the essential form, inner relations, and economy of the divine nature. The modes and inter-actings of finite created capacities furnish neither measures nor resemblances for the region of infinite uncreated spirits.

THOMAS SCOTT.

11, *The Terrace,*  
*Farquhar Road,*  
*Upper Norwood,*  
*London, S.E.*



VIA CATHOLICA.



PART I.

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## P R E F A C E.

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THIS little book will, I hope, help to supply an answer to three questions—three questions which appear to call pressingly for an answer at the present time,—1st. What religious teaching can a clergyman, who frankly accepts as true the results of the scientific study of nature and the critical study of the Scripture, give to his people? 2d. Can this teaching be *conscientiously* given by a clergyman of the Church of England while he retains his position as one of her ministers? 3d. Can a clergyman utter his convictions freely without running his head against the *legal* fences raised round the doctrines of the Church of England?

To these questions the following pages endeavour to give a practical answer; and in each case this answer consists *not in a statement* applicable only to a particular case, but in the exhibition of a *method* applicable to many different cases. The mode of reconciling the frank statement of opinions opposed to the current orthodoxy of the Church with the restraints legally imposed upon her ministers, illustrated in the concluding chapter, would apply to opinions diverging from the popular standard to an extent far exceeding the divergence of the opinions maintained by myself. And the principle applied throughout the book, as a means of reconciling in *foro conscientiæ* the position of a religious teacher belonging to a particular section of

the Christian community with the freedom of religious thought admits of adaptation to a great variety of particular conclusions, while it holds out a promise of an ultimate unity of faith, to be brought about by its consistent employment. On this ground, not because I am vain enough to suppose that I have uttered the *sesame* of religious truth, I ask for the calm consideration of my views alike by the clergy and the laity of all Christian churches, especially the members of the Church of England.

E. P.

## CHAPTER I.

### A LECTURE AND ITS CONSEQUENCES.

OUR first winter evening reading. All went off very well. C—— delivered his recitations from Burns with great effect. Our people seemed to enter, more than I thought they would, into the genial humour of Addison's descriptions of Old Sir Roger in his parish, which G—— had chosen for his contribution to the evening's entertainment; and my attempt to initiate them into some of the secrets of the past history of the earth, unravelled for us by modern research, appeared particularly to excite their attention. My large coloured chart of the succession of strata, and sketches of the huge giants and strange forms of the old animal and vegetable world, which dear Agnes' ready brush had dashed in with grand transparent effects, lit up beautifully, and made the rustic eyes open. They appeared to apprehend fully the story of Time, written in the cutting out of the channel of Niagara, and the six hundred feet of alluvial deposits, stored up in the valley of the Mississippi, with its growth of cypress forests, each marking a fresh floor in this palace of Nature, separated from the floor beneath by all the time required for the growth of the tree, and all the time required for covering up its remains, so that another tree might grow on the top of it; and were startled, as every one who realizes what is meant by the words must be, at the thought that the 100,000 years which, on the most moderate computation, must have been consumed in these operations, are but the beginning of the entrance upon those

ages of geological succession, to which the human imagination can fix no definite bound. I hope I have done something, and, by popularizing scientific teaching, may in time do more to lift the thick mist of materialistic prepossessions which hangs over their minds, and raise them a little into the free air of spiritual beliefs.

Where rolls the deep, there grew a tree.

Oh Earth! what changes hast thou seen!

There, where the long street roars, hath been

The stillness of the central sea.

Rather a curious conversation this morning, with my odd scientific neighbour, Mr N——, who did me the honour to patronize our reading, though I could not persuade him to show at it. I met him at the style, just as I was turning across the meadows to pay a visit to Margaret B——. "Well, Rector," he began, with one of his sarcastic smiles, "So you have not thrown off your gown yet. I almost thought when I heard you speak out so freely on Friday evening, that I had seen you in your pulpit for the last time."

"Why so?" I asked.

"Why? What is to become of the six days of creation, and the seventh, when the Elohim rested and cried bravo, if your geological epochs are true. Your 'inspired word of God,' and scientific discovery, will never run together."

"I cannot follow you there. Surely the Bible may teach us truths of the highest importance, though it does not teach us geology."

"Yes; on condition that we are not required to take them for granted, *because* they are in the Bible. Else, *Falsus in uno, suspectus in omnibus*.\* You can't get away from the geological blunders of the Bible by the excuse of condescension to popular impressions, by whose help you have hobbled away, lamely enough, heaven knows, from its astronomical blunders. 'In six

\* False in one case, suspicious in all.

days Jehovah created the heavens and the earth, and all that therein is, and rested on the seventh day.' There it stands in words uttered, as you tell us, when Jehovah condescended to talk Hebrew from the top of Mount Sinai. For details, see the first chapter of Genesis; and this happened some 6000 years ago, says the Bible. The valley of the Mississippi tells of 100,000 years spent in the *last* operations of creative evolution, when the plains of North America were occupied by the races which live there now: so says geology. And these two steeds I mean to drive together in one team: so says our Rector. Take care, I say; take care, or you will overturn the coach."

"My dear Mr N——, you are a deep thinker, I know; have you ever considered how we obtain the notion of Time. What is Time?"

"Oh! if you plunge into metaphysics, I have done. I have no faith in anything but science. But see, we are close home. I am afraid I have taken you out of your way. Won't you turn in? No.—Then good bye."

I had walked with N—— so far during this conversation, that I had scarcely time left to pay a visit to Margaret B——, and look in afterwards at the school, which I wished to do. So I bent my steps to the latter, and was just crossing the green to reach it, when I spied good Miss T—— rustling out of her garden gate, obviously intent on stopping me, and turned aside to meet her. She was so full of her subject that she could not wait till we met before speaking, but began, when I was scarcely well within hearing distance, "Oh! Mr. P—— do come in to speak with me. I want to talk with you so much."

"By all means, my dear Miss T——," I replied, so I turned back with her to her pretty garden, and thence to her drawing-room, where she first carefully shut the door, and then throwing herself on the sofa, and almost bursting into tears, exclaimed, "Oh! Mr P—— such a dreadful thing! I am sure it has made my poor heart

beat so, that I thought it would burst, that you, whom we have all so loved and trusted, should go and say such things."

"What things, my dear madam?"

"Why, that the Bible is not true, and that God did not make the world as it says He did."

"My dear Miss T——, who has been so egregiously hoaxing you? I am certain that I never said a word of the sort."

"Well, it's all over the place that you did,"—this, by the way, I found afterwards was a great exaggeration—"or at all events, what comes to the same thing, at that reading that you have been and set up. I never knew any good come out of these new fangled schemes. I am sure it was never so in my dear father's days. 'Let the poor people learn their Catechism,' he used to say, 'and read their Bibles, if they have learned to read, or come to church and hear them if they have not, that's learning enough for them!' and so say I too."

"My dear Miss T—— I thought you were a true friend to the education of the poor. I am sure you have given me most useful help in the school, both with girls and boys."

"Well! I have tried to do my duty to the poor; *that* I may say, and I won't deny that the learning music, and history, and geography, and such things, has made the lads and lasses much brighter than they used to be, but I never did think it would come to this, that I should hear God's word called in question; and by one of my own class too, or who was one at least, and that through what he had learned of the Rector."

"But my dear Miss T——, who has called God's word in question?"

"Tom B——."

"And how do I come in as his authority in this matter?"

"Why, he says you told them last Friday, and proved it to them downright in figures, that the valley of,— what do you call that great river in North America?"

"The Mississippi."

"Yes, the Mississippi. Well, that this valley is coll—all—"

"Alluvial."

"Alluvial. Yes, that's what he said; and that it must have taken at least 100,000 years to make it; and that this was only just the least little bit of the time that it must have taken to make the whole earth; and 'then you know, madam,' says he, 'it's as clear as that two and two make four, that the earth never could have been made in six days, as is said in the Book of Genesis, let alone the sun and the stars, which are all suns themselves, only a very long way off.' Well, Tom, I said, I don't know much about these things, but I am sure that what the Bible says must be true, because it is God's word, and God cannot tell lies."

"And what did Tom say to that?"

"Oh, Mr P——, that is the worst of all; that's what shocked me so much. 'I don't wish to say anything contrary to you, madam,' he said, 'but if I may be so bold as to ask, how am I to know that the Bible is God's word?' 'Why, surely Tom you don't mean to say that it is not God's word?' said I. 'Well, madam, you say that God cannot say what is not true,' he replied; 'so, if the Bible tells us what is not true, it cannot be God's word, and that is what Mr N—— thinks too.' Oh, dear! oh, dear! that it should come to this; and that too with Tom B——, who has always been such a good boy, and so regular in his place at school, and one of our choristers too."

"My dear Miss T——, you are worrying yourself, I suspect, a great deal more than there is any need for your doing. I am sure Tom did not mean to say that the world made itself, without God."

"No, Mr P——, indeed! I am certain he did not mean to say anything so wicked."

"Well, then, after all, is not the main thing that the Bible tells us about the world simply that it was made by God? You recollect the civ. Psalm?"

"Certainly."

"There you have the whole story of God's works in the world, and with the creatures to whom he gives life in it. Did it ever occur to you that there was any deficiency in this description, because nothing is said about the time taken up in producing them?"

"No, I never thought anything about the time."

"Suppose, then, that in the first chapter of Genesis all mention of the time taken up in bringing the earth to be what we find it now had been left out, and that the chapter had read simply: God said let there be light, and there was light; and God divided the light from the darkness; and God said let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters, and it was so; and so on all through the chapter, without any mention of evenings or mornings, would not the chapter seem to you just as much part of the Divine teaching as it does now?"

"But, Mr P——, if God tells us in His word that He made the earth, and the sun, and all the stars, in six days, what business have we to say that He did not?"

"I am afraid I must ask with Tom how do we know that this saying about the six days is really a part of 'God's word?'"

"Why, are not the words in the Bible?"

"No doubt they are in the Book of Genesis. But that book was written by a man whose name is not mentioned in it, nor yet the time when he lived, nor how he came to believe that the world was made in six days. What right then have we to assert that this saying as to the six days is really 'God's word' to us?"

"But, Mr P——, what is to become of us if we are to pick the Bible to pieces, and settle for ourselves what we choose to call 'God's word,' and what not?"

"My dear Miss T——, remember what the Epistle to the Hebrews tells us about God's word. 'The word of God is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder



of soul and spirit, and of bones and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.' Is not the Bible full of such words—words which testify for themselves that they are 'God's word' to us? Why place all its words on the same level? You have your favourite chapters in the Bible, no doubt?"

"Well, I can't say but what I have; and so has everybody, I suppose, who reads their Bible. But I am sure, Mr P——, I have heard you over and over again preach against picking texts out of the Bible just because they suit our own fancies, and say that the Bible must be taken altogether."

"And so I say still. What we call the Bible is a collection of many books, written by different persons, who lived at different times, during a long course of ages. It contains the history of the growth of religious beliefs and thoughts among the Jewish nation, and the preparation thus made for the teaching of Christ and the spread of the gospel. We cannot understand this preparation rightly if we do not look at it by the light of what followed on it, nor yet the gospel, if we do not look at it in connexion with the preparation for it. But this is a very different thing from treating every word in all this set of books as if it came to us directly from God. To do that is to turn the Bible from 'God's word' into 'God's words.'"

"I do not understand what you mean."

"I will try to explain myself more fully. What I have said to you to-day is my word to you, is it not? And what you have said to me is your word to me?"

"No doubt."

"And this word of yours or mine has been made up of *all* the words we have used?"

"Certainly."

"But these words are not yours or mine, but part of the English language, which neither of us made, but found ready made to our hands, and have used to communicate our thoughts to each other."

“Well?”

“And, to let these thoughts be known, *all* the words we have used must be taken note of in their connexion. For our part in them really consists entirely in this connexion, in the way we have joined the words together. This is *our word*; not the words taken separately, which are not yours or mine, but the common property of the English people; so, I say, ‘God’s word’ to us in the Bible is the meaning which comes out from considering all its parts in their connexion, not from any of its statements taken separately; though any of these statements may become to us ‘God’s word,’ in so far as we feel it to be true.”

“I’m sure I don’t know what to make of that,” said Miss T——. “I am getting quite into a maze, and I am afraid if I go on talking I shall get one of my bad headaches. But, Mr P——, will you promise to tell Tom not to say such shocking things.”

I promised to take an early opportunity of speaking to Tom, and took my leave of my good, pious, fussy friend, and her quaint drawing-room, and pleasant garden, bright even now with pompons and chrysanthemums, with a sigh.

Yes—a sigh. For is it not sad to see how the worship of the letter of the Bible,—the putting the human medium, with all imperfections inherent in it, in place of the Divine Spirit which has manifested itself through this medium,—is forcing piety and knowledge apart, and turning theology from a true science of the Divine into a miserable system of apologetic sophistry? Which of the many answers to Colenso should we tolerate for an instant, if it had been published in justification of statements in the Koran, or any other book where we cared for the truth of our judgments rather than for the defence of our preconceived opinions? Is there one among them, except perhaps that attributed to a young chemist at York, which does not show that its author came to the subject he professed to investigate with a

mind completely made up as to the results of his alleged investigation before he entered upon it? Now, granting that this tenacity of opinion is excusable—nay, to some extent praiseworthy, in those who feel that the opinions called in question are associated in their minds with profound religious truths—how are those who do *not* entertain the opinions to be convinced of these truths, if their teachers do not place them upon grounds admitting of an impartial investigation? How is the knowledge of Christ to be spread among the nations who have never received it?—how is it to gain a hold upon the myriads in professedly Christian countries to whom it is only a name, if it is to be inseparably associated with the maintenance of notions about the universe, which the very men who proclaim these religious truths, reject as mistakes whenever they are not ‘talking shop’?

It is easy to chatter about “science falsely so called.” The very men who use the words know that, in their own judgments, the science, with which they come into collision in defending the statements of the Bible, is not false, but true. Does any educated European of the present century doubt the teachings of astronomy, that the earth is a ball of what we call matter, always turning on its own axis, utterly insignificant in comparison with the sun round which it revolves, and with which it is borne along through the practically limitless expanse of space, or rather through the æther filling it, in the journey of its sovereign luminary among the sister suns which we call stars? Does any such person deny that the notion of *above* and *below*, of a heaven as opposed to the earth, is devoid of any meaning when applied to such a ball—that the earth is itself one of the heavenly bodies thus opposed to it? But can any one read the Bible with open eyes, and not see that, from beginning to end, it is built upon the notion of an earth *below*, opposed to a heaven *above*, where God dwells; separated from this earth by a firmament, to

which the stars are supposed to be fixed, while sun and moon run about *in* it? The conflict of the astronomy of the Bible and the astronomy of science, in its notions of *space*, is as complete and radical as that conflict between the geology of the Bible and the geology of science in its notion of *time*, which has recently caused so much trouble to religious faith.

"The heaven is God's throne, and the earth is his footstool," is the key-note of the scriptures. Grand image to the eye of sense! but shrivelling into insignificant absurdity to the eye of imagination, science-taught. The heavens, God's throne, and the earth, His footstool!—say rather, "the earth a grain of dust, carried about *in* those heavens of which you speak—an invisible speck in a universe of suns," cries astronomy. "In six days Jehovah made the heavens and the earth, and the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day." Six days! say rather millions of years; made and rested! say rather is making always, in unresting development, cries Geology. Here is the true "word of God" in respect of these physical acts. Fully do I admit that, to the eye of a spiritual philosophy, this vast extent and unlimited duration is irrelevant to religious trust, neither adding to it nor taking from it—that religion consists in the recognition of the Eternal, the ever-present gracious Being, on whom our spirits can rest, with whom they can hold communion, and thus press forward to attain that "kingdom of heaven within," the peace which passeth understanding. And the fact that in the Bible we find an effective instrument for aiding us in this progress, makes it truly "God's word" in the deepest sense; full of His Spirit, however imperfect the conceptions of the universe or its origin, formed by the various writers through whom this "living word" has been made known to us, may have been. There is a rock beneath on which is firm standing-ground, unaffected by the shifting mass of unscientific conceptions, and this rock "is Christ."

But how am I to get my flock to realise this, while yet I let them see that to stick fast to the letter of the Bible, as they have been trained to do, and fight for all its statements as if they were unerring truths, is simply to build a wall against which to knock their own faith. This is my difficulty. There is firm standing-ground, I am satisfied, within the limits of the Catholic belief. But how to prevent their floundering off it, if I urge them not to lean any more on the broken reed of scriptural infallibility? God grant me power and wisdom for this difficult task.

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## CHAPTER II.

### STANDING-GROUND.

AFTER all the task may not be so difficult as I had feared. *Beati pauperes*. It is easy to attach too much importance to the want of intellectual culture in the poor, and too little to that spiritual insight, which those who are earnestly striving to serve God while living in close contact with the hardships of existence, gain, through the purifying and strengthening influences of His spirit, into the deepest principles of spiritual life.

My favourite, Margaret B—, has opened my eyes. I meant to have gone to her the day after my talk with Miss T—, but I shrunk back, coward as I was, from the path to her cottage, dreading a look of reproach in her mild eyes, if she had heard any rumour of her son Tom's delinquencies. To-day I forced myself to go, and saw, as I approached, Miss T—, with the tail of her gown in her hand, picking her way carefully over the stones, along the path by the brook

which bounds one side of Margaret's little garden. I doubt whether she saw me; at all events she was determined to seem not to see me if she did; for she kept her head steadily looking before her till she had crossed the slope of the hill, and was lost in the copse beyond. I knew when I saw her that what I dreaded had happened. I did not divine how little cause I had to dread it.

As I raised the latch of the cottage door, my eyes fell on Margaret sitting, not in her usual place, but close to the window, through which the sloping rays of the winter sun shone into her scrupulously clean dwelling, lighting up its well polished furniture, and bringing out, in a charming intermixture of colours and shadows, a nosegay composed of a late rose, a few chrysanthemums, a geranium, and some sprigs of verbena, which, placed in a glass on the window sill, gave an air of refinement to the scene. The love of flowers, the love of neatness, and the love of goodness, I have generally found associated in the poor. They are so pre-eminently in Margaret B—. A curtain, partly drawn across the window, shaded her pale, delicate features; and her face was raised towards that of her son, round whom she had passed one thin hand, while the other kept open a Bible which lay upon her lap. Tom was standing by her side, with eyes cast down, and cheeks flushed, apparently rather excited and a little ashamed. At the noise of my entrance Margaret let fall the hand which encircled Tom's waist, as she rose from her seat, and motioned to her son to bring me a chair.

"You're very welcome, sir," she began, "to a poor widow woman, who has been sadly beat about by the storms of the world, and would fain not lose hold of the stay that's left her. I'm thinking that Miss T— and Tom doesn't rightly understand what you have been saying about the Bible-book,—leastways it's not like you to go and say anything against 'God's word.'

But Tom is young, and there are a many things in the Bible which it wants God's teaching to see into, and God's teaching takes time. And mayhap Tom's been looking only at the joinings of the threads, when, just because there are joinings, we may feel sure that there is a pattern on the other side."

Tom smiled at his mother's simile. "Well, mother," he replied, "but Miss T—— will have it that there are no joinings at all in the Bible, but a pattern without join, made by God's own hands; and that's what I can't believe; and what's more, I am sure Mr P—— doesn't want me to."

"My dear boy," I said, "I want you to believe nothing but what is true. But there is more than one kind of truth; there are truths about that which is outside us, what we see or touch, for instance, and there are truths about that which is inside us, what we feel in ourselves. Now in the Bible there are sayings as to both these kinds of truths. May it not be that what the Bible says about the outside world shows the joins of the threads as your mother suggests, while what it says about the inside world shows the true pattern."

"Yes, sir, I don't deny that this may be so; but then if some of what the Bible tells us is not true, how can everything that is in it be God's own word, as Miss T—— says we ought to think."

Before I could answer this question, I heard Margaret's gentle voice say, "Perhaps, sir, if it is not too bold of me to ask, you would let me talk with Tom a bit first, before you speaks, and tell us, if you thinks I says anything as is not just what it should be. For, you know, sir, Tom will be a coming to me when you are gone, to talk of all that's in his mind with me, God be thanked, he do do that always; and if you speak together, may be I shan't quite understand all you says; for I'm no great hand at learning, and Tom," she added, looking at him with a smile full of maternal pride, "knows a deal more than I do, thanks to the

good teaching he's had, and the many wise books you lends him to read. But if it is I myself who speak, what's said can't be above my knowing, anyhow."

"Nothing would please me better, my dear Mrs B——, than to listen to such a conversation; and I am sure of one thing, that whatever knowledge may be wanting to it, it will not be deficient in mother wit."

"I am afraid, sir, you praise me more than I deserve," Margaret replied, with a slight blush; then, turning a little towards Tom, she began: "Well, now, let us put it that some of the words as is between the boards of the Bible isn't true, as for certain the Bible do say that the sun runs from one end of the heaven to the other every day, as it seem to do; and you say that it don't run at all, but only *seem* to run, because the earth turns round, and we on it, and that there isn't properly any heavens at all different from the earth, only what we ourselves is part of on the earth, what comes next?"

"Only, mother, that we oughtn't to call all the Bible 'God's word,' but only so much of it as is true; and then it's we who must judge the Bible, not the Bible which can guide us; so that, after all, we must rest on ourselves to know what is right and wrong, and what is true or false. And so Mr N—— says we must."

"But if when we judge the Bible we do find that there are there a many things which we do judge to be true, and they great and precious things to our souls, why should we be hindered from using the Bible to help us in these things, because there are other things in which, may be, it cannot help us at all? Our Maggie, now, is very useful if you drive her in the cart, but if you was to put a saddle on her old back, and go out a hunting on her, no doubt she'd tumble over the first hedge she came to, and maybe break your neck."

"Yes, mother; but then you see it is I who must



choose the road for Maggie, and settle that she is not fit to go out hunting, but only fit to draw the cart."

"But it's she as must draw it. You're not strong enough for that, for all you are a well-grown lad of your age. And the Bible do draw our hearts, and lift us over the ruts, and out of the mire, as no other book do—leastways, none I know of."

"Only then, mother, if the Bible is like Maggie, who cannot be trusted to go quite alone, but it's we who must hold the reins and guide her, we must trust to our own judgment after all."

"And why should not God have us trust our own judgments? What do he give us a judgment for else?"

"But, mother, if the Bible can only help us to judge for ourselves, what does it do for us more than any other books, that we should call it 'God's word,' and all other books only 'men's words.'"

"I must e'en go back to Maggie. Why do you put her in the cart and not Duke?"

Duke hearing his name, as he lay dozing before the fire, looked up and wagged his tail.

"I suppose, because he's not fit to draw it," Tom said with a little laugh.

"But for all that he's one of God's creatures."

"So, I say, all books are written by men, and the Bible, like any other book. Why should we call it only 'God's word?'"

"Don't we give a name of its own to every kind of thing. There's Duke; don't we call him a dog, and Maggie a mare. And don't we give names of their own to different sorts of books? Isn't there books of history, and books of 'rithmetic, and books of the stars, and books of Gol—"

"Geology."

"Yes, that's books of the earth, you says, and I don't know how many more sorts of books. Why shouldn't we call the Bible by a name of its own, if so

be we feel that there is that in it which makes it not like any other book."

"And what is that?"

"That we feel God do speak to us in it as he do not in any others."

"But how can we be sure it is God who speaks to us out of the Bible, and not only other men?"

"No doubt it is other men who speak to us. But why may not God speak to us through other men? Does he not speak to us through the trees, and the flowers, and the beautiful sun, and the stars, and all his works? Why not through other men? Are not they his work too?"

"Yes, mother; but then all men are God's work, and yet you don't say he speaks to you through all men."

"Ay, but I do. Only not with the same words. By some he says, 'take care,' and by some he says, 'hope,' and by some he says, 'learn what are my ways, and how I make the world, and all that therein is,' and by some he says, 'hear what great things God will do for the souls of them who put their trust in him;' and if these are they as wrote the Bible, why shouldn't I listen to what he tells me by them, though mayhap it is not by them that he tells me how he makes the world, or least-ways what is known about it?" Tom making no immediate reply, she continued, after a little pause, "And is it not a grand thing to think of, that they who lived and died so many hundreds and thousands of years afore I was born, as I am told, and in quite another country, with quite different ways of living, and quite another tongue to what we uses, should tell me words about their own souls, and what they thought and felt, that do speak to my soul, as perhaps no one can do now, though they live in my land, and are of my own kith and kin. Oh! it's a noble book, is the Bible, for showing us that God's spirit is always the same, and doesn't change as we often do, nor get tired of being with us men, for all we do so much to weary him."

“ Well ! mother, to hear you put the matter, it can't make much difference who wrote the books of the Bible, nor whether they were written at one time or another, any more than whether all that is in them is true or not ; yet Mr N——, when he lent me those books of Bishop Colenso about the Pentateuch, which I showed you the other day, told me that the great folks in London, and the other bishops are making ever such a pother about his books, because he argues that the Pentateuch was not written by Moses at all, and some of it not till the time of King Josiah, and that a great many of the stories in it cannot have happened as they are written ; and they have declared that, if such opinions are allowed to be taught about the Bible, the end must be that the Christian religion will come to nothing. And they have tried to get him put out of his bishopric, only as yet, they have not managed to get this done.”

“ Well, Tom, I can only speak as I feel, and I am not able to judge between them as is scholars, who's right and who's wrong on such questions : but for the matter of that, put it that all that's in the Bible is true, if so be it is rightly understood, and that nothing is called Bible which is not the real Bible ; for you know there's a many different books in what we calls the Bible, and, for certain, it's not said in any of they books, what books do make the Bible ; how am I, poor ignorant woman that I am, to tell whether what men call the Bible now-a-days is the real Bible, as is all true ; or whether the interpretation that is give to this Bible, if so be we have it, is what they as wrote it first meant to say, or no ? You remember the volumes of commentators as your poor father was so fond of reading.”

“ Don't I indeed : most of them are up-stairs in my room.”

“ Well, I recollect, poor dear man, he would use to impanel, that was his word, a jury of as many of the most famous he could get hold of, as he would say,

to sit upon the texts which most has been written about; and he would read them to me of an evening sometimes when I could sit working and listen to them; and it was mighty curious, to be sure, to hear how they did differ among themselves, for all they were such great scholars, about what the Bible does really mean. I used to say to father, that it seemed to me very hard lines on us poor folk, if we was bound to believe all that's written in the Bible just as it was meant, and us not able even to read the tongues it was written in, when they as knew them best couldn't agree among themselves about the true meaning. For you see Tom, I was young and light-hearted then, and hadn't had the help of God's messengers to teach me with what a power the Bible can speak to them as is ready to hear."

Tom stooped over his mother, and kissed her up-turned face tenderly—as she uttered these words. He knew well what 'messengers' those had been, to whom she alluded; the deaths of his brothers and sisters, and father, the long years of nursing and struggle during his earlier boyhood, which had changed the light-hearted young wife into the gentle, grave, though cheerful widowed mother, who now found a solace for her declining years in his affection.

There was something, however, in his face which made me sure that he had not yet used up his quiver of objections, but was afraid of wounding his mother's feelings by producing them. Divining where the difficulty lay, and wishing to take this opportunity of testing to the utmost the power of faith to overcome historical perplexities, I said, "My dear Mrs B——, I heartily thank you, and so, I am sure, Tom will, for a very instructive lesson on the true standing-ground of religious trust. But there is, I suspect, something behind in Tom's mind which I may do good by lending words to. You have dealt with the Bible generally, but our Bibles consist of two parts, the New Testament, and the Old Testament, which concerns us less closely

than the New. Do you include both these parts equally in what you say? I mean, would you be as ready to admit that there are errors in the New Testament, without feeling your trust disturbed by them, as seems to be the case with the Old Testament."

"Well sir," she replied, "I am apt to think it must be with God's word, as it seems to be with His works, it must be all of one piece. If so be, that in the Old Testament, God teaches us through men's words, and we can feel His Spirit to be in them, though men's errors are there too, why shouldn't we expect the same thing to happen in the New Testament?"

"Only, mother, if Jesus tells us anything that is not quite true, how can we believe Him to be the Son of God?"

"But Jesus Christ didn't leave us any book written with His own hand, like Mahomet, as I've heard say, and, I am told, He didn't even speak in the tongue as the gospels is written in. So if there is anything in them as seems not true, as for certain there is a saying about His coming in the clouds before that generation should pass away, how can we tell that the words is just what the Lord did say, and hasn't been altered? But there's sayings of His there as goes straight to our hearts, like the true 'word of God,' 'piercing even to the dividing asunder of the soul and spirit, and the bones and marrow.' There's no need of proof that they's not been altered."

"But what do you say to the storics about Christ," I asked; "about His Birth and Infancy, for instance, or about His Resurrection and Ascension?"

"Well, sir, if it's not being too bold to say so, I'm apt to think you parsons makes too much of these stories, as if the gospel was all in them, when to my thinking they's more a sort of garnish than the true dish. No doubt, there's many a one as would be greatly troubled to be told so much; but you see, sir, I'm not altogether strange to such questions. Many's the time,

when I have talked over the story of Christ's resurrection with my man. For he used to lay great stress on it, and examined the witnesses, as he said; and sometimes he would make me take the contrary part, to cross-examine them, and I cannot say I was ever quite satisfied with what came of it; nor he either, I think, for the matter of that. It's so hard to bring Matthew and Luke into one; and then again John is different from both; and as for Mark, my man used to say that, in the oldest and best copies of his gospel, the last twelve verses is not found; so that in these copies there's no mention of any one having ever seen Christ again at all."

"But there's the testimony of St. Paul in his first epistle to the Corinthians."

"No doubt there is, sir. And it's reason to think that he had talked about it with the other apostles; and what's more, as my man used to say, he puts all that beautiful chapter of his in Corinthians upon the resurrection of Christ from the dead. But it do seem to me, after all, that what he meant is only, if Christ is not really alive, then our faith in Him would be vain. You see, sir, it's so curious that he speaks of himself as having seen Christ, just as he do of Cephas, or James, or the other apostles; and yet he couldn't well have seen Him with his bodily eyes, if so be he was blinded, as the Acts says he was; and then it's so puzzling about them, "Five hundred brethren at once," that there should not be a word said about them in any of the gospels, nor yet in the Acts, if so be they actually saw Christ as I see you now. Well, many's the time my man and I have talked over all this, and it rankled in his mind more than I thought for, till, one day not long afore he died, he took my hand as I was standing by the side of the bed, and said, 'Margie, my love, do you remember how we used to talk about the proofs of Christ's resurrection, and puzzle ourselves to think how the stories should fit so ill together, if so be that the

fact is the corner stone of the Christian faith, as I have heard it called times without number? Well, I have found out what was the matter. We were seeking to know Christ after the flesh, when the only way to know the risen Lord is after the spirit.' I didn't scarce understand him then, but often and often has his words come into my mind since then, till I feel sure that he was right. What use could a body of flesh and blood have been of to the Lord after He was crucified? Could it make it more easy for Him to get into our hearts, and lift them up by love to Himself? No; it is in us that he must rise; and if He is risen in our hearts by faith in Him as our living Lord, it matters very little what became of His body which was nailed to the Cross in Palestine."

"And as to the stories about the birth of Jesus' mother, did you talk with Father about them, too?"

"No doubt we did, and sore puzzled we were to think how the story in Matthew can fit in with the story in Luke; or how Jesus could be said to be of the seed of David at all, if he was not the son of Joseph, but only of Mary, who was not anyways related to David, for anything that's said in the gospels; let alone the many other strange things in the stories themselves, as, for certain, it is mighty strange to think how anyone could find out one house from another by a star standing over it, if so be the star was anything like what's called stars commonly; but, for that matter, Father did find a way of looking at it which satisfied him and me too."

"What was that?" I asked.

"Why, you see, sir, he thought we, who live now-a-days, had no call to trouble ourselves about matters of which St Paul knew nothing. I mind well his saying to me, 'What was enough for the great Apostle of the Gentiles to know about the Lord, must surely be enough for you and me, Margie.' Now, you see, sir, St Paul never in any of his epistles, so much as once hints at

the stories about the birth of Christ; but says quite simply that he was 'of the seed of David after the flesh;' so my man says to me, 'Margie, you and I had best leave those stories alone, and let the gospel begin for us where it begins in Mark and John.'

"But then, mother, what is to become of the hymns of the Virgin, and of Zacharias, and of Simeon, which we sing in church, if they are not part of the true gospel?"

"What is to become of the *Te Deum*, and the other hymns which is sung in church, that are not in the gospel at all, for the matter of that? Put it, they hymns were made by some Christian who had heard some such story about the birth of Christ, and about what happened before it, as is written in Luke, and thought to himself what might Zacharias, or Mary, or Simeon say, that is what was fitting for them to say, and that it is fitting for us to say now, why shouldn't we say it? Suppose it had been written now-a-days by Mr Keble, we might use his words, I suppose, and thank God that gave him the will and the power to write them. So why should we not use them, when we find them in Luke's gospel, and thank God for them too?"

"Only, mother, if the stories in the gospels about which these hymns are made are not true, can it be right to thank God for that which is false?"

"Why not, if the thoughts about them are true?"

"How do you mean, mother?"

"I mean that they hymns have true thoughts,—leastways for me, very true thoughts about the Lord; though, may be, the things which is said in the gospels to have made the hymns be said, never happened, as is told there. Is it not true that, through Him, 'God has done great things for us,' and 'shown forth His mercy from generation to generation,' if so be He came among us as a man, to let us see how great His love towards us really is; and has He not thus, indeed, 'scattered



the proud in the imagination of their hearts,' and 'put down the mighty from their seat,' and 'exalted the humble and meek;' if the son of a carpenter, a man who 'had not where to lay His head,' who lived among the 'publicans and sinners,' for all He was so pure and holy, has come to be worshipped by the kings and rulers of the greatest and mightiest nations of the earth, as the Lord of all; who yet says to you and I, and all other who love Him, poor and lowly, and despised of men as they may be, I am your brother, who was no ruler on earth any more than you are; and you, if you are minded like me, may come to share what I am."

"But, Margaret," I asked, "do you suppose this is what the writers of those hymns really meant? Mr N—— would tell you that the pious Christians, at least such of them as were Jews, looked for a Christ to make of them a great people, who should govern all the earth, and be what the Romans had been, only not through their own strength, but by the power of God, who should 'scatter their enemies.' Would it make any difference in your feelings about these hymns, if Mr N—— could be proved to be in the right, and this was what the writers meant?"

"Well, sir," she replied, with a smile, "I cannot say that it would; for, to tell you the truth, this is the opinion that I have myself. You see, sir, it seems to me that it wanted the coming of Christ to wean men from such dreams, and teach them what the true greatness is. It's so hard for us to believe that, in the race after the 'things eternal, *all* may run, and *every one* receive the prize.' It takes such a deal of schooling before men get to learn that God is 'no respecter of persons;' and it seems to me that even now, with all the lessons that Christ give us, and all the sermons that we hear,—no offence to you, sir,—we have learnt it so ill, that it's no wonder if they as lived in the days afore the Lord came, stumbled over it a little. To my

thinking we has more reason to thank God that they who made those beautiful hymns mixed up so little of that which was only true to their fancyings with that which is true for them and for us too. So you see, Tom," she continued, turning to him, "I can hear you sing they hymns—and you do sing them very nicely, that I must say—and sing them myself, too, after my power, without being troubled in my mind by any questionings about them, which must come to us, if we won't shut our eyes, when we asks ourselves whether what is said to have happened to Zacharias, and Elizabeth, and Mary did happen, as is said, or whether they as made the words put the same sense on them which God has taught us now to put."

"I see, mother, you would have me take the bread and eat it, if it is good, without bothering myself as to what oven it was baked in, or where the fuel came from. Is it not so, mother?"

She only laughed gently, and clasped his hand in reply.

"Your mother is not far wrong in that," I added, and so the conversation ended.

*Sancta simplicitas!* Here am I tormenting myself with questions how I can save the eternal truths of the gospel,—the faith in the reality of spiritual things, of all that concerns the inner life of man,—from being disturbed in the minds of the poor committed to my charge, by the questionings as to the historical truth of the Bible stories which arise in my own mind; lest they should cease to value the Bible as a guide and support; and now I find one of the best of my own flock, *the one* of them all who knows, and studies, and prizes the Scriptures most thoroughly, to whom these questionings have long been familiar; who, without blindly putting them aside, and without any assistance from her spiritual teacher and pastor, for I am very certain my worthy predecessor's hair would have stood

on end, "like quills upon the fretful porcupine," at the bare mention of them, but solely by clinging to her own inward sense of spiritual realities, and by letting that drop as immaterial which does not directly affect them, has discovered for herself a standing ground, apparently incapable of being disturbed by any of the doubts with which modern inquiry surrounds the ancient traditions. Why not seek to spread among my people this child-like, trustful, peace-giving feeling? Yet how to elicit it where it does not spring up spontaneously? That is the difficulty. Am I to begin by sowing doubt that I may reap faith? Am I to cultivate distrust as the preliminary to conviction? Is the Bible to be resolved for my parishioners into a series of legendary or semi-legendary tales, that they may learn to separate the husk from the spiritual food which it encloses, and sift out the pure farina for themselves? Must I refer them to the teaching of God's spirit within their own minds, as their true guide in this process, and say, seek for yourselves among that which the Bible offers for what speaks to your own consciences, and take that as "God's word" to you?

It is tempting. Yet, what if they come to me for assistance in the selection? What if they make a false choice in my judgment?—fix on that which to me is an element of human error, destined to be swept away by time and thought, and neglect that which to me is the eternal truth associated with it? Surely, as their appointed spiritual teacher, I am bound to try if I cannot guide their choice rightly. And then to what rule should I refer them? That there is sure footing across the bog my conversation with Margaret to-day doubly assures me; but how can I bring my people to see the stepping-stones, and tread firmly upon them? Oh! thou who knowest our feebleness, and canst sympathise with our perplexities, enable me, by the light of thy good spirit, to point out truly through the dim mist the path which leads to thee.

## CHAPTER III.

## THE DEAN'S VISIT.

HURRAH ! A letter to day from my old college friend the Dean of C——, to ask me whether we can receive him for his long promised visit. He can give us a week. Charming ! I know of no one to whom I can open my mind more freely ; no one better fitted to help me in solving the doubts which weigh upon me than he is. Calm, clear-headed, learned, candid.—I recollect well the pleasure of our college conversations : and his life, spent mostly in the college circles, from which a longing for active pastoral work took me early away, must have made him familiar with all the turns and windings of the controversies, into which I have only been able to peep, in the intervals of parish cares, and converted him into just such a counsellor as I want.

Well ! The Dean is gone, and I must own that I have been a little, perhaps, I should say, *not* a little disappointed in my friend. His mind seems to me to have stiffened in the stays of accepted opinions, since I last met him ; and scarcely to be alive to the pressing nature of the doubts which weigh on us teachers, and our need of feeling firm ground under our feet. He builds so much on mere *probabilities*, I may almost say *possibilities*, and would have them treated as certainties. One thing he confirmed me in, that is, the doubts I have entertained as to the historical evidence for some of the books of the Scriptures, on which theologians are wont to rely most : the fourth gospel for example, which we talked over thoroughly, balancing the pros and cons for its composition by St John on all sides, with a result which he owned to be anything but satisfactory, as a foundation for the Paley style of argument. But then, he gets over the difficulty by a subtle chain of reasoning.

His plan is to work backwards ; begin, he says, with that which is certain and see if we cannot discover there a clue which will serve to guide our path among that which is more questionable. There is the Church, say in the third century, full of spiritual energy ; coming forth, with the strength of a giant, to do battle with the gross vices and manifold superstitions of the Roman world ; nerving the poor, timid, despised members of society, slaves and women, with a force which could defy the might of the Caesars ; swaying the minds of men by a new principle of unity, an unexampled all-per-vading influence. Whence came this society ? What was the source of its strength ? You say the history of its earlier years is dark and doubtful ; full of ill-attested legends, and contradictory accounts. Well ! assume that to be true ; allow, that full, clear, well-attested narratives of the formation of the christian faith are wanting ; yet *some* origin it must have had, and that an origin sufficient to account for what it did and was, when we do get trustworthy accounts of it. Now we have histories preserved by this body, of its own origin ; in books held sacred by its members at this epoch. Assume them to be substantially true, and you *do* account sufficiently for the phenomena which we know to have happened. Then why not make this assumption ? The books are not infallible, no doubt. No doubt they are only human compositions ; and if we try them by the standard of absolute correctness and entire consistency, we must make them rub each other to pieces, as Strauss has done with the Gospels. But why impose such a test ? May they not be *substantially* truthful memorials of a great spiritual manifestation ; inaugurated by physical events entirely out of the common course, wrought by means of which we know nothing, but needed to introduce this great spiritual principle to human notice ; to accredit it, at its first appearance, and start it on its course of blessing in the world ?

And, if we have thus worked our way back to Christ, and the miracles of His life, and the wonders of its beginning and close, may we not carry the same process further back to the Old Testament? Assume Christ to have been, what by our first chain of reasoning we have concluded that He is, then, does not the belief of the New Testament writers, that the Old Testament and Mosaic Law was prophetic or symbolical of Christ, raise a probability that they are really thus prophetic and symbolical? And do not the wonders of the New Testament, in matters connected with Christ, if we accept them as probably true, give probability to the wonders of the Old Testament, which in their turn confirm the later wonders, as parts of the same system. And, in this way, does not the whole of the Old Testament acquire a probability of its substantial truth, which morally justifies us in treating its statements as substantially true, wherever they cannot be demonstrated to be false? And how is such a demonstration possible, unless we had a different account of the same transactions, of which we were certain that it was true?

It is a very pretty building, but can it *stand*? Will it bear the winds and rains of critical research? the uncompromising truthfulness of the scientific spirit, displayed in every branch of modern knowledge? Is it not confusing every sound principle of evidence to place possibilities on a level with well ascertained facts, simply because I may think these possibilities not improbable? On what can I base my judgment of probability, if the facts alleged to be thus probable are out of the common course, unless it be upon positive testimony? and this, my friend the Dean allows to be, in the case in question, in itself, and apart from the argument of possibility, by which he seeks to set it up, quite unsatisfactory. 'The alleged facts cannot be disproved,' he says. But can they be thereby proved? Can I, as one who would minister to divine truth in the matters of

the deepest concern to the human soul, my own no less than the souls of those committed to my charge, teach them as proved, what I feel to be not proved, only because it is not disproved? because, not knowing the limits of the possible, I cannot say such and such things never could have happened? Surely if religion is not altogether a delusion, God must have provided for us some better method of dealing with it than this? But what?

What do I want? and why do I ask for more than God has clearly given me. I have the Bible. What is it? A set of books of various ages, in different languages, by various authors—in great part anonymous; a great part highly poetical and imaginative; scarcely any portion, except a few letters of St. Paul, and a fragment or two of narrative interspersed among the prophetic writings of the Old Testament, contemporaneous with the events noticed in them; as evidence of those events most unsatisfactory; as evidence in what way pious men of the Jewish nation looked on their national history, on its connection with the general history of mankind, and on the part destined for it in the future, clear and conclusive. There is no question for critical doubt *here*. Without dispute we have in the Old Testament, the surviving literature of a nation, marked by characters of its own most distinctive; by a profound trust, reverence, and love in, and for, the one author and governor of the world, whom, with pardonable national prejudice, they looked upon as their God specially, and yet not exclusively; for other nations are to share the beliefs, and partake in the blessings of the Divine favour which the reign of the Messiah, descended from Jewish origin, should diffuse over the world. And then one came who claimed to be this Messiah—one very unlike what the prophets, even the most evangelical, expected, no doubt; for it is clear that only *post eventum* did the idea of their having predicted a suffering Messiah grow up: no one dreamt of

it beforehand. St. Paul's letters show that even he could see no evidence of this sort, or assuredly he would have made more use of it than he has done. And St. John's Apocalyptic vision proves how completely the suffering Messiah melted, in the vision of the Christian community, into the triumphant king, who should trample his enemies under his feet, in the wine-press of Divine wrath. But what then? Jesus was not a Messiah such as the ancient prophets expected; but was He not *the Messiah* in a much deeper and truer sense? He did not give to His ancestral nation dominion over all the nations of the earth: but has He not given to His true followers the dominion over themselves? He did not give political freedom: but is not spiritual freedom, the freedom open to all men in the love of God, a far more precious gift? Nay, is it not a gift which, sooner or later, includes the lower freedom? He has not fulfilled the confident anticipations of His first disciples, by 'sitting on the throne of His glory,' to judge all peoples assembled before him: but has not His spirit been present on the earth 'taking one from the mill, and another from the field?' clearing away the lifeless corpses of dead faiths and false judgments, as 'the vultures clear away the decaying carcase?' revealing the secrets of men's hearts as by a lightning flash? and thus 'discerning between the evil and the good,' and guiding the course of events in the path leading to the universal reception of that kingdom 'which cometh not with observation,' but is set up within men?

What more do I want than the testimony of history in its great facts, to the part which, in the counsels of God, has been allotted to the work of Christ? Is this not enough to give to the Catholic faith 'in His nature that guarantee of conformity to truth and fact, through which hypothesis becomes science? Is it not far better, far more worthy of my profession as a minister of the Gospel, to take my stand on this rock of unquestionable reality on the one hand, and the response of the con-



science of man to the declarations of the Gospel on the other, and leave the details of the sacred story to show themselves for what they are—legend or history, as the fact may be—rather than to load the faith of my people and myself, with a long chain of bare possibilities, that I may still talk to them of the Bible as all historically true?

And if they ask what are we to believe about the Bible, if it is not all true? can I not answer, Believe it to be the record of the faith and hopes of those through whom God prepared the way for the coming of Christ, and for the diffusion of trust in Him among mankind; and use it to confirm your own faith, and kindle your own hopes by the communication of theirs? Try to understand what its writers really did mean; that you may compare their convictions with your own fairly; and see whether and where they differ from you, if they do differ; and thus be the better able to judge whether you are right. Let the books speak for themselves. Do not endeavour to make out of them anything which they are not. Trust in their declaration that God's truth can never perish, and for all besides, why care at all?

“But would you teach men to sit in judgment on ‘God's Word?’” Pious nonsense! as if the persons who utter it were not the foremost to sit in judgment on this word themselves, only an unjust judgment; a judgment which, instead of striving honestly to understand it, twists its sayings to suit the theologies of the judges, and gratify the inborn ‘pride of our hearts,’ the love of dictating to other men, under the pretext of urging them to submit their feeble reason to the ‘inspired word,’ that is to the self-confident assertions of its self-constituted interpreters. Who among Bible worshippers is ready to look with equal eyes on the texts which conflict with his favourite dogmas, and those which support them? Does the Sabbatarian ever dwell on St Paul's, ‘Let no man judge you in meat, or drink, or of a holi-

day, or the new moon, or the Sabbath,' or the Calvinist on the 'work out your own salvation,'\* or the Protestant controversialist on the pun upon Peter's name in the *Petros* and *Petra*. What are our systems, propped up by selected texts 'for edification, or doctrine, or reproof;' our pleas in justification of a sentiment or a command which violates our moral sense; our so-called *reconciliations* of Scriptural assertions and scientific discoveries, attained by forcing the Bible to say what we have found out for ourselves that it ought to have said, but snares set for men's consciences; pretexts for preferring our own fancies to the teachings of our Maker, addressed to the sense of truth within us—the living offspring and fruitful seed of unbelief?

"Wer darf das Kind beym rechten Namen neunen?"† Who, if not the minister of the God of Truth? Let us dare to look God's teachings in the face; to take them as they are. "He who spared not His own Son, but gave Him up for us all," how can He require us to believe falsehoods in His name? Gracious Lord, who hast offered up Thyself to bring us to the knowledge of the truth, teach me to see and feel what is true. Open to me more fully those Divine things whereof I am ordained a minister to Thee. Guide and strengthen me, never wilfully to be false to my own convictions, but, at whatever cost of perplexity and difficulty, to follow the leading of that light which Thou dost vouchsafe to me.

\* Colos. ii. 26; Phil. ii. 12.

† "Who dares to call the child by its right name."

## CHAPTER IV.

## AGNES.

"BUT what are we to rely upon, if all that you tell me about the Bible is true? If nearly all Genesis, and the story of the Exodus, and the wanderings in the desert, and most of the conquest of Canaan, are only stories about the Fathers which grew up in the days of Samuel, or David, or Solomon; and the book of Deuteronomy was not written till the time of Josiah; and the book of Daniel not till the days of the Maccabees; and none of the gospels, not even that of St John, were the work of apostles or companions of apostles; and this one was not even heard of till 150 years after the birth of Christ. I declare to you, Edward, it puts my poor head into such a whirl to think of it all, that I almost feel as if I should go mad. The world seems turned upside down, and all its foundations out of joint."

Such were my dear wife's words to-night, as we sat on the bench at the bottom of our lawn, under the boughs of the great chestnut, now covered with the glory of its pyramidal flowers, while near us a nightingale poured forth its thrilling melodies to the warm May night. They were the outcome of a long conversation, in which she had drawn out from me, nearly against my will, the conclusions to which much anxious, and I trust impartial, inquiry has reluctantly led me, as to the authorship and historical claims of some of the most important sacred books.

"My dearest Agnes," I replied, while I pressed her closely to my heart, "trust in God. Rely on Him. Pray to Him. His presence with us in the earth cannot depend upon the dates or authorship of any books. Was He less our Father when Christ taught, before any gospels were written, than He has been since; or would He cease to be our Father if every copy of them was lost?"

"But should we equally know Him to be our Father without them?"

"I do not say we should; but having had this blessed truth once brought to our souls—having found by our own experience, as I trust we may truly say we have both found, that God is indeed a loving Father to those who trust in Him—why disquiet ourselves? If we feel ground, why worry ourselves about the stepping-stones?"

"But it seems to me as if God had cheated men, in leading them to place so much trust in the Bible histories as they have done, if after all they are not to be trusted."

"Dearest, may we not say the same thing of the church? To confine ourselves to its western branch. Think of the Virgin mother, of the millions to whom her immaculate conception and all-prevailing intercession are as certainly part of God's teaching as any Bible story is to you; think of transubstantiation, and the litanies to the saints, and the supremacy of the Pope; think of the learning, the piety, the self-sacrifice, the unflinching trust and hope clustered round these faiths; think of all the institutions to which they have given rise—hospitals, schools, colleges, abbeys, nunneries, churches, cathedrals; place yourself at the Reformation, with the links of tradition, the long line of faith unbroken, the dogmas of the church affirmed to common belief by countless miracles; might we not far more justly say, if this is not true, God must have purposely cheated men into a delusion, than this can be said now of our faith in the dates and authorship of our canonical books?"

"But when the Reformers rejected the teaching of the church, they did it in the name of 'God's word,' which the church had herself put at the bottom of all her own teachings. They said, when we compare your dogmas with the sacred books, we find that they do not agree. So they stood, after all, upon the old foundation. But if our faith in the Bible is taken away, the foundation itself goes."

"The foundation of what, dearest?"

She paused a moment, and then replied, "Of our faith that God has given us a revelation of Himself, besides that given in nature."

"Including in 'nature' the thoughts and feelings of men?"

"I do not quite understand what you mean."

"Consider, my love; the Bible is a collection of books of very different kinds—histories, laws, poems, patriotic or moral exhortations, letters, written during a long course of years, and expressing the thoughts and emotions of many different persons."

"But persons inspired by God."

"Persons filled with the Spirit of God, if by that is meant the love of justice, peace, and truth, and an unflinching trust in a righteous, merciful, and all-powerful Being, ever-present with them, but still human creatures, feeling, perceiving, imagining, thinking, acting as true men and women."

"No doubt, they were not blind machines."

"Well, then, what they wrote must have been what they felt, believed, or thought."

"I suppose it must. But surely, Edward, the church has always held that in what they wrote they were supernaturally preserved from error."

"Then of what consequence could it be at what time, or by whom the books were written? If we were quite certain that everything which the fourth gospel records about Christ is absolutely true, what matters it whether the book was written by John the apostle or any one else—in the first century or in the second?"

"But, if it was not written by the apostle, or at least by some one who was a companion of Christ, how can we feel sure that Jesus really did do and say what is there stated?"

"In no way that I know of, unless it could be proved that the gospel was written, as is alleged of the Koran, at the dictation of an angel. But, my dearest love,

do you not see that your objection gives up the faith in the infallibility of the scriptures altogether? If our confidence in the truth of any gospel narrative rests simply on the trust which we naturally place in a witness, of whom we believe that he does not mean to deceive us, it must be open to all questions affecting the credit we give to such witnesses—imperfect information, prepossession, credulity, forgetfulness, &c.”

“But is not great weight due to the way in which the stories are told—to the truthfulness and sincerity apparent on the face of them?”

