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1840/1850  
FRAZER PRIZE ESSAYS

ON

# AGNOSTICISM

*FROM A MORAL AND SPIRITUAL POINT  
OF VIEW*

BY

VERITAS VINCIT

AND

BETA

GEORGE ROBERTSON & COMPANY  
SYDNEY AND MELBOURNE

1858

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VERITAS VINCIT

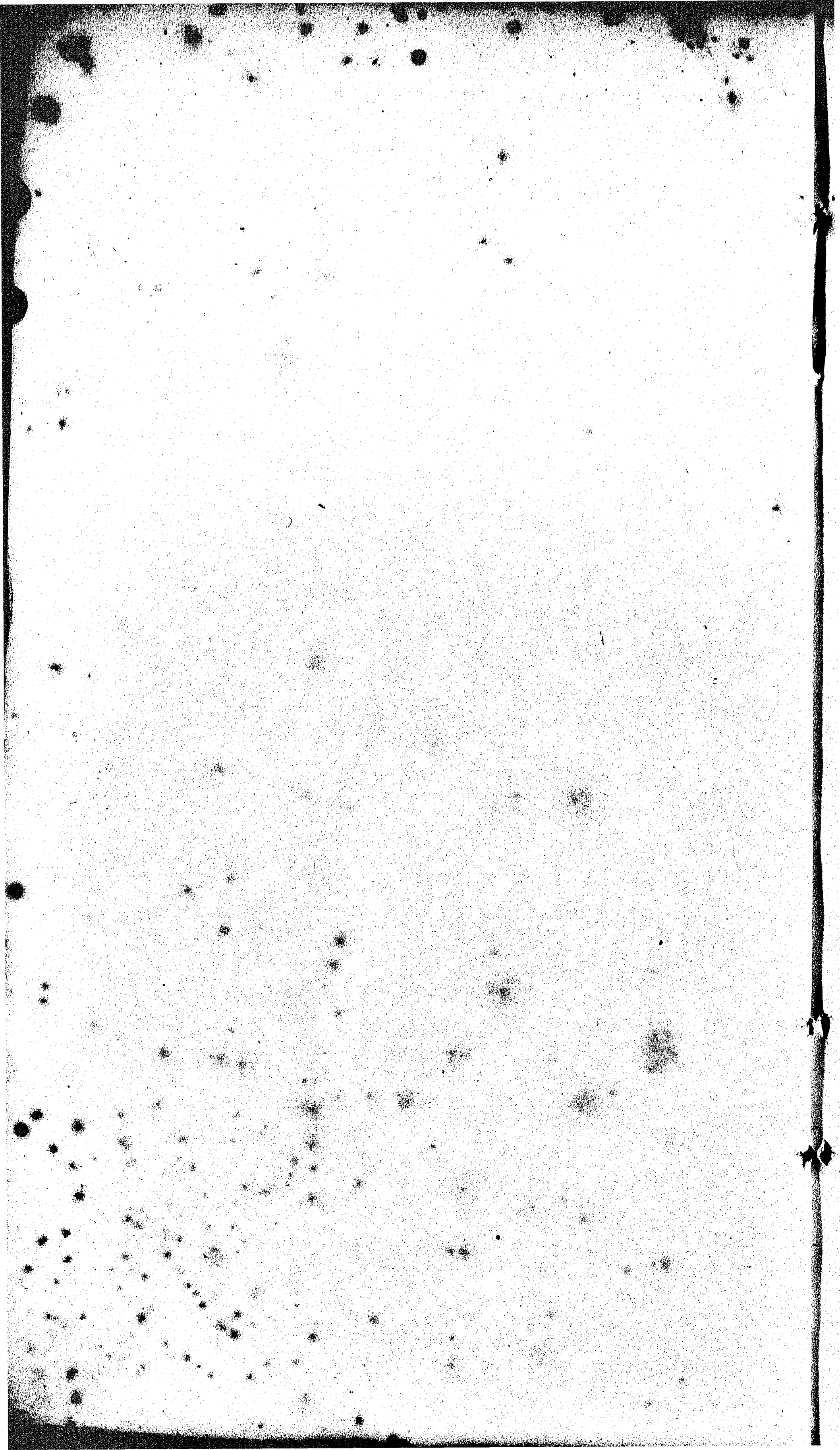
AND

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SYDNEY AND MELBOURNE

1888





## P R E F A C E .

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THE late Hon. John Frazer, M.L.C., of Quiraing, Woollahra, bequeathed the sum of £2,000 to found an Annual Prize of £100 for an essay "in Defence of the Christian Faith." The judges named in Mr. Frazer's will are the Professor of Classics in the University of Sydney, the Principal of St. Andrew's College, and the minister of Palmer-street Presbyterian Church. As the present Professor of Classics felt unable to accept the position, the Primate of Australia, at the request of the trustees of the estate, kindly agreed to act as assessor in the first adjudication of the prize.

It was agreed, both by the judges and the trustees, that the subject of the first competition should be: "Agnosticism, considered from a moral and spiritual point of view." Accordingly, in the month of August, 1885, this was advertised in the chief newspapers of the Australian colonies as the subject of the essay for 1886; and the same advertisement stated that the prize "was open for competition to all residents in, or natives of, Australia and Tasmania," and that the essays must be forwarded on or before the 30th of June, 1886.

In response to this invitation, essays were sent in from most of the Australian colonies, amounting in all to twenty. As many of these were of considerable length, and as all the judges had their own official duties to attend to, some time necessarily elapsed before they could arrive at a decision. After a careful

## PREFACE.

examination of all the essays sent in, the judges were unanimously of opinion that the prize should be awarded to the two essays contained in this volume.

The following is a copy of the decision of the judges :—

SYDNEY, 21st December, 1886.

TO THE TRUSTEES OF THE

LATE HONORABLE JOHN FRAZER, M.L.C.

GENTLEMEN,—

The minister of Palmer-street Presbyterian Church, and the Principal of St. Andrew's College, University of Sydney (the judges named in the will of the late Hon. John Frazer), and the Bishop of Sydney (requested to act as assessor by the trustees of that will) having examined twenty essays on "Agnosticism, considered from a moral and spiritual point of view," submitted to them in competition for the Frazer Prize of 1886, are unanimously of opinion that the two best essays were the one whose motto is "Beta" and the other with the motto "Veritas Vincit."

Looking at these essays from various points of view, it was difficult to decide to which a preference was due. Accordingly they recommend to the trustees that the prize be equally divided between the authors of these two essays.

Having opened the sealed letter bearing the motto "Beta," they found the name of the author to be—REV. JAMES MILNE, BEGA, N.S.W.; and that of "Veritas Vincit" REV. H. T. BURGESS, GOODWOOD, SOUTH AUSTRALIA.

(Signed)

JOHN KINROSS, D.D.,

Coll. S. And., Pres.,

J. FAULDS HENDERSON,

Minister of Palmer-st. Pres. Church,

} JUDGES.

ALFRED SYDNEY, ASSESSOR.



# *AGNOSTICISM*

FROM

A MORAL AND SPIRITUAL POINT OF VIEW

BY

HENRY T. BURGESS

"For that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the Lord . . . Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices. For the turning away of the simple shall slay them, and the prosperity of fools shall destroy them."—PROV. i. 29, 31, 32.

"Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."—JNO. viii. 32.



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# *AGNOSTICISM*

BY

JAMES MILNE





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6/12/87.

# AGNOSTICISM

FROM A MORAL AND SPIRITUAL POINT OF VIEW.

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## Part First.

### INTRODUCTORY.

#### 1. THE FIELD OF SPECULATION.

SPECULATIONS concerning the unknown are probably as old as the history of human thought. They are embodied in what is believed to be the most ancient literature in the world. It could not be otherwise ; for the first thinker must have found himself confronted by problems that were at the same time extremely fascinating and exceedingly difficult of solution. The evidence of his senses could only guide him a little way, and beyond the limit of the territory to which they conducted him a vast unexplored region dimly revealed itself on every side. His straining vision faintly discerned what appeared to be fitful gleams of light, and his listening ear seemed to catch faint sounds as of voices calling him onward. There was within him a strong responsive impulse, and he looked eagerly around for some sufficient guide by whose aid he might explore the intricate yet attractive labyrinth.

Something of the same kind has been the frequent experience of the thoughtful ever since. Every reflective person is conscious that he is surrounded by mystery. There are a few facts of

which he is positively certain, but these are few indeed when compared with the variety and extent of his far-reaching inquiries. If he studies himself he raises questions that are not easy to answer. He is conscious of powers and faculties for the possession of which he cannot account, yearnings of which he does not know the origin, and affinities that at most he but vaguely comprehends. How he came to be what he is baffles his analysis, and the stirrings of hope and fear within him are equally inscrutable. He is consciously endowed with what are designated intellectual and moral attributes, such as memory, reason, conscience, will, and emotion, which ally him with his environment, and suggest a promise of the future; but the character, mutual relations, and functions of these important endowments are involved in no little obscurity. His very personality is a mystery.

Unaided vision reveals to us something of the material universe in which we live, and scientific investigation a good deal more. The universe has yielded up some of its secrets to its patient watchers, but there are many more that it jealously retains. A certain amount of order and adaptation is readily discernible. Laws such as that of gravitation are found to prevail. Method and progress from stage to stage in regular succession are perceived. Nature has its affinities and repulsions, its fixed principles and its self-adjustments. There are mighty forces and delicate compensations. Tokens of a definite plan are everywhere. As the observer surveys the wonders of the universe, a bewildering sense of its vastness and his own littleness and ignorance is apt to steal over him. There it is, but how came it into being? Whence did it derive its order? What or who stamped upon it its inflexible laws? How came the worlds by the regulations which guide their courses and govern their history, and what causes the interspaces to throb with pulsations of irresistible power?

Yet another and a still more solemn branch of inquiry presses upon men whose mental capabilities have received any considerable cultivation, and whose moral sense is really sensitive. There are individuals, and even races, of the human family that have no concern beyond those of their physical necessities. Their existence is a struggle so severe that everything else has been crushed by it, and their one aim is to obtain daily supplies for their bodily wants. The commonest and grossest appetites dominate their whole condition, and the one thing that rules their conduct is the instinct of prolonging life which pervades all animated nature. This state, however, is always held to be proof of degradation and debasement. Wherever the intellectual and moral faculties have been developed at all, it is found that, in some form or other, they are drawn out after the supernatural. Among the beliefs which are so general as to be substantially universal, and so tenacious of their existence as to be practically ineradicable, are the immateriality of the soul, existence after death, and a Supreme Power that governs all things. They have existed under an infinite variety of forms, and taken on an endless diversity of manifestations. An endless series of transmigrations in one case, and eternal placidity in another; an infinite multiplication of deities in this system, and a solitary, self-absorbed, passionless, and inactive Supreme Being in that, have held wide and long-enduring allegiance. Underlying and, as it were, uniting these extremes may be seen universal faith in the supernatural. Speculative excursions into this realm of inquiry have been innumerable. The mind of man will not be deterred from incessant inquiry. There is a part of his nature that stretches out after the unseen and the unknown. With a longing that often rises to passionate intensity, he craves assurance as to his future, and to acquaint himself with the Being from whom he feels that he came, and to whom he believes he must return.



## 2. REVELATION AND ITS OPPONENTS.

The religion of the Bible offers itself as a clue through this labyrinth. If in some particulars it fails to gratify his curiosity, it nevertheless satisfies the craving of the heart. With the voice of authority it tells him all that it is necessary for him to know. It informs him that he is not a chance product of causes working by accident, but that he is the offspring of a Divine Creator ; that his complex nature, with its wonderful possibilities, has been framed by infinite skill, so as to afford him the means of personal advancement and abundant happiness ; that his opportunities are arranged and his life cared for by a beneficent overruling power ; that his responsibility is constant and serious, and that for right-doing he shall have a certain recompense. At the same time it assures him that his Creator is also the Creator of all things ; that all the worlds are made and sustained by the God that made and sustains him ; that the laws by which they are governed are the expression of His will, and that the forces which are constantly in operation are the manifestations of His power. Still further, while it discovers to him the reality and greatness of his spiritual nature, it opens the most glorious prospect before that nature which the human mind has ever contemplated. He is assured that his present existence is but the initial stage of an endless life. Life and immortality are pronounced in the most solemn manner to be his heritage. God is made known to him with majesty and glory transcending all other representations, and yet as coming nearer to him than any other external influence. His Creator is not only his Sovereign, but his Father and Friend as well ; and while the revelation fills the believer with devout awe and profound adoration, it inspires him with implicit confidence, and thrills him with affectionate gratitude.

The Christian theist who believes the record in the Bible to

be true finds that he is furnished with an answer to the questions that arise in his mind, and that the principles he has embraced co-ordinate themselves with his own experiences. In the declarations and promises he has accepted there is rest for his perturbed and anxious spirit, and a response to his deepest needs. Not only are his intelligent convictions laid hold upon so that he possesses the inward peace of quiet assurance; his horizon is widened, his anticipations raised, and his whole nature strengthened, elevated, and improved.

