

Immortality
Revealed

Revealed Religion:

ITS CLAIMS ON THE INTELLECT AND ON
THE HEART

IMPARTIALLY DISCUSSED

In a Series of Letters from a Father to his Son.

BY

A WRANGLER, AND EX-MEMBER OF THE
UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE.

LONDON:
PUBLISHED BY E. TRUELOVE, 256, HIGH HOLBORN.
1870.

Price One Shilling.

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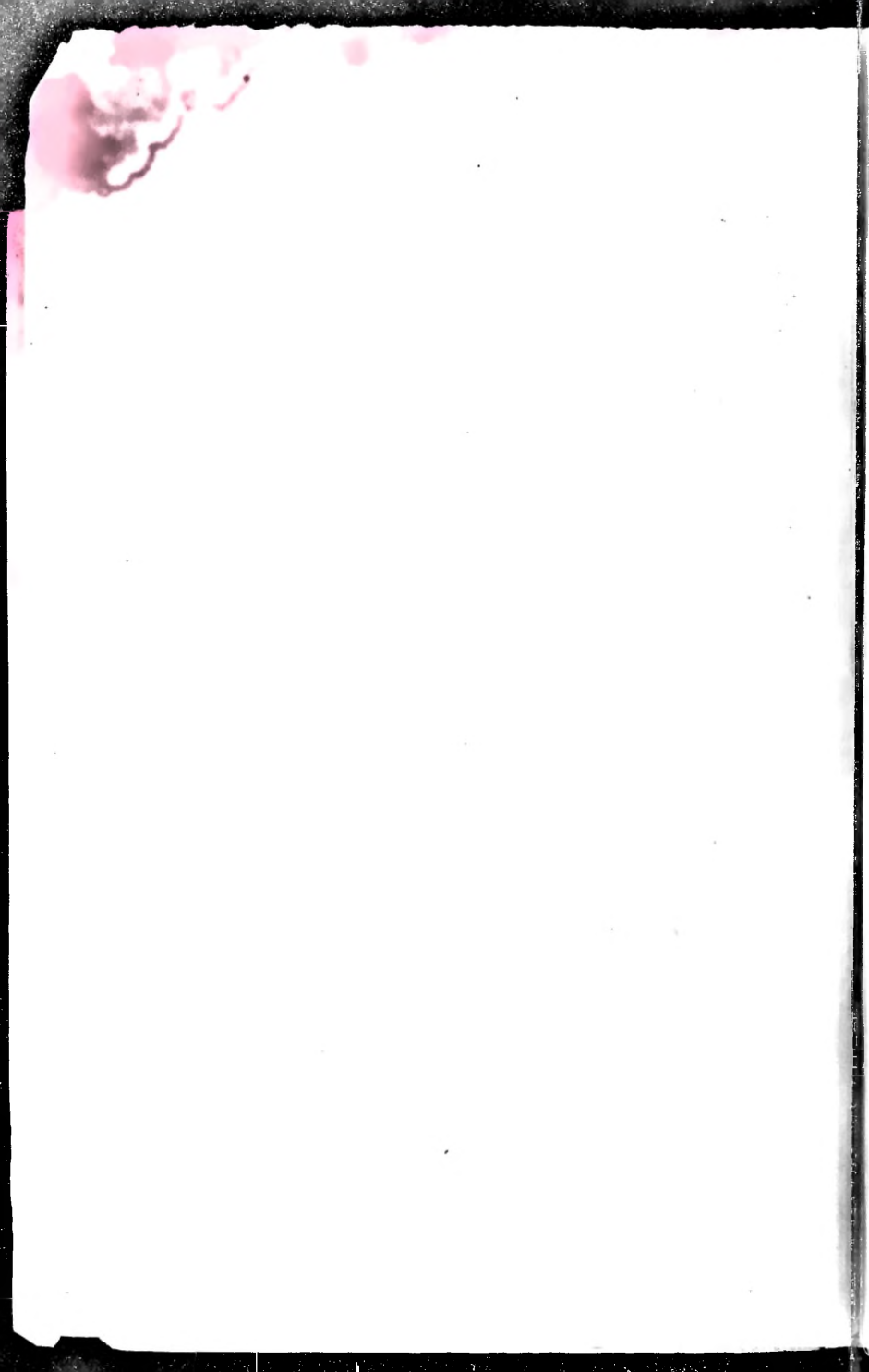
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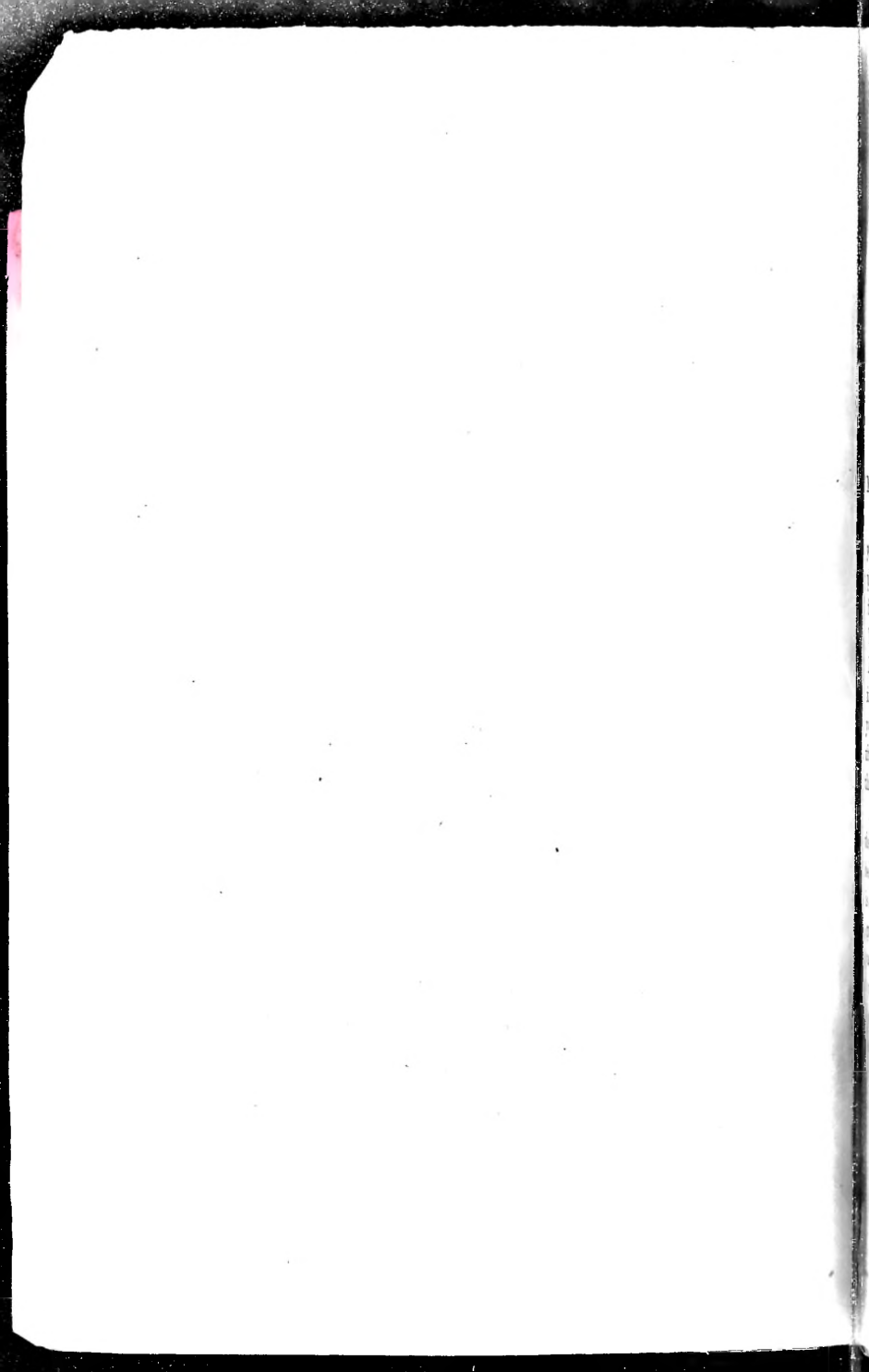
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PREFACE.

THE author has ventured to publish the following letters, in the hope that they may interest and benefit other persons besides the young man to whom they are addressed.



REVEALED RELIGION.

LETTER I.

MY DEAR SON,—

YOU will soon be leaving the paternal roof, under which you have spent so many happy years, to go forth into the world and play your part upon its stage as an independent actor. Take, therefore, these letters from me, and read them carefully at your leisure. They have been written for your guidance on the subject of religion. Remember they are from one who takes the most affectionate interest in your welfare, who has no other motive in thus addressing you than your own good, who writes with the sincere conviction of the truth of his own conclusions, and who is most anxious that in this important matter you should not take a false step.

I have always guarded you against a vice which is too common in the place in which we live, and amongst the race to which we belong, viz. : drunkenness. I have pointed out to you that this vice is acquired by degrees, and that education is not an infallible safeguard against it. I have now to tell you of another kind of drunkenness, viz. : a drunkenness of the *mind*—which is a far more dangerous vice than that of the body, and which is also acquired by degrees, and in defiance of reason and education. The man who drinks deeply at the fountain of error, in matters which are above his comprehension, becomes a *mental* drunkard ; and, in his drunken fits, may be guilty of hideous crimes and merciless tyranny. He is then far more dangerous to encounter than the poor wretch who is merely reeling under the influence of alcohol and tobacco. The Papist Bonner, and the Protestant Calvin, have each consigned to the flames the living bodies of their fellow-creatures, from religious motives ! Imagine the state of mind under which such an atrocity

can be possible, and reflect that that state is induced by degrees, just as common drunkenness creeps upon a man step by step. Then beware of the *first draught* from the fountain of error. Beware of *starting* the mind on a false track which may lead to fanatical cruelty or insane folly. There are fanatics in India who will stand with their arm held out until it withers; there are fanatics in Egypt who will allow a cavalcade to pass over their body and break their bones; and there have been fanatics in all ages who have devoted their lives to celibacy in the cause of religion: there were the vestal virgins in Pagan times, and there are the monks and nuns of modern Christianity. Then beware of the *path which leads* to the fountain of error in matters of religious belief; beware of *tasting the first cup* from that dangerous pool; beware of *listening* to the enticements of any mental drunkard, for such an one may be more dangerous than the boon companion of a tavern. Even a grog shop may be a safer place than a temple of religious worship.

I have hitherto conducted your education so as to leave you without any religious bias, in order that when the time should come for our discussion of the subject of religion together, you might have no false steps to retrieve, no false feelings to subdue, no erroneous conclusions to combat, no prejudices of education to struggle against. I have not brought you up in any religious belief in order that you might hold it in after-life simply because you were taught it by me in your youth. I have left you to decide for yourself, with my help on your arriving at the proper age for investigating this subject. I have introduced you at different times to members of different religious persuasions, in order that you might observe for yourself the influence which such beliefs have upon life and conduct. Thus you have become intimate with Papists, Unitarians, Deists, Calvinists, Dissenters, Swedenborgians, and Church of England people, High, Low, and Broad. You have hitherto received a moral education; and I have endeavoured to teach you to avoid all degrading vices, and to be truthful, loyal, generous, merciful, and brave, by placing before you valuable lessons from history and fiction. But the time has now come when we must discuss together the subject of religion in order that you may follow the right path, and not be led astray.

Look out upon the world, with its thousand millions of inhabitants, and observe the vast number of religious beliefs, all different, and the

vast number of temples where homage of different kinds is paid to the great First Cause. These different creeds and modes of worship cannot all be right, for they differ in essential points, both of practice and theory. You and I are acquainted with a Catholic priest who, apart from his mental drunkenness, possesses most estimable qualities of mind and heart, and is a loveable creature—in fact, a most noble creature. You have also a near relation, an evangelical vicar in the English Church, who, apart from his mental drunkenness, is equally loveable, generous, and estimable. These two men differ so totally in their religious beliefs, that each supposes the other to be on the road to eternal perdition ; and it would not require many of the intoxicating draughts from the fountain of error at which they drink daily to convert either of them, at any time, into a persecutor of the other in some way. Happily the law of most civilised countries now tolerates all religions, and thus our lives and property are safe from the zeal of fanatics.

But if the ten thousand different religious creeds in the world cannot all be right because they differ widely on essential points, which of them is the right one ? Or are they all wrong together ?

Religion exercises so important an influence on the affairs of life that it becomes necessary to think over the above questions very seriously, and strive to answer them. It is incumbent on every rational being to do so. We must not adopt a religious belief, or reject all religious creeds and dogmas, without a fair inquiry ; because the adoption of one or the rejection of all may affect considerably our practical conduct in life.

Let me convince you of this by a few illustrations.

Take, for instance, the subject of matrimony. If you adopt the belief that Allah is God and Mahomet his prophet, you may have four wives and as many concubines as Solomon. If you become a Mormon, and believe that God has made a divine revelation in America to Joe Smith, you may have as many wives as Mr. Brigham Young, without infringing the supposed divine command. But if you are a member of the Church of England, you may have only one wife—no matter what may be the law of the land in which you live.

Similarly in other matters. For instance, if you are a Mussulman, you may think it incumbent on you to take a pilgrimage to Mecca, to visit the tomb of the Prophet, in the midst of a dirty

rabble, and thus, on your return, import plague or cholera into your family; or if a Papist, you may think it imperative to spend time and money on a pilgrimage to the shrine of St. Anne, in Brittany. We have both seen lately six hundred pilgrims start together for this celebrated shrine, in order that the Saint might prevail on the Almighty to send rain in a time of drought. If, like the Turks, you should be a fatalist, and find yourself on board a sinking ship, you may sit with your hands before you and cry "Allah Kerim, God is great," instead of working at the pumps; or, if a Papist, you may pray to the Virgin to work a miracle in your behalf, instead of working out your own salvation. Should you adopt the Jewish persuasion, you may take your choice between the Sadducee, who does not believe in a future state, and the Pharisee who does; you will not eat pork, and you will circumcise your male children. Should you become a Mahometan, you will say your prayers many times a day, to the interruption of all other occupations; and should you die in battle with infidels, you will feel certain of a happy hereafter, amidst houris and sensual delights; but wine will be forbidden in this world, and you must fast rigidly during the month of Ramazan. Should you adopt Brahminism you will become a vegetarian, and abstain from taking animal life, or eating food across which the shadow of an infidel may have passed. Christianity has no such drawbacks in this world, but as regards the future it is the gloomiest religion of all. Should you visit the tomb of a dear departed relative or friend, and reflect on the immortality of the soul, the question may occur to you, as a believer in Christianity, whether the soul of that dear departed is now in a state of happiness or woe. If a Protestant, the possibility of the latter, and the belief that nothing which you can do can in any way affect that condition through all eternity, may be most harrowing to your feelings; but if a Papist, you may find it a relief to hope that by paying to the priests a sum of money for masses, you may be able to mitigate those tortures, or reduce the term of their duration. In either case, your belief may lead to a practical result, viz., a torrent of unavailing tears in one case, or a possibly absurd act of benevolence in the other. The way in which you spend every seventh day in the week may also depend upon your religious belief. If you are a Papist, you may attend mass early in the morning, and make the rest of the day a complete

holiday, to the great benefit, perhaps, of your health after a week's confinement to business ; but if you are a Protestant, you may feel bound to keep the entire day holy, to attend religious worship three times, eat a cold dinner, and abjure all pleasant and healthy recreation ; and if you happen to be a member of Parliament, you may vote against the opening of museums on Sunday, and thus keep these places shut against the poor toilers of the world on their only holiday during the week. In short, whatever religious belief you hold, the degree in which you attach importance to it will always more or less affect your conduct in life. All religion is practical and has practical results. Difference of religion is a fertile source of domestic troubles, and it interferes with many a friendship and many a matrimonial alliance, which might otherwise prove an unmixed good.