“Great weight, if the question be, did the witness intend to deceive us; but what other weight? Would you trust dame G——’s stories about what happened in the campaigns where she was present in the Crimean war, because she tells them with such thorough personal belief, and such an overwhelming minuteness of detail?”

As Agnes made no answer, I continued: “But we have travelled away from the question whether men’s feelings and thoughts may not have been the means which God has used to give us a revelation of himself, besides that given by what we commonly call nature. Now, I say, those who look to the Bible for such a revelation of God, and I am one of them, really answer ‘yes’ to this question. What they have to rely on, as embodying this revelation, is simply the thoughts and beliefs of the men who wrote the books which compose the Bible.”

“But I have always been used to think that the wonderful actions, the miracles of which they tell us, gave a Divine sanction to what they said; and now you take away this sanction, because, if these writers did not themselves see the wonders, how can we feel sure that they really happened?”

“And if this sanction fails, and yet the Bible is to keep its place in your mind as a trustworthy source of religious truth, you want some other sanction. Is it not so? Well, I think there is another, and a much more solid sanction.”

“In what?”

“In the connection of these stories with each other, and their place in the history of mankind. If the Bible had been, like the Koran, the work of one man only, who claimed to be God-inspired, any doubt cast upon the truth of any part would have destroyed our confidence in it altogether. But the growth of a nation which evolves a literature of its own, developing thus a characteristic mode of thought, carries us beyond the human action into that which underlies it; and where, as is the case with the Jews, this history passes out of its special national sphere into the wide circle of humanity; when we have, as we have in the connection of Judaism with Christianity, ‘first the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear,’ the beliefs through which this result has been brought about are transformed, by their connection with each other, from indifferent phenomena into abiding facts, on which we can rest, as a true manifestation of the Divine action.”

“That is very beautiful, I am sure, as well as very profound. Just like you. But after all, dearest Edward, does it not all depend on the importance which you attach to the coming of Christ and our faith in Him? And yet your doubts as to the Bible histories extend even to those about Jesus.”

“Certainly, my love. God does not change His hand. If the means which He has generally employed for the more profound revelation of Himself to man have been, as I hold, the imaginations and beliefs of man about God, guided by the insensible action of His providence, I should expect to find the same means employed to lead men to appreciate aright the great manifestation of himself in Christ; and most strikingly, as appears to me, is this expectation fulfilled in the New Testament. Consider first that Jesus left us absolutely nothing in writing, not a word of which we can feel certain that it is His, just as He uttered it. How strange! if He meant to put fetters on the free

creations of human thought, and not rather to stimulate them."

"Very strange, certainly. I never reflected on that before."

"Then, consider again that the man who had the greatest influence over the first teachings of Christianity is St Paul, who did not personally know any of the details in the life of Jesus, and was therefore free to form his conceptions of Him according to his own imagination, under the influence of a few great facts; and that the Apocalypse, the only part of the New Testament of which we can feel reasonably certain that it proceeds from one of the Twelve, is wholly occupied with imaginations about a future never realised. Does not this imply that the human imagination really is the instrument employed by God as the agent of his deepest revelations."

"It looks as if this were the case, only the notion is so very startling."

"Then, again, remember the belief in the coming of Christ to judge the world before the generation among whom He had lived should have passed away—a belief with which the New Testament overflows. What could be better adapted at once to sustain the first disciples against the difficulties and dangers attending the first preaching of the gospel, and to prevent their writing histories of their Master? For what would be the use of them, if the time was so short before the Lord came again?"

"Do you suppose that is the reason why St Paul says so little about the life of Jesus in his Epistles, never mentioning any fact but the resurrection and the institution of the Lord's supper; and only two or three times quoting a saying of Christ?"

"I have little doubt but that it is the true reason. He says little, because he had so little to say on these matters. What St Paul conceived Jesus to have been in the flesh, he shows us clearly enough by his enume-



ration of the fruits of the Spirit, and his pictures of the love of Christ. But the proof seems to have been implied for him in the idea of the Messiah, and the one all-sufficient evidence that Jesus was the true Messiah, was furnished for him by the belief that 'he had been declared to be the Son of God, with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.'

"But that he looked on as a fact ascertained by the testimony of numerous witnesses, whom he counts up in the 15th of Corinthians; though I must say it has often puzzled me to see how his list of the appearances of Christ can fit in with the story in the gospels."

"You remind me of what Margaret B—— told me last autumn as to the perplexity which the same question, and the conflicting stories of the resurrection in the Evangelists, had caused to her and her husband, and of the light which came to him about it on his death-bed. Did I never mention it to you?"

"No."

"Margie, he said, taking her affectionately by the hand, as she was standing at his bedside, I think I have found out the cause of our puzzles. We have been seeking to know Christ after the flesh, when it is only after the spirit that the risen Lord can be known to us."

Agnes sat still for a minute or two, apparently absorbed in thought; at length she said, "Well! I think that gives me light too. There's a wonderful depth in those words. We look for help from without, when it is only from the Father of light, the God of our spirits, that help can really come."

"And we lose the help which we may gain from without, when we look for it in balancing the accounts of past phenomena, incidents lost for ever in the gulph of time, to construct what we call evidences of our faith, instead of seeking evidence where it can always be found, in the records which tell us what their faith

was who have preserved these accounts, and show us the same spirit working in the past which we can trace at work now."

"It is," I continued, after a moment's pause, "with the sacred records, I think, as with geology. To understand the past we must begin with the present. To reconstruct the life of the fossil we must study the life of the living creature, but then the remains of the dead may help us greatly to clear up our ideas as to the true relations of the living to each other, and to the universe. So to appreciate the old religious story aright, we must study carefully the voice of our own consciences, distinguishing that to which they naturally respond from that which finds in them no response, but must rest, if it has any foundation at all, only on some external authority. Then if we turn to the past, we may perceive, I think, that this authoritative element has varied from age to age, and country to country, making its assertions in every case with equal positiveness, but growing only more and more perplexingly contradictory and obscure, as time advances. While that to which the conscience responds has been in a continuous state of growth; faintly traceable at first; seen differently in different nations; yet as time advances ever seen more clearly; asserting its hold on men with renovated force, if it has seemed for a time to decay; and drawing under its influence a perpetually widening circle of believers. If we see this, can we doubt to what issue the Divine teaching would lead us? 'Except ye become as little children, ye cannot enter the kingdom of heaven?' What should you say the virtues of a child are, to which Christ attached so much weight?"

"I should say trust, love, and the joy that springs from them."

"And what, if the true office of the Bible is only to bring us to act in this spirit, and all the conceptions about God and his acts to be gathered from it are but the dress in which men have clothed the tendencies

conductive to this end, 'at divers times and in divers manners, 'each as best they might in their own day; according to the insight into the Divine idea attained by them;' filling more or less consciously a part in the Revelation of God made through a providential action, which stretches in an unbroken series from the earliest ages to our own day."

"It is a new conception of God's word; but I don't know that it is not much better than the old one: at all events it puts an end to any conflict between Science and Religion."

"And to all danger from any possible result of Biblical criticism," I added. So our conversation ended, and we went in both much happier than when it began.

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## CHAPTER V.

### THE CHILDREN.

I COPY a passage from my wife's journal, adding that the children referred to are respectively aged, Constance nine years, and John ten.

I have tried to-day how Edward's new ideas about the Bible will work, when one comes to use them practically in teaching young people. The result was very satisfactory. It seemed so horrible to say anything which might unsettle the faith of my own children, that I could not make up my mind to begin for a long time, and let them read on as usual in our ordinary course, without making any remark indicating any doubt as to the truth of what we read. But then, again, it was so terrible to be always wearing a mask, and seeming to make believe, to believe what I did not really believe,

that I had pretty well determined to speak out plainly, trusting the result to God, and going simply straightforward in the path of truthfulness, which Edward says is always the best course, though up to the present time I have kept him from saying as much as he would have liked to do to the servants and children, when the whole matter was settled this morning by a question of Constance; not the first remark of the same nature she has made, though I suspect now, it was the first time she got an answer which satisfied her.

We were reading the third chapter of Genesis, when suddenly she said, "Mama, I don't like that story at all. It seems so unkind of God to punish all the men and women who ever were to be, just because Adam and Eve ate an apple which they were told not to eat. Why could not God make them not like to eat it?"

"My dear girl," I replied, "there are a great many things in the world that we do not fully understand, and we must not be in a hurry to settle that God is unkind on account of them; but Papa thinks that this story tells us only what the people who wrote it, and who must have lived a very long time after Adam and Eve, thought about the reason why men do so many wrong things, and are often so unhappy, and why they all die; and that what really happened may have been very different."

"But did they write what was not true, Mama?"

"My dear, no doubt they thought it was true; but we cannot tell whether they had any better means of knowing what actually took place so many years before they lived, than we have."

"But, Mama," said Johnnie, "was not the story of Genesis written by Moses? and did not God tell Moses all that had happened, just as it did happen?"

"My dear boy, I used to think so, formerly, because I was taught that it was so when I was young; but Papa says that the most learned men who are able to read this book in the Hebrew in which it was written, and

who have taken a great deal of pains to find out when it was written, are quite satisfied, as Papa is himself, that the book of Genesis was not written till long after Moses was dead, and that there are in it stories written by several different persons, which often do not agree with each other, so that it is certain they cannot all be true."

"But, Mama, why were these stories put together into the same book, if they are so different?"

"Papa says, we cannot be quite sure how this happened, my dear girl; very likely, those who put the stories together did not see the differences as clearly as we see them now, when we come to compare them together. Or, if some of the stories were written a long time before the others, as seems to have been the case, perhaps those who wrote the last did not like to leave the old stories out, but put in their own stories only as an addition to them."

"Oh! Mama, do you think that's why, after the story of the making of the heaven and the earth, and men and women seems to be all finished in the first chapter of Genesis, it begins over again in the second chapter?"

"Papa thinks so, my boy, and he has shown me a great many differences between the two accounts, and the way of writing used in them, which prove that they come from different authors: one which you can very easily see for yourself is, that while the first chapter speaks only of God, which in the Hebrew is Elohim, the second chapter always speaks of the Lord God, which in the Hebrew is Jehovah-Elohim."

"But, Mama, why did God teach the man who wrote the first chapter of Genesis differently from the man who wrote the second chapter?"

"My dear girl, God's teaching is not of what we ought to think, but of what we ought to be. God's spirit makes men contented, and loving, and humble, and truthful; and this is the truest wisdom; but it does not make them know what happened before they were

born, or in places where they never have been. We see that the best men may make mistakes as to such things, as easily as the worst. And, since God is the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever, as the Bible itself says, we must suppose that so it has been always."

"But then, Mama, why is the Bible called God's word? and why should Miss T—— be so angry with Tom B——, and scold him so, as I heard her do last Sunday afternoon, because she said he doubted the truth of what God's word told us?"

"My dear boy, Miss T—— is a very good, kind lady, and no doubt she says only what she believes to be right; but about what 'God's word' really means, Papa thinks she makes great mistakes."

"But, Mama, what does Papa think 'God's word' really does mean?"

"My dear girl, Papa thinks the Bible is properly called 'God's word,' because from it we can learn, better and more clearly than from any other book, what God really is in Himself, and what kind of persons we must be in order to please Him."

"That's what Tom B—— said to Miss T——, but then she asked him how are we to learn from the Bible what God really is, and how are we to please Him, if all that is in the Bible is not quite true?"

"And did Tom say anything in reply to that?"

"Oh! yes, he said a great many things, but I can't quite remember what; only I recollect it was something about the light getting brighter and brighter, as the world went on, till at last the 'Sun of Righteousness arose—that's our Lord, you know,—and then the day came, and men could see clearly; and then, oh! I remember now, he said, if we hadn't eyes in us, how could we tell light from darkness?"

"And what did Miss T—— say to that?"

"She was angry, I think, and told Tom he was very uppish and conceited to think he knew so much better than his elders; and then she said something half to

herself about this being the fruit of Papa's having put nonsense about science into his head ; but I am sure she was wrong there, for Papa never says any nonsense, except it is as a bit of fun, and I know he never would make fun of the Bible."

"That you may be quite certain of, my dear boy. Nothing gives Papa more pleasure than to see people earnest in reading the Bible, and trying to the best of their power to understand it ; and so getting out of it all the good which they can for themselves. But then Papa says that if we are to get this good in the way in which God would have us get it, we must take pains to see the Bible as it is, and not begin by fancying it to be different from what it is, and then being angry with those who show us that we are mistaken."

"But, Mama, do you think, like Papa, that the Bible can do us good if it is not all true?"

"Yes, my dear boy, I do, because I feel that it does do me good, although Papa has shown me that a great many things in it cannot be true."

"Mama, I think I know what some of those things are. For in the Bible it says that God made the heavens and the earth in six days, and I read the other day, in one of Papa's books, that the earth has taken—oh ! I don't know how many millions of years, before it became fit for men to live on it. Is not that one of the things, Mama?"

"Yes, my dear boy, one of the things which showed me that the Bible cannot be a sort of letter dictated by God, as I had been taught to think that it was ; but I do not find that I trust in God a bit the less, or feel less sure that man is truly made in His image, as the book of Genesis says, because I believe that He has formed the earth a great deal more slowly and gradually than the writer of the first chapter of Genesis supposed."

"But then, Mama, if the earth took so many years to make, as brother says, it can't be true what is said

in the book of Exodus, that God himself told the Jews from the top of Mount Sinai that it was made in six days?"

"That's one thing that I remember Miss T—— said to Tom, and what do you think Tom answered?"

"Oh! brother, do tell me."

"Well, he asked her why, if God said these words from the top of Mount Sinai, as part of the fourth commandment, they are left out in the book of Deuteronomy, and other words put in their place; and why in that book it is said expressly that God spoke the words written in it, and no more, and that these were the very words that were written on the stone tables?"

"And what did Miss T—— say to that?" I asked.

"Oh, she only scolded Tom, and told him it was very presumptuous and wicked of him to say that 'God's word' could contradict itself."

"Which could do him very little good, I added, half to myself, "and, indeed, would be just the way to make an infidel of him, if he had not had better teaching."

"Mama! will you tell me what is an infidel?"

"My dear girl, 'an infidel,' properly speaking, is a man who does not believe in anything greater and better than himself; who has no faith in anything for which he would give up what is immediately pleasant to him. And so an infidel is one who has no faith in God; because by God we mean all that is perfectly good, and noble, and unselfish. But men often call other persons infidels, although they have faith in God, only because they differ from them in what they believe about Him. You remember, I daresay, what we read a few days ago, that the Mahometans call the Christians 'infidels,' because they do not believe that Mahomet was the prophet of God, and that God taught him to write the Koran."

"But, Mama, is not that very wrong?"

"Yes, my dear boy, it is very wrong, I think, though, unhappily, a great many Christians follow



this bad example, and call numbers of persons 'infidels' whom our Lord Jesus Christ never would have so called."

"Mama, do you believe that what is said in the Bible about God coming down to the earth and talking with men, and walking about among them, is really true, or is it one of those things which men thought were true, but which were not?"

"Well, my dear Constance, I think these stories are most likely only one of the things that men thought were true, but which were not so really. You know the Greeks had the same notion, as we read a little while ago in the stories about their gods; and so many other nations have had, but we do not think that they were right."

"Oh! Mama, I am so glad."

"Why, my love?"

"Because it seems so unkind of God to have come to people who lived a long time ago, and not to come to us now."

"Oh! Constance, don't you remember what is said in Jeremiah, that 'God will dwell with them that are of a humble and contrite spirit;' and what is said in St Paul's Epistles about the spirit of God dwelling in our hearts?"

"Yes, brother, I remember that quite well, only I think it would be nicer if God would come to talk with us. But if he never did do so I don't care. Only it seemed so unkind of Him to do it once, and then leave off."

"My dearest girl, as you grow older, I trust you will feel that the presence of God in your heart is all that you can ask, and much more to be wished for than that He should come to talk to us. That would be for God to make himself into the likeness of men, while God grants us that His Spirit should make us into the likeness of Himself."

"Well! I am sure it will be a great deal nicer to

read the Bible, if I may think, when any thing in it seems very odd, that perhaps it is not all true, but only what people believed to be true, because they did not know any better."

"Or, perhaps, that my little girl does not quite understand what the writers really did mean; and that it will seem less 'odd' to her by-and-by, than it does now," I added. "But I think we have had talk enough for to-day, and sister must be quite ready to go out. So put on your things and take a run in the garden."

"Among God's flowers; yes, I like to think that He is there."

So the dreaded disclosure is over, and instead of the mischief I feared, it seems as if the knowledge of the truth about the Bible would take away a serious hindrance to its action on the souls of my dear ones, which I had never suspected. I long for Edward to come in, that I may tell him how rightly he counselled me to put my trust simply in God, and go on fearlessly in the way of truth, and plain speaking on the matters which concern our spiritual welfare. The conversation will interest him, I am sure, as much as it has done me, and that was so much that I think I can rely on recording it faithfully.

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## CHAPTER VI.

### EVIDENCES.

"My dear friend, you must excuse my saying that, in spite of your great ability, you seem to be leaving the road of common-sense, and getting lost in unreal subtleties, and German metaphysics. Depend upon it, there is nothing like the old sound method of Paley and

Leslie; the argument—here we have the testimony of eye-witnesses, who could not be deceived in what they saw, and whom every thing shows were not deceivers, to that which demonstrates, if every principle of reason is not a delusion, that God did communicate His will to men of old, in a way in which He does not communicate it to us now; and, that we clergy are the keepers and interpreters of this sacred message, appointed to that office by God in His providential government. Here is solid ground on which we can take our stand, and feel ourselves commissioned to teach in God's name what He has thus revealed. But once get off this ground, and where are we?"

So said to me to-day my excellent brother clergyman and neighbour L——, who, with his wife, has come over on a visit to us, and has been spending the last two or three days in our house; with whom I had got into a serious talk on the foundation of our teaching as ministers of the Gospel. I put down the conversation which followed, as I have done in other cases to the best of my recollection, on which, I may say, *en passant*, that I rather pride myself.

"Doubtless, my dear L——, the ground seems solid enough if we can feel sure that it exists; but can we feel sure of this? Where have we the testimony of the eye-witnesses?"

"In the gospels, to confine ourselves to the New Testament."

"Well, no doubt they speak of eye-witnesses, and two of the gospels are commonly attributed to two such witnesses, and the two others to persons who are supposed to have conversed with them. But all the gospels are anonymous; there is not one of which we find any mention before the beginning of the second century, and then only of Matthew and Mark; and *they* are mentioned in a way which makes it very questionable whether our Matthew and Mark are the same books as those mentioned, though they may very likely have

been the foundation of what we possess. It is not till the middle of the second century, through the quotations of Justin Martyr, that we can feel at all sure of gospels substantially the same with those which we now possess having been in use ; and then only as to the Synoptics. For the fourth gospel, anything that can be called evidence begins a quarter of a century later.\* To build on the gospels, as the testimony of eye witnesses, under such circumstances, seems to me to be building on a very sandy foundation."

"But, if the gospels were not really written by the persons to whom they are attributed, how came they to be attributed to these persons? You do not suppose that the Christians designedly bore false witness about them?"

"No, I suppose only that they were, like the mass of all human beings, more ready to accept as true what

\* The passages supposed to be quotations from the fourth gospel in Justin Martyr, are cited at length and fully discussed in Mr J. J. Taylor's work on that gospel, whose judgment, which appears to me a very fair one, I quote. P. 62. "If there be reason to believe, on independent grounds, that the fourth gospel was generally received as an authoritative and apostolic work before the year 138 A.D., it would not be an unfair inference, that familiar acquaintance with the gospel had occasioned the general similarity of thought and expression, which I have pointed out in several passages between the Martyr and the Evangelist. But the similarity in no one instance amounts to a quotation ; and the conformity to the supposed original is much less close than what it is, in innumerable passages, to the gospels of Matthew and Luke, which are cited every where so copiously and so verbally, that it has been often remarked, a very complete history of the life and teachings of Jesus might be made up, in the language of the Synoptists, from the writings of Justin alone." "Only once, adds Mr Taylor, is reference made to a circumstance, the calling of the sons of Zebedee, Boanerges, mentioned by Mark alone, (Dial. c. Try., c. 106), and in this passage the reading of all the MSS. would seem most naturally to ascribe the statement to certain 'records of Peter,' from whose teaching, according to the tradition of the church, confirmed by Papias, Mark derived the materials of his gospel."

fell in with their wishes and wants, than to criticize it calmly. When the gospels acquired authority, the orthodox *wanted* something definite to which they could appeal in controversy with the rising bodies of heretics. The canonical gospels supplied this want, and consequently, were commonly received; and, being received, must have been attributed to some body."

"But why should these bodies be the wrong bodies?"

"Because if they had been the bodies ultimately selected, and you know even Justin Martyr, though he quotes the Synoptics so fully, never mentions their names, the gospels must have been known much sooner than they actually were, and must have modified early opinion in a way which they have not done."

"For example?"

"If St. Paul had known that Jesus had predicted the total destruction of the temple as a sign to precede His second coming, which he must have done, if he had the gospel according to Luke in his hands, when he wrote his second epistle to the Corinthians, and refers to Luke by the words 'the brother whose praise is in all the churches,'\* as the defenders of the traditional doctrine maintain, how could he have lived under the continual expectation of the coming of the Lord, as his epistles show us that he did, while the temple was still standing, with no sign of its overthrow approaching? Or if St. John had been one of those who obtained this declaration from Christ, as Mark tells us, how could he, in his Apocalypse, have *excepted the temple* from the destruction which he foretells for the city of Jerusalem, and raised it into heaven?"†

"Take care. Your objections affect the very foundations of the faith. If we are to pick such holes in the testimony of the first ages, on what can we rely?"

"On the eternal, ever-present witness of the spirit, affirmed as that is by the religious history of mankind."

"So be it. I say Amen to that. The historical

\* 2 Cor. viii. 18.

† Rev. xi. 1, 2, 13, 19; xvi. 1.

affirmation is just what I want ; but your criticism of the historical record takes it away. It seems to me nonsense to talk of history affirming anything, when you call in question the truth of the story narrated."

"But not the fact that it was believed ; and that this belief has swayed the religious life of mankind with a mighty influence."

"But if this influence rested on false notions of fact, of what value is it ?"

"The alleged facts may be questioned, or even disproved, and yet the influence remain. How much does there not perish in every organized being, while the being survives ? The sheaf of leaves round the young plant is indispensable to its early growth, though they fall off afterwards ; but the plant continues. It does not need them for its future nourishment. May not an analogous process take place in God's moral government ?"

"I like to feel something solid under me. I want facts ; facts which prove the reality of spiritual life ; facts which prove that God will forgive the repentant sinner, while he punishes the hardened unbeliever."

"Can any thing prove the reality of spiritual life but its actual manifestation ? and if it is manifested, what more proof of its reality do we want ?"

"But then what becomes of your historical argument ?"

"It is the evidence that the manifestation is no accident, but belongs to the nature of things. I am not an isolated being, but one member of a great human family. What I prize, as part of my own nature, I desire to see manifested as part of theirs ; especially if it bears upon the relation between myself and the Author of my being. I want to see this not only in the present, but in the past. Hence the value of a history which shows me the traces of a Divine action, in the belief of a long succession of generations."

"But, if these beliefs are, and have been, in every case associated with grievous errors and mistakes, of

what help can they be to us as evidences of this Divine action?"

"None, if we assume that the Divine action must display itself, if it appear at all, by superseding the natural action of our minds, so as to free them from error; much, if we regard it as leading men to truth gradually, through the natural action of their own minds; acting always, in fact, as we trust that it acts now in our own case."

"Well! I admit there is something satisfactory in that notion. God seems brought closer to us, if the extraordinary operations of His Spirit merge into the ordinary, the exceptional into the universal. But then the whole current of what I must look upon as Revelation seems to me to run the other way—an especial family, called away from its ancestral home, to be the forefathers of a peculiar people; separated from the rest of mankind by a remarkable set of institutions, which their history refers to a cause wholly exceptional—the expectation of a Messiah through whom the blessings specially promised to them, should be extended to all nations, who would merge their nationality in that of the chosen race. A Messiah who appears, and does break through this national exclusiveness, by founding a body open to all, indeed, yet confining its blessings to those only who, by becoming members of it, claim a part in the special promises made to the Jews."

"But did this exclusive element, in the Jewish and Christian bodies, truly express the Divine idea? Was it not rather a manifestation of human imperfection; a doctrine inevitable, 'necessary for those times,' but now giving place to a truer conception?" Think of what this system of exclusiveness has led to—the ruin of the Jews as a people; and of the church as a body capable of fulfilling its avowed aim—to bring *all* men into its fold—from the deep rooted, mutually repellent, internal divisions springing out of this principle."

"But is not this exclusiveness inseparable from a belief in the fallen condition of man, and the one appointed way of restoration?"

"Yes, if the notion of this fallen condition is not itself a misapprehension of a profound spiritual truth; namely, 'that the flesh and the Spirit are contrary one to the other,' so 'that we cannot do the things that we would;' the one claiming to rule, while the other refuses to obey; and that there is but one way of deliverance from the 'body of this death;' through faith in the Love of God, which comes to meet us, pardoning our offences; strengthening our weakness; purifying our defilement; transforming us from stage to stage into the likeness of itself."

"But what part is left for the Redeemer in this process? You seem to omit Him altogether."

"On the contrary; if the spiritual nature of man is my  $\pi\tilde{\omega}\nu\ \sigma\tau\tilde{\omega}$ ,\* Christ is to me the lever, the moving force, the determining agent in that action of the soul, by which men can pass from faith in God as their national protector, to faith in Him as the universal Father; from faith in Him as the mighty sustainer of nature, to faith in Him as the source of all spiritual life. That the will of man may open to the Divine influence, it needs to sun itself in the warmth of the Divine love. The belief that in Christ the Divine being had appeared under the form of a man; and, by sharing in all the worst miseries of human existence, had manifested its profound sympathy with mankind, cleared the atmosphere, and let the warming rays pass."

"So that, the objective necessity for Christ's coming lies, according to you, in the nature of man, rather than in that of God."

"Certainly. The reconciliation of justice and mercy, about which so much has been said, takes place, as I conceive, not in God, where they could never be opposed, but in man; who learns, from a true appre-

\* Standing point.



hension of the Divine character, that he has not to buy God's mercy by satisfying his justice; and that his one only way of fulfilling the demands of the law, is by the love which unites him to the lawgiver."

"But, assuming that to be the *vera ratio* of redemption, yet surely, the belief in the Love of God, manifested in Christ, is as necessary for us now, as it was for men in the first Christian ages?"

"I think so."

"Then do we not get back to the old difficulty? How is this belief to be sustained without evidence of the Divine nature of Christ?"

"Evidence, no doubt; but what sort of evidence? What better evidence do we want of the Divinity of Christ than the place occupied by this belief in the history of man's religious progress? Take for granted that all the wonders recorded about Him in the gospels are literally true, what does it all amount to, but a few unaccountable phenomena, which might raise an expectation that the person with whom they were connected, had some great part allotted to Him in the history of mankind? But, when eighteen-hundred years' experience has shown how great a part this person *has* filled in human history; when we know that this place has depended mainly on the idea of His nature, which began to show itself as soon as men began seriously to ask themselves, who He was who had lived among them as the 'carpenter's son'—to put aside this mighty outcome of the idea as immaterial, and fix our eyes on the handful of unaccountable phenomena which may have led to its original formation, seems to me an act of utter unreason."

"But, if these 'unaccountable phenomena' manifest that the person whose greatness is attested by the religious history of mankind, exercised over all nature a controlling influence; commanded the issues of life and death; had in his hands the sources of food and health; could govern the mysterious powers which affect the will of man; surely the appropriateness of

this action on nature to His Divine character, must greatly strengthen the faith to which it appears to have given rise."

"I question the 'giving rise.' The acts of power attributed in the gospels to Christ, are only what the imaginations of His countrymen were ready to ascribe to any one whom they believed to be the Messiah. All have their parallel in the Old Testament. And as to the argument that they prove Him who possessed such powers to be a Divine Being, what are we to say to these ancient wonders? The sea divides before an act of Moses. Fire comes down from Heaven, and 'the earth opens her mouth,' and swallows up Korah and all his company, at his bidding. The earth ceases to rotate 'for about the space of a day,' at the order of Joshua, though addressed by mistake to the sun and moon; a miracle, by the bye, which, in the enormous multitude of objects affected by it, according to our modern knowledge of the universe, and the magnitude of the force exerted to produce it, reduces all the stories of Christ's command over nature to insignificance. Elisha again, multiplies food; entails and cures disease; and restores the dead to life; yet you do not consider these facts to prove the Divine nature of Moses, or Joshua, or Elisha, supposing them to be facts."

"But Christ worked His miracles in His own name; they only in the name of Jehovah."

"I beg your pardon. Joshua speaks directly to the sun and moon; and Elisha multiplies the oil in the pot of 'a woman of the wives of the sons of the prophets,'\* without any reference to Jehovah; and declares to Gehazi, 'the leprosy of Naaman shall cling to thee and thy seed for ever;'<sup>†</sup> and Christ, at the raising of Lazarus, according to the Fourth gospel, prays first to the Father;‡ and, throughout that gospel, disclaims acting in His own name. Besides, if He had worked wonders in His own name, without any apparent re-

\* 2 K. iv. 1-6.

† 2 K. v. 25.

‡ John xi. 41-43.

ference to God, while other teachers had always made such a reference, might not this be a distinction belonging to Him as the Messiah? How then can it prove His Divine nature?"

"I do not say that it proves, but only that it accords with this belief."

"Yes, if the working miracles is consistent, with the Divine perfection; but to me the case is quite the reverse."

"What? surely you do not hold that nonsensical, so-called scientific, heresy, of the unchangeableness of the laws of nature?"

"I hold the whole conception of laws of nature to be a mistake."

"What *do* you mean?"

"I mean that, to speak of laws imposed by God on nature, is to put nature over against God; as if she existed apart from Him, but was subject to His orders, like a conquered nation, subject to the will of the conqueror; while nature is, to me, only the vesture of the omnipresent Deity; ever changing in her forms, but eternally the same in her substance; the primal utterance of the Divine reason: the adequate means through which God works out His beneficent will. Now a miracle I take to be, essentially a work supposed to be effected without means, *i.e.*, in opposition to the Divine reason."

"But, may not miracles be only acts performed by means beyond our knowledge?"

"I think not. Import the notion of means into the narrative of any miracle; you will find that the notion of the miraculous disappears. Take, for instance, the turning of water into wine. The phenomenon happens every year, by means of the vine and its fruit, and the process of fermentation; we understand very imperfectly *how*; but no one calls the change miraculous. What then is the miracle in the act ascribed to Christ? Simply that the change is supposed to have taken place

by the bare wish, even the unuttered wish of Jesus, without the use of any means."

"But suppose He worked the change by the use of subtle means; latent forces, accessible to Him, though not to men generally."

"Then the miracle becomes a case of 'knowledge is power'? The electrician, who flashes a message across the Atlantic, in scarcely more time than is needed to write it down, employs subtle means, incomprehensible to the mass of mankind, and quite beyond their power to use; yet we do not call the act a miracle, be it said *pace* the writer in the *Edinburgh Review*, who, not long since, attempted to illustrate the miraculous by appealing to it."

"But, what if the means were produced at the moment of the act? Surely the case would be different?"

"Certainly: because then the means would not be really means, but a thin disguise for will effecting its ends without means. Don't let us cheat ourselves by empty words. *The means used by God must be as eternal as the will which uses them.* They may admit of infinite variety in combination; they may even be entirely latent, when circumstances do not allow their action to display itself, as seems to be the case with the power displayed in organization; but to suppose them produced *pro re nata*, is to make the idea of them absurd."

"But, to conceive that God works always through means, and is limited in his action by that which he sustains, seems to me to be subjecting God to a fate stronger than himself. 'He speaks and it is done,' is far grander."

"Grandeur, perhaps, as *Louis le Grand* was grander than Queen Victoria. But whether greater, query? Absolute will is imposing: but is not all true greatness self-limiting?"

"Self-limiting? yes, but not self-limited: not limited by its own utterances."

“Why not, if these utterances are the true expression of this will? Assume the Divine essence to be pure reason with the philosopher, or perfect love with the writer of the First epistle ascribed to St. John, the result is the same. Neither in the one case nor in the other can God be conceived to change in Himself. How then can he change in the utterances of Himself.”

“But does not this view of the Divine action, however difficult it may be to escape from it, as a logical conclusion from the notion of Divine perfection, run counter to the whole current of scriptural teaching?”

“Formally, I admit it does, but I think not essentially. The unchangeableness of God is a cardinal point of the old Jewish faith in Him.”

“Unchangeableness in His ends, no doubt; but with entire freedom as to the means of effecting them.”

“True. The Jews were a profoundly unscientific people. They were no logicians; and did not see that, if the end remains unchanged, change of means can arise only from trial and failure; in a word, that it would imply a God who grew wiser as He grew older. Now, this ground of change is excluded by their own conceptions of the Divine wisdom. It follows that, according to their own teaching, the Divine action must be as unchangeable in regard to its means as in regard to its ends. But, in truth, the notion of means is essentially a scientific one. It arises when we ask, *How* is such and such an effect produced? And this question the Jews, being a nation thoroughly unscientific, never seriously asked. Enough for them that God so willed.”

“Well, I allow their standing formula, ‘He said and it was done,’ does not explain at all *how* it was done. Yet there is to me a charm in its simplicity. It seems to go directly to the root of the matter, and to carry with it, to my intelligence, the conviction that such must be at bottom the real character of the Divine action, however little light may be thus cast on the channels which it makes for itself.”

“The formula is attractive, I conceive, because it affirms of God, effectually though indirectly, that personality of which we are conscious. The God who speaks appears to be truly a living God, who as He speaks so also must hear; and thus is one in whom we may trust; and that is the essence of religion, the soul of spiritual life.”

“There seems to me more in the formula than you state; there is also the conviction of unlimited power, when He hears, to act as He will.”

“Yes. There is the affirmation of man’s ineffaceable persuasion that the intelligent, free, moral being of which he is conscious is the true governing power of the universe—an affirmation clothed in language borrowed from that act in which our spiritual being most thoroughly expresses itself, the act of speech—where our will seems to emancipate itself completely from the fetters of nature, and can create at pleasure whatever its imagination can suggest. But to convert this power into the Divine essence appears to me to be an abandonment of the deepest lessons which we learn from Christ; that out of weakness comes forth strength, and that love is mightier than might.”

“Yet, surely, the *rationale* of prayer, which is the life of conscious love between man and God, depends on the faith that He hears and answers; and does not the notion of an answer to prayer involve at bottom the assumption on which the belief in miracle rests? that God can and will modify the course of Nature in conformity with our requests, not in the startling manner exhibited in miracle, yet not less truly because more secretly,

‘Moving in a mysterious way  
His wonders to perform.’”

“Granted, as to prayers directed to outward objects, to all that is truly comprised in the course of Nature. But are these the proper objects of prayer? Is not

Carlyle right when he says of all that labour can do, '*Laborare est orare?*'"

"No doubt we must use the appointed means, but without God's blessing what can they effect?"

"Nothing, if the Divine blessing, that is the result desired, is not *always* attached to the use of the appointed, that is, suitable means, in a suitable way. But if it is so attached in every case which we can distinctly test, it seems to me self-delusion to assume that it is not so attached, precisely in those cases which we cannot thus test. Is not the true humility to accept the lessons concerning the character of the Divine action, in the use of means given us by the growth of natural science, as part of God's revelation of Himself, in which each age has its peculiar share."

"But surely you do not mean to deny the reality of *any* answers to prayer?"

"Certainly not, if they are looked for in their proper sphere—within our own minds. Prayer I consider to be the appointed means by which we may learn that 'the service' of God is 'perfect freedom.' And that is the greatest of all lessons."

"No doubt, the highest object of prayer is to bring the will of man into conformity with the will of God. But, to shut out from it all that your theory requires us to exclude, we must place ourselves in profound opposition to the teaching of the Church in all ages, nay, to the general instincts of humanity. When have men prayed at all, and yet not prayed for the relief of their outward necessities, and the supply of their bodily wants? 'Give us day by day the bread we need' is a petition of the Lord's prayer. Are we wrong in expanding it?"

"Perhaps not, if we keep the same proportion in our prayers between the material and the spiritual which we find in our model; very much so if, as is commonly done, the expansion takes place all on the side of the outward. The functions of prayer, in all that does not

directly concern our own wills, is, I think, to keep before us the consciousness that all ultimately proceeds from that Being with whom our wills can enter into communion, and to lead us to make such a use of the outward world as is in accordance with His will. This appears to me to be the main object of the petition you quote. If we ask only for sufficient bread from day to day, what is this but to say, as for ourselves we limit our desires to the necessities of existence? And how much do we not stand in need of such a check in the present age? Time is bringing into striking light the profound significance of Christ's teaching."

"Your views seem to hang well together in themselves; and certainly you turn the flank of a vast body of perplexing difficulties by your trust in the continuity of Revelation, if it does not end in improving away altogether the faith once delivered to the saints."

"My dear friend, I must end as I began. No true faith can be 'improved away' by honest inquiry. The evidence of the true becomes more and more strong the more it is examined. 'Prove all things, hold fast' that which on proving you find 'good,' is an unfailling note. And it is a rule which the Church herself tried to apply in her general councils. She erred, I think, only in not having faith enough in it."

But by this time we had got to the house, and so our conversation terminated.

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## CHAPTER VII.

### PRAYER.

TO-DAY Agnes and I took a walk together to pay a visit to Margaret B——, whom I hope the readers of these



pages have not forgotten. It was a lovely summer evening, and we found her sitting in her pretty little garden in front of the door of her cottage, with her eyes fixed on the bright glory of crimson and violet tints which followed the departing traces of the king of day. Her refined features, seen in profile, upon a background of light, seemed surrounded by a halo, though their expression scarcely had all its usual serenity, and a tear glistened in her eyelid, as if she had recently been crying. Her knitting had fallen on her lap, and her folded hands, and the moving of her lips, showed that she was engaged in prayer. She was so absorbed that she did not notice our approach, and we stopped a minute or two at the garden-gate, unwilling to disturb her, and hesitating whether to go in or try to retreat unnoticed, when a slight noise which I accidentally made in touching the latch handle, led her to turn her head in the direction in which we stood. She coloured a little, but immediately got up and invited us to come in.

"I fear, Margaret, we have disturbed you," said Agnes.

"Oh! no, madam, you are very welcome, and so is your husband, and the more that he is a friend whom I always like to see when I'm in anyways troubled in my mind; the best of friends he have been to me and Tom, barring Him as never leaves us," she said, looking up with a sweet smile.

"What is the matter, my dear Margaret?" asked Agnes. "Nothing bad has happened to Tom? he's quite well, I hope?"

"Nothing as to his body, ma'am, God be praised, nor nothing as to his mind, to call wrong, leastways as to anything he have done; but I do fear lest he be turning into a dangerous path. You know, ma'am, my Tom will always be a thinking, and asking, and learning, and God forbid that he shouldn't think, and learn, and ask—and question, too, what he have been taught—for

doesn't the Scripture say we are to 'prove all things,' even that we may 'hold fast that which is good.' But then, you see, ma'am, Tom's young and hasn't no experience, so to speak; leastways none of what trial and sorrow is, and what prayer is to them as are in sorrow and trial, when we learn that best. And Mr N—— has such notions about prayer as seems almost to take away the wish to pray from them as minds them seriously. And he, and a friend of his, has put such doubts and difficulties into Tom's head, that it does puzzle my poor brains sadly to see to the way to the end of them, when he comes to talk with me about them, and I have been hoping that you would be coming soon, for I was wishful that he should have a talk over them with you."

"Well, Margaret, if you can tell me what they are, I can at least try whether I may be able to help you."

"I don't know, sir, that I can repeat them all quite accurate, but they turns mostly on two points: first, on the goodness and wisdom of God, and then on what's called the laws of nature. And I may say that it is mainly the last matter which is a puzzle to me; for as to the first difficulty, that we hadn't ought to pray to God, because He's so wise that He doesn't need us to tell Him what we requires, and so good that He will always give us what we want, without our asking Him for it, that's a matter which I and my William have talked over many a time."

"And how did you settle it?" asked Agnes.

"Well, madam, you see we concluded that if so be God would have us pray to Him, as the Scriptures say, it was not for us to refuse to do His will, because so far as we can tell, He had no need of us to put Him in mind; for it might be for *our* sakes that He would have us pray, that *we* might not forget *Him*. And Tom too, he don't deny but what that's a good answer to what Mr N—— says, as far as that, but then the question about the laws of nature is much harder. For sure, if there

be laws of nature, and I mind, sir, that in the books you lends to Tom there's a mighty deal about they laws; and how wise and regular, and unchangeable like they are; and how they regulates the smallest matters, as well as the biggest; they laws must be God's true will. And then it do seem as if all our praying couldn't be of no use, leastways as to the matters which these laws regulates, and that's nearly all that we are used to pray to God for, except for the gifts of His Spirit in our hearts."

"But that is a very important exception, Margaret, is it not?"

"Well, sir, I don't say but what it is, and so I have told Tom. Put it, that what Mr N—— says about they laws of nature is all true, and that all they regulates will happen just as they fixes, whether we pray or not, as Mr N—— says, it's all stuff to pray for rain, or fine weather, or against the cholera, or the cattle plague, and the like; let it be that they as wrote the Bible mistook as to these things, because they didn't know as much about God's ways in the world, as He has taught us, who live so much later; yet that don't make any difference as to what's inside us, where we have no call for book-learning to tell us what is, but God Himself speaks direct to our hearts by His Spirit, when we call upon Him."

"And what does Tom say to that?"

"Well, ma'am, he doesn't justly deny but that it's true, only, you see, he hasn't got the experience yet of what it lies in prayer to do for our souls. And, besides, there's a friend of Mr N——, who often comes to stay with him, and who has got a talking with Tom, and he will have it that to pray at all is a mistake, because, he says, men put outside themselves, up above the clouds, what really is only inside them; the incarnation of God in man, as he calls it: so that when we pray we are really only a talking to ourselves, and hadn't ought to pray at all, but only to meditate. And Tom do seem to

take to that notion mightily. But here he is," she exclaimed, "well, that is lucky," as she turned towards the path on which her quick ear had caught the sound of his approaching footsteps; and a moment after he appeared with his bat over his shoulder, flushed by the excitement of a game at cricket. He began immediately to tell his mother the story of the cricket field; then catching sight of Agnes and myself, stopped abruptly, and came to shake hands with us.

"It is hardly fair, Tom," I said, "to hinder your chat with your mother, and bring you in to our talk, while your head is running on your game."

"For the matter of that, sir, when the game is over, perhaps the less said about it the better; only mother always likes to hear of every thing that I have been doing."

"We have been talking about you, Tom," said Margaret, "I have been telling the Rector about the laws of nature, and what you told me last night that Mr D—— had said about the divine in man."

"Well, sir, and what do you say to that?" asked Tom rather eagerly.

"It is like many other things, Tom, in my judgment. It has a right side, and a wrong side. The will in man, that principle of moral will which one of the greatest German philosophers, Kant, used to say filled him with admiration, when he thought of it, equal only to that produced in him by the sight of the starry heavens, is indeed divine; the deepest manifestation of God that we know of. But Mr D——, I suspect, makes of it not only a divine power, but the Deity; and that I cannot agree to. Worship of the unseen is to me the noblest function of man, shared by no animal known to us; which has called forth the grandest efforts of human genius. But if man is God, worship must change into self-admiration. I cannot accept that conception as an explanation of the sentiment of reverence."

"But then, sir, Mr D—— showed me a book by some German philosopher, Feurbach, I think he called him."

"I dare say, Feuerbach's *Wesen des Christenthums*."

"Yes, sir, it had some such name. Well, sir, he read to me out of it, and showed how curiously everything that men supposed God to be and to do, when they worshipped Him, is just what they found in themselves; what they thought or wished for."

"And why should it not be so? Where are men to get their conceptions of what God is from, except from themselves, or from what they imagine about that which they perceive out of themselves? You remember, I dare say, what I showed you not long since, that we know nothing about the world without us except through our own imaginations, which have an instinct that makes them refer to some object outside ourselves what we are conscious of inside ourselves. Yet we do not doubt that the world is different from ourselves, because we have found out this instinct. Then if we discover a similar instinct leading us to throw out of ourselves the moral will which we find in ourselves, and worship it, why should we refuse to follow this instinct as a safe guide?"

"Well, sir, it seems very different, as you put it, from what it does at first."

"*Audi alteram partem*\* my boy; that is a lesson we all have to learn, and very slow a great many people are in learning it."

"But, sir, do you think it can be right in men to have made of God a person who will always do whatever they earnestly wish and ask for, as Mr Feuerbach says they have done?"

"By no means, my boy, I allow to Feuerbach and Mr D——, that the ideas which men have formed of God as the hearer of prayer, have been as much mistaken as the notions which they formed about the earth, when they thought of it as the centre of the universe, flat and round like a shilling; or of the sun, when they imagined it to be set in a firmament above the earth,

\* Hear both sides.

and to run from one end of the heavens to the other. Yet they were not wrong in thinking that the earth, their home, had a solid foundation or that the sun is the 'ruler of the day,' the source of light and heat to us; and so they may have been quite right in their faith in a God 'who heareth prayer,' and wrong only as to the objects for which prayer should be made."

"You mean, sir, I suppose, that we should pray to God only about that which is inside us, and not about that which is outside us at all; and that the mistake which men made was to think that these outside things could be changed by their prayers."

I nodded assent.

"Only, sir," interposed Margaret, "if I may be so bold as to interrupt, they outside things has so much to do with us, and takes up so much of what is in our hearts, that it's hard lines if we have to take them out of our prayers. There's Tom now, he's outside of me; but if I hadn't ought to come to God with my wishes, and fears, and hopes, and griefs about him, and to pray that he may be kept well in health of mind and body too; and may grow up a true child of God, and be happy and blessed, and a blessing to those as come after him, when I am dead and buried, I shouldn't half feel as if I was really praying to God."

"But, my dear Margaret," said Agnes, "as to all of your prayer which is about Tom's health, and happiness, and prosperity, I am sure you would always put in, 'nevertheless, Thy will be done;' and if this will is expressed by what are called the laws of nature, which seem to be in themselves so wise, and reasonable, are we to be the less resigned to it on that account?"

"No, madam; I don't mean that we shouldn't be resigned to God's will, even if so be that it takes so little note of us as they laws seem to do. Only it do appear to me less loving and harder to bear. You see, ma'am, I used to think that when we prayed to God for

anything we very much wished for, God would give it to us if it weren't altogether best for us not to have it, of which, no doubt, He could judge better than us; and then we had to bear with it, and put our trust in Him who knew best. But now it seems as if our prayers must always 'return into our own bosom,' and weren't of no avail at all to get any outward blessing, or to keep away any ill, either for ourselves or for any one we loves, which is worst of all."

"I know what you feel, for I have felt it often myself," replied Agnes. "But we may trust, Margaret, where we cannot see. I do not believe that God would have put into man's heart such a desire to pray for others, if these prayers were altogether contrary to His will, and of no use except to deceive ourselves into imagining that we can do what is quite beyond our reach."

"Besides," I added, "although the more we know of the universe the less ground we have for thinking that our prayers can alter its profoundly wise order, we must remember that we are ourselves a part of this order, and that whatever affects our wills does or may affect the outward course of events according to their natural constitution. So that our prayers may really help our wishes through their action on our characters. How often has not the vicious son of pious parents been checked in a career of evil by the recollections of a mother's gentle voice and tender love. Get to the bottom of the charm which beautifies the memory of her, and you will find the influence shed over her own spirit by her communion with God. How often have not the sick been recalled from the brink of the grave by the calm patience, the unwearied watchfulness of those who, around the couch of almost hopeless suffering, drew their own strength from the unfailing Source of spiritual power. How much of physical and moral evil is there not perpetually arrested or diminished by the benevolent effort which the habit of intercourse with

God first awakens and then sustains against the rubs of the world. If the unbiassed study of God's action in nature forbids our attributing to our prayers that direct influence on events which pious faith is apt to ascribe to them, it leaves untouched that wide field of indirect influence, influence on outward events reflected from ourselves, where an attentive observer may find what he requires to encourage him in the belief that his prayers are not fruitless, even when we leave the region where their effect is certain."

"Well, sir, God's ways is apt to be wiser than ours, and maybe it's better for us that our prayers should work, as you say, obliquely like through us rather than direct. And no doubt that thought do take away a deal of conceit which it's hard to get rid of, if one supposes that God can be got to do what we wishes only by our asking for it."

"Indeed," said Agnes, "I am afraid if we lived in the Palace of Truth, of which a French story tells us, where what people said turned without their knowing it into what they were really thinking of, 'Thy will be done' would very often change into 'our wills be done;' and against this malady there can be no remedy so good as the conviction that our prayers can really aid others than ourselves only by strengthening us to aid them."

"There is another consideration, however," I added, "which we have not noticed yet, but which I think will remove a good deal of Margaret's difficulties: and that is, the large part that should be given to the feeling of *sympathy* in considering the office of prayer. We come to each other, with our griefs, and fears, and hopes, and wishes, not because we expect those to whom we come to be often able to help us, but because it is so sweet to the affectionate heart to have the assurance of a fellow-feeling. Keble tells us that

'If one heart in perfect sympathy  
Beat with another, answering love for love,  
Weak mortals all entranced on earth would be.'



Well, this sympathy, so hard to find in other mortals, we may find in the eternal Spirit; and, through it, we may learn to bear with cheerfulness the heavy burdens that life sometimes lays upon us, as well as its little bothers, which are often more worrying, and thus attain that tender, calm, joyous serenity which, so far as we can judge from the little we know about our Divine Master, seems to have been one of His most striking characteristics."

"So then, sir, you don't think it at all again God's will that we should pour out our hearts to Him just as they are, without troubling ourselves as to whether the things that we speak about are such things as can be altered by our prayers or not, but going to Him as a friend, who, if He cannot help us outwardly, can and will help us inwardly."

"Certainly, Margaret, that is my belief. 'Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh,' and should speak. God, I think, would have us come to Him as to a father, who can and will make flowers bloom and waters flow for us in the desert, if, in the course of events, which expresses His wisdom and goodness, our path should lie through it; and teach us, in every condition of life, how much greater the inward and spiritual is than the outward and material."

"Well, sir," said Tom, "I think I can understand what you mean, and how our prayers may do us a great deal of good, though they do not alter anything in nature directly. Only don't the Church prayers speak as if we ought to think that they did make a difference in these things."

"No doubt they do, my boy, in a great many places; though, in other places, more especially in many of the collects, which are often taken, as I have shown you, from the oldest Christian services, they carry us into the pure atmosphere of spiritual communion. I should think our litany a great deal more perfect, if it made us ask God to dispose us to do justice and mercy, and

promote peace and good will, and succour, help, and comfort all that are in danger, need, and tribulation, and provide for the fatherless children and widows, and forgive our enemies, persecutors, and slanderers, and so on, instead of making us pray that it would please *Him* to do all these things, as if the wish to do good came from us, and had to be put into God's will by our reminding Him of what should be done. And it is in this sense, as a summary of what I ought to try to do by His help, that I use these prayers, which you know I have no right to alter."

"Ah! sir, I am sure it would do a deal of good, if you would only say from the pulpit some of they things that you has been saying to us to day. For, from what folks tells me now and then, and still more from what I learns of their sayings through Tom, I am thinking that this question of what is the use of prayer, and what should be prayed for, and what shouldn't, is beginning to stir mightily the minds of many a one, may be to scoffs, and may be to doubts and misgivings, which ask for a wise word in season."

"It is a matter I have often thought of, I assure you, Margaret; but in speaking to a mixed congregation there is need of a great deal of care, not 'to pull up the wheat with the tares'; still, I believe, I must soon try to grapple publicly with this, and some other similar questions, where the eternal truth needs to be distinguished from grave though venerable errors, on which I trust that my people are now growing ripe for the harvest."

## CHAPTER VIII.

## SPIRITUAL BEING.\*

“WELL, Rector, you have begun to speak out pretty boldly ; you grappled with a toughish bit last Sunday morning, and I must say you didn't shirk it. D——, whom I think you have met before, and I were talking over your notions when you were announced.”

Such was my greeting from my neighbour N——, who, by the way, has been a much more frequent attendant at church, of late, than he used to be, when I called on him this morning, wishing rather to find out what he thought of my sermon.

“I hope not to shirk any matter fit for pulpit discussion, which you will, no doubt, admit, *all* subjects that a clergyman may have to study for his own satisfaction, are not.”

“I think there can be no doubt of the fitness of your subject last Sunday, if you clergymen mean to deal with the thoughts which stir men's minds now-a-days. There's nothing where science and religion come more directly into collision, than on that question of prayer ; how a universe of unchangeable, natural laws, is to be fitted on to a universe of perpetual miracle ? For though you Protestant divines tell us the age of miracles is past, the special providences which you dish up, are nothing but miracles disguised in a rationalistic sauce.”