The belief which affords so much that may be considered worth having is to be briefly defined as an assent to that which is credible as credible. Against this basis of faith and morals the attacks of sceptical philosophy have been varied and incessant. There is little that is absolutely new in the main principles of agnosticism. Its chief features are to be found in a declaration of Pliny that is hoary with the dust of eighteen centuries:—"All religion is the offspring of necessity, weakness, and fear. What God is, if in truth He be anything distinct from the world, *it is beyond the compass of man's understanding to know.*" An agnostic is said to be one who denies the certainty of anything not evident to the senses, or which does not rest upon mathematical demonstration. If this definition is not strictly accurate it is sufficiently correct for that which chiefly takes refuge in negations and eludes exactitude of statement. The central principle of agnosticism is that it dismisses subjects of religious faith as things which cannot be known. Because they are not evident to the senses, and are incapable of proof by mathematical demonstration, therefore, in the words of Pliny, they are beyond the compass of man's understanding to know.

The subtlety of this mode of attack is evident. It differs very widely from the coarse assaults of some other schools of infidelity which have been repelled again and again. Its assertion that we do not know and cannot know the things about which we

are concerned, is calculated to be welcomed as a positive relief by a certain class of inquirers. Whether such a belief can be permanent is another matter, but a perplexed student who has been weighing evidence and feeling that more than life itself depends on his reaching the right conclusion may, for the time, be glad of such an excuse for abandoning his search for truth. There is a glaring inconsistency in the bold statement that we cannot know, for to say that we know we cannot know is itself a claim for absolute knowledge of a certain kind. This, however, is only on a par with the elusive character which this school of philosophy presents and seems to cultivate. Intrenching itself in negations, it assumes a position which is difficult to overthrow by reason of the intangibleness that pervades the whole. It neither formulates a theory that can be disproved nor develops a system that will bear examination. It is destructive rather than constructive. Its evasiveness is its defence, for it is so shifty and slippery that it seems to escape from the grasp. An array of things unknowable is what it presents to the attention of mankind, and its direct result must be to lull the mind to sleep in contented ignorance. Most philosophical schemes stimulate the intelligence, and some of them do that to an unhealthy degree; but agnosticism operates by a more fatal method. It paralyzes but does not stab, and instead of goading to madness it reduces to imbecility.

### 3. GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF AGNOSTICISM.

Agnosticism teaches, according to its chief apostles, that not only God and the things of God are unknowable, but a wide range of other objects about which most of us ordinarily claim to know something, if not everything, must be set down in the same category. When the list is fairly drawn out it will probably be startling at first sight, but a little reflection tends to reassurance.



It is seen to be a necessity of the case for these things to be included, otherwise the central principle would instantly break down. Let it once be accepted as true that we do not know anything except by the evidence of our own senses or as the result of mathematical demonstration, and it will be found that the subjects of which we can affirm "we know" are few indeed, and the range of our knowledge is limited in an extraordinary degree. Even on such elementary subjects as the geography of our planet, the history of our empire, and the brief chronology of our Australian settlements, we shall have to acknowledge an amount of ignorance for which, without some such justification of it, we are hardly prepared. As to time and space we are told by Mr. Herbert Spencer in his "First Principles" that the immediate knowledge which we seem to have of them proves on examination to be "total ignorance." With regard to matter, he tells us that our supposition concerning it "leaves us nothing but a choice between opposite absurdities." He further says that "should we succeed in decomposing matter into those ultimate homogeneous units of which it is not improbably composed . . . the ultimate unit must remain absolutely unknown." What is true of matter is very likely to be true of motion, and we find him declaring that "Neither when considered in connection with space nor when considered in connection with matter do we find that motion is truly cognizable. All efforts to understand its essential nature do but bring us to alternative impossibilities of thought." Whatever else we know or know not, most of us think we know something of ourselves, but we are told that this is impossible. "The personality of which each is conscious and of which the existence is to each a fact beyond all others the most certain, is yet a thing which cannot be truly known at all : knowledge of it is forbidden by the very nature of thought." It is unnecessary to specify other provinces of the realm of nescience, the frontiers of which are thus shown to be so vast. If

those designated Time, Space, Matter, Motion, and Self are included, to say nothing whatever about the kingdom of heaven, the territory is so expansive that the domain of actual knowledge is reduced to an insignificant fraction. Mr. Spencer and his fellow-workers have dealt with it as Prince Ignatieff did with the Turkish Empire in the Treaty of San Stefano, which caused the Sultan to remark with bitterness, when he saw the map, that there was not enough left of his ancient possessions to make a farm !

There is, however, some encouragement to be derived from this survey, for it shows us at the same time the inconsistency of the statements that are made and to some extent what is meant by the term unknowable. Mr. Spencer says that knowledge of our own personality is forbidden "by the very nature of thought." Such an assertion can only be justified by the most positive knowledge, and such knowledge is claimed in the final clause of the sentence. No one can be sure what the nature of thought forbids, or what it does not forbid, without being very clearly and fully cognizant of that nature itself. To possess that cognizance is certainly to be thoroughly familiar with the laws and functions of mind, or, in other words, of self. Yet we are told that "the nature of thought" forbids our knowing anything about it ! With all due deference to the famous thinker, is not this reasoning in a vicious circle, and simply begging the question ?

It is not an easy matter, and yet is exceedingly important, to define accurately what agnosticism means by the terms it usually employs. Because of the elusiveness of the ideas and language it so much affects, many of its propositions seem to be mere word puzzles. Mr. Justice Stephen roughly but deservedly satirized this peculiarity when he said—"This intricate game, of which words are the counters, reminds me of Isaiah's description of the manufacture of

idols. Effort, force, and energy are to Mr. Spencer what the cypress, and the oak, and the ash were to the artificers described by the prophet. He works his words about this way and that; he accounts with part for ghosts and dreams, and the residue thereof he maketh a god, and saith, 'Aha, I am wise, I have seen the truth.' "

One of the chief of these puzzles occurs in connection with the ideas of known and unknown, knowable and unknowable. The ordinary student finds himself at a loss to understand the precise significance of the expressions. At times it seems as though the possession of knowledge means the being able to survey the subject on both sides, to scale its heights, to fathom its depths, measure its length, and gauge its thickness. At others it appears to imply what is partly included in the foregoing—ability to form a mental picture of the object, including its top, and sides, and under-surface. Now it is very clear that if this rule be adopted it shuts us up in a very narrow chamber. There are multitudes of things about which we think we know, and think further that our knowledge is very real, while in practice we find it, whatever it is, exceedingly useful. It is unpleasant, it is denied by our consciousness, it is opposed by our interests, to acknowledge that this supposed knowledge is a delusion and a sham. At the same time it is clear that even such knowledge as is described is only part-knowledge. Ability to grasp the dimensions, the constitution, and the functions of an object, if it has any, does not necessarily or even usually involve all that is to be known about it. Of a planet in the sky, whose orbit, weight, and velocity are known: or of a ship on the sea, whose architecture, cargo, motive power, passengers, crew, and destination are also known, there is yet more unknown. Who can define in the innumerable host of things, of which these are only suggestions, the limits of the known and the knowable? Is it to be said that because something remains unknown therefore nothing is known? If so, what



a hopeless bewilderment of chaos is around us. Yet again, the ability to form a mental picture of an object does not necessarily involve knowledge of that object, nor does inability to do that prove ignorance. It is easy to conjure up an image of the Sphinx or the Great Pyramid, to see in imagination its top and sides and under-surface ; but a great deal more than that is required before knowledge of either of those famous objects can be rightly claimed. On the other hand, the same mental exploit may be performed where there is sheer ignorance. A good many have performed it, and gravely published the result ; but they have not thereby proved their knowledge, or even the existence, of the kraken or the great sea-serpent. The "mental picture" of these monsters has not indicated the fact of knowledge at all.

We are forced to the conclusion that cognition does not depend on either ability to make such a comprehensive and exhaustive survey, or the development of a mental photograph. Without either of these, it may be both real and trustworthy so far as it goes. We have other avenues to the mind than the evidence of the senses, and other sources of information than mathematical demonstration. It is not necessary to walk round the subject of consideration that we may predicate concerning it, "We know." Knowledge, though only partial, may nevertheless be true. It may be sufficient for the practical purposes of life without being absolutely complete.

Confusion is very apt to result from the careless use of the terms conceivable, understandable, and knowable. Many a lad who carries a cheap watch in his pocket knows that it keeps fairly accurate time, the result of the adjustment of its mechanism ; but he does not in the least understand the process, and is wholly at a loss to conceive that it is only one of a thousand produced in a day at the manufactory where it was made. We cannot conceive the distance of star from star in the celestial spaces, nor can we understand how it is that they retain

their places and the regularity of their movements age after age ; yet we are not by any means ignorant of these things. The immensities of space and the extent of duration are inconceivable, and comprehension thereof impossible ; but knowledge that is too valuable to be abandoned at the bidding of philosophy still exists. Of time and space, of matter and motion, of self and, it must be added, of God, we do know something, though not the whole. They have attributes so vast as to be inconceivable, but at least we know of those attributes ; there are some things about them which we willingly and even gladly confess transcends our understanding, but we cannot on that account admit our total ignorance. "We know in part," and, though only part-knowledge, what we have is both real and trustworthy. It is constantly subjected to the test of experience with satisfactory results, and in practice it guides our lives.

Agnostics are not so unkind to us, or so untrue to facts, as to deny the existence of degrees of knowledge ; but even in their marking off of those degrees they are arbitrary and unreliable. They say that "the smallest conceivable degree of knowledge implies at least two things between which some community is recognized ;" and again, that "an object is said to be little known when it is alien to objects of which we have had experience, and it is said to be well known when there is great community of attributes between it and the objects of which we have had experience." Neither of these postulates will bear investigation. The first shuts us out from all knowledge of things which are unique in themselves. Hence nothing can be known unless there is a pre-existing standard of comparison, and this argument, when pushed to the last analysis, lands us in a self-contradiction. If the second object could not be known, even in "the smallest conceivable degree," except by comparison with the first, then the first must have had something antecedent, which is nonsense. There could never have been a first,

and therefore never a second ; and so on in an endless series of negations. As to the other canon by which degrees of knowledge are graduated, it is altogether misleading. We may learn about an object more or less readily because of its correspondence with, or divergence from, other objects of which we have had experience ; but that is another matter. A marine engineer will more readily understand how to work a railway locomotive than one who has never seen a steam engine at all ; but if there were only one such engine in the world, that would not prevent its driver from knowing it as thoroughly as he knows it now. We do, in fact, know things that are isolated and incomparable as well as others of which there are numerous examples and an indefinite series.

#### 4. ITS MORAL CONSEQUENCES.

Subtleties of the kind just referred to show the straits into which philosophers are led by their repudiation of a personal God. Following closely upon the doctrine that such a Being must be unknown and unknowable comes of necessity another—that the universe must be placed in the same category. Time, space, matter, motion, mind, and self have to be included, and the end is universal nescience. It is evident at a glance that the moral and spiritual aspects of this controversy are both numerous and grave. Agnosticism substitutes for a personal God “an Infinite and Eternal Energy from which all things proceed.” Its aim is to make an Ultimate but Unknowable Reality all in all, and therefore it reduces man and nature to mere manifestations and a kind of All-Nothingness. It differs from positivism inasmuch as the latter, to make man all in all, makes God a dream, a myth, a fiction. There are points of contact between the two, but there are also gulfs of separation which cannot be bridged and which it is not our business to



explore. Christianity stands in direct opposition to both. To the agnostic idea of a stream of energy of which men and all other things are but shows and appearances, and the positivist deification of humanity, it opposes the doctrine of a living and personal God, who is before all things, by whom all things consist, and in whom we live, and move, and have our being.

Dispensing with a personal God, agnosticism precludes the possibility of any revelation of the Divine will, and, indeed, the exercise of any such function, but Christianity affirms that God has not only exercised but expressed His will. It discerns the expression of this will in the order of the universe, the arrangement of material things, the constitution of society, the government of the world, and a volume which He has inspired. It holds the Bible to be the revelation God has made of Himself, His character and purposes, an historical record of His dealings with the human race, a compendium of laws for its guidance, with warnings against their neglect, and encouragement of all kinds to the obedient. While agnosticism cannot admit that there was anything superhuman in the character, words, or actions of the central figure in human history, Christianity adoringly recognizes in the Christ "God manifested in the flesh," "in whom dwelt all the fulness of the Godhead bodily," humanity's pattern and saviour as well. Taking away the authority of supreme law by denying that it issued from a Supreme Being, agnosticism relaxes the obligations to moral conduct which bind society together and make for its welfare, but Christianity enforces these obligations in the most solemn and impressive manner, declaring that the soul that sinneth it shall die. Personal immortality on the one hand is represented as a mere delusion, and that it will only consist in the enduring effect of the work done or example shown, but on the other it is declared that death neither terminates consciousness nor effaces identity, but that there is endless life to come, the nature of which depends on righteousness or unrighteousness

now. The one represents this life as everything and after it a blank, the other as comparatively nothing except as preparation for that which is to be. In the one case there is behind and before this short time of active existence only vacancy, but the other ascribes our origin to divine parentage, and illuminates the future with the brightness of eternal glory. All that can be said by agnostic teachers concerning the stirrings of desire for a better life is that they come from a power within us that makes for righteousness ; but Christianity emboldens us to believe that conscience has divine affinities, that it hears the voice of God, and feels the guidance of His hand.