From what I have said, it is evident that the subject of religion is an important one ; and that you must exercise great care and judgment in the election of a religious belief.

But how are you to know which of the ten thousand different religious creeds in the world is the right one ; or whether they are not all wrong together ?

This is precisely what we shall have to discuss in the following letters.

LETTER II.

I HAVE told you in my former letter that there are thousands of different religious creeds in the world, and that the adoption of any one of them will, more or less, affect your practical conduct in life. Moreover, I have said that they cannot all be right, although they may all possibly be wrong. Let us now consider whether any one of them is right ; and, if so, by what means it may be discovered. You will be told by the adherents of some of these creeds that the eternal salvation of your soul depends upon your making a proper choice, and judging the matter correctly ; so that the inquiry appears at first sight to be a very important one.

You cannot judge of the truth of any creed by the mere sincerity of its votaries, as tested by the amount of torture which they will undergo in defence of it. A Hindoo will stick a sharp hook into the muscles of his back, and then swing by it, as a proof of the truth of his religion. I doubt whether the Pope or the Archbishop of Canterbury would do as much. Religions as different in their tenets as light and darkness have had their martyrs; so the test by torture proves nothing. It has been often tried, but has led to no practical result. Sincerity alone, as tested by the most excruciating ordeals, does not prove any man's creed to be the right one. Galileo gave up his professed belief in a scientific truth: viz., that the earth turns upon its axis, rather than endure the tortures of the Inquisition; but many different religious creeds have had their martyrs, who have maintained their belief even on the rack and at the stake.

There are people who will tell you that it does not matter what your religious creed may be, provided you are sincere in it; and that, if wrong, the Almighty will forgive your error for the sake of your sincerity. Thus, if you have been brought up a Papist, or a Calvinist, or a Unitarian, you may remain one, provided you are sincere; and it will be all right with you at the last. If this be true, religion bears no analogy to what occurs in other matters. A stockbroker may sincerely believe that certain stock will be higher a month hence, and he may make his speculations accordingly; but if wrong in his belief, his sincerity will not save him from the consequences of his error. A medical man may sincerely believe his treatment of a patient to be right; but if wrong the patient may die under his hands, notwithstanding his sincerity. In common affairs, an error of judgment brings its own penalty, no matter how sincerely that error may have been entertained. Is it likely, then, that religion should be an exception to the rule? "He that believeth shall be saved, and he that believeth not shall be damned," is a doctrine preached every Sunday from many a pulpit; what then is likely to be the fate of the man who believeth not, simply because he cannot find sufficient grounds for belief, even after a most impartial examination of evidence? In many religions, differing in their theory of salvation as widely as the poles, the penalty of disbelief is simply damnation, without any extenuating circumstances or recommendation to mercy.

In your election of a creed you cannot rely upon the judgment of

any particular, great, or good, or learned man ; because there are numbers of equally great, good, and learned men who hold different opinions, after having made a life's study of the subject. Beware, then, of pinning your faith to that of any man, however great, good, or learned.

There is no escape from the necessity of examining for yourself the comparative evidence on which different creeds rest, if great, good, and learned men cannot help you, on account of their own differences of opinion, and if sincerity in a wrong creed will not avail you. To remain a Papist, or Mahometan, or Buddhist, simply because you have been born one, is manifestly unreasonable, because it may be highly unsafe.

We cannot make the election of the true religion a matter of feeling and taste ; because people's feelings and tastes differ so widely that there would still remain a large number of totally different creeds which could not all be right. It is because religion is made so much a matter of feeling, and so little a matter of reason, that there are so many different creeds in the world. Be especially careful of trusting to what is called "internal evidence ;" which, in fact, means nothing more than believing just what it pleases one to believe. The internal evidence and blind faith of a Mahometan or Hindoo is just as strong as that of the Pope or the Archbishop of Canterbury. not

If the inquiry we are upon is not to be treated with levity, it must be treated in the same way as we treat a scientific investigation ; that is to say, the evidence upon which creeds rest must be collected and weighed impartially and reasonably. We cannot put aside reason, and trust entirely to faith, or we may adopt at random any one of the ten thousand creeds offered to our notice. Nor can we trust to the direct aid of the Almighty in making our election, for there are dozens of different sects of Christians who all affirm that they pray to the Almighty for guidance in the matter of faith ; and yet behold the result ! The number of different sects is on the increase rather than otherwise. If the prayers of religionists are answered at all, they only receive an access of faith in that particular dogma which it has pleased them to hold. The Almighty vouchsafes no information in answer to their prayers, for the world remains as much divided on the subject of religion as ever ; and this, one is sometimes told, oddly enough, arises from the *want* of faith, and not from the excess of it.

The man who differs from you, simply wants more faith in order that he may give up his own creed and believe as you do. He does not pray with faith enough; but may he not retort upon yourself the same reasoning?

You will observe that the different sects of Christians, holding theories of salvation as different as light and darkness, base their creed upon the Bible; the differences amongst them arising from their different readings and interpretations of certain texts; their interpolations or excision of other texts; and so forth. There are many different versions of the New Testament; and the Jews do not accept our version of the Old. Some Bibles contain the Apocrypha; others do not. The translation of the Bible now in use in the Church of England contains so many mistakes that it is in contemplation to revise it. In the Old Testament, a future state is but dimly, if at all, alluded to; and rewards for good and punishments for evil are always confined to this world. The Jewish Sadducees, who admitted the Divine authority of the Old Testament, did not believe in a future state. And yet this Bible is said to contain a Divine revelation made to man!

What then are you to do, in order to make a right choice in the matter of a religious belief?

If you pray to the Almighty for his special aid, and pray with faith in any particular creed which you may have a fancy to, you will find your faith in that particular creed strengthened. First have faith in a particular creed; then pray for a little more faith, and you will probably receive it, because the act of prayer will increase your faith; but simply pray for guidance, *without* faith in any particular creed, and you will receive no guidance at all. Go amongst different religionists, and you will find the truth of this demonstrated every day. To a mind perfectly unbiassed, no faith or guidance whatever is vouchsafed in answer to prayer. It is exactly like table-turning; the table will only turn in the hands of the willing dupe.

If you trust to the guidance of some great, good, or learned man, a dozen such will offer to guide you at once; but, unfortunately, in as many different directions.

You have, therefore, only yourself to trust to in the election of a creed. You dare not trust to your tastes and feelings, and can only

trust to your reason. The different creeds rest on different evidence, on the different interpretations of particular texts in particular books, on the authenticity of old manuscripts, the credibility of the witnesses of miracles, the honesty of transcribers, &c., &c., &c. Out of this chaos you have to collect and weigh evidence, and form an independent conclusion; and on the result may hang the eternal happiness or misery of your soul in a future state!

I have not mis-stated the problem, or exaggerated its conditions in the slightest degree. I have put it before you fairly, and it cannot fairly be presented to you otherwise. You must decide for yourself, and on your own responsibility.

Now I ask you to place yourself on an eminence, above all the little details of this chaos of confusion, and take a broad general view of a problem, which, if you conscientiously attempt to solve it, will occupy your whole life, and require vastly more learning than you now possess; does it not seem to you, viewing the subject from this elevated stand-point, far more probable that all the different religious creeds in the world should be wrong, than that any particular one of them should be right?

There are some problems which are properly treated by the *reductio ad absurdum*; and this, I think, is one. If each of us must collect and weigh for himself the evidence of many religious beliefs, before he is justified in electing any particular one for his own adoption, the whole of every man's life would be consumed in the inquiry, and the common practical work of life would stand still, and famine would ensue, and the human race become extinct; for, remember, the penalty of a false choice, even between Popery and Calvinism, might involve eternal perdition. Now, is it conceivable that the Almighty should have placed before us such an intricate problem as this, and with such a fearful penalty attached to a wrong solution of it? The mere existence of such a vast number of different creeds, all bearing a certain family likeness, as if of the same origin, and yet differing in essential features, is, at first sight, condemnatory of them all—for it seems vastly more probable that they should all be wrong, and mere human inventions, than that any particular one of them should be a divine revelation.

Let me now put the subject before you practically.

Suppose you elect to adopt some form of Christianity as your

creed, that being the general religion of the most civilized race, and to reject all the dogmas, revelations, and miracles of Mahometans, Fire-worshippers, Buddhists, Brahmins, &c., leaving the deluded followers of those sects (who form, by the way, the majority of the human race) to make such peace as they can with the Almighty—which form of Christianity will you elect? Let me give you a sketch of a few only.

UNITARIANS believe in one God, and that Christ was a man inspired by him to teach a pure system of morals. They believe in his miracles, and in a future state. They do not believe in the Atonement; that is to say, that he died in order that our sins might be forgiven, and God's justice satisfied. Their creed is about the most charitable and most inoffensive of any, and their code of morals the very highest. They damn no one, and persecute no one. Nevertheless, they are damned themselves most emphatically by a service read occasionally in the English Church, called the Athanasian Creed. Although they deny the divinity of Christ and the Atonement, yet they accept the whole Bible as an inspired rule of faith. There are men of great learning amongst the Unitarians, and yet their creed differs widely from that of most other Christians, although based upon the Old and New Testament.

During the first five or six centuries of the Christian era, the creed was for the most part Arian or Unitarian. What is erroneously called the Athanasian Creed appears to have been introduced about the eighth century. An interesting work on the history of the doctrine of the Trinity has lately been published by M. Reville, minister of the French Reformed Church at Rotterdam, a Unitarian. He says, "If any one desires to form a true conception of the great distance which separates original and authentic Christianity from the orthodox Christianity fabricated by councils, he cannot do better than peruse this rhapsody of contradictions (the Athanasian Creed) imposed upon faith under pain of everlasting condemnation, and then open the New Testament and once more read the Sermon on the Mount."

"Let not this weak, unknowing hand,
Presume thy bolts to throw;
And deal damnation round the land,
On each I judge thy foe."

Speaking of DEISM, the author above quoted says :—

“On many points the deistical philosophy of the eighteenth century was incomparably more Christian than the Church. Was it ever as intolerant as the Church? What system ever waged such war against intolerance, or displayed such humanity, as it did? What system so took the side of knowledge and justice, or ever, since the time of Christ, so asserted the rights of the poor? When we understand something of what the philosophy of the last century had to contend with, we at least learn its courage and its relative utility, both of which we are apt to overlook.”

PAPISTS believe in the Divinity of Christ, the Trinity, and the Atonement, and they base their creed upon the Bible. They say that, in order to supply a right interpretation of the Bible, and keep believers in the right faith, Christ founded a church, having a succession of heads, or Popes, of which St. Peter was the first, and that this Church was founded at Rome, where St. Peter was crucified. The evidence of this, however, is called in question by learned Protestant divines, who deny that St. Peter ever was at Rome, or that Christ ever founded any but a spiritual church. Papists are forced to accept the Pope's interpretation of all religious difficulties. They put their faith in their Church, and their Church teaches them, helps them out of Purgatory after death, and does its best to save them from eternal perdition. This is an aggressive religion, aspiring to embrace the whole world within its clutches, and not hesitating to torture the body of the heretic for the good of his soul. It imposes a belief in modern miracles, and puerile legends of saints and martyrs. Popery has, nevertheless, numbered among its votaries some of the greatest names in science, art, and literature. Let this teach us all caution and humility, and never to coquette with error.

PROTESTANTISM includes a great number of different sects, holding quite different theories of salvation, and practising different modes of worship. The Calvinists believe that the elect only can be saved, and that they are chosen from the rest of the world, not for any merit of theirs, but because it pleases the Almighty to save them from perdition by his grace. The doctrine of election is the belief in Christ's atonement for sin, and that this has satisfied the terrible vengeance of the Almighty, reconciled him to the sinner, and rendered

his eternal happiness possible as a pure act of mercy. The sinner must admit his sinful nature, that he of himself can do no possible good thing, and that he is saved as a pure act of grace through Christ's atonement and mediation. All that are not elect are of course consigned to perdition, and these seem to form unhappily by far the greater part of the human race ; so that this is an uncomfortable creed, particularly when you attempt to realize in your mind what eternal perdition is, and the great chance there is that many of your dear friends and relatives may hereafter be subjected to it. As a matter of taste, one would hardly elect this creed ; and, happily, the evidence on which it rests is not overwhelming, being the same as that which leads the Unitarian divines to the most opposite conclusions. Calvinism, strange to say, is not a mild, charitable creed, which makes this world as comfortable as possible for the unfortunate non-recipients of God's grace, but, like Popery, is an aggressive and uncharitable one, loudly proclaiming the doctrine of election to those whom it may never beneficially affect. It is the sworn antagonist of Popery, and the two are deadly foes. To listen to the denunciations of Popery in Exeter Hall, Mr. Spurgeon's Tabernacle, and many a Church of England pulpit, and to hear the bad names which are applied to the "Holy Father," and to a church which preserved the faith, and the old manuscripts on which the evidence of Christianity rests, during ten centuries, is enough to drive one into the streets. Calvinism is the creed of the Church of England, as laid down in the Thirty-nine Articles—so at least say the "Low Church" party ; but there is a "High Church" party, which coquettes with Popery ; and a "Broad Church" party with Deism. The Wesleyans are a respectable body of Dissenters, who attach importance to good works as a means of salvation, and who treat election as a mysterious dogma, about which the least said the better. As for the other sects of Dissenters, there is nothing remarkable about their tenets ; but the practices of some of them—for instance, the Bundlers, Jumpers, Howlers, and Latter-day Saints—are amusing, though not always moral or artistic.