“Is not the conflict of science rather with certain notions commonly embodied in theological systems, than with religion ? What is religion but the thought of the omnipresent, eternal power manifested in the universe, embodied into a principle of human action ? And what is science but the investigation of the way

\* Readers who dislike metaphysical speculations, had better pass over this chapter.

in which this power acts? What necessary conflict is there between them?"

Pardon me, interposed Mr D —, "but religion is, I conceive, the putting our own personal being over against, and outside ourselves, and then falling down and worshipping it. While science is, at bottom, the perception that the power which acts *in* us, and the power which acts *on* us, is the same power, at once subject and object."

"So that the reverence which the religious man shows to God, you would say he ought to show to himself?"

"That is to say, to the idea of which his individual self is only a passing form. Self worship is idolatry. But what else is religion at bottom? What are the gods whom men worship, but glorified images of their own selves, gifted with the will and the power to fulfil all the wishes of their adorers?"

"But how are we to form the conception of this ideal, except from the study of our own nature?"

"Our own nature, that is human nature, certainly: but not our individual nature: nor even human nature exclusively. All that is great and noble in man, and all that is majestic, or beautiful, or wise in the universe as it presents itself to us, gives its contribution to the idea of true humanity, the subjective embodiment of the universal being."

"But what is to hinder us from taking all that is great, and noble, or loveable in man, as well as all that is majestic or beautiful or wise in nature, for the materials whence to construct our idea of God? If, after all, we have to build up for ourselves an idea of humanity, to which we are to bow our heads in philosophic submission, and conform our individual wills to its dictates, why not add to the ingredients the conception of personal consciousness, and yield duty as reverence, instead of as mere submission."

"Because you pass, in doing that, from the con-

ceivable to the inconceivable, and from freedom to slavery."

"Is love slavery?"

"Willing slavery I allow, but love is not for the unseen."

"You mean, I presume, the essentially invisible, that which never can be seen? For the unseen, we find countless instances of passionate love."

"I admit the correction. My remark related to the formless, the invisible in itself, the all-embracing, all-penetrating, all-constituting power which we call God. Of this I say, it may be the subject of contemplation, may call forth admiring wonder, and devotion, but not love, in any other sense than this, which is Spinoza's *Amor intellectualis Dei*.\* Love is for the personal, the concrete, for that which can love again, and busy itself with the beloved object; but to ascribe to the all-upholder this special attention is to individualize him into a man; and a man torn by endless conflicting claims, from the opposing wishes in the supposed objects of his love."

"I agree to that, if His answer to their requests is supposed to apply to outward things, where the gain of one is usually the loss of another, yet even here, the opposition concerns the operations of man rather than those of nature; wealth, for instance, rather than health."

"Ay," interposed Mr N——, "but health no less than wealth is controlled by laws of nature, which you must allow to be God's will; and to change them in order to satisfy man's requests would be the action of a very foolish God."

"But man must have strength enough to work under these laws, or he could not exist at all. The wind may not be tempered to the shorn lamb, but if the lamb's constitution is not tough enough to bear the blast, it will die. The question is, whence is this strength derived? Is it with the inward, as it

\* The intellectual love of God.

clearly is with the outward, where we possess only a certain measure of strength belonging to us at any one time by our nature, which we must continually keep up by proper food? Is there no food for the soul? no meals by which it can renew its strength?"

"Yes," said Mr D——, "by meditation, by withdrawal from the distractions of the external, to bathe in the contemplation of the eternal idea."

"Eternal moonshine! You must excuse me, D——, but I can't, for the life of me, enter into your idealism. What are our ploughmen and carters to make of bathing in the ideal? If they would bathe in the river, it would be of more use. No; man's business is to work, not to dream; work with his brains, if he has the luck to be well provided in that way; and work with his hands if he has not; but any how work, and do something useful in the world where he finds himself."

"Useful—full of use—very good," said D——, "but of use for what?"

"Food, clothes, fire, knowledge, which means all these."

"And law, art, truth, morality, do these count for nothing in your unideal world?"

"No! these are included in the useful things."

"Again I ask, useful for what?"

"To make it more easy to get food, clothes and fire," replied N——, with a slight smile.

"Come, N——," I interposed, "I cannot let you belie yourself so grossly. I have known you too long for a straightforward, truth-loving, kind-hearted, neighbourly man to believe for a moment, that you do not prize truth, honesty, justice, and kindness, far more highly than food, clothes, and fire, though I allow, there can be no place on the earth for the last, at least in this climate, among those who do not possess the first; yet I agree with you that to refer our ploughmen and carters, and I may add, the great mass of our population, to the contemplation of the ideal, as the source of

moral strength, would be, as you phrase it, mere moonshine, a little light perhaps, but no perceptible warmth. But my expectations would be very different, if I could say of the ploughman or carter, as the story in the Acts says of Saul, 'Behold he prays.' Can you honestly say you think my expectations would be unfounded?"

"That depends on what they are. If you expect rational, sober goodness, I should say, yes."

"Is not that to ask more than a rational, sober philosopher should ask? You take a man who has never exercised what you would call thought at all, whose whole mind has been occupied with the objects of immediate sensation—you appeal to a sentiment of reverence, of dependence, of love to the Author of his being, latent within him—you succeed in awakening it to activity. It brings him to his knees to seek for pardon of past offences, for strength to resist the selfish impulses which he finds in himself, for guidance in the new life he wishes to lead. He finds peace, strength, light, too, though a light modified by his power of perception. Is it reasonable to demand that he shall see all that this light can reveal as clearly as if he had been long accustomed to it? Is it not much, if he begins to realize the fact that there is a light within him besides the light which affects his eyes?"

"But," said Mr D——, "why has such a man as you adduce never learned to think? Why are the notions of moral duty, of love, of a life nobler than the life of sense, so strange to him, but because he has never been educated to look beneath the sensible—because he has been left to grow up, not only in ignorance of all speculative thought, but with no acquaintance with the examples of the noble and loveable, with which the history of mankind is crowded?"

"There is too much truth, I fear, in what you say. Our ordinary education, especially of the poor, is very far from dealing as it should do with the most effective of all moral teaching—the teaching by the history of

great and good men. But if we are to present these true noblemen of our race as they really were, with the motives by which they were habitually actuated set forth truly, 'without fear and without favour,' in how many cases would not religion, the reverence for an unseen Being, the desire to please Him, the habit of worship, be a prominent trait in their characters?"

"No doubt, religion is the philosophy of childhood; and the past is the childhood of humanity, speaking collectively. But, in citing the actions of the heroes of our race as models, we might present them without noticing the errors of conception which disfigure them."

"And so write false history like Hume," interposed Mr N——. "No, let us have the genuine article. If you want mere moral tales after your own fancy, write good story books, if you are not sick of them; but don't turn live men and women into puppets, dressed up to suit your fancies."

"And suppose we tried your plan, Mr D——," I said, "and endeavoured to translate the actual motives of our heroes or heroines into the form which you think they would have assumed, if they had possessed an insight into the nature of the universe as deep as you suppose to belong to the manhood of our race, would not the narratives lose their attraction for our living children? You remember, I daresay, Göethe's epigram:—

'Johannis Feuer sei unverwehrt,  
Die Freude nie verloren,  
Besen werden immer stumpf gekehrt,  
Und Jungens immer geboren.'\*"

\* See Eckerman's Conversations, I. 298, for interesting remarks on this sentiment, which may be paraphrased:—

Never mind, if the young ones jump,  
When St John's fires shine on the hill;  
Brooms will be brushed to a stump,  
And men born babies still.

"I need only to look out of my window," says Göethe, "to have before my eyes, in the brooms which sweep the streets



“Yes, I believe you are right. Childhood *will* have its proper food. No doubt this is the reason of the strong hold which these stories out of the childhood of mankind, with their personal deities, have upon succeeding generations who should have outgrown them. They present the ideal to the child in the form in which the child can grasp it; and the hold once taken, is not easily lost. *Quo semel est imbuta recens servabit odorem Testa diu.*” \*

“Are you quite sure that the grasp ought to be lost? You hold, I presume, that whatever is, is in some sense right? Why should not this general tendency in man to ascribe personality to God be regarded as the spontaneous, instinctive testimony of Nature to the fact that the assumption is rightly made?”

“How can that be possible? What do we mean by God but the Infinite, the Limitless, the Universal?—and what by a person but a limited, finite, individual? How can these conceptions be combined in the same being?”

“Are not you yourself personifying the infinite in that objection, treating it as a something set over against the finite, which it shuts out? Take the infinite in the sense of that on which the finite rests—that which utters itself in the finite—and where is the absurdity of attributing to it personality more than attributing to it force.”

“Force is essentially unlimited in its idea.”

“No, that it is not,” interposed Mr N——. “your ‘ideas,’ are quite out there. Science knows nothing of any

and the children who run about in them, the symbols of the ever wearing out and ever fresh renewing world. Thus children’s sports and the enjoyments of youth preserve themselves, and are handed on from century to century. For absurd as they may appear to our riper age, children always remain children, and are like themselves in all ages. And so the St John’s fires should not be forbidden, and the pleasures of the dear little ones in them not be spoilt.”

\* Long will the cask keep the scent it imbibed when new.

force but what is limited. All her quantities are fixed; though no doubt they may be heaped up till they seem overwhelming. With your unlimited force, you would plunge us into the miraculous before we knew where we were."

"No doubt," replied Mr D——, "the manifestations of force are finite, but not, I conceive, the principle. But the principle of personality is limited. The idea of a person is that of an individual consciously distinguished from other individuals. Therefore, it is necessarily inapplicable to the common source of all being. What can such a universal Being be conscious of, as distinct from his own Being?"

"That which is *determined by Him*; the limited existences, as distinguished from the limiting will," I replied. "You or I can imagine a universe filled with forms occupying space, and determined by our wills. All of these would be objects of our consciousness, but they would not absorb it. We should remain the conscious individual creators over against our imaginary creations; why may not God be supposed similarly conscious of that which He sustains, as distinct from His sustaining will, and thus find, in His own eternal action, the perpetual condition of His own personality?"

"*First*, because neither you nor I can imagine an infinite universe.

"*Secondly*, because what we thus imagined would not be living and conscious.

"*Thirdly*, because the notion of *will* is inapplicable to the all-sustaining power; which, as it can *want* nothing, can *wish* for nothing, and therefore can *will* nothing. *Will*, like *ends*, *purposes*, and all the other faculties which man has borrowed from his own experience and attributed to God, must be excluded from the philosophical conception of the absolute, infinite and eternal."

"I can't say much for your first argument," observed Mr N——, "How do you know that the universe is infinite?"

“From the idea of infinity,—where will you fix its limits?”

“I don’t undertake to say; but that does not prove that there are none.”

“Are you not mixing the infinity of the *possible* with the infinity of the *actual*,” I asked. “To the universe which you or I can imagine, no absolute limit could be set, beyond that which we might fix, to carry out our own conceptions. Enlarge its bounds as much as you please, there must always be an endless *possibility* of widening them. Yet somewhere we should certainly set a limit to our creations. Why should not God similarly set a limit to His?”

“And beyond this limit there would be?”

“No-thing.”

“No space?” asked Mr D.

“Not, if by space you mean that which is occupied by real objects. The *actual* of co-existence, or space, is limited, as I conceive, on every side by the *possible*, compared with which it becomes a vanishing point, however vast in itself; thus the idea of space becomes assimilated to that of *succession* or time; where the actual, however long any period of it is assumed to be, is only a vanishing point between the possible past and future.”

“You are making the real world very unreal with your vanishing points,” said Mr N —, “Let us keep to the positive, to what we know.”

“By all means,” I replied, “but what do we positively know, except that we possess conscious wills, which can exercise force and self-control; and that we are acted upon by forces of various kinds, not under our control. The question is what is at the bottom of these forces which act upon our conscious wills? Why should we not suppose them also to be the expression of conscious will?”

“Because they exhibit no signs of consciousness. Science shows us everywhere the reign of law, universal,

impartial, indifferent to mineral or vegetable, animal or human; embracing all, moved by none."

"You describe the apparent conditions of the outward; but are these also the conditions of the inward, of the conscious spirit? This is just the point at issue. Is there no inward response to the will of man, when it throws itself upon the infinite love, from which I assume all Being to arise? Pardon me, if I affirm that there is."

"No doubt there is a response," said Mr D——. "Turn your gaze inward, to the forms of ideal perfection, the Infinite within you, and you may rise superior to the struggles of the Finite without. But this brings me to my second objection. Granting, for a moment, that the universe of actual existing objects may be limited by the infinity of the possible, and may thus give to this infinite a sort of personality, such as we should retain, over against that which our imaginations might produce, still this imaginary world would be a world of dead, unconscious objects, but the actual world culminates in living, conscious objects. So that if we ascribe consciousness to the power by which they are sustained, we get it twice over. Your God must be conscious of a consciousness distinct from his own consciousness, and yet entirely dependent on his conscious will. Surely this is absurd?"

"To weigh your objection fairly we must first consider in what consciousness consists."

"If you want to know what the consciousness of the real world depends on," interposed Mr N——, "science has pretty well settled that question to be the perception of the molecular movements of our nerves. All sensations resolve themselves into that."

"Add to this perceptive power a constructive, active will; the capacity of originating and combining movements in these nerves, and putting together the movements affecting them from without into groups, which then we can at pleasure pull to pieces, and compare

and rearrange the materials composing them—a variety of emotions urging the will to act in this or that way by the stimuli of pleasure or pain—and certain principles, such as the desire for truth, for harmony, and love, which serve as guides in these acts ; and I think we shall have a tolerably complete account of consciousness.”

“ I allow that,” said Mr D——.

“ Then why may we not imagine ourselves to bestow on any of our imaginary creatures these powers without identifying the consciousness involved in their use with our consciousness of what the powers are in themselves ?”

“ But where is there left in your description any room for that intercourse which you assume as possible between the individual and the Universal Being ?”

“ In the governing power which guides the complex machinery of what we call ourselves, and rests, I think, upon an external power, on whom it may or may not lean.”

“ But is this governing power distinct from the desire for truth, harmony, and love ?”

“ No, I hold it to be identical with those desires, which form a sort of inner sense—a channel whereby the Being by whom we are sustained can act upon us from within, as He acts upon us from without, through our senses : disclosing to us His operations in the one case, and drawing us to Himself in the other.”

“ Something, I suppose, as Aristotle imagined God to act on the world generally without being acted upon.”

“ Yes, barring the not being acted on.”

“ How acted on ?” asked Mr N——.

“ Much as a wise and kind father is acted on by the sorrows and difficulties of his children if they turn to him for support and guidance, and who gives to them his sympathy and counsel.”

“ Ay, there we have it,” exclaimed Mr N——; “ that’s just what I feared we should come to at bottom. God-counsel, God-guidance—the root of all fanaticism—when we take our own likings and dislikings, our fancies, and impulses for the teachings of God’s wisdom.”

"But if this were so, as no doubt has often been the case, why should the result be worse than if we take our own likings and dislikings, our fancies and impulses, as the rules of our conduct?"

"Because you cease to judge them? God's teaching is not to be questioned."

"And is passion clear-sighted? are caprice and impulse ready to allow themselves to be questioned? Grant all you can say of the superstitious folly, the ungrounded assumption of infallibility, which often disfigures the opinions of conscientiously pious folk, is it of no value that they *are* conscientious? that they endeavour to guide their conduct by *some* rule? nay, that the rule which they choose is the supposed will of One whom they think of as perfectly just, good, pure, and unselfish."

"No doubt," said Mr D——, "it is of great value. All excellence depends on the apprehension of the ideal, and religion is the form under which the reason, semi-conscious of its own divine nature, presents to itself the idea of moral goodness—the highest of all ideas. But the instrument by which we apprehend the ideal is, thought. To suppose that God will open the world of ideas to us by any means other than our own meditations, is to pave the way for every sort of delusion. It is to make God think for us—a notion which I should have supposed quite opposed to your views."

"You judge me truly there. The aid which I conceive that man receives from God is not counsel so much as force. It resembles the power of seeing rather than that of correctly interpreting what may be seen; it is strength to control impulse, not the decision where and when that strength shall be employed."

"And this strength to control impulse, do you deny it to man as a natural possession?"

"By no means; but, like our other natural gifts, it must grow if it is not to decay; and for its healthy growth it needs two things, culture, and an atmosphere suited to it. We may cultivate it by meditation: but for the atmosphere we need communion with God."

‘But how can men have communion with God,’ said Mr N——, “if their heads are full of all kinds of false, nonsensical notions about Him, and the universe?”

“As a child may have communion with a father who loves it, and whom it trusts and loves, though it may have very mistaken notions about his fortune, influence, social position, or plans and objects in life. It is the property of loving will to penetrate beneath all the complications of the outer world to its vital principle, where the mistakes of our intelligence vanish into insignificance.”

“That is somewhat strange doctrine,” said Mr D—— “from clerical lips. When has your church ceased to teach that ‘whosoever would be saved’ must *think* aright, that is, as she teaches?”

“And when has philosophy ceased to protest against the intolerance involved in such a doctrine?”

“But philosophy has never been indifferent to truth?”

“Nor am I. Indifference to truth is one of the most fatal of errors, for it is indifference to one of the noblest principles of our nature; but indifference to truth, and error in our judgment of what is true are very different things.”

“But,” said Mr N——, “to pray to beings who have no power to help us, if they exist at all, to angels, and saints, and the virgin Mary, or to a piece of bread which the priest declares to be God, must be sheer waste of breath; yet the Catholic gets his answers to prayer, according to his own account, as fully as you do. Nay, his books of devotion are fuller, I take it, of what you call ‘communion with God,’ than Protestant ones.”

“And, for influence on his life,” added Mr D——, “his devotion is no way inferior to yours. Are not your Anglo-Catholics now beginning to walk, with unequal steps, in the paths which monks and nuns have trod for centuries before you?”

“Granted,” I replied, “but what then? If our com-

munion with God depends not on the correctness of our judgments, but on the action of our wills, these diversities of opinion can not materially tell on it. Angel, saint, eucharistic sacrifice, virgin-mother, what are they but words? If the thing signified beneath them all be substantially the same, what matters the name? Prayer is not incantation. Whether it is addressed to God or the Lord, Theos, Deus, Jahve, Elohim, or Allah, is immaterial to its efficacy."

"You seem about to land us," said Mr N——, "in Pope's—

'Father of all, in every age,  
By every name adored,  
By saint, by savage, or by sage,  
Jehovah, Jove, or Lord.'

"Not quite. My position is only, that communion with God depends on the degree of harmony subsisting between the will of God, and that of man, and the sympathy of God with the will which turns to Him; and that this sympathy is no more destroyed by the mistakes which men may make about the Divine nature, than the sympathy of a father with the love of his child is destroyed by the mistakes of the child as to his fortune, influence, or objects in life."

"But," said Mr D——, "the Catholic idea of the intercession of the saints for their favourites is fatal to morality."

"No doubt it may be, if the saint is looked on as a good, easy fellow, who will put up with what God would not tolerate, and use his Court influence to get his favourites into heaven. But, when this is so, the case is out of my rule. We pass from faults of judgment to faults of will. The father who smiles at his son's blunders, will whip him if he tells lies."

"Well, Rector," interposed Mr N——, "you have turned one of the stiffest obstacles in the way of the belief, in a direct divine intercourse with men—the infinite quantity of nonsense that men have believed



about God. If God acts only on the wills of men, and only when they turn to Him, as you suppose, this nonsense may be carried to the credit of human stupidity, and that is equal to meeting any amount of drafts upon it."

"To me there is a much greater obstacle," added Mr D——, "in the untenableness of the conception of a divine will, distinct from its manifestations in the universe which it sustains. The Christian God, governing all things from His especial dwelling-place 'above,' whatever that may mean; directing them by His word, which orthodox divines please themselves by identifying with the so-called laws of nature, as if nature were a conquered province, governed by deputy according to a set of rules imposed by the conqueror: to me, excuse my bluntness, this God is the absurdest, and most irrational of beings.

'Was wär, ein Gott der nur von aussen stiesse,  
Im Kreis das All am Finge laufen liesses?'\*"

"But the Christian faith does not involve the belief in such a being," I replied, "at least I have no such faith. I admit fully the force of Goethe's words. God is to me as essentially immanent in the world upheld by Him, as He is distinct from it by His consciousness, and transcendent to every finite manifestation of Himself in wisdom and moral perfection."

"Where can we place such a Deity?" asked Mr D——, "unless in your region of infinite possibility? What room is left for this infinitely perfect will within the universe of finite beings, without overlaying and stifling them? And how are progress and development conceivable if we begin with perfection?"

"Is it not a principle of all ideal philosophy that the idea of God transcends space and time?"

"The idea certainly; but you are dealing with its manifestation, with a God who works in and upholds

\* Goethe. What sort of God would he be who should only push from without, should let the All run round his finger?

the universe. We come to my third objection: the inapplicability to the Divine Being of those notions taken from our human nature, of which will is one. You have likened the Divine action to the process by which we can produce within our brains geometrical forms. Now the power of will thus exercised by us may be conceived to reside in our brains, and to embrace the sensible elements on which it acts, and from which it seems to be distinct. But how can such a distinction be made in the Divine power? Assume it to be *within* these sensible elements, how does it differ from them? Assume it to be *without* them, how does it sustain them?"

"I imagine literally, by embracing them. Finite existences are to me like corks—excuse so coarse a likeness—each floating in an elemental ocean of power—each possessing its own measure of force, physical or spiritual, drawn from the inexhaustible source of Being around it, and distinguished from that source in two ways: *first*, by the specific character assigned to it; *secondly*, by its local boundary."

"I think science may help you there," said Mr N——. "If you want a dwelling-place for this inexhaustible power she offers you the æther. The notion would make God literally 'robe Himself in light.'"

"Thanks for the suggestion," I replied. "It is an idea which has often occurred to me, especially since I heard of Professor Challis' resolution of the force of attraction, that marvel of marvels, into the reaction of the pressure of æthereal waves, originating in the ceaseless motion of the atoms or centres of material action, which are thus held together in the endless variety of combinations disclosed to us by chemistry. Now assume this notion to be true, does it not give us just such a transcendant, yet ever present conscious source of all sensible power, as we want, in order to substitute the possibility of reasonable theories of the existing phenomena, in place of the hopeless mysteriousness of pantheistic assumptions?"

“Mystery,” replied Mr D——, “may well hang over the origin of finite existence. What can you say of it, after all, more than that it is a mode of the infinite—the manifestation under the conditions of co-existence, and succession, of that which is omnipresent and eternal, and must therefore be essentially different from its manifestations?”

“We can form no imagination of the origin of an eternal action, I admit; but it does not follow that we cannot truly imagine the nature of this action. The error of modern Pantheism seems to me to lie in overlooking this distinction. Since the breakdown of the great systems, by which the successors of Kant tried to show how the Eternal Subject-Object could utter itself in the actual world, they seem to have taken refuge in the unfathomable, and build their philosophy on negations. Because eternity and infinity are inconceivable as positive realities, therefore they assume that we can form no positive conception about that which is infinite and eternal, though it is always present with us. Because the self-existent must be essentially different, *quâ* its self-existence, from all that exists through its action, therefore they assert that no qualities predicable of the latter can in any sense be attributed to the former. Intelligent will, for instance, they deny to God as distinct from the will and intelligence of the finite creature, because the will of God cannot be supposed to vary like that of man, or to limit itself to final ends; as if reason were essentially variable, and will could not understand its own action unless its operations changed; and this they do without in any way explaining how will and intelligence can emerge from that which is will-less and unintelligent. And yet they present to us this inconceivable Being as an object of intellectual love and adoration.”

“I think you are quite right there, Rector,” said Mr M——; “I cannot, for the life of me, make out what my friend D——’s religious philosophy rests on. Tell

us that we can know nothing about essence; that our knowledge is limited to phenomena and their laws; you have an intelligible system at all events. I don't assert that it is true. Or deduce the phenomena from your essence, as Schelling and Hegel, I understand tried to do, and I can test the value of your deductions. But to assert that you know what the Deity essentially is, and attribute to Him all conceivable perfections, provided always that they are taken, one and all, in an inconceivable sense, which appears to me to be D——'s method, is to give me words instead of things. It is an insult to common sense."

"The question," replied Mr D——, "is whether there is not a sense higher than common sense, which finds its satisfaction in this process. But, apart from that, do we not lose the most ennobling conception of humanity—the idea of development and progress—while we are seeking for a reasonable explanation of the processes of life and thought, which after all is not forthcoming?"

"The ideas of progress and development are not excluded," I answered, "by the reference of all being to the action of a conscious loving will distinct from that which is thus developed. The material universe, within which alone progress and development can be looked for, is as the 'small dust of the balance' compared with the vastness of its æthereal surroundings. It lies in them, I conceive, as an ever-moving, changing deposit, invariable only in its ultimate elementary forms. Universes may begin in nebulous mist, out of which suns and planets may aggregate and separate. Life, on these centres of local existence, may begin by the formation of 'protoplasm,' and build itself up, through 'natural and sexual selection,' into an endless diversity of living forms, such as enrich our planet. Moral consciousness may have sprung from the family and social instincts, purified and enlarged by imagination and reflection, till they are converted into

truths of the reason. But why not suppose, around and pervading these centres of progressive development, an eternal reason ever present—a loving, conscious will which realises its own harmony through the diversities of force derived from itself, and supplies to the sense of reverence and instinct of worship inherent in man an adequate object?"

"There is a difficulty in the way of that supposition which you do not meet," said Mr D——. "You have adduced the material universe to make the idea of personality conceivable in respect to God, assuming this universe to be limited, because you argue that God may be thought of as a distinct person, inasmuch as His will is distinguishable from the finite reality willed by it. But if this reality is such an infinitesimal feature of the Divine action, as must be assumed on your present argument, the foundation of your reasoning in regard to the Divine personality appears to slip away. Your God would be conscious of himself as a person only here and there, in minute spots and patches within the endless vastness of His impersonal being."

"I agree that the foundation of the idea of a Divine personality must be sought for deeper, where it may, I think, be found. The world around us displays a three-fold action. In Nature we find a double manifestation—of elemental force, and organising wisdom which uses this force as means to its own ends. Man has in himself, as I consider, evidence of the presence of a communicating sympathy and love. Each of these powers has a distinct species of work, limited by and limiting the operation of that belonging to the others. These three hypostases, to use the consecrated expression, carry the notion of personal distinction into the eternal unity of the Divine essence, far beyond dependence on its realization in the local action of any material bodies."

"You talk of an 'organizing wisdom,' said Mr

D—, “displayed in living beings, as if it were certain that the principle of life is not itself a modification of the powers with which it seems thus to deal, mysteriously evolved in the continuous order of changes which constitute the development of what we call Nature. We fix limits to the capabilities of these powers by the extent of our knowledge, in other words, by the vastness of our ignorance; but have not our chemists already begun to break down the ‘hard and fast line’ between chemical and organic action? Have they not built up themselves, out of the so-called primitive elements, a host of substances identical with those which living beings produce? Where shall we set a limit to this action? Why may not the old dream of the alchemists come true some day, and life itself, in some of its lowest forms, appear as the result of some combination of chemical actions effected in our laboratories?”

“And if it did do so,” I replied, “would not this be a result of intelligent wisdom, of a profound knowledge of the properties of the elemental bodies, applied by a being who had learnt how to use them as the means to his consciously determined ends? How could the appearance of a living substance under such conditions be any argument against the position, that these elemental bodies cannot give rise to organized beings without some superadded intelligent action?”

“The Rector has hit you there,” said Mr N—. “You will be driven to your unintelligent intelligence—the intelligence which is not intelligent of what it does—and that’s a ground where I beg to be excused from following you.”

“We come to mystery, no doubt,” replied Mr D—, “but does Mr P—’s alleged explanation do anything more?”

“Certainly, until we can show *how* the intelligent application of such powers as we can distinctly conceive may give rise to what we find existing, we must remain

in the twilight of mystery. But we have always some hope of light coming, while I cannot see the slightest prospect of it, if we set out by denying conscious intelligence to the power from which conscious intelligence arises."

"And until *you* can show how such a result is possible, I don't see what right you have to call your system more reasonable than P——'s," said Mr N——.

"While unquestionably it is less satisfactory to our emotional nature," I added.

"Well!" replied Mr D——, "I own you have the advantage there, so long as we do not look too closely into the action of the living power in nature. But what shall we say to the strife, the pain, the cruelty which meets us everywhere in her creations; the creatures formed to prey upon each other, even to live on other living nay sensitive creatures, by skill as exquisite, adaptation of means to ends as perfect, as any that can be pointed out among the instrumentalities conducive to the happiness of their possessors? Is it not an unmeaning absurdity to call this the action of intelligent love? Nay, is it not inconsistent with the notion of intelligent design at all, to form one creature with a set of faculties specially adapted for its preservation, and at the same time to form another, with another set of faculties specially adapted to destroy what constitutes the first?"

"Yet you admit that the power which acts thus tends to, and culminates in, the production of intelligent design, and self-sacrificing love?"

"Yes, in the creatures fitted to embody it."

"And, surely, it cannot give rise to that which is inconsistent with its own essence?"

As Mr D—— did not reply to this remark, I continued, "That we should use this action in nature to qualify the notions of intelligence and love derived only from ourselves I quite admit. To do so may tend, I think, to make our love more genuine, by becoming

less sentimental, and our notions of intelligent action more profound, by seeing ends beyond ends, wheels within wheels. We may learn to be more modest and less exacting. But I see no reason in it for denying that the capacity for sympathy, which we find in the human has its eternal root in the Divine. Whence does it come otherwise?"

"Of course, this capacity like every other capacity must come out of the Infinite," said Mr D——. "The question is, does it exist as sympathy till it appears in the Finite? May it not be like our sensations of colours and sounds, which certainly do not exist, as *colours* or *sounds*, except in our organisms, whatever sources of them there may be in the objects which act upon us?"

"I much question that theory of the non-existence of colours or sounds out of ourselves," interposed Mr N——. "No doubt the perceptions are in our bodies; but what is perceived? Certain molecules vibrating at certain rates; that's all I take it. And what gives rise to these perceptions? Certain other molecules vibrating at similar rates. I call the perception of the first set of vibrations, by a particular name, say blueness. Why am I not justified in asserting,—all bodies which have this rate of vibration possess blueness as an inherent quality?"

"How can you perceive blueness or any other colour without light?" asked Mr D——.

"My perception is one thing, and the thing to be perceived is another," replied Mr N——. "But when it is asserted that that of which I am conscious, and that which I assume as the cause of my consciousness are quite unlike, the assertion seems to me opposed to the ascertained facts: On the contrary we have good reason for supposing that the two things are as much alike as it is well possible for two distinct things to be; namely, in both cases similar states of molecular movements. The feeling of pleasure or pain which I may have from the perception is quite another matter."



“And the act of perception requires the intervention of a medium, I observed, so it is I think with spiritual action. The Divine love exists all around us, like the molecular movements which cause colours. But we cannot perceive these colours without the intervention of light, which acts through our nervous constitutions upon our conscious wills. Neither can we perceive the Divine love except through the spirit of love in us, which acts upon our wills, and opens them to the source of spiritual blessings; as the light opens our eyes to the beauty inherent in nature, and the air makes our ears susceptible to her harmonies.”

“You apply your analogy very ingeniously,” said Mr D——, “but to return to your theory: The work of creation is not very equitably apportioned among your triple hypostases. The sphere of power, which must be co-equal with material existence, is immeasurably vaster than the sphere where organized existence is possible, and this again comprehends an ocean of being, within which the objects of communicating love are scarcely discernible.”

“*Rari nantes in gurgite vasto.*” \*

“You are going rather too fast,” said Mr N——. “Our friend, I take it, will tell you, that the all-pervading, all-binding power exerted by the æther, is a manifestation common to all his three hypostases.”

“You hit my notion exactly,” I replied. “Observe also that the *importance* of the work rises in proportion to the limitation of the sphere within which it can be exercised. *Finis coronat opus.* The end limits the means. The living rooms of a family may form but a small portion of a great mansion, but they are the centre to which all its arrangements point. So the manifestation of physical power in the universe, may be justly said to have its final cause in the formation of those spheres of activity upon which organized life can exist :

\* Swimming sparsely in the vast whirlpool.

and the far-stretching slow development of organic life, through its infinitely varied possibilities, must be regarded as having its true end, in the production of beings who can respond to the all-sustaining spirit which communicates with them."

"So that your conception," said Mr D——, "comes to this. Each Divine hypostasis is always and everywhere present within the limits of realised space, either as the patent actor or as the latent mover to the patent action."

"Or as the common source of power, the æther," added Mr N——.

"Yes; I ascribe to that threefold conscious Divine Will, in which I believe, the principle that what comes out last is essentially first, insisted on by Hegel, if I am not mistaken, as the *rationale* of his unconscious development of consciousness. The fruit is potentially present in the stem, which may be said to be what it is in order to produce it."

"We have got into a region of very subtle distinctions," said Mr N——, "but there seems more foundation for them than I thought possible. Certainly there are two forms of power, sensibly working together in the world; the chemical, and the organising, plastic, of which the last seems to use the first and yet to depend upon it. One cannot be less eternal than the other. And if you have the two acting together at the same time, there you have two out of the three hypostases at all events."

"And, as you have suggested," I continued, "all three may be conceived to be eternally present in the æther, which pervades everything, and may be regarded as the manifestation of their joint Being, the sphere of their proper personality."

"Do you allow, then," asked Mr D——, "that the divine action in nature is impersonal?"

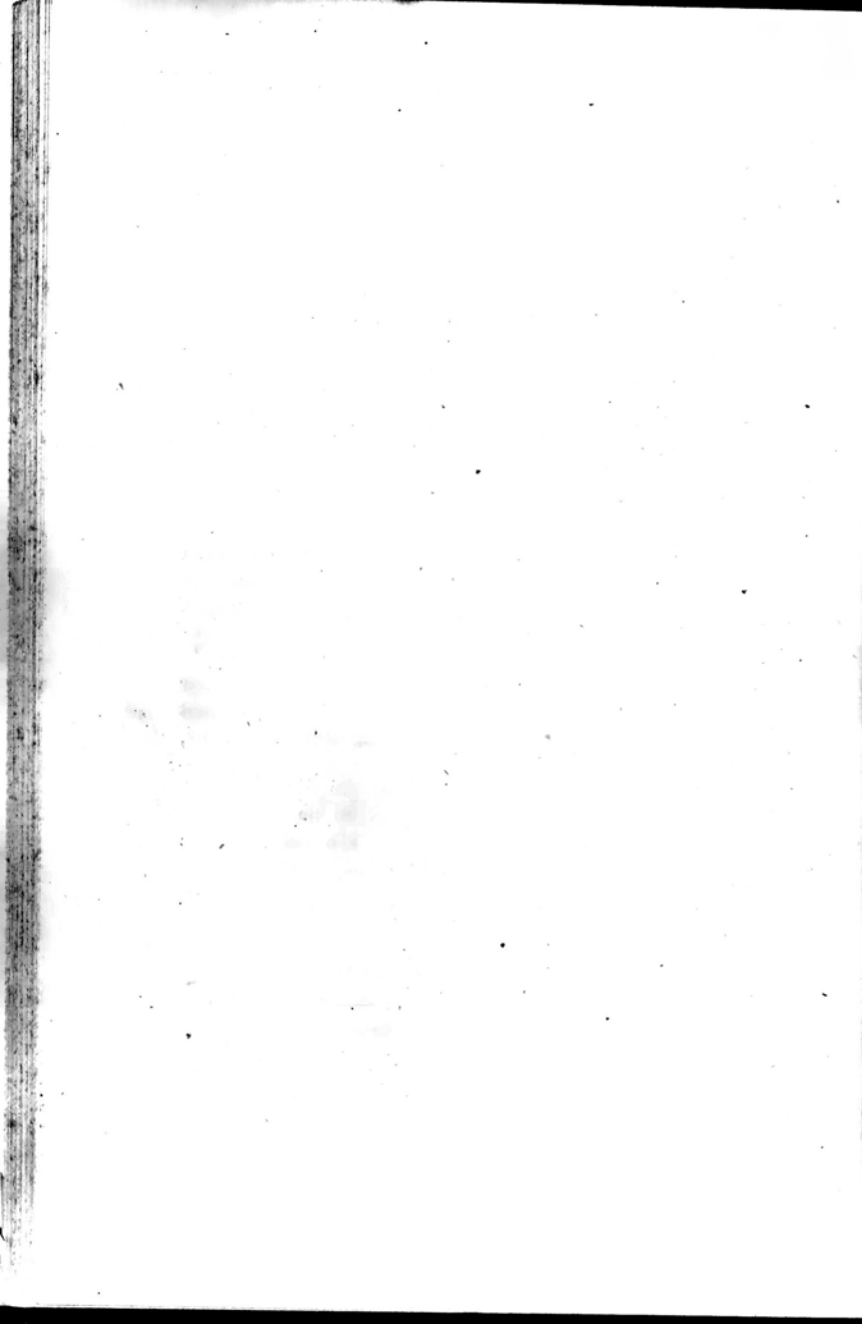
"If by 'personal' is meant that which can consciously control its own action, no doubt no such power shows

itself in chemical forces, nor yet in the lower forms of organised being. How far they may embody some elemental phase of consciousness, out of which, in animals and men, conscious personal life is built up, I do not undertake to determine. My position is only that these forces are agents floating in an ocean of conscious Being, and are not the originators, but only the local limited manifestations of the eternal spiritual Life. The impersonal is to me not less divine than the personal, but rests on it. It is, if I may so venture to call it, the ever-during deposit of an ever-present personality, which is such in virtue of the threefold modes of action belonging to the principle of will."

"Well, I must allow," observed Mr D——, "that your theory goes on all fours. And it has the merit of showing that the universe cannot be the accident of a divine caprice, but is the necessary result of the relation borne by each divine hypostasis to the other two, of which its own action is either the condition or the complement. But it wants a good deal of thinking over."

"And I greatly question," said Mr N——, "whether it is very orthodox, after all. But luncheon is just ready. You will stay and take something with us, won't you?"

"A very orthodox way of ending the discussion at all events," I replied, "but I am not to be frightened by your thunder. My opinions on this subject have more to say in defence of their orthodoxy than you may fancy."



# VIA CATHOLICA:

OR,

## PASSAGES FROM THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF A COUNTRY PARSON.

### PART II.

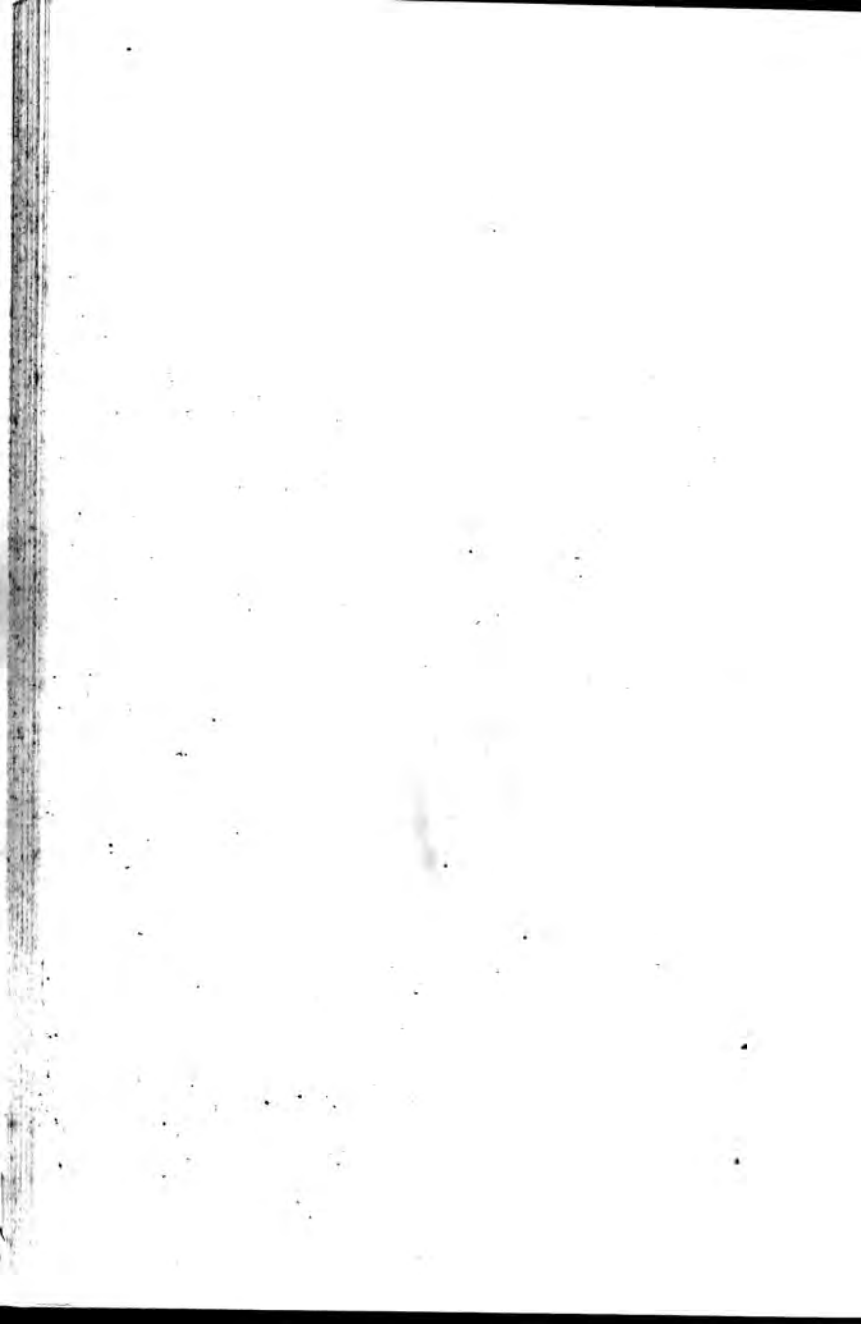
*Ἐπεὶ οὐχ ἱερόμιον οὐδέ βοείην  
Ἀρνύσθην, ἃ τὲ ποσσὶν ἀέθλια γίνεται ἀνδρῶν,  
Ἄλλὰ περὶ ψυχῆς θεῶν Ἐκτορος ἱπποδάμοιο.*

*Il. xxii. 159.*



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PART II.

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## CHAPTER IX.

### FREE SPEECH.

TWO letters this morning; one from my very High Church friend R——, the other from the now somewhat noted Theist W——, old university chums, both of them; but how differently impelled on the voyage of life! Each offering to come to us for a day or two, and just at the same time. “Agnes, my love,” I said, when she had read the letters, “I suppose we must accept them both, but I am rather afraid of, either a very contentious or a very stiff visit, from their widely differing opinions, on questions which both justly consider of the highest importance. With either by himself I should have no fear; but, both together!”

“I don't think, my dear Edward, you need be alarmed, even at that prospect; I have very great faith in your powers of keeping the peace,” she replied, smiling. “I think you possess a charm for getting people to open their hidden stores of thought and belief, without producing an explosion, even when they conflict.”

“Well! we will try at all events. I know that I have a true helpmate in you; and that is half the battle. Woman's indifference to serious talk, or dread of having her cherished idols too roughly handled, are at the bottom of the wretched seclusion from each other's minds, in which so many of us live. But between us, happily, no such barrier exists.”

“No, God be thanked for that,” she answered;

giving me a kiss on the forehead, as she left the room, to make her domestic arrangements for the expected guests.

The anticipated trial came on at dinner, through a question which W——, in his off-handed manner, asked of R——, "Whether he had read Theodore Parker's Discourses on Religion, and what he thought of them?"

R—— appeared staggered by this inquiry; but, after a moment's silence, said, with a glance at Agnes, and the parlour-maid who was standing within easy ear-shot, "I have looked at them, from the noise made about them; and I suppose you can pretty well imagine my judgment. But the subject is scarcely fit for general conversation."

"Do you know, I differ from you there Mr R——," said Agnes. "If you are afraid of talking on the questions which Theodore Parker treats, lest you should annoy me, you may put such fears aside. There is nothing I enjoy more than to listen to learned and able men, if they will open their minds to each other on subjects which really interest them. And what subject can be more interesting than that of the foundation and value of religious belief?"

"I could readily believe that of you, madam, if the conversation tended to show the solidity of the foundation of our holy religion and the weakness of the attacks made on it; but, if I am to discuss Parker's religious views with my friend W——, I am afraid our conversation must be more controversial than edifying."

"But what can be more edifying," I said, "than controversy, if it is carried on as I think I may say, we used to carry it on at Oxford."

"When thought lept out to wed with thought,  
Ere thought was wedded unto speech."

"Ay, those were happy days," replied R—— with a sigh, "when our doubts still rested on a ground of

faith, which we all held to be unshakeable, while now——”

“I, at least, have slipped off, and fallen into deep waters, I suppose that sigh means, and even our host is not quite sure-footed, eh, R——?”

“I cannot jest on such subjects.”

“We must not identify jesting with trifling,” I observed, “a cheerful spirit is one of God’s greatest and best gifts; and to a cheerful spirit a jest is always welcome.”

“You speak of natural impulses,” replied R——, “and I admit that, to nature, mirth, even on sacred subjects, is always acceptable—nay, perhaps the more acceptable, because the subject is sacred. But when we become alive to the awful magnitude of the interests involved in the question of religious truth; to the fearful consequences which a misplaced jest may have, in disturbing the faith of the ignorant and simple-minded; children, perhaps, or women; one is more disposed to weep than to laugh at them.”

“Well! I am very much of Goldsmith’s mind,” said W——, “that the virtue which always requires a guard is not worth the guarding. I think the faith which can be damaged by a jest is not worth having.”

“I do not like jests on religious matters,” interposed Agnes, “they jar on my feelings; but I cannot agree with you Mr R——, that our faith is more likely to be disturbed by them than that of men. I assure you it is a much tougher plant than you think, if it is allowed to grow freely. But the thoughts and feelings of women are so often thrown back on themselves, by the way in which their spiritual pastors and masters treat religious matters, as a tabooed ground on which no questions are to be admitted, that you should rather wonder their faith can endure at all.”

“I see, madam, you are quite on your husband’s side. Free Discussion has always been his favourite dogma,” replied R——. “Well! that’s as it should be, in one way, at all events.”

"And, if I could make you aware of how much benefit free communication with Edward on religious matters has been to me; how much more solid I feel my faith to be now, than I used to do before I was accustomed to weigh the objections to it, as well as I can, and understand its grounds, I am sure you would say, it is well in every way."

"You look at Mrs P—— as if she were some rare animal," said W——, as R—— did not seem to know what to say to my wife's declaration, "but you may rely on it she is telling you a home truth, 'very necessary for these times.' The days when the clergy could maintain influence by burking discussion are gone, or fast going. They must be prepared to have their most cherished mysteries dragged into daylight, and to stand up for them like men, in the common *melée*, with the weapons of reason and argument, a fair field, and no favour; or their hold on the minds of men, and even women, will soon be lost."

"To me," I interposed, "the denial of the free discussion of religious matters seems to imply, at bottom, a want of faith in God, who cannot wish us not to employ our reason on subjects which peculiarly call for the exercise of its highest powers, and it is inconsistent with the instinct and early habits of the Church. To 'give a reason for the faith that is in us,' is a venerable Christian precept, and involves the right of those to whom the reason is given to weigh it fairly, otherwise it would be not a reason but a dictum."

"In the beginning of the Church," said R——, "reasoning was in its proper place. Old errors had to be confuted, and the true faith established, defined, and made clear to men's minds. But when this had been done, when the questions, at first allowable, and even necessary, had been settled, what once had been honest inquiry turned, I conceive, into perverse doubt; the questioner was transformed into the heretic."

"No doubt," I replied, "when the Church had chosen

an opinion, the position of those who did not accept her choice, but chose for themselves, was altered, but when you say 'questions were settled,' by what means do you consider this settlement to have been effected?"

"By the decision of the majority of the bishops, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit."

"Is not that something like Napoleon's Providence, which is always on the side of the strongest and best combined battalions? Why should we suppose any special guidance to be given to part of a body of men, of whom, so far as we know, all were equally desirous of coming to the truth, rather than to another part?"

"How could it be possible to arrive at any certainty of decision, if the voice of the majority is not to be accepted as the true exponent of the revealed Truth?"

"That depends on what 'Revelation' is. If it is a collection of statements forming a course of absolute knowledge, communicated to a few only, but which all others are bound to accept, I allow that the expedient of settling any doubts by trials of strength, by the legal method of majorities, is the most suitable; but if Revelation is a continuous process, the manifestation by God of His Being and Nature to man, through facts offered to man's reason, whence it may form its own judgments, arriving at truth by continual re-examination, and the rejection of whatever will not bear this examining, the notion of 'settling' dogmas by votes must be a fatal mistake, the exclusion of the very means to which God has attached the discovery of what is true, namely, free discussion."

"But if the teachings of the Church are to be perpetually re-examined afresh, 'without fear and without favour,' as I suppose you would urge, what progress could be made? Orthodoxy would have to take for her motto the apostolic reproach to the heretics, she would be 'ever learning, and never able to come to a knowledge of the Truth.'"

"Yet, is not this the usual method of learning, the

way in which God teaches us in all that is called Science?" asked Agnes. "And have not men got to a great deal of truth by means of it? And then, is it not likely that God would have us use the same method for getting to truth in other things, those which concern man's spiritual life?"

"Bravo, Mrs P——," said W——, "your illustration is excellent. You should really take a lesson from scientific methods, R——. Here we are, 'ever learning,' no doubt, and always ready to allow even first principles to be called in question if any defect can be pointed out in our statement of them, but so far from 'never coming to a knowledge of the Truth,' never reaching any views which appear the more solid the more they are examined, until they are taken for granted without further questioning, that we are attaining to such conceptions more and more fully and clearly every year, on every subject fairly submitted to the method. It is only in your musty, theological apartment, where you won't let the air and light penetrate freely, that there is such a fungoid growth of hopelessly conflicting opinions."

"I admit the miserable diversities of error," R—— replied, with a sigh. "When has it not been so? There were, I believe, eighteen shades of the Arian heresy, but the Truth must have been always one and the same."

"No doubt Truth is always one and the same in the same subject-matter," I observed, "the question is, how are we to get at it? Are we *jurare in verba magistri*,\* taking for granted that the right master has been found? or are we not rather to say, 'there is none wise but God,' I look to Him to teach me, and his method of teaching is by leading me to the faithful exercise of the power of reason which He has given me, in examining and trying to apprehend the materials which He brings before me?"

\* To swear by our master's words.

"And you treat the doctrines of the Church as part of these materials?" asked R——.

"Certainly; the progress of thought in the minds of men; the beliefs by which they have been swayed from time to time; the forms of conception in which they have embodied these beliefs; still more the emotions which have found utterance in them, constitute a body of spiritual phenomena, most important to every one who would attain to something like scientific accuracy in his notions of religious progress. We must not assume that all who have been before us were fools or cheats. If we are to get the fruits of science in religious questions, we must follow her method. If we are to derive real instruction from the past we must submit our imaginations to its testimony. We must honestly let it speak for itself, and carefully watch against the temptation to make it say our words for us."

"In short," interposed W——, "we must do exactly the contrary to that which the so-called orthodox commentators on the Bible are always doing. For these interpretations consist, almost entirely, in reading between the lines what is not there; and so making the writers say, what if they were as orthodox as their interpreters they would, or could, or ought to have said. It is the thing that disgusted me with theology—their dishonesty of interpretation."

"Now, Mr W——," said Agnes, "I won't have you pass uncharitable judgments, not even on the absent. I used to be very fond of some of these dishonest interpreters as you call them; and, though I can't take the same pleasure in them now that my eyes are opened to see how far they are, in many cases, from giving a natural interpretation to the words with which they deal, I am sure they did not intend to put a false meaning on them. Look at Scott now. I am certain he was as honest a man as ever lived."

"And as self-important," said W——, "always assuming that his conclusions for the time being, were

not only true to him, but due to the 'Force of Truth' itself to which every one who did not agree with him must wilfully shut his eyes."

"Scott, no doubt, had far too little reverence for the Church," said R——. "In fact, he seems scarcely to have had an inkling of what her true teaching is; but he was profoundly impressed with a sense of the authority and Divine inspiration of Scripture, which is the first step to the Church's teaching. And, as for what W—— calls 'reading between the lines,' can anything be more reasonable if the Scriptures are all the work of one Spirit, who has gradually made known to man 'the deep things of God,' than the supposition that there would be, in the first unfolding of the mysterious scheme, obscure intimations of what was to come? Does not that favourite dream of modern science, so called, the doctrine of the development of one animal out of another, teach us to look for the traces of what was to come in a past where it was not yet perfected?"