Mr. Spencer has said that Christians erroneously assume "that the choice is between personality and something lower than personality, whereas the choice is between personality and something higher." Lower and higher are terms of comparison which must vary according to the standpoint of the observer, but the series of contrasts that has just been presented sufficiently shows that in all that constitutes real elevation in humanity itself, its origin, Author, relations, progress, and end, the agnostic view sinks immeasurably beneath that of the devout believer in a living God, an inspired Bible, the responsibility of man to his Maker, and the hope of eternal life. Add to this the Christian doctrines that God is love, that in His benevolence He daily gives us life, and food, and all things ; that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, and that He is very near to everyone of us, caring for us and helping us with patient goodness, and human dignity is seen to be augmented, while the most powerful stimulus to rectitude of conduct is supplied. Yet further, this conception appeals to the noblest and most influential of our faculties ; for it arouses and directs the affections, which in their turn control the will. Aspirations are thus developed after a higher life, and the pursuit of it rendered more eager. Hence the belief in a living God of infinite power and purity and love,

who has bound humanity to Himself by the strongest bonds, supplies a moral and spiritual force to raise mankind in all that constitutes real excellence of which agnosticism is totally destitute.

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FOUR PRINCIPAL SUBJECTS have been alluded to. They are the agnostic and Christian teaching respectively concerning (1) the Deity, (2) the Universe, (3) the Bible, and (4) Humanity. Though of necessity the topics are somewhat interlaced, it will be best to deal with them separately as far as possible, and this will be done in the following pages.



## Part Second.

### AGNOSTICISM AND THEOLOGY.

#### 1. AGNOSTICISM CRITICISED BY OTHER UNBELIEVERS.

How came the idea of God into the mind of man? Mr. Spencer, in his famous paper entitled "Religion: a Retrospect and Prospect," published in the *Nineteenth Century*, ascribed it to an evolutionary process, and its origin to dreams. Out of these dreams came ghosts, and so, step by step, in the course of social evolution, and the evolution of intelligence accompanying it, there were generated both the ideas and sentiments which we distinguish as religion; and through a process of causation clearly traceable, they traversed those stages which have brought them among civilized races to their present form! The process is not supposed to be yet completed, but it has reached a stage at which the "ultimate cause" is ascertained to be divested of all such human attributes as emotion, will, and intelligence. It is now recognized as "an Infinite and Eternal Energy from which all things proceed," but the end is not yet arrived at. "The conception which has been enlarging from the beginning must go on enlarging until by disappearance of its limits it becomes a consciousness which transcends the form of distinct thought, though it for ever remains in consciousness." What it will be when this transcendental operation is completed seems hopeless to inquire, for already the idea of Deity as thus presented is the mere shadow of a shade.

Out of delusion has grown reality, fact has been evolved from fiction! This is what we are seriously expected to accept as a

leading truth of the agnostic gospel. The conception of a Deity is formed by the dropping of some human attributes, with which he was formerly invested, and the transfiguration of others. Though the primitive belief was false, the derived beliefs, derived and purified by successive generations, are true. The answer given to this objection, which not only looks, but is, fatal to the argument, is that at the outset a germ of truth was contained in the primitive conception—the truth, namely, that the power which manifests itself in consciousness is but a differently-conditioned form of the power which manifests itself beyond consciousness. If there is any force in the reply it will be equally available on the theistic side of the argument. With equal appropriateness it may be urged that the crude and anthropomorphic conceptions of God which prevailed in the early ages of the world, and which still prevail in some parts of it, contain a germ of truth, and the development of the idea of a living and personal God is the result of more perfect acquaintance with Him. All that agnosticism can tell us is that there is a power manifested throughout the material universe which is the cause of all external phenomena, and that this is the same power which wells up in ourselves in the form of consciousness. It discerns that behind every group of phenomenal manifestations there is a *nexus*, which always remains a fixed reality among appearances that are variable, but is for ever inaccessible to consciousness. In characters which seem to indicate some degree of submission, if not of reverence, it styles this *nexus* the unknowable, or the ultimate reality which must for ever be unknown.

The scathing criticism by Mr. Frederick Harrison of the agnostic creed as thus presented is familiar to most readers of current literature. He takes exception to the phrase “absolute certainty” by which it is introduced, and remarks that “practical belief” would be more legitimate, and equally satisfactory. “Why should there be *an* energy?” he asks; for the

unknowable may easily consist of more than one. To assert that there is one uniform energy in operation throughout the universe is to claim to know something, and a good deal, about the unknown. It is implied for instance, that it must be homogeneous and identical everywhere, and these are two most important attributes to predicate of what is beyond cognition. Having thus exposed the fundamental error of his antagonist's formula, Mr. Harrison demonstrates with acute logic the utter worthlessness of Mr. Spencer's creed as a basis for religion, and tears it to pieces in a kind of triumphant irony.

Mr. Justice Stephen, in a still later issue of the same periodical, deals still more roughly with the agnostic theory as propounded in the first of this remarkable series of articles. He styles Mr. Spencer's employment of the terms energy, force, and effort as an unmeaning playing with words. "Energy is a conjectural metaphor, a metaphor upon a metaphor, a something which possibly may be the meeting point of two different things, of one of which (force) we know only that it is unlike the other (effort), whilst of effort we know hardly anything, because each man's experience of it is confined to his own internal consciousness, so that he can neither compare it with other things nor with the experience of other people." This playing with words is satirized in a scorching sentence that has already been quoted, but the exposure does not end there. With pitiless logic the learned judge submits Mr. Spencer's celebrated formula to a close analysis which leaves it without a shred of real significance. Energy is shown to be only a symbol to indicate a sort of guess that perhaps there is something in nature to which functions, limits, and conditions cannot correctly be assigned, but which corresponds to the sense of muscular effort that every man perceives in himself. To say that we are in the presence of that energy is to use language that is absolutely without meaning. It can neither see nor hear us;



and we can neither see nor hear it. How, then, can we attach any meaning to the word? Even if we could it would not matter one way or another. Either to be in its presence or out of its presence would be of no sort of consequence. The disappearance of such an energy or its re-appearance, its solitary existence or its duplication, would not affect us in any way. The conclusion is indeed attenuated to such a degree of abstractness that it has no meaning at all. Such is the verdict of Mr. Justice Stephen. In his own words, "it is like a gigantic soap-bubble, not burst, but blown thinner and thinner till it has become absolutely imperceptible."

The examination of the agnostic creed concerning God by these able reasoners is all the more valuable because both of them belong to anti-Christian schools of thought. Neither of them took up the cudgels on behalf of the orthodox theology, or designed to lend it a helping hand. Mr. Harrison's purpose was to show that belief in the unknowable was utterly worthless as a basis of religion, a source of comfort, or a guide to conduct. On the ruins of the edifice he sought to overthrow he designed to plant the flag of positivism, and, after clearing away the *debris*, to erect a temple for the worship of humanity. Mr. Stephen, with impartial hostility to both the agnostic and the positivist, and not a little contempt as well, proposed to complete the work of demolishing the first and then to make a clean sweep of the other, leaving the field absolutely bare, without either temple or altar, law-giver or laws, worshippers or worshipped. The scene reminds one of incidents that are recorded in Jewish history when the invaders turned their swords against each other and their armies melted away.

It is, however, too soon to raise the song of victory. Error dies hard. Mr. Spencer, in replying to the assaults of his antagonists, was forced into the effort to show that agnosticism, even if universally accepted, would not involve the destruction

of all that is valuable in religion. On this point he made the following important statement:—"The gradual replacement of a power allied to humanity in certain traits, by a power which we cannot say is thus allied, leaves unchanged certain of the sentiments comprehended under the term religion." This is one of the critical statements to be found in his writings which deserve and demand the closest scrutiny. In the first place it presents us with the object of his expectation. The God of Christians and all other theists is to be done away with, but not by a simple process of destruction, for there is to be the complex work of replacement. All orthodox believers regard the God whom they trust and worship as not only a power but a being, "allied to humanity in certain traits," such as volition, intelligence, and emotion. This belief of theirs is to be eradicated, its object dethroned from the supreme position in their thoughts and affections, and there is to be only a partial substitute. Such as it is, the substitute is to be "a power which we cannot say is thus allied" to humanity, and which, therefore, cannot take the same place. It will have no will to utter, no counsel to give, no love to kindle. We may cringe before it in superstitious terror, but we cannot look up into its face with affectionate confidence. We may worship it as an idolator does a painted block of wood or stone, but it will have no more consciousness of worship than the dumb idol, and be as incapable of making any response. It will not exercise authority in any degree over the moral conduct of the race, nor will it elicit any expression of gratitude for the results of its operations.

## 2. ITS SUBSTITUTE FOR GOD.

This is the sorry exchange which agnosticism proposes to effect, but which most Christians will feel is sheer robbery and no exchange at all, in spite of the smooth promise of its

apologist; for it leaves only a chaotic void in the place which the living God fills with light, and life, and splendour. Yet Mr. Spencer says the replacement "leaves unchanged certain of the sentiments comprehended under the name religious." This is as if he were to say that a destructive fire leaves unchanged certain of the sentiments which are associated with the dwelling it has ravaged. Here in the hall were collected trophies of the chase, portraits of revered ancestors, mementoes of the departed, and souvenirs of foreign travel. There in the diningroom scores of family gatherings have taken place, and every corner of it had precious associations. Yonder in the library were preserved a number of records and documents, family heirlooms, which cannot be replaced at any cost or sacrifice. In every room there were tokens of paternal care or filial affection. Yesterday it was a *home*, rich in the memories it kept alive and the sentiments it fostered, and powerful for good by its clustering associations. Now it is a smoke-blackened ruin, with here a charred beam, there a tottering wall, and yonder a jagged rent that once was a window. As the former inmates, half-clad, destitute, and shelterless, stand gazing on the scene of horror, tell them that their home has not suffered! Assure them that the replacement of a power allied to their home-feelings in certain traits, by a power which you cannot say is thus allied, leaves unchanged certain of the sentiments which we call homely, and satisfy them if you can that their loss is only imaginary.

Even an agnostic would probably feel that his philosophy was out of place under such circumstances, but the facts are rather worse. Dearer and even more tenaciously to be held than the sentiments of home are those which we call religious; but agnosticism would wither them as effectually as a consuming fire. To say that it leaves unchanged certain of the sentiments comprehended under the term religious is mere trickery. It leaves, perhaps, the crumbling walls and fallen timbers, but nothing



more. What about the sense of safety, the provision for rest, the opportunity for communion, the adequate supply for constant wants, the bonds of association, the influences that elevate, the example that inspires, the accumulated treasures of the past, the joyous delights of the present, and the bright promises for the future? These are gone—all gone, and gone for ever. Does the replacement leave unchanged love to God, which is the most powerful incentive to pure living that the world has ever known; joy in God, the direct result of trust in His constant care; peace with God, the fruit of intercourse with Him, producing harmony with His will; or hope, that sustains under all difficulties, resting itself on the sure promises of His word? Does it leave unchanged the religious sentiments which restrain the selfish man from indulging his greed, the licentious man from gratifying his lust, or the hungry man from stealing food? It is no answer to these questions to say that such propensities are yielded to despite the religious sentiments that are abroad in the world. Where they exist they do operate as a salutary check, and of those who habitually work unrighteousness, it is true, though trite, that there is no fear of God before their eyes. On the other hand, does the proposed replacement leave unchanged the religious sentiments which prompt to benevolence, to charity, to hatred of perjury, to uprightness in business transactions, and willingness to suffer in the cause of truth? Consider how these sentiments underlie social relationships, permeate business transactions, and weave themselves into every department of human life, and then let it be said how mighty will be the revolution effected by the displacement of their central object for a power that cannot be said to be allied to humanity.

The vague expression, "certain of the sentiments," is a conspicuous instance of the baneful generalizations which characterize agnostic utterances. Let the power that is conserved when the replacement is wrought be never so grand and

powerful, if it is not allied to humanity by attributes the existence of which is denied in express terms, the only "sentiments comprehended under the term religious" left unchanged will be a dim sense of awe at the vastness of nature, and a vague feeling of mystery, mingled, perhaps, with a shiver of dread. That is all, and perhaps more than all, for it is probably too much to say that these sentiments will not undergo some modification. Strictly speaking, these are scarcely religious sentiments at all in the best sense of the word, though they may be comprehended loosely under the name. They are rather superstitions than anything else, and so poor a residuum as to be scarcely worth the keeping when the rest have disappeared. Yet they are all that agnosticism even professes to leave untouched when its promise is analyzed. Faith, love, joy, peace, and all the bright cluster of gracious qualities which the Christian prizes as God-given, and by which he expects to grow in moral stature and resemblance to his lofty ideal, while at the same time doing good to his fellow-men, must perish at the root. The inevitable result will be their speedy withering, and the moral results be disastrous in the extreme.