An impartial and thorough examination of the evidence upon which all these different Christian beliefs rest would occupy a lifetime, and require an amount of learning which few persons possess or could ever acquire. On the other hand, if any one of

them is to be accepted on blind faith, Mahometanism is just as rational and vastly more simple. The first verses of the Koran run thus :—

“There is no doubt in this book. It leadeth into the right path him who walketh blindly—him who receiveth without inquiry my word, which saveth the simple and confoundeth the wise.”

Mahometanism is but another Christian sect. In the fourth chapter of the Koran, it says :—

“The Messiah, Jesus, the Son of Mercy, is a prophet, and an angel of God, his Word and his Spirit, which he sent to many.”

But in the sixth chapter it says :—

“How shall God have a Son who hath no wives ?”

Mahomet's father was a pagan, his mother a Jewess, and his tutor a monk of the Nestorian sect, which was a branch of Arianism.

LETTER III.

I TOLD you in my last letter that there is a strong family likeness in all religious creeds, although they differ greatly about a future state and the theory of salvation. Many creeds which have been held by hundreds of thousands of human beings, highly civilized, have become extinct, whilst a new creed, which may prove to be of some importance, is now being established in America, at the Salt Lake. The religions of Ancient Egypt, Assyria, Rome, Greece, Carthage, where are they? and Mormonism, what is likely to come of it? The old pagans believed in a Tartarus or Elysium for the disembodied spirit after death; in Minos and Pluto, the Fates and Furies, and Jupiter the Lord of all. They had their temples and religious rites; but these were only for the vulgar. Then, as now, the philosophers had sometimes but little faith; and Socrates was compelled to drink a cup of hemlock for denying his country's gods. Morals and religion were the subject of discussion in the groves of Academus; and you may still read Plato's divine dialogue on the

immortality of the soul, and the fine moral precepts of Seneca, as conveyed in his epistles to his friend Lucilius. In the moral codes of Christianity and Mahometanism I can discover nothing really good which is not to be found in the teachings of the old philosophers; and in some respects their teachings are, in my opinion, greatly to be preferred. Christianity, so far as I can see, borrows all that is good and right in its morals from the old philosophy, and adds to it nothing but fables and extravagances. The old divinities have been banished from Olympus; the old temples are in ruins, or have been converted to new religious uses; the pagan mythology is to be found only in the libraries of the learned; and the civilized world has adopted the new creeds of Christ and Mahomet. The mosque of Omar stands upon the ruins of the temple of Solomon, and the Pantheon has become a Popish church. The world has seen old religions overturned and new ones founded; it has witnessed religious wars and persecutions; it has seen Christians torn to pieces by wild beasts in the Coliseum; and Christians in their turn tearing with sharp oyster shells the flesh from the naked limbs of the young pagan virgin Hypatia; it has also seen Christians burning each other at the stake! Mankind has advanced in scientific knowledge and its applications, but religion has stood still, in spite of all the changes which have been rung upon it. The religious fables of to-day are as absurd as those of antiquity, and even the Zulu of Natal laughs at them.

What has the world really gained by what is called revealed religion? What does it *really* know now of the great mysteries of life and death, the past and the future, right and wrong, good and evil, more than it did in the time of Zeno and Epicurus? Strip modern religions of all that man may easily have invented, and the same inscrutable mysteries remain which have puzzled his limited understanding in all ages.

But what *is* Christianity? Where is it clearly defined? The Unitarian says one thing, the Papist another, the Calvinist another. Which of them is right, for they differ as greatly among themselves on essential points of theory as do the Jew, the Pagan, and the Turk? Before we talk about what Christianity has effected for mankind, we must know what Christianity really is. The only point upon which Christians are agreed amongst themselves is the occur-

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rence of certain miracles eighteen hundred years ago, which
 place in the midst of a people who have preserved no record of them
 in their history. The Christian miracles rest on the evidence

ly. We are told that at the time of Christ's death
 over the whole earth, the veil of the temple was
 and dead men left their graves and walked about
 Jerusalem. But no Roman historian has published
 these stupendous wonders, although they are said to
 a Roman province, in the time of Pliny the great
 in the zenith of Roman civilization and literature.

It is to observe that the Christian miracles belong to the
 all other miracles, and possess a peculiarity common
 each I will point out. They consist in such things as
 into wine, raising the dead, healing the sick, casting
 by a mere word of command; walking on the sea,
 Heaven, and so forth; stories which would require in
 great strain on the inventive faculty; and they teach
 art or science. If the miracle-monger of those days
 effected an eclipse, or have sent a message from Jerusa-
 along a telegraphic wire, or have knocked down his
 electric shock, his performance would have been
 miraculous by the ignorant populace, but they would
 miracles. Is it likely that the Almighty should have
 done miracles, in order to establish a new truth in the
 intellects of man; or that, having had recourse to such
 would have so signally failed to carry conviction? Is
 the Almighty should have made a revelation in such
 way, and to so few persons, that up to the present
 history of mankind have failed to profit by it? The
 man explain this in accordance with his own unchari-

table and gloomy creed.

What has the Christian revelation, based on these miracles, really
 done for the good of mankind? Let the history of the first sixteen
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Liberty not by Christianity

immortality of the soul, and the fine moral precepts of Seneca, as conveyed in his epistles to his friend Lucilius. In the moral codes of Christianity and Mahometanism I can discover nothing really good which is not to be found in the teachings of the ancients; and in some respects their teachings are, in my opinion, to be preferred. Christianity, so far as I can see, is

good and right in its morals from the old philosophy nothing but fables and extravagances. The old deities banished from Olympus; the old temples are in ruins or converted to new religious uses; the pagan mythology is only in the libraries of the learned; and the civil laws adopted the new creeds of Christ and Mahomet.

Omar stands upon the ruins of the temple of Saturn; the Pantheon has become a Popish church. The works of the old religions overturned and new ones founded; it has witnessed wars and persecutions; it has seen Christians torn to pieces in the Coliseum; and Christians in their tortures sharp oyster shells the flesh from the naked limbs of the virgin Hypatia; it has also seen Christians burnt at the stake! Mankind has advanced in scientific knowledge and applications, but religion has stood still, in spite of the revolutions which have been rung upon it. The religious fables are as absurd as those of antiquity, and even the Zulus believe in them.

What has the world really gained by what is called religion? What does it really know now of the great questions of life and death, the past and the future, right and wrong, evil, more than it did in the time of Zeno and Epicurus? The modern religions of all that man may easily have invented, the same inscrutable mysteries remain which have puzzled the philosophers of all ages.

But what is Christianity? Where is it clearly defined? The Unitarian says one thing, the Papist another, the Calvinist another. Which of them is right, for they differ as greatly among themselves on essential points of theory as do the Jew, the Pagan, and the Turk? Before we talk about what Christianity has effected for mankind, we must know what Christianity really is. The only point upon which Christians are agreed amongst themselves is the occur-

Good

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rence of certain miracles eighteen hundred years ago, which place in the midst of a people who have preserved no record of them in their own history. The Christian miracles rest on the evidence of Christians only. We are told that at the time of Christ's death there was darkness over the whole earth, the veil of the temple was rent in twain, and dead men left their graves and walked about the streets of Jerusalem. But no Roman historian has published any account of these stupendous wonders, although they are said to have occurred in a Roman province, in the time of Pliny the great naturalist, and in the zenith of Roman civilization and literature.

It is important to observe that the Christian miracles belong to the same family as all other miracles, and possess a peculiarity common to them all, which I will point out. They consist in such things as making water into wine, raising the dead, healing the sick, casting out devils, &c., by a mere word of command; walking on the sea, ascending into Heaven, and so forth; stories which would require in an author no great strain on the inventive faculty; and they teach nothing new in art or science. If the miracle-monger of those days could have predicted an eclipse, or have sent a message from Jerusalem to Rome along a telegraphic wire, or have knocked down his enemies by an electric shock, his performance would have been thought equally miraculous by the ignorant populace, but they would not have been miracles. Is it likely that the Almighty should have had recourse to miracles, in order to establish a new truth in the hearts and intellects of man; or that, having had recourse to such artifices, they should have so signally failed to carry conviction? Is it likely that the Almighty should have made a revelation in such an ambiguous way, and to so few persons, that up to the present time the majority of mankind have failed to profit by it? The Calvinist only can explain this in accordance with his own uncharitable and gloomy creed.

What has the Christian revelation, based on these miracles, really done for the good of mankind? Let the history of the first sixteen centuries answer the question. But first define what Christianity is, and prove the truth of your definition.

X Modern civilisation and political liberty are not due to the introduction of Christianity, but to other causes. Popery is opposed to civil liberty, and Unitarians are at least as civilised and humane as

Liberty not by Christianity

Calvinists, although differing as much on essential points of doctrine as Jews and Mahometans do.

The miracles of the Bible have this peculiar feature in common with the miracles of the Romish saints, and of modern spiritualists, table-turners, clairvoyants, &c. ; viz., they teach us nothing new, and leave our knowledge exactly as they found it on every point to which a practical test can be applied. No one has ever become any the wiser in art or science for having witnessed a miracle. Moreover, your miracle-monger never astonishes people by feats on the Stock Exchange ; he never announces a grand new fact in chemistry or optics ; he never improvises a glorious new poem, or produces by magic a splendid work of art. Michael Angelo and Shakespeare, Newton and Laplace, Fresnel and Young, Daguerre and Davy, Rothschild and Peabody were not miracle-mongers, nor did Handel and Beethoven lay claim to divine inspiration. Mr. Home, it is said, can evoke spirits who sing songs and recite poetry ; but if he could evoke a spirit which should improvise a new poem equal to Childe Harold, or sing a new song worthy of Haydn, it would be the fortune of a publisher. The performances of miracle-mongers and spiritualists leave no practical results, except such as are due to the credulity of the spectator ; and he is never any the wiser for them, so far as an accession of knowledge can be practically tested. I know the editor of a photographic journal who believes in spiritualism ; why does he not evoke a spirit which shall describe to him a new and good instantaneous collodion process, or the means of taking photographs in the natural colours ? Such a spirit would be a fortune to him.

The Christian miracles belong to the same family as all other miracles, and have this peculiarity in common with them ; viz., that they teach us nothing new in art or science, and impart no knowledge which can be of any use to us in the ordinary affairs of life. Belonging, then, to the same family, and being merely marvellous stories which any ignorant person might invent, their truth must rest upon the same kind of evidence as that of other miracles, viz., the value of the human testimony which supports it. There is nothing intrinsically different in the nature of the Christian miracles to command our superior respect.

The wonderful things related in the Bible do not gain by com-

parison with those related in the Koran, or in the writings of Swedenborg. But how are we fairly to estimate the value of human testimony in regard to miraculous events which occurred eighteen centuries ago, and the written accounts of which have passed through many hands during a long period of almost total extinction of civilization? Hume, the historian, says, that in any case it is more probable that a miracle should be false than that human testimony should be true. Paley, the great champion of Christianity, replies that mankind stood in need of a revelation; that a revelation could only be made by miracles; and that it is as probable that miracles should be wrought as that a revelation should be made. To this I answer—first, that mankind does *not* stand in need of a revelation; for if man were to receive a divine revelation respecting the great mysteries of the future, it would unfit him for this world; and, secondly, that even if a revelation *were* necessary, it *could* be made by means of an additional moral sense or instinct implanted directly in the human mind—just as the bee has received a revelation how to build its cell, and the dog how to be faithful to its master.

Pope truly says,—

“The bliss of man, could pride that blessing find,
Is not to act or think beyond mankind;
No powers of body or of soul to share
But what his nature and his state can bear.”

We want no divine revelation. We have got quite revelation enough for our nature and our state to bear.

“Know thy own point; this kind, this due degree
Of blindness, weakness, Heaven bestows on thee.
Submit—in this or any other sphere,
Secure to be as blest as thou canst bear;
Safe in the hand of one disposing power,
Or in the natal or the mortal hour.”

The ancients, who were ignorant of the circulation of the blood and the rotation of the earth on its axis, were, nevertheless, familiar with miracles, and highly privileged in this respect. And the + further we go back into history, the more common miracles seem to

because they were more

Science
 have been, until at length history itself becomes a fable. We moderns have no experience of such wonders, and the world has become very tame and commonplace. Nevertheless, we have the electric telegraph, steam locomotion, the photographic camera, the spectroscope, &c. We can send a message in a few minutes, from the Old world to the New, along a wire laid at the bottom of the Atlantic; we can measure the distances and velocities of the heavenly bodies; and we can analyse the chemical constitution of the sun and stars. I venture to believe that Mr. Lockyer, Mr. Airy, or Sir Charles Wheatstone could have astonished the ancient world by their scientific experiments, as much as some of the miracle-mongers did, the account of whose supernatural performances, transcribed by successive generations of priests and monks, have come down to the present time.

It is related in Giesler's Text Book of Ecclesiastical History, that Abbot Stephen, of Liege, in the beginning of the eleventh century, prayed Saint Wolbodo to refrain from working any more miracles, on account of the inconvenience which was felt by the brethren of the monastery, from the number of sick persons who came to be healed by day and by night!

LETTER IV.

I HAVE now shown you what a tremendous task it would be to elect a religious creed from amongst the vast number which the world offers to your notice, if you were to employ reason alone in the investigation of the evidence on which their various merits rest; and yet how dangerous it would be to trust to feelings, faith, and internal evidence, since these merely lead you towards that creed which most pleases your own inclination. And yet nothing but your own reason *can* be employed; for if you trust to other men's reason to choose for you, you find the best and most learned of them disagreeing amongst themselves. Thus a problem which is said to involve your eternal

salvation, would engross your whole life, and render the prosecution of all other studies impossible. I have shown you also that these different creeds are based upon the truth of miracles which are said to have been wrought by their respective founders ; and the accounts of which are mere wonderful stories, devoid of any cleverness of invention, teaching nothing new, and belonging to the same family ; so that no particular set of miracles has any superior claim to your attention over the rest. And I have shown you that no divine revelation is really needed ; but that, if necessary, it might have been made by means of a new moral sense or instinct, so that there could be no dispute about this matter.

The inevitable conclusion, I think, is, that if any system of religion has been revealed at all by the Almighty, it has not been revealed in the way that religionists commonly assert ; but has been made intelligible to us all in some other way, from our very first, and so as to form part of our nature, without requiring any historical or other evidence at all.