"Say rather," replied W——, "to look for an explanation of the present, in a growth to be traced in the past. The modern naturalist does not imagine that a muscle or a bone existed in some ancient animal, not because it was of use to that animal, but because some day or other it would become of use to some more perfect animal. On the contrary, from finding in a living creature the traces of some structure of no use to it, but which apparently was important to the wants of some earlier creature, he says, here is the explanation of the useless parts in the living creature; they are derived from a remote ancestor to whom they were of use. Theology may offer illustrations of a parallel character, but I doubt whether they would be very acceptable to you."

"Perhaps," I observed, "it is scarcely possible to draw a parallel between matters so unlike as are natural development, and the unfolding of revealed truth, if it is revealed in the authoritative manner which our friend



R——, following, I admit, the main current of religious opinion, supposes. But the important question I take to be, whether this supposed authoritative method is God's method or not? All truth except mathematical truths, where we deal only with the creations of our own minds, is revealed. We learn it by using our faculties of perception and reflection, to extract the meaning of materials supplied *to* us. We do not supply the materials from within. But to learn what these materials are able to teach us, we must sift them carefully; turn them over thoroughly, and arrange them in our own minds; and test our combinations with entire freedom, until we produce some that will stand this test without falling to pieces. Now the question is, has God a different method of revealing to man spiritual truths from that through which He reveals to them natural truths?"

"Where are your materials for this spiritual revelation?" asked R——. "You seem to want them."

"In the spiritual nature of man, his impulses, longings, aspirations, conceptions, as I said a little while since."

"Well, if I could assume that man's emotional nature is in its natural state, I might allow that it would furnish materials for a conclusion as to its source. But assuming, as I must do, that it is corrupted by a fall, how can I argue from it?"

"But that," interposed W——, "is the very ground of quarrel of rational religion with what you call orthodoxy. What right have you to assume this fall, and corruption of man's spiritual instincts?"

"I rely on the account in Genesis."

"That is to say, on an anonymous story of creation, which contradicts itself."

"But is borne out by the results, by the whole history of man. Byron is but too true a witness when he says, that 'history with all her volumes vast, hath but one page; first, freedom, and then glory; When

that's past, wealth; vice, corruption; barbarism, at last.' 'The whole creation travaileth in pain together,' as the apostle Paul tells us, 'waiting for the redemption, to wit, the manifestation of the sons of God.'"

"Or, as Schiller words it:—

'Im Herzen redet es laut sich an,  
Zu was Besser'm sind wir geboren.'\*

said I. "And undoubtedly the Church has never rejected that hope. She has always looked forward to a higher state to which God is leading mankind. She tells us that the goal is the attainment of a spirit of reverence and truth, and love. Here, I am confident we all agree. The question between us is, by what road would the Father of our spirits lead us to this goal? Are we to suppose that He educates us to reverence and love by perpetually thwarting our sense of truth?"

"God forbid that I should teach such a blasphemy," replied R——.

"Then is it not certain that free thought, and therefore also free speech, is the very vital air without which the spirit of truth cannot exist? So that if God is to disclose to us His spiritual nature at all, as an object of conscious thought, this must be by means of the conceptions to which we come freely, in searching for an explanation of man's spiritual nature and history, as part of the universe of Being."

"That might be the case if God had not himself given us the explanation."

"My dear friend, excuse me, but are you not arguing in a circle? The explanation which you say God has given to man is contained in human words, embodying human thoughts, which, if we are to benefit by, we must translate into some conceptions intelligible to ourselves. How can we tell that these conceptions are true, that is, correspond to the reality of things, except by freely and honestly trying whether they fit in to all

\* The heart says loudly, We are born for something better.

the facts known to us which bear upon them, and account for these facts?"

"Certainly, we must come to that at bottom. The authority of the Church, her right to teach, rests upon the fact that nothing so well explains the known phenomena of man's spiritual nature, as the supposition that God has set up such a divinely guided body, and would have all men come into it. But upon your view this authority is to be for ever brought into question."

"Because, if not, its claims must be self-contradictory. If the right to teach authoritatively is grounded upon the satisfaction which the credentials of the teacher afford to my sense of truth, it follows that, if any part of the teaching jars with my sense of truth, this must react upon my faith in the credentials. I shall begin to doubt whether I was not mistaken in placing so much confidence in the teacher."

"Would you call in question the credentials of an ambassador, sent to negotiate a peace, because the terms unfolded by him differed from your expectations?"

"No; but if the terms appeared to me unreasonable, I might question whether they truly expressed the intentions of the sender."

"It comes at last to the question of might or right," said W—. "Believe, because your reason is satisfied that what is proposed for your belief is true; or, disbelieve, and be——"

"Condemned as mistaken," interposed Agnes, smiling.

"But with what consequences?"

"Well, Mr R——, shall we say with the consequence of the mortification of having to own that we are mistaken, when we find our errors out? What other consequence would you attribute to mere errors of judgment, which do not affect our wills?"

"Mistaken judgments, my dear madam, may easily lead to wrong acts. St. Paul believed it to be his duty

at one time in his life to persecute the Church, but that did not make the act justifiable."

"But is not that because persecution is always wrong?" asked Agnes, "as it must be very wrong, if free thought is the way by which God would bring men to the knowledge of the truth as it is in Him. Surely you do not think that it would have been wrong in St. Paul to argue, 'Jesus of Nazareth cannot be the true Messiah,' as long as he was convinced that He was not? But to try to force a man whom you cannot convince to say what he does not believe, or to hinder him from stating his honest convictions, seems to me so very self-important and conceited in those who do it; it is such a setting-up of their own opinions, as if they must be true, so very unlike St. James's rule of being 'swift to hear, slow to speak,' or St. Paul's, 'that love is greater than knowledge,' that I cannot think it can be right."

"But, madam, would you leave no doctrine on which the Church is to insist as unquestionably true?"

"I think I should wish the Church to teach that 'to love the Lord our God with all our heart, and soul, and mind, and strength, and to love our neighbour as ourselves,' includes all essential doctrines, and to let all other doctrines take care of themselves. Why should we not believe that so the true ones will come out at last?"

"And in the meantime what are we to do?"

"I should say, follow what appears to us the most true, being ready always to listen to any serious objection to it, because, after all, we may not be quite right, and then the objection may help us to get right."

"But if, among the opinions thus questioned, there should be the question whether the Divine Essence was truly manifested in the person of our Lord or not, can those who believe that it was so manifested treat this belief as indifferent?"

"Oh, no! I do not say they should do that. Of course such a belief can't be indifferent to any body

who really believes in it. I am sure Edward is not the least bit indifferent about it. Only, why did our Lord come? Was it not just in order that through His example and our faith in Him, we might learn to love God thoroughly, and to love our neighbour as ourselves? And if any persons do that, or are trying their very best to do it, must we not think that Christ is pleased with them, and loves them as His true followers, even though they may make mistakes about His nature? And then, ought not we to do the same?"

"I think Mrs P—— has got the best of you there," said W——, "she has gone to the root of the matter. Indifference to truth is one thing, and error of judgment is quite another. 'There is more faith in honest doubt than lies in half the creeds.'"

"Agreed," I said, "if the doubt be free from that self-importance which my wife has well noted as the true sin of persecution. We must not forget that it is as possible for us to pride ourselves on not believing, as on believing, and that the one pride may be as fatal to truth as the other. But there's Jane, who has been peeping in half-a-dozen times to see if we are ready for coffee. Suppose we adjourn to the drawing-room, where Agnes, I dare say, will give us some music."

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## CHAPTER X.

### THE INCARNATE DEITY.

R—— could stay with us only over the next day, which was fully occupied in the morning by an expedition to see —— Abbey, and in the evening by a dinner party of some of our neighbours. No opportunity occurred for

further conversation upon our respective religious convictions; indeed, R—— appeared to avoid the subject. But there was a marked difference in his manner to me from what had been the case at our meeting.

His old, affectionate playfulness returned, and quite thawed the somewhat stiff coldness which he had assumed the first day. To my dear wife's remarks he appeared to listen with peculiar interest, and used the resources of his varied knowledge to draw out her opinions on a variety of subjects, with such a mixture of earnestness and humour that she was quite delighted with him. And, on taking leave, he said, rather to my surprise, "I must put in a claim to a return visit from you and Mrs P——. I cannot tell you how much pleasure this peep at you has caused me. It has opened to me a new world of ideas; but I must make out their latitudes and longitudes a little for myself, before I have any more communication with you about them."

W—— stopped with us longer, and got several times into talk with me on various points of Biblical criticism, seeming, as I saw by his manner, though he did not say so, not a little surprised at the extent to which I concurred with him in my judgment as to the unhistorical character of large sections of the sacred writings, more especially the fourth Gospel, which he had supposed that I must defend, with tooth and nail, from what I had incidentally said about the nature of Christ; but found, to his astonishment, that I agreed essentially with the views of C. F. Bauer about it. To-day, as we were walking up and down in the shade on our lawn, enjoying the fineness of the summer-morning, and chatting on various topics, his feelings at last found a vent.

"I want to have a good talk out with you," he said, "for I own you completely mystify me. I really cannot make out your state of mind. How, with your logical powers, and thorough-going honesty, you can give up the premisses of your Christian theology, and yet stick to its conclusions?"

“ May not this be, because I do not consider that the premisses, which I give up, by which I suppose you mean the infallibility of the Bible, and the notion of any essential difference between the inspiration of its writers, and that of other men, are the necessary premisses of the doctrines about God, and His relations to man, which are commonly supposed to rest upon them ? ”

“ No doubt ; but the marvel to me is what other premisses you can find solid enough to support such conclusions as you draw. Here you were, this morning, talking to your family about the Triune Being of God and the manifestation of the Divine essence in Christ : while yesterday, you admitted to me that you believe the great prop and mainstay of both doctrines, the fourth Gospel (not that I allow it really teaches what the orthodox assert, but that’s by the way), to be, in all probability, the work of some unknown writer, not an apostle or companion of apostles, in the middle of the second century ; and that you questioned whether it contains a line of Christ’s actual words. So that you teach the most astounding faith about God on the testimony of a forger.”

“ I cannot allow the justice of that appellation. Forgery essentially consists in passing off a work under a false name. Now the fourth Gospel is anonymous. When it was accepted as canonical, no doubt the Church ascribed it to the Apostle John, and wonderful stories were told as to how he came to write it ; but, set aside this assumption, of which the first act is the twenty-first chapter, an anonymous appendix, given up by the best critics even those who defend the apostolic origin of the Gospel itself, there is absolutely nothing to point to John the Apostle as the writer. Nay, the celebrated *ὁ ἔγραψε ὡς μεμαρτόρηκε καὶ ἀληθινὴ αὐτοῦ ἐστὶν ἡ μαρτυρία*,\* implies, by its change of tense, that the writer relied on

\* He who saw *hath* borne witness, and his testimony is true, xix. 35.

other testimony than his own senses, and therefore could not be the Apostle, if he is supposed to be the witness appealed to."

"Well, well! I give up the forgery, but anyhow, you allow that the Gospel is a romance, whatever scraps of historical legend may be woven into it?"

"Say, rather, a theological treatise in the form of a biography, the ideal picture of what the life of Christ must have been, according to the conceptions of the writer, if he were what the author of it believed him to be, the *λογός*,\* visible in human form, the *δευτέρος θεός*,† —drawing, indeed, all power and glory from the eternal Father, but the instrument through whom the Father had worked from the beginning; the source of all life, the light of the world."

"But, a Christ essentially drawn from the imagination of the writer?"

"Yes, as the Adam of 'Paradise Lost' is essentially drawn by Milton from his own imagination of what the primal man, according to his conceptions, must have been, and what kind of life he must have led in the Garden of Eden, and, as these conceptions were founded upon an intense study of the scriptural story, so the fourth Gospel is founded, I think, on a most earnest study of the synoptics."

"Whom, yet, the writer has no scruple at all in contradicting and supplementing, *ad libitum*."

"Certainly; because, as I conceive, he was quite aware that they were only incorporated traditions, and believed that the narrators did not describe the true Jesus, as he *must* have shown himself in acts and discourses, of which they contain only hints; one saying in Matthew and Luke,‡ alone preserving the single trace of what Jesus, he thought, had without doubt unfolded in long discourses; and the simple words of

\* Word.

† Second God.

‡ Matt. xi., 27; Luke x., 22.



institution ascribed to the last supper, intimating a doctrine of spiritual relation between the eternal Lamb of God, and those who feed on His divine body and blood, which Christ *must* have fully explained on some appropriate occasion."

"Well! suppose all that taken for granted, not that it is not ingenious and interesting, but it turns me away from the point I am driving at; anyhow, you allow that we have not got in this Gospel any acts or sayings of Jesus about himself which can be relied on as historically attested?"

"Yes."

"And you give up any claim in the writer to supernatural information?"

"Admitted."

"Then of what possible value *can* the Gospel be to you?"

"As the embodiment, in a form suited to the age when it was written, of an idea which I conceive that Christ appeared on earth in order to plant among mankind."

"What! the idea that the infinite, passionless, all-embracing, all-powerful, self-existing Deity can be imprisoned in the finite form of a tender-hearted, excitable, somewhat pretentious, feeble, mortal? What but blind superstition can be produced by the growth of such an idea?"

"There has been produced, *first*, a society which swallowed up the religions sustained by the most powerful of all known civil organizations, and *then* a group of states, which have given birth to a race of the most clear-sighted and least superstitious thinkers whom the earth has ever beheld; and I conceive very much because they have grown up under the influence of the great idea embodied in the person of Christ, that *power* is less divine than *love*, an idea carrying with it the faith that the universe arises from the action of a reasonable, and therefore intelligible, will."

"God forbid that I should contest the importance of

those ideas ; but what they have to do with a belief in the divine personality of Jesus of Nazareth, passes my apprehension.”)

“Because you look at them from without, as conceptions presented to your reflection to be analysed and traced out in their consequences, rather than from within, as a working power. To think of God as the principle of Love is an affair of the Intellect.

‘Nenn es denn was du willst,  
Nenn's Gluck ! Herz ! Liebe ! Gott.  
Ich habe keinen Namen  
Dafür, Gefühl ist alles.’\* \*

To be conscious of Him as a loving, purifying, strengthening will, present with our wills, requires us to realise God as a person distinct from our own personality, and to do this, we need the faith in a Divine person manifested among us.

“I cannot admit that. Look at the Jews. Do not their psalms glow with an intense trust in, and love to, God as a personal ruler, guide, and friend of the nation, and every member of it who trusted in Him? Yet, they had no notion of the possibility of his living among them as a man.”

“No doubt that is true; but the Jehovah of the Jews, though nominally the ruler of the whole earth, was practically to them the special God of their nation, caring for them as He did not care for any other. The principle of personal distinction was thus ingrained in their conception of God. The Deity who cared for the Jews more than for the heathen, who had no knowledge of his laws, would naturally care for the Jews who observed those laws more than for the Jews who did not observe them. They looked up to Him, therefore, as their special friend and protector, who would listen to their requests, and shower blessings on them individually. As men lose this geographical

\* “Call it as you will ; call it Happiness, Heart, Love, God. I have no name for it ; Feeling is all.”—*Faust*.

and ethnographical limitation to the Divine action; they need a wider and deeper foundation for a living faith in the love of God to them individually. We require to import the notion of personal limitation into the very essence of the Deity, if religious trust is not to change into the conception of moral law. Now, this want the idea of the Incarnation supplies."

"Well, I allow that your Deity is limited enough, if he can squeeze his infinity into the skull of one man, but that such a monstrous assumption,—excuse my outspoken epithet—can be needed as a foundation for trust in the 'Love of God;' His watchful care over every living creature; His response to the prayer of those who call on Him earnestly, as the Father of their spirits,—the notion seems to me like building a pyramid on a sandbank in order to give it stability."

"But build it on as solid a rock as you please, your pyramid will be unstable if you construct it with its point downwards."

"Your proposition is incontestable; but how is my pyramid so built? What broader foundation can you find for trust in the personal Being of God than our consciousness of His action on our souls?"

"None certainly: but that is the rock, not the building. On this rock you rear, and must rear, a building of conceptions about the Being in whom you trust, which will stand the analysis of your intellect. There's where I think your Theism fails. It seems to me *illogical*, in assuming love to be possible without distinction, and *unscientific*, in resting on the subjective internal evidence of the divine presence alone, to the neglect of the external, objective, furnished by the spiritual history of mankind."

"You open a wide field for discussion. Let us take the logical part first. You say love is not conceivable without distinction,—that is, I take it, if we do not love some being other than ourselves, our love would be only self-love, which is not love at all."

"Allowed."

"But then you do not identify man with God? Surely there is distinction enough."

"No doubt, if you assume that the creature stands over against the Creator, as a universe of objects, which the external creative essence contemplates while he sustains them, you get a distinction between the two. The conscious Creator is limited by the creation of which he is conscious, and so may be regarded as a person."

"And, as a conscious person, may love that of which He is conscious?"

"Certainly. But if God can thus consciously distinguish His work from Himself, the principle of distinction must belong to His essence. He cannot be that absolute unity which the Theists assume. You must either make the matter of the universe an eternal opposite to God, or you must admit that God is present in it 'otherwise' than as he is in Himself."

"So that you get a God 'the other of Himself,' as Hegel might say. I suppose this is your Incarnate Deity?"

"Not quite so fast, if you please. I have got only as far as this. The conception of an immanent conscious Creator,—you don't want a God out of the universe I suppose?"

"God forbid."

"Well, then, the conception of an immanent conscious Creator, since it excludes duality, else you have at best only an architect, not a creator, implies the notion of 'otherness' as inherent in the Divine Essence. If God is a conscious will, the universe must be 'other' than God."

"Go on."

"But the universe, if by it we mean only the visible, tangible, sensible utterances of force, is, with all its vastness, but a collection of motes in the infinity of imaginable space, and an ever-changing phantasmagoria in the infinity of imaginable time. It cannot satisfy the eternal principle of 'otherness' which comes out in

it. So that this principle must have a deeper root within the Divine Essence."

"I see you are driving me to your theological hypotheses; but take care that you do not lose your way in a mist of unreality. Granting that the unity of the Divine Being may mysteriously involve a principle of 'otherness,' manifested in the universe yet not one with this essence, how are we to penetrate beneath this manifestation to its root in the Eternal?"

"By the help of that power through which we get the notion of the Eternal, the power of will. Take will in the purest expression of it known to us, in the action of our own imaginations, you will find it essentially *double*; *first*, a will producing means; and *secondly*, a will to use these means 'for ends distinct from themselves.'"

"Means? What *means* can our imaginative wills supply to themselves? *Ends*, I allow, they can furnish in abundance, but for the means of accomplishing those ends we must rely on nature."

"No doubt, we must, if we want to carry our action beyond the kingdom of our own brains, but within that realm, the same distinction exists. Suppose you imagine a triangle, that is the figure formed by three straight lines, the tracks left by three moving points, which intersect, and so mutually limit each other. Here you have a primitive conception, an original creation of your imagination, possessing a number of definite properties, which you can study in themselves without using them for any purpose whatever. But you need not stop there. When you have learnt what the properties of your triangle are, you may *use* them as a means of making clear to yourself another set of properties arising from their connection with other mental constructions, squares, circles, &c., &c., till you build up the science of geometry."

"I go with you so far."

"Now, this *double* action of our wills is, in us *successive*. We form our triangle in imagination first, then

we study its properties; helping ourselves generally by making a drawing of it, so as to present it to our mind through our senses; and lastly, we use it by bringing it into connection with some other creation of our imaginations, commonly by a similar help from our senses. But to the eternal will of God this double action must be concomitant, as we see it in nature."

"In nature?"

"Yes, in the combination within every organized structure; 1st, of the *power* expressed in the chemical elements of which the organic structure consists, and on which it depends for the possibility of being at all, and, apparently, for all the peculiar qualities characteristic of it; and 2ndly, of an ordering *wisdom*, which unites these elemental powers in a way in which they are incapable of uniting by their own natures only, so far as we can discover, and so uses them to effect its own ends, in producing the organizations which without it would remain mere unrealized possibilities."

"And this organizing faculty is your *δευτέρος θεός*?\* Well, I allow you make out a fair case for its real existence, but, after all, you have not got over the difficulty you have raised. Your organizing power acts only on the material element. If this is a partial local inadequate manifestation of the Divine in itself, can it change its character by being organized?"

"No; but it is converted into a mere utterance of the Divine Being, the outward manifestation of an inward personality, but not its condition. The will displayed in the production of means, and the will displayed in their use, with the ideas governing their action, and the common spirit uniting them to each other exist, according to my conception, in the Deity as eternal personal relations, independently of the modes in which they are manifested in the universe. And these modes may, or may not involve conscious person-

\* Second God.

ality. For the most part, it seems that they do not. The chemical elements, for instance, marvellous as are their adaptabilities to varied forms of being, do not appear to have any consciousness of what they do. The living principle in the plant seems only to dream, as Oken says. The will manifested in creation does not awake to consciousness till we reach the animal, and then has to rub its eyes for a long time before it begins to see clearly in man. But the personal principle in God is wholly unaffected by all this impersonality in its manifestations, if my theory is true; and, after all, this is only what our own conscious action supplies a type of. Neither our primitive geometrical constructions, nor any combinations of them, display consciousness. This is confined to ourselves."

"You make out a plausible case for the three in one, or at least for the second hypostasis, which, I suppose, involves the third. But I fear that your notions are not very orthodox."

"They do not rest on texts or decisions of councils certainly, but they are more orthodox than you may fancy. Dante, the pupil of Thomas Aquinas, whose orthodoxy no one questions, recognizes the same three-fold distinction. You remember, no doubt, the melancholy grandeur of his—

Fecemi la divina Potestate,  
La somma Sapienza, ed il primo Amore.\*

There you have Power as the distinguishing attribute of the Father, Wisdom, as that of the Son, and Love, as that of the communicating Spirit, though, of course, neither is the Father supposed to be destitute of wisdom, nor the Son of power, nor are either power or wisdom denied to the Spirit; so in Nature there must be a force belonging to the organizing power, but the wisdom shown in the organization is what strikes us,

\* *Inferno* III. 5. The Divine power, the Supreme wisdom, and the Primal love made me [Hell].

and there must be a profound wisdom latent in the chemical elements, which makes them adaptable to be organized, but that which is most striking in them is, not their wisdom, but the power displayed in their action, the so-called attractions or repulsions which they exhibit. Again, in the dealings of God with our spirits, neither power nor wisdom, but love, is especially manifest: His infinite patience, His sympathy with every variety of character, so that it be genuine; His readiness to answer every earnest aspiration of our hearts to Him, whatever their intellectual standing-point, orthodox or unorthodox, Christian, or Mahometan, or Brahmin, or Buddhist, or of whatever other creed, provided only they come to the Divine Father in the true spirit of brotherhood yet, doubtless, this 'primal love' is also the 'supremest wisdom' and 'divinest power.'\*"

"And you would have men carry out this universal sympathy, recognizing, say, Keshub Chunder Sen, or myself, not only *sub specie amici sed sub specie ani-*

\* The analogy of the two-fold action of our wills, adduced here to illustrate the conception of the Triune Being of God, must not be confused with those of the tripartite nature of man, as body, soul, and spirit, or of the triple energies of the human mind, as intelligence, love, and will, or the three-fold qualities of the sun, its substance, light, and heat, which a recent critic of Canon Liddon's Bampton Lectures justly pronounces to be pointless. Examination of Canon Liddon's Bampton Lectures, p. 318. In these analogies the illustration is taken from *distinct properties* belonging to the same object, in the action of the will adduced by me, it is drawn from *distinct* though concomitant *spheres of action* belonging to the same faculty; that faculty being one whose action extends over the whole range of existence known to us; the physical, the intellectual, and the moral; while its *whole action* is exhausted by the three-fold division of its activity into—1st, the original constructive act of conception; 2nd, the use of that which is so constructed for further ends; and, 3rd, the determination of the motive or spirit, by which these energies are regulated.



*malis religiosi*,\* as worshippers of the true God, though you cannot call us brethren in Christ?"

"Yes; I invert the conclusions commonly drawn from the fourth Gospel. To me, whoever comes sincerely to the Father, recognizing Him to be what He really is, comes to Him through Christ, though he may not know it, for he comes in that spirit in which Christ would have him come, and there whither Christ would draw him. The conception of God as a triune Being, in whom creative power, organizing wisdom, and communicating love co-exist, as a threefold mode of interpenetrating will, each with its special sphere of action dependent on or pointing to that of the other two, is to me the scientific statement of the Divine Nature. The conception satisfies my intellect and my affections by bringing into intelligible harmony with the action discernible in the external universe, that conscious personality of relations between man and God, on which religious trust rests as its datum. But this trust can exist apart from the theory. So the theory which connects summer and winter, and day and night with the revolution of the earth round the sun, and its rotation on its own axis, satisfies our intellects by making these phenomena intelligible, but does not in the slightest degree affect our sensations of light and heat."

"Well, let us suppose for a moment that this notion of a triune Being is the most reasonable conception of the self-existent that we can form, still it does not furnish any proof that one member of this Trinity could appear on the earth as a man distinct from the other members of it. The difficulties besetting the notion of incarnation, the incompatibility of Divine strength with human feebleness, Divine knowledge with human ignorance; Divine unchangeableness with human change; growth, maturity, decay; the 'death of a God in the flower of his age,' which I once heard a clergyman dwell on—

\* As a friend, but as a religious animal.

all these are not at all removed by the feat of imaginative ingenuity displayed in your speculative construction of the Trinity."

"I allow that they are not, and no doubt the conception of a real incarnation is beset on all sides with the most formidable difficulties, though I think that I can see my way, for some distance at least, towards the solution of them. But we reverse the process of scientific inquiry, if we begin with the 'how,' and because we cannot imagine this, shut our eyes to the evidence of the 'that.' Astronomers would never have discovered an unobserved planet, by calculating back from the disturbed body to the disturbing one, if they had waited to show how attraction is possible, before dealing with it as a fact."

"Agreed; but then the fact is patent, that bodies do act as if they mutually attracted each other. The earth compels the stone to fall to it. The needle visibly leaps to the magnet. We may not be able to explain how; but as we must begin with the phenomena, at all events, before we can explain them, it would be the height of absurdity to begin by denying them."

"But astronomers have done something more than merely accept undoubted phenomena. They found their system upon the assumption, that a force which they can experimentally test only on the earth, extends to an unlimited distance from it."

"Because no good reason can be assigned why it should not do so. The difficulty in conceiving one body to attract another distinct from it, whatever the relative position of the two bodies may be, depends on the fact of their being distinct, not on the distance between them. If we are driven over that difficulty by direct observation, there is no ground at all for fixing any limit within which the action of this power, which we know can act, shall be assumed to be confined. But where is your evidence for the fact of an incarnate God? All that men of your cloth are accustomed to

rely upon, and over which they have fought for ages with rational theologians, the authority of the Church, the authority of the Bible, the words of Christ in the fourth Gospel, the stories about his birth in the synoptics, you give up as indefensible positions. On what then *do* you rest? What is the evidence which satisfies you that this idea of incarnation, so beset with difficulties, as you allow, has been realized as a fact, in the person of Jesus of Nazareth?"

"The place occupied by Him and it in the spiritual history of man; the consistency, and unity of development which the known facts of that history assume under it."

"There is difficulty number one. What do we know of the facts of man's spiritual history? Is not the rise and progress of every ancient religion shrouded by an impenetrable mist of myths, and traditions, where all clear traces of the facts which gave birth to them, if they ever were more than the order of nature, is lost?"

"No doubt the facts which led to the beliefs that have constituted man's religious faith are often obscure enough; but it is the *beliefs themselves*, not their external generating causes, which constitute the facts of man's spiritual history, and these are readily ascertainable. They are contained in documents or monuments in our hands, or accessible to our observation at this moment. They furnish the solid basis of facts, on which we can take our stand for the scientific study of God's dealings with our race."

"You say that the beliefs of men generally, not those of any one people, to the exclusion of those of any other, about God, are a sort of revelation of what God would have us believe about Himself. Well, there may be something in that notion. At all events, it is free from the pretentious self-importance which is so revolting in the common assumptions of orthodoxy; that insisting on a private monopoly of the universal Father for the especial benefit of the orthodox. But then we

can take only the residuum, the element common to *all* these beliefs, as the revealing agent, and to what can this lead but simple faith in the one Divine Parent, discovered more perfectly by some than by others—imperfectly by all, but ever leading man through the gradual clearing-up of the mists of their own raising, to perceive His all-pervading love, and mysterious presence?”

“As I read the facts of man’s religious history, they show a more complicated evolution, indicative of a Divine Revelation in which the idea of Fatherhood assumes a deeper significance. The religious beliefs of mankind, as they emerged from the primitive stages,\* where men had either not yet attained to the conception of any spiritual power, or identified every natural object with some conscious Being, half-feared and half-despised, fall, I think, into two great divisions, each remarkable for its hold on the minds of one of the two great families with whom man’s religious progress has been especially associated, the Aryan and the Semitic. By the races who form the Aryan family of nations, God has been regarded as a power dwelling in the universe, informing all its parts, and manifesting itself most completely in Divine men, or beings capable of appearing under a human form, and often conceived to constitute a species of Divine state or society into which good men might be admitted after death. *Incarnation* is the normal shape of this mode of religious faith. By the Semitic race, the Divine has been removed from the earth, and conceived, either as a supreme governing power controlling the universe, and reigning down influences from the celestial bodies, who were often identified with it, or as a Creator, who calls forth and rules these bodies and the earth, and all that it contains by His all-mighty will. Now, if we really believe in the constant presence with us of a living Father, who would

\* Since classed by Sir John Lubbock as Atheism, Fetichism, and Totemism.—*Origin of Civilization*, p. 119.

draw all men to Himself, we must see in each of these great modes of conceiving the Divine, which have actually moulded the religious faith of mankind, one side of a Divine teaching, which cannot be complete except both sides are united."

"And, I suppose, you say that is the case in Christianity?"

"Just so. The Christian religion has carried the idea of a Deity, indwelling in the world, and capable of incarnation in a human form, to a point beyond that to which even the pure Aryan conception carried it. For none of the Aryans imagined a Deity who could so completely identify himself with humanity as to share human suffering. But Christianity has, at the same time, insisted, with equal perseverance, on the Semitic conception of God, as a Being distinguished from the universe by His unapproachable majesty and perfection. The phenomenon, so far as I know, is unequalled in the history of man's religious beliefs.\* If I am to have faith in a Divine guidance of men at all, I say it appears here."

"But why insist on associating this union of ideas with such a special reverence for the person of Jesus? May it not be a mere accident that made of him the point round which beliefs, floating in the atmosphere of the age when he lived, took the definite shape they were ready to assume of themselves? How little was wanting to have made of Apollonius of Tyana, for instance, the representative Divine man; prophecy, miracle, the control of disease, of earthquakes, of human violence, converse with the departed, the power to drive out unclean spirits, to raise the dead, to pass through closed doors, the knowledge of all languages,

\* The dualistic systems of Persia, &c., blend, but do not organically unite the two ideas of the indwelling, and the supramundane Deity.

a mysterious disappearance from the earth\*—all these are ascribed to him. So perfect a pendant are the stories about him to those heaped up round Jesus by the Christian faith, that it was at one time the fashion to suppose they had been copied from the gospels, though the notion seems now to have died out through more impartial enquiry.† If the Divine reverence, which Philostratus tells us was paid to Apollonius by some, as to a God manifested in human form,‡ had taken root, we might have had your argument applied to a different subject."

"But it did not take root, and in scientific reasoning that is everything. We deal with facts, not with supposed possibilities. I believe you are quite right about Apollonius. His story is, to me, most interesting, as showing how readily and abundantly the imagination of men in those days could supply that materialistic supernatural element, with which the Christian imagination invested Christ. But the true supernatural, the faith, which has enabled the idea of this Divine presence to act on the consciences of men and purify their wills, was wanting. The genuine Semitic element, the conception of a superhuman love, which we find in St. Paul's writings and the fourth Gospel, is not there. You have only the Aryan belief of the Divine in man, dashed with a little Turanian mysticism. That was not the true mixture, it would not work."

"I own it did not, and, as you say, from a scientific point of view, that is enough. But take the ideas in themselves. Why should we not place the Divine

\* See Dr Wolf Schmidt, *Geschichte der Denk und Glauben's Freiheit im ersten Jahrhundert.* Berlin, 1842, pp. 99, 135, 232, 399.

† See Schmidt, 48, 185, note 7.

‡ Philost. I., 2, 4, 5, 6, 19, 21; II., 50; IV., 1, 44; VI., 16; VII., 10, 11, 20, 21, 31, 38; VIII., 5, (7), 12, 13, 15, 21. Etnap. Vit. Phil. proem 6, p. 3. Hist. Aug. in Aurelian 24, in Alex. Sev. 29. Schmidt, 186, note 1.

guidance in the act of their union, and the conception of God produced by it? The Jew embodied especially the notions of power and justice in the idea of his all-mighty Creator. He raised God so far above men that they could only crawl at His feet, as the Mahometan has done since. The Greek religion, (I take the Greek as the typical Aryan), brought God too near to man. His gods not only sympathised with man's shortcomings, but shared man's weaknesses. The Christian Church has, in a certain degree, very imperfectly and unsatisfactorily, I think, united these conceptions, and brought in the faith in a Deity close to man, and yet not lost in him; one who is at once perfect in purity, and infinite in love. I am quite ready to treat this teaching of the Church as a stage in the progress of mankind to the one true religion, but why make more than this claim for its conceptions? You admit that the notion of the true Divinity of Jesus was not part of the original Christian faith; that it began with Paul, who, even if he ever wrote any of the epistles attributed to him except the four great ones, does not get beyond an *εἰκὼν τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ἀοράτου, πρωτότοκος πάσης κτίσεως*; \* that the fourth Gospel gives no confirmation to the idea by anything really traceable to Christ himself, and that on it the imagination of mankind afterwards piled up Pelions on Ossas of absurdity: why then adhere to it at all? Why not suppose that God is teaching us now, by the aid of our scientific study of nature, the true way in which these Aryan and Semitic conceptions must unite, to form the solid foundation of an universal religion for mankind?"

"Because there would not come out an universal religion at all, but only a moral philosophy, with here and there enthusiastic religious sects, who would practically deify their particular prophets. An universal re-

\* "The image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation."—Coloss. i. 15.

ligion must trace its roots clearly into the past. It must grow out of the history of man as a Divine teaching, imparted to him through channels not of his own making, though they may be made of human materials. But your modern Theism, resting with one leg on negative criticism, and the other on subjective feeling, cannot show its pedigree continuously. There is a gap of 1800 years in it. If a simple Theism is to legitimate itself as the outcome of God's providential guidance of the human race, it should have appeared in the first Christian century, when the transition from national to universal religion had to be made, and the foundation was to be laid for the beliefs of the ancestors of our modern world, and the birth of Christianity in its stead was a gigantic mistake. How can we reconcile such a blunder with any faith in a Divine teaching of mankind? and without that faith how can there be any firm logical foundation for religious trust? Am I to believe in a God who cares for me individually, but is indifferent to my kind? An ever-silent God, who leaves men to flounder among Materialistic, or Mono- Poly- and Pan-Theistic faiths, with no guiding light—

“ But a *dark* lantern of the Spirit,  
Which none see by, but those who bear it ?”

“ You are rather satirical on us Theists ; but I don't know that we have any right to complain ; after all, you are only paying us in our own coin. But, seriously, is the religious history of man since the appearance of Christianity reconcilable with the belief in the Divinity of its founder. Think of Mahometanism, sweeping away the faith in the Incarnate Deity from the very land ‘ trod by his blessed feet.’ to say nothing of other once Christian countries. Think of the fact that, only through the consolidation of the western nations under the ‘ Vicar of Christ,’ was a point of resistance opposed to the spread of the faith in Allah and his Prophet in the west, as well as in the east and south ; and then



think of the abuses and superstitions that have grown up under the shadow of the tiara. Surely if Christianity may look like a legitimate child of God at its birth, its subsequent story is very much that of a bastard. Or if we are to insist upon a special Divine guidance shown in its introduction, must not this bring us to the feet of his holiness the Pope in sackcloth and ashes?"

"I should be very much at a loss how to answer that objection, which you will readily believe is not new to me, but for one circumstance."

"I am curious to know what?"

"That the Church from her very beginning, departed from the example set her by her Divine Master, who laid down no rules for his followers of which we hear, except one to secure the sacredness of family life; enjoined no beliefs beyond trust in Himself; and imposed no ordinance except the common meal, to be held in memory of Him; but summed up His whole teaching in 'thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and soul, and mind, and strength, and thy neighbour as thyself;' whereas the Church, as Bauer has well shown, would have wrecked Christianity at its outset on the rock of ceremonial observances, but for the energetic opposition of St. Paul; and from the earliest time to which we can trace her action historically, began, not merely to *introduce* ordinances, and *proclaim* beliefs, which would have been her duty, but to impose the one, and enjoin the other, as conditions of Christian union, under the claim that 'what she bound on earth should be bound in heaven, and what she taught on earth should be taken for unquestionable truth.'"

"And drew the bond tighter and tighter, till it burst at the Reformation. I suppose you would go on to say, the Papacy is the logical fruit of this error, and the growth of Mahometanism, with all the other endless 'schisms' in the body of Christ's faithful people, its visible punishment."

"But there's the luncheon bell; we must not keep

madam waiting till we have done our talk. Besides, I should like to think it over quietly a little before we go any further. So I vote for an adjournment to the dining-room. It's a blessing, at all events, to be able to speak so freely with you, old fellow, without riling up the implacable divine, who, I suppose, must lurk somewhere beneath your clerical costume. But mind, I am not going to let you off. We have not got to the hardest part of the tussle yet."

"I assure you I have not the least wish to avoid it; and trust only that, if I am convinced of being in the wrong, I may have grace to confess my mistakes honestly."

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## CHAPTER XI.

### THE INCARNATE DEITY—II.

TRUE to his promise, W—— resumed our conversation the next day, though this time in my study; a heavy thunderstorm during the night having made the lawn "too wet for a jousting place," as he told my wife, who when she heard of the subject of our controversy, brought her work, and declared her intention of listening to its continuation.

"Well," began W——, "I have lain awake I don't know how long this morning, thinking over our talk of yesterday, and I have come to the conclusion to leave your theory of the True Being of God alone; not that I altogether see my way to accepting it; there's something so startling in the idea of a double, or more strictly speaking, triple action of the Divine will, as distinct, and yet one at bottom. Yet, certainly our

wills do show three distinct sets of operations, the production or choice of means, the use of means, and the determination of ends, which involves the spirit of the work. All their action seems reducible to one or the other of these three kinds. 'What,' 'How,' and 'Why,' sum up our conscious energies apart from 'When' and 'Where?' And again, I do not see what solid objection can be taken to your position that, if these operations are carried on simultaneously, as we must assume them to be in the Divine consciousness, if we ascribe consciousness to God at all, they must constitute distinct hypostases, to employ the old ecclesiastical word, not merely nominally but really distinct, within a substance truly one; at least this is the case in the production of means, and their use in organized beings; as to the determination of ends, I am more doubtful. The determination of the end seems to me directly involved in the acts which produce or combine the means."

"No doubt; but you may remember that I placed the distinctive sphere of action of this Third hypostasis in its operation on the beings formed by the Primal and Secondary hypostases when these attain to the condition where, as Hegel says, the Idea comes to the consciousness of itself."

"True, I had forgotten that. That would complete the threefold distinctive action, though it cannot have an aftertype in ourselves. Certainly, this conception of the Divine nature does get us out of a host of difficulties which hang round the idea of the conscious personality of God, so long as we insist on His absolute unity. But it is 'a far cry' from this Triune mystery to the faith in the Incarnation of one of these Divine hypostases, in an individual man."

"But you must admit, I think, that the way for the proof of that proposition is thus prepared. Recollect that the reference to our wills and their action, as a means of gaining some conception of the Divine personality was not the process through which the notion

of a Triune Divine Being grew up in the Church. It was the belief in the Divinity of Christ which drew after it the conception of the threefold nature of God, as a necessary consequence. If we find now that this conception clears up difficulties which it was not intended to meet; which, indeed, do not appear to have occurred at all to those who formed it; surely that is a strong indirect confirmation of the truth of the notion which led originally to this conception."

"I dispute the 'strong.' The coincidence is some confirmation certainly; but to turn it into a strong confirmation, you should show—*1st*, that the notion of the Divine Being, to which the faith in the Divinity of Jesus led, does substantially agree with your physico-spiritualistic induction; *2ndly*, that this conception of the Divine Being does afford some good ground for thinking that one member of the triple twist could detach himself from it without 'untwisting the twist.'"

"Let me see how far I can satisfy your requisitions on these points."

"First, then, if the Divine Being has this threefold character, the three hypostases must be essentially co-eternal, co-substantial, and co-equal, in the sense that the action of one implies that of the others. But the action ascribed to Christ in the Church doctrine is separate from the threefold power, not part of its action."

"You must bear in mind that the action of the three hypostases in nature is not, apparently, co-extensive. The manifestation of the Divine power is far vaster than that either of His wisdom or His love. Power is displayed everywhere. The earth is full of power from its poles to its centre. Power must have been exhibited at every stage in its long history of development, before any organic action was possible at all upon it. And now, the display of organising wisdom is limited necessarily to its surface, and even there is not universal. It exists only where water is to be found. Still more limited must be the active sphere of the Divine love.

Love needs response. We may admire and delight in that which is incapable of loving again, but we cannot truly love it. Now, we cannot love God till we have a conception of His Being; and the quality of our love must vary with the purity of our conceptions."

"I fear you leave a very narrow sphere for the proper action of the Divine Spirit."

"Its distinctive special action I allow you, which on the earth must be limited to the minds of men; and there can act only in proportion to the degree in which the will of man opens to receive it. Yet this principle of love is truly the informing spirit of the whole Divine action, determining the operations both of power and wisdom, within which it must be always present, as you argued just now, to form their hidden motive."

"As the beauty and reproductive capacity displayed in the flower and the fruit, must be conceived to be latent in the root, branches, and leaves, I suppose?"

"Yes, that's what I have often heard Edward say," interposed Agnes, and it has always seemed to me such a good illustration."

"I am fond of it myself," I said, "and it will carry us on further; for the flower and fruit depend on the leaves, and through them on the stem, which yet is, only that it may expand into them. Must we not admit that, between the relations disclosed by these considerations and the conceptions about the Triune Godhead, of which we see the beginning in the New Testament, there is a logical connection not unlike that of fruit, leaf, and stem."

"I do not quite follow you," replied W——.

"Consider what were the conceptions about the Divine Being, prevalent in Western Asia and Europe before the coming of Christ. Were they not mainly characterized by the belief in Him as a mysterious *Power*, in some way present with man, but nationally and locally, rather than universally? Then, with the rise of the Christian Church, there grew up the notion of a profound Divine

*Wisdom* manifested in the constitution of the Church as a universal body, for the salvation of mankind. And has not this belief widely fostered the growth of *Love* towards God in men's minds, with a corresponding manifestation of those graces of tenderness and purity, in which the old world was especially wanting?"

"I suppose you mean to say, here is an evidence of organizing wisdom preparing the way for the action of the spirit of love in the world, by what at first appears an insulated act?"

"No doubt. The way has been prepared by the Divine *Wisdom*, through faith in the manifestation of its own essence in one in whom the spirit of Love dwelt in perfection. 'We love God,' as St. Paul says, 'because He first loved us.'"

"I heartily admit that, but why go beyond the idea? What do we want more than that? The whole course of human progress must spring out of the continuous action of the organizing Divine Wisdom. Why ascribe such an exceptional peculiar manifestation of it to one age?"

"Because the idea of such a manifestation has gathered historically round the person of one individual."

"But one, of whose real actions, true aims, and genuine personal character we discover across the disturbing mists of Messianic traditions and popular superstitions, how much?"

"Enough to see that He set mankind off upon a new track, to look for a spiritual Messiah, who should form a people gathered out of every race, to free them from their sins, instead of a political Messiah, who should make his own nation ruler over all others."

"But a Messiah who was to come in the clouds before the generation among whom he had lived was extinct, to take a crushing vengeance on his enemies and bestow unbounded joys on his followers."

"Add, joys identified with supposed spiritual perfec-

tion, and vengeance which embodied the conception of good eternally triumphing over evil. But it is no part of my argument that these suppositions were free from error. They were what the knowledge and character of those who held them made possible; the cotyledons, which protected during its early growth the tender shoot of faith in a Divine presence and love, open to all men, truly sympathetic with man, since it had manifested itself in one who was Himself a man. The cotyledon might wither up and drop when it had done its work, while the living power, the underlying, eternal idea expanded into a lasting tree."

"That is to say, the idea of an essential unity between the Divine and the human; the idea that man should seek a perfection not inferior to that which he ascribes to his 'Father in heaven;' but this idea needs to be realized in every man. It cannot be shut up in one individual."

"But Mr W——," remarked Agnes, "surely, the Church always taught that Christ is our example as well as our light. I am sure Edward has read me some words out of one of the old Greek Fathers, which I cannot recollect exactly, but they meant God appeared in the likeness of man, that He might make man into the likeness of God. And is not that quite different from teaching that the manifestation of the Divine perfections was 'shut up' in Christ?"

"My dear madam, I confess you have caught me tripping. I have stated my difficulty, for I assure you it is a difficulty, not a mere objection, badly; but the difficulty is this. Between the original and the copy, the Divine perfection assumed to have been displayed in Christ, and the idea of perfection which we seek to realize, there is the difference, that, in the first case perfection is inherent; complete from the first; incapable of increase or of diminution: in the second it is of gradual growth; a constant striving after a perfection never attained. How can the unique pheno-

menon enter into the series of phenomena so different from itself?"

"*How* is more than I can answer, or than you ought to ask," I said, "at least, until you can explain *how* the individual spirit comes to be what it is, at all. But if you ask *why* such a manifestation should take place, the answer seems to me more possible. Men's conceptions about God have commonly oscillated between two opposite notions. They have thought of God either as too unlike, or as too like themselves: either as so unlike that no real relation between Him and themselves was possible; as an unlimited, impassive, all-pervading power; a fate indifferent to the individuals who form the subjects of its changeless laws; or as so like themselves that the idea ceased to have an ennobling influence on them; as national, partial, jealous; loving those only who loved Him; honouring those who honoured Him; and listening to those who bribed Him with gifts, or teased Him enough with prayers; a capricious man in fact, and yet clothed with all that unbounded power after which man is always longing. To attain the truth we must combine these views. We must conceive God as at once like and unlike us; unlike us in His perfect sympathy, and yet His absolute purity; like us in that His action is always limited, conditioned, bounded, and therefore entirely reasonable. Such a conception of God, the idea that the Divine essence was truly incarnate in the man Jesus gives us."

"But the Church has never accepted the gift. From the days of John's Apocalyptic vision to our own, on what has she insisted so much as on the omnipotence, and omniscience of the Being, whom she imagined to have hid himself in the humanity of Jesus?"

"And yet she has always insisted with equal earnestness on His true humanity. You must remember that it forms no part of my argument to undertake to justify all that the Church has taught about Christ and



God. I hold her to have been essentially right in the idea that the conscious Divine essence did manifest itself in the man Jesus. It does not follow that she has been right in all the qualities which she has ascribed to this Divine Being. For these, theologians have been indebted partly to the Old Testament, and partly to the philosophical theories current in their own days. We may mend their conceptions by the help of the deeper knowledge of God's action derived from our more accurate acquaintance with nature."

"But it is precisely that knowledge, the conception of the vastness of the Divine action in the universe, and that 'nous y sommes pour bien peu de choses,' as the Empress Eugenie remarked to Leverrier, when he had enlarged the imperial mind with a lesson on the first doctrines of astronomy, which makes the notion of such a manifestation of God so inconceivable. With the old Biblical universe, the heaven *above*, and the earth *beneath*, it might be another thing; but to associate our littleness with His greatness as we now apprehend it—Reason revolts at it."

"You forget Pope—

'To Him no high, no low, no great, no small,  
He fills, He bounds, connects, and equals all.'

"But that is the Pantheistic soul of the universe; we are speaking of a personal God."

"Oh! Mr W——," exclaimed Agnes, "surely you do not seriously mean to place the God in whom we trust, to whom we pray, the Spirit with whom our spirits can have communion, further off from us than Pope's Soul of nature. And if He is 'not far from any one of us,' as St. Paul says, what does it matter how big the world is outside of us?"

"My dear madam, I go with you heartily as to God's spiritual presence. It is the visible presence, in one fragment of the universe, of the universal upholder, or any hypostasis of his Triune Being, if such be its nature, which staggers me; visible, I mean, in any

other way than through that which He upholds. For a God who sits above the earth, and looks at it, and gives orders to it, like the God of the Old Testament, the notion might pass; but for the eternal Spirit who sustains the wonderfull all of which we begin to see clearer glimpses—I cannot stomach it.”

“And yet, Mr W——,” said Agnes, was it not the nation who believed in the Old Testament that rejected Christ?”

“My dear friend,” I continued, “as W—— did not answer this question, are you not letting your imagination run away with you into that false infinite of bigness with which Dean Mansel chokes us;\* that boundless power, which, no doubt, needs boundless space and endless time to show itself in, and cannot possibly be squeezed into an individual? But what has the true infinite, the infinite of moral perfection, to do with great or little, in space or time, if there is only space and time sufficient to allow of its manifestation at all? Why should it not be shown in a man as well as in a world; in one conscious individual as well as in a host?”

“Don’t suppose that I deny the appearance of the all-sustaining ordering power in the individual man. It is the *double* appearance that I stumble at; that the sustaining should come out as at the same time consciously sustained; the ordering as consciously ordered.”

“I admit the difficulty fully; for it cost me a great deal of perplexing thought before I could see my way out of it.”

“And you think that you do see your way out of it?”

“It seems to me that, in fact, this double character belongs to the organising power by its proper nature. It is at once sustained and sustaining; *sustained*, in so far as all that it organises depends upon the properties

\* The conversation was before the death of the late Dean of St. Paul’s.

of substances which are produced not by its own will, but by that of the primitive hypostasis; *sustaining*, in as much as it upholds the action, whatever that is, for at present it seems very little understood, which, out of these elementary substances, or their combinations, builds up organized beings. Therefore, to appear as an actual finite Son of God, far from being inconsistent with the Divine nature of the Being whom I call the Eternal Son, would show precisely what this nature is, and display his true Divine character."

"As a sort of dependent Deity? But how do you reconcile that notion with the 'equal to the Father as touching His Godhead, and inferior only as touching His Manhood?'"

"I am not bound to reconcile my conceptions with those of the anonymous author of the Athanasian creed. But you must remember that, if the organizing will is dependent for the materials organized upon a will other than its own, and thus, in manifesting the virtues of a dependent being inferior to that on which it depends—the virtues of a perfect humanity—manifests also its own essential character, still the production of the organized existences must be supposed to be the object for which the Being who provides the materials works; so that here the primal appears subject to the secondary, the Divinity of Wisdom in its turn takes precedence over the Divinity of Power, and therefore must be recognized as co-equal with it."

"I see that in admitting your three hypostases, I have fallen into an unexpected trap," said W——, after a short pause.

"Now, Mr W——, I must scold you for that," interposed Agnes. "I am sure Edward never sets traps for any body. I know you don't believe he wishes for any thing but to get at the truth, as nearly as we can get at it, in matters so hard to understand at all. And I feel certain this is all you wish for Mr W——."

"My dear madam, I beg a thousand pardons for the

word. I know your husband's straightforwardness far too well to suppose for a moment that he seeks for victory in argument rather than truth, and you do me only justice, I assure you, in thinking as well of me. The word 'trap' really meant nothing but the expression of my own surprise. But, after all," he continued, turning to me, "the great difficulty remains, the localizing of the Divine. What is to become of the organization manifested in the universe, if the organizing power is sucked up into one Divine man?"

"It is not the power, but the character of the will which guides the power, that I conceive the Divine man to have manifested, the spirit which—

'Lives in all life, extends through all extent,  
Spreads undivided, operates unspent.'

All organized being shows us this will more or less fully, according to the degree of conscious power which each displays, without necessitating us to suppose that the greater manifestation in the one case interferes with the lesser manifestation in another. Why then should we feel a difficulty in imagining that some one being might manifest this Divine essence perfectly? May not the difficulty be one of our own creating, because instead of seeking to ascertain what God is from His acts, we evolve a notion of Him simply from our own imagination."

"Perhaps that may be the case; and if the gradation were clear the difficulty would be almost evanescent. But is any such gradation really discernible? No doubt organized beings show an increase of complexity, a gradation in the variety of functions; but is not the power shown in them always one, the faculty of adaptation, the fitting of means to ends, I don't say final ends, but needs of the particular being? The gradation of which you speak is in the conscious powers, exercised by the individual creatures. But when we come to these we seem to lose the Divine in a whirl of conflicting impulses,

till we catch sight of it again in the ideal world, in the sense of beauty, truth, goodness."