### 3. THE DEITY OF CHRISTIANS.

The Christian idea of a personal God is the foundation-stone around which the entire system of faith and morals is constructed. Take this away, and the entire structure must fall to pieces. This idea has sometimes been presented in a form that is too gross and material. The tendency to anthropomorphism is natural, for it is not easy to clothe such ideas in other than human forms. Hence references to the hand, the face, the eye, the ear, and the heart of God, pass current. Critics complain that such expressions are false and misleading, and make them the objects of their satire. To this there is an easy reply. Abstract ideas

are best because most vividly conveyed in concrete forms, and no one is misled by such vehicles of thought. When we say that Queen Victoria sways her sceptre over hundreds of millions of people, though the statement is not literally correct, there is no misunderstanding and no misconception. The Press is said to be Argus-eyed, which involves a kind of double abstraction, and yet the idea conveyed is quite correctly apprehended by the reader. Similarly, the endowment in popular language of the Divine Being with bodily organs does not necessarily involve the formulation of what is calculated to produce any misconception. All that is intended is that He possesses the qualities which those organs represent, and to object to the use of such aids to thought is only hyper-criticism, which thereby exposes its own weakness. So long as we continue to speak of the sword of justice and the sceptre of mercy, of one class of people as hard-hearted and another as wilfully blind, we may describe the Divine personality by the use of terms like those that have been named without either inconsistency or impropriety.

Not only are such expressions justifiable, but to a certain extent they are necessary. In the infancy of language there was no other mode by which abstract ideas could be embodied. Take, for instance, the idea of power. That attribute was exercised by the hand of a man or the horn of an ox, and, hence, the hand and the horn respectively became its easily-recognized symbols, the use of which is familiar to all readers of the Book of Psalms. Yet again, the idea of moral purity could only be developed by visible illustrations; and a large part of the Hebrew ritual, to be found in the Book of Leviticus—the ceremonial cleanings and settings apart—was directed to this important purpose. Had the revelation of God been made in precise philosophical language, it would have been utterly unintelligible, and in consideration of human narrowness of comprehension and slowness to learn, a simpler method was



adopted. It is perhaps certain that a true idea of God could not have been apprehended in another way, and it is quite certain that it could not have been taught so easily or so well.

When these figures of speech have served their purpose, and are laid aside, there still remains the underlying fact that the God of the Bible is no dim abstraction or unconscious force, but a Living Being, possessing a personal and independent existence. He is shown to possess intellectual faculties such as knowledge and will. These are attributes not of an Energy, but of an Intelligence. They differ from such faculties in man in the degree of their perfection. The Divine knowledge is represented as so vast, that there is nothing, however remote in time or space, beyond its range : so comprehensive that there is nothing too minute for its inclusion ; and the will of God is said to be the originating cause of the universe and the fountain of all authority. To God are attributed personal emotions, such as love and hatred, pleasure and wrath. These are distinct marks of personality, for a stream of effort flowing through the cosmos must be incapable of anything of the kind. The Supreme Being is not a passionless somewhat, but a someone, whose nature is benevolent, and whose purpose towards other intelligences He has brought into being is good. They are the objects of His solicitude that their well-being may be secured and their happiness promoted. What His mind has resolved upon His heart desires to be executed. He loves what is worthy of love, and of necessity hates its opposite ; He is pleased when the interests of His creatures are advanced, and angry when the wilfulness and perversity He witnesses does them damage. He maintains personal relations with the creatures He has made. The material universe is under His control, having been brought into existence by His power, and its forces are continually sustained and employed according to His will. To the intelligent perceptions of His rational creatures He seeks to reveal Himself

not only as their Creator, but also as their Lord, their Father, and their Friend. An active principle of benevolence runs through all these relationships. As a ruler He insists on obedience to laws because thereby alone can order and progress be secured. As Judge, He distributes reward and punishment, that thereby righteousness may be promoted and the unrighteous deterred. Describing Himself as Father of all the families on the earth, He seeks to develop universal brotherhood and goodwill. Finally, personal operations are ascribed to Him, such as can only be wrought by a Being in whom such intellectual faculties, moral emotions, and intelligent relations as have been described do actually exist. An Infinite and Eternal Energy may or may not sufficiently account for the existence of the material universe—that question need not be discussed just now—but it assuredly cannot perform the works which the Christian believer regards as done by the Living God. Energy without intelligence may accomplish anything up to the limit of its capacity, and if the qualities of infinite and eternal be added, that capacity must be boundless ; but it is impossible to conceive of it as forming a plan.

The argument from design is unfashionable, but it has not lost all its cogency. There are tokens of contrivance, adaptation, and adjustment everywhere. Energy devoid of will must have proceeded on uniform lines, and the infinite diversity to be seen everywhere proves that something else than energy has been engaged. A force may be generated that will perform a series of delicate operations with precision and regularity while the force continues, or until the machine wears out, but it is incapable of the smallest deviation. A machine that makes pins will do that and nothing else, and one that puts the portrait of the Queen on a disc of gold, making it a sovereign, cannot test the weight of the coin. You must have the personal elements of guidance and instruction even in such matters as these. To initiate or to

arrest, to direct and to control, the operation of a personal mind is necessary. God, as we believe, has not only a personal will, but the power of communicating that will. He is self-revealing, and therefore has a self to reveal, can and does suspend the laws He has given in some particulars when occasion requires, and proves Himself to be, by His interposition in the events that transpire.

#### 4. ENERGY COMMANDS NO HOMAGE.

Denial of a personal God necessarily involving the denial of intellectual qualities like intelligence and will to the being, whether He or It, to whom we owe our origin, it follows as a matter of course that the creature is greater than the Creator. Whatever grandeur there may be in an Almighty, Infinite, and Eternal Energy, or indeed any energy of any kind, it nevertheless fails to command respect. There is energy in the devastating hurricane, the turbulent ocean, the mysterious earthquake, and the roaring volcano. In sight of its effects we are inspired with wonder, perhaps with terror, but never with gratitude or esteem. Whatever be the cause which produces these tremendous manifestations, it is one to which we cannot look up.

The same may be said of the silent forces that are at work around us all the time. The energy of the sun is essential to render the world habitable, and that of gravitation to preserve its very existence as a globe, but they are not to be thought of as comparable with the qualities that constitute greatness in an intelligent being. Energy is everywhere, for the universe is full of it, but instead of feeling that it is something above us we feel that it is something beneath. Let material forces be never so powerful, there is in us a sense of superiority which cannot be denied, and is in constant employment. We hold them to be our subordinates and utilize them for our need. We are free to



resist them if we can and to defy them to do their worst, are under no sort of obligation to them for the services they render, and never think of reproaching them with malevolence, even when we are injured by their attacks. We neither pity them when they are harnessed to work for us, nor praise them when they are of most service. They are even less worthy of such treatment than the sentient things, the horses, the dogs, and the cattle we use. Though they may be personified in poetry and apostrophized by orators, in such cases we only gratify our own fancy, and it never occurs to us to be taken seriously. In short, our regard for simple energy is that paid to something altogether different from ourselves, and on a lower plane. Our possession of intellect alone endows us with a nobility which we cannot and will not ignore at the bidding of philosophy.

That the maker of a thing is greater than the thing that is made is one of the truths that go without saying, and its corollary is that that from which all things proceed must be greater than what proceeds from it. A painting may be so perfect as to be one of the world's treasures, but the painter is confessedly greater than his work. One may stand in speechless admiration before a sculpture by Michael Angelo; but whatever of such feelings are excited by the statue, it is felt that the mind which saw that figure in the block of unhewn marble and conceived its execution is far worthier of praise. There are not many more impressive illustrations of inventive genius and mechanical skill than a powerful steam engine working smoothly in some international exhibition. It seems to pulsate with life and to be an embodiment of power. Its heart of fire and muscles of steel, which wield a force that can be as gentle as the touch of an infant's lips and yet as irresistible as an avalanche, are things to wonder at; yet it is so inferior to a human agent that, though it does the work of a thousand horses, it can be controlled by a boy. There is poetry in its rhythmic motion and energy in

its polished limbs, but it has no brain ! The machine is, after all, less than the machinist. The design of the engine proceeded from the intellect of the engineer ; its several parts were made and adjusted by his directions ; and though he may be a pigmy in appearance by its side, the man is infinitely greater than his manufacture.

Agnosticism will not reverse all this by its dictum that the choice is between personality and something higher, for therein it states what is contrary to experience and contrary to fact. That which is dissociated from personality ceases to have any hold on our reverence, for we cannot revere that upon which we look down. The moral change of such an attitude towards the Supreme Being can only be perceived when the importance of reverent feelings is considered. Without them the seriousness and sobriety of disposition which is needed for the ordinary business of life, and which promotes the gravity and dignity that ought to characterize us, would be difficult, if not impossible. It is something to stand in the presence of an infinite and eternal someone whose knowledge transcends ours by immeasurable degrees, and to have the consciousness that we are the objects of His regard. The surroundings of what is so august are calculated to check flippancy and induce a propriety of deportment. He who goes before his fellow-creatures who are but a little higher than himself with the feeling that, being exceptionally wise and learned, it is meet to pay them respect, will be heedful of his behaviour. But to be in the presence of mere energy has no such effect whatever. We picnic among the ashes of a volcano and laugh at the roaring of the angry sea, treating the forces they suggest with the most complete disrespect.

So also the element of submission, which is an important part of moral discipline, must be done away with if we abandon the idea of a personal God. With a consciousness that His will

is not only stronger than ours, but also wiser in as great proportion, there comes cheerful acquiescence in what may wreck our plans and disappoint our hopes. It is good for us to learn the lesson, and to practise the habit of yielding. Were it otherwise the world would be peopled by tyrannical monsters, owning no right but that of the strongest. The habit of submission to superior authority is one that has to be sedulously inculcated that men may be tolerant of each other. It is sometimes difficult to foster it, even under the most favourable circumstances ; but if we were shut up to the conviction that our lives are the sport of caprice, the football of accident, or a target for the arrows of fate, it would only be tolerable by those who went to the extreme of believers in the doctrine of despair. Their state is not one to be emulated, but between the apathy of the fatalist out of whom hope is crushed and the rebellion of the infuriated victim of chance there is no alternative except that which is supplied by faith in a personal God. Such faith will lead to manly submission to a power that is wise as well as strong, will develop courage in the presence of conflicts and fortitude under disaster. Apart altogether from the religious aspect of this question the moral consequences that must follow from stultifying these qualities, and thereby dwarfing much that is excellent, are too serious to be treated lightly. Not only calmness in trouble and resignation in adversity, but heroic endurance and loyal devotion to duty, depend on submission to a higher power. Destroy them and you make man a smaller, narrower, meaner creature in almost every respect. He cannot be brought to say "Thy will be done" to that which has no will of its own ; but if that utterance, and all that it means, is taken away, not only is his comfort diminished—he is diminished himself.

Most of what has been said as to the moral effects of divesting the Supreme Being of intellectual faculties will apply to the view taken of His moral nature, and much of it with far stronger



emphasis. If the Deity is presented to our minds as possessing neither emotions nor sentiments, the idea thus unclothed is still less able to command esteem. In our own organization we recognize the presence of three distinct sets of qualities—the physical, the intellectual, and the moral. We share the first, and to some extent the second, with the lower animals ; but there are departments in the third which place an unfathomable gulf between us and them. We cannot alter the arrangement, for it would be utter self-degradation to part from it. Let the schools of philosophy teach what they will, and men of science prove all that is possible about the origin of species, there is on our part an unconquerable repugnance to a closer alliance with the beasts that perish. Theories are scattered to the winds by the force of inborn consciousness that we have within us—that which not only differentiates us from other orders of being, but also raises us to a higher standard. Our emotions may or may not be the result of evolution—that matters little ; here they are, and that is enough. Our moral sense may have come upward in the slow development of ages or downward as a gift from Him who made us—we prefer the latter hypothesis—but whichever is true it is in us, and it marks us as apart from, and immensely above, the creatures in whom it is not. They have qualities of some kinds that are far in advance of ours ; but we are nobler beyond all comparison than they. We have not their bulk, their strength, or their swiftness ; but what of that ? The elephant is larger, and, therefore, we make him a show for our children ; the horse is stronger, and we compel him to carry us where we want to go ; the pigeon flies faster than we can travel, and so we send him to carry our messages. The cunning of the fox and the ferocity of the tiger contribute to our recreations. We have dominion over the beasts of the earth, the fowls of the air, and the fish of the sea.

### 5. MORAL CHARACTER IN MAN INTIMATES MORAL CHARACTER IN HIS CREATOR.

This being the case, it is not strange that we experience an intellectual revulsion from the idea that the originating cause from which we and all things proceed is even lower in the scale of being than the animals we press into our service or slaughter for our food. We differ from them most of anything in our sense of right and wrong. They have intellectual qualities, such as memory, will, and cunning; exhibit such moral faculties as fear, love, anger, and rage; and are capable of such emotions as pleasure, grief, and parental affection; but conscience is absent, and it is only in an accommodated sense that vice or virtue can be ascribed to anything they do. Yet agnosticism would lead us to the conclusion that the highest power in the universe is less richly gifted than they! Whence came the moral sense that is our most distinguished characteristic and supreme glory? *Ex nihilo nihil fit*. It must have had an originator, and it is a far greater strain on credulity to believe that it was slowly and gradually evolved out of the lower attachments and social instincts, between which and it there is a bottomless abyss, than to believe that it is the reflex of His character from whom we came, and thus is a bond of union with Him. Sundering the link by declaring that no such quality exists for it to be connected with, leaves the moral universe without a centre of gravity, a semblance of order, or a vestige of law. The moral sense of man is not authoritative in legislation, its function being only that of an interpreter and administrator. If there be no moral authority beyond this world and the present life, our position is perilous in the extreme. Let that principle once be established and it will prove an explosive force compared with which dynamite is harmless. The ultimate appeal of all the nations is and must be to an elevated standard of right that is

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raised high above the agitated atmosphere of conflicting interests and contending passions. The final decision of vexed questions, which limited human judgment is unable to settle, warped as it is by prejudice, swayed as it is by the bias of selfishness, and beclouded in its vision by the mists of ignorance, can only be by the calm voice of supreme authority proclaiming—"Thus saith the Lord." Nothing less than this can meet the necessities of the case. Experience has proved that the government of the world cannot be carried on without it, and the attempt to effect such a displacement as is proposed, results in anarchy and worse.