Thus, by merely taking a very broad view of the whole subject, which is the only possible view to take, and without going at all into the investigation of the different creeds, we may reasonably conclude that not one of them is true, and that they are all equally wrong, and unworthy of our serious attention. This, I think, is evident from the very nature of the case. No religious belief that is based upon evidence requiring a lifetime to weigh and consider can possibly be true ; whereas, if we trust to internal evidence and faith, we may believe any dogma that is put before us, and that happens to please our fancy.

If this should be the conclusion at which you arrive, never, in dealing with an opponent of it, quit your elevated stand-point to discuss details. Never close your eyes for a moment to the broad and comprehensive view of the problem, such as I hope I have presented to you. If you do so, you may be worsted on some little point of technical philology, or be smothered by a cloud of words bearing on some particular miracle, prophecy, or the like.

What, then, is religion, and what are we to believe ? Or are we to remain in ignorance ?

How do we act in common matters, and in matters of science ? Do we here feel obliged to believe something, and act upon it rather

than remain in ignorance? Surely not. We are not obliged to believe anything until the evidence in support of it is such as to convince our reason. In common matters, and in science, there is no disgrace in being ignorant, and we are compelled to confess our ignorance a hundred times a day. Why, then, cannot we consent to remain in ignorance on the subject of mysteries which it appears are far beyond our comprehension?

No amount of teaching or training could ever make a worm understand mathematics, because its brain is not equal to it. For the same reason, probably, no amount of teaching or training could ever make a man understand the great mysteries of nature, which have perplexed him in all ages. Nor is it necessary to his well-being that he should understand them. What would become of a worm if it could understand mathematics, or of a man if he could understand the great mysteries of nature? Would not both be unfitted at once for the peculiar mode of life which has been assigned to them? Is not ignorance of these mysteries an essential condition of man's well-being in this world? May he not with wisdom pray,—

“ Save me alike from foolish pride,
Or impious discontent,
At aught Thy wisdom has denied,
Or aught Thy goodness lent.”

“ Presumptuous man ! the reason wouldst thou find,
Why formed so weak, so little, and so blind ?
First, if thou can'st, the harder reason guess,
Why formed no weaker, blinder, and no less ?
Ask of thy mother earth why oaks are made
Taller or stronger than the weeds they shade ? ;
Or ask of yonder argent fields above,
Why Jove's satellites are less than Jove ? ”—POPE.

The religionist who offers a creed for our acceptance, based on stories of miracles which happened so long ago that it would take a lifetime to investigate the evidence on which they rest, offers no real explanation of the mysteries, but the very same difficulties concealed by a mass of rubbish. In what does the God of the Christian differ from the God of the Deist? Simply in wearing a

mask made by human hands. Remove that mask, and both Gods are incomprehensible. Man can no more understand God than a worm can understand mathematics.

Why then is man obliged to make a mask for the Deity, in order to conceal his own ignorance, and to fall down and worship that mask of his own making? He is not obliged to mask his ignorance in matters of science, why then in religion? He is humble in matters of science, why cannot he be humble also in matters of religion?

Consider for a moment the VITAL principle. What is it? Plants and animals live, stones do not. What is life? This is a scientific question, and how do scientific men treat it? They take a plant, and investigate its functions and parts, until they come down to the simplest form of life, the living cell. The materials of this cell they can resolve into its simplest elements, and they can understand something of its functions; but in what way it is able to perform those functions, in consequence of its possessing life, entirely baffles their comprehension. They sit down before the problem, and wonder; but to solve it they find impossible. Their inductive reasoning can make nothing of it; and yet they have established the laws of gravity and of light; have worked out the lunar and planetary theories, and made wonderful discoveries in chemistry, geology, and in all that relates to inorganic matter, and the abstract science of quantity. But organization puzzles them; they cannot produce organized matter synthetically by recombining elements of which they know it is composed; and they stand dismayed before the mighty enigma of the VITAL principle; and confess their ignorance, because they know that their ignorance can be proved. But suppose some empiric were to come to them with a theory on this subject, based upon accounts of wonderful phenomena which were said to have occurred eighteen centuries ago; and were to demand their acceptance of this theory on the faith of his version of certain documentary evidence which would admit of many different readings and interpretations, and had passed through the hands of many generations of interested transcribers, would they give themselves the trouble to investigate the documents upon which his theory was said to rest? I am quite positive they would not. If the phenomena were such as could not be repeated, and might admit of a hundred different interpretations, they would

reject the whole account as a fable, and would prefer to remain in ignorance, rather than to hold a possibly erroneous opinion.

But there is a greater difficulty still than the VITAL principle, viz., the MENTAL principle. The plant merely lives, and has apparently no consciousness, and certainly no volition; but the animal has both. Now if the mere vitality of a plant is an enigma to man, how much more inscrutable must be all the varied phenomena of animal life, volition, consciousness, instinct, reason, moral feeling, affection, &c., which depend upon the MENTAL principle? Surely if man sits down dismayed before the difficulties in the former case, and hesitates to form an opinion, and humbly confesses his entire ignorance, he must be doubly inclined to do so in the latter. But, strange to say, it is otherwise. Because in the case of *mental* phenomena his false theories cannot actually be put to the test of experiment, and be *proved* to be wrong, his pride steps in; he now refuses to plead ignorance, and adopts all sorts of wild creeds on the subject of a future state, election and perdition, the nature and attributes of Deity; and so forth. Simply because any absurdity *may* be possible, and cannot be *proved* to be wrong, he now gives the reins to his imagination, and willingly becomes intoxicated at the fountain of error. Such is the inconsistency of man, and the pride of religionists! All religions have their origin in pride. An insect which cannot comprehend the living principle in a blade of grass, will nevertheless contend that there are three Gods, and yet only one; and that he who believeth not this will doubtless perish everlastingly!

Remember, in religion, as in science, ignorance is better than error. Let no one persuade you that you *must* have blind faith in *some* religion; and on that false pretence lead you to the fatal fountain of which I spoke in my first letter. Be humble-minded. Strive to understand what you can of the glories and mysteries of nature; but when these are too vast for your finite intellect, confess your inability to solve them with becoming submission. Your constrained ignorance of mysteries that are above your grasp will teach you charity and tolerance; and you will soon learn that all that is really necessary for your guidance in life, safely and happily, has been revealed to you at your birth, and forms a part of your nature.

“Know then this truth, *enough* for man to know,
Virtue alone is happiness below.”

And when you pray, say,—

“ What conscience dictates to be done
Or warns me not to do,
This, teach me more than hell to shun ;
That, more than heaven pursue.”

Cultivate rationally the qualities of your mind and heart, as you cultivate rationally the muscles of your body, and you need not, my son, fear—

“ . . . The zealot's ready hell
Which answers to all doubts so eloquently well.”

LETTER V.

I HAVE in my library a book published in 1819 by the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, entitled “ A short and easy method with the Deists,” by the Rev. Charles Leslie, M.A. I advise you to read it as an example of the kind of special pleading which is put forward in defence of Christianity. The author asserts that the miracles recorded in the Bible rest upon far better evidence than any other events that are related in history ; and that they bear certain marks which distinguish them from all other miracles or historical events whatever, and which preclude all possibility of doubt as to their truth. We may dig up old coins bearing the names of Roman emperors and potentates about whom we read in history ; we may go and see the ruins of old cities which have been buried for ages amidst the ashes and lava of Vesuvius, and which are being dis-entombed in our own time ; we may examine in the various museums of Europe the relics which modern travellers have brought from Italy, Greece, Egypt, and the East, of the old civilisations about which we read in the works of the old historians, all of which things prove incontestably the general truthfulness of history. But no matter. The miraculous stories recorded in the Bible are said by the

author in question to rest upon far better evidence than this. His argument for so strange an assertion we will consider in the present letter.

At page 12, he says,—

“First, then, I suppose, that the truth of the doctrine of Christ will be sufficiently evinced, if the matters of fact which are recorded of him in the Gospels be true; for his miracles, if true, do vouch the truth of what he delivered.”

The author has only, he says, to prove the truth of the miracles, and then the truth of the doctrine follows as a matter of course. But what *is* the doctrine of Christ that is based upon his miracles? Can any one tell us for certain? The Unitarian, the Papist, the Calvinist, all believe the miracles; and yet the doctrines which they suppose to be based upon them are as different as light and darkness. There are good and learned divines belonging to each of these sects who have made a life's study of the evidence, and who arrive at vastly different conclusions respecting the doctrine. What then *is* the doctrine which Christ's miracles prove?

Suppose I were to lay it down as a rule that all accounts of miracles must be false which do not enforce some particular doctrine so clearly as not to admit of any possibility of doubt by good and learned men who examine the subject conscientiously; is there any person in the world, whose mind is in a sober state, who could deny this rule? I think not. If miracles do not establish some particular doctrine so clearly and indubitably that there can be no mistake, for what purpose were they wrought? But the Calvinist will tell us that Christ's miracles *do* support *his* doctrine, the Papist *his*, the Unitarian *his*, and so on of a hundred different sects. Then, which of these doctrines is right? We require more miracles to enlighten us; we have not yet had miracles enough!

Again, we are told in the Bible itself, that real miracles may be wrought by an impostor, aided by the power of Satan. In the second epistle to the Thessalonians, chapter ii., verse 9, we read, “Of him, whose coming is after the working of Satan, with all power, and signs, and lying wonders;” and in the Revelations, chapters xiii., xvi., and xix., we read of the Devil and false prophets working miracles. Now, if the Devil and false prophets can work miracles as well as God, a FALSE doctrine may be based upon a miracle as

well as a TRUE doctrine. A miracle, therefore, proves nothing, unless we are certain of the character of the person by whom it is wrought—a certainty which must rest upon common evidence, and such as would render the miracles superfluous. The Jews, we are told, admitted Christ's miracles, but attributed them to Beelzebub; and, therefore, did not accept his doctrine, whatever that may have been. Whether the Jews were right, or the early converts to Christianity, who can now determine?

The miracles recorded in the Old and New Testaments, do not, therefore, even if true, prove any doctrine for certain. But *are* they true? Let us now examine the evidence upon which they rest.

The author says, at page 12, that he will lay down such rules as to the truth of matters of fact in general, that where they all meet such matters of fact cannot be false; and then he will show that all these rules do meet in the matters of fact of Moses and of Christ.

These rules are four, viz.: "1st. That the matter of fact be such as that men's outward senses may be judges of it. 2nd. That it be done publicly in the face of the world. 3rd. That not only public monuments be kept in memory of it, but some outward actions to be performed. 4th. That such monuments, actions, or observances be instituted, and do commence from the time that the matter of fact was done."

As an illustration, take the case of the Jewish Passover. The origin of this observance, which is kept by the Jews of the present day, is said in the Bible to be as follows:—

The Jewish families, when prisoners in Egypt, were each to kill and eat a lamb, and sprinkle some of the blood upon their doorposts. An angel was then to pass in the night and slay the first-born of every family throughout the land whose doorpost was not thus sprinkled. This massacre, of course, was intended to fall upon the Egyptians only, and not upon the Jews. The proof that the event actually occurred, according to our author, is this:—Jews of the present day keep the Passover, and do it professedly in memory of the above event. Moreover, all preceding generations of Jews have done it in succession, down to the very generation in which the event occurred; therefore the event did indubitably occur in the manner related in the Bible, and we are bound to believe the miracle, since no other fact in history is better attested. The miracle bears

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all the four marks which have been enumerated above, and the evidence of it is as convincing as if we had witnessed it with our own senses.

Such is the argument of the author.

To this I reply, that the miracle in question does *not* bear the four marks which have been laid down as the test of truth ; neither does any other miracle that is recorded in the Old Testament. We learn from the history of the Jews, as related in the Bible itself, that there have been many breaks in the chain of evidence ; and that pious frauds might, therefore, have been practised upon the Jewish people, over and over again, respecting their laws and observances. We learn, from the Bible itself, that the Jews were singularly prone to fall into idolatry, and to give up, during successive generations, the practice of the Mosaic laws and observances, in order to follow those of the nations of idolators amongst whom they lived. What, then, could have been easier than to practise pious frauds upon this people on the occasions of their temporary return to the religious rites instituted by Moses ? It is actually recorded in the Bible that on one such occasion—viz. : in the reign of King Josiah—the book of the law, which had been mislaid for a number of years and disregarded, was suddenly found and restored. How easy, then, for a new priesthood, on that occasion, to have inserted in the newly-found volume false and exaggerated accounts of the early history of the Jewish people, and of the origin of their old institutions and ceremonies.

If any one should deem this to have been impossible, I can say in reply, that my great-grandfather died about seventy years ago, that I do not know where he lived, died, or was buried, what his Christian name or profession was, or what were his religious opinions. If I were willing now to be a dupe, any one might palm off upon me falsehoods respecting these matters. If I was told that he had annually kept a certain feast in honour of a certain miraculous event which had occurred in the history of our common ancestors, I might be willing to believe it, and to continue the same observance, and hand it down to my children. At any rate I should not be able to prove the negative.

The story of the finding of the book of the law, in the reign of King Josiah, is very important, as affording a reply, from the Bible

itself, to the ingenious argument of Mr. Leslie. You will find it recorded in the 22nd chapter of the second book of Kings, and also in the 34th chapter of the second book of Chronicles. From these chapters I make the following extracts :—

“ And Hilkiab, the high priest, said unto Shaphan the scribe, I have found the book of the law in the house of the Lord. And Hilkiab gave the book to Shaphan, and he read it.

“ And Shaphan showed the king, saying, Hilkiab the priest hath delivered me a book. And Shaphan read it before the king.

“ And it came to pass that when the king had heard the words of the book of the law that he rent his clothes.

“ And the king commanded Hilkiab the priest, . . . saying. Go ye, inquire of the Lord for me, and for the people, and for all Judah, concerning the words of this book that is found ;

“ So Hilkiab, the priest, . . . went unto Huldah, the prophetess, and they communed with her.”

You will observe that this occurred in the eighteenth year of the reign of King Josiah, who had always been a good king, although ignorant of the existence of the book of the law. His predecessors, Amon and Manasseh, who had been idolatrous kings, had reigned fifty-seven years, so that the book of the law had been lost for seventy-five years at least ; and even the king himself had never heard of it, although a good king. Now, observe what followed the finding of this remarkable book.

“ And the king sent, and they gathered unto him all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem.

“ And the king went up into the house of the Lord, and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem with him, and the priests, and the prophets, and all the people, both small and great ; and he read in their ears all the words of the book of the covenant which was found in the house of the Lord.

“ And the king stood by a pillar and made a covenant before the Lord, to walk after the Lord, and to keep his commandments, and his testimonies, and his statutes, with all their heart and all their soul, to perform the words of the covenant which were written in this book. And all the people stood to the covenant.”