"But in the manifestation of this inward ideal element, there is an immense gradation perceptible."

"And," said Agnes, "may it not be just because the truly Divine seems to withdraw into obscurity, and become invisible when we get into the world of conscious organized creatures, that some special utterance of it was needed to show men what God really is in Himself, that they might not lose their way in groping after Him in the dark?"

"You give a very good reason for such a manifestation, my dear madam," replied W—. "Your position then," he added, turning to me, "I take to be this: local action belongs to the organizing power as such. If we suppose this power to be conscious, its action must be, consciously, limited differently in each organism, and thus each organism shows more or less fully, according to the range of its capacities, what lies in this power; when individuals reach the degree of development where they can act for themselves, there come to light a host of impulses, which, though they are excellently adapted to promote the welfare of the individuals, clash more or less with the universal spirit. But you contend there is no reason why this universal spirit, which does manifest itself locally in the production of all these individuals, should not also locally manifest its own universal character, of which it has given manifold glimpses in the ideal

'Forms and virtues that we dare  
Conceive in boyhood, and pursue as men,  
That unreached paradise of our despair,'

as Byron has it. Now, assuming all this to be so, there certainly seems a good reason why, if such a manifestation is not impossible, it should have taken place. But we come back to the old fence, what proof is there that it has taken place?"

"But we are much more likely to clear the fence, now that we do not begin by assuming that it is too stiff to be taken," I replied.

"I suppose, my dear madam," said W——, who detected a smile on my wife's face, "from your countenance, that P—— has got another surprise in store for me?"

"I don't know how far it may be a surprise to you, Mr W——," Agnes rejoined, "I know only that, when I thought there was an end of all evidence as to what the nature of Christ really was, because I could not trust what is said in the Bible to be all true, Edward showed me that it was just this notion of its being all true that made the difficulty; and that, if we once get rid of the idea that the proof consists in texts, there comes into sight another sort of proofs, ever so much stronger, which the texts have hidden."

"Oh, I think I can guess what you mean. It is his argument from the union of Semitic and Aryan conceptions in Christianity, is it not?"

"Yes, just so. True historical proofs, from the fitting together of what men of different races had thought about God; which Edward says, if we believe in God at all, we must take as marks of the way in which we ought to think about Him; for how else should men come to have such thoughts at all about a Being whom none of them had ever seen, if the spirit of God had not led them?"

"But how are we to get over the enormous differences in men's thoughts about God,—differences so vast that they give some colour to the argument that the notion of a God distinct from the nature of things is a delusion which man's imagination has foisted on itself?"

As Agnes did not seem quite to know what answer she should make to this question, I interposed with the remark—"We must not confuse conceptions with tendencies, otherwise we shall be in danger of losing all sense of certainty about anything not dependent en-

tirely on our own will. Men's conceptions as to what the objects which affect our senses are have varied, and do vary indefinitely, yet we do not therefore doubt that our instinctive tendency to attribute our sensations to the action upon ourselves of something outside us is well founded. So the diversity of men's conceptions about the Being whom they place above or behind nature does not show that the instinctive tendency to assume such a Being is not rooted in the fact of His existence."

"Not the general fact, I allow, but in the notion of an Incarnate Deity we get far beyond the instinctive assumption of a God, to definite conceptions of His action."

"But, as I argued yesterday, these conceptions fall of themselves into two opposite modes of apprehending the self-existent; and these, to me, seem to point to an instinctive action as much deserving attention as is that general tendency to project our own being out of ourselves into the universe, to which the faith of mankind in God seems ultimately due."

"Are these opposite tendencies, after all, anything more than the old distinction of Polytheism and Monotheism?"

"I think they are. Polytheistic and monotheistic conceptions of the Divine are found in connection with each of these two great tendencies of religious thought. The Chaldean worship distributed the Divine action among the stars; but they still opposed the Divine to the earthly. The philosophic thought of Greece conceived God as one; but it was the unity of an indwelling power, one with what it upheld."

"But surely we come at bottom to a difference of conception? Men see God dwelling in the skies; they see Him in the stars; they see Him in all things in earth and skies. But in each case you have the Divine, and that which it produces, or in which it shows itself, or which depends on it."

“ No doubt, you have either that in which the Divine is manifested, or that which depends on it ; but consider what a difference there is between the feeling associated with the Divine in the one case and in the other. It is the expression of the difference which enters so deeply into our conscious nature between the power of Will and that of Reflection. The races in whom the impulsive, emotional faculty of will predominated over reflection, where they were capable of forming the conception of God at all, have separated Him from nature, which they made either His offspring or His slave. The races in whom reflective power predominated over will and emotion, identified God with the hidden source of the phenomena which furnished the subject matter of their reflections. Language bears witness to this. Max Müller has shown that, in the Semitic tongues the names of God all resolve themselves into ‘Mighty One,’ ‘Lord,’ or ‘King,’\* while among the Aryan nations, the names of God mean the sky, the sea, the sun, the earth, air, fire, &c. The whole atmosphere of religious thought was coloured by this difference from the beginning.† Now, if both Will and Reflection have thus proved themselves competent to be the source of religious conceptions, of which each presents the Divine action under an aspect suited to the originating power, the religious faith which most fully corresponds to the real nature of its object should embody in its idea of the Divine both these phases, the transcendent and the immanent. God should be to it manifested in the world, and therefore

\* *El*, Strong ; *Baal*, *Adonis*, *Marnas* (at Gaza) Lord ; *Baal-Samin*, Lord of Heaven ; *Moloch*, *Milcom*, *Malika*, King ; *El-i-eun*, The Highest ; *Ram*, *Rimmon*, The Exalted—Chips from a German workshop, 358-361.

† Hence, a monotheistic religion could arise among the Semites, while the Aryans produced only monotheistic philosophies. The many Lords of the popular faith might easily pass into the notion of *one* Supreme Lord of all, but how could the god *Sea*, and the god *Sky*, be identified in the popular imagination ?



in man, as the microcosm, the being in whom the indwelling power attains the highest natural expression known to us ; and yet should be conceived to possess a being distinct from the world, supernatural, transcendent."

"And that you say has actually been the case with the idea of the eternal incarnate in Christ?"

"Just so: the union of the opposite phases of religious conception has, historically, taken place in Christianity, and in *no other religion*. That is a fact which, if we do not altogether give up the idea of God as a conscious Being present with us, must, I think, have great weight."

"And you see, Mr W——," said Agnes, "what makes this idea so delightful, is that it gets us over all bother about the Bible, and who wrote this book or that, and whether they thought that the earth was made in six days, and that the sun ran about the sky or not; and whether all that is said to have happened about Jesus did happen just as is written in the Gospels or not. For this is not what makes the revelation, but it is about the character of God; what He is in Himself, and what He is to us. And this we learn through the union of two great streams of religious thought, as Edward says, about which there can be no doubt: and these meet in the faith in our Lord on which the Catholic Church actually grew up, that He is both God and man."

"You sum up the case so well, my dear madam, that I am almost tempted to lay down my arms to you. And no doubt what you say as to the freedom from critical difficulties belonging to this line of argument is most true; but you must not forget that it has difficulties of its own. And by the bye, that is one of the points I want to talk over with your husband more fully."

"What difficulties, Mr W——?" asked Agnes.

"The difficulty of judging of the whole course of a great development from the knowledge of part only. Granted that the Catholic conception of Christ grew up

out of the union of the old Jewish faith in a transcendental, supernatural God, with the old Greek faith in Gods dwelling in the world, and capable of appearing as men. May not some purer religious faith grow up out of the union of this Catholic belief with scientific thought?"

"But what kind of religion can science teach us?" said Agnes.

"It can show us—

'Sermons in stones, and good in everything.'

Nature, by the order, beauty, and wisdom which we perceive in her, conducts us to the faith in an invisible intelligence, ever present beneath her powers. Man, by his aspiration after the beautiful, the true, and the good, conducts us to faith in a moral perfection associated with this intelligence: and personal experience founded on this faith, seals our confidence in our Father in heaven."

"You are well provided," I said, "with bow, string, and arrow head, but the shaft of the arrow is wanting."

"And what is that?"

"The religious history of man. This ever-present intelligent, perfect Being with whom you believe it possible to have personal communion, has He been indifferent to the conceptions which the human race has formed of Him, and made no provision for bringing them to the knowledge of Himself?"

As W—— made no answer I continued, "And if He has made such a provision where can we look for it so reasonably as there, where, as Agnes said, the two great streams of human conceptions about God historically coalesced, to form the notion of a Being transcendent by his moral perfections, and yet essentially immanent in the universe which He transcends, since He could truly appear in it as a man? Leave out either side of the double element, the transcendence or the immanence, and you condemn one side of man's

religious development to sterility. United, they produce the faith in which the Catholic church has grown up."

"Well! I own there is something very seductive in the view, that the faith in which the two great streams of religious conviction apparent in the history of man have combined, must be the one true, divinely attested religion. But this historical proof is a two-edged sword. It is full of difficulties. We began upon them yesterday, but we could not get half through them. First, except the fourth Gospel which you give up, there is no evidence that Christ himself taught the doctrine of his divinity. Then the Church has not adhered to the faith in an immanent Deity, but raised her Christ into the skies, and banished God from creation more thoroughly than even the Jews had done. Then, again the Catholic faith has not been able to hold her own. Mahometanism tore from her the fairest regions of the East. Schism, or what she calls heresy, has rent her into a crowd of conflicting sects. Her chance of becoming the universal guide and teacher of mankind, seems to grow less and less, as ages roll on; because she is going to pieces herself. While Theism is rising up fresh out of her ashes, and can perfectly accept faith in the combined immanence and transcendence of the Deity, as the true Revelation; the belief in which men ought to have grown up, when the energy of Paul broke through the Jewish fence."

"Only that, as an historical fact, the faith in Christ appeared instead."

"I am afraid I must run away," Agnes here said, "to look after my little ones. But, Mr W——, you are not going to leave us yet I hope, and I should so much like to hear what Edward has to urge as to these 'difficulties,' could you put off the discussion till to-morrow?"

"By all means, my dear Madam, I should like nothing better than to enjoy a little more of your

society, as you kindly ask me to stay, and I have a day still at my command—so let the debate stand adjourned.”

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## CHAPTER XII.

### THE INCARNATE DEITY. III.

“WELL,” said W——, the next morning, after breakfast, when we had taken up our quarters in the shade on the lawn, to which the fine day tempted us, while my wife’s industrious fingers were busy over a dress for one of our girls, “I have been rolling my ‘difficulties’ of yesterday about in my brain a good deal since we talked together, and I am afraid they rather grow than lessen by the process. Your historical argument goes on beautifully till the foundation stone is laid, but then I think it breaks down. The history of the Church is not what it ought to have been if your notions are true. Instead of spreading over the earth, she lost to Mahometanism, half the ground she had gained, and her growth since, has been by the natural increase of population, in the countries remaining Christian rather than by drawing men into her fold. Then, within, her history has been one succession of schisms or heresies, turning mainly on that very faith in the Incarnation to which your argument leads as the essence of the religion, and its logical consequences; Maryolatry, Transubstantiation, Papal Authority, Election, Predestination, Bible worship; all turning on it, I say, because it is precisely this dogma that has converted religious faith from the internal to the phenomenal, from that which may be tested by the conscience to that which can be attested

only by learned research; and this, too, a dogma which takes away all interest from the life of Jesus as a man, and makes a good many of his sayings about his coming in the clouds absurd; and to crown all, a dogma never taught by Jesus himself if we derive our picture of his teaching from the only source appearing to be at all trustworthy—the synoptics. I am like David, I cannot fight for God and His cause under all this heavy armour, I prefer the ‘Sling and the Stone.’”

“You have given us a terrible budget of ‘difficulties’ indeed, Mr. W——,” said Agnes, with a rather sad smile.

“But we ought to give him our sincere thanks for it,” I added. I have never forgotten one of Herder’s striking sayings, that ‘religious difficulties are like corks,’ if you try to force them under water they may drown you, but if you learn to float upon them they bear you up. W——’s difficulties seem to me to have something of this cork-like nature. They are just what the character of Christ’s teaching, if we form our notion of it from the synoptics, and, assuming him to have been what the Church has believed, compare it with the character of the teaching of the Church, would lead me to expect. You look incredulous, but consider: Christ’s teaching, as the synoptics give it, setting aside the predictions of His coming in the clouds to judgment, which they put into His mouth but which I think it clear that He never uttered, at least as we read them, is very authoritative, like that of one who had no doubt at all on the matters of which he spoke, and has an essentially personal, or as Mr Renan calls it, ‘femine’ element, yet it always brings men to God, to ‘the Father who seeth in secret,’ ‘who sendeth down rain on the evil and the good, and maketh His sun to shine on the just and unjust,’ and ‘clothes the lilies of the field, with beauty. *He never puts himself between man and God;* but the Church has continually done this.”

"That is my argument. You ask me to build on the faith of the Church as a guide to the truth in regard to the nature of Christ. I say this faith was a blunder of the Church, and that he who alone could have been conscious of his own nature, if it were what you suppose, does not sanction it. For the 'come unto me' tone of his teaching, remarkable as it is, no doubt, and unsatisfactory as Renan's explanation is, to me, at least, though, certainly, it fits in with your hypothesis, cannot prove it.\* Then just on account of this blunder,

\* Miss Hennell, who notices this peculiarity in her "Aids to Faith," (34-54), explains it by supposing Jesus to have been carried away by the Messianic expectations of his age and nation, which he qualified only by the uncompromising assertion of the necessity of a thorough reformation as the indispensable condition of their realization. But this conception is inconsistent with the fact that Jesus claimed to be the Messiah in a sense strongly opposed to the popular notions of what the Messiah should be, as is clearly proved by the circumstance, on which Gröner dwells at length in his "Geschichte des Ur-Christenthums," § II. 6-14, that of all the Messiahs who have appeared among the Jews, Jesus is the only one whom his own nation have given up. Now, no one can be carried away by an idea which he governs. If the sense in which Jesus claimed to be the Messiah was opposed to the popular expectations, the explanation of any peculiarities attending his conceptions must be sought in his own ideas, not in those current among the Jewish people; consequently the remarkable union of profound devotion to God with the assumption of personal authority, characteristic of the discourses of Jesus in the synoptics, remains a problem unsolved by any popular belief attaching to the character of the Messiah.

It may, perhaps, be contended that Jesus was induced to adopt this pretentious tone by the fancy that he had been appointed the future judge of mankind, on condition of submitting to rejection and suffering in the present. In a subsequent conversation I have assigned reasons for thinking that no predictions of any such coming to judgment were uttered by Jesus, and that they prove only how strong the belief of the common Messianic notions was among the Jews, since even those who had learned to believe in a suffering Messiah could not avoid transforming him into one who should eventually triumph, not *through* suffering but *over* it. But, at all

Christianity, *i.e.*, the worship of Christ, took the place of the worship of God, taught by Jesus, but only now, after long centuries of error, and all its lamentable consequences of schism and disunion, beginning to exercise its healing and uniting power."

"I do not differ from your conclusion, though I cannot assent to your premisses. That the Church fell into a

events, such an idea would be fatal to the explanation given by Miss Hennell, who makes Jesus continue to the last under the delusion that God would vindicate his title to be the true Messiah, by a manifestation of almighty power, until he broke out in despair into the *Eli, Eli, Lama sabacthani*. Professor Newman has recently dealt with the same subject in a tract entitled the True Temptation of Jesus, published as part of this series. His explanation is "that the idea that he was himself the Messiah may not have occurred to [Jesus] until after he had experienced the zeal of the multitude, and was aware that a rumour had gone abroad that 'a great prophet was arisen,' and that some said he was the Messiah; can any one study his character as that of a man subject to all human limitations, and not see that the question, am I then possibly the Messiah? if at all entertained, instantly became one of extreme interest and anxiety to Jesus himself? Indeed, from the day that it fixed itself upon him for permanent rumination, his character could not but lose its simplicity. Previously, he thought only, what doctrine is true morality? What are the crying sins of the day? But now his own personality, his own possible dignity became matters of inquiry, and the inquiry was a Biblical one. He was brought hereby on to the area of the learned commentator, who studies ancient books to find out what has been promised and predicted about a Messiah. An unlearned carpenter, however strong and clear-minded, while dealing with a purely moral question, was liable to lose all his superiority and be fearfully entangled when entering on literary interpretations. Wholly to get rid of traditional notions was impossible, yet enough of distrust would remain to embarrass a fixed belief, and produce vacillation. Nothing is more natural than that the teacher should desire to know what was the general opinion concerning him, should be pleased when it confirmed his rising hopes, should be elated when Simon Peter declared him to be the Messiah, and should bless his faith, even if not with the extravagance of giving him the keys of the kingdom of heaven; finally should be displeased,

grievous, though probably inevitable blunder, I allow ; but it was, I think, not in ascribing true Divinity to Jesus, but in not ascribing it sufficiently."

"What *do* you mean ?"

"Simply, that Christ, as I conceive, came to show us that the perplexing tangle of human infirmity, and pain and sorrow, with the great terror, death, which seems to interpose

with himself, and frightened at his own elation, and in order to repair his error should charge his disciples to tell no one that he was Messiah, not that he desired to keep the nation in ignorance, but because he was himself conscious of uncertainty. After this his course could not be straightforward and simple," p. 21-22. But this theory is open to the grave objection that it has no support from the traditions about Jesus, beyond that afforded by the statement that Jesus forbade his apostles from announcing him as the Messiah. All the synoptics represent him to have spoken in the same authoritative tone from first to last. There is no trace of any change in this respect consequent on his recognition as the Christ by Peter. On the contrary, it is *after* that recognition that they place his refusal to be addressed as "good,"—Mat. xix. 17, Mark x. 14, Luke xviii. 16; or to act as judge,—Luke xii. 14. Nor is there any trace of his having been more occupied in the consideration of the predictions relating to the Messiah after that time than before it. Luke makes him *begin* his ministry by applying Isaiah lxi. 1, to himself, iv. 18. He calls himself the "Son of Man" from a much earlier date,—Mat. viii. 20, Mark ii. 10. Luke iv. 24. And, after it, he disclaims descent from David, which was one of the most unquestionable scriptural signs of the Messiah, Mat. xxii. 42, Mark xii. 15, Luke xx. 41. That religious teachers are peculiarly open to the temptation of self-importance may be admitted. The perplexity is to account for the union in a character so calm and earnest as that of Jesus appears to have been, of such high personal claims with such profound devotion to God and such zeal for the good of man, without any attempt to secure political influence for himself. This puzzle the instances adduced by Professor Newman, Luther, and Zwingle, Calvin and Servetus, the ascetic philosophers who have become legislators, Bouddha, Confucius and Zoroaster, (Temptation of Jesus, p. 6), leave unsolved. Bouddha comes nearest to Jesus. But then, as Baron Bunsen has said, Bouddha gives up the actual which Jesus would raise to Divine purity, *Gott in der Geschichte*, ii., 4.



such a barrier between man and God, that we create Miltonic falls to account for it, is no barrier at all; because He who was essentially God could share them, that the eternal is ever present beneath the temporal; ready to give support and rest to those who earnestly seek it in communion with God: and that this is the true 'kingdom of heaven' present on earth, into which all may enter who will. But the Church, as a body, has never believed in this Divine teaching. Individuals within her communion have, and have often exaggerated the sublime lesson of renunciation contained in it, but the Church has not. Christ in His humanity has never been to her more than a God in disguise; who by and by would *throw off the mask*, and return in His true shape, attended by all those splendours of power, and overflowings of pleasure, in which our imaginations delight to revel."

"I see you are, indeed, a root and branch reformer. What becomes of the golden throne, and the assembled nations, and Jerusalem descending from above, and the temple where the sun shall not burn by day nor the moon by night, and the renovated earth, and the resurrection bodies; all vanish before this sublime doctrine of renunciation, whose sublimity I do not deny: but it is the voice of Spinoza or Goethe that I hear, not the teachings of Jesus."

"You hear more than you can learn from Spinoza or Goethe. You hear the *sesame* which opens to *all* mankind that 'kingdom of heaven,' which, to the philosophical thinker, is the inheritance only of a few—the kingdom where the individual is truly sovereign, because by the magic of love, he feels his oneness with the universal, the eternal." In Christ's teaching God is a power present not only *in* but *with* man; with whom man can truly enter into communion; and, in so doing, attain a serenity, not involving indifference to suffering; a capacity for enjoyment free from indifference to evil; a zeal for truth free from the self-conceitedness of orthodoxy.

This side of the Divine, by which the 'Eternal Gospel' can be preached to the *poor* you find in Christ, and do not find in the teachers whom men would substitute for Him. But I cannot think He is the less Divine for that."

"There I quite agree with you. But see what we come to. Christ you say, did not teach men to worship himself, He taught men a profoundly simple, and therefore profoundly philosophical religion, which his example, so far as we know it, illustrated. This, the Church converted into the worship of Christ himself, and thereby lost or dimmed the purity of Christ's teaching. Now, that's my position. I want to restore this profoundly philosophical religion by getting rid of the interpolated disturbing element."

"But in so doing, 'you root up,' in my judgment, 'the wheat with the tares.' The element of personal reverence for Christ on which the Church has laid so much stress, is only the expansion of that personal element, that 'come unto me and I will give you rest,' so especially distinctive of Christ's own teaching. Reduce Him to a mere human teacher, and it becomes an offensive assumption.\* No one man has the right to speak so. At best He must have limited His invitation to 'come and I will show you the better way,' as St. Paul does. But take away this personal element from the teaching of the Church, you take away also the main spring of its force. It began, during the life of Jesus, in reverence for one who led men to God in drawing them to Himself. It has continued, because, under the Catholic conception about His person, to come to Him was to come to God. To take away this conception might indeed throw down a great deal of mud suspended in the stream; but it would dry up the water."

"Can the waters of trust in God ever dry up?"

"They cannot fail to satisfy the individual soul which draws from the living spring; but they may dry

\* As Professor Newman powerfully shows in the tract cited above, p. 166.

up for the many, from doubts as to the existence of the spring preventing their searching for it."

"Religion," I continued after a moment's pause, "being a universal principle, though it must grow up within the individual, requires to root itself in something deeper than the individual. A faith growing out of the remote past by a continuous development, can fulfil this condition, and yet allow of freedom and progress. But, on your hypothesis, there would be no continuity. The passage from the national faith of the Jew to the faith in a God of all mankind, has been historically made through the belief in the Divine nature of Christ. Any further religious development must take into itself this belief, or it cannot be continuous with the past, and must thus lose the 'note' of a true revelation. You cannot jump back eighteen hundred years, and live the *first* century over again in the *nineteenth*."

"But, surely, the Reformation was founded on the notion of going back to primitive Christianity, and throwing off the corruptions of it introduced during the middle ages?"

"No doubt it was. But is not the history of the Protestant bodies a perpetual witness to the error of the attempt? What have Protestant theologians gained by breaking up the unity of the Latin Church, but the affirmation of a principle at whose results they tremble,—the *duty* of personal conviction, and therefore, the *right* of free inquiry? If we are to attain to any satisfactory issue from the Reformation, we must alter our conceptions of revelation. Instead of a set of stereotyped dogmas, we must see in it a living, continuous process."

"And then we stumble over the Roman Catholic Church in the West, to say nothing of the East: a magnificent development no doubt of the principle of authority, but with what a result? What faith can we place in the Church having revealed to us truths about the person of Christ, not asserted by himself, when her

system culminates in a solemn claim of personal infallibility for the old gentleman, who sits for the time being in the Papal Chair, a claim which seems about to be made in sober earnest.\*

"None, if the Church had not, in her development, departed from the free spirit of her Founder; if she had been content to allow the condition of attachment to His person to remain the sufficient theoretical bond of union, and, limiting her censures to moral transgressions, had left the progress of thought free——"

"That is to say, pardon my interrupting you, if the Church had been different from what she has been, she might have been a trustworthy guide. But we can deal only with what she has been."

"We must deal with the Church, I conceive, as with all natural growth; look for the idea beneath the phenomena. If my conception of revelation is right, what the Church had principally to do was, to blend effectually into one, the two great modes under which man's imagination has presented to itself the Divine; as transcendent to the visible universe and as immanent in it; and to fix men's attention on their union in the point where it had actually taken place—namely, the person of Christ. This function she had to fulfil under the common conditions of all human effort. We learn to go right by the consequences of going wrong. But it is better to take the wrong path than not to move at all, for then we never could find the right one. The Church went wrong, I think, when she relied on the principle of authority as the guide to truth. The error was inevitable: it was inherent in the spirit of the age when she sprang up. But she fulfilled the primary purpose of her existence, if not by the best means, yet in the end. She developed and asserted, with unwavering constancy, the faith in the Divinity of her Lord."

"And in his perpetual contra-sensual presence in the elements of the Eucharist."

\* As has since actually been done.

“His hidden presence, that is to say, His presence, not attested by any visible sign, distinct from the phenomena which we call natural. But is not the conception of this sort of presence inseparable from the idea of the immanence of God in the world, with which you do not quarrel?”

“Well! no doubt God is really present beneath every natural phenomenon, but that is not what the Church taught. The Real Presence of Christ in the Bread and Wine is to her occasional only; depending on the magical force of the consecrating words, which draw Him from the skies, and make Him descend on His altar, to be offered up as the ever-present bloodless sacrifice.”

“But if He is really present there, as He must be if the conceptions of His inherent Divinity and of the immanence of God in the universe are true, the Church is substantially right in her teaching, and wrong only in taking as partial that which is truly universal; making the priest *produce* a presence which it is his proper office only to *declare*.”

“You take me quite aback. Of all doctrines in the world I never dreamt of finding the dogma of the Real Presence put forward as a truth of reason. But if it is only one case of a universal action, what becomes of the special reverence attached to the Sacred Symbol?”

“Reverence is the offspring of faith; faith in the living God, whose continual presence the symbol attests; and faith in the Divinity of Him, of whose love, manifested on earth, the Sacramental Bread and Wine are the memorials. We may kneel before the Christian altar, as we uncover our heads in church, from motives entirely free from any magical notions of Divine action.”

“And, you see Mr. W——,” interposed Agnes, “if Christ is, as Edward supposes, the Divine Person whose power is especially shown in all living things;

and His peculiar Divine work is to make them be, and so to clothe the earth with beauty, and fill it with gladness, there could not be better and more fit memorials of Him, than that 'bread' which is 'the staff of our life;' and that great minister to our enjoyment 'the wine which maketh glad the heart of man.' I assure you I was quite delighted when Edward first made me understand this. It was so charming to feel that one could really sympathize with the builders of those grand old cathedrals, in the reverence they expressed in their beautiful stonework, for this profound truth, which the Church has preserved for us, almost without knowing it."

"But where are we to stop in this philosophical rehabilitation of Catholicism? Does it include the Virgin Mother?"

"I think every true lover may answer that question in the affirmative," I replied. "Set aside the physical absurdities, and can any conception be more profoundly true than that the spirit of chastity and purity is enshrined in wedded love, not profaned by it: that it is the subordination of the spirit to the flesh, not the union where the body ministers to the deepest impulses of the soul, in which lies the danger of love."

"And as for the invocation of the Saints," continued Agnes, smiling, "you must remember that Mons. Comte proposes to revive it in his own fashion, only bringing in certain benefactors of mankind, of whom the Church has taken no notice, but whom Edward thinks that she might, in many cases, very properly include in her commemorations."

"To express, I suppose, *la solidarité humaine* as our neighbours say; the feeling that the great and good of all ages are really one body of workers together with God; and that the thought of them should be continually present to our memories, as their work is really present to our lives, which are what they are, in great part through what our forefathers have been and have

done. Well! if you do not insist on their bones working miracles, I won't quarrel with that doctrine."

"So, Mr W——, all your long list of stumbling-blocks to the faith in Christ from the history of the Church, seem to resolve themselves into the Pope. But then Edward says the whole idea of the Papal power grew out of the feeling of the unity of all spiritual life, which is at the very root of our faith, if we believe in Christ really as a Divine Being, and not, as is the case with most Protestants, unhappily, only as the head of a sect. And that the Pope should be at Rome has a deep significance, too, when we remember that Rome has been the type of empire. For when Rome became identified with the visible head of the Church, what was this but the sign that the 'kingdoms of the world' were to be transformed into the 'kingdom of God and of His Christ'?"

"You make a very good defence for his Holiness, my dear madam, but I don't know that I object to the head so much as to the body—the priestly order thrust in between man and God—the whole monastic system, and the celibate clergy. You cannot have the heart to defend them, surely?"

"*Optimi corruptio pessimum est*,"\* W——," I said. "That which is beautiful, and noble, if freely chosen, may become a villainous burden on men's souls if it is enforced. You must not forget that Plato proposed for his select teachers and guardians of the order of his commonwealth a body free from the distracting influences of individual homes. I cannot but think there is a profound truth latent in the notion that, for the perfect development of human society, we want associations of men and women, in whom devotion to the common good, and cultivation of the inner life shall take the place of the anxieties and pursuits which usually engross our time."

\* The corruption of the best is the worst.

"At all events, the Church did not solve this problem of a perfect human society."

"No; but she kept it constantly before men's eyes, while Protestantism has shelved it, till it is coming upon us like a 'giant armed' in questions of social reform."

"We must not get on that topic, or we shall never get back to our proper one," said W—. "But, apart from the question of celibacy, what is the whole priestly system but a barrier, where we require a bond?"

"And what is to form the bond?" As W— did not reply, I continued. "Look to the origin of the Christian priesthood. You will see, I think, that in its idea, it is exactly what you truly say we need, a bond between God and man, by the witness which it bears, through the fact of its existence, to the great manifestation of God in Christ."

"Assuming that manifestation to have taken place?"

"Naturally. Assuming the idea on which the Church has been built to express a reality, I say the conception of a body of teachers who, according to their original institution, were bound to no enforced form of doctrine, but were simply linked by the fact of the laying-on of hands to the Divine Revealer, combines, in the happiest union possible, those opposing phases of faith and freedom, so hard to reconcile by the methods commonly adopted."

"So you see, Mr W—," interposed Agnes, "it is just as I said after all, your difficulties about the Church melt away when we examine them closely, though they look very formidable at a distance, when you see them in a mass."

"But, my dear madam, even if we could quite boil away all these inner difficulties by the sort of process to which P— subjects them, you must not forget that there is another lot from outside the Church; there is that great stumbling-stone, the rise of Mahometanism, the vast regions where it extinguished the faith in Christ."



"The ebb of what we believe to be the truth from lands it once covered must always be perplexing," I answered, "but this perplexity seems to me to attach to your views as well as to mine. You do not maintain, I suppose, that Mahometanism contains more religious truth than Christianity. But if not, how came it to supplant Christianity?"

"You forget that to me *both* Christianity and Mahometanism are imperfect statements of the simple Theistic religion, the one distorting it into the worship of a man, the other into blind obedience to 'God's word' delivered to His Prophet. It is conformable to the general analogy of the Divine order upon earth, that the various forms of error should perish by external conflict or internal decay. Men are commonly led to discover the right road by continual failures in trying wrong ones."

"But to me, too, as I have said more than once, the Christianity of the Church has been wrong. Sadly wrong, in substituting the principle of authority embodied in her creeds, founded on the writings treated by her as infallible, for that of personal trust in the living God manifested in her ever-present Lord. Why then should she not experience in her contest with Mahometanism, that necessity of learning the truth from the bitter consequences of error, which you and I agree in considering to be the Divine method of instruction?"

"But the struggle did not teach her this. The tendencies you condemn were strengthened rather than lessened by the conflict of Christendom with the Mahometan power."

"The struggle did, I conceive, all that mere trials of strength can do. It braced up the conflicting forces and made each side put forth its noblest energies. Ranke traces the great conception of the Papacy in the ages next preceding the Reformation, in part to the loss of the grand object of arming Europe against the In-

fidels, which had been continually before the eyes of the mediæval Popes. And modern Europe owes, I imagine, not unimportant elements in her civilization to the Crusades. But the energy thus developed followed its own course. It could not do otherwise. The lesson is for us, who stand at a point in human history where it can be drawn. We may see in the growth of Mahometanism and its decay, God's continuous protest outside the Church, against the double error of Catholic and Protestant orthodoxy inside it, Church worship and Bible worship."

"A sort of pendant, I suppose you would say, to His protest within the Church against the same tendencies, in the schisms and sects into which Christianity has split up, under the vain attempt to rest truth on authority instead of on conviction."

"You put the case very well. And, granting our common assumption that God works always through natural means, the history of Mahometanism ceases to be so puzzling. Rather the puzzle would have been, if the Church had gone on 'conquering, and to conquer,' while she carried within her frame such a formidable disease. How can we expect that she should draw mankind generally into her fold, when she presents herself as the bearer of a message requiring to be supported by learned apologies, instead of as the proclaimer of living truths responded to by the conscience of man."

"And what can those be but the simple affirmations of Theism?"

"None else. But in teaching them as that to which God has borne witness in the history of man, by showing Himself to be that personal, pure, just, and yet loving Being whom the noblest imaginings of man have conceived, she can appeal to men's consciences with a power such as teachings addressed only to the witness of conscience, with no claim to any affirmation by the concurrent voice of history, could never exercise?"

"Well! that is probable, and of course, if you give

up the claim to infallibility either for Church or Bible, and take your stand on the history of human beliefs, that is, really on the scientific ground of the interpretation of nature, where you place all creeds on the same level, you get over the grand stumbling stone of partial conflicting revelations. All become part of one universal scheme. But suppose me a Hindoo, say Keshub Chunder Sen, whom I mentioned the other day, of whom I daresay you have heard, as the leader of the advanced Brahmoos, to whom you come with your historical affirmation of Theistic faith, through the Divine personality which you attribute to Jesus, may I not justly urge, 'You ask me to believe in a self-contradictory supposition, in an unchangeable being who changes; who grows up from babyhood to manhood; who as a baby, was necessarily entirely ignorant, and as a man, according to the accounts preserved of him, shared in the notions of his countrymen about their sacred books, and about the universe, which we now know to have been mistaken, and entertained entirely unfounded anticipations of coming in the clouds to judge all mankind, before the generation who saw him had passed away.' How can I believe in such a Deity?"

"As to the complaint of 'unfounded anticipations' I should reply, a careful examination of the New Testament has satisfied me, that in them we hear only the voice of the early Church, the hopes and fears of the first generations of Christians, not the words of Christ. The other difficulty goes much deeper. It strikes at the root of the idea of Incarnation. Now this idea is, as we have seen, one of the two great modes under which the religious instinct of man has presented to itself the Divine action. What shall I say then? Is my knowledge of the Divinity such as to justify me in condemning the religious sense of the Aryan family of mankind—the one among whom intellectual power has achieved its grandest triumphs, to sterility. Yet if we accept this instinct as a true element in the manifesta-

tion of the Divine, and do not play at bo-peep with our thoughts, but attach a serious meaning to our words, it must be consistent with the Divine essence to exhibit itself, under every phase through which will and intelligence can pass in man."

"But our ignorance of the Divine nature cannot justify us in ascribing to it a mode of action inconsistent with itself."

"Agreed, provided you do not call that inconsistent with 'itself,' which is only inconsistent with some arbitrary assumption of your own."

"Surely, the notions of unchangeableness and growth are opposed by no arbitrary assumption, but by their own proper conception. Now, if the Divine essence is to be really manifested in a man, that which is so manifested must be unchangeable; but if it is unchangeable it cannot grow; and if so it cannot be manifested in any being who, like man, grows."

"But what is to hinder us from ascribing the growth to the vehicle through which the manifestation is made, not to the essence manifested by it? Suppose a glass capable of expanding from a point visible only with the aid of a microscope, to the size of a common tumbler, it might contain water in every stage of its growth, but we should not discover it to be water till the glass had grown to a considerable size; though its qualities would really be all the while the same, and there would be change only in the quantity contained. What evidence have we that the Divine cannot manifest itself quantitatively, under all the phases of human growth; putting forth at each successive stage just so much inherent power as belongs to the principle of will in man in that phase; yet always with a consciousness of its own nature and acts."

"I won't deny the possibility of that. But the will thus displayed would be essentially different from our ordinary human will. In us, to carry on your analogy, the oxygen and hydrogen have to combine into water.

In the Deity clothed in our shape, the water would be always formed and indecomposable."

"I admit that."

"Then you must admit also that there can be no question of a growth in the mind of Christ to a perception of his Messianic functions. From the first he must have known who he was."

"No doubt! And so the Church has always held, from the time that the idea of the true Divinity of Christ presented itself in biographical detail, to the imagination of the author of the fourth Gospel. This is the very thing that has made this Gospel so dear to the Christian body. It made Christ say of Himself what they thought about Him; mistaking very much, I believe, what such a Divine man would do and say, but guided by a true instinct to see that He must have spoken and acted always with the consciousness of His Divinity."

"But then, what is to become of the great example which you clergy are accustomed to press upon us in the character of Christ. How can a Being who, from the first dawn of conscious reason, possessed a will perfect under every trial to which it could be subject, be a pattern to a struggling host of imperfect creatures in their slow and often backsliding efforts to realize in their own case the ideal of humanity?" \*

"I should say it is precisely the idea of the true Divinity, and therefore the inherent perfection of the will of Christ which makes it possible for Him to be an

\* If Christ were a man he is our *pattern*, the possibility of our race made real; if He were God, a partaker of God's nature, as the orthodox maintain, they are guilty of a cruel mockery in speaking of Him as a type, a model of human excellence. How can one endowed with the perfection of a god be an example to beings encumbered with the weaknesses of humanity?—Greg "Creed of Christendom," p. 87. See also "The Problem of the World and the Church Re-considered," 145.

example to mankind, and that the idea of His simple humanity destroys this example."

"You speak in paradoxes."

"But the solution is not difficult. Consider. How can one man be an example to any other man, all the circumstances of whose life are utterly different, let alone the difference of the sexes?"

"Surely the same spirit may be manifested under all sorts of circumstances, the spirit of truthfulness, for instance, of temperance, of justice, of purity?"

"No doubt; but what is the spirit manifested by Jesus which is of such universal application that He can be said to be an example to all mankind?"

"The common voice of Christianity answers, the spirit of pure unselfishness, of self-sacrificing love, carried to the supreme point of enduring death on the cross for the sake of other men."

"But if Jesus was only an obscure carpenter's son, who claimed to be the Messiah of whose greatness the long line of Jewish prophets had traced such magnificent anticipations, this self-sacrifice was associated with an amount of self-importance which quite spoils it as an example. Socrates seems to me a purer pattern of simple human earnestness in the search for truth, without regard to consequences; and Paul a more striking instance of missionary energy in proclaiming what he conceived to be true, under every difficulty."

"To say nothing of Bouddha," interposed Agnes, "who, according to the story about him, was a king's son, heir to his throne, who gave up all the luxury of a court, that he might practise and teach, in a life of the most self-denying poverty, the true wisdom which overcomes desire."

"Yes," I continued. "To convert Christ into an effective example of self-sacrificing love we require the idea of his voluntary abasement, as it is shadowed forth in the Philippians; the notion of one "who being in

the form of God, grasped not at equality with God,\* but took on him the form of a servant, and being found in the likeness of man, humbled himself to be subject to death, even the death of the cross."

"Well, I admit that the idea of the true Divinity of Christ does make him a very effective example of this spirit, yet the Christians who have most emphatically dwelt on the conception of Christ being our example are the Unitarians, who reject this idea."

"Because, in the Catholic Church the grand old life-giving conception of the Divine example afforded us by Christ was stifled beneath the notion of mysterious exclusive blessings purchased through His atoning blood, for His orthodox followers. When this after-growth was cut down by the Unitarian pruning-hook, the primitive conception revived. And the old Unitarians did not feel that they had really destroyed the value of the example on which they insisted by abandoning the Catholic ground, because to them, Jesus, though only a man, was a man clothed with such exceptional powers, that in *not using them for his own aggrandisement*, but submitting to poverty and reproach and death, he displayed an amount of self-denial so great, that it might be justly rewarded by the privilege of becoming the Christian Minos, the judge of quick and dead, which they thought that God had bestowed upon him."

"But now that critical enquiry has swept away the foundation of our belief in these supernatural powers, I suppose you contend that the old Unitarian conception must fall through. Yet James Martineau, I remember, says somewhere, 'Come what may of the critical verification, the Divine image furnished by the life of Christ is now secured to the soul of Christendom,

\* This appears to be the true rendering of *οὐχ ἀρπαγμὸν ἡγήσατο τὸ εἶναι ἰσα θεῷ*. The rendering, thought it "not robbery to be equal with God," spoils the natural course of the thought.

presides in secret over its moral estimates, directs its aspirations and inspires its worship."

"Martineau, I think, deceives himself by his own genius. He creates the image of an ideally perfect man, and calls it Christ, influenced by 'the scent of the roses' which hangs round the revered form. And no doubt this ideal is not liable to be destroyed by critical research, but then it has no firm objective foundation. It cannot appeal to the past for its verification as the Catholic idea can. It is not a datum given us by man's religious history; but a modern creation of our own minds, to which we give an illusive solidity by looking at it across the mirage of eighteen centuries."

"I suppose you make the same sort of objections to Dean Milman's dictum, that the words of Jesus will survive, as a beacon light for mankind, though the faiths connected with his person should perish."

"Yes, if those words are not left to rest upon themselves; if any special weight be claimed for them, because they are ascribed to Jesus, apart from the witness borne to the Catholic idea of His nature by their general tone. For, then arise the questions. First, why attach greater weight to the words of Jesus than to those of any other man? Second, are we sure that we have a faithful report of his words? And if we seek to establish this to the satisfaction of a stringent criticism, one sentence after another will disappear till there is left only *magni nominis umbra*."\*

"I believe you are about right there: *so revenons à nos moutons*. I have not half done with the difficulties involved in the notion of this Divine manifestation. Surely, you must go further with the fourth gospel as to his knowledge. How is it possible to separate the consciousness of Divinity from the absolute knowledge belonging to God?"

\* The shadow of a great name. Hence the contradictory estimates of the motives and objects of Jesus formed by eminent critics of different schools.



“Will you tell me what that absolute knowledge is? What knowledge can be suitable to the eternal but a knowledge of principles? Each Divine hypostasis must know the modes, limitations, and purposes, of its own action. But the knowledge of phenomena appears to me to belong to the creature, not to the creator. God is the ever-present doer, and Divine knowledge is, I conceive, a knowledge of the present and inward; knowledge of the outward, phenomenal, which, in fact, is always a knowledge of the past, for all such knowledge arises by reflection and implies the previous being of that on which we reflect, belongs, I think, to the beings who are themselves phenomena—to man not to God.”

“So, that, setting aside the question as to what Christ’s words on any particular occasion really were, you would say, it is not inconsistent with the essential Divinity of Christ that he should have thought about the phenomenal, as a Jew of his day would think: supposing, for instance, that Moses wrote Deuteronomy, or that the earth was made in six days, some 4000 or 5000 years before his birth, for this sort of knowledge would not belong to his Divine nature.”

“I am disposed to think so. Strange as the notion may appear at first, from our habits, borrowed from the Bible, of representing God to ourselves, as a big invisible man who lives in a place at a distance from the earth, but near enough to see it, and notice all that goes on in it; having begun to do so some few thousand years ago. But the more I meditate on the nature of an eternal omnipresent Being, the immanent sustainer of the universe, the more utterly inconceivable the knowledge of phenomena by such a Being seems to me to be. What limit are we to put to it? Once begin, and you cannot stop short of the movements of each elementary particle of what we call matter, of which there are probably millions in a pin’s head; and that for endless time. And does God grow wiser as he grows older, through all this accumulated knowledge? I see

no way to untie this knot but to cut it clean off, and assume that the Divine knowledge is limited to that, into which all knowledge worth the having resolves itself, the knowledge of ideas."

"My dear Edward," said Agnes, "you rather frighten me with these notions; you have never told me anything about them before. And I am sure you have often said that it is best not to puzzle ourselves with such questions, as to which we cannot know anything certain. Besides, how can God judge us, if He does not know our actions?"

"My dearest love, God's judgment is of the will, not of the act, the internal, not the external. If we can be sure of anything in the teaching of Christ, He taught that God regards the will which is always present, not the particular phenomena in which it may have manifested itself."

"I don't think you have any need to trouble yourself about this matter, my dear madam," said W——, "I understand your husband only to answer an assumption of mine about the Divine nature, which raised a difficulty to belief in the Incarnation, by another equally probable assumption which removes it. The fact so far as we know it, seems to be that Jesus spoke of matters of history, and perhaps of physics, as a Jew of his day would naturally speak, and the question is whether the ignorance implied in his so speaking can be reconciled with the faith in his Divine nature? To this your husband answers, what reason have we for supposing that the knowledge of God is like our knowledge a knowledge of phenomena, whence we slowly and painfully feel our way to the knowledge of principles? Is it not far more probable that the Divine knowledge is a knowledge of the principles which are eternal, and not of the phenomena which are in a state of perpetual flux?"

"You state my point very well. The question, however, is the less important, because on the matters where the then current opinions of the Jews came most

into conflict with what we now consider to be true, we have either no sayings of Jesus at all, or such as do accord with our present knowledge. For instance, in dealing with the Sabbath, He quite ignores the notion of any rest of God after the labour of creation, and refers to the Ten commandments only as what had been 'said by them of old,' without the least notice of the story of their having been uttered by Jehovah from the top of Mount Sinai."

"But what do you say to his expulsion of devils?"

"That Christ, possessing natural healing influence exerciseable over certain diseases, especially diseases of the nervous system, did, what every wise physician who has to do with mad persons does; used their delusions to aid in their cure. His argument with the Pharisees about these cases is an *argumentum ad hominem*. If they could cast out devils, as they asserted, in the name of God, why should they accuse Him of casting them out by any other than a Divine power. And then we find Him spiritualizing the whole question of devil possession; speaking of the devil who had gone out of a man 'returning to his home and finding it swept and garnished.' But we must not forget, in any of these cases, how fragmentary our knowledge of Christ's acts and sayings really is; and through how deep a haze of popular beliefs we see His form."

"I cannot deny your right to use the uncertainty cast over the story of Jesus by the critical examination of the Gospels, to blunt difficulties, as others have used it to destroy proofs; but it is very unsatisfactory to be indebted to a mist for the removal of doubts on a point of so much importance to our religious faith as this doctrine of the Incarnation is. Why should not Jesus have had a Xenophon, or a Boswell, as well as Socrates, or Johnson, that we might see clearly?"

"Or why did He not leave us an autobiography attested so as to remove all doubt as to its genuineness? It seems to me that this is one of those cases, where as

St. Paul says, 'the foolishness of God is wiser than man.' The eyes of mankind, in that age, were too full of the marvellous to have discerned the Divine where we, now, should be inclined to seek it; in a Being who seemed to touch the supernatural on all sides without leaving the natural. A simple picture of Christ's life, as it actually was, would, I believe, appear to us more truly Divine than the one presented to us; but it would have appeared scarcely Divine at all to those to whom it was first offered. The deification of Jesus began, as Strauss justly observes, not with the Apostles who had been His companions, but with St. Paul who had not known Him after the flesh: and the insensibility of the first ages would have been fatal to the faith of their successors. But, left as they were, to shape and colour the picture of Christ from their own imaginations, they produced a figure which satisfied them; while to us, who have before our eyes the long development of this conception, history can supply the gaps of biography.\*

"You meet my difficulties in detail with answers which seem always to turn them; yet, somehow, I cannot get over the feeling of something false in the whole conception of such a unique manifestation of

\* Dean Milman has remarked "that the passages in the New Testament relating to the marvellous interpositions and prodigies in the gospels, which do not accord with the more subtle and fastidious intelligence of the present day, are precisely those which were dearest to the believers of an imaginative age, and that the reverential feeling thus excited most powerfully contributed to the maintenance of the religion for at least seventeen centuries." *History of Christianity*, I. 131. But he does not carry this view as far as it seems to extend; and weakens its force by speaking in other passages of the "necessity of some departure from the pure and essential spirituality of the Deity in order to communicate with the human race" instead of adhering to the position that the *language* of poetic incident may be part of the Divine order. *Ib.* p. 117. See Note to *English Life of Jesus*, I., p. 37. 2nd Edition, p. 39.

God. Place yourself where you please, among Brahmins, Mahometans, Bouddhists, Parsees, as a teacher of pure Theism : there is a wideness, a universality about the creed, which seems capable of drawing in all minds open to religious emotions at all. To the unity of the Deity all nature, interpreted as she now is, to a wonderful degree, by scientific research, bears witness. And the same research furnishes proofs that, in every special religion, there is an amount of physical error in the teachings which its followers have regarded as sacred, demonstrating that they are not infallible ; yet in every case their teaching also supplies the proof that ' God has not left Himself without witness ' among men, but in every age and race has raised up prophets, who have drawn men to Him, according to the measure of the faith and insight possible in that age and people. And now, when the advance of knowledge has enabled us, by the comparison of all these teachings, and the rejection of that in them which will not bear the criticism of reason and light of science, to sift out the pure grains of spiritual truth from the husks, now an universal church may grow up in all lands, of those who would worship the Father of all ' in spirit and in truth ; ' claiming no exclusive privilege, but only to have gained, by the teachings of time, a clearer view of that supreme Being whom all more or less ignorantly sought.

" And what is to prevent me from presenting this grand faith which you describe so eloquently and well ? "

" Why, the special claim to reverence which you set up for Christ. "

" But Christ, according to the Catholic faith, was the manifestation of the one true God, the proof of whose three-fold Being, though this was disclosed to man through the faith in the Divine nature of Christ, rests, as we have seen, on a basis entirely independent of the Christian story, namely, on the scientific fact, that there is in nature a two-fold co-existent action of primitive power, and organizing

wisdom, which, if we see in nature the manifestation of conscious will, compels us to ascribe to this will a double action ; while the religious man, to whom God is also a loving Being, with whom he can have personal intercourse, must add to these double hypostases of power and wisdom, the third hypostasis of a communicating love. What is there then to hinder me, I do not say as a minister of the Church of England, but as a minister of Christ, from inviting Brahmin, or Bouddhist, or Parsee, or Mahometan, or any others, to join in the recognition and worship of this Triune God, as the true Being whom they have ignorantly worshipped : ‘ baptizing them in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost ? ’

“ Certainly, I do not see what is to hinder you, if you can satisfy your reverence for Christ, by the invitation to such a common worship.”

“ I do not say that I should be satisfied by it. On the contrary, I should use my best powers to argue with them, as I have argued with you, for the further truth, that this Being who manifests Himself to our outer senses in nature, and our inner sense in communion with Him, has manifested Himself in the history of mankind, as a personal God, in union with whom all men may find rest for their souls. But to teach this faith as my own belief is one thing, to impose its acceptance as a condition of communion is quite another. I know of no commission from Christ to His ministers to bring men to Him apart from the Father.”

“ But would you receive men to the Lord’s Supper without any profession of their special faith in Christ ? ”

“ Why not, if they are *willing* to come ? Why should I exclude any worshipper of the one true God, from ‘ breaking the bread ’ and ‘ drinking of the cup,’ in memory of Jesus, if they are so minded ? What right have I to say to one in whose heart the Father and the Son may dwell, by the eternal spirit of love, you shall not draw near to express your love to God, and your fellowship to man by an act of affectionate remembrance

of one whom you regard as a great revealer of this true God, because I have notions about His nature different from yours?"

"But if you do not repel them directly, how could you help doing so indirectly? Those who believe in the Divine Being of Christ would naturally accompany the act specially connected with the memory of his death by expressions of their belief repulsive to those who did not share it."

"Even that difficulty might, I think, be overcome. The 'do this in remembrance of me,' is a formula so simple and wide, that it may embrace those who believe the story of Christ to be only the history of a divinely moved man, as well as those who see in it the manifestation of the self-existing Divine essence. The common worship might be confined to expressions in which all could share, supplemented by special devotions for those to whom the Divinity of Christ was a reality."

"An esoteric gathering of the genuine worshippers, I suppose."

"Esoteric, no doubt, yet not exclusive, and associated with a worship by which they expressed their community of feeling with all who had faith in a conscious, loving Being, immanent in the universe, with whom the spirit of man can have communion, though they might not interpret similarly the manifestation of this Being in the history of mankind."

"But then, there is the doctrine of the Trinity in unity, as a barrier between you and the believers in the simple Divine unity."

"A barrier, if they choose to make it a barrier, but to me only the scientific expression of the views in which all agree, who ascribe to God, conscious power wisdom and love, and regard Him as immanent in the universe sustained by Him."

"Do you mean to say that you would not impose on your converts even the professed belief in that Triune character which you have almost talked me into ascribing to the Deity?"