With the abolition of the moral law-giver there must be the abolition of the moral law. The effect of this might not be seen all at once, for the beliefs and practices of many generations have so far penetrated into the very constitution of society that they are not speedily eradicated. It is this fact which makes us more tolerant of the modern teachings than would otherwise be the case. Were there any prospect of the principles of agnosticism being accepted and carried out to their logical issue, it is probable that the very propounders of these principles would stand aghast, and most assuredly the better half of the world would rise in indignant and vehement protest against them. Yet it is only fair to look at these principles from this point of view, and to realize their banefulness by seeing to what they logically conduct. It is not too much to say that the most atrocious deeds of African slavery and the worst horrors of the commune might be justified on the principles that are thus laid down. Let it go forth to the world, and be accepted everywhere, that the Ultimate Reality exerts no moral authority and exercises no sort of moral control, and then see how it will work! Men will not respect the laws made by other men—even by any number of them—and will claim an equal right to issue laws of their own. Every man will feel that he is free to do what is right in his own eyes, and what pleases himself best. Self-



interest thereby coming to be the ruling motive of every life and guide of all conduct, incessant collisions must result, and a return speedily take place to "the good old rule, the simple plan, that he may take who has the power, and he must keep who can." *Facilis descensus Avernus*; but it is needless to depict the stages of moral deterioration which must inevitably result, as this aspect of the case must be more fully considered elsewhere.

There is another aspect to be viewed. The human mind needs an ideal to be placed before it as well as an authority to guide its conduct. Without such an ideal it finds progress impossible. Even the schoolmistress has to set a "copy," as nearly perfect as may be, for the pupil to imitate. There must be a model or else there will be no definiteness of aim. So urgent is this necessity that, all the world over, ideal standards have been erected, and their character is stamped upon the community wherever they are to be found. The Red Indian of books has for his ideal the mighty hunters and warriors of his tribe, legendary stories of whom he hears from his childhood, and his ambition to resemble them as closely as possible gives him the longing for strife which has done so much towards the extermination of his race. On the other hand, the ideals of man and womanhood that Grecian art in the zenith of its excellence placed before the nation did no little to develop the softness, luxury, and effeminacy that sapped its manhood. In all ages the objects of adoration and worship have been reproduced in their most pronounced characteristics among their devotees. Some of these were

"Gods changeful, partial, passionate, unjust,  
Whose attributes were rage, revenge, and lust."

In such cases the attributes with which they are credited re-appeared with more or less fulness of detail in those who

worshipped them. So also it is universally confessed that the early Christians were the living representatives of the Lord Jesus Christ. Their persecutors, who derided them for their folly, had to confess the purity of their lives. The agnostics of those days, who treated Christianity as a silly superstition, nevertheless acknowledged that it seemed to possess an inexplicable power. In the meekness with which the disciples bore reproach, the unfailing benevolence of their charity, the fidelity with which they maintained their bond of brotherhood, and their calmness in the prospect of an ignominious and cruel death, they were true copies of Him who was their pattern and their head. What is observed in these diverse and opposite instances need not cause surprise, for a law of nature is thus shown in operation. Men must have a standard of excellence, and will resemble it with a degree of accuracy proportioned to the hold it has upon them, by the vividness and constancy of its appeal to their minds. Such an ideal the living God placed before His ancient people, and in connection therewith gave one of His most suggestive and solemn commands—"Ye shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy." Likeness to God in this, the loftiest attribute of His being, was enjoined upon them, and the ceremonial arrangements for their worship and service converged upon this central purpose of His plan. This, indeed, may be described as one of the most striking features of the entire economy. There were visible symbols to assist the mind in forming a true conception of God, and the culmination of the whole was correspondence with His character. In the fulness of time Jesus of Nazareth appeared, God manifest in the flesh, giving a still more vivid illustration of what man should be. He was the great pattern as well as teacher of His followers. The perfection of His character, as delineated by His biographers, has often been declared by foes as well as friends to be without flaw. As the ideal of those who call themselves by His name He has influenced the civilized world. To tread in

His steps is recognized as their duty, to participate in His character their highest privilege here, and to be still more fully like Him—"seeing Him as He is"—their crowning glory hereafter.

Agnosticism shatters at a blow the grandest ideal that mankind had ever set before its eyes and utterly destroys the standard of its moral growth. Denying that there is a moral character in the ultimate cause, it leaves us without an example to copy which we can willingly accept. There being nothing in the world outside human nature, all we can do is to look round over that diversified multitude, and the survey must result in intense dissatisfaction. If it be said that the figure of Jesus of Nazareth remains unchanged, we answer that the statement is not true. He is traduced as an impostor, His claims of heavenly descent declared fictitious, and His assertions false. There can be no acceptance of Him as a guide under these circumstances, for in proportion to the homage cheerfully given, if His pretensions were just, must be the aversion excited by the conviction that they were untrue. What, then, is left? Moses, Mahomet, Confucius, Luther, Joseph Smith? Each of these was in his day a leader of so-called religious thought, and still numbers multitudes who accept his teachings; but to accept any of them from first to last as an ideal to copy is totally impossible. If we search the mythologies of antiquity the same result confronts us, and, moreover, we find that the best of the characters that so pass in review are only bad copies of humanity. No. The one grand ideal is the God of the Bible manifested in Jesus Christ His Son. Here there is exactly what the world requires, perfect in every detail, not so far removed as to make resemblance impossible, and yet so exalted as to always maintain its place of honour. Striving after this image the world grows purer, nobler, and better in every way. Just in proportion as Christ's likeness prevails, humanity rises in the scale of being. Let creeds and



dogmas be what they may, the Christly life is that which makes him who lives it a blessing to himself and to the world. For the ideal which both instructs and inspires agnosticism has no substitute whatever, and though it destroys it does not replace. The moral effects of this operation, by extinguishing the aspirations of humanity and paralyzing its efforts to grow better, are akin to quenching the light of the world.

Should it be objected that whatever ideals are placed before human minds are evolved from human intelligence alone, the answer is close at hand. The stream cannot rise above the fountain. The necessity of a standard has already been shown, and in the absence of one that is set up by higher authority, men will erect one of their own. Whenever they have done so it has not been higher, but lower than themselves. In the progress of the ages their conceptions of God become deteriorated instead of the reverse. The pagan deities of ancient mythology are clothed more and more with the baser passions of human nature, and are increasingly the subjects of its weaknesses. The religion of the Bible exerts a distinctly opposite effect, and pursues the opposite course. Its tendency is to purify and elevate the conceptions of God, and thereby to raise the standard of human life. It has replaced the objects of veneration to which entire races of mankind bowed down, and the effect on their character and conduct is known to all the world. Witness the triumphs of modern missions, and the changed lives of those who from the perpetration of bloody and obscene orgies have turned to be followers as well as worshippers of a living and holy God. In regions where there was every natural opportunity for the evolution of a lofty ideal, where the conditions of life were easy, there was nothing either effete or repulsive in nature, and the physical development of the people was splendid, morality was almost an unknown quantity. Yet the capabilities of these same people are proved to be ample, their devotion has

stood the severest tests, and their conversion to Christianity been followed by moral and spiritual results of the most satisfactory kind.

For it is not only an ideal that theology presents to be gazed upon with admiration, but without hope of successful emulation—the character of God is a constant example and an ever-present power. It deals not only with broad generalizations, but with minute details, and directs conduct in every department of life. It shows us “what manner of persons we ought to be, in all holy conversation and godliness,” and does not content itself with a mere formulation of abstract principles. God is shown to be inviolably true to His word, not only because He has declared that truth is His character, but by the fulfilment of His covenant. The people whom He chose for His own were led by Him through many difficulties ;—but, after a long series of years and a totally unexpected succession of events, the historical record is that “not one good thing failed of all that the Lord hath spoken ; all came to pass.” It is true that He is said to have prohibited falsehood and deceit in the most stringent manner, but this would have lost much of its weight had it not received the additional sanction of vivid example. In the same way He is revealed as absolutely righteous, incapable of injustice even in the smallest degree. He inculcated uprightness in the most emphatic way, by declaring that the unrighteous shall not participate in His favour or be permitted to enter His presence. There is a majestic roll in the very words, “Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord ? or who shall stand in His holy place ? He that hath clean hands and a pure heart, who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity nor sworn deceitfully.” Thus, with the revelation of His attributes, their imitation was enjoined.

These declarations of His character are corroborated and illustrated by His dealings with the world. Agnostics may say that such dealings are only imaginary, but witnesses on the other

side have at least an equal right to be heard. They affirm, with the utmost strength of conviction, that God has interposed, and does interpose, in exact accordance with the assurance that He has given, and that "He is righteous in all His ways."

The immediate effect of this example is plainly visible, and plainest of all in the case of those who most fully allow themselves to be led thereby. It is traceable in the statement of one such person, who said, "He that worketh deceit shall not dwell within my house; he that telleth lies shall not tarry in my sight." Influenced in the same way, the resolve to abhor injustice and seek its opposite is definitely formed, and its execution promoted. "I will behave myself wisely in a perfect way. . . . I will walk within my house with a perfect heart." By the conduct of those whose lives are thus modified others are affected for good, and that in an ever-widening circle. Thus it is not only the example of God Himself, but that also of those who have most fully imbibed His Spirit and listened most attentively to His teaching, that we have to regard. The one cannot stand without the other. The most truth-loving and upright of mankind are the last to credit themselves with the honour of having produced these characteristics and the readiest to ascribe them to the ideal before their minds. As their product, it may be seen that the nations where these causes have operated longest and most generally are the most largely permeated with such principles. It is in the Anglo-Saxon branch of the human family that the religious cult has had the freest scope, and it is there, too, that the principles of truth and honesty are most fully acted upon. Compare their habits with those of some other races with which they are brought into contact and observe the difference. In India you may find that theft, cheating, trickery, and falsehood are so universally practised as to embarrass the administration of justice and be a potent factor in all commercial transactions. The very sense of their inherently



abominable character is lost. There is no shame whatever on the part of the culprit, except at the clumsiness which has permitted him to be found out. Admiration is openly expressed when there is sufficient cleverness to defy detection, and there is no sort of reprobation for the acts themselves.

#### 6. PRACTICAL EFFECT OF MORAL EFFACEMENT.

This is the direction in which agnostic theories must inevitably lead. By the effacement of the example which is set for our imitation, the best method of guiding conduct in such respects must disappear. Not only will the standard of these elementary virtues be taken away, but a worse thing will accompany it, for its living embodiment will exist no longer. Our greatest reason for exalting the lives of the excellent of the earth and preserving them in remembrance is the effect which such lives must have on posterity; but if from them their centre and mainspring is withdrawn they may as well lapse into oblivion, for their teaching power, their inspiration and stimulus, will be at an end.

Yet again, in the Divine regard for humanity there is shown universal benevolence. It is recognized that His will is disregarded and commands disobeyed by great numbers of His creatures, yet He is shown to be so benevolently disposed towards them as to restrain His anger and bestow blessings on them still. There is bounty in His gifts and mercy in His dealings. With Him is no respect of persons, and His goodness is displayed in a thousand ways. The unbeliever may deride these descriptions, and assert that they have their source in an utter misconception; but whether they are or not, they are deeply wrought in human feeling. Countless numbers have sung for thousands of years, "His mercy endureth for ever." Thus the divine example, as presented in a literature which is read more generally than any other, is one which develops the idea of individual worth. It

shows that the least of His intelligent creatures is precious in His sight. At the same time it is one of wide benevolence to the needy, and patient forbearance towards the erring.

Who can estimate the influence which this presentation of the divine treatment of men has exercised in the history, and to what extent it has promoted the welfare of the world? It is simply incalculable. It underlies the famous statement embodied in the declaration of American independence, that all men are created free and equal. The principle of human equality is the basis of liberty, and pervades all democratic institutions. It fired the hearts of the men who wept so copiously in secret and toiled with such persevering energy in public for the emancipation of the slave. Through every political movement which tends to the elevation of the masses it is ramifying as an irresistible force, though often unrecognized. Every process of social amelioration may be traced to this as its origin. It is the lever that moves the world.