After which we read that Hilkiab and certain other priests, brought out of the temple “ all the vessels that were made for Baal,

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and for the grove, and for the hosts of heaven, and burned them without Jerusalem ;” and “ that he put down the idolatrous priests, whom the kings of Judah had ordained to burn incense in the high places in the cities of Judah, and in the places round about Jerusalem ; them also that burned incense unto Baal, to the sun, and to the moon, and to the planets, and to all the host of heaven.” And he defiled Topheth, “ that no man might make his son or his daughter to pass through the fire to Moloch. And he took away the horses that the kings of Judah had given to the sun, at the entering in of the house of the Lord, and burned the chariots of the sun with fire. And the altars that were on the top of the upper chamber of Ahaz, which the kings of Judah had made, and the altars which Manasseh had made in the two courts of the house of the Lord, did the king beat down. And the high places that were before Jerusalem, which were on the right of the mount of Corruption, which Solomon the King of Israel had builded for Ashtoreth, the abomination of the Zidonians, and for Chemosh the abomination of the Moabites, and for Milcom, the abomination of the children of Ammon, did the king defile. And he brake in pieces the images, and cut down the groves, and filled their places with the bones of men.”

After which we read that “ he slew all the priests of the high places that were there upon the altars, and burned men’s bones upon them.”

Having dealt in this summary manner with the existing religion and its ministers, King Josiah “ commanded all the people, saying, Keep the passover unto the Lord your God, as it is written in the book of this covenant. Surely there was not holden such a passover, from the days of the judges that judged Israel, nor in all the days of the kings of Israel, nor of the kings of Judah ; but in the eighteenth year of King Josiah, wherein this passover was holden to the Lord in Jerusalem.”

Now really, after this, what becomes of Mr. Leslie’s story of the four marks as applied to the Jewish passover? That ingenious gentleman, in his “ Short and Easy Method with the Deists,” ignores altogether the story of King Josiah, and the finding of the book of the law, after heaven knows how many generations of Jews had been entirely sunk in idolatry, worshipping the sun, moon, and

stars, and offering human sacrifices to Moloch! Such short and easy methods find happily a short and easy answer, by merely turning to the chapters from which I have just quoted. King Josiah, and Hilkiah the high priest, Shaphan the scribe, and Huldah the prophetess, have done much unconsciously for the elucidation of difficulties respecting the miraculous part of early Jewish history. The newly-found book of the law may have contained just what it pleased these worthies to insert in it.

The miraculous and fabulous part of all history can of course be explained by reference to the possibility of similar transactions, although we may not always be able, as in the case of the Jews, to lay our finger upon the precise how, when, and where, impostures were practised upon the people.

The supposition of pious frauds is quite consistent with what we know respecting the pious frauds of priests in all ages; but if you reject it, observe the alternative, and ask yourself seriously whether that is not far more difficult of belief. This alternative will require you to accept the Mosaic account of the creation, the stories of Adam and Eve, of Noah's Ark and the Tower of Babel, of the sun standing still at Joshua's command, in order that the Jews might have daylight wherein to finish the massacre of their enemies, and a hundred other improbable stories which I need not enumerate. You will also have to explain how it was that a people who were frequently the witnesses of astounding miracles worked in their favour by the true God, could have so perversely and on so many occasions have given up his worship to follow that of Baal, Moloch, &c. Now I venture to assert that it is not in human nature for any people who *really believed* that their ancestors had crossed the Red Sea and the Jordan in the miraculous manner related, had witnessed the delivery of the law on Mount Sinai, and had received, through an unbroken succession of generations, the laws and institutions of Moses, enforced by such awful wonders, to have given up the worship of the God of their fathers to follow that of the idolatrous nations about them. It is not in human nature for *any* people to have done a thing so utterly rash and so monstrously foolish; or, if you believe it possible of any people, then their history, as recorded by themselves, must be entirely unworthy of credit, for they must have been a nation of fools beyond all precedent and all belief.

Let us now see whether the four marks apply to the miracles of Christ.

Our author refers us to the institutions of Baptism and the Lord's Supper, as existing amongst Christians of the present day, and as having been practised by all successive generations of Christians from the time of Christ to the present time without a single break; and hence he infers the indisputable truth of the Christian miracles; the walking upon the sea, the healing of the sick, the raising of the dead, the miraculous draught of fishes, the feeding of a multitude with two small loaves, the staying of a tempest by a word of command, the transfiguration, the resurrection, the ascension, &c. But the rites of Baptism and the Lord's Supper were not based upon any miraculous event (like the Passover), which was witnessed by those who were first baptised, and the belief in which was asserted by all who were subsequently baptised, or who partook of the Lord's Supper; and therefore they do not directly go to prove a miracle. The rite of Baptism is said to have been founded by John the Baptist, a man who lived in the wilderness, whose food was locusts and wild honey, who preached repentance, listened to confessions of sin, and baptised penitents in Jordan, as a token, I suppose, of their having been washed clean from the pollution of sin. This rite was administered to Christ himself, notwithstanding that he is said to have had no sins to confess; and it was very different from baptism, both in fact and in meaning, as now practised by the Church of England, which consists in simply sprinkling with water the face of an infant, who is too young to be conscious of having sinned, or to make a confession. Baptism did not at first mean a sign of admission into the visible Church of Christ, because no such Church existed at the time when it was first introduced. In those early times baptism may have meant simply repentance of sin, renunciation of Paganism or Judaism, and the acceptance of the broad code of morals taught by Christ, without necessarily involving a profession of belief in Christ's miracles, as subsequently described in certain books. The Last Supper was simply a rite performed in remembrance of the last meal at which Christ and his disciples were assembled together before his betrayal by Judas. Any believer in the new code of morals taught by Christ might have partaken of the Lord's Supper, in remembrance of their founder, without necessarily believing in any

miracles. The four marks do *not* apply to the Christian miracles, so far as Baptism and the Lord's Supper can be supposed to prove this, because these rites were not instituted in direct attestation of any miracle ; nor did their observance necessarily imply a public profession in the belief of any miracles—but simply repentance of sin, a renunciation of Paganism or Judaism, and the acceptance of Christian morals in their broad sense.

With respect to the regular succession of Christian priests, which is said by our author to date from the time of Christ himself, and to have come down unbroken to the present day, so much difference of opinion exists amongst learned divines as to the fact of this regular succession, that it cannot be regarded as possessing the four marks which entitle it to be considered indubitable evidence of the Christian miracles. A large proportion of the Christians of the present day deny the fact of priestly succession, and consequently all evidence of the truth of their religion which might be deduced therefrom. They do not regard the existence of Pope Pius the Ninth, or the Patriarch of the Greek Church, or the Archbishop of Canterbury, as any proof that Christ rose from the dead, or made water into wine. We may dismiss, therefore, the evidence which our author adduces from episcopacy of the truth of Christian miracles, since about one-third of the Christians of our own country deny the divine origin of that institution.

If there has really been a regular succession of Christian priests, from the first establishment of Christianity to the present time, that succession seems to have included some very unworthy members. The history of the Popes will not bear close investigation, and the state of morals of the Christian clergy during the middle ages was very corrupt. The author of "Glimpses of the Dark Ages," a work published by the Religious Tract Society some years ago, says at page 59 :—

"The impostures which were frequently countenanced, and even practised by the clergy, and the palpable falsehoods which were propagated by them in the legendary tales of the saints, evince a most deplorable disregard of truth, the very first of virtues. There is scarcely anything that strikes the reader more forcibly, on looking into the records of this dark period, than the general moral obtuseness of feeling which prevailed relative to the guilt of practising

deception and telling lies. Connected with this disregard of truth was an equal disregard of the principles of justice. Complaints were made, as early as the sixth century, of bishops who had appropriated to their own use endowments conferred on the Church, and who were guilty of various acts of injustice and oppression. Instances of unjust conduct abound in the annals of monkish historians, and sometimes acts of shameful perfidy are recorded, as if they were by no means immoral."

Such were the guardians of divine revelation, and the transcribers of apostolic writings!

The same author says, at page 61 :—

"There are also abundant proofs of a general laxity of morals among the clergy of the dark ages. It is difficult to convey a correct impression on this subject. A style of sweeping declamation upon the vices of the clergy through the space of eight or nine centuries is very often adopted. . . . Immediately after the barbaric invasion the morals of the clergy in Europe seem to have been very low. . . . In the ninth century some facts of a most revolting nature are disclosed. In the canons of a council held A.D. 888, the bishops complain of the numerous instances of vice among the clergy, which had come to their knowledge, and go on to state that they had heard of certain priests who were guilty of incest. A bishop of Italy, in the tenth century, after complaining in the strongest terms of the vices of the age, laments that the clergy were deeply tainted with them. . . . They rushed headlong, like stallions, to every vice," &c.

The less said, therefore, about priestly succession the better.

And since I have alluded to the betrayal of Christ by Judas, let me now draw your attention to the following picture, and ask you seriously to consider whether such a scene is possible.

Imagine, if you can, a man endowed with such awful power as to be able to raise the dead, and arrest the fury of a tempest by a single word of command, surrounded by twelve disciples at a supper-table, and telling them that one of the twelve should betray him to his enemies! Imagine, if you can, such a man *having* enemies; and one of his disciples, who had witnessed on many occasions the evidences of his awful power, meditating the betrayal of him to them for thirty pieces of silver! What would be the use of such a

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betrayal, or of such silver pieces to the disciple and friend of a man who, by a mere act of will, could fill his net with fish and his baskets with bread; who could cure him of any disease, raise him from the dead, or destroy him by a curse, as he did the barren fig tree? Imagine Judas, seated at that table, meditating the betrayal of such a master for such a reward! Was the thing possible, consistently with his belief in the awful power of that master? Would he not have trembled as the thought entered into his wicked heart, lest by a single glance his purpose should be discovered, and he be shrivelled up instantly into a blasted skeleton as a punishment of his sin? Is it in human nature, that a man under such circumstances should dare to conceive of such an act? Surely not. Judas could never have witnessed such miracles as are recorded in the Gospels, or he would not have dreamed of the betrayal of his master.

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The Christian miracles are recorded in writings, the history of which is very obscure, and which were not collected into a volume until the fourth century. These have been copied over and over again by interested persons, and there are many different versions of them supporting different doctrines. The Christian miracles do *not* bear the four marks which our author has attributed to them; they are opposed to all modern experience of *human* as well as of physical nature; and no theory of salvation can be based upon them which is not fairly open to dispute by conscientious persons sincerely desirous of arriving at the truth.

Speaking of the miracles of the middle ages, Jeremy Taylor says:—"They became a daily extraordinary, a supernatural natural event, a perpetual wonder, that is, a wonder and no wonder." The author above quoted says, at page 54:—"It should, however, be observed that great as was the credulity of the middle ages in reference to the miracles of their saints, it scarcely surpasses the credulity of many of the fathers of the Nicene period. Augustine, Ambrose, and Jerome may be matched to a great extent, in this respect, with the legendary writers of a later period."

[With respect to Christian morals, these, taken in their broad sense, are extremely pure and amiable, but somewhat effeminate, and not to be compared, in my opinion, with the manly philosophy of the Stoic, or the refined philosophy of the Epicurean. They

inculcate all the loveable virtues, including humility, self-denial, and the patient endurance of injury ; but, on the whole, they seem better adapted for women than for men. There is not a word in the four Gospels in praise of courage, perseverance, and that laudable ambition which prompts a man to seek the highest place, and to be worthy of it ; not a word in praise of that patriotism which would impel a man to die in defence of his country ; or of that hatred of tyranny which would impel a slave to rebel against his oppressors. I very much doubt whether strict Christian morals are adapted to the hard practical uses of life. Resentment under a sense of injustice and oppression is a more manly virtue than the patient endurance of wrong ; courage combined with self-reliance in overcoming difficulties, and pushing forward towards the goal of honourable distinction, is a more manly virtue than faith in supernatural aid obtained by prayer ; and a stoical contempt of death is more manly than meeting it with the hope of a happy hereafter, in which there is to be neither pain nor toil.

It is a singular fact that Christ, living as he did at a period when slavery was an institution of the civilized world, did not denounce it strongly, and preach rebellion on the part of the slave. The Bible has been often quoted by upholders of slavery as justifying that institution, and this with a fair show of reason ! Many of the early Christians were slaves, but we do not hear of their religion impelling them to rebel. To me it appears that to struggle for liberty against despotism is a high moral virtue, and to be resigned under tyranny a crime.

Christian Venice, in the middle ages, became great and rich by the sale of white Christian slaves to the dark-faced Saracens ; and Christian England of the same period trafficked in English slaves.

The ninth century after Christ appears to have been the NADIR of civilisation. The state of morals at that time is described by the author last quoted in the following terms :—

“ While so many of the priests were regardless of justice, truth, and purity, it would be unreasonable to look for much virtue among the people. There was a general regard paid to the forms of religion, but there was shown as general a disregard of its principles and spirit. Hallowed rites were associated with immoral practices ; deeds of injustice and cruelty were prefaced by acts of devotion ; the vilest

True
 Slavery

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be doubtful in the extreme.

Let us apply these considerations to the prophecies contained in
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It is a singular fact that Christ, living as he did at a period when slavery was an institution of the civilized world, did not denounce it strongly, and preach rebellion on the part of the slave. This has been often quoted by upholders of slavery as justifying the institution, and this with a fair show of reason! Many of the early Christians were slaves, but we do not hear of their religion impelling them to rebel. To me it appears that to struggle for liberty against despotism is a high moral virtue, and to be resigned under tyrannical rule a crime.

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characters breathed forth their aspirations to the Deity, and the Virgin ; and multitudes were punctilious in their observance of the ritual of the Church, who were totally ignorant of the truths and duties of Christianity."

Thus, when Christianity had been on its trial for a thousand years, it was found lamentably wanting, and a practical failure. The revealed religion is said to have become entirely corrupt, if you can suppose such a thing possible !

In my next letter I will discuss the evidences of the truth of a religion which are based upon the supposed fulfilment of prophecies.

LETTER VI.

THERE are persons who attach great importance to the supposed fulfilment of certain prophecies in the Bible, as a proof of its Divine origin. Let us then consider this subject of prophecies and their fulfilment, as proving the truth of a religion.

Whether the fulfilment of prophecies proves Divine inspiration, or not, it is quite certain that if a prophetic book should contain a single false prophecy, or if its prophecies should be couched in such ambiguous terms as fairly to admit of different interpretations, or if a doctrine intended to be proved by the prophecies should fairly admit of different meanings, the claim of the book to Divine inspiration would be doubtful in the extreme.