"I feel no authority to *impose* my beliefs on other men, only to *propose* them. If I look to that pattern of the earliest Christian devotion, which tradition ascribes to Christ, I find in it only the expression of pure Theism—the belief in a Father of all, whose will is the perfect rule of our conduct; whose goodness is the source whence our wants are supplied; whose aid can deliver us when we are tempted; whose forgiveness is conditioned only by our readiness to forgive; the promotion of whose kingdom, the extension of whose power and influence in the sphere of human will, is the true object of conquering ambition, the proper aim of human effort—but not the slightest allusion to any distinctions in the Divine nature. Why should I narrow the approach to God, by interposing intellectual limitations on which Christ did not insist?"

"Certainly, it is not my argument, that you should do so. But you spoke just now of 'baptizing men in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost:' in what position would the baptized stand in your ideal congregation, to those who did not accept this creed?"

"Somewhat in that of the 'initiated' in the ancient Greek mysteries to the body of 'uninitiated.' Only that, here, the secret would be an open one. They would have avowed the faith which I hold to be true. They should, I conceive, declare it publicly by acts of worship, solemn enough and frequent enough to show that it was not indifferent to them; but acts from which none would be excluded in taking part who did not exclude themselves."

"Well! the idea is novel, at all events. I should like to know how you would work in the special devotions with your common worship, if you have got to this point in your speculations."

"I am inclined to follow the Lutheran model, and call in the aid of musick for the greater part of the devotions. The prayers I should make short and simple, and addressed to God only, and combine them



with psalms, also confined to the expressions of religious feeling common to the general instinct of mankind. Passages selected from *various* religious writings, ancient or modern, might be read as lessons.\* Then should succeed short hymns expressing the ideas special to the different religious bodies of which the members were known to take part in the united worship, chosen by them out of a selection formed for the purpose of this worship. Of course the order in which they were to succeed would be made known, and those persons who could not join in any of the hymns might withdraw themselves in the simplest possible way, by sitting down."

"Provided the hymns were not selected by cross-grained Presbyterians, who insist on sitting when they sing."

"They must be invited to give up their cross-grainedness so far as to adopt the common practice of standing up."

"So, after all, you would not offer up prayers to Christ specially?"

"Except in the Christian hymns," interposed Agnes.

"No," I continued, "I prefer to keep to His own model, and avoid the risk of dividing in prayer the feeling which should be one. Distinction should be admitted, I think, only when the aid of poetry and harmony is invoked to preserve the sense of unity.

"Well! I own the scheme seems to me more practicable than I had thought possible. I should like to see an attempt made to realize it. London must supply a sufficient diversity of religious opinion to offer a good field for such an experiment. Why not get up a society for introducing united worship. Only what is to be done as to the teaching."

"I should be disposed to adopt Lord Amberley's idea, and admit a variety of preachers of various creeds,

\* As has since been done by Mr Voysey in the services conducted by him in St. George's Hall.

under the condition that they would confine themselves to stating their own positive beliefs, and refrain from the abuse of those who do not agree with them."

"All approach to the 'without doubt he shall perish everlastingly.'"

"The nature of the proposed union would probably exclude men of this stamp of mind from seeking to take any part in it. If it did not, if any exclusive teacher, say Archbishop Manning, in his zeal for the salvation of souls, offered to address the mixed congregation whom he might meet at such gatherings, I would not prevent him from asserting the claim of his church to be the 'allein-seligmache[n]che,'\* leaving it to his own good sense to assert it in the way most likely to influence such hearers."

"No doubt the Archbishop would *draw*, and that would be a main point. I see what you would exclude are only controversial sermons."

"Just so. I should insist on positive to the exclusion of negative teaching, except where it was indispensable to distinguish what was affirmed from what might be mistaken for it, or to show that no other affirmation was tenable. The hearers would then have some chance of judging for themselves which of the different systems presented to them was the best."

"Well, my dear madam," said W——, turning to my wife, "I am afraid I must leave you to-day, and my train is due before long, so I suppose our talk must end here. But I am very much pleased to have had it, and can truly say I heartily wish there were more clergymen in the Church of England who thought as your husband does."

With this our conversation terminated. He went in to pack up his clothes, and left us shortly afterwards.

\* The only way of salvation.

VIA CATHOLICA.

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PART III.

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# VIA CATHOLICA:

OR,

## PASSAGES FROM THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF A COUNTRY PARSON.

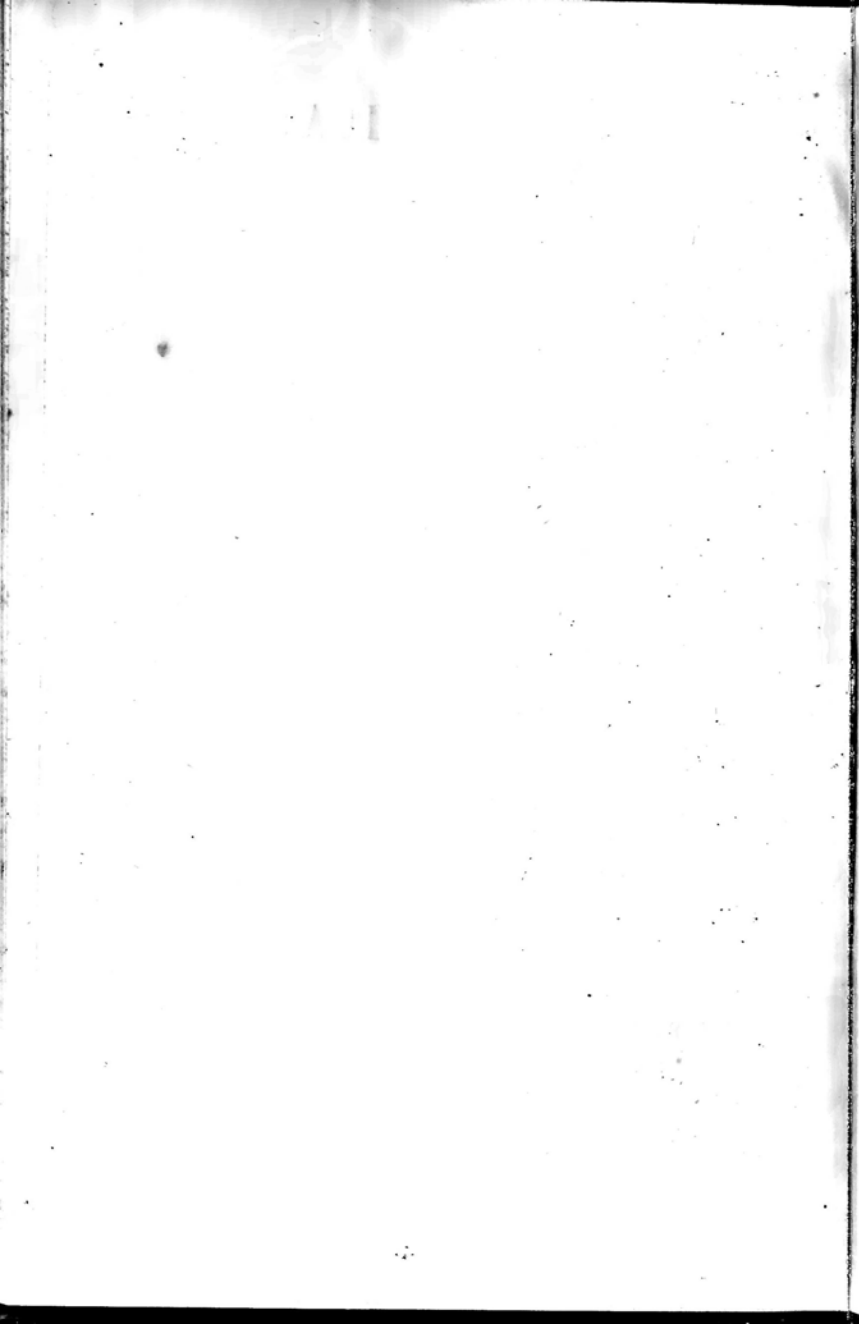
### PART III.

Ἐπεὶ οὐχ ἰερῆσιον οὐδέ βοείην  
Ἀρνόσθην, ἃ τὲ ποσσὶν ἀέθλια γίνεται ἀνδρῶν,  
Ἄλλὰ περὶ ψυχῆς θεῶν Ἐκτορος ἱπποδάμοιο.  
Il. xxii. 159.



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## CHAPTER XIII.

### THE GOSPELS.

THE round of my parish visits took me again to-day to Margaret R——'s cottage. I found her reading a book, with which she was so intently occupied, that she did not perceive my entrance, but laid down upon my speaking to her, and said, with one of her pleasant smiles, "Well, sir, you find me nearly lost like in a kind of book that does not often be my reading—a book about the gospels by one as doesn't half believe in them."

"I should not think that was much in your way, indeed, Margaret," I replied. "What book is it?"

She placed in my hands "The English Life of Jesus."\* "So you have got hold of one of my friend ——'s books," I continued, naming the gentleman whom I knew to be the author. "And what do you think of it?"

"Maybe I should tell you first how I came to get it. You see, sir, among my Tom's friends, or rather I should say his acquaintances, is one Will S——, a joiner, I think, he is by trade. Maybe you knows him, sir, though he isn't of the parish."

"I have often heard of him; and a very clever fellow he is, by all accounts."

"Yes, that he is, surely. I don't know any one that's

\* Part of a series of works published by Mr T. Scott of Norwood.

clearer in his head, nor readier with his tongue—that is among his class, sir, I mean.”

“Don’t be afraid of hurting my vanity, if you think him a cleverer fellow than I am. Natural gifts do not go with professions.”

“But I don’t know as I do, sir; leastways, if Will have the greater natural gifts, your’s has had the more cultivation. Anyhow, he has fallen on Tom more than once for believing, as he says, without having facts behind as the backbone of his belief. So, as Tom told me of this, I asked him to bring S——to see me some day. Well, Will seemed rather pleased with that; so, one Sunday afternoon he came here to tea, and we had a long talk together about the gospels, and the differences and contradictions, and errors that there is in them. And, to be sure, he did make out a mighty long list, which I was fain to allow to him was fairly shown, leastways so far as I could judge. But then I made him an answer, mainly from something I’ve heard from you, sir, in the pulpit, which he did say took him quite aback,” she added, with a smile.

“What was that, Margaret?” I asked, rather curiously.

“Why, sir, you remember, I dare say, when you were preaching to us they sermons about the Apostle Paul, last spring, you said to us that, for all his faith in Jesus was so strong, and his love to Him so great, as we see by his letters, there’s no sign in them that he knew of the stories in the gospels, how He was born, or how He was tempted, or of His transfiguration, or of what wonders He did, or of the darkness and earthquake at His crucifixion, or of the angels who came to roll away the stone, or of His going up into heaven, while the apostles were looking on; and that, to judge from these letters, all that St Paul knew about the Lord was, that He was a very good man, of the family of David, whom he believed to have been seen alive several times after His crucifixion, though, for ought that he tells us,



all they appearances might have been some sort of visions, like his own; leastways, you said he uses the same word for them all, and that a word such as, for them as wrote the Greek tongue, would have been fitting to use in telling of a vision. Well, sir, this come into my memory as Will was arguing, and indeed it weren't the first time as I had heard that idea, when I heard it from you, for my William had said something very like it, as I think I once told you, sir, though it warn't so fully put as you put it; so, at last, I says to Will, 'Mr S——, do you think that the Apostle St Paul believed in the Lord Jesus, and loved Him truly?' 'There can't be a doubt of it,' said he. 'Well then, suppose I know nothing more about the Lord than St Paul did, why shouldn't I believe in Him, and love Him as much?' He didn't make no answer to that, so I went on, 'You see, Mr S——, St Paul don't say a word in his letters about they matters of which you have been talking, leastways of none except of the appearances of Christ to His apostles after He had been crucified, so that, if so be we was to give up all they other stories altogether, as history, we shouldn't meddle with the grounds of his faith, and why shouldn't we follow him?'"

"And what did S—— say to that?"

"Well, sir, he says, 'I want time to think about that, it takes me quite a back, and I cannot tell what to make of it off hand;' which, to my thinking, showed that he meant honestly, and didn't only try to say something as might puzzle me. So it was settled that he should come another day, to have our talk out, when he had time to turn over what I had said. 'And meanwhile I'll lend you a book about the gospels,' he says; and this is it which I was reading against he should come, for I'm rather expecting him to-day. And there he be, I declare," she added, looking up at the sound of the garden gate closing, "and Tom with him. Well! this is fortunate, that you, sir, should be

here just at the nick of time. Come in, Mr S——," she continued, "I'm not busy; this is our rector, whom I've just been talking to about you. You may speak to him quite as freely as you do to me. I mean to make him my champion. I think that's the word, isn't it, Tom?"

"Quite right, mother."

"I have pleasure in making Mr S——'s acquaintance," I said, shaking hands with him.

"Well, sir, you must be a rare one of your cloth, to meet me so friendly, when you know what errand I have come on," replied S——, taking a seat, for at first, he had looked half inclined to retreat. "I am more used to black faces than shakes of the hand from the clergy. They seem in general to think that all free thinkers on religious matters, as I am known to be, must be wolves, whom they are bound, as the guardians of the sheep, to bark at and worry."

"But the dog, if modern naturalists are right, is closely allied to the wolf," I said, "and I claim spiritual relationship with every one who sincerely seeks for the truth in religion, as I believe to be your case. It is not free thought, but the want of thought, the refusal to think earnestly at all on such matters, that I find reason to complain of."

"Well, I think I may say as much as this in my own praise, *that* is not one of my faults," replied S—— laughing. "Mrs B—— will have told you, I dare say, that if I don't believe all the stories on which you build your religion, it is not for want of thinking about them, but just because, the more I think, and consider, and weigh, the less reason I find for believing in them."

"Believing what of them?" I asked.

"Believing them to be true histories; believing that the facts stated in the gospels and the acts, which I take to be the foundation of Christianity, were what they are said there to have been; and if you want arguments to prove that point clearly, and fully, and

shortly put, you should read this book," he added, taking up the English Life of Jesus, which Margaret had laid on the table as he came in.

"I know it well, and you know the conclusion of its author, no doubt, the result of his enquiry," I replied; and turning to the closing chapter I read this passage:—"While the traditions, at the beginning and end of the story, are altogether unhistorical, while of the nativity, and infancy, and of the events following the crucifixion, we have no knowledge whatever, there runs an element of historical truth through the synoptic narratives of the ministry. We have before us, in outlines sufficiently distinct, the picture of one, who in a highly artificial society, dared to propound truths unwelcome to a dominant hierarchy, and to condemn a traditional ceremonial system which placed barriers between God and man. We have every reason to believe, that the sincerity and boldness with which he announced the absolute righteousness, and unflinching love of God, impressed the multitudes who heard him with the sense of an authority, wholly different from that of the Scribes and Pharisees; and that, in the long series of his discourses, he sought to convince his hearers that God cared for every one of them, and willed to bring them all to their highest good. The very taunt, that he was the friend of publicans and sinners, is proof, were other proof wanting, that the gist of his teaching may be found in the sentence of Origen, *Nihil impossibile omnipotenti, et nihil insanabile factori suo*.\* The care with which, in his many parables, he strove, by the most familiar images, to kindle, in dull and deadened minds, the faint embers of a higher life, is evidence that he regarded none as beyond the healing power of the great Maker. The gentleness with which, while sacrificing no truth and

\* There is nothing impossible to the omnipotent, or incapable of being healed by its maker.

weakening no divine law, he treated those whom a sacerdotal society despised or hated, attests his sympathy for all suffering, and his yearning to rescue all men from moral and spiritual degradation? 'For my part,' I continued, "I want nothing more as the foundation of my Christianity."

"You should not stop there, sir, said S——; read on."

"Certainly,"—accordingly I read. "But every reason which constrains us to admit the substantial fidelity of this picture, compels us to repel the whole fourth gospel, as not only unhistorical, but betraying a set theological and ecclesiastical purpose. If we hold that the synoptic narratives have any truth, we cannot believe that he who in them speaks only to comfort, to teach, and to purify, speaks in the other only to confuse, perplex, and exasperate. We cannot believe that he who throughout the one speaks only of the love of God for man, speaks in the other only, or chiefly, of the nature of his own office, and the dignity of his own person. We cannot believe that he who in the one never divulged his Messiahship, even to any of his disciples, until towards the close of his ministry, had, as the fourth gospel represents him, announced the fact freely from the beginning, not only to Andrew, Peter, and Nathanael, but to the whole population of Samaritan cities, and to crowds of indifferent and even hostile Jews."

"Well, sir, what do you say to that?" asked S——, with a somewhat triumphant air.

"I admit it to be a substantially true, though in my opinion, a hard, unsympathising, and so far unjust criticism of this gospel."

"Admit—it—to be—true!" said S——, opening his eyes very wide. "Why then, you don't believe in the divine nature of Jesus."

"Nay, Mr S——, you are reckoning without your host there," interposed Margaret, with one of her quiet

smiles ; "leastways I have heard the rector tell us he believed *that* many a time from the pulpit, and sometimes almost in the same breath, I may say, in which he told us that we must not take the gospels, they three I mean that you calls—I never can get the name right."

"The Synoptics, mother," whispered Tom.

"Yes, the Synoptics. Well, that we must not take them for more than stories about Christ, which were collected out of the mouths of the people, as it were, more than forty or fifty years after the Lord were crucified. And as for the fourth gospel, I'm thinking he takes it for a poem more than a history."

"But poetry, you know, Mr S——," said Tom, "may be very beautiful and very true in its own way, though it is not properly history, as we see in Shakespeare's plays about the history of England."

"Or Scott's novels," I added.

"But what becomes of the solid foundation of facts on which writers about the evidences of Christianity, Paley and others, so much insist ; the eye-witnesses-who-weren't-deceivers-and-couldn't-be-deceived argument, which I remember made such a strong impression on me when I was growing up, till, after a bit, I learned what the facts are, and that in truth we cannot rely on having the testimony of one contemporary witness, except the Apostle Paul, as to what happened to himself ? Legends and poems are a very shaky foundation for religion, to my thinking, sir, begging your pardon."

"Very," I replied. "We are quite agreed there, Mr S——. Religion can have but one foundation, the fact that there is a Being ever present with us, 'in whom we live, and move, and have our being,' whom we can revere, and love, and worship."

"I am not going to dispute that, sir, or if I did, it would be only as to one word, 'worship.'"

"Then suppose that a legend or a poem should awaken me to the consciousness of this fact, which I might never have realised before, and that, in consequence, I

began to love and reverence this author and sustainer of my being, surely you would not say that my religious feeling rested upon the legend or poem?"

"Certainly not. But the Christian religion does not stop there. That is natural religion, where you need only to light the fire, because the coals are ready laid. But the Christian teachers will insist that if you don't use their patent article you can get no heat. I want the proof of the patent."

"Well, Mr S——," said Margaret, "I should think the best proof was to try the coals; and if they as has tried finds that they give more heat than any other sort, why shouldn't they believe in the trial?"

"But have they ever really tried any other? You say, if I pray to Christ, that gives me comfort and strength; but so the Romanists say, if we pray to the Virgin Mary, the mother of Christ, we get comfort and strength. And that great Brahmo, Keshub Chunder Sen, whom I went to hear only a few days ago, when he preached at N——, says, 'if I pray to God simply, without any mention of Christ at all, I find comfort and strength.' So that your argument from the effect of your prayers won't do instead of proofs from the gospels of facts, which show that we ought to revere Jesus as if He were God, more than any other good man."

"It does not prove this, no doubt," I replied; "but this universal effect of prayer lays the foundation for the proof, I think."

"How so, sir?"

"It shows the universal presence with us of one who is not indifferent to our prayers, but gives us comfort and strength when we seek it of Him. Now such a Being cannot be indifferent to the welfare of man generally. We must suppose that He intends to lead men, as fast as they can be led, to a knowledge of what He really is, that they may learn to pray to Him, and so obtain comfort and strength. But then we ought to find clear traces of some provision for such a teaching

in the history of mankind, after it has gone on for so many thousand years as we know that it has continued. Now I think you are well enough acquainted with history for me to ask you whether you can point out any sign of such a provision except in Christianity. You would not set up Mahomet against Christ as the true guide, I presume?"

"No, indeed. That would be 'out of the frying-pan into the fire.' But I suppose, sir, you don't attribute all the success of Mahometanism to the sword. As Mr Carlyle says, the first question is how to get your sword. There must have been something in Mahomet's teaching that made men believe in him before they fought for him. And from this their imaginations took occasion to make Mahomet into what he was not—an infallible teacher of God's will. Well then, why should not the divine nature which the Christians have attributed to Jesus have been simply created by the imagination of his followers, just as the character ascribed to Mahomet by the Mahometans was simply created by the imagination of the Mahometans?"

"Leave out the 'simply,' and I should say yes. I hold that the divine nature ascribed to Christ by the Church has been a creation of the Christian imagination. But that does not prove this notion to be false. All our knowledge rests on the conceptions we form about the sensations which we receive through our senses. But these conceptions may be *true*; that is, they may correspond to the reality of the things whence the sensations may arise. And this I consider to be the case with the Christian ideas about the person of Christ."

"But how can I tell that except from facts?"

"No way, certainly. The conformity of ideas to facts can never be shown except by the study of the facts. Out of this study comes science."

"But if the facts are altogether uncertain, as they must be, if the gospels are so full of contradictions as you allow them to be, what is there to study?"

“Two great facts, neither of which appear to me uncertain,—the character of Jesus,—and the course of man’s religious history.”

“But how can the study of such facts as these, show that the claim set up for Jesus by the Christians is true? Excuse me, sir; you seem to me to be forgetting what you allowed just now, that the gospel of John cannot be trusted even as a tradition—that we must keep to the Synoptics in order to know anything about Jesus. Where does he claim to be God in them?”

“Suppose it to have been quite certain, that He had made such a claim, should you have been a bit the more disposed to believe it on that account? Should you not have been much more inclined to think Him mad?”

“Certainly, unless he had proved his right to make the claim by some astonishing works, some great acts of Divine power.”

“Which, if they proved anything, would prove only that the Divine power is indeed very strong, much stronger than man’s power, a point needing, I think, no proof, but quite unreasonable.”

“How, unreasonable?”

“Your astonishing works would be miracles, I suppose, and I presume you will not contend for the reasonableness of miracles?”

“No sir, you’ve hit me there,” said S——, laughing, “No doubt. I can’t stand up for miracles.”

“Then, see where we are. If Jesus had claimed to partake of the Divine nature in any special way, then, since He could not have astonished men by any acts of power, if such acts are contrary to the Divine reason, the result of His making the claim must have been that He would have been supposed to be mad. So that, assuming the claim to have been well founded, to make it would have defeated the object of His appearing on the earth, if this object were, as must be supposed, to teach men what God really is.”



“ I have nothing to say against that argument. But then, sir, it seems to me to show that the notion of the Divine Nature of Jesus must be a mistake; because God could never have made such a manifestation of Himself for no use. And of what use would it be, if it would not be proved ?”

“ To produce what it has produced by the aid of man’s imagination—the belief that it had taken place; and, through the results of this belief, to accumulate proofs of its being well founded, against the time when the growth of the spirit of inquiry should make men ask for such proofs.”

“ And do you think that the results of Christianity can be truly said to furnish such a proof ?”

“ Yes, I do, if we judge them from the scientific point of view, setting aside the notion of the, so called, supernatural influences, and holding that God always works by natural means, which *you* must do, if you are to be consistent with yourself; and I think you will come to my opinion, if you examine the facts upon this hypothesis. Scientific opponents of Christianity,” I continued after a moment’s pause, as S—— made no reply, “ seem to me to forget that the difficulties on which they insist depend upon the supernatural action claimed for it, and vanish if it be regarded only as part of the system of natural forces.”

“ But then, the notion of a revelation made in it, must vanish also.”

“ Why? What is all nature but a succession of appearances, which reveal to us the power lying beneath them, and working through them. I claim for Christianity a share in this great Revelation ?”

“ And why not for Mahometanism ?”

“ I allow it a share; but consider what it reveals? simply the consciousness possessed by man’s imagination of its own grandeur; which it has embodied in the conception of an unfathomable, unlimited will, ascribed to Allah. While the whole progress of science depends

upon the opposite assumption, that the will of God produces a system of limited forces; a *cos-mos*, as the Greeks called it; a universe of reasonable order."

"But that revelation we get from the study of nature without Christianity. What does Christianity reveal more?"

"The very root and foundation of the principle of order,—that God is *love*,—that, not self-asserting power, nor even self-governing power, as the Stoics thought; but self-sacrificing power, power which goes out of itself to benefit that which is not itself, is the essence of the Divine; the true idea of humanity. Now whatever errors may be justly charged against the church, it cannot be denied that this she has always taught, by all her acts, and under all her distractions."

"Yet, surely, that doctrine could be taught without encumbering it with the notion of the Divine nature of Jesus."

"Yes, as the doctrine of the gravitation of the planets to the sun might be taught, without encumbering it with the notion of their perturbing action on each other's movements; but you wish for facts as the solid foundation of your beliefs,—do you not?"

"No doubt, I want facts, something real to stand on."

"Then here you have a great fact; the intimate historical connexion of a profound spiritual principle, the true source of all noble, beneficent action upon earth, with an idea which adequately embodies it,—the idea that the Eternal has manifested its essence in the person of one such as Jesus was, according to the picture of Him, drawn by the author of the English Life of Him—and remember that Strauss and Renan substantially agree with this author there,—who endured what Jesus endured, to display the sympathy of God with man, and bring men into spiritual union with God? Why not take your stand upon this fact; at least provisionally, till you find some good reason for leaving it?"

“But if I find out that this idea gained its hold on men’s minds, through their belief in stories which, when I look into them I find full of inconsistencies, errors, and contradictions, have not I a good reason for thinking the idea to be a delusion?”

“Perhaps you would, if the idea had been produced by the stories, and not rather, as seems to have been the case, the stories by the idea.”

“Yet that cannot make the stories prove the truth of the idea.”

“No; but it prevents the collapse of the stories from disproving it; since it does not rest upon them, it need not fall with them.”

“Not if it had an independent proof; but what is that proof?”

“That the idea sums up, as it were, the religious tendencies of man’s nature, which he certainly did not give to himself, in the person of an historical individual whom no human power could produce, and that it was introduced and spread through a combination of circumstances which no human penetration or contrivance could have foreseen or brought about. There are three independent sets of facts, all coinciding in proving the truth of this great idea, and each quite unaffected by any errors in the details of the gospel narratives.”

“I am very much obliged to you, sir, I am sure, for calling my attention to these proofs. Can you tell me where I may learn more about them?”

“I don’t know that I can refer you to any book where you will find the whole argument put together for you. But for a picture of the combination of influences which united in preparing the way for the spread of the faith in Christ, you may take the fifteenth chapter of Gibbon’s ‘Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire.’”

“What, his celebrated attack on Christianity?” asked S—, in amazement.

“Just so; his attack on the notion that its growth demanded the intervention of a mass of supernatural

influences, by showing what a wide and deep root it had in the history of mankind. You will find this still more completely stated in the introduction to Strauss' 'New Life of Jesus.' This is the first set of facts. The second is the character of Jesus, which you have in the 'English Life' of Him, and also in Strauss, who brings out very forcibly the remarkable manner in which the peculiar characteristics of the Jewish and the Greek mind appear to have combined in Christ.\* The third set consists in the religious tendencies of human nature, that is the conceptions which man is naturally disposed to form of God. You have one side of them in the Old Testament, where you will find God represented as quite separated from the world, though He knows and governs all that is going on in it. The other side you will find stated in any recent work on mythology, say Mr Cox's 'Tales of Gods and Heroes,' where you have God identified with the powers manifested in nature, of which the highest known to us is seen in man, while in Christ both sides unite. There are the facts. Put them together for yourself. Try if you can find any conception which reconciles and accounts for them all better than the idea that in Christ the eternal essence of that divine power whose offspring is man, displayed itself to mankind."

"Well, sir, I think I see the point of your argument, and I will do my best to work out the problem as you advise me. But you will excuse my mentioning a difficulty which strikes me at once."

"Certainly. What is it?"

"You have said that the Christian teaching reconciles the notion that God is distinct from the world, which we find in the Old Testament, with the other notion that He dwells in us, and in all that we see. Now I don't dispute that the Christians have put Christ

\* The religious consciousness of Jesus, according to the three first gospels.

in God's place, up in the sky, as a sort of God-man, who governs all things; but there's no proof that this is true at all; and if it were, what becomes of the other side, the faith that God is really present on the earth, which I take to be the truth. I don't see how Christianity reconciles them one bit."

"No wonder; because the doctrine which expresses this faith in the continual presence of Christ in the world has been almost lost in England since the Reformation. But perhaps you know that, according to the old church teaching, the body and blood of Christ are truly present in the elements of the sacrament."

"But surely, sir, you don't hold that doctrine?"

"I do not hold that the priest can turn the bread and wine into anything which they are not naturally. But I do hold that they are, by their proper natures, what the Church taught that the priest makes them become—a visible embodiment of that power who appeared as a man in Jesus. The sacrament was intended, I think, to be a perpetual remembrancer to us of Him in whom we live. And He, by appearing among men as a man, showed us that this divine Being, which dwells in all living things, is yet distinct from these things, as completely as our wills are distinct from the things on which they act."

"And you see, Mr S——," interposed Margaret, "there's no need to be any heaven over our heads for the Lord to ascend into visibly, though they as-wrote the Acts no doubt thought so. For the heaven in which He dwells is the Spirit of Love, into which He draws us to live with Him, by the story of His blessed life."

"Well I must say, sir, you have a wonderful knack of getting round difficulties. You make my critical objections to the gospels look very small with all these world-embracing theories," said S——. "But if Jesus really was what you take Him to have been, how came He to hold the notions common to his countrymen then,

but which we have since found out to be human errors, ascribing epilepsy or madness to possession by devils, for instance; and how could he imagine that He was to come in the clouds before that generation had passed away, to 'judge the quick and the dead?'"

"I think it is for you to prove first that He did entertain such notions. When we find in the gospels traces of thoughts or feelings unlike those of other men, it is reasonable to ascribe them to Jesus, since otherwise we should have no source at all for them. But, for my part, I am convinced that we have, in the Synoptics, an image of Jesus so coloured by the imaginations of His disciples that I cannot accept anything as certainly belonging to Him which I have reason for believing to have been strongly rooted in their minds. Take, for example, the prediction of future judgment. Have you observed that the Synoptics never make Jesus speak of His *going* into heaven, though this would naturally have occupied the first place in the thoughts of a man actually on the earth, living under the delusion that he had been appointed judge of all mankind, but always of the matter most important to themselves—His *coming* again from heaven?"

"That is true, no doubt, and very curious."

"It is still more striking that while there are several statements in the gospels of the surprise of those who heard Jesus at His words, and questions as to their meaning, there is not the smallest hint of any one being surprised at the notion of this man, who was walking about among them on the earth, coming in the clouds to judge them all. And yet predictions of this nature are put into His mouth at the very beginning of His teaching, before even His most chosen followers had recognised Him to be the Messiah. The Sermon on the Mount concludes by a prophecy of what 'many would say to Him in *that* day.' No one thinks of asking, *What* day? Again, the parable of the Tares describes the 'Son of Man' sending forth *His* angels to the ends

of the earth, to gather the wicked, and cast them into Hell: and the disciples are made to say that they perfectly understand this.\* Yet two chapters afterwards we find Jesus questioning the Apostles as to whom they supposed Him to be, greatly praising Peter for acknowledging Him to be "the Christ, the Son of God," and strictly charging them not to tell any one of it.† So that, as the story reads, they were quite aware that He was the appointed judge of quick and dead, and yet in doubt whether He was the Messiah or not. Then as to the time of His coming, this is distinctly stated in all the Synoptics to follow the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple. Yet we find from St Paul's epistles that he lived under the firm expectation that the coming of the Lord from Heaven would probably happen in his own lifetime, and might happen any day, though Jerusalem was then standing undestroyed, with no sign of its approaching destruction; so that, if the apostle had ever heard of such a prediction of Jesus, he must have known that the time for His coming could not have arrived."

"That is very remarkable, certainly."

"It is still more remarkable," I continued, "if, according to the commonly received opinion, we ascribe the Epistles to the Thessalonians to St Paul, because in them he cautions the Thessalonians against supposing that Christ's coming would be so immediate that it was not worth while for men to occupy themselves about their ordinary business; and he would therefore naturally have said, we have our Lord's own prophecy that his coming is to follow the destruction of Jerusalem, so that while that city remains undestroyed, we know that we are not to look for it, instead of speaking mysteriously about something 'that kept it back,' and about a 'man of sin' of whom nothing is said in the Gospels, to be first revealed. But I do not insist on this because

\* Matt. xiii. 36-51.

† Matt. xvi. 15-20.

there are some things in these epistles which make me doubt whether Bauer is not right in thinking that they were not written till after St Paul's death."\*

\* These are, 1st. The statement in 1 Thess. ii. 16, that wrath had come beforehand, *ἐφθασε*, on the Jews to the uttermost *εἰς τέλος*, which appears to point to the destruction as a *fait accompli*. 2d. The reference in 2 Thess. iii. 17 to the signature in his own hand as a proof of genuineness; though these epistles are supposed to be the first that the Apostle wrote, and it is hard to see why he should anticipate the probability of forgery. 3d. The injunction in 1 Thess. v. 27, that the Epistle should be read by all the brethren, which would seem to be a matter of course with an epistle addressed to the church by its founder. Bauer enumerates many other objections, drawn from alleged inconsistencies between the teaching in these two epistles and other parts of St Paul's writings. But query whether we know enough of the history of his mind to affirm that his views did not change in these respects. On the other hand, a formidable objection to Bauer's hypothesis is supplied by the large amount of personal feeling manifested in the first epistle, and the comparatively insignificant place occupied in it, even by that anticipation of the speedy coming of Christ, which, if the epistle is not genuine, must be assigned as the motive for composing it, and would therefore naturally have filled a large part of it; while, in fact, it comes in only incidentally as a ground of consolation under the loss of friends. Again, the Second Epistle presupposes a great effect to have been produced by the first, and sets itself to correct this in some respects. Now both the epistles are obviously the work of an earnest man, sincerely desirous of promoting sound religious feelings among those whom he addresses. We cannot suppose that such a person would have alluded in his second letter to an effect produced by the first which it had not really produced. While it is impossible to suppose that a letter written years after St Paul's death in his name, would have produced any effect at all upon the community to whom it was specially addressed, who must have known that it was not genuine.

The difficulty in bringing the letters into agreement with Acts xvii. may as justly be placed to the account of the imperfect knowledge of the writer of the Acts as to that of the writer of the epistle; and, as has been observed by De Wette, *Einleitung IV.*, § 127, 128, is a grave objection to the supposition that the writer of the epistles drew his materials from the Acts.



"That's the worst of the New Testament," said S——.  
 "One never knows what to rely upon as genuine."

"Mind I don't say that these two epistles are not genuine. I am disposed to think that they are. But they are not needed for my argument. The four great undoubted epistles of St Paul are all that I require to show that he lived in the expectation of an approaching 'coming of the Lord,' without connecting it in any way with Christ's supposed prediction of the previous destruction of the Temple and City of Jerusalem. Yet how is it possible to imagine that such a prophecy would not have made a deep impression on the Apostles, and have been generally known to all Jewish Christians, if it had been uttered as the synoptics state. But even St John, if he wrote the Apocalypse, as there is very good reason to think, could have known nothing about the predicted destruction of the Temple, since he exempts it from the destruction of the city of Jerusalem, and transports it into heaven."\*

"Well, I must admit, that seems to dispose of 'the coming from heaven' pretty effectually. But what do you say to the 'casting out of devils?'"

"Do you believe the story of their entering into the herd of the two thousand swine?"

"I think the absurdity of that is sufficiently shown in the English Life of Jesus."†

"Yet this account is in all the synoptics."

"Well!"

"If you don't believe their concurrent testimony to so remarkable a *fact*, how is it possible for you to build any certain conclusions, from the *words* which they put into the mouth of Jesus to the persons supposed to be possessed by devils, as to what He thought of their state?"

"I can quite understand that Jesus may have addressed mad men who believed themselves to be

\* Rev. xi. 1, 2, 13, 19; xvi. 1.

† Pt. iv. 46, 47.

possessed by devils, according to their belief, without having shared it. My difficulty is that there is no trace in the gospels of his ever having explained to his disciples that what they took for possession was only disease."

"But there are clear traces, I think, of His having treated spiritually what they treated physically. Shakespeare makes Cassio say—

'It pleased the devil drunkenness to give place to the devil wrath.'

The devil who 'returns to the house that he had left, taking with him seven spirits worse than himself,' and finds it 'swept and garnished,' can hardly be any other sort of devil than Shakespeare's. Connected as the saying is with the parable of 'the strong man armed, who keeps his house in peace till a stronger than he come,'\* it points, I think, to some declaration of Jesus, that it is not enough to drive a devil out of a man if you do not put some stronger spirit in his place. The devil will come back to a home ready for him in the company of kindred spirits, and 'the last state of the man will be worse than the first.' Again, the 'Satan' whom Jesus saw 'fall like lightning from heaven,'† and the 'devil who taketh away that which was sown in the heart of one who heareth the word of the kingdom and understandeth it not,'‡ must, I should say, have a similar meaning; they point to internal, not to external spirits."

"Well! sir, I cannot say but that you are entitled to turn my criticisms against me, and claim for Jesus, that if he is not to be credited with the 'mighty works' narrated in the gospels, he must not be debited with the ignorance of nature shown in them. But if he were so great a person as you hold him to be, it does seem to me very strange that so little should be

\* Matt. xii. 29,

Luke xi. 21, 24.

† Luke x. 18.

‡ Matt. xiii. 19.

certainly known about him. It is a waste of power, which I cannot easily bring myself to impute to God."

"May be, Mr S——," said Margaret, "God works in this, as He do seem to do always, behind a veil as it were; here a veil of nature, and there a veil of men's passions, and wants, and sins; and where we might have thought that all was going to be made clear, and there wouln't be no veil at all, then a veil of men's imaginings, which we can't get behind no how. It may be very puzzling to the like of us to say why it be so; but there do seem to be what Bishop Butler, I think it is, sir, calls 'Analogy' in it?"

"You are quite right as to your 'Analogy', Margaret," I replied; "and perhaps, if we look closely, we may discover something of divine wisdom in this. You see, Mr S——, it places us all on a level. The sacred picture has been preserved to us only in outline; distinct enough to show its beauty and majesty, but dimly, through the haze of early tradition and the pious imaginations of the first Christian generations; and each age and class of minds has thus been left free to fill it up for themselves. It is the peculiar excellence of the Catholic idea of Christ to carry a perpetual renovating and purifying power in itself. Make of Jesus merely a teacher sent from God; we require to know accurately what He taught that we may benefit by the teaching. But if we accept the Catholic faith, that in Him the Divine Being manifested its true essence, we have, in our own conceptions of the Divine perfections, the materials necessary for deriving from this faith the spiritual food which we require: as we may see by St Paul's letters, which Margaret tells me that she quoted to you, very appositely, I think."

"But if that is so, sir, of what use are the gospels?"

"They assure us that St Paul's idea of the character of Jesus was not *merely* the creation of his own imagination, but expresses the impression left by Christ on those among whom He lived. Now this knowledge is

indispensable. If we are to derive any spiritual benefit from the belief that God has manifested His essential Being in the form of a man, we must know what *kind* of Being it was that was thus manifested, though we do not require to know by what particular acts this character was displayed."

"But that is precisely what I do want to know."

"There's many a thing, Mr S—, " said Margaret, "which we want to know that's not given to us, because, no doubt, it wouldn't have been for our good that we should know it. And, may be, this is so here."

"You must remember," I continued, "that the knowledge of particulars is never of any importance in itself, just because they *are* particulars, which no sooner emerge from the stream of Time than they sink into it again, and are lost for ever. It is not the particulars, but their interpretation, the permanent principles indicated by them, which alone is of consequence. Now to interpret aright a life intended to manifest the Divine essence, a special frame of mind may be required, such as was produced in Palestine and Asia Minor, when Jesus lived, by the religious faith and philosophical conceptions then prevalent there, but which may not exist in the Europe of modern times."

"You think, then, that if I could have all the facts of the life of Jesus before me, just as they were, I should not be able to interpret them aright?"

"Yes. I take it, that what you, and I, and the men of this age generally, at least in our western world, can interpret far better than such details, are the great facts of the connection between the faith in Jesus and the religious history of mankind. Our scientific training and extended knowledge fit us for such a task. To *divine* the God in the man demanded a more childlike faith, more ardent hopes, greater readiness to believe in supernatural action than belongs to us, who look for God *in* Nature, not *above* her. To trace His footsteps in the historical development of religion, and therefore

to accept as true what our forefathers divined, does belong to our time ; and I think it is well for us that we are restricted to this field of the permanent and universal, in respect to the story of Christ, and have lost sight of the particulars which would only bewilder us."

"It may be that you are right," said S——, "but I cannot help wishing the case were otherwise."

"I can understand that wish," I replied. "There is always a something gratifying in criticism. To sit in judgment on the past gives us a feeling of superiority. But this is a condition of mind to be carefully watched. It slips so easily into self-conceit. Wordsworth beautifully says—

'The child is father of the man ;  
And I would wish my days to be  
Linked to each other by a natural piety.'

So it is with the ages. The greatest genius belongs to those in whom the freshness of childhood can live on with the sagacity of manhood. If 'they didn't know everything down in Judee,' they may have seen some things more clearly than we do."

"Or, may be," said Margaret, "it wasn't light so much as feeling as was needed. And there, Mr S——, you must own that a child, with its soft skin, may easily beat you, though your hands can do many a thing that would mightily puzzle the child."

"Well, Mrs B——, I won't deny but what that's true. But I don't like to go to school to children."

"Ay, Mr S——, perhaps none of us does. And yet it is most true what He said, 'Except ye become as little children ye cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven.' The more I sees of the world the more certain I am of that. And, Mr S——, there's one other thing I wants to say, and that is this : if so be the Lord did speak about many things, as they among whom He lived spoke, and not as is done now, to my thinking it brings Him nearer to me than if He had spoke as wise

men, or they as deems themselves such, do speak now-a-days. Not that I want to say anything against knowledge, God forbid! For I takes the power of knowing to be one of God's greatest gifts to us. But that the Lord should leave Hisself open to be accused of not knowing they earthly things as they really are, do seem to prove that not to know them can't be no ways a bar between Him and me. And there's great comfort in that thought, Mr S——, though I dare say I may seem to you a very poor creature for feeling it."

"No, Mrs B——," replied S——, "I assure you I have no such feeling. *You* have taught *me* a great deal more than *I* had to teach *you*. For I can see that you knew pretty well already where the weak point of the gospel stories lies; but I didn't half see what is the strong point in them as I see it now, thanks to what you and Mr P—— have said. And I thank you, sir, too, very heartily," he continued, "for showing me how a clergyman may teach Christianity without being a hypocrite in what he teaches."

"I am sure you may say that without fear of being wrong, at all events," said Margaret. "And now, Mr S——, I hope you'll take a cup of tea before you go. And if the Rector will join us we shall all take it as an honour."

I accepted the invitation willingly, and so ended, in a pleasant chat, my interview with this "pestilent infidel," as I have often heard S—— called by my clerical brethren.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### THE CHURCH.

"THIS is, indeed, a charming spot, Agnes," I exclaimed as we turned into the gate of R——'s pretty parsonage, where we proposed to spend a few days on the visit, half promised when he came to see us, and since that time warmly pressed on us by him more than once, though various circumstances had intervened to prevent our accepting the invitation. "What a beautiful church! and how perfectly it is placed between those fine trees at the top of the little hill, round which that clear stream has found its way to the all-embracing ocean. I'll be bound there's good fishing there."

"And what a very nicely kept garden," added Agnes, as a turn of the road just then showed us the house across a lawn enclosing beds of many varied flowers in full bloom. "Well! I felt sure that Mr R—— was a man of excellent taste from what he said when he was with us, but I did not expect anything so delightful. What a pity there is no Mrs R—— to help him!"

"Oh! depend on it that will come in due time," I replied. "He is leaving his semi-ascetic moorings, I suspect."

"At all events, there is no gloom about his asceticism," said Agnes; but by this time we had reached the door, where R—— stood ready to give us a cordial welcome.

"This is truly kind; I am charmed to see that you have not left the little folks behind," was his greeting

as he lifted my youngest girl out of the carriage, "but where's Johnnie?"

"Oh! he is at school," said Agnes. "He was getting beyond me, and his father's time is too much taken up by parish work to do justice to a boy's education."

"Besides," I continued, "half the education of a boy, and I am not sure that it is not the best half, he gets out of his companions in any school which is under a good master. There is nothing for keeping mind or body up to the mark like the struggle for existence."

"If there is stamina enough to bear it, perhaps so," said R——, as he led the way into the drawing-room. Such was our introduction to a very agreeable visit, which R—— induced us to prolong beyond our original intentions; varied by many pleasant walks and drives about his picturesque neighbourhood, and by intercourse with his neighbours; and leading to long conversations on the subjects, as to which his visit to me had opened the way to a freer communication between us, where Agnes often took a not inconsiderable part. Of their result some idea may be formed from the one I am about to narrate.

Everything at X—— is the perfection of Anglicanism; flourishing under the auspices of refined taste, ample means, and unwearied zeal. Noble schools adjoin the beautiful church, which is reached by a walk of five minutes across the rectory grounds, and where R—— had a daily service, with a choir selected from his schools, and trained under his skilful supervision to pure and expressive singing. The churchyard is bounded on one side by the village green, bordered by magnificent trees, and surrounded by cottages, which seemed a model of considerate arrangements on the part of their proprietor, with a corresponding amount of care and neatness in the occupiers, almost marvellous to us, till R—— let us into the secret—that to occupy these cottages was a reward, to be earned only by this care and neatness, from a landlord, who, being sole



owner of the parish, and resident there during great part of the year, had everything his own way; and who, under R——'s advice had built a pretty sort of club-house, with reading-rooms and provision for different amusements in-doors and out of doors, on one side of the green, as an evening gathering-place for the young people, and a substitute for the beer-shop or public-house.

"I do envy you your parish, Mr R——," said Agnes, when we were sitting on the lawn after dinner, the evening before the day we were to leave. "Everything seems so complete about it. I wish we could get to something like it at V——."

"I don't despair of that. The singing is getting on nicely now, under our present master, and I think we may soon look to having a complete choral service. Then what I see you have been bold enough to do, R——, though I could scarcely have believed it of you, if I had not seen it," I said laughing, "takes away one difficulty."

"You mean, I suppose, my short services. I own it was rather a bold step to set them up; for I dared not venture to ask the bishop, because though I felt inwardly certain that he would not say 'You shall not,' he would hardly have ventured to say 'You may.' But the regular service was clearly too long; scarcely any one could find time to come to it, except on Sunday; and I thought it so bad for the people to form the habit of never taking part in public worship on any other day; as if God was a task-master, to whom we gave one-seventh of our time on condition of having six-sevenths for ourselves; so as the bishop did not insist on my saying the daily common prayer in church, but was quite content that I should have prayers of my own at home, I saw no reason for not having them in the church, and inviting the people to pray and sing psalms or hymns with me."

"And so you tried," said Agnes, "and I am surprised to see how many you get to come, even of the men."

"Ours is rather an exceptional case. You see, there are a number of labourers employed in the gardens at the Court, and about the home farm; and I got Sir E—— to allow a quarter of an hour's extension of breakfast time to any who desired to come to church; and then G——, who has the large farm on the other side of the Green, did the same, and so a good many could come if they would; and Sir E—— and his family always come when they are here, and it has got to be rather the fashion. I am afraid there is a large spice of service to Sir E—— rather than to God in it; but many do come, even when he is not here, and I make a rule of never taking any public notice of who come and who do not, so that I hope there is something genuine about it."

"I wonder whether that's why there are always two bells at the Court in the morning," whispered my eldest daughter, between whom and R—— there had grown up quite a little flirtation, to her mama, by whom she was standing, playing with the fingers of one hand which Agnes had abandoned to her.

"Yes, my dear," said R——, smiling, "you are quite right, that *is* the reason. One bell is for the men who don't go to church, to know when breakfast time is over, and the other is for those who do go. And so," he continued to Agnes, "what with this, and what with the women and old people, a good many of whom seem pleased to come, we get on tolerably well, even without the school children, who are *de regle*."

"We cannot obtain any extra breakfast time, certainly," I said; "and perhaps it will be best to try an evening service. I daresay a good many people would come to it then, if the music was attractive, and the whole thing not too long; and though I would rather make the worship open the day, we must adapt ourselves to the wants of the people. What Christ said of the

Sabbath, according to the gospels, we may say of the church and her services; they are 'made for man, and not man for them.'"

"No doubt you are right there; and theoretically, of course, I should always have said so; but I feel it now more practically, from my intercourse with you. The church must go with the age, if she is to lead the age; she cannot 'rise and rule,' as Dr Newman once dreamt. The question is, Can she go with the age without losing her divinely given character?"

"If she cannot, I should say this inability would disprove her claims to a divine origin. What is the age but one phase of a providentially-ordered development? If the church really expresses the will of the developing power, how can she not possess the faculty of adapting herself to all its phases?"

"Even to that of the critical questioning of all authority, including her own?"

"Yes, even to that. For, go back to her beginning, and what do we find; as far as tradition shows us, in her earliest phase, but the personal attachment to a master who imposed no condition of faith beyond an act to be done in remembrance of his death, and summed up his teaching in the simple, well-known formula of love to God and man. I question whether there has ever been an age so ready as is the present age, to accept the teaching of a body which should really make this motto its watchword."

"But, to return to this earliest phase seems something like charging the whole historical development of doctrine, beginning with the fourth gospel, with falsehood."

"I should rather say, the imputing to it an inadequate appreciation of the true relations between those two great factors of the reason, Will, and Reflection; whence it has produced 'servitude,' where Christ intended 'liberty;' till the system threatens to break to pieces, from the reaction of the compressed forces against it. But it does not follow that the dogmas in which the church has

embodied her teaching are false, because the attempt to claim for this teaching the authority belonging only to that which influences the conscience is vain. It is not the overthrow of dogma, but its revivification, by appealing to conviction instead of to authority as the test of truth, that I contend for."

"You canonize the principle of individuality; and the question is, Whether this can possibly be done without destroying the opposite principle—that principle of universality on which the church has always taken her stand? That is my doubt."

"Yet the church has always recognised it to be her function to give peace to the individual conscience?"

"Yes, the conscience which submitted to her teaching; but not the conscience which questioned it. Though to be sure the '*prove all things*' addresses the individual judgment."

"And the '*give a reason for the faith which is in you,*' and that comes from the Petrine side too," I added. "And is it not the fact, that, until the progress of scientific inquiry began to make men call in question the conceptions of the universe, shared by the scriptural writers with mankind in general, the church always contended that her teaching was essentially reasonable, and therefore had nothing to fear from sound knowledge, and thorough inquiry?"

"No doubt all her greatest teachers, Clement Alexandrinus, Origen, Athanasius, Chrysostom, Augustine, to say nothing of the Schoolmen, claim reason as on their side; and make constant appeals to her. But it was a reason enlightened by faith; while you seem to appeal to a reason which is to enlighten faith."

"But is not that something like what happens in growth, generally?" asked Agnes. "The child begins by leaning on its parent; then it learns to go alone. At last, when it has grown up, the parent may be glad to lean on it; yet the feeling between them need not change."

"You have given a very apposite illustration, my dear madam. And perhaps the alarm I feel at the notion of the church unreservedly accepting reason as her guide comes from my having contemplated the reason principally when she was exercising the power of going alone, and seemed more disposed to knock her parents down than to support them."

"But, is it not that Mr R——, because the Church has acted to the reason the part of schoolmistress too much, and that of parent too little, and so has called out opposition, where she should have cultivated affection and trust? I remember, Mr Strauss, in one of his books which Edward read to me, amused me by talking of philosophy 'getting on her hind legs,' and beginning to growl at faith, who would not go on petting her, as she had begun to do. Now, though petting is not a good method of teaching, scolding is a worse one."

"Besides," I continued, "it is not to reason unchecked—but to reason checked by fact, the facts of man's religious history, that the appeal is made: to the spirit of science, which certainly leaves no assumption untested, but tests it, not by her imaginations of what ought to be, but by its power of accounting for what is, or has been. The trial is 'by fire;' but the furnace is not capriciously heated."

"But if we submit the dogmatic structure to this fiery test, who shall say how much will come out uninjured?"

"Yet does not St Paul contemplate this process," asked Agnes, "when he talks of the fire burning up 'the wood, hay, stubble,' which might be built on the 'one foundation,' while the gold and silver would remain unhurt?"