Taking pattern from the goodness of God as shown by His acts of kindness, men have devised schemes of philanthropy and been unsparing of themselves in carrying them out. Were proof required of this assertion it would only be necessary to direct attention to the places where charity is the largest, and the characters of those who are most conspicuous for its exercise. Just in proportion as the divine example has been seen and understood, has it prevailed to open the fountain of human benevolence and direct its flow. There is no necessity to deny that some who have not confessed themselves as imitators of God have shared in such good works. Isolated cases prove little or nothing. What must guide to right conclusions must be a general survey of the field. In such a comprehensive purview the fact affirmed is conspicuous. The leaders of human action, and those who chiefly exhibit what makes for human relief, are penetrated with the injunctions which they at least regard as of divine authority.

Such are to feed the hungry, to clothe the naked, to alleviate the sufferings of the wretched, and to comfort the distressed. Their example is contagious. Their fellow-thinkers rally round them, and a public impulse is given. It may be that others who scorn their professed beliefs for very shame's sake are induced to join them to some extent in their undertaking, for at least they are obliged to acknowledge that their objects are worthy and their motives pure. Let it never be forgotten that in almost every instance men whose striving is after godliness, who have a divine ideal present to their minds, divine sanction to justify their conduct, and a divine example to direct their course, are the initiators of such enterprises, and bear the greatest burden of responsibility.

Agnosticism may say that there is not such an example, a personal God does not exist, and therefore there cannot be a power that wills or commands, that cares one way or another, that gives or withholds. If so, then the best of our race, and the most useful, are either deceived or deceivers. We cannot accept the latter alternative. Our common sense revolts against such an impeachment of their character. The tree is known by its fruits, and the men whose lives are transparently sincere cannot be accused of imposture and falsehood. Impeachment of their motives is equally impossible. The charge of selfishness against those who are most really benevolent will not hold water. We accept with willingness the fruit of their self-denial, honour them living, and perpetuate the memory of their example when they are dead, and it is impossible for us to falsify their statements, and thus discredit their deeds. Then, are they deceived? If so, the delusion under which they labour is altogether unique. No other hallucination of which the world has any knowledge has produced corresponding effects. A moral insanity that has the power of ennobling and not degrading, of raising instead of lowering the standard of virtue,



which prompts to generosity and encourages self-sacrifice, which refines what is gross and extirpates meanness, would be an extraordinary thing. Delusions mostly work the other way, and if there be mental obscuration or moral obliquity the animal part of man becomes unduly dominant. To believe that in this case there is such an entire contradiction, and that this is a correct interpretation of the conduct under examination, is a tremendous strain on credulity. Agnosticism discounts faith in the supernatural, but for its teachings on this point to be believed there must be faith of almost immeasurable capacity.

On either supposition it is evident that such characters are altogether unsafe guides to follow. However plausible their explanations of their conduct may be, and however strong our sympathy with their expressed designs, we must be allowed to go to the foundation. If we find, as we are told we shall, that it is altogether delusive, all experience warns us against building thereon. Appearances are proverbially deceptive, and in such matters our judgment is not entirely trustworthy. What seems to be promising may turn out a failure, and a temporary relief of trouble prove in the end a bitter aggravation. These are only reasonable and logical deductions from the premises. If the blind lead the blind both shall ultimately fall into the ditch. Distrusting our own perceptions we may not consent to be led by those whose vision is defective, be the defects self-inflicted or otherwise.

Humanitarianism may deplore the loss to the world that must result from the refusal thus to accept the example of a benignant and benevolent power, and of those in whom His character is found, but pitiless philosophy is not concerned with such considerations. It reminds us that we can only know what is ascertained by the evidence of the senses, or proved by mathematical demonstration, and rides a ponderous car, more cruel than that of Juggernaut, over the crushed hopes and bleeding affections

that lie in its way. There are facts it cannot deny. Clarkson, Wilberforce, and their associates, who broke the iron fetters of the negro; Shaftesbury, whose name will be blessed by the women and children of England for ages to come; Gladstone, who conferred their political rights on two millions of his countrymen; the author of the "Bitter Cry of Outcast London;" W. T. Stead, whose exposure of vice wrought such a change in British legislation; and many others equally worthy to be named, have all owned that their warrant, inspiration, and reward are in the character, example, and word of God. Agnosticism would paralyze the arms of such men, and chill their hearts. It is a shame to contemplate such a contingency with calmness. The diffusion of an Arctic atmosphere all over the world would be a trifling catastrophe in comparison. Better far for humanity to be buried under eternal snow than for the springs of a higher life to be congealed by such a philosophic frost.

#### 7. NO PROVIDENCE IN AGNOSTICISM.

The Scriptures consistently represent God as profoundly concerned for the welfare of humanity. The idea that He is self-absorbed, or that the vastness of His dominions prevents His paying regard to individual wants, finds no place in their teaching. On the contrary, His people are assured that they are personally the objects of a solicitude so constant and comprehensive that the very hairs of their head are numbered. It is stated that the permanent welfare of the race is His object, that He has no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, but would have all mankind in alliance with Himself. His concern is said to extend to both their physical and spiritual wants, to the supply of their bodily needs and the salvation of their immortal souls. His interest in them does not exclusively depend on their interest in Him. He has pity for the disobedient, pardon for the penitent,

and protection for those who trust Him. None are despicable in His estimation, and all may share in His favour who turn to Him with open hearts as a flower turns towards the sun. He is patient with those who go astray, seeking anxiously their reconciliation, and meanwhile conferring on them unmerited benefits, but those who have acquainted themselves with Him have still more of His care.

The effects of these declarations are twofold on those who have accepted them in full confidence. They produce direct personal results, and are an incentive to active co-operation. He who feels that God is concerned for him is emboldened thereby to care the more earnestly for himself. When a man can say, "I am poor and needy, yet the Lord thinketh upon me," his poverty and need are matters of less consequence; they do not cause him the loss of self-respect, for the dignity of his manhood, independently of such accessories, is affirmed by the fact of the divine consideration. It is when any man feels and knows that he is accounted worthy that he feels himself raised to a higher level, and the notice of the Supreme God invests him with something superior to the honour that comes from men. Thus has it always been with those that in long and solitary communion with their Lord have realized such closeness of relation and freedom of intercourse as has lifted them out of themselves. Their experience is like that of the Puritans, concerning whom Macaulay says that, as the result of just such habits, "on the rich and the eloquent, on nobles and priests, they looked down with contempt; for they esteemed themselves rich in a more precious treasure, and eloquent in a more sublime language, nobles by the right of an earlier creation, and priests by the imposition of a mightier hand." A second result of this conception of God's concern about humanity is to promote our own concern for it and to regard it in the light shed upon it by the divine interest in man.



This is no mere theory but proved historical fact. The value set on human life among men is in proportion to the value which it is supposed to possess in the sight of God. Let the awful butcheries in some parts of the realm of paganism, the practice of infanticide in India, and other practices in which human life is carelessly sacrificed, bear witness. It is in the nature of things that it should be so. If there is no superior intelligence to mine to care for the multitudes of my fellow-creatures, why should I care? If they are valueless to all except themselves, then they can have no sacredness to me. On the other hand, if they are the object of such solicitude, the fact furnishes a reason for exercising all possible efforts on their behalf. God's concern for the well-being of the world justifies every enterprise that has a similar object, and is its high consecration. Hereby all the impulses of charity are justified and strengthened. The agnostic view of an eternal energy from which all things proceed, but which is incapable of being concerned about that which has thus proceeded, is that of a preternatural monstrosity, teeming with life and yet not exhibiting the lowest of its functions. Were that idea to prevail life would indeed be not worth living, and the world unendurable as a place of habitation.

According to the generally-received conviction, God's concern for the world is not a mere sentiment, or confined to simple observation. It expresses itself in many ways, and reaches down from the heights of His dwellingplace a hand of power. That the Creator did not organize the world, and leave it then to work out its own destiny—adjust the machine, and content Himself with seeing it go—is the doctrine of revelation and the conclusion of experience. In the affairs of nations there is such frequent indication that a power, unseen and unrecognized, interposes for the triumph of the right and the confusion of the wrong, that the impartial student of history cannot ignore it. Undoubtedly

there is a tendency to refer to Providence whatever otherwise cannot be accounted for, and unwarrantable liberties are taken with that name. It has been said that Sir Frederick Alison's voluminous "History of Europe" was written to prove that Providence was on the side of the Tories, and, however that may be, he is not the only one who has sought to fortify his own ideas in a similar way. Nevertheless, it is true that, were the direct interference of a supernatural power omitted from the records of the past, the history of the world would be a hopeless enigma. It furnishes an intelligible explanation, and the only such explanation, of what otherwise would be shrouded in impenetrable mystery. There are great epochs and startling events, revolutions and adjustments, developments and coincidences, so marvellous in their occurrence, so unexpected and incomprehensible at the time, yet so opportune when seen through the vista of the succeeding years, that the faithful chronicler is compelled to say, "This is the finger of God." Separately, they are like the fragments of coloured glass, which appear to have no correspondence with each other in either hue or outline, but as, one by one, the artificer puts them into place, they are seen to exhibit tokens of design, and the whole reveal a plan on which it would be impossible to improve.

It would not be wonderful if in the brief space of a single life the signs of Providential action were few, indistinct, and rare. Our view is only partial, and, like short-sighted judges of a painting, we are too close to the canvas to criticise the work with accuracy. Yet there is scarcely anyone who does not believe that, here and there along his course, his path has been deflected by a power not his own. He was the subject at one time of an uncontrollable impulse, and at another of a sudden inspiration, for which he could not account. The result of what has thus suddenly impinged upon his life has reminded him, if a devout believer, that "the steps of a good man are ordered of

the Lord, and he delighteth in His way." If he is unable to appropriate the comfort thus offered, he has recalled the declaration of another authority—

"There's a divinity that shapes our ends,  
Rough-hew them how we will."

One thing peculiarly noticeable about the belief in Providence is that it never induces resentment. People are apt to ascribe the evil that befalls them, rather than the good, to this source. It is the customary explanation of misfortune, and to it are ascribed calamities which are not the visitations of Providence at all—as when, in the rough words of Charnock, the Puritan preacher, David swept all the dirt to that door by making God responsible for the death of Uriah the Hittite. For all that, such an attributing of trouble, disappointment, or loss is seldom accompanied by upbraiding or complaint. The will of Providence is accepted as a rule with cheerful acquiescence, and even when it appears to be the cause of sore deprivation, is met with the submissive words, "The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord."

The world is very full of trouble, and suffering humanity needs all the support and consolation it can find. To offer it that which is based on untruth would be cruel, but to deprive it of that which it may fairly and rightly accept is equally heartless. Theology assures it that human affairs are under divine control, and that there will be adequate compensation for all kinds of apparent evil. It is taught that what seems to be evil will eventually produce good results, and that though weeping may endure for a night joy cometh in the morning. The assurance is pressed to its heart that sorrow does not spring from the dust, nor affliction from the ground, and that in due time the purpose of all things will be made plain. Fortified by these things it acquires courage



to endure and patience to wait. Pain is bearable if it is followed by that which will be its reward, but purposeless suffering is only calculated to infuriate. Belief in Providence is not only the solace of the world's woes, but a kind of safety-valve for its preservation. The cynical philosophy which dashes away the cup of consolation from the fevered lips also risks an outburst of passion. The world would be fit to go mad with terror if amid all the possibilities of wretchedness it did not discern some ground of hope. This is the star which shines through the driving clouds and along the waste of waters, but which agnosticism would quench in darkness. It is the bow of promise, spanning heaven and earth and uniting them in one. It is the safeguard against despair, to part from which would be to drift into destruction.

Agnostics cannot deny that the doctrine of divine providence has at least a basis of probability, accounts for the facts of history, explains the meaning of life, and is a source of strong consolation. They may try to explain it away, but what can they offer as its substitute? Are we to obtain comfort from such ideas as that there is neither matter or mind, that we cannot tell either whence we came or whither we go, that other laws than ours may prevail elsewhere, and there is no certainty in anything? Must we try to find spiritual consolation in a fourth dimension of space, or in the possibilities of triangles? To such prophets we declare—"Miserable comforters are ye all!" Your proposed replacement of the sentiments which impart manly courage in the presence of trial, and illuminate the future with the brightness of a hope that is not ashamed, are a mockery, a delusion, and a snare.

#### 8. AGNOSTICISM EXERCISES NO MORAL CONTROL.

Closely allied to belief in Providence is belief in a future judgment. They stand or fall together. All governments are

carried on by systems of rewards and punishments. Even the unwritten laws of society have behind them advantages to be gained, or penalties to be endured, and without these they would be of no force whatever. In this life we are taught to expect that there will be a partial rendering to every man according to his deeds. "Thou, Lord, wilt bless the righteous" is only one of a vast number of similar assurances. The final award, however, in the nature of things cannot take place here. Our own intelligence is sufficient guide in this matter. There are neither means nor opportunity for the actors to receive their deserts. Time is too short and its opportunities too scanty. One of two alternatives is before us—either there is no retribution, or there is an hereafter. To accept the first is to conclude that the whole universe is utterly out of joint, for oppressors flourish while their victims starve; tyrants wreak their wicked will without let or hindrance, and slaves linger out a life that is one long agony; the hypocrite, whose career is a living lie, passes away in the odour of sanctity, while the true saint is despised and forgotten; the cruel, the covetous, and the profligate, who are a curse to the world, are never punished for their crimes, while the chaste, the generous, and the self-denying have no recompense. Shall there never be any redress? It is not enough to say that vice is its own punishment and virtue its own reward, for in this life the rule does not work.