Let us apply these considerations to the prophecies contained in the Bible.

We are, of course, not concerned with such prophecies as those of the destruction of Babylon, or Jerusalem, or of the coming of Christ, and the circumstances attending his ministry and death ; because these events happened so very long ago, that it is impossible, at this distance of time, to know *for certain* whether the prophecies were delivered before the events took place. We have only now to con-

sider such prophecies as those of the dispersion of the Jews among all nations, their subsequent return to their own land, and their peaceful enjoyment of it for ever; or the present desolation of Babylon and other ancient cities, and of certain tracts of country in the East; or of the wide spread and present existence of Christianity.

Let us begin with considering the present dispersion of the Jews. This is said to have been plainly foretold in the Bible, and the prophecy of it is held up as one of the most striking evidences of the truth of the Christian religion. I will endeavour to show that the present dispersion of the Jews has *not* been predicted at all; but, on the contrary, that it is a fact which falsifies many prophecies in the Bible. Thus, instead of proving the Bible to be *true*, it goes to prove it to be *false*.

I will show you that the prophecies which refer to the dispersion of the Jews among all nations do not refer to their *present* dispersion, but to their dispersion, at the time of the Babylonish captivity, amongst the nations bordering upon Canaan; and that these prophecies were accompanied by predictions of their return to Canaan after that dispersion, which really took place; and of their subsequent peaceful occupation of Canaan *for ever*, which did *not* take place, since they are now dispersed again. This prophecy has therefore been falsified by events.

In the concluding verses of the last chapter of Amos, we read:—

“And I will bring again the captivity of my people of Israel, and they shall build the waste cities, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and drink the wine thereof; they shall also make gardens and eat the fruit of them. And I will plant them upon their land, and *they shall no more be pulled up out of their land* which I have given them, saith the Lord thy God.”

This prophecy must relate to the Babylonish captivity, and not to the present dispersion of the Jews; for they are not now *captives* in any country, but free to leave it if they choose. It predicts that they shall return to their own land, which really happened; but that they shall no more be pulled out, which has been falsified by subsequent events.

The prophet Jeremiah, alluding to the return of the Jews from the Babylonian captivity, says at chapter xxxi., verses 12 and 40:—

“Therefore they shall come and sing in the height of Zion, and shall flow together to the goodness of the Lord, for wheat, and for wine, and for oil, and for the young of the flock and of the herd ; and their soul shall be as a watered garden ; and they shall not sorrow *any more at all.*”

“And the whole valley of the dead bodies, and of the ashes, and of all the fields unto the brook of Kidron, unto the corner of the horse-gate toward the east, shall be holy unto the Lord; it shall not be plucked up nor thrown down, *any more for ever.*”

These prophecies were falsified by the subsequent subjugation of Judæa by the Romans, and the destruction of Jerusalem under Titus. The Jews were only happy *for a time* in their own country, after their return from Babylon, and not *for ever.*

Read attentively the 33rd chapter of Jeremiah, which relates to the predicted return from the captivity ; and note verses 17 and 18 which say :—

“For thus saith the Lord : David shall *never* want a man to sit upon the throne of the house of Israel ;

“Neither shall the priests the Levites want a man before me to offer burnt-offerings, and to kindle meat-offerings, and to do sacrifice continually.”

These predictions have been falsified by events. There is now no man seated upon the throne of Israel ; and there are now no Levites to do sacrifice continually.

One of the predictions of the present dispersion of the Jews, quoted by Mr. Leslie, is said to occur at Deuteronomy iv., verses 27 and 28 :—

“And the Lord shall scatter you among the nations, and ye shall be left few in number among the heathen, whither the Lord shall lead you.

“And there ye shall serve gods, the work of men’s hands, wood and stone, which neither see, nor hear, nor eat, nor smell.”

The Jews are not now idolators, nor have they been since the Babylonish captivity ; the above predictions of their dispersion among the nations can only, therefore, apply to their dispersion amongst the nations bordering upon Canaan, in the olden time.

Another prediction of the dispersion of the Jews occurs in Leviticus xxvi., verses 33, 34 :—

“And I will scatter you *among the heathen*, and will draw out a

sword after you; and your land shall be desolate, and your cities waste.

“Then shall the land enjoy her sabbaths, as long as it lieth desolate, and ye be in your enemies’ land; even then shall the land rest, and enjoy her sabbaths.”

This is another predicted scattering of the Jews *amongst the heathen*, which cannot apply to their *present* dispersion; for their land does not now enjoy its sabbaths, being in possession of the Mahometans.

A prophecy of the dispersion of the Jews among all kingdoms, occurs at Jeremiah xv., verse 4.

“And I will cause them to be removed into *all kingdoms of the earth*, because of Manasseh, son of Hezekiah, king of Judah, for that which he did in Jerusalem.”

By the expressions, “all kingdoms,” “all countries,” &c., which occur in these prophecies, is not to be understood the whole world such as we now know it, but simply those nations which bordered upon Canaan. This is evident from the following passages in Jeremiah. At chapter xl., verses 11 and 12, we read:—

“Likewise when all the Jews that were in Moab, and among the Ammonites, and in Edom, and that were *in all the countries*, heard that the King of Babylon had left a remnant of Judah, and that he had set over them Gedaliah:

“Then all the Jews returned out of all places whither they were driven, and came to the land of Judah.”

And at chapter xliii., verse 5, we read:—

“But Johanan, the son of Kareah, and all the captains of the forces, took all the remnant of Judah, *that were returned from all nations*, whither they had been driven, to dwell in the land of Judah:”

Read the 34th chapter of Ezekiel; and note especially verses 6, 27, and 28, viz.:—

“My sheep wandered through all the mountains, and every high hill; yea, my flock was scattered upon *all the face of the earth*, and none did search or seek after them.”

“And the tree of the field shall yield her fruit, and the earth shall yield her increase, and *they shall be safe in their land*, and shall know that I am the Lord, when I have *broken the bands of their yoke*, and

delivered them out of the hands of *those that served themselves of them.*

“*And they shall no more be a prey to the heathen, neither shall the beasts of the land devour them ; but they shall dwell safely, and none shall make them afraid.*”

In the first of these verses, the Jews are said to be scattered upon “all the face of the earth ;” in the last two it is prophesied that they shall be delivered from *captivity*, and shall inhabit in peace, *for ever*, the land of Canaan.

You will observe that the expression, “upon all the face of the earth,” merely refers to that part of the earth in the neighbourhood of Syria ; because in the *present* dispersion of the Jews, they are not *captives*, but free men ; as free as you and I are. This is absolute proof that the expression, “upon all the face of the earth,” does not relate to the face of the whole earth, such as we now know it ; and that the allusion to the dispersion of the Jews does not relate to their *present* dispersion. The prophecy that they shall dwell safely in Canaan, and *no more* be a prey to the heathen, has been falsified by subsequent events.

Read also chapter xxxvii., verses 21 and 25 :—

“Behold, I will take the children of Israel from among the heathen, *whither they be gone*, and will gather them on every side, and bring them into their own land.”

“And they shall dwell in the land that I have given unto Jacob, my servant, wherein your fathers have dwelt ; and they shall dwell therein ; even they, and their children, and their children’s children, *for ever* ; and my servant David shall be their prince for ever.”

These prophecies were delivered during the Babylonish captivity ; and are falsified by subsequent events. They cannot refer to the *present* dispersion of the Jews, and any *future* return to Canaan ; because the expression, “whither they be gone,” refers to their *actual* dispersion at the time when the prophecy was delivered.

The present dispersion of the Jews, instead of being a fulfilment of old prophecies, is a direct falsification of them.

Christians endeavour to get out of the difficulty by assuming that they refer to Christ, and to a *second* return of the Jews to Canaan, which has yet to take place. But the Jews, who ought to understand their own books, do not admit this.

Be that as it may, it is sufficient for my purpose to show you that the supposed prophecies of the present dispersion of the Jews, taken in their literal sense, and according to their translation in the common English Bible, are so worded as fairly to admit of a different interpretation.

The prophetic books of the Bible are written in such an inflated and obscure style, they are so vague and rambling, and the matter is so disjointed, that we are puzzled as to the meaning of those very prophecies upon which so much has been made to depend. The dispersion amongst all nations appears to have been one of those hyperbolical expressions common in Eastern writings, and to have meant the dispersion which occurred at the time of the conquest of Judæa by the King of Babylon, and not the *present* dispersion of the Jews in America, Australia, and countries which were not known to the ancients.

At Jeremiah, chapter xxx., verse 11, we learn the fate of all the nations wherein the Jews were to be dispersed :—

“For I am with thee, saith the Lord, to save thee ; though I make a full end of *all nations whither I have scattered thee*, yet will I not make a full end of thee ;” &c.

If this relates to the *present* dispersion of the Jews, the full end to be made of all nations whither they are scattered would include a full end of many pious Christians, if Christianity is to continue to spread until that event takes place.

Putting together the disconnected texts which allude to the scattering of the Jews amongst the heathen, and regarding them in connection with the context, I cannot perceive that they relate to the *present* dispersion of the Jews. I regard the prophecies concerning the Jews as having been falsified rather than fulfilled by subsequent events. At any rate the matter is open to discussion ; but a prophecy, to be worth anything, should be so clearly worded as to admit of *no possibility* of dispute.

With respect to prophecies of the eternal desolation of old cities, and the extinction of old empires, these events are not in themselves sufficiently remarkable to form the basis of a belief in the supernatural ; on the contrary, it seems to be in the ordinary course of nature that they *should* occur. If Babylon and Nineveh remain to this day a heap of ruins, and the Assyrian Empire exists no more,

the same is true of Carthage and the Carthaginian Empire, and of old ruined cities and empires in Central America. All history proves it to be a *law of nature* that such demolition and extinction *should* occur.

“Assyria, Rome, Greece, Carthage, where are they?” and where will be the English empire two thousand years hence? Predict that it will be extinct, and London a heap of ruins, and there are many chances to one in favour of your prediction coming true. The miracle would be if it did not.

There are some countries so circumstanced as to be exempt from this general law of desolation which follows a period of prosperity and productiveness, and which law is due probably to the exhaustion of the soil of its phosphates. Egypt is a country of this kind, which, from the regular inundations of the Nile, and the uniformity of its climate, has always been, and still is, an important corn-producing tract. And yet we find its desolation predicted in the last chapter of Joel, 19th verse:—

“Egypt shall be a desolation, and Edom shall be a desolate wilderness, for the violence against the children of Judah, because they have shed innocent blood in their land.

“But Judah shall dwell for ever, and Jerusalem from generation to generation.” (!)

If, instead of such predictions as the above, the prophet had foretold the completion of the Suez Canal, a work which was unsuccessfully attempted by the ancients, the railroad across the isthmus, and the great steamships which now ply regularly to the port of Alexandria, he would have astonished posterity much more than by predicting the desolation of a country from which England derives annually large supplies of wheat, and whose population is now more profitably employed than in rearing vast pyramids over the sepulchres of its kings, or colossal temples to its gods.

For more prophecies respecting Egypt, read the 19th chapter of Isaiah, and compare them with facts.

You will observe, that in dealing with all the prophecies which I have quoted in this letter, I take the English translation as I find it in our Bible, and interpret it literally, by the aid of the context. The Bible prophecies partake so much of rhapsody and rigmarole that other methods of dealing with them may possibly be more cor-

rect, but in that case I throw them up altogether. If our English translation, taken literally as it stands, is not to be trusted, or, if some fanciful interpretation of prophecy is to be substituted for the literal common sense meaning of the words, then all discussion becomes childish.

The Bible is a strange old book, which has turned the head of many a good man and woman. Its undoubted antiquity invests it with a sort of solemn interest, and the quaint pomposity of its style, which, if imitated by modern writers would be ridiculed, has a charm for the believer. The English translators have done their work nobly, and our version of this extraordinary old book is more than worthy of the original. The Bible has gained by a translation into the purest known example of Saxon English. Its stories are the delight of all ages, from the little prattler upon its grandmother's knee, to the venerable old dame herself; its historical part is full of romance; battle, murder, and sudden death, interspersed with the miraculous and supernatural, are blended with amorous ditties, and interesting love passages, not always narrated with the scrupulous delicacy of modern fiction; its incidents are sublime indeed; the creation of the world, with the sun to rule the day, the moon the night, and the stars also; its destruction by water, in the year 2,348 before Christ, and its ultimate destruction by fire are all eloquently described; there is no lack of the sensational; the sun stands still, the shadow on the dial goes back ten degrees, an army is destroyed in one night by the breath of the Lord of Hosts, the waters of the Red Sea and Jordan are divided, so that the chosen people pass over dry shod, and at the blast of their trumpets the walls of Jericho fall down flat; there are pathetic incidents, also, which make the blood run cold, such as the hewing of Agag in pieces before the Lord, by Samuel, the story of Jael and Sisera, and of Elisha and the bears; and there are proverbs, parables, and philosophy to suit all tastes, with a glimpse of the day of judgment, of heaven for the faithful, and hell for the hardened unbeliever. The Bible is a curious old book, a rare relic of antiquity; but the morality of the Old Testament is somewhat barbarous, and that of the New effeminate and unpractical. The God of the Old Testament can be jealous, passionate, and cruel, as well as merciful to his creatures; and the God of the new—but stop—which God am

I speaking of?—for the Unitarian, the Calvinist, and the Papist has each a God of his own, based on his own peculiar interpretation of the sacred volume!

The Bible may be a comfort to the poor, because it promises in the next world an equality with the rich, which can never be realized here below; and it may be a comfort to the afflicted, because it promises rest and peace in a glorious immortality; but it promises, also, the bottomless pit, the lake of fire and brimstone, and an eternity of torment for those who walk in the broad road instead of the narrow one; and “many there be that find it.” So there are two sides to this picture; and the man who can derive any comfort from the contemplation of it must have strong faith in his own salvation and but little concern for that of others.

“ . . . If this be true, indeed,
Some Christians hold a comfortable creed.”

But the wisdom of those men whose heads have been turned by the study of the Bible is seldom of that kind which results from a study of nature and nature's laws. Science is sadly provocative of scepticism, and is the true safeguard against superstition. Instead of spending life among musty tomes, and the lumber of theological and learned disputes, which teach us nothing, go to NATURE, and study the wonders in the midst of which we live, and move, and have our being.