"I have been accustomed to apply that rather to the practical result of teaching," R—— replied, "but perhaps it ought to be extended to dogma. The 'struggle for existence,' of which your husband speaks, may be needed here, too, to keep down the growth which is fit

only to die, and further that which is appointed to live. If I understand you rightly," he added, turning to me, "it is not the efforts to define the faith that you object to, so much as the attempt to impose the definition as a condition of church membership?"

"Yes," I said. "The Church, I think, should embody a principle of *inclusion*, not one of *exclusion*. She should resemble those scientific bodies, where the only condition of entrance is the declaration of being 'attached to science.' I would have her receive all who profess to believe in the God whom Christ manifested, leaving all further questions open to free discussion; to be determined, as all matters thus discussed will be determined in one way or another, from time to time, till a body of doctrines might grow up, authoritative as all science is authoritative; because it is generally accepted as true; not because its acceptance is made a virtue, and its non-acceptance a crime."

"So that the Church might properly include among her members, even among her ministers, men like Colenso, or Voysey,\* or Martineau?"

"But, Mr R——," said Agnes, "are they not actually ministers professing to teach in the name of Christ? And can we be sure that He would reject them? And if not, why should we take upon ourselves to do so?"

"It is the right hand of fellowship produced by a common feeling, not the bond of a common dogmatic teaching that I proffer," I observed.

"But that, you would not refuse to others, from whom you differ yet more widely." said R——, "Keshub Chunder Sen, for instance, or Professor Newman. What perplexes me is, to see on what principle the Church is to be constituted, so as to include Voysey, or Colenso, or Martineau, and exclude others, as Theodore Parker or Francis Newman, who refuse to belong to her?"

\* Who had not then taken up a position of antagonism to Christianity.

“Have you not yourself answered the question? They would be kept out, because they *will* not come in. The ministers of the gospel say, We address you in the name of one through whom we believe that God has manifested to man His essential nature, in a way which gives unity to man’s religious history; so that, according to the old apostolic formula, ‘at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, and every tongue confess that He is Christ, to the glory of God the Father,’ those who accept this teaching, and seek to promote the spread of it, have a community of thought and object, which others, who may indeed be willing to work for the glory of God the Father, but ‘on their own hand’ only, not ‘in the name of Jesus,’ cannot share. Why should not this community of religious aim suffice as the bond of Church union? There are wider bonds of union among men, in the sentiments of reverence, love, trust, truthfulness, as there may be narrower and closer bonds in assent to this or that peculiar system of teaching; but why not recognise this bond of attachment to Christ as sufficient?”

“Which you propose, not as a compromise of opinions, but as an historical fact. It is hard to say why that should not be sufficient to constitute a Church union, but I doubt much whether it would prove to be so. However, happily we need not settle that matter. The question for us is, in what spirit ought the claims of the Church to be advocated, and on what grounds should they be placed?”

“The old ground, of ‘Truth authoritatively defined,’ has obviously failed,” I replied. “That the Church should realise her ideal of a world-embracing unity, upon this ground, seems hopeless. Eighteen hundred years of experience has proved it. But is there not a good hope that she might realise it, if she takes her stand firmly on the ground of ‘Truth based on conviction;’ the common ground of all science applied to the peculiar subject matter with which she is concerned;

namely, the development of man's religious instincts into opposite modes of conception, which have united round a central historical figure, so as to associate the deepest speculations of thought, with the tenderest impulses of emotion?"

"Yes, no doubt," said R——, with a sigh; "the old ground has failed. And there is something singularly attractive in the idea of substituting such a ground as you suggest, if the change which it must make in our theological world were not so awfully great. But think what is involved in the notion of resting our teaching only on the sort of proofs that will stand the scientific method. According to the views for which you have contended so clearly and powerfully, instead of creation we must have evolution; instead of a fall and redemption, continuous development; instead of 'signs and wonders,' acts of the imagination, asserting the freedom of will against the necessity of nature; instead of God's unerring word, an inspiration stripped of all vestige of infallibility. The sacraments must become declarations of a universal divine action and presence, instead of channels of special grace. And of the efficacy of prayer, there remains only communion with God."

"Which, Mr R——, I am sure, does not esteem to be its least important office," said Agnes.

"No, my dear madam. No; you are quite right there. But the change is like the alteration in astronomy, from the Ptolemaic system to the Copernican."

"But that was a change from error to truth, was it not?" asked Agnes. "And, after all, it was only an alteration in our way of looking at the things, not in the things themselves."

"And it grew legitimately out of the old astronomy," I added, "by the same sort of process which leads to the change that I advocate in our theological system; because men had tried every possible way of making the old conception answer to the facts, and found that they failed. As we have tried, in the Church, every



possible mode of realising unity by the principle of authority — councils, the Pope, the Bible, national creeds, sectarian shibboleths—all failures. Shall we not take this as God's lesson, that the method is mistaken; and substitute the scientific principle, of unity produced by conviction, based on the reasonable interpretation of facts."

"Those facts being, as you say, the religious tendencies of man's nature, and the belief in which they have been historically embodied; matters about which we may attain to a certainty sufficient to make the process possible?"

"Just so. That is what makes me hopeful about the principle. We get out of that fatal circle of facts adduced in proof of beliefs which, in turn, are appealed to to prove the facts, where theology has been entangled since the birth of criticism at the Reformation. We breathe the free air of investigation; and feel ourselves living on a planet, not God-forsaken, but where God has been present beneath the most subtle workings of the creative faculty in man's imagination, as truly as beneath the development of organised being, or the mysteries of physical action."

"Avaunt thee, Satan," said R—, laughing. "You are a skilful angler, and know how to bait the hook for me with that idea of the possibility of attaining to religious unity by an untried road."

"Untried by theology," I continued; "but yet the road taken by every other science: the great high road of Truth attained by Induction."

"It is very fascinating, I must own. There seems such a possibility of reconciling opposites; such a penetrative, transforming power in the idea, that the belief, whose diversities form the perplexities of faith, are themselves the stones out of which God would raise the temple of belief, by the uniting bond which His own action, attested by the general voice of the Church, has supplied. It reminds me of a striking suggestion of

Newman, in one of the 'Tracts for the Times,'\* that the true religion is 'the summit and perfection of other religions, combining in one whatever there is of good and true in each of them severally, as the Catholic creed is for the most part,' he says, 'the combination of separate truths which heretics have erred in dividing.' But it rescues the notion from the imputation, which mars it as a reconciling principle, that these religions were 'false,' because they were imperfect."

"Yes; what has been called the falsity of religions is really, I apprehend, only their one-sidedness; they have seen God in the world, or they have raised Him out of the world. They require the Catholic faith, that men may learn to look on Him as at once in it, and higher than it."

"In fact," said R——, "we may say that there never has been a religion false *qua* religion, though it may have become associated with immoral usages; that which was worshipped did really deserve reverence, only not the exclusive absorbing devotion paid to it."

"You remind me," said Agnes, "of an idea which charmed me very much, when I first heard of it, that even the *Fetish* creed, the worship of an inanimate substance, which seems the most stupid and unspiritual of all, is transformed by the Catholic conception of the eucharist into a symbol of the most spiritual faith; the faith in the constant presence with us of Him who was manifested in the flesh as our Lord."

"The idea of the growth of the complete faith out of the union of opposing incomplete ones, resembles," I said, "that grand conception of Hegel and his followers, which, however, they have not half carried out, that the various systems of philosophy are nothing but the development, in successive phases, of the thinking faculty in man: and that the true philosophy is the statement of the principle by which the process is explainable;

\* No. 35. See Discussions and Arguments, 200.

namely, an evolution resting on the distinction and union of contraries."

"At the same time," said R——, "the fact of this religious development having taken place by a series of acts quite independent of the succession of philosophical systems, is an answer to the theory that religion is only one phase in man's spiritual progress, destined to be transformed ultimately into a philosophical morality."

"No doubt. Morality, I take to be the common result to which both religion and philosophy lead, by processes independent of, though harmonising with, each other. But the question immediately before us is, not what are the results of the method, but is it not the true method? Now the Church has always professed that her teaching was founded on facts. She agrees completely with the demands of the scientific thinker on that point. And if the claim set up for the Bible to be a perfectly true record of facts could bear the strict scrutiny of impartial research, I should rely on its statements. But if we cannot honestly say that this is the case, and I at least cannot; if we must admit that our sacred books, when we apply to them the rules which we apply to the sacred books of other religions, such as the Vedas, or the Koran, can no more establish their freedom from error than these books can, and I think Dr Newman's tract, to which you referred just now, is of itself sufficient to prove that . . ."

"To say nothing of Mr Irons," interposed R——, with a smile.

"Yes, to say nothing of the perplexities which he has pointed out in the Bible, if taken as an authoritative source of faith," I exclaimed; "Well, then, what facts remain but man's beliefs? The past history of man cannot be brought up for re-examination, like the physical phenomena on which science builds her theories; all that exists of it is its records. These *are* the *facts*, the only facts answering to the facts of

scientific observation, that we possess in this sphere of inquiry. From them we may learn with sufficient precision the beliefs of their writers; but as for sitting in judgment on the phenomena which may have led to these beliefs, and settling what actually happened, as the German divines have often tried to do, I think the task hopeless. At the very best you cannot get beyond probability, and rarely even to that."

"In truth, you would deal with these statements, as the Church has always dealt with them—accept them unreservedly as expressing the beliefs of their writers, without any rationalistic boiling of them down. Only, while divines have in general assumed that the objective realities exactly corresponded to these beliefs, and formed the true revealing facts, you say *the revealing facts are the beliefs themselves*; which may not represent any other objective reality, but to us are objective—that is, the results of a spiritual power independent of our wills or imaginations, and therefore form an element in the divine revelation to us."

"And, on no view have they been more than an element of revelation. Every one who believes in God at all, must admit nature to be a revelation of Him; and I can truly say that to me the revelation of God made through the spirit of man in its religious history, is the deepest and truest revelation, the one which shows most fully and clearly what God is in Himself. Only we must not make God one-sided and partial, as we do if we confine His spirit to the Jewish prophets and apostles, and do not recognise its presence in other men."

"That is what delighted me most in this idea, Mr R——," interposed Agnes, "when I had once made it out. It was so beautiful to think that God has really always cared for *all* men, and has been present with them *all* in the same sort of way, though the differences between their notions and ours have hindered us from seeing this."

"You express my sentiments exactly, my dear madam. There is a great charm for me in the idea. It seems to lift a weight off my mind: and it gives such meaning to those words of Christ which place the perfection of God in his goodness to the evil as well as to the good."

"And to the absence of any dogmatical conditions of belief in the sayings which can be ascribed with anything like historical evidence to Jesus himself," I added.

"But," continued R——, "one has got so accustomed to look on the exclusive doctrine as a truth to be accepted, however perplexing, because it was revealed, that it must be a wrench to pass to the opposite view."

"And yet," I said, "the change is only a further progress in the same direction with that out of which the Church arose originally. We began with national religions. Then came a system claiming to embrace all men; breaking down the distinction between 'Jew or Greek, barbarian, Seythian, bond or free,' but yet limiting the divine presence and favour to its own members. God, I think, is now leading us to see that this barrier of church exclusiveness is as false as was the old barrier of national exclusiveness; and that the true function of the church is to make men rub their eyes, and come out of their caverns to enjoy the light of the Sun of Righteousness, not to set bounds to His influence."

"True, true," replied R——. "The idea is grand and continuous when it is grasped as a whole. It is in the particulars that one feels the change. I have been so accustomed to contrast man's imaginations with God's revelation, that it seems a sort of profanation of the word to regard God's deepest revelations of Himself as made through the medium of man's imagination, exercised in its creative freedom. And yet, no doubt, man's imagination has been the revealing agent, accord-

ing to the views we call orthodox. What can be more imaginative than the Apocalypse?"

"Only you have put the imagination in chains."

"Yes, we have put it in chains. But it is nobler to believe that God has used it in its inherent freedom. I suppose I shall end in thinking you in the right, if I can get over the repugnance which I feel at treating the two most remarkable books of the Old and New Testaments, Deuteronomy and the fourth Gospel, as what I cannot but call 'forgeries,' though I know you won't admit the name."

"Say *Poieseis*, and I am content, for *forged* they are, I own, in that sense. Works fresh from the creative forge of the spirit of men full of the most intense faith in that which they uttered, and to whom the form given to their teaching was, what the human shape and countenance given by Phidias to Athene was to him—the expression most suitable to the manifested Divinity. Forgery, in our modern sense, is the use of a false name for a bad purpose, and I object to its application to either of these books, more especially to the anonymous gospel, because it associates them with objects entirely foreign to those of their authors."

"But I can quite enter into your feelings, Mr R——," said Agnes, "for it was this very point that seemed to stick in my throat, as it were, when Edward first told me what he thought about the Bible. I felt as if it was making God build up eternal truth upon lies."

"And how did you get over the feeling, for I can see that you have got over it?"

"Well, Mr R——, at last this thought came to me, that if the imagination of man really is the instrument which God has used to make us understand what He is in Himself as far as we can, it is quite likely that the books from which we can learn most about Him would be full of the profoundest imagination. And is it not the fact," she added, "that everywhere the greatest teachers of religion whom men have had, have been

poets. I am sure it was so with the Psalms among the Jews, and Edward says that it was so among the Greeks, and the Vedas, I am told, are poems; and there's Dante among the Italians; and Milton, and Cowper, and Wordsworth, and Keble, and Tennyson, have been the greatest teachers of religion in different ways among us."

"You may add Bunyan," I said, "and he is an example the more in point because his work is a poem in prose. No one, I suppose, would have thought of calling Deuteronomy, or the fourth Gospel 'forgeries,' if these words had been composed in rhythmical order."

"Probably the association of certain forms with works of a peculiarly imaginative character, has a good deal to do with the feeling," said R——; "yet, no doubt, the fact that a narrative is in prose or in verse does not affect the question whether it is objectively, or only subjectively true. The Greeks looked on Homer as history: and the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle is written in verse."

"Mama, what does Mr R—— mean by objectively true?" asked Constance in a whisper of her mother.

"What, are you still there, my love?" said R——, stroking her hair softly, "Why you have been as quiet as a little mouse. It means," he added, "a history, a story of something that actually happened, and subjectively true, means what might have happened, though perhaps it never actually did so."

"But mama," said Constance, "Mr R—— doesn't think that the stories about Jesus Christ never happened, does he?"

"My dear girl," said R——, "I have no doubt, but that our Lord lived such a holy life as the Gospels tell us, going about doing good; and that He endured to be crucified for our sakes; and that He is always present with us now to help us, if we pray to Him; but it seems very probable that some of the things told us about Him in the Gospels, are what the Christians who

lived when they were written, thought that He had said, or done, rather than what they really knew that He did say or do. You know, I might write a story about a little girl who lived once at the parsonage at Y——, and was called Constance, and who had a sister called Helen, and a brother called John, and how she came with her papa and mama to pay a visit to me here; and if I wished to show other people what sort of little girl she was, I might put in a great many things out of my own head which she said or did, because I thought them to be such things as she would be likely to say or do; although, perhaps, she never had said or done exactly any of those things. But that would not show that there never was such a little girl, or that she did not come with her papa and mama to pay me a visit, or that she did not say or do things like what were in my story, though not the very same."

"And if Mr R—— were to write such a story about such a little girl," I said, taking her in my arms, "I think he would say that she staid up when she ought to have been in bed."

"And, I think, I should say she was a good little girl, who had a wise papa and mama, whom she liked to listen to when they talked of grave matters," added R——.

"Especially if a gentleman called Mr R—— was of the party. Eh! is it not so, Conny?"

"Now, papa, you are a very naughty man, and I have a great mind to box your ears for saying such things," exclaimed Constance, blushing,—and making her way out of my arms, she gave her mother and me a kiss, which R—— claimed to share, and ran off to the house.

"She is a sweet creature," said R——, when she was well out of ear-shot, looking after her as she skipped across the lawn. "Well! who knows, if I could find one like what she promises to be when she grows up, who would take a fancy for me—perhaps, X—— might see



a mistress at the rectory some day. "You see P——," he added, as he offered his arm to Agnes to take her in to tea, "whatever may come of your attempts to convert me to your New Catholicism, your wife has converted me into thinking that it is good for man not to be alone if he can find a 'help'-meet 'for him.'"

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## CHAPTER XV.

### THE BIBLE.

AGNES and I have been much interested during the last week, in a young Hindoo, C—— S—— G——, who has come over to England to study English law, and qualify himself for practising as a barrister at Calcutta, and who brought a letter of introduction from my friend I——. By it, we found that he had a strong desire to see something of the interior of an English family, especially a clergyman's. As we had no occupant of our spare room at the time, we were able to gratify his wishes at once, by asking him to take up his quarters for a few days with us; and have had our reward in becoming acquainted with a very amiable and intelligent man, peculiarly attractive to us, because, though profoundly religious, he belongs to that "young India," who have thought their way out of the superstitions of their countrymen for themselves, and to whom, therefore, our missionaries are apt to be antagonistic rather than helpful, since they cannot get their own peculiar dogmas to take hold on them. Naturally, our conversation soon fell upon the question of our difference or agreement in religious matters, which we found to have a deep interest for him; especially our

faith in Christ, whom he owed to feeling sometimes almost a longing to worship, were it not, as he said, for an obstinate rationality which drove him away. We had a good deal of talk about his difficulties. They involved many of the subjects discussed in conversations already recorded in these pages; and appeared gradually to melt away under the influence of the considerations now, I hope, familiar to my readers; many of these being new to him, while others put on a new aspect in their new associations. But there remained some resisting element hard to make out; till at last I discovered that his great stumbling-block was the Bible histories.

Christianity had been presented to him as a belief, attested by a set of stories concerning God's acts towards the Jewish nation, or mankind in general, stated in the Bible, and to be accepted as unerringly true, but which, to him, seemed a strange mixture of improbabilities, absurdities, and often immoralities. "How," he said to me at last, "can I believe in the manifestation of a Divine Being which is connected with believing such tales as there are in your Bible?"

"That is a matter," I replied, "on which I may be able to give you some help; but that I may do this you must tell me more fully what you object to in these stories?"

"I am afraid it is almost everything of much importance," he answered. "The whole character of them from beginning to end appears to me so unworthy of God."

"Surely," said Agnes, "you do not quarrel with the statement that 'God made man in his own image?'"

"No, madam, that is one of the few things in these stories that I can admire. But, if you will allow me, I will read you a few notes I have made about the things which stagger me in the Bible; not in all of it, for I should keep you the whole day to hear that, but only of the creation, and of Adam and Eve, and down to the

flood of Noah: they will give you a good idea of all the rest."

"I should like very much to hear these," I replied; and so G—— produced his MSS.

"I ought to tell you," he said, before he began, "that this was written some time ago, when I had not yet read Bishop Colenso's books about the Pentateuch; and perhaps, too, I should ask pardon before-hand for some things in it at which many of your clergy would be very angry. But I think you are one of those who like to know what men's thoughts really are."

"You judge me quite correctly there," I said.

"Then I will begin with my notes on Chapter i. of Genesis."

'There is a noble saying at the end of this chapter, that Elohim made man in His own image, in the image of Elohim made He him.' "You see, madam, I have not missed that." "But as to the rest of the chapter, what can I learn from it? What is the meaning of God's *saying*, Let there be light, and there was light. No doubt it seems grand; but what does it tell me more than if the book had said, it was dark, and then all at once there was light? Then, what do I learn about the sun or the stars, or the earth, that is true; for as for the six days, nobody stands up for them. Even the stoutest champions of the Bible allow that these *days* must mean not days, but immensely long periods of years; though why, if so, God should be said to have rested on the seventh *day*, and blessed it, and to have set the sun and the moon to be for *days* and for years, I find none who explain. Then, if I cannot learn the time which the earth has taken to grow up from this chapter, can I learn the order in which living things appeared on it? By no means. If the days of Genesis mean such days as the geologists want for the accumulation of the strata on the earth, then, according to this chapter, there must have been an enormously long "*day*," when there were only plants alive, before there

were any "fish," or "creeping things." But some of the very earliest remains that the geologists find are kinds of "fish," or "creeping things," which lived in the waters long before the great growth of plants that made the coal. Again, what do the physicists say to there having been no sun, till after these coal strata had been formed, they who tell us that the force which the coal gives out, is the old heat of the sun stored up for modern use? But here comes in astronomy, to teach me that the earth is only a quite insignificant ball of matter, entirely dependent on the movements of this sun, which Genesis puts on a par with the moon: the moon that is nearly 100 times less than the earth; while it would take more than 100 earths, put side by side, to stretch across the sun.\* And I am to suppose that this sun began to be, myriads and myriads of years after the earth! I should like to know what the earth was doing during all those long ages without any sun to move round? But astronomy has not done yet with this chapter. Will she let me think of a *firmament*, set between waters *above* the earth, and waters *beneath* it in the sea; a firmament *in* which the sun and moon are set; she who tells me that the moon is 250,000 miles distant from the earth, and the sun 92,000,000 of miles; while the meteorologists tell me that the water, which comes down on the earth, is all contained in a little film of air, not five miles thick. I ask, then, what can I learn from the beginning of this pretended revelation, which, the missionaries say, was given by God Himself to Moses, and make so much ado about, and tell us that without it, we can know nothing at all as to how the earth and men came to be—except false notions, which, as soon as I study the European sciences, that these same missionaries boast of as the great glory of the Christians to have found out, I have to put aside, as popular ways

\* The mass of the moon, the earth being 1, is .011369, while the sun is 882,000 miles in diameter, the earth 7926.—See Herschel's Astronomy.

of speaking; God condescending to talk to men according to their own blunders, and to tell them *lies*; yes, I must use the word, absolute *lies*, because He was not clever enough to find out some way of teaching them, without puzzling them by speaking of matters about which they knew nothing. For my part, I am not willing to turn my God into such a foolish liar.'

'But I go on to Chapter the 2d, where the first thing which surprises me is, that God who calls Himself only "*Elohim*" in chapter *one*, begins, all at once in chapter two, to call Himself *Jehovah Elohim*, which are the Hebrew words translated, the *Lord God*, without giving any reason for this change. However, let me pass on to the substance of this revelation! I rub my eyes as I read. Hullo! I say, how can this be? In the first chapter every thing is finished in six days; and God takes a little rest quietly on the seventh, after all his hard work; though it is strange, too, how it came to tire Him so much, since, after all, He did nothing but talk.' "You will excuse me," said G——, looking up, "my little jokes, which I know are not in very good taste, but I read to you just what I have written; and when I wrote this I was rather angry with a missionary, who teased me continually with his Word of God."

"I can enter into your feelings, Mr G——," Agnes replied; "pray read on quite freely. We know that you do not intend to say any thing that might annoy us. It is very kind of you to let us see into your thoughts so unreservedly."

G—— resumed,—'But now, at the end of the seventh day, all begins over again: *first*, the earth, which is quite dry, so that it has to be watered by a mist before any thing can grow upon it, though only six days before, according to chapter one, it had been under the waters; and *next*, the plants when the water had come, made over again; then *thirdly*, the man, whom Elohim had made, with the woman, too, only on Saturday afternoon, Jehovah Elohim makes over again, without the woman, on

Monday morning, I suppose "out of the *dust* of the ground." And then the orthodox doctors are very angry with Mr Darwin, and say he takes away the faith in the Divine origin of man, by teaching that his great-great-great-grandfather may have been a monkey. Well! for my part I would rather have a monkey for my grandfather than a lump of dirt. But then, say the missionaries, is it not true that men do turn into dust when they die? Yes, no doubt, part of them; but a great deal more is water, and a great deal too is air, nitrogen gas. Why could not the All-wise Maker reveal to us a little about this water and air in men, as well as about the dust? And, then, what marvels have not the chemists found out about this water, and air, and dust. I think, if I had been Jehovah-Elohim, making a revelation to my children about themselves and their origin, I would have given them just a little peep into these wonders of the stuff their bodies are made of, instead of telling them a falsehood; that they were made all of dust! But, I go on. I pass over the curious geography of Eden, with its four great rivers, which belong to a river system, certainly not found in Arrowsmith. But *then* comes some more of the crab-like work of creation, going back from men to animals, while the first chapter had gone forwards from animals to men: and so at *last* we arrive at women; but by what a strange route! Jehovah-Elohim makes the animals, and brings them to Adam, to find out if any of them would be a help-meet for him. One does not see clearly whether Jehovah-Elohim wished to find this out for his own information; or whether it was Adam who was to make the discovery in such a hurry, just by staring at a creature whom he had never seen before, whether it would suit him as a help or not, and let God know. Anyhow, it seems that Adam and Jehovah-Elohim between them concluded that the right thing had not been hit off; and so Jehovah-Elohim fell upon the strange notion of making a "help-meet" for Adam out

of one of his own ribs: a straight, slender, graceful female, out of a crooked, ugly bone! I am almost ashamed to write such a criticism because the moral of the story is so tender and true; that the man said to the woman, "thou art bone of my bone, and flesh of my flesh; for thee I will leave father and mother, and be joined to thee as my wife, that we two may be one flesh." It is so clear to me that, out of this idea, the fable grew up. But when the Christians will have us take these old tales to be God's own word, written down to teach us what happened to the first man and woman, this drives us to a strict criticism to prove whether such is the case: And then we must ask, how could Adam tell that the woman was made out of one of his ribs, if he was in a "deep sleep" as it is written, when the rib was taken out, and the flesh closed up in its place? And what could he have known about father or mother, or the feelings of children towards them, he who had no father or mother but God? But I pass on to the tale on which the missionaries insist so much, because they say it clears up the great mystery why there should be sin, and sorrow, and death, in the world. But what a way of clearing up such difficulties! By a story which begins, in this earth just newly made, where all is said to be "very good," with a serpent so *subtle* that he could talk with men, and cheat them into believing him more than God; and ends with a God who is at once *foolish* and *unjust*; so *foolish* that he drives the man and woman out of the garden which he had made on purpose for them, lest they should eat of a tree He had put into it, and become immortal in spite of their creator; instead of simply taking the tree away, or depriving it of the property of preventing death; and so *unjust* that He punishes all the descendants of Adam and Eve, and the earth besides, for one offence, for which it would have been quite punishment enough to have made the apple give Adam and Eve the stomach-ache. Of course, if it were quite certain that the story

was true, there would be nothing more to be said about it; but there is no proof of this at all, that I can discover; and, without such a proof, to set it up as an explanation of the mystery of evil; a revelation clearing up the perplexity we feel about the tendencies to sin which seem born with us, is an insult to common sense.

‘I go on to the story of Cain and Abel, which is a little less unreasonable; though it is curious that the arts which make men strong, or which make life pleasant, are said to be invented by the descendants of wicked Cain, not of pious Abel. But, here again, I find the same arbitrariness which there is in the story of Adam and Eve. Why will not Jehovah accept Cain’s offering as readily as Abel’s? The missionaries read between the lines, and tell us, Oh! Abel offered a lamb, because Jehovah had ordained it in foresight of the death of Christ; but Cain insisted on offering fruits against God’s order: but the story itself, which they tell us is God’s own word, says nothing about this. It seems to have a pleasure in making God act unjustly; and therefore I cannot think it is a true revelation of Him.

‘Chapter v., brings us back to Elohim, without Jehovah, as in chapter i.; while in chapter iv., we have Jehovah alone without Elohim. It is very strange, I think, that God should change so often the name that He gives Himself in “His Word.” And not only so, but we get back also to the Adam and Eve who are made both together, and not one out of the other; and then we go on with Adam’s descendants, and their wonderful long lives, just as if nothing had been said about the garden of Eden, or Cain and Abel. Certainly, this looks very much as if, in this book of Genesis, there were two different stories of the creation, instead of one, as the missionaries pretend. And this seems to go on in the narrative of the Flood, where the name of God jumps about strangely, sometimes being Jehovah, and sometimes Elohim; and the animals who come into the ark, are first *two* of each sort,



without saying any thing about clean or unclean ; and then, after all that has happened as Elohim orders in chapter vi., in chapter vii. Jehovah gives another order to Noah, to take seven males and seven females of each clean animal ; and then again, a little further on, we come back to Elohim's order of two and two creatures out of all flesh, clean or unclean. And then at the end of chapter viii., Noah offers a sacrifice out of the clean animals to Jehovah, who sniffs it up, and finds the smell so pleasant that it quite softens him, and he declares he will not drown the earth any more. While in chapter ix. we get back to Elohim, whom I certainly like a great deal better than Jehovah, who blesses Noah and his sons without wanting any sacrifice to tickle his nose, and sets his bow in the clouds, and gives orders to put murderers to death, with no allusion at all to Jehovah. And perhaps it is from some confusion between the two stories that Noah is made, in chapter viii., to take off the covering of the ark on the *first* day of the *first* month, but yet does not come out of it till the *twenty-seventh* day of the *second* month ; so that he and his family and all the animals must have lived at the top of Mount Ararat, which I believe is always covered with snow, for nearly two months, without any fire, or even a roof. As for the story itself, I daresay when it was written it did not seem so strange as it does now ; because, no doubt, men had no idea then how many different sorts of creatures there really are upon the earth, or how far they live from each other, or how many different sorts of food they would want to live for a year, or how high the mountains are which they supposed to be covered with water, and how much water would be needed to cover them. And if they thought, as the *first* chapter of Genesis says, that there was a great ocean of water *above* the firmament, over their heads, it might seem a very natural thing to suppose that God let it come down to cover the earth. But if God, who must know

the truth about all these things, had revealed the account of what really happened to men, one should expect that He would have let us have some little peep into the way in which the flood really could take place, and the animals could be brought together and kept alive; and when I find nothing at all of this kind in the story, it seems to me to show clearly that this tale is not a revelation made by God at all, but is like those stories of a great flood found among many other nations, which no intelligent and well-instructed person now believes to be true, though, perhaps, they may all have a foundation in some great flood which did once happen.'

"Your notes are a very creditable piece of criticism, indeed, Mr G——," I said, when he stopped reading. "It must have been a satisfaction to you to find, when you read the Bishop of Natal's work, how well you had hit off the conclusions to which he has come, from the most careful analysis of the original, as to the double story of Creation and the Deluge in Genesis, with that distinction in the divine names, which, in this case is almost sufficient of itself to mark out the different parts."

"Yes, I was pleased to find that I had made such good shots, and of course that settles the question of revelation, as to this book of the Bible at all events, for no one can suppose that God would tell two stories that do not fit into each other, about the same things."

"I agree fully with you as to that. But you probably know that the champions of the infallibility of the Bible do not let themselves be stopped in their 'harmonizing,' as they call it, by any difference short of the positive denial by one scriptural writer of what another has positively affirmed. You may see that by the so-called 'Harmonies' of the gospels."

"No, indeed," said Agnes; "and I don't think they would be stopped in their 'Harmonies' even by such a contradiction. If one verse of Genesis had declared, 'God made the earth and the heaven in six days,' and

another, 'God did not make the earth and the heaven in six days, but in one,' they would have maintained that the two statements were perfectly consistent; only one was to be understood of the unity of the idea, and the other of the variety in executing it."

"You seem to have a high opinion of the ingenuity of your commentators, madam," replied G—— laughing; "but you must allow me to say that this is rather at the expense of their honesty."

"Oh! they are not dishonest; they are most sincerely self-blinded, I assure you. I can speak with confidence on this, because I have gone through that state of mind myself. Men mix up their reverence for the Bible with their reverence and love to God so thoroughly, that it appears to them as wicked to doubt the truth of any statement which they find in it as it would be to question the goodness of God. So they won't let themselves be put out in their trust by any difficulties."

"It seems to me, madam, that the Bible must be a very dangerous book if it can produce such an effect on men's minds."

"I think," I said, "that the effect which I agree with Agnes in admitting to be really produced, and with you in considering to be 'dangerous,' is due to two causes; *first*, the inherent beauty of the sentiments by which the books called by us the Bible are generally penetrated; *secondly*, the grandeur and depth of the idea which has come out of them, and embodied itself in the Catholic Church."

"Well," replied G——, "after the conversations we have had together about that Catholic idea, I will not deny its greatness and depth. Only I must say that the way in which you put it is very different from the way in which any of your sects do. I suppose because your way of thinking about it is only just beginning to be known. But as for the sentiments in the Bible, you must excuse me for saying that you seem to me to throw back your own feelings upon it as a colour. What can

you find to delight you, for instance, in the story of Jehovah Elohim cursing all mankind because the first man and woman, in their ignorance and simplicity, ate of a fruit which they had been told not to eat of?"

"The myth embodies a profound moral truth, which the Proverbs, attributed to Solomon, express for a particular case, in the maxim, 'the beginning of strife is as the letting out of water.' Did you ever read Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*?"

"I have looked into it, but I do not know it thoroughly."

"You will find there a very instructive story of a path across the 'Meadows of Delight,' into which Christian and his friend were tempted to turn out of the straight highway; very charming at first, but leading them by little and little astray, till they fell into the clutches of a great giant, 'Despair.' Take away the clothing in which the Jewish imagination dressed its notions of sin and its cause, and the story of the Fall becomes a profoundly true picture of the temptations by which the attractions of the senses induce us to neglect the warnings of conscience, and the far-reaching consequences, extending often to others whom we cannot aid, that may flow from this neglect."

"But that is what you learn now from observing men and things; you do not want this old story to reveal to you that. And all that it tells you more than this you say yourself is a myth—a clothing which must be taken off to disclose the naked truth. Why then call it a revelation at all? What does it reveal to us?"

"The way in which these moral truths grew up and found acceptance among men; the mode in which, thousands of years ago, the Jewish mind conceived them."

"But that appears to me a matter of interest for the antiquarian rather than for the religious teacher."

"Oh no, Mr G——," exclaimed Agnes, "I am sure you are wrong there. It is so delightful to think, when

one reads in the Bible anything that goes straight to our own hearts, here is the Spirit of God proving to us that it is always the same. It is like hearing a voice from heaven proclaiming the grand refrain which we sing at the end of the psalms, 'Glory to God, as it has been, is now, and shall be evermore.'

"But then, madam," said G—"why should you confine that feeling to the Bible? Why not hear God's Spirit in all the profound religious or moral sayings which are to be read in the writings of other nations besides the Jews?"

"So I do, Mr G—; and there is nothing on which my husband is fonder of dwelling than on this idea of the proof given by these writings that the Spirit of God has been present with men, at all times and in all countries, since there have been real men on the earth at all. Only the true religious spirit seems to flow more clearly and fully in the old Jewish writings than in those of any other nation; just as it is with natural water. We don't get here the beautiful clear springs that come out of the chalk hills; but the water is water for all that."

"And comes pure in every case from the skies," I added, "to take its colour and taste from the soil on which it falls. What you want, my dear young friend," I continued, "to perfect your religious faith is what, in my judgment, you cannot obtain without the Bible, and that is the historical element in religion. By means of the Bible we can trace the fibres of the great Catholic idea of a Divine Being, ever present in the world from which it is yet distinct, in continuous connection down to the primitive soil out of which the life-giving tree has sprung. It is a great thing to do that. Religion thus becomes objective, while otherwise it remains only subjective; and that is a real revelation."

"And you see, Mr G—," said Agnes, "the revelation depends on the way in which, in history, God has worked in, as it were, generation after generation, and

different races of men, each with its own thoughts and feelings, but all helping to bring out a great idea which none of them completely understood; so that the revelation is not affected by the mistakes which any of them made, any more than the plan of a great piece of embroidery would be by the imperfect stitches of those who executed it, to give you a woman's simile," she added smiling.

"It might be taken from men's work in Bengal," replied G——, "but in either case it is not the less appropriate; and I think that I begin a little to see how the Bible may be called 'God's' word to man more than other books, and yet be quite truly made up of men's words. Only there seems to me to be some things in it worse than merely imperfect stitches. Must you not admit that there is in it some work which cannot enter into the plan at all? What shall we say, for instance, to the belief of Abraham that it could be right for him to cut his son's throat, and make of him a burnt-offering to God,—that such a command could possibly come from Jehovah, who, in the story, actually praises Abraham for having been ready to do this horrible wickedness?"

"It would be very bad work, indeed," I said, "if we were to take the Bible as teaching us absolute truth by God's dictation. But take it as a history of the growth of religious feeling and thought in the Jewish nation, and this difficulty disappears. Put yourself back into the age when the Jews were beginning to emancipate themselves from the fearful idea, common to many Semitic people, that God was specially pleased by the sacrifice on the part of man to Him of what was dearest to man—his own children; when the prophets began to teach, God takes the will for the deed. It is enough if you are *ready* to offer up your son, your only son, *if* He asks; but He does not ask it; the story is turned from an appalling blasphemy into a very interesting record of religious progress to a deeper insight

into moral truth; and in this aspect it finds entrance into the New Testament."

"I remember, Bishop Colenso puts it so, only I did not quite see, in his way of stating the matter, how, in that case, the story could be called part of a true 'revelation' at all. But I think I see this better now. It is the progress that makes the revelation, is it not?"

"Just so. We trace in the Bible, that is, the records of the Jewish religious history, the growth of a great idea which took root and sprang up in that nation more vigorously than in any other—the idea of one only God, the loving Father, and yet the just and holy Judge of all men, on whom all things depend, from whom men are separated by sin, but who is ever ready to receive those who turn to Him. Then in the New Testament we see how this great idea allied itself with the opposite profound idea which had grown up among the Aryan race, especially the Greeks, that the one God on whom the world depends is truly present in it, working beneath its appearances, not as an arbitrary dictator, such as the Semitic Deity becomes when it shuts out the Aryan element, as it did in Mahommedanism, but as a patient law-maker and upholder. Now since the conception of God presented to us by this combined idea satisfies at once the demands of our emotions and our intellects, it becomes a true revelation, because it contains a principle which binds together the inside and outside—the conscience of the individual with the history of the race."

"But then," said G—, "it is not only the history of the Jews that you want for this revelation; you must have the other side also, the Aryan side, to make up your 'word of God.'"

"That is, to trace the process through which the actual 'word of God' to me—namely, what I can accept as true—has come to take this form in my mind. No doubt I require both sides."

"Then why do you call the Bible exclusively 'God's word?'"

"But Edward never does do that," interposed Agnes; "he always speaks of God's word in the scriptures; and he has often told the people from the pulpit how great a mistake it is to think that God speaks to us only in the Bible."

"I cannot tell you," replied G——, "how much I am obliged to you for making me understand better what the use of the Bible really is. I very much wish you could a little enlighten your missionaries on that point. I know something of my countrymen's way of thinking, and I assure you that if the missionaries go on as they do to make out that the Bible is 'God's word,' just as the Mahommedans say that the Koran is the 'word of Allah,' and my countrymen cease to believe in their own sacred books, they will become Mahommedans sooner than Christians; and I do not think that would be a good thing either for them or for you English in India."

"I have heard before," I said, "from well informed persons of the fruits which Mahommedanism is gathering in from the shaking of the old faiths in Hindostan. It is a very unexpected result of our missionary labours."

"But it is quite indubitable. You see the Hindoos might have become Catholics, perhaps, if you English, when you got the government of India, had believed in the old religion of all Europe; for my countrymen like to belong to a religion which is old and great; but you Protestants come to us with twenty sects all different, and none of them older than your Reformation, and all building themselves on your infallible 'word of God,' which those of us who look into it and know anything, find full of difficulties that you cannot at all explain, but bid us gulp down in a lump by what you call 'faith.' Why should we do that? And then, for those who do not inquire, or who are too ignorant to see difficulties, Mahomet's word is shorter and clearer, and suits their way of thinking in common things better; and it has



been the faith of the great Indian emperors who ruled before you. Why should they not believe it to be 'God's word' as readily as the Bible, which does not even profess to be the word of God at all?"

"And has all the better claim," I observed, "to be a true 'word of God,' because it makes no claim to be anything but men's words about God. A friend of mine, in a poem which one day I hope will see the light, has well said of the Bible—

'It were not scripture then  
Unless it wrote the lives of common men ;  
Nor written for our health, unless it wrote  
Things which were ancient once, but still are new,  
Baptized in our experience ever fresh.'\*

To tell us truly of God, it must tell us what men have really felt, or believed, or hoped of Him who is the source of all hope, and belief, and feeling. It is a note of God's genuine work that it courts inquiry, and makes no pretences. But we have sacrificed our advantages by encumbering ourselves with the heavy armour of infallibility, of our own forging, instead of trusting to the 'sling and stone' of simple truth. If we are to convert the Bible into a mimicry of the Koran, the Hindoo is right in preferring the original. It should be the glory of the Christian teacher to say, I alone can offer you a true revelation, because, while all other alleged revelations are nothing if not infallible, God has revealed himself in Christianity through human infirmity and error."

"And I suppose you will say, it is one proof of this that the Christian teachers have been so long in finding out their special privileges."

"I am afraid you are rather satirical on us, Mr G——," said Agnes with a smile.

"No, madam, I assure you I am quite serious. It

\* Glendower, Act V., § 5, by the Rev. Rowland Williams, published since his death.

was an idea which came into my head that seemed to clear up a difficulty, why, if Mr P——'s notion of the proper character of Christianity is the right one, so few Christians should have perceived this?"

"Yes," I said, "the idea of infallibility has a heavenly mother in Faith, but an earthly father in Self-importance; and it has a very strong hold upon men's minds on the earthly side. The 'pride which apes humility' is prone to conceal its true features under the mask of reverence for what is called 'revealed truth;' that is to say, in nine cases out of ten, fancies which have no support but confident assertion."

"I do not know," observed G——, "whether I quite rightly apprehend how you look upon rival religions, those which do not enter into your development, such as Mahommedanism. Do you deny to Mahomet all right to be a true teacher of 'God's word?'"

"By no means," I replied, "In so far as he taught what is true in itself, he must be a true teacher of 'God's word;' and I am far from denying that there is profound religious truth in Mahommedanism. But I say that it is a one-sided, and therefore imperfect teaching, which moreover, cannot point to that affirmation of the inherent truth of its great doctrines by the religious history of man, capable of being shown in the great ideas of Christianity. Hence it cannot claim, as the Christian ideas can claim, that its subjective assertions are objectively sanctioned. *Credibile est credentibus*\* is true of it, no doubt; but one cannot say it ought to be believed, because the belief gives a coherence and unity to the divine action in human progress, otherwise wanting."

"No doubt," said G——, "Mahommedanism is a one-sided faith. There is no room for the Vedantic religion in it at all. If the Hindoo embraces it, this is because it sweeps away so much superstition which has fettered

\* It is believable to those who believe it.

him. While its morality, both in what it forbids and in what it allows—the prohibition of intoxicating drinks, and the allowance of more than one wife—agrees better than Christian morals with his notions of what is desirable.”

“I have no doubt myself that the church is right in restricting the last liberty and leaving the first free,” I answered; “but you are probably aware that if any Hindoo reformer thought proper to copy Mahomedanism in these respects, there is nothing in the gospels to stop him. Christ, we are told, forbade very decidedly the practice of the Jews in putting away their wives, but we are not told that He said anything about the taking of them. The Christian doctrine of monogamy is entirely a church institution. I have no reason for quarrelling with it,” I added, with a look at Agnes, “but to impose its reception as a necessary consequence of faith in Christ is quite another matter.”

“To allow such a practice would be a great going back, I think,” said Agnes.

“So do I, my love; a going back not to be thought of, where the purer idea has once taken root. But we are dealing with nations where it has not taken root. And when I see what fearful consequences have followed the tendency of the Christian community to raise barriers which Christ did not set up, I doubt the propriety of raising one on this point.”

“I see,” said G——, “the idea of a divine presence manifested upon the earth is with you the first thing: the way in which this idea may realise itself among men to their conceptions, and mould their customs, you would leave very free.”

“You divine rightly,” I replied, “the principle through which I conceive that God would bring the human race to a unity of religious faith.”

And thus our conversation ended.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### INFALLIBILITY.

I WAS surprised to-day by receiving a note from Father F——, another old college friend, whom the tide of modern religious opinion has stranded on the ancient shores of Roman Catholicism, asking whether, as I profess to advocate the free discussion of religious questions, I would allow him the use of the school-room to deliver a lecture on the claims of the church to be the guide of mankind, or else to discuss the question with him publicly. Finding that he had taken up his quarters at our little inn, I replied by an invitation to exchange them for a room in the parsonage that we might renew our acquaintance, observing, at the same time, that, great as I felt the importance of free investigation in religious matters to be, I was not in favour of public discussions of them, because such proceedings appeared to me adapted to foster party spirit, and talking for victory more than for truth; but that we two might quietly compare our ideas, and test the strength of the arguments by which we were mutually influenced without incurring this danger.

My invitation called forth a reply almost more than friendly, the outpouring of a tender spirit wounded by the chilling repulsiveness of many old acquaintances to the "pervert," at finding the cordiality of college friendship unaffected in me by his changes of opinion; and we had in the good Father a pleasant addition to our family circle during the time he could spare to us. The great question of his relieving his mind by publicly

advocating the claims of the Roman Church to absolute obedience was finally settled by his giving two lectures in the school-room, at which I presided, saying a few introductory words to explain my own position, and adding that I proposed soon to treat of the matters on which Father F—— would dwell, from my own point of view, either in the pulpit or by way of lectures, as I have since done. Father F——'s lecture was followed in each case by a conversation with those of the audience who wished to ask any question of the lecturer, who was rather surprised by the kind of questions asked. Hence arose the discussion which I am about to relate.

"That seems to be a very clever lad—Tom, I think you called him," said Father F——, as we were sitting at a tea-supper after his second lecture. "I was scarcely prepared for the line he took. Now, candidly hadn't you been coaching him for the occasion?"

"No, I assure you, I have not said a word to him on the subject; and to tell you the truth, I was rather surprised at him myself. Tom is a lad who reflects a good deal, and he has a most sensible, excellent mother, to whom I should much like to introduce you, only I am afraid you mean to run away from us too soon for that to be possible; but I did not give him credit for so firm a grip as he seems to have got of the idea that revelation does not imply infallibility, and yet may be a true 'revealing.'"

"Anyhow, I suppose by his being so clear upon the matter that the notion is a favourite one of yours. But surely it is practically to give up the point in dispute. When, until now, has there ever been an idea of revelation without a backbone of infallibility somewhere, in the church or in the scriptures?"

"Or Sybilline Books, or Delphic Oracles, or Vedas, or Tripataka, or Zendavesta, or Koran, or Book of Mormon."

"What *do* you mean? Surely you do not place all

the writings you have mentioned on a level with the Old and New Testament."

"Far from it, except in the assumption of infallibility made for them, in which they are all alike. To me the Bible is distinguished from these other professed revelations, because it reveals, without being or even pretending to be infallible; while its competitors, if they cannot tell us absolute truth, have little to say of any present value to us."

"But without infallibility what would be the worth of the Bible. If it cannot tell us, with unerring certainty, whence we came and whither we are going; how the earth became what it is, and what destiny awaits it and us? What help can it be to us in answering these questions if we cannot rely on it as absolutely true?"

"None, I admit; and if the proper subject of revelation is the past and the future, I own that infallibility would be an indispensable condition; but past and future are, after all, only the vanishing factors of that which is entitled to far greater interest, because in it the temporal coalesces with the eternal, the ever-present, and here I conceive revelation is possible without infallibility."

"How so?"

"Because we can test the truth of what is alleged to be revealed by its conformity to our own experience, as well as by its power of accounting for the past so far as we are acquainted with it."

"But how can our present experience possibly tell us whether a man who was crucified 1800 years ago was or was not the eternal Son of God? or whether he did or did not die as a sacrifice for sin, to deliver His servants from His Father's just wrath, and obtain for them unending happiness in another world?"

"No more than it can tell us whether Mahomet was or was not the true prophet of Allah, commissioned to deliver all who believed in his message from never-ending misery, and open to them everlasting happiness in another world?"

"That's just my point. Our experience cannot furnish any test of revelation. It requires the aid of infallibility."

"So say the Mahommedans. Ergo, they conclude the Koran must be infallible."

"But I admit that, if it is a revelation at all, it must be infallible; only as I do not allow that it is a revelation, I require the Mahommedans to begin by proving its infallibility. But you do admit Christianity to be a revelation of God; therefore you are inconsistent in denying infallibility to its records."

"Certainly. I admit Christianity to be a revelation of God, but not in a sense in which I deny this of Mahommedanism. Both are to me revelations."

"Surely you do not put them both on the same level? You do not profess to teach Mahommedanism."

"Nor Christianity, if by Christianity is meant a set of statements about man's past history, and God's dealings with him, which I require men to believe, or at least to say that they believe, on a promise of endless happiness hereafter, if they do so, and a threat of endless misery if they do not. What I endeavour to teach, is, what God is in Himself, and what are man's present relations to Him. I go to the history of Christianity, so far as I know it, and to all other facts known to me which bear on the subject, to discover this. And I profess to be a teacher of Christianity, because it seems to me to cast more light on these matters than I obtain anywhere else."

"But what do you understand by Christianity?"

"In its widest sense, simply a personal attachment to Christ as Him through whom the Divine character has been most fully disclosed to us."

"And in its narrower sense?"

"The belief that Christ was essentially that which He disclosed: that He not only told men truly what God is, but showed this by His life."

"That is, you believe in the true Divinity of Christ?"

"Just so."

"But that is a doctrine."

"Why should I not believe in a doctrine?"

"Surely, it is an axiom of your school, that revelation cannot be conveyed by doctrines, or propositions as they say, about God."

"I don't know precisely what you mean by 'my school.' I am not aware that I have any scholars, and am not accustomed myself '*Ullius jurare in verba magistri.*'"\*

"I mean, of course, the 'Broad Church' generally. But, anyhow, you, at all events commit yourself to this doctrine?"

"Certainly."

"Then I ask you, how can we possibly be assured of such a matter, except by an infallible testimony. What but the positive declarations of those who could not err, can satisfy our reason, that the eternal, unchangeable, incomprehensible, invisible, intangible Deity could be really present in a transitory, variable, limited, human being, who could be seen and handled?"

"Well! let us consider. You will not, I suppose, contend that any testimony could go beyond that of Jesus himself on this point."

"Certainly not."

"And you admit the true humanity of Jesus?"

"Of course. It is an article of the Catholic faith."

"Then suppose yourself to be in the company of any one at the present day, who, appearing to be a man, declared himself to be the eternal, unchangeable, invisible, intangible God, should you believe his assertion?"

"That would depend on circumstances. If I could be certain that He was perfectly good, and He did works such as no other man could do, I might."

"But how could you be certain on either of these points? To know that he was perfectly good, you must yourself be all-knowing."

\* To swear by the words of any master.



"But if he could multiply food?"

"Like Elisha."

"Raise the dead?"

"Like Elisha, Peter, and I know not how many saints, according to the Catholic story. How could such acts, however unquestionable in themselves, prove such a proposition as you have just now enunciated?"

"Yet you profess to believe in it; and I suppose that you do not do that without some proof, which you think sufficient?"

"No doubt; but the question is, what proof?"

"And what proof but an unerring declaration can be sufficient?"

"But how am I to know that it is unerring? Don't you see, we are arguing in a circle?"

"Just so. It is what led me to give up Anglicanism. I could get no support for my faith in Christianity at all, without the infallibility of the Bible; and no support for the infallibility of the Bible without the infallibility of the Church. But the infallibility of the Bible was Anglican doctrine as much as Catholic. It was more logical, therefore, as well as far more satisfactory to my feelings, to assume this infallibility of the Church at once."

"And my quarrel with those who reason like you, is not for making this assumption; you have as good a right to make it as I have to my assumptions; but that you will not allow it to be an assumption, which the reason is entitled to criticise, as it is to criticise every other assumption."

"But that is to object to the principle of Faith,—the condition of all revelation."

"No. It is only to object to the divorce of faith from reason—to the introduction of the notion of infallibility, with the inevitable result of stifling the faith which it professes to cherish."

"Surely you do not claim more faith for the members of your church than for those of ours? Why the

standing reproach of the Protestants against us is what they call our 'credulity,' our excessive readiness to believe."

"My dear friend, don't let us confuse principles with phenomena. Religious faith, as is admirably stated in the Epistle to the Hebrews, is simply trust in God, who is, and is the rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. And this principle, as the writer argues, has been the same in all ages, in the minds of persons who had, otherwise, very different conceptions in religious matters. Now I say, that to interpose any authority whatever between man and God, is to weaken this principle of faith. In fact it is to transfer religion from her proper home, in the Will, and the emotions connected with it, to the Intellect, where she wants a guide, and not seeing her way clearly falls into the arms of Master Infallibility."

"But what, if Master Infallibility should lead us to everlasting joys, if we trust his guidance?"

"Is not that," said Agnes, with a little smile, "very much like the old nursery exhortation,

'Open your lips, and shut your eyes,  
And in your mouth you'll find a prize?'"

"Would that those who refuse the offer may not find the fruit gathered under their own guidance bitter to their taste, when it is too late to change," replied Father F——, with a melancholy expression.