There must be an hereafter, or else the world is a horrible bungle. All analogy confirms the belief in ultimate retribution. Mankind in its collective form pays the penalty of wrongdoing and reaps the reward of righteousness. Nations rise and fall, prosper and decay, in proportion to their observance of moral laws, and what is true of races ought to be true of individuals. Posthumous honour or execration does not meet the case, for its subject has passed beyond its reach, and that the more surely if the doctrine of another state be untrue. Life beyond the grave

is thus found to be a necessity of the life on this side of it; if the work even of "an energy" is to be decently complete. Human immortality, however, is not just now the primary question, for what we want to settle, if we can, is that of future rewards,—in other words, a final Judge. This is the teaching of nature and reason, and it is also the teaching of Scripture. Be the authority of that volume what it may, its utterances on this point are clear and precise. It declares explicitly that the law-giver is also the judge, that the character developed here will there meet with just recognition, that the actions performed will be recalled, and even those most apparently trivial brought into view. The cup of cold water on the one hand and the offence to a child on the other will be recompensed in due measure. Grievances will be redressed, wrongs righted, the humble exalted and the proud abased. It is this prospect that makes government here possible, which checks iniquity in mid-career, and enables the righteous to wait with quietness, while it strengthens them against temptation. Though it does not make the practice of virtue universal or totally repress that of vice—nothing in the world has ever done that—it does act as a potent incentive to the one and the strongest of all deterrents against the other.

Supposing the idea of an Omniscient and Eternal Being, who notices how His creatures behave, and who will act accordingly, to be done away with, as more than one class of philosophers desire, what can be put in its place? It is a poor comfort to be told that what we have to look forward to is to join

"The choir invisible  
Of those immortal dead who live again  
In lives made better by their presence."

Something more tangible than this is hungered for, and what is more is needed, to meet the cry of the long-suffering world. Mr. Justice Stephen's heaviest blow at the positivists' semblance of



religion was struck at this weak point in its system. Pointing out that after all that Christianity has done, even by calling to its aid the resources of both persuasion and force, with the powers of this world and the next, the vast majority of mankind are still reproached for having a practical standard of morals and conduct which falls far short of its requirements, he asks, with rough scorn—"What will positivism do with all the vast number of indifferent and worldly people? It can neither hang them nor damn them. How, then, can it hope to govern them?" This is like the crashing blow of a bludgeon, and effectually pulverizes Mr. Harrison's creed so far as that creed pretends to provide the means of government. That of Mr. Spencer escapes a similar fate by reason of its characteristic flaccidity. To smite it is almost as unsatisfactory an operation as beating the air. In the late triangular duel the learned judge probably had some satisfaction in putting forth his strength against the positivist, for he felt something solid under his hand; but how perplexed the latter must have been in trying to come to close quarters with the agnostic! "Your system will not make good men and women," he says, and all he gets for an answer is, "I never said it would." He pursues the charge, "It never does provide means for promoting the order of society and the government of the world," and is told in reply, "About that I am in no way concerned." This is at least a frank confession. Let it be pondered well. It is an admission of the utter failure of agnosticism as a working power in all that is most important. No system of government is possible that does not comprise a just and wise rewarder and an equitable apportionment of recompense to both the good and the bad.

From this position it follows that agnosticism would banish from our world the strongest restraint that the evil-minded are capable of experiencing. The salutary effect of fear on such characters is well known, and though on the whole it may be

inferior to love, it is one of the most potent of human emotions. Moreover, it is that which is naturally the first to be appealed to. All human enactments proceed upon it, and the laws are framed to be a terror to evil-doers as well as a safeguard to them that do well. In its absence there is nothing sufficiently strong to cope with the grasp of selfishness or the flame of passion. The culminating feature in the well-known description of those whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness, and whose feet are swift to shed blood, is that "there is no fear of God before their eyes." Being in such a case, neither respect for law nor reverence for authority, nor any of the finer feelings, will operate as a check to those who are bent on wickedness. They laugh at the teachings of humanitarians, and scarcely feel the fine-spun web of social philosophy, which their hot breath alone causes to shrivel like threads of gossamer. No God, no devil, no heaven, and no hell, what is there to hinder them from following their own depraved inclinations, and turning the world into a veritable pandemonium?

For such a fear to be permanently effective and beneficial it must have a truthful presentation of its object. Any other will certainly be detected as an imposture, and the ulterior consequences be worse than the first. Because of this fact superstitious terrors have no abiding influence. Ghosts and hobgoblins, fétiches and charms enslave for a season; but when the time comes for emancipation from their thralldom the reaction is what might be expected. Thus, wherever priestcraft has swayed the consciences and governed the conduct of mankind, its overthrow has been the signal for iconoclasm and a wild plunge into wickedness. What the world requires is a knowledge of the living and personal God, who is neither arbitrary nor capricious, who is severe to punish but slow to anger, who is inflexible but long suffering, who cannot be deceived but is ready to forgive, whose laws are holy, just, and good, and who only punishes those

who will not repent. To His decrees men can submit without losing their self-respect. Fear of Him is unaccompanied by cringing cowardice ; it involves no forfeiture of filial regard, and is not antagonistic to confidence and love. Its influence is all on the side of moral purity and growth, and woe be to the world if it is done away.

#### 9. IT REDUCES LOVE OF GOD TO AN ABSURDITY.

If there be no God of love, then love to God is an absurdity. Yet there is no affection of human nature which can at all compare with this for its happy effects. It is universally true that whatever a man loves will leave its impression on his character. There is in us a wonderful capability of assimilation, and we insensibly, but inevitably, take on some degree of resemblance to that with which we live in contact. According to the closeness with which we hold it to our hearts will be its power over us to mould our characters for the better or the worse. The lad who loves his teacher will learn of him most rapidly, and the artisan who loves his trade will have all the better chance of rising to excellence as a workman. To love purity is the way to become pure, and to love integrity the path to uprightness. Conversely, the love of sensual pleasure begets sensuality, of worldly things worldliness, and of gain greediness. Surely this is the real reason why the first and great commandment is, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart." The author of that command was prompted to its utterance, not by the importance to Him of love, but by its importance to them. On obedience to it depends the hope of humanity for progress in all that is good. Such love must expand the capabilities of being and exalt it in every way. Likeness to the sublime ideal and correspondence to His character will be the result.



Not only so, love to God is the fountain of acceptable service. It controls the will, and thus makes duty a delight. Under its inspiration the feet are swift to run in the way of His commandments. By its expulsive force it casts out of the nature of him who cherishes it everything that would retard his moral progress and impede its growth. There is a purifying power in any noble love, and the most purifying of all is the noblest. Hence, while the will is thus engaged, all the other faculties are prepared to do its bidding. Its impulsive power constrains and preserves active obedience. There is no sense of coercion, for the language of the heart is, "Oh, how I love Thy law."

When the admission is made that the moral law (which is professedly the utterance of the Divine will) and the entire morality of the Bible is infinitely the best the world has ever had for its guidance, the essential value of this affection for God needs little enforcement. There is nothing that can compete with it as a moral agent. All the deductions of science and the entire fabric of sociology are not worthy to be named in connection with it as moral regenerators. Let the witnesses come into court. Is there to be found one who has so cleansed his hands and purified the chambers of his heart, whose intellect has expanded, and whose nature been raised by all his learning and wisdom, as this half-naked trophy of the Gospel into whom, in his barbarism, the love of God came like a heavenly messenger? What it has done for him it has done for millions more, and is accomplishing similar work in every part of the world to-day. Is there, indeed, no God? and has the Unknowable no emotion of love to kindle such love in return? Whence, then, came that spark of celestial fire which still burns and glows with unabated fervour and produces such unparalleled results? Law is insufficient without love. The two going together afford the only prospect of this ruined race being restored. Those who repudiate either are dooming their race to hopelessness; but those who

conjoin them and proclaim their divine sanction and authority are hastening the dawn of Paradise restored.

There is more than the personal element in this matter to be taken into account. If love to God be quenched under the chill negation of a dreary philosophy, love to man must disappear along with it. The second commandment is the corollary of the first. Strike out the one authoritative requirement, and you must strike out the other. Universal brotherhood is logically and naturally dependent on universal fatherhood. The family must have its head, and the system its centre, otherwise disintegration will necessarily follow. What then? If the root principle be destroyed, the branches will wither. When brotherly kindness has ceased, charity is abandoned, and all sense of mutual obligation has come to an end, what will be the relations of each to all the rest? The attempt to substitute humanity for God is childish folly when the true source of fraternal affection is seen. There is little or nothing in humanity itself to elicit admiration, win confidence, or command respect. The race is stained with so much crime, and degraded by so much folly, that on its own merits it will never have such regard. Only by perceiving that our fellow men are the offspring of Him who made us, and equally with ourselves the subjects of His affection, can we teach ourselves to care for them as we ought to care. If we love God, and realize it our duty and happiness to glorify Him, as we look around for ways to fulfil this duty, we discover that the method of serving Him is by serving them. Thus directly connected with the consciousness of a living and personal God comes the clearest indication of duty and the most powerful motive to its performance. Denial of the fact carries with it the denial of its consequences, and is fraught with moral injury as wide as the world and as enduring as time.

## 10. IT MAKES WORSHIP RIDICULOUS.

It is a perfectly legitimate complaint that Mr. Harrison makes against agnosticism that it excludes both prayer and worship from the occupations of our ordinary life. Its failure to meet the wants of humanity in these respects can hardly be better stated than in his own words :—"A child comes up to our evolutionist friend—looks up in his wise and meditative face, and says, 'Oh! wise and great master, what is religion?' And he tells that child, 'It is the presence of the Unknowable.' 'But what,' asks the child, 'am I to believe about it?' 'Believe that you can never know anything about it.' 'But how am I to learn to do my duty?' 'Oh! for duty you must turn to the known, to moral and social science.' And a mother, wrung with agony for the loss of her child, or the wife crushed by the death of her children's father, or the helpless and the oppressed, the poor and the needy, men, women, and children, in sorrow, doubt, and want, longing for something to comfort and guide them—something to believe in, to hope for, to love, and to worship—they come to our philosopher and say, 'Your men of science have routed our priests, and have silenced our old teachers. What religious faith do you give us in its place?' and the philosopher replies (his full heart bleeding for them), and he says, 'Think on the Unknowable.'

"And in the hour of pain, danger, or death can anyone think of the Unknowable, hope anything of the Unknowable, or find any consolation therein? Altars might be built to an unknown God, conceived as a real being, knowing us, though yet not known by us. But altars to the Unknowable Infinity, even metaphorical altars, are impossible, for this Unknown can never be known, and we have not the smallest reason to believe that it ever knew us, or affected us, or anybody, or anything. As the Unknowable cannot bring men together in a common belief, or



for common purposes or kindred feeling, it can no more unite men than the precession of the equinoxes can unite them. So there can never be a congregation of Unknowable worshippers, nor churches dedicated to the Holy Unknown, nor images, nor symbols of the unknowable mystery. Yes! there is one symbol of the Infinite Unknowable, and it is, perhaps, the most definite and ultimate word that can be said about it. The precise and yet inexhaustible language of mathematics enables us to express in a common algebraical formula, the exact combination of the Unknown raised to its highest power of infinity. That formula is  $(x^n)$ , and here we have the beginning, and, perhaps, the end of a symbolism for the religion of the Infinite Unknowable. Schools, academies, temples of the Unknowable there cannot be. But where two or three are gathered to worship the Unknowable, there the algebraic formula may suffice to give form to their emotions. They may be heard to profess their unwearying belief in  $(x^n)$ , even if no weak brother with ritualistical tendencies be heard to cry, 'O  $(x^n)$ , love us, help us, make us one with thee!'"

By the deprivation which is exposed in these scornful paragraphs, the sum total of human happiness is cruelly reduced. To offer philosophic formula or algebraical symbols to a breaking heart is worse than giving stones for bread. Sometimes it is said that God's requirement of worship derogates from His dignity, but such is not the case. That which is perfunctory and formal, which is offered by untrue hearts or lips tainted with falsehood, He abhors. There are no denunciations more scorching in the Bible than those thundered against such worshippers and worship. Like the command, the invitations to prayer and praise were given because of the moral effect of such exercises on our part. Hence it is from no love of adulation, or reluctance to give, that praise and prayer to God are required, but from His desire to bring His people by them into closer relations with Himself for their own advantage. Look at the

case of a household where requests for favour are discouraged. A cold and unloving atmosphere is thereby produced, and the bonds which ought to unite the members of the family are relaxed, to the injury of the whole. In an opposite instance there is the glow of mutual affection which produces harmony and goodwill. Communion with God lifts the soul to a higher level, whether the exercise be prayer or thanksgiving, and when a company of believers unite in these exercises they are stimulated to worthiest deeds, and drink deep of a joy that is unspeakable. If happiness were all that resulted therefrom it would be worth their preservation, but the kindling of moral emotion that is fruitful of good works renders them a greater treasure, to be guarded with the utmost care.