It is a noteworthy fact in history, that the extinction of science for many centuries was contemporaneous with the introduction and spread of Christianity; and that the revival of science in modern times, to which we owe so many valuable inventions, is accompanied by the spread of scepticism. Divine revelation is shaken by every fresh discovery of the laws by which nature works. The telescope in the hands of Galileo gave one of the first heavy blows to the papacy; and modern discoveries in geology have proved heavy shocks to the reformed religion. A mind accustomed to investigate the sublime wonders of creation, has, in general, but small appreciation of miracles, and the evidence on which their truth is supposed to rest. There may be exceptions, but such is the rule; and eminent men of science are rarely believers in the supernatural. If you are fond of

the marvellous, go to nature ; and, in the humblest weed that grows, you will find more real wonders than are recorded in all the revelations of St. John. The love of the marvellous, directed aright, finds a rich field of gratification in the study of nature ; but neglect physical science, and shut yourself up with the lumber of theology, and Don Quixote, over his books of chivalry, may be no madder than yourself.

Call to mind how much has been done during only the last thirty years in scientific discovery and its applications, and then reflect on the fifteen centuries of misapplied mental labour which accompanied the rise and spread of Christianity ! From the days of Celsus and Pliny to those of Galileo and Bacon, what an unprofitable gap ! The mind, trained in a wrong direction, bore little or no fruit. Occupied with divine mysteries, the study of Nature was ignored. Pope's philosopher blowing bubbles, whilst the great fountain of knowledge is running to waste by his side, is emblematic of that dark unproductive period. If monks and ecclesiastics, instead of wasting their time in religious ceremonies, in transcribing old manuscripts, and in propagating nonsense, had turned to good account such rich opportunities as they had of studying science, what an extraordinary world it might have been now ! Take one instance only of the application of modern scientific discovery, viz. : that of the use of chloroform in surgical operations—what an inestimable boon to the human race ! What have all the religious temples and ceremonies, miracles, prophecies, and learned theological disputes done for mankind in comparison with only this ?

If there should be intellectual beings in Mars or Venus, who could read the history of man upon the earth from the dawn of science to the present hour, what would they think of that terrible gap in which all progress was stopped during the fifteen centuries which followed the rise and accompanied the spread of Christianity ? If they have themselves steadily prosecuted science to results of which we can hardly form a conception, what would they think of man's mis-spent opportunities, wasted faculties, and childish delusions ?

But to return to the subject of prophecies.

A prophecy, to be worth anything, must foretell some very *remarkable* event, some event of which the world has previously had no

experience. Suppose one of the old prophets had foretold that a certain mineral would be discovered, having a singular property, by means of which sailors would be able to traverse thousands of miles of sea with unerring certainty, and thus arrive at a new continent, and prove that the world is round instead of flat; this would have been a prophecy worthy of some attention. But your prophets and miracle-mongers belong to the same school, and never help us to anything really new, by which our knowledge is increased.

As for the prophecies of the spread of Christianity, the Koran contains prophecies of the spread of Mahometanism, which have come equally true. Moreover, does not the Papist maintain that the eternal duration of the Papacy is predicted in the Bible, whilst the Protestant declares with equal confidence that its downfall is as clearly foretold?

Away, then, with this belief in the supernatural, and childish tales, which is worthy only of children, and not of men. What is the supernatural? Look out upon the universe, from the smallest to the greatest, and observe the working of inflexible laws, where—

“ All Nature is but Art unknown to thee ;
 All Chance, Direction which thou canst not see ;
 All Discord, Harmony not understood ;
 All partial Evil, universal Good.”

A vast chain of being, where, one link broken, the great scale is destroyed. For whom? For what?

“ All this dread ORDER break ! For whom? For thee ?
 Vile worm !—oh, Madness ! Pride ! Impiety !”

If I write with no reverence for prophets, miracle-mongers, and divine revelations, it is because I feel nothing but contempt for delusions of this sort; and I am almost ashamed of having treated the supposed predictions of the present dispersion of the Jews so seriously as I have done in this letter.

The Jews, even in their present dispersed state, are not a degraded people. They are useful members of society, following their own

special line, and enjoying the protection of the laws and the rights of citizenship. They are not more degraded than Unitarians, Papists, or Dissenters. They form an industrious commercial class ; and if they were desirous of re-occupying the land of their ancestors, they are wealthy enough to buy Jerusalem and the whole of Syria three times over. But they are sagacious enough to know that that would be a very bad investment of capital, and they prefer their present mode of life. Moreover, they ought to understand their own books, and yet the Society for converting them makes but little way ; and it has been calculated that every conversion made has cost on an average about five hundred pounds ! This being the case, they must have good reasons for believing that the interpretations which Christians put upon their books are erroneous. They practise the rites of their religion unmolested ; and that is an inoffensive and non-aggressive one. It is to the credit of the Jews that they maintain their own poor, and never disturb the peace of the world by religious dissensions, or the thirst for military glory. The history of the Christian world is certainly not such as to tempt the Jews to a conversion to that faith, and if they prefer to remain a distinct people they can adduce some excellent reasons for that preference.

Thus you see that the argument in favour of the truth of Christianity from the fulfilment of Bible prophecies is very weak indeed, and open to as much fair discussion as Bible doctrines are. And then comes the ever-recurring question which cannot be put aside, viz. : What particular doctrine do Bible miracles and prophecies prove ? What *is* the doctrine of the Bible, regarding the whole, if you please, as an inspired book ? And which is the true Bible (for there are different versions of it), while the truth of a particular doctrine generally depends upon a particular reading of particular texts ? We are still thrown back upon the old story of religious differences which I have discussed in former letters.

LETTER VII.

MAN has not been idle. If he has fallen sometimes into error in matters which are above his comprehension, he has, nevertheless, used his faculties rationally in endeavouring to understand such natural phenomena as are actually within his grasp ; and he has picked up a few pebbles on the shore of the great ocean of truth, even if he has not gathered them all together into a mountain and seated himself upon the top of it.

Let us examine some of these pebbles which he has picked up, in order to see if they can afford us any enlightenment on the subject of religion ; since by an appeal to Nature we may learn something of Nature's God.

“Yet not to earth's contracted span,
Thy goodness let me bound,
Or, think thee Lord alone of man,
When thousand worlds are round.”

The different creeds which we have been considering refer to man and to this world ; but there are other bodies in the universe which may once have been, or which now are, or which at some future time may be, the abodes of beings morally responsible, and as intelligent as man, or possibly more so. I will tell you briefly some of the main facts concerning what we know of these other worlds. Go and look at the stars ; and, with the heavenly host spread out before you—“theme of so much thought and so much song”—try to realize in your mind these facts, which rest upon far higher evidence than any religious creed, and are far more surprising than any stories of miracles. How wonderful is our own insect world ! And yet if we could survey the animal life under the altered conditions of many of the other bodies of the universe, or even of our own solar system, there is hardly a doubt that their strange aspects and habits would surpass the wildest flights of our imagination to conceive.

A few thousand stars are visible to the naked eye, but an incalculable number may be observed through a telescope. The Milky Way, which forms a belt of stars round the celestial vault, contains myriads; and the universe is supposed to extend in the direction of that stratum of countless worlds. But our own universe may only be one of many which are too remote to become known to us.

Besides all the visible heavenly bodies, mostly at incalculable distances, there may be invisible ones which have become opaque, and which belong to our own universe. The earth was once self-luminous, having been composed of an incandescent fluid, which has now cooled down and become crusted over. Upon that thin crust we live. The sun is probably cooling down in a similar way, and will eventually become opaque. Strictly speaking, the earth does not revolve round the sun, or the sun round it: they both revolve round their common centre of gravity. Both were once suns; but one of the two, viz.: the earth—has become opaque and habitable, and receives its light from the other. The moon was also once self-luminous, and a little world which has become opaque.

Arguing from analogy, it is highly improbable that either the sun, the moon, or the planets Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, or Neptune, are inhabited by a high order of intelligent beings; because we know that, in our own earth, the desert of Sahara and the ices of the South Pole are not the permanent abodes of such beings. Certain favourable conditions of temperature, &c., seem to be necessary for the development of a race as high as man. Venus and Mars may, however, be the abodes of such a race, because in them the favourable conditions may exist.

The moon is a cinder, apparently devoid of atmosphere and water, and often, perhaps, severely peppered by meteoric stones, since she has no buffer, in the form of an elastic atmosphere, to keep them off and dissipate them. She would be a most unpleasant place for us to live in. With Lord Rosse's telescope, a small town could be clearly distinguished in her. Jupiter is, perhaps, a great drop of water with some cinders in the centre, and the abode of huge aquatic monsters of a low type of intelligence. The asteroids between him and Mars may be fragments of a planet which has come to grief. The comets appear to be masses of gas, some of them, perhaps, carbon vapour. Such is our own system now. It may, at some future time, roll

through space opaque and frozen, without a trace of life. According to the nebular theory of Laplace, which is considered a highly plausible one, our system was once an immense nebula, which has acquired rotation in becoming gradually condensed, and, at the same time, has evolved light and heat. Rings of matter, which have afterwards become planets, have been, from time to time, detached from it as the central mass contracted, as exemplified in Saturn's rings. Observe what an immense waste there is apparently in our system of the sun's light and heat, the great source of all the animal and vegetable life on the earth's surface, and the motive power of all its wonderful machinery.

We must not regard any of the fixed stars themselves, which are self-luminous and in a state of incandescence, as the probable abodes of highly intellectual beings, any more than our Sun is. But many of the stars may have planets revolving round them, and it is upon some of these planets that we might expect a high order of intelligent beings to exist. Remember this when you look at the starry heavens. We can only actually *see* two heavenly bodies, viz., the planets Mars and Venus, which are probably the abodes of such beings. The equally favoured planets which may revolve about other suns are invisible to us. But many of the fixed stars are double, and revolve about each other; and these could not have a planetary system revolving about them, because such a system could not be stable.

There are spiral nebulae that appear to be systems in which rotation is just commencing, and which are in process of formation, according to the theory of Laplace.

Thus, arguing from analogy, it would appear that most of the heavenly bodies which are visible to us are *not* the abodes of highly intelligent beings; but, on the other hand, that many of these may be the central suns to planetary systems, amongst which *may* be found incalculable numbers of worlds which *are* thus inhabited, inasmuch as there is one such world, and there may be three, in our own solar system. If we give up reasoning from analogy, we may people space with phantoms, and believe just anything we choose, for no one can prove a negative. There *may* be highly intelligent microscopic beings living in the interior of a red hot coal in our kitchen fire, for anything we can *prove* to the contrary.

To sum up this wonderful story, thus briefly sketched :—

There are probably countless worlds inhabited at this moment by beings as intelligent as, and perhaps more so than, ourselves. There have been in past ages worlds thus inhabited, which have now ceased to be so ; and there will probably, in future ages, be worlds thus inhabited which are now only in process of formation or preparation. This being the case, the following questions arise for the consideration of the Christian. Has the Son of God already died for other worlds than ours ? and will he yet have to die for the sinful inhabitants of other worlds not yet formed or peopled ? And for you there is the following question. Is it likely that the great First Cause of this stupendous universe ever had a Son, who died at all, or is ever likely to die as an atonement for the sins of the wicked inhabitants of any world whatever ? Does not the consideration of the immense universe of worlds, as it has been in past ages, now is, and will be in future æons of time, cast some doubt on the Christian fable ; and is it not more probable that certain men should have been liars than that that fable should be true ?

You have perhaps known liars amongst your schoolfellows, who would lie for the mere pleasure of it, and afterwards take any number of canings rather than confess the truth. There are such in every large school, and men are but hardened boys. Let one of these men start a falsehood, and stick to it under persecution, and he will find admiring adherents, some of whom will give currency to it with a little colouring of their own, until, perhaps, a mad enthusiast takes it up and propagates it largely ; from oral tradition, the lie will then pass into writing, and after being transcribed many times by willing dupes, will be presented to mankind as a story upon the belief of which eternal salvation depends. There may be a hundred different motives for lying in the first instance, a hundred different motives for bearing persecution in defence of the lie afterwards, and subsequently a hundred different motives for propagating it. If new creeds, such as that of the Mormon, can be easily founded and propagated now, in the heart of civilized countries, where railways, newspapers, and telegraphs exist, judge how easily Christianity could have been founded and propagated eighteen centuries ago. Paley says it must have been founded by men who suffered persecution whilst they preached virtue, and who could not

have done this with a lie in their mouths. In reality, it appears to have been propagated mainly by Paul, who was converted in a trance, had never personally known Christ, and never witnessed one of his miracles. Stephen, at whose stoning to death he assisted, may have been one of the hardened liars of whom I spoke. It requires but a hardened liar, a cruel persecutor, a zealous propagandist, a conversion in a dream, and a few credulous dupes, to found any new religion, even in these times. But the subject of the origin of Christianity is not worth discussing, except from a station which commands only a broad general view of it. Life is too precious to waste in the examination of its details. We know what men are from our own actual experience and from contemporary history, and have no difficulty in coming to a conclusion as to the merits of any creed which is based upon stories of miracles which are said to have occurred many centuries ago.

A word or two now upon that part of the theory of Christianity which asserts that death is the penalty of sin.

Geology teaches that, during immense periods of time, successive races of animals existed on the globe before the advent of man ; and that consequently death had entered the world before man began to live upon it. How then can death have been the punishment of man's sin ?

Do plants and animals die in any of the other worlds, to make way for new generations, or does a different law prevail in them ? Is the whole universe laid under a supposed curse for the sake of Adam's disobedience in this insignificant planet, or are the living creatures of other worlds exempt from the penalty of death ?

In a word, does not the Christian fable involve believers in an immensity of new difficulties, without clearing up a single old one ? But sweep away all the newly-imported dogmas which bear the manifest stamp of human invention, and what remains ! A simple belief in the mercy of the Most High, and a fearless reliance on his goodness. What is this but simple Deism, and Socratic philosophy ? Why disfigure it with fables and cast over it a gloomy pall ?

What is the creed of the Calvinist respecting himself, supposed to be one of the elect ? He believes in a triune God ; the nature of this trinity in unity being incomprehensible to him, and a mere contradiction in words. He then invests God with human passions,

making him angry at sin, and incapable of forgiving it unless atoned for ; so that a God equal to himself must be sacrificed and endure death, in order that the sins of the elect may be forgiven. All that is then needed by the elect is to believe that this atonement has been made. This faith is imparted to him by God, and thus his future happiness is secured. Now, divest this creed of all that is incomprehensible and fabulous, and what remains? A simple belief in the mercy of God, and the absence of all doubt and dread respecting the future. Then why superadd a foolish fable, and why suppose that the same mercy which has been accorded to the elect, however sinful, may be withheld from others?

In my next and last letter, I hope to be able to show you that death and toil are not, on the whole, a curse, but a blessing ; and that a true curse would be an idle, aimless, monotonous immortality, devoid of care and pain ; and, consequently, with no field of exercise for our highest moral feelings.