"Come, come," I said, "don't let us spoil our present by useless forebodings. We must all act according to our own consciences, and 'stand or fall' each 'to our own master.' The question which I want you to consider is, whether the demand for infallibility does not arise from a function having been assigned to the intellect, which properly belongs to the will? 'Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence towards God,' says the author of the first Epistle attributed to St John. 'He that would be saved must thus *think* of the Trinity,' says the author of the

Athanasian Creed, so called. Here is a great change in the point of view; inevitable, probably, at the time it took place, but not the less carrying in itself the germs of division and decay; a disease fatal to the fulfilment by the church of her divine mission—to gather God's flock in all future ages and nations into the fold of the Good Shepherd, to whom the quality of the wool may be far more important than the colour or texture of the fleece?"

"How can we possibly suppose that the church has missed the right path, if she had such an origin as you ascribe to her?"

"But, Father F——, why is that more difficult to imagine," asked Agnes, "than to suppose that the mass of the human race have missed the right path, as you assert them to have done, if the consequences are so fearful as you intimate?"

"My dear madam, I do not venture to dogmatise on a matter on which the Church tells me nothing. But this supposition is no peculiarity of the Catholic faith. Your Anglican articles limit salvation to 'those whom God has by His counsels, secret to us, chosen out of all mankind,' whom they declare 'to be by nature children of wrath,' 'that He might deliver them in Christ from curse and damnation.'"

"But we are considering, not what our articles may or may not say or imply," I replied, "but what is reasonable; and there you must allow, surely, that if the church has erred she has shared only the common lot of mankind."

"Only, in sharing this lot, she loses her right to be a guide."

"To be an unerring guide, no doubt, but a guide may be, on the whole, a good guide, though sometimes he makes mistakes."

"Provided," added Agnes, "he has the humility to keep his eyes open, and, if he finds that he has taken a wrong path, is ready to turn back, and try another

road. Else, if he should get us into a bog, there we must stick; as it seems to me that you Roman Catholics do, with your personal infallibility. I am quite angry with Edward sometimes, because he won't speak out boldly enough about that absurd old man who has got together, I don't know how many bishops at Rome, to declare that he and his predecessors, the Bishops of Rome have always been infallible, without knowing it."

"It pleases you to be satirical, my dear madam," said Father F——, "and to those who look at the conclusion only, without tracing the steps of the advance from the original promise of Christ to Peter, to the present recognition of the function implied in it, this act of the 'old man at Rome,' and the fathers of the church who, under the Divine guidance, have been the instruments in accomplishing it, must appear one of those 'acts of folly,' which nevertheless may really be the Divine foolishness of the deepest wisdom."

"But, if the infallibility of the church resides in the Pope, and not in the whole body of the faithful, according to the grand old ideas for which Dollinger is fighting, why was that found out now, for the first time,—more than eighteen hundred years after Christianity began?"

"My dear madam, infallibility belongs neither to the 'body of the faithful,' nor to the Bishops, nor to the Pope, but to the Holy Ghost, who speaks through them. The question is through what organ He speaks at any particular time. And this we, who believe that He is always present with His church, hold that he has now thought fit to declare, through the mouths of the bishops assembled at Rome, to be the Pope."

"I don't wish to shock your feelings, Father F——," said Agnes, "but when one remembers what sort of persons some of those Popes werè, it seems to me almost blasphemous to suppose that they have been the special organs through whom the spirit of God spoke?"

"I cannot go into that question, my dear madam,"

replied Father F——, “it would take up too much time; you must let me follow your husband’s lead, and confine myself to the present wants of the church; the subtle poison to which, in these days, ‘when many go to and fro, and knowledge is increased,’ she is exposed; and the effective nature of the remedy applied by the self-abnegation of the bishops, who, at the apparent sacrifice of the privileges which men like Dollinger declare to belong to them, have acknowledged in the successor of St Peter, the supreme power to ‘bind and loose’ on earth. No act in the long history of the church, full as it is of noble acts, seems to me greater; none shows more clearly the spirit of holy obedience springing from that faith, which you, who are familiar with Dante, will remember is the first of his three supernatural virtues.”

“But what is the ‘subtle poison,’ to which the recognition of an infallibility concentrated in the person of the Pope is to be a remedy?” asked Agnes.

“The claim of learned men, especially in Germany, men in our own ranks; men of whom Dollinger is one of the most moderate, and therefore not the least dangerous, to set intellect above faith, and transform the deepest mysteries of our holy religion, the doctrines of the Trinity and Incarnation, for instance, into truths of the reason; which has indeed been nursed by faith, but is now grown strong enough to perceive and know more than poor faith, guided only by the Holy Spirit, can discern. There are Forschhammer, Volkmuth, Scherard, Eberhard, Singler, at different universities, leaders in this system who in the name of ‘Free Science,’ as it is called, are ready to give up Christianity, bound hand and foot, to the tender mercies of the Professors of Theology; and, for their followers, ‘their name is Legion.’ How could this peril be averted? It was not a question of any specific novel doctrine; but the introduction of a new principle; reason getting on the shoulders of faith to look over her head. What

could the Church do to meet this claim so effectual as the solemn affirmation, in the most definite form, of her own principle; the doctrine of her own supernatural origin; by not only formally claiming infallibility, but designating the visible Head of the Church as him to whom is committed the office and authority, not only to sound the alarm against each new assault of our Zion, but at once to smite the assailant with the keen sword of the Spirit?"

"I admit the efficacy of the doctrine, as an instrument of church police," I observed, but that such an instrument should be wanted for such a purpose; that it should be possible for a large body of earnest and pious men deliberately to deny the congruity of the revelation which they believe God to have made of Himself, to the faculties of the beings to whom it has been made, is to me one more proof how false the principle is, which places the object of revelation in an action on the intellect, instead of an action on the will."

"But I deny that the Church does this," answered Father F——. "What are the sacraments but channels of Grace which act on the will? Only the will must be enlightened through the intellect, else it could not apprehend the sacraments aright. Therefore, God has granted to it an unerring guide; and in so doing He really magnifies the importance of the will. For what, after all, is at the bottom of the difficulties of the intellect in accepting the teachings of the church, but *unwillingness* to be guided?"

"Unwillingness to be *blindfolded*, you should say," observed Agnes.

"You must remember," I continued, "that criticism is of the essence of the intelligence. We call its operations reflection, a bending back of the mind. On what does it bend back, but on itself; on its own constructions; the imaginations, judgments, purposes which it finds within itself. To demand of the intellect, not to

criticise, is to require of it that it cease to be intelligence. Now, if it does criticise it cannot be that passive instrument, guided by judgments not its own, which your theory needs."

"And how can we follow St Peter's direction, to be always 'ready to give a reason for the faith that is in us, with meekness and fear,' if we are not to reason at all?" asked Agnes.

"My dear madam, Catholics do not call on men not to reason, but not to rationalise. Reason has her proper office in Divine things; namely, to judge of the claims of the Church to be her teacher; that is of the fact of God having revealed Himself to us through Christ, as your husband allows that He has done. But the making such a revelation implies some provision for making it known, and preserving it in its purity. This office belongs to the Church. Here reason has no place except in subordination to the supernatural guidance vouchsafed to her."

"Reason, you say, can take us to the door of the temple by her natural eyesight; but when we enter it the light becomes supernatural, and the objects cannot be discerned at all in their true shapes, except through the glasses of faith. That's a fair description of your doctrine, is it not?" I asked.

Father F—bowed assent.

"You should add," said Agnes, laughing, "that the right glasses are to be got only in the Catholic shop; else you may be provided with a host of faith spectacles, each making things look very different from their appearance in the infallible ones of his Holiness."

"Yes," I continued, "we come back to our starting-point. Is faith a principle belonging to the will, the principle of trust, which may ally itself to very various conceptions about God? or is it an intellectual assent, either to a certain set of propositions which has been the notion of Protestant orthodoxy, as to the authority of a certain teacher, which is the old Catholic notion?"

"And, surely, far the most reasonable notion," said Father F——, "for the teacher can supply the propositions whenever they are wanted; but the propositions cannot supply their interpreter, if conclusions about them differ."

"And a committee of the Privy Council is a very poor expositor of religious truth, though it may be a very good expounder of ecclesiastical law," I added.

"Certainly, it is *aut Cesar aut nullus*—infallible supernatural guidance, or no guidance at all; but 'every one for himself.'"

"'And God for us all.' You must not leave that out, if you please, Father F——," said Agnes.

"I am afraid, my dear madam," replied the Father, rather sadly, "you give me very little hope of bringing you into the Catholic fold."

"Indeed, Father F——, I hope that I am already in a fold more Catholic than your Roman one. For, as Edward often says, we can take you in, as true servants of Christ, after your own notions, though we think them mistaken; but you cannot take us in, because, inside God's fence, built of men's wills and affections, you have built up one out of a set of conceptions of your own, which you won't let any one touch."

"But if the mere breadth of inclusiveness is a test of truth, the Theists would beat you hollow, my dear madam, for they include Jews, Mahommedans, Parsees, and Brahmoos, as well as Christians. Nay, if we put the adjuncts Mono, Poly, and Pan on a level, they include every one except Atheists."

"And yet," I said, "the divisions of Protestants have been a favourite and powerful argument with Roman Catholics for the truth of their views."

"Certainly, truth is one," replied Father F——. "It does not follow that its adherents are many; but a Catholicity which glories in including persons of widely differing views affirms, not the unity of truth, but its nullity."



“Or the nullity of the differences; the fact that they do not really affect the principle of unity,” I answered. “Assume for a moment that the real object of Christ in appearing upon earth was simply to foster the growth among men of certain dispositions of the will towards God and towards each other; then, clearly, Christ would recognize as His every one in whom these dispositions exist. And we, if we are His disciples, must follow His example.”

“But, according to that reasoning, you might have to recognize as true members of Christ persons who might never even have heard of His name, not to speak of those who altogether deny His divinity.”

“And why not? If the Catholic faith about Christ is true, are not all these persons sustained by His action?”

“No doubt they are, as natural beings.”

“Then what right have we to assume that those who are sustained by His power are excluded from His love, if they do not exclude themselves by the opposition of their wills to His perfect will?”

“But what is the use of church membership on this system?”

“What is the use of all education? Self-taught persons may be found much better informed than many who have been carefully educated. It does not follow either that education is useless, or that the knowledge of these uneducated persons is not real knowledge.”

“Well! if Christianity were only an affirmation of natural religion, I might agree with you; but the church has always regarded it as a system of supernatural blessings, purchased by the merits of Christ for the members of His mystical body, to whom God has revealed Himself as a Father, loving them, so to speak, with an ecstasy of love, a fire of love, burning like a passion in the heart of God, till it led the Father to sacrifice His Eternal Son, a willing victim, that He might have the luxury of pardoning the sinner.”

“But, surely, Father F——,” said Agnes, “the

more intense you suppose this passion of Divine love to be, the less reason there must be for supposing its action to be confined to the members of one church, and the more reason for thinking that God's love is always ready to bless all who do not turn away from it."

"Then there would be an end of the supernatural; it would become part of the natural."

"Why should it not be so regarded?" I asked. "What do you suppose the supernatural to be? Not arbitrary power, I hope?"

"No, certainly not arbitrary."

"Then, if not arbitrary, it must be constant, *i.e.*, it has what we call a natural constitution, certain definite characters from which its action might be understood if we had knowledge enough of it. This nature may be higher than other natures; and, in that sense, love is truly supernatural, above all other natures. It is because the principle of love is manifested in the idea of the Incarnation, on which the Church has been founded, as it is nowhere else in human history, that the Church is, to me, a supernatural body. It is because I look to the spread of the knowledge of this idea, through the Church, over the earth that I regard her as destined to form the uniting bond of all mankind. But this sort of supernaturalism has so little to do with infallibility that it is precisely the introduction of that notion which has, I think, prevented the Church from fulfilling hitherto her proper work."

"There we get to my difficulty. How could this divinely-instituted body have fallen into so great a mistake?"

"How come men to fall into mistakes about religion generally? If the revelation consist, as I contend it does, in the manifestation of the supernatural power of love, this manifestation, when it had taken place, would be dealt with by the human intelligence, according to its own character, and that character is to attain to truth through error."

“But to what extent does this liability go? How can we be sure, if we admit it, that any part of the faith will remain unaffected?”

“And how can we increase our security by refusing to admit that our faith may be unfounded? My dear friend,” I continued, as Father F—— made no reply, “don’t let us rest our confidence in revelation upon distrust of God. If infallibility is beyond our reach, it does not follow that truth is denied to us.”

“Only mingled with error.”

“Say, rather, in a continuous process of purification from error till there remains only what is true.”

“But how can this be known?”

“By its fruits. By its harmony with itself, with our nature, and with all other knowledge.”

“And what is to be the position of the Catholic theology in your system?”

“It must change. It does not follow that the theology must perish. In so far as it has taught eternal truths, and, in my judgment, it has taught many, it will remain in substance, though probably a good deal modified in form.”

“Yes,” said Agnes, “Edward is very conservative, with all his radical notions. He won’t even dismiss the Pope, but keeps for him a place of pre-eminent dignity in his renovated church, as the visible centre of a spiritual organization, extending freely over all the world, the outward symbol that ‘the kingdoms of this world’ have become ‘the kingdoms of the Lord and His Christ.’”

Father F—— stood a minute or two, meditating apparently on these words. At last he raised his eyes slowly, and said, “It is a beautiful dream; too beautiful, I fear, to become a reality. And there is still a great question beyond. If you take away the note of infallibility from revelation, what becomes of the future?”

"I think we will leave that for the future to settle," said Agnes; "at all events, I am going now to insist on the claims of the present, and send you both to bed."

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## CHAPTER XVII.

### THE BISHOP.

YESTERDAY evening, when I entered my church to prepare for the service, I found the clerk's wife standing at the door, with a half-alarmed, half-important expression on her face, come to meet me with the intelligence "that Lord and Lady M——, our neighbours in an adjoining parish, had driven over with the Bishop of ——, who I had heard was to pay them a visit for a few days; and that she had just put my Lord and Lady into my pew, but that the Bishop had gone into the vestry. His Lordship wouldn't hear of my sending anyone over to the parsonage to let you know," she added; "and, to my thinking, he's come over just of a-purpose to hear what you preaches like. For yesterday afternoon a servant lad rode over from the Hall to our house, to ask whether you was a-going to preach this evening, as there was a gentleman a-staying at my Lord's as might like to come over and hear you. But I never give it a thought that it was the Bishop, nor my man neither, or you may be sure we would have let you have a warning."

"Don't be frightened, Jane," I replied; "I am not at all alarmed at having to preach before my Bishop;" and went on to the vestry. Here I found his Lordship, somewhat reserved and stately-looking, as if he was in doubt how he ought to receive me. However, he put

out his hand as I came near him, and gave me a friendly shake, while he said, "I have heard a good deal about your teaching, Mr P——; I am afraid I must add not altogether in its praise. So, happening to be in the neighbourhood to-day, I determined to come over and judge for myself. I am here now only to express my wish that you will make no change whatever in consequence of my presence."

"I trust your Lordship will find nothing in the order of the service departing from the customs of the Church of England," I answered; "and as for my sermon, fortunately I was about to preach a written one, which is not always my practice. So your Lordship can have my *ipsissima verba* if you desire it. I am only sorry, for my wife's sake, that we did not know of your coming; for she will be quite put out if you and Lord and Lady M—— will not stay to have tea with us after the service, and as much flurried as she can be at not having more time to make preparations for you."

"We had not thought of intruding on you," said the Bishop; "but as you press it, I can at least promise for myself, if my hosts do not insist on carrying me off."

I was about to reply that I was pretty sure of their consent to stay, when I was interrupted by a gentle tap at the vestry door, and, on opening it, found my eldest girl, who, standing on tiptoe, told me in a confidential whisper "that Lord and Lady M—— and Miss M—— were going to stop to tea if the Bishop didn't object; so I must come to the pew after church to take Lady M——; and Jane is gone to tell cook," she added mysteriously in my ear. "And mamma says I am to say she's not at all frightened."

"You are come just in time to show his Lordship the way to our pew, my love, he has kindly consented to stay to tea," I replied; adding in a whisper, "and tell mamma it's all right."

I subjoin my sermon, because it is not a long one, while it shows my way of dealing in the pulpit with

some of the most serious of a clergyman's difficulties at the present day. The text was from Acts i. 9-11, part of the Gospel for the day. The sermon was as follows :

“The story I have just read to you is one full of difficulty to those who know what we know now about the earth, and the world of which it is a part. But to those who first heard it, there would have been no difficulty in it at all; or, at all events, if they found any difficulties in it, they would have been of quite a different nature from those I have just mentioned. For in that age men generally supposed the earth to be a flat mass, very much bigger than anything else in the universe, except the skies, and in the middle of them. It is true that they thought it was round. But there are two ways in which things may be round, as I have often said to you: they may be round like an orange, or they may be round like a shilling; and men then commonly thought that the earth was round like a shilling. And as a shilling has an upper side or top, and an under side or bottom, so they thought the earth had, and that men lived on this top or upper side, while on the under side they supposed that the souls of the dead lived in what in the Old Testament is called *Sheol*, and in the New Testament *Hades*—a word often confused in our version, under the name “Hell,” with a word *Gehenna*, which has a very different sense in the original. I return to the ancient notions about the universe. Over this flat central earth men imagined that there was a great hollow covering, the heavens, as we translate the Jewish name for it, to which the Jews thought that the stars were fastened with diamond nails, as their Rabbis taught in after times; while *in* these heavens they supposed that the sun and moon ran about from one end of them to the other. *How* this could be, they do not appear to have ever asked themselves. It was quite enough for them that such was the will of Jehovah, who dwelt, they thought, above the clouds, *in* these heavens of which we saw the under side.

“ Now persons who had such imaginations as these about the earth, and the heaven covering it, could have no difficulty in supposing that Jesus Christ might go up into this heaven, and there live with God, and govern all things by His divine power, if they believed in His divine being at all. But if we try to fit in such a story to our notions about the earth and the universe, the case is quite changed. We think of the earth as being round like an orange, a ball always turning round about a line passing through the middle of it, called its axis, and so making day and night; and besides this, going round the sun every year, and so making summer and winter. Now such a ball has an inside and an outside no doubt, but to speak of it as having an upper and an under side is to talk nonsense. What people mean by *upper* in this respect, is the point over their heads, and by *under*, the point below their feet. But at the end of every twelve hours our heads point in a direction opposite to the one in which they pointed at the beginning of them; and, in the meantime, they have pointed in a countless number of different directions between these two; and if we were to travel to any other part of the earth, the same thing would happen, except just at the two ends of its axis, where our heads, in the one case, would point where our feet pointed in the other case; and the points to which our heads pointed would be different at each different place; so that the words ‘*upper*’ and ‘*under*’ have no meaning at all when they are applied to the earth as we imagine it to be, instead of having a very clear and intelligible meaning, as they had to the writer of the Acts of the Apostles.

“ Perhaps, however, some of you who are listening to me may be thinking to yourselves, after all is said, ‘*up*’ and ‘*down*’ are very unimportant words, and the parson makes a great deal too much fuss about them, when the meaning is only that Christ went *away* from the earth to some place beyond the stars, where God lives.

But there cannot be a more unfortunate way of getting out of the difficulty than this, because the idea that Christ went away from the earth in going up into heaven, is just what those who wrote this story did *not* mean. For Christ to be in heaven meant, according to their ideas, that He was with men as God is with men, 'about their path, and about their bed, and spying out all their ways,' and would be so with them always, 'even unto the end of the world,' as we read in the first gospel. It was anything but to be 'away' from them. Yet persons who, in order to avoid contradicting the words of the New Testament, introduce this variation, or as it is properly called 'rationalising' of them, that is, who make the Bible say something it does not say, because they think the Bible ought to have said it, if they are to retain any belief in the story of the Ascension, cannot avoid falling into this fatal departure from the spirit of the old narrative. For, in the universe, as we now conceive it, the earth, instead of being, as it was to the writers of the Bible, both Old and New Testament, the centre round which all God's action turns, the most important part of the whole universe, is so very insignificant a part, that it is truly, to use a scriptural simile, 'as the small dust in the balance;' so little, that if we could go only so far from it as to the furthest of the planets which all move round our own sun, let alone the stars each of which is a sun in itself, we should scarcely be able to see it, even though we knew where to look for it; so that if we are to have a belief which shall give us the same sort of feelings as the old belief of Christ having gone into heaven gave to the first Christians, this faith must certainly *not* be a belief that He has gone to some home of God, farther away from us than the stars.

"But if we are not to 'rationalise' this story of Jesus having gone up into heaven, by making it mean He went away from the earth; and if we cannot understand it literally, because to 'go up' from the earth has



no meaning at all, what are we to think of it? The answer may perhaps rise very readily to the lips of some who hear me, 'Think of it? Why, simply that it is a "cunningly devised fable;" a story which the apostles invented, that they might get credit for themselves out of the honour given to their Master, as the head of His Church. Depend upon it, that's the common sense of the whole matter.' But there is a grave difficulty in the way of this 'common sense' explanation. If the apostles had invented such a story for any such purpose as is suggested, we must suppose that they would have made the most of it. They would have taken care to spread the tale as widely as possible, and we should be certain to find plenty of allusions to it in any Christian writings which take us back to that age. Now this is not the case. We have four lives of Jesus in the New Testament, but two of them end without any notice at all of this 'going up' of Jesus into heaven; a third, which we call the gospel according to St Mark, says, indeed, that 'Jesus was received into heaven,' but makes no mention of any one having *seen* Him ascend there, and goes on to declare that 'He sat at the right hand of God,' which is not what any one could have been supposed to have seen, as they might see a man rise into a cloud, and even this is contained in a passage not found in the oldest and best copies of this gospel. Nay, what is still more curious, the gospel ascribed to St Luke, although it seems to have been written by the same person who wrote the Acts, gives an account of this 'taking up' of Jesus very different from that in the Acts; making it happen on the evening of the day on which He rose from the dead, instead of forty days afterwards, as any one may see who reads the 1st, 13th, 30th, 33d, 36th, and 41st verses of the 24th chapter of Luke, one after the other; and saying nothing at all about any 'cloud' into which He was received, or any 'men in white apparel,' who came afterwards to foretell His coming again. And yet the writer of the later

version of the story takes no notice at all of the former version, and makes no attempt to fit the latter into the former, so that the two stories might hang together, and not seem to destroy each other, as we should naturally expect to find him doing, if the story had been designedly made up.

‘But further, we have in the New Testament a number of letters written by St Paul, the first great preacher of the faith in Jesus among the Gentiles, from which we see how firmly he believed that Jesus was in heaven, and would come again to judge all mankind very soon, probably while St Paul himself was still alive. Yet, nowhere in these letters do we find any allusion to the story of Jesus having gone up into heaven in the presence of His apostles. Now, when we consider what St Paul thought about the Lord, it is quite impossible to suppose that he would not have dwelt upon the account of His ascension, if he had ever heard of it; and it is quite incredible that the other apostles should not have told him this tale, if they had invented it, in order to gain converts. So that the silence of St Paul about the story of the ascension of Jesus seems to me to prove conclusively that it is not a tale got up by the other apostles.

“But then you may say, Does not this silence prove a great deal more? Does it not prove that St Paul never could have heard of the visible ascension of Jesus at all? And if he had never heard of such an event at all, does not this prove that it never happened? And if it never happened, what becomes of the Christian religion which you preach to us? My friends, these are very important questions. Let us look into them quietly.

“Many of you probably are aware that the fourth article of the Church of England declares ‘Christ did truly rise from the dead, and took again His body, with flesh and bones, and all things appertaining to the perfection of man’s nature, wherewith He ascended into

heaven, and there sitteth until He return to judge all men at the last day.' As a minister of the Church, I am bound not to contradict this statement; but there is nothing that I know of to prevent me from considering with you how far the statement is borne out by the ascertainable evidence for it; or examining what the effect of rejecting it must be upon the religious feelings of any persons among you who may not believe it, if, apart from the weight due to the positive statement of the Church, the evidence should appear insufficient. Now, I must admit that, in this case, the evidence for the assertion of the Church does seem very weak. When we consider that the story of the visible ascension of Jesus is found in one only of the New Testament writers; that this writer gives inconsistent accounts of it; that he does not profess to have seen the event himself, nor tell us from whom he heard the account; that we do not know with any certainty who he was, nor when he wrote; and that no notice of the story is to be found in St Paul's letters, I own that I do not see what argument to oppose to anyone who should maintain, the reasonable inference from these facts is, that the supposed event never happened at all, except the argument that the writer of the Acts was clearly himself persuaded of the truth of the story told by him; and that, as he had better opportunities than we have of ascertaining what evidence there was for it, we may properly trust to his judgment. And I cannot honestly say that this argument is a strong one. Let us examine then what effect the conclusion that Christ never did visibly ascend from the earth should have upon the Christian religion, in the minds of any persons who may come to this conclusion.

“Well, my brethren, in the first place, obviously the difficulty which I noticed in the beginning of my sermon, from the absurdity, according to our present notions of the universe, of speaking of a heaven *above* the earth, disappears of itself. And with it we get rid

of the notion, so destructive of the feelings connected with the old story, that the heaven into which Christ went is some place beyond the stars, as we now think of them. And the disappearance of these stumbling-blocks is not due to any arbitrary way of dealing with the story. We do not get rid of them simply by *leaving* out what appears to us improbable, though it may be just as well attested as other parts of the narrative which we retain. The reason for thinking that this account of Christ's having been seen by His apostles to go into the clouds states only what the writer of the Acts believed to have happened, and not what actually did happen, would be only the same sort of reason which would lead us to say, if we met anywhere with a story of Queen Victoria having been crowned Queen of France, This must be a mistake; for such an event, if it had happened, would certainly have been mentioned by many writers, whereas one only has mentioned it; and this one, we may suppose, to make the comparison with the story of the Ascension more complete, in one passage had said that this coronation took place when the Queen went to visit Louis Philippe, and in another, that it took place when she went to visit Louis Napoleon. The difficulty, then, disappears. Yes, you may reply, no doubt the difficulty disappears, but with it that faith in the Divine nature of Jesus, of which you so often talk to us, must disappear also. Why so? What is this faith, when we come to think of it? Certainly *not* a faith in any particular, visible, passing event; but the faith in a continual presence. To believe in the Divine nature of Jesus Christ, is to believe that we live and move and have our being in virtue of a power, whose true character was shown by the acts of the Lord, because His will was one with the will of this divine power; so that, from Him, we may learn not only what He imagined God to be, as we may learn this from the words or acts of other men; but what God is in Himself.

“ Now such a belief is quite distinct from the question whether or not the body of the Lord did rise into the air in the presence of His apostles, ‘ till a cloud received Him out of their sight,’ as the story in the Acts tells us. No doubt this story has often been used, by those who thought that it described what actually had taken place, as an evidence for the truth of their other beliefs about Him. But any of you who has ever attended a trial in a court of justice must know that the evidence for any matter is a very different thing from the matter itself. Suppose a man to be accused of a murder, and a witness to come forward and say, I was standing at my bedroom window, at such and such a time, and I saw the accused person strike the blow which killed the murdered man; and suppose it to be afterwards clearly proved that this witness was, at that very time, quietly asleep in his bed, and could not have seen what he stated, his evidence would be worthless; yet, for all that, the accused man might have committed the murder.

“ And so, in the case we are considering, the body of the Lord may never have been ‘ taken up ’ into the air, as the writer of the Acts supposed, and as the fourth of our articles asserts; and yet the will which acted through that body, while the Lord lived on earth as a man, may have been truly divine, truly one with the will of God, as the Church has believed. Those who are in the habit of hearing me preach will know how very little importance I attach personally to the stories about our Lord which are commonly brought forward as evidences of His divine nature, and over which almost all the battles with those who deny that belief have been fought, as a means for deciding that question; though it would be impossible for me on the present occasion to go into this matter at such length as would be necessary, in order to do it any justice, without making my discourse a great deal too long. But, at the same time, I would not have you think that, because these stories

are not wanted as proofs of the divine nature of Jesus, therefore they are idle stories—stories not worthy of attention at all—stories from which nothing valuable is to be learned. Far from it. These stories, if they are not historically true, are at all events the dress in which the belief in the divinity of Christ naturally clothed itself to the imaginations of those in whom that great idea first dawned; and they are full of the spiritual lessons to be drawn from it. And these are not lessons which those who doubt whether the stories are historically true try to extract from them, that they may not seem quite useless; but lessons which the Church has always drawn from them, from the time when they were first told; and has thus borne witness that not the mere passing sights or sounds of which the stories tell, but the meaning conveyed through them, is 'the one thing needful' to be apprehended.

"At Easter we found abundant proofs that what the Church has seen in the story of the resurrection of Christ was the affirmation of her faith that 'He could not be holden of death,' which the conception of His divine nature necessarily implies. And now, in this story of His ascension, we have, ready to our hands, the lessons of trust and active goodness proper to it, meeting the present needs of our spirits as they met the needs of those to whom, eighteen hundred years ago, they were first given. 'Lo! I am with you always, even to the end of the world.' 'Why stand ye gazing up into the heavens?' Jesus is not gone from you; He is ever present among you; He 'will not leave you comfortless, but will come,' as we read in the fourth gospel, by the Spirit of Truth to all who love Him, 'that He may make His abode with them. And not He only, but the Father also.'

"So were men told by the earliest Christian teachers; so the Church of England herself expounds the lesson to be drawn from her faith in the ascension of Christ, when she teaches us to pray 'that, like as we do believe

our Lord Jesus Christ to have ascended into the heavens, so we may also in heart and soul thither ascend, and with Him continually dwell'—words destitute of any meaning if applied to the visible going up of Christ, and demonstrating that what the framers of our prayer-book valued in the story was, not the outward phenomenon, but the spiritual significance symbolised in it. Even that statement, so strange to our ears, which I have quoted from the fourth article, may be interpreted, in a spiritual sense, to mean that Christ has not thrown off His humanity, but is still essentially what He was on earth—sensible of our burdens, and sympathetic with our struggles. So then, I say to you now, *Sursum corda*. Awake! ye who lull yourselves in the dreams of sense, who rest on the fleeting, the perishable; on that which speaks only to your senses; which appeareth for a time, and then vanisheth away; awake to know that within you and around you is the eternal Love, seeking to draw you into communion with itself. This is no delusion of some enthusiastic teacher, who takes his own fancies for the utterances of the Divinity. The voice which addresses you comes out of the depths of the ages. The Power who invites you has manifested His influence through the long course of human history, 'bringing out of His treasures things new and old;'—old as existence; new as the life which every year covers the earth with fresh flowers, rising out of her dark and mysterious womb, to drink in the free air, and glow in the warm sunshine, and scatter around them beauty and fruitfulness. Will you refuse to listen to the invitation? Oh! beware lest He who would come to be your deliverer, your guide, and your comforter, should come to be your judge. For 'if our heart condemn us,' then, brethren, most assuredly we shall have this witness in ourselves, 'that God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things.'

The Bishop offered his arm to Agnes as we left the church, Lord M—— walking by their side, while

Miss M—— took possession of Constance, who is a great favourite of her's.

"Your husband has solved one difficulty at least," said the Bishop, with a smile, to my wife, as they were walking to the rectory. "He has got the ear of the young men. I was astonished to see such a congregation—on a week day, too."

"There were a good many strangers," replied Agnes, who, as she told me afterwards, thought this a very promising beginning; "and the having the service in the evening, and the music, and the church being pretty, and not always the same, has something to do with it, I suppose."

"Yes," said the Bishop. "I was surprised at your floral decorations—they are quite artistic. I had no idea your husband would have encouraged such acts of outward worship."

"It is a good deal our eldest girl's doing," Agnes said. "She seems to have quite a genius for this species of decoration. But Edward has always agreed with Dr Arnold, that in enlisting the senses in the act of worship, we have more reason to learn from the Roman Catholics than to quarrel with them."

"However," replied the Bishop, "there's more than that wanted to bring together such a congregation as you had this evening."

"No doubt," said Agnes, "and it has been a great pleasure to my husband, during the last two or three years, to find that his people appear to take so much interest in his teaching."

"I think he is to be envied in that respect, indeed. I know my diocese pretty well now, but I have never met with anything like this before."

"And it is not mere curiosity," observed Lord M——, "that brings them. I hear on all sides of the improvement among the young men of late. 'They may say what they likes about our parson,' old farmer G—— told me only yesterday, 'and I cannot say as how I



can rightly make out what he's after myself; but anyhow, the young men, to say nothing of the women, is better than they was; they's kinder-like to the beasts, and they's nicer toward the girls, and they's more civil spoken, and they doesn't need near so much looking atar; and as for the boys and lasses as is growing up, and has had more schooling, there's a mint of them as is as busy as bees, and as sharp and trusty as a colly-dog. So I'm for parson, anyhow."

"A very gratifying testimony," observed the Bishop.

"By the bye, Mrs P——, was not that Will S—— sitting just opposite us?" asked Lord M——.

"Do you mean that rather pale man, with very bright eyes, which he scarcely ever took off Mr P——," said the Bishop.

"Yes, that was Will S——," Agnes replied.

"And who is he?" asked the Bishop. "I have rarely seen a more intelligent face."

"Oh, he's one of P——'s converts," said Lord M——, "a joiner, and a very clever fellow too, who at one time had a sort of passion for going about and lecturing on the errors, contradictions, and absurdities of the gospel stories; but P—— has converted him. And by what means do you think?"

"I have no notion."

"By means of Gibbon's celebrated 15th chapter."

"That was a curious remedy for the disease, certainly," said the Bishop. "How did it operate?"

"I will tell you the account of it which my steward, who, by the way, was one of your congregation this evening, Mrs P——, gave me of it. He met Will about a year ago, and said to him, 'Mr S——, how is it that I have not heard of your lecturing on the gospels of late?' 'Why, the fact is,' replied S——, 'I had a talk with Parson P—— a few months since, and he has put me on a new tack.' 'How so, Mr S——?' said I. 'He has not refuted your arguments about the gospels, has he?' 'No, sir,' replied S——. 'He's not at all

like any other parson whom I have come across. He didn't try to refute me, and he didn't abuse me for not being refuted. He left me in possession of all my positions, but he just turned them, as the soldiers say. 'Turned them; but how?' I asked. 'Well, by setting me on explaining to my own satisfaction, how it happened that a person of such a remarkable character as Jesus had, even according to the books on which I relied, such as "The English life of Jesus," or Strauss' "New Life" of him, should have been born just at such a curious nick in the world's history, when so many causes, all independent of each other, met together to make men believe in him, as we see mentioned in Gibbon's famous chapter about Christianity, or the introduction to Strauss' "New Life." Well, I have been trying for the last three months, and the more I try, the harder I find it to give an answer, unless I take Mr P——'s way. So I suppose I shall even be driven to follow it,' he added, laughing, 'though it's rather against the grain too.' And now he almost always comes to this church, though he has pretty nearly a four mile walk to it. Is it not so, P——?" continued Lord M——, addressing me; for during this story the Bishop's party had reached the lawn, where I was standing with Lady M——, before our drawing-room window.

"Yes. I generally see him on Sunday mornings, if you mean Will S——," I replied. "I believe he has made an arrangement with Margaret B—— to have dinner with her and Tom. I should have liked to have given him a general invitation to dine at the rectory, but I found, through Tom, that he had rather not be asked, except on special occasions."

"I suppose," said Lord M——, "he was afraid of having the loaves and fishes thrown in his face."

"It is a curious thing," remarked the Bishop, "to return to what you told us of Farmer G——, that when we wish to compliment any one on his good qualities, we should so often compare him to an unreasoning creature."

“And the converse,” said Lord M——. “My game-keeper, for instance, told me the other day that one of my dogs ‘was as spiteful as a Christian.’ What do you say to that, P——?”

“It seems to me rather to bear out Darwin’s idea, that the first action of the free intelligence of man on the instincts of the animal would probably be to deteriorate them.”

“A sort of scientific ‘fall of man,’” observed the Bishop.

“At all events, a stumble at first setting out,” said Lord M——.

“Perhaps Mr P—— would say, rather an instance of ‘*reculer pour mieux sauter*,’” added Lady M——.

“I am very much inclined to agree with your Ladyship,” I replied. “In the mysterious course of the divine evolution, the road to good seems often to lie through apparent evil.”

“Much, I suppose, as the road to religious truth lies through doubt and critical questionings?” asked Lord M——, with an arch expression of face.

“I admit the justice of your comparison,” I said. “Questionings and doubts are not goods to be desired in themselves; but they seem to be the only way to the end to be desired—convictions which can bear to be questioned without being destroyed.”

“A process of natural selection by ‘the struggle for existence,’ eh, P——?” said Lord M——.

“I believe that is really so. The internal is, I take it, profoundly similar to the external. As we have learned that the process of decay and death, which at first sight appears so repugnant to our notions of divine order, is the effectual method of preventing the degeneration of living beings, by preserving those only who are most fit to live, so it appears to me to be the case with opinions and beliefs. Shelter them from contest, you destroy their vitality.”

“But what then is to become of woman’s virtues?” asked Lady M——. “Won’t you allow them a quiet

nook to grow up in, unvisited by the rough winds of heaven?"

"I am afraid I cannot grant even that, Lady M——. The tenderest of things are often in themselves the toughest."

"Especially twining things, which twist their tendrils about one, so that there is no shaking them off. But here's Miss Constance come to say tea is ready. You will make one of those tender, tough, twining things when you grow up, I'll warrant," added Lord M——, as, clasping her in his arms, he snatched a kiss, while she struggled to escape, and at last ran off to the drawing-room.

"Oh, Papa, you will never be forgiven if you don't take care. You don't know what a scrape you will get yourself into with Constance."

"How so?" I asked Lord M——.

"Why, she has fallen in love, I believe, with a grave clergyman, old enough to be her father, a Mr R——, and vows that she will not be kissed by any gentleman except her papa and this friend of his."

"Hoity, toity, here's a pretty pickle indeed," said Lord M——, giving a long whistle, while we were taking our seats at the tea table; which Agnes, who had slipped away when we reached the house, had managed somehow to furnish forth more handsomely than I had thought possible under the circumstances.

"Well! my Lord," said Lord M—— to the Bishop, who was chatting pleasantly with Agnes, when 'we had taken out the desire of meat and of drink,' I don't know what they would say of this system of operations in the rival camp; but to my imagination, we don't look much like a body of inquisitors assembled to try a clergyman 'grievously suspected of heresy?'"

"Not like the pictures of them which one sees in illustrated works, at all events," added Lady M——.

"Oh! but the inquisition is not over yet, the chief inquisitor has not spoken," said Miss M——.

"But he has listened," the Bishop said; and has heard a good deal that pleased him, after some things that alarmed him. For I own, Mr P——, to having felt very uncomfortable when you were about half way through your sermon. I almost feared it might become my duty to get up, and walk out of the church; but can you guess, madam, what reassured me," he continued turning to my wife.

"No, what was it, my Lord?"

"Your face. I saw that you had placed yourself so as to be able to observe me without seeming to do it."

"Oh! my Lord, how can you make such a cruel remark," exclaimed Miss M——

"Quite natural, and right," interposed Lord M——.

"Any how, you will not deny it to have been the fact," continued the Bishop. "Well, I divined, from the glances you gave me now and then, and the little smile round your mouth, that something tranquillising was coming; and you see I read right."

"We must be on our guard against you, my Lord," said Lady M——. "Whatever you may say to other sorts of criticism, you are a keen critic of our expression."

"I must add," the Bishop went on, "that if your husband showed himself a very daring critic in pulling the Scriptures to pieces, in the first half of his discourse, he showed himself no less skilful in putting the Faith together again in the end of it. I began to question, as I listened to him, whether in our alarm at the free criticism of the Bible, we had not taken our best friends for our foes."

"Bravo! my Lord," exclaimed Lord M——, "I will tell you frankly, that is just my opinion; and I think it is the opinion that is beginning to make way among a large section of laymen, who know anything about the matter."

"Your Lordship's judgment is very gratifying to me, as I scarcely need say," I observed.

"Though, if it had been the other way, you know you would not have cared one jot about it," added Miss M——.

"Now, my dear Miss M——," interposed Agnes, rather eagerly, "you are quite wrong there. It has long been a great grief to Edward, that the heads of our Church seem, in general, to pay so little attention to the questions raised by modern criticism about the Bible; however honest, and fair, and good the critics may be personally; and however little reason there may be for thinking that they desire anything but to ascertain the simple truth. I know that something which his Lordship said in his last charge on this subject, made him quite ill at the time, with worrying about it. And sometimes he has thought of writing a book to state just what his views are. Only a book of that sort would take such a long time to do it well; that it is not easy for him to find the time for writing it."

"But, I very much wish, Mr P——, you could find time for such a work," said the Bishop, "I am sure it would be very useful. Critical inquiries we have in abundance, at least if we look beyond our own country; and it is not in that line that I want to see you put forth your strength. It is the constructive part of your views; the way you seem to have of showing that the critical results, assuming them to be established, do not touch the essence of the Catholic Faith, that I think so important."

"Yes," added Lord M——, "that's the point; and, really P——, I think you ought to write such a book. You can take the critical conclusions for granted, on the put-the-worst-possible-case principle. Genesis, a set of fragments put together, in the time of David, or Solomon,—Deuteronomy not written till the time of Josiah,—The last twenty-six chapters of Isaiah composed at Babylon,—The mass of the Levitical legislation, after the captivity, as Kalisch and Colenso contend,—and Daniel in the days of the Maccabees."

"And the Fourth gospel not till the middle of the second century, I suppose," said the Bishop; "you

cannot stop short of that, I am afraid, Mr P——, if you are to deal with the critics on the principle which Lord M—— advocates."

"I think so, my Lord," I replied, "and this, at all events, we must admit, that a religious faith founded on the assumption of the Fourth gospel having been written by the Apostle John, would, at the present day, rest on a foundation very liable to disturbance."

"I allow that," said the Bishop, "though it is going a long way to concede it."

"To the end of the tether, my Lord; there remains none of the old authoritative ground left, that ground which Rome has always occupied, and where her position is so strong, when this is conceded. It becomes certain that, if the Catholic faith in the Divinity of our Lord is true, as I think, that faith must have been intended to rest, not on authoritative statements, but on some other ground."

"And on what ground do you rest it?"

"Why, on the doctrine of development, to be sure," interposed Lord M——, "Do you suppose our friend there would leave the enemy in possession of such a splendid piece of artillery, and not seize upon it for the use of the armies of the faithful. He has given over throwing dirt at his foes, after the example of Milton's angels; but bowls them over, instead, with their own bullets."

"I do not quite understand the process," observed the Bishop.

"I think I can give your Lordship a general idea of it in a few words," I answered. "Suppose we assume the scientific conception of the divine action, as carried on always by definite limited means, to be the true conception."

"And give up Miracle, as we have given up Infallibility?"

"Yes, my Lord, give up miracles as phenomena, and look upon the stories of miracles as only the instructive

affirmation by the spirit of man of its inherent freedom, its superiority to mere natural necessity; as we give up infallibility, looking on the notion of it as only the instructive affirmation by man's intelligence that its goal is *truth*."

"Good."

"Then we have, first, the natural process of development on the earth, as the expression of a divine action culminating in the production of a being capable of self-government; of moral will. Now this process has been double—an action and a reaction, an internal acting on an external, which reacts on the work produced."

"Yes," said Lord M——, "that is Darwin's doctrine in its latest shape—the internal manifests itself in an external, but this manifestation is perpetually moulded by that to which it has given rise. The beauty, which appears to be the utterance of the spirit of love is perfected by the selections caused by the love it has evoked."

"Well, then, if this moral being is to be itself developed, as has been actually the case in mankind, and the same sort of process is to go on, we ought to find here also an internal moulding power, modified by the reaction of an external which it has produced."

"And what do you consider this internal and external to have been?" asked the Bishop.

"Confining ourselves to the subject of religion, I find the internal action in the instinctive tendency of man to ascribe the universe to some eternal, self-existing being, whom he has called God; and the external element in the conceptions which he has formed about God. Now we cannot get at the internal directly; we can get at it only by studying the different shapes which come out through the reaction of the external upon it, and reducing them to some uniting conception."

"No doubt that is the scientific method."

"This method, then, I apply to the history of religious beliefs. I find that they fall into two great



classes. The first set is one where the divine has been regarded as quite distinct from man, and from the universe; the second set is one where the divine has been looked on as dwelling in the universe and man, and manifesting itself through them, the more especially divine being placed sometimes in the individual, sometimes in the family, or the state, sometimes in the kosmos, of which the human is the highest form.\* Now, if my method is right, we ought to find in these two classes of beliefs a tendency to unite."

"There seems to me to be a hitch in your theory here," said Lord M——. "In natural development we find a perpetually increasing diversity."

"But this diversity, when we learn to appreciate it, leads our thoughts back to a unity out of which it has grown up, and after which our intelligence instinctively seeks. Now, if man's religious beliefs are, as I maintain, an expression of the same power which manifests itself in nature, we ought to be led to unity by the study of them also."

\* The first of these conceptions seems to have led to *Buddhism*, where the highest perfection is placed in the annihilation of desire, by which the individual escapes from the chain of succession. The second appears in the religion of *Egypt*, where the divine was embodied in the king, as head of the state, and in that of *China*, where it is embodied in the king as father of the family. The third is seen in the religion of *Greece*, which placed the divine in the beautiful, and in *Brahminism*, which places it in the infinite. The religion of *Rome* belongs to the 2d division, the divine being transferred from the person of the sovereign to the principle of law and social order. On the other hand, the conceptions of the opposition between God and the world has produced *Mahomedanism*, where the divine appears in an absolute supernatural will, and the *Turanian* religions, where it appears as a mysterious influence. In *Judaism* the opposition of the human and divine is indicated, without being fully developed, and in *Christianity* the two unite without coalescing.—See an interesting work called *Ten Great Religions*, by the Rev. T. F. Clarke, which, however, does not, I think, sufficiently notice the double classification stated above.

"Emile Burnouf would tell you that this is just what the study of religion scientifically does lead us to; that all the great religions of mankind may be traced back to the original Aryan conception, which regarded light, heat, and intelligence as different forms of the same power," replied Lord M——.\*

"I admit that theory in respect to the Aryan faith in an indwelling Deity. But Burnouf allows that the Semitic faith introduced another element, though he scarcely appreciates it as it deserves, I think, in the conception of a God distinct from the world, which has given rise to another series of religious developments distinct from the Aryan."

"I quite go with you there, Mr P——," observed the Bishop.

"Then, my Lord, I say, if the religious faiths of man proceed from the action of that power from which nature arises, the history of this double development should lead our thoughts to the unity whence it has sprung. There should grow up some faith in which these opposite conceptions tend to unite."

"And this faith you find in the Catholic belief that Christ was truly God and man."

"Exactly so, my Lord."

"I think I begin to understand your position. You consider that the real evidence for the faith in the Incarnation is to be sought in the whole religious history of man, rather than in any particular texts of the Scriptures?"

"Yes."

"And, in that history, you appear to hold that God has used man's imaginations about Him as an instrument, so to speak, by which men should be led to a true appreciation of what He is in Himself."

"With the aid," I added, "of the important fact that at the right moment, when the imagination of the

\* See a series of articles on *La Science des Religions* in the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, vol. 54, 74, 76, 77, and 82.

ances who constituted the Roman world was prepared to seize on the conception of one who was truly divine coming among men as a man, one appeared round whom their imagination could crystalise into a definite form, and from whose character this conception could acquire that quickening, purifying power which the faith in Christ has actually exercised."

"I see you trace all through this development a divine action, distinct from the action of the human imagination, on which this power could lay hold, and which has acted on it."

"Certainly, my Lord; just as I trace in nature a divine intelligence, working through the powers by which it is displayed, and which limit its action. And this conjugate action I consider to have culminated in Christ."

"In fact," said Lord M——, "you ascribe to your internal power a double action. *First*, Separative, shown in the twofold tendency of mankind to conceive the divine, as distinct from the world and themselves, and, as indwelling in the world and themselves, which has led to the great differences in man's religious conceptions; *secondly*, Unitive, an action by which these different modes of conception have been brought together. I never quite apprehended that part of your theory till I heard of the course of inquiry on which you set Will S——. It covers a blot in it."

"What blot?"

"That the divine action did not appear sufficiently 'thorough.' It was seen in the distinction of religious faiths, because these were traced to natural tendencies, which man did not give to himself; but in their union, when the facts of the gospel history melted away under the critical blowpipe, the divine action appeared to coalesce too completely with the human. But I see now that you present both sides, the uniting action no less than the separating, under the same aspect of a human element dealing with a divine impulse—moulding, and yet being moulded by it."

“Yes,” I replied, “that is an indispensable part of my argument. The union of the two great forms of religious conception evolved by mankind, in a faith which claimed to be universal, would have been a startling phenomenon in itself; but if it had taken place *only* through the conscious action of man’s imagination contemplating the diversities, and seeking to reconcile them, the meaning of it would have been doubtful. Again, the concurrence of various independent circumstances to the spread of the belief in a particular person as the revealer of the divine, however striking of itself, would leave us in doubt as to the meaning of this phenomenon; for such a concurrence has happened more or less in other cases—Zoroastes, Gautama, Sakya, Mahomet, for instance. But the combination—the reconciliation of these great opposites of religious conception—the remarkable, I may say unique, character of the person through whom this reconciliation was effected—the spontaneity, amounting to unconsciousness of what they were doing, of the actors in this process—and the marvellous concurrence of external circumstances favourable to the growth and diffusion of the faith thus produced, appears to me to form a fourfold cord capable of bearing any strain that the reason can apply to it.”

“You may add,” said the Bishop, “the profound adaptability of the conception which thus grew up and spread, to the religious wants of man.”

“No doubt, my Lord. Feuerbach’s penetrating analysis of the internal action of the Catholic idea completes the chain of evidence which Gibbon’s masterly exposition of its external surroundings began.”

“But is there not, after all,” observed the Bishop, “a something rather arbitrary about this double action which plays so important a part in your theory? Why should the separation in man’s religious conceptions have taken place at all? You see, Mr P——,” he added with a smile, “I resemble Queen Caroline, Leib-

nitz's royal patroness: I want to know the *pourquoi de pourquoi*."

"Your Lordship's objection is a very sound one," I replied, "and I am pleased to hear you make it. It shows me how deeply you have entered into my reasoning. But I think that I can show a solid *pourquoi*, a *vera ratio* in this case, in the double nature of our intelligent faculty; its resolution into the opposite principles of *Will* and *Reflection*, which unite in the *Imagination*. Man necessarily derives his conceptions of the divine from that principle which is dominant in himself. The races in whom the impulsive, self-sufficing, personal element of *Will* predominated, naturally apprehended the Deity as absolutely distinct from the universe which depended on His will; while the races pre-eminently reflective, as naturally merged the action of the producing power in that which it produced, as reflection always merges into the ideas discerned by reflecting."

"And you place the principle of union, I know," said Lord M—, "in the recognition of the superiority of love, or moral perfection, to mere power."

"Just so. The God of absolute *will*, the Allah of Mahomet, crushes the universe beneath His unlimited might. The God of perfect *love*, the Deity who, according to the Catholic idea, was manifested in Christ, can dwell in the world and work through it, as an all sustaining, ordering, sympathizing presence, without being lost in it."

"He is at once in nature and above her, natural and supernatural," observed the Bishop.

"As man himself is, compared with other beings on earth," added Lord M—.

"But are you not resting your theology on a new theory of psychology?" asked the Bishop.

"I think, my lord, it is a theory to which modern investigation into the action of the brain, with its doctrines of unconscious cerebration, or latent thought,

as Sir Wm. Hamilton called this phenomenon, steadily tends. Between the impulsive motive power of *will*, and the acts of intelligent attention, or *reflection*, there seems to intervene a spontaneous constructive faculty, the true home of genius, long since familiar to us as the *imagination*."

"And by it you maintain that the conception of the divine has been originally elaborated, taking either an emotive, impulsive, absolute, or a reflective inherent, limited aspect, till, in the providential development of man's spiritual history, both phases united round the person of Christ."

"Your Lordship perfectly apprehends my conception."

"I am afraid," said Lady M—, looking up at the clock on our drawing room chimney-piece, "we really must put off any more conversation till another opportunity. I had no notion it was so late; and I am sure it is not good either for Mr P— or your Lordship to do without sleep; though for my own part, I could sit up all night listening to them," she added to Agnes.

So the party broke up; the Bishop's last words being "Mind, Mr P—, you are to let us have your book."

And now the reader knows how this work came to be written; and can see also, why it must be written anonymously; for I could neither omit this last conversation, nor publish my name, if I inserted it, without committing the Bishop to my opinions, more than I feel justified in doing.

*P.S.*—I will add what Lady M— has told me, that, as soon as they got into the carriage, the Bishop said, "that Clergyman seems a remarkable sort of man. I don't know when I have had a conversation which has interested me more. I am most curious to see what his book will be like; and I am very much obliged to you for making me better acquainted with him."

AGNES P—.