#### 11. OUR KNOWLEDGE OF GOD REAL, AND THE AGNOSTIC NEGATION A FAILURE.

It is perhaps necessary, before parting from this branch of the subject, to repeat with greater emphasis what has been already stated—that knowledge does not imply comprehension of God. Knowledge of Him in this larger sense is unattainable by man. The words of Eliphaz the Temanite are true—"Behold, God is great, and we know Him not;" and again, "Touching the Almighty, we cannot find Him out. He is excellent in power, and in judgment and in plenty of justice: He will not afflict!" Be it so. We would not have it otherwise. What can be comprehended must, of course, be less than that which comprehends it. Apply this principle, and there is nothing to discourage but much to exalt in the idea of an unknowable God. Human nature, in its intentions and longings, reaches out beyond the known and the knowable. The moral man is nobler, higher, larger than the intellectual. It is content to know in part, and

glad that in part only it can know. There is joy in the consciousness that God is illimitably greater, is before, above, beneath, around, always and everywhere. It revels in the thought that His immensity cannot be expressed in words or His duration in any number of figures, feeling with a blessed sense of happy confidence that such a being must be infinite in love as well as power.

Such a conception of God bows the soul of man in adoration, inspires faith, and opens the lips in prayer. While accepting the terms that have been used to mock at human hopes and bar the progress of inquiry, it impregnates them with new significance, and derives from them fresh inspirations. There is another side to the favourite catchwords of agnosticism, which is thus perceived, and whereby even they are turned to good account. Dr. Parker says:—"Unknowable, Invisible, Incomprehensible, grim negatives, emptinesses that deceive us by their vast hollowness, and nothing more, are these surly words. The wrong word is to blame for the wrong conclusion. We have chosen the very worst word in our haste, and have needlessly humbled ourselves in doing so. We have made a wall of the word, when we might have made it into six wings, twain to cover the face, twain to cover the feet, and twain with which to fly. Instead of Unknowable, Invisible, Incomprehensible, say Super-knowable, Super-visible, Super-comprehensible, and at once the right point of view is reached and the mystery is made luminous. From the *Unknowable* I turn away humiliated and discouraged; from the *Super-knowable* I return humbled, yet inspired."

For part-knowledge may yet be real knowledge. Because we do not know everything it does not follow that we do not know anything, and still less is it certain that nothing about what we are so intensely interested can ever be known. We do not know how a single blade of grass grows, but we know that it



does, and on that knowledge we act. So also in higher mysteries. The very words of Eliphaz, already quoted, contain not a little about God—that He is great, excellent in power, just, and merciful—even while they assert that we cannot know Him. Zophar the Naamathite asked, “Can’st thou by searching find out God? Can’st thou find out the Almighty to perfection?” No, thank God! Searching will not discover Him, but He reveals Himself. Finding Him out to perfection is impossible, else would His glory be limited. Yet the sorely tried patriarch could say, with strongest confidence, “*I know* that my Redeemer liveth!” and in his final confession, “*I know* that Thou can’st do everything, and that no thought can be withholden from Thee.” Surely it is much to know that there is a living Redeemer who is perfect in knowledge and infinite in power. Part-knowledge only is claimed everywhere, but it is claimed to be enough. The apostle who said, “We know in part” and “we see through a glass darkly,” also said, with triumph in his tone, “*I know* in whom I have believed.” Yet another, who wrote “It doth not yet appear what we shall be,” also wrote, “*We know* that we have passed from death unto life,” and “*We know* that when He shall appear we shall be like Him.” A greater than either, and the master of both, has left on record the memorable words, “This is life eternal, that *they might know Thee*, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent.”

Denial that such knowledge as this is possible, and indeed any knowledge of God at all, carries with it profoundly important moral and spiritual results. In the preceding pages it has been shown that the agnostic replacement of a living and personal God by an infinite and eternal energy is logically a failure and morally disastrous. It represents the originator as utterly inferior to the thing originated, destroying thereby reverence and submission. Destroying moral authority, it renders government

impossible, breaks the bonds of brotherhood, introduces the wildest disorder, and tends to foulest degradation. Leaving man without either ideal or example, it makes the world a chaos and its sufferings purposeless cruelty ; life a monstrous blunder, and its issues utter despair. From the well-disposed it withdraws every encouragement, and from the evil their strongest restraint, by the denial of the life to come. Teaching that worship is unmeaning and unprofitable, it reduces the sum of human happiness and deprives mankind of an occupation which of all others is the most certain to raise it to a higher standard. Thus in every aspect the agnostic teaching concerning the Deity is not only dishonouring to Him but infallibly certain to produce moral degradation and misery among men.

## Part Third.

### *THE AGNOSTIC COSMOGONY.*

#### 1. AGNOSTIC AND THEISTIC THEORIES COMPARED.

THE agnostic representation of theistic belief about the origin of the universe appears to me radically defective, and therein is to be found a warning for writers on the other side. It is, of course, easy to find loose and unguarded statements in the writings of both schools of thought, and by regarding them as authoritative and typical, to demolish the entire structure of which they form a part. Such dialectic victories, however, count for nothing in this conflict, and this perhaps explains why it is that after all the argumentation the question remains unsettled and so few confess themselves convinced. It is an absolute necessity that a representation should truthfully represent, and that no isolated dictum be taken as embodying a consensus of judgment. This is what agnostics have not done, and accordingly not a little of their tilting has been like that of Don Quixote at the windmills. They have exposed absurdities which theism acknowledges to be absurd, and disproved doctrines it does not affirm. This may be magnificent, but it is not war—brilliant writing, but not useful discussion.

In order, while dealing with this error, to certainly avoid falling into it, there does not seem a better way than to quote the exact words of Mr. Spencer, for there can be no objection to regarding him as the mouthpiece of agnosticism. In his "First Principles" he names three possible theories of the origin of the universe which may be formed—"We may assert that it is self-existent;



or that it is self-created ; or that it is created by an external agency." The first of these he describes as the atheistic hypothesis ; the second the pantheistic ; and the third the theistic. With the first and the second we have nothing particular to do just now, except to remark that, having disproved the atheistic theory on the ground that the idea of self-existing matter is inconceivable, he applies a closely similar argument to what he calls the theistic, and thus to render the following quotation intelligible—"Whoever argues that the atheistic hypothesis is untenable because it involves the impossible idea of self-existence must, perforce, admit that the theistic hypothesis is untenable if it contains the same impossible idea." It will be necessary to recur presently to the question whether self-existence in any case is, or is not, an "impossible idea;" but meanwhile attention must be strictly limited to Mr. Spencer's notions of theistic doctrines. Thus far we have as one "creation by external agency," and its disproof attempted on the ground that it contains the same fatal fault as atheism. Continuing our inquiry we find Mr. Spencer explaining and illustrating his idea of theistic cosmogony as follows :—"In the cosmogony long current among ourselves, it is assumed that the genesis of the heaven and the earth is effected somewhat after the manner in which a workman shapes a piece of furniture," and it will be seen that this is entirely consistent with his previous remark of "creation by external agency."

It is not necessary to multiply citations, for these sufficiently show how real and great is the misconception that prevails. Taking first Mr. Spencer's definition of the theistic theory, we find it impossible to accept it. The word "agency," to begin with, is manifestly unsuitable. An agency is a person or thing employed, and not the employer of the person or thing. It may be living or dead, mechanical or chemical, simple or complex. We cannot so define the Creator. And why or how "external?"

Does it mean that the Creator was outside His work or not? We object, further, to his intimation that theism combats atheism on the ground of self-existence being an impossible idea, for that idea is one that it holds tenaciously as fundamental, while it denies that the universe is self-existent. Nor is it at all inconsistent in this, for what is true of the creator need not apply to the created. Finally, the illustration of what is called current cosmogony is entirely a mistake. "A workman shapes a piece of furniture" from materials made ready for the purpose, and by the application of mechanical force. This is manufacture, but it is not creation. Every theistic authority worth taking notice of would repudiate the idea that the genesis of the heaven and the earth was effected "somewhat after that manner." Something like it is to be found in mythology at both its highest and lowest extremes. Thus in the Veda there is the account of the production of the god Fire by the friction of two pieces of wood, which reads thus: "The apparatus of attrition is ready; the generation of the flame is ready; take up this stick, the protectress of mankind, and let us churn the fire as has been done of old." Side by side with this may be placed a tradition of the blacks of the Lower Murray, that an ancient and mythical being long ago threw into Lake Alexandrina flat stones, and they became bream. Each of these corresponds in some respects with Mr. Spencer's illustrations, but they have nothing whatever in common with the idea of creation by fiat. This is the doctrine of Genesis: "And God said let there be . . . and it was so." It runs through the Bible, and, as the Rev. W. Arthur remarks, "has probably done more to shape the thoughts of the nations touching the cosmos than any other in the history of thought." Mr. Spencer's illustration is nothing better than a coarse caricature of the noble theistic idea of creation by Divine command, embodied in the words, "He spake, and it was done."

It is all the more important to clear away these misunderstandings and misrepresentations because they are probably unintentional. Mr. Spencer, at all events, may be credited with entire sincerity; and it is on this account, as well as because of his prominence as a recognized leader of this school of thought, that his expositions are selected for examination. No impeachment of his honesty is intended by the criticism of his views, but inasmuch as by them many of his disciples are led astray, their erroneous character has to be distinctly exhibited. Less scrupulous as well as less able men have gone further in the same direction, but it is not necessary to follow them along their tortuous course. Sufficient has been said to show that the agnostic view of theistic cosmogony is fundamentally wrong, and that, in consequence, the arguments based upon that view must fall to pieces.

## 2. DENIAL OF CONSCIOUS INTELLIGENCE IN CREATION THE FUNDAMENTAL ERROR.

What agnosticism has to say about the cosmos is like a good deal more—not very easy to gather. Its negations and marvelous faculty of obscuring its meaning in a cloud of vague expressions render the attempt to exhibit its doctrines in a clear and precise manner a somewhat risky proceeding. This much is plain, however—that it rejects atheism, pantheism, and theism with judicial impartiality. It blandly dismisses them all as equally impossible, and cheerfully contents itself without substituting anything that is possible. As to the theories, it says “it is not a question of probability or credulity, but of conceivability;” and further it says that “we can entertain them only as we entertain such pseud-ideas as a square fluid and a moral substance,” which means, if that sentence is not among the numerous



things that are inconceivable, that we cannot entertain them at all. Yet strangely enough we find what looks like thorough inconsistency in the statement that "it is impossible to avoid the idea of self-existence somewhere." Here, for once, the theist and the agnostic seem to be in cordial agreement, the latter having performed the remarkable feat of discovering that an "impossible idea" is an idea "impossible to avoid." It is perfectly true. This necessary idea does in fact underlie every conception of the universe, and forms its basis in the most etherealized agnosticism and the most orthodox Christianity. The agnostic confesses it when he says that "amid the mysteries which become the more mysterious the more they are thought about, there will remain the one absolute certainty, that he is in the presence of an Infinite and Eternal Energy from which all things proceed." And the Christian incorporates it with his creed when he says, "I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth," adding perhaps thereto, with some degree of exultation, "for of Him, and through Him, and to Him are all things; to whom be glory for ever."

Such a point of agreement is worth dwelling upon, for it will help us, when the roads diverge, to see more clearly which is right. How strongly the idea of self-existence tempted him, pursued him, pressed him to leave the quicksands of agnosticism for firmer ground, is shown by Mr. Spencer very curiously in his reply to Mr. Harrison. He was shocked by the charge that he had been proclaiming what was perilously near the religious doctrine of an intelligent Creator, and in his haste to put himself right he tells how he first of all wrote after the term energy, "by which all things are created and sustained." These words he erased, and substituted "from which all things proceed," because though the words would not have exceeded his thought "in the sense I used them," he considered that "the ideas associated with these words might mislead." It is a little

awkward to follow the writings of a man who uses language in a special and private sense; but this is what students of agnosticism have to make up their minds to face. When Mr. Spencer intimates that the words were all right, but the ideas associated with them liable to mislead, the feeling is at least excusable that he is entangled in a word puzzle, and that if his readers do not take extreme care they will find themselves lost in the same intricate labyrinth. One is forcibly reminded of Judge Stephen's severe criticisms—"He works his words about this way and that!" This, at least, is clear—in spite of himself Mr. Spencer was forced to the very verge of acknowledging, despite all he had previously written, that the universe is the product of a self-existent mind. Wherever he may be at other stages of his cosmogony, at this point only a thin and almost diaphanous partition, woven mainly of words and phrases used in a private sense, separates him from a position we should be glad to see him frankly occupy. How else is the following to be understood? "The indescribable existence manifested through phenomena stands towards our general conception of things *in substantially the same relation* as does the creative power asserted in theology."

Is the distinction, then, between the two systems only after all a question of terminology? Alas, no! There seems to be a junction here, or what looks very like it, but the lines are not quite parallel. As one may see in a railway station, the trains which start side by side quickly diverge, and the angle between them grows wider and wider the further they go. Ours keeps the main line straight for the metropolis, but Mr. Spencer's turns a corner, plunges into a tunnel, and is seen no more. The switch that turned it on to that track was determinate clinging to negations. What a pity he did not let them go! Mr. Harrison, though he had no intention of serving our cause, has done so by pointing out the initial and fatal error of denying consciousness to the creative power. After showing how the agnostic was

compelled to clothe