LETTER VIII.

THERE is a sect of Christians called the New Jerusalemites, founded by a good and learned man named Swedenborg, who has invented many strange tales, and added largely to our stock of religious marvels. He tells us in his writings that he has been to heaven and hell, and passed some years in both places, and he describes what he saw there. I will endeavour somewhat to imitate his style in relating to you an imaginary vision of my own.

Some years ago I was transported to a planet which had never been visited by the King of Terrors, and I spent some time there. I will tell you what I saw.

This planet contained a certain fixed number of human beings, all of whom were immortal. The number was necessarily limited, because the area upon which they lived was limited. They neither died, nor did they multiply ; there was, consequently, no difference

of sex, since that would have been unnecessary. There were no inferior animals upon this planet; for, if there had been, they would have been immortal also, like the human beings, without sex, and herbivorous; but animals inferior to man were not deemed worthy of immortality. There the groves contained no birds, the meadows no oxen, the waters no fish. The only living things upon this planet, besides its human inhabitants, were plants; but these did not produce flowers and fruit, but simply foliage, for they also were immortal, and neither died nor propagated. The foliage of these plants was the food of the inhabitants, and its taste was insipid, and conveyed no pleasure to the eater, so that there was no temptation to gluttony. There were, in fact, no temptations to commit any sin in this planet, and the inhabitants had never sinned; so that the sentence of death, and of toil, mental and bodily, had never been passed upon them. There was no possibility of any accident occurring to them to produce pain and anxiety, so that they moved about without taking the least care of falling, and dreaded nothing. Pain and dread are the penalty of sin, and as they had never sinned they were free from these evils. Their faces had an aspect of perfect serenity, like the face of a corpse; for their souls were never agitated by passions; and as their condition could not possibly be improved, their minds had no aim; no troublesome speculation ever perplexed their reason, and no desire ever tormented their hearts. They knew nothing of the pleasures of love, the triumphs of success, the excitement of ambition, the glow of generosity, the tenderness of sympathy, the self-respect which accompanies fortitude under suffering, or the glory of vanquishing a difficulty. Their life was one of profound peace, without pain, fear, sympathy, or object; for what object could they possibly wish to attain? What possible circumstance could improve their condition? If they increased in knowledge from year to year its growth was spontaneous, and involved no trouble of theirs, since they were free from the penalty of toil. They knew none of the fatigues of study, and had therefore none of the corresponding delights of discovery. They wore no clothing, since that would have involved the labour of manufacture; and they never slept, for their bodies and minds were never weary; nor did they ever laugh or make merry, for there was nothing to laugh or make merry about. Thus they spent a peaceful immortality, moving like so many living sphinxes amongst each

other, with no new ideas to communicate, no mutual wants to supply, no mutual cares to participate, no mutual troubles to console. They had not even a language or the power of speech, since that would have been unnecessary. Their happiness consisted in perfect repose, in perfect freedom from care and toil, and in the absence of all that gives a zest to life in this wicked world of ours.

I soon got tired of the place, and one day fell into a doze. I was aroused most agreeably by the merry voices of some young people at a croquet party, mingled with the distant sounds of a blacksmith's hammer, and the song of a crew of sailors weighing anchor. These sounds cheered me, and I got up. Glad to find myself upon mother earth again, I wandered forth. Presently, I joined a little knot of people who were carrying to the hospital a poor bricklayer who had fallen from a scaffold and broken his leg. Their faces were all expressive of sympathy; and, amidst the groans of the sufferer, he now and then betrayed an emotion of gratitude. There was pain in this scene, but some of the highest feelings of humanity were brought into play in it; and, as I aided those who supported the sufferer, a new and god-like feeling of sympathy filled my heart, such as no one had ever experienced in the planet of immortality. The scene changed, and I found myself walking in a lovely garden amongst roses and honeysuckle, with a fair girl whom I loved, and laying plans with her for the future, full of hope. This, too, was a sweet sensation never experienced by the immortals. Again, the scene changed, and I was riding on a broomstick—like Henry IV., of France, when the astonished ambassador, Sully, paid him a visit—with my little ones romping and rollicking about me; and, again, I experienced a delightful sensation unknown to the immortals. Lastly, I found myself leaning over the corpse of my beloved wife, and gazing upon its serene countenance. It reminded me of those in the planet of immortality; and as I was considering the possibility of spiritual happiness in a future state, the loss of identity due to the absence of all the pleasures of sense and the exciting emotions of this life, and asking myself whether even the eternal sleep of death would not be preferable to such an eternal life as that which I had witnessed in the aforesaid planet, I awoke in reality, and behold it was a dream!

I leave to yourself to point the moral of this tale. Is not our own

planet far more wisely ordered, with its successive generations of living things, its infinite beauty and variety, its stimulating toils and struggles, and all its exquisite emotions, than the monotonous planet of immortality? Are not death and toil, on the whole, rather a blessing than a curse; and do they not add greatly to the sum total of happiness? Then, if so, let us strive to disrobe death of those cowardly and selfish terrors with which a gloomy religion has invested it. Let us meet it bravely when our time comes, remembering that we die but to make way for others, who in their turn will enjoy the blessings of life; and, for what is to follow, let us commit ourselves resignedly and fearlessly into the hands of the Author of all good.

Life has its pains as well as its pleasures; but if we meet its pains manfully we are rewarded by our own self-respect. Moreover, take away its pains and anxieties, and what becomes of the incentive to many a noble deed?

Man has a moral nature adapted to his condition here, and moral feelings which can be pleurably cultivated and enlarged by use, precisely as his muscles can. But without death, pain, and trouble, some of the highest of these feelings would become flabby and wither up, for they would have no field for exercise. Away with the cowardice or the selfishness which would allow this to be. Let us fight bravely the battle of life, with "faith, hope, and charity" for our motto:—Faith in the goodness of the unknown God; hope in every trouble; and charity for our fellow man.

All revealed religions involve the belief in fables which are incomprehensible, and in miracles which rest on insufficient evidence, or on evidence which at this distance of time it is impossible to investigate. They all demand the exercise of blind faith on the part of their votaries; and faith is in all such religions the cardinal virtue. But in the common affairs of life, faith in matters which rest on insufficient evidence, and which are opposed to universal experience, would lead to all sorts of miserable failures, and the faithful would be only worthy of a lunatic asylum. Suppose a farmer were to believe, on insufficient evidence, and contrary to universal experience, that his fields, if uncultivated and unsown, would nevertheless produce fine crops of wheat, and were to act on this belief, would he not be deemed a madman? Blind faith is a very unsafe guide in

the common affairs of life, why then should it be made a cardinal virtue in matters of religion? Prayers addressed to the Deity are thought in many religions to be productive of practical results, but facts do not support this notion, and it is generally found that Providence helps those who help themselves. In a railway accident, those who are unhurt are often ready to thank Providence for their *miraculous* escape, but why should this kind Providence have allowed the others to suffer? Humility is a virtue strongly enforced by some religious sects, but it is found in practice that self-reliance is an essential element in the success of all arduous and noble undertakings. The passive endurance of wrong is unnatural and unsafe, and the dread of the resentment of those against whom we offend is a wholesome restraint upon aggressive tendencies. Revealed religions are based on infatuation, and the moral duties which they enforce are often such as would lead us to the workhouse or the lunatic asylum.

But the world we live in is a very practical one; for, happily, it *must* be so, or we should all be starved and the race become extinct; and, in general, the practical results of religious creeds are not severely felt. The Englishman may drink grog, the German smoke tobacco, the Hungarian eat arsenic, and the Turk chew opium, to a moderate extent, without interrupting the main practical business of life; and so it is with religious creeds; a heavy penalty is not enforced for small offences; but when a vice is carried to excess, or an error indulged in to great lengths, much mischief will be done. Beware, then, of acquiring any bad habit, lest it should grow upon you; and beware of the first intoxicating draughts from the fountain of error.

You may ask me, perhaps, how it is that all mankind seems to have had, in all ages, some notion of a God, and some form of religious worship? The fact seems to be that the lowest orders of savages have no such notion; whilst the most learned philosophers of the highest race place the Deity at an infinite and incomprehensible distance, and decline to believe in any human attributes with which faith may invest him. It is the highest effort of reason to remain in ignorance of what we cannot understand; and not to allow our imagination to lead us into error. That the multitude, in all ages, should have been thus led away, and have become the dupes of im-

postors is not difficult to understand ; for even well-informed people of our own time are superstitious in matters which have no reference to religion. The not liking to sit down thirteen at table is an instance of this.

In Volney's lectures on history, he says :—

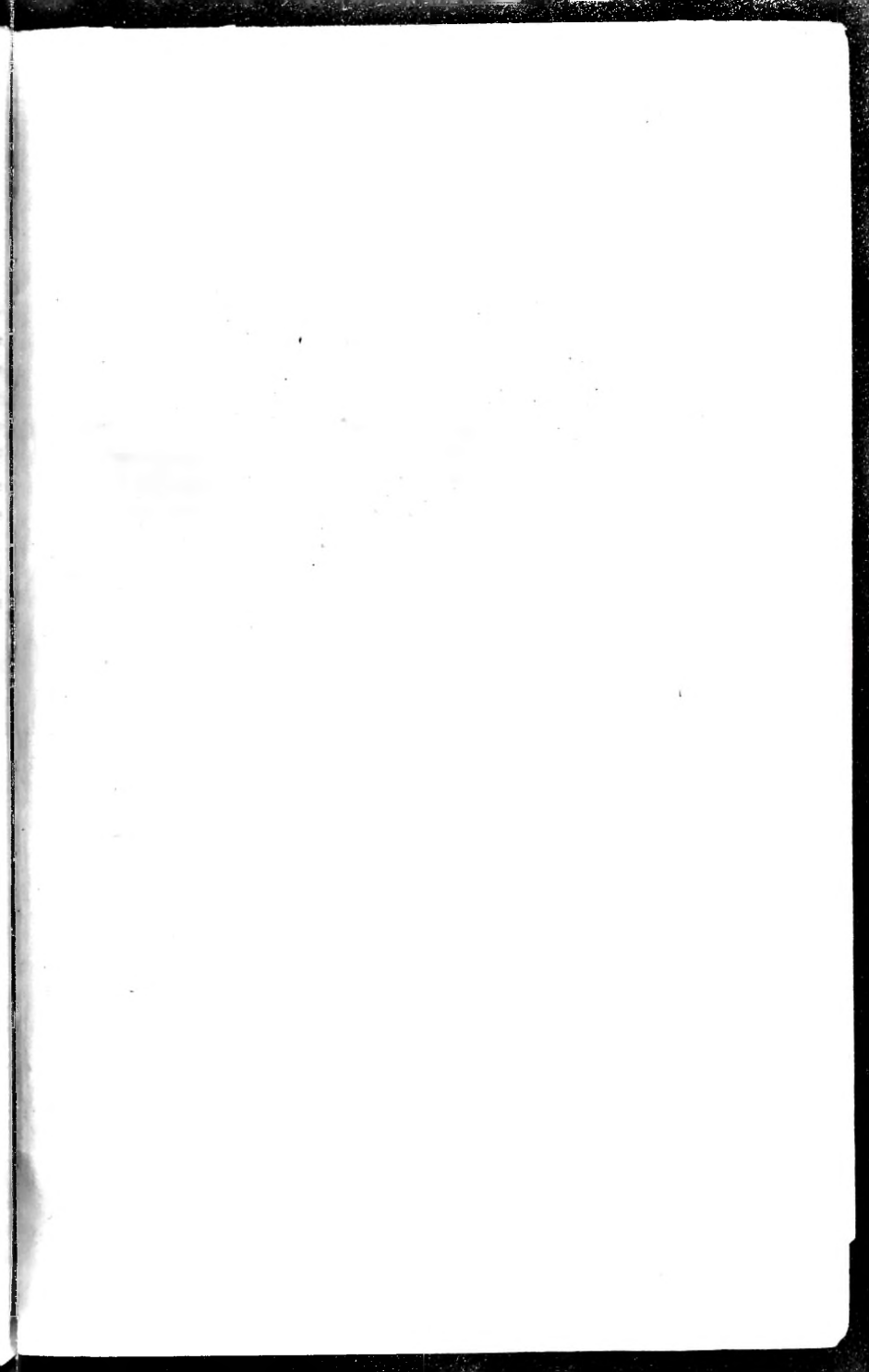
“ Faith is the violent fever of an energetic constitution, which acquires by example a contagious intensity, and ends by exciting the convulsions of enthusiasm and the phrenzy of fanaticism. Such are the periods of the progress of this malady of the understanding that an opinion being once admitted, from indolence or neglect the mind becomes attached to it, and maintains it to be just from habit ; it is defended from obstinacy and self-love ; and, soon passing from the defence to the attack, the believer, influenced by that self-esteem called *pride*, and that desire of domination which seeks in the exercise of power the unlimited gratification of every passion, proceeds to impose his *creed* upon others.”

If the highest race of mankind is worthy of immortality, so is the lowest, or where are we to draw the line ? And what is to become of the idiot and the imbecile ; or the child that is stifled in its birth ? The Aztec is but one remove above the ape ; and the poor Indian believes that in future hunting-fields his faithful dog shall bear him company.

“ Lo, the poor Indian ! whose untutored mind
Sees God in clouds, or hears him in the wind ;
His soul proud science never taught to stray
Far as the solar walk, or Milky Way ;
Yet simple Nature to his hope hath given,
Beyond the cloud-topt hill, an humble heaven.
Some safer world in depth of woods embraced,
Some happier island in the watery waste,
Where slaves once more their native land behold,
No fiends torment, no Christians thirst for gold.
To BE contents his natural desire,
He asks no angel's wing, no seraph's fire ;
But thinks, admitted to that equal sky,
His faithful dog shall bear him company.”

“Hope humbly then ; with trembling pinions soar ;
Wait the great teacher Death ; and God adore.
What future bliss he gives not thee to know,
But gives that Hope to be thy blessing now.”—POPE.

You and I had a friend last year, whom I followed to the grave at the age of eighty-two. He was sensible to the last ; and during the last few weeks of his life I had many conversations with him on the subject of religious creeds, and the great mystery of the future. Our opinions were entirely in accordance on these points ; and he never wavered. He faced death like one of the old Stoic philosophers ; and departed as a brave man should. In his death, as in his life, he bore testimony to the practical superiority of ignorance over error. He was brave, honest, truthful, charitable, affectionate, and a gentleman. May you, my son, be all this ; and may you be kept from the fatal fountain of error. I now conclude my last letter to you on the subject of religion, in this earnest hope.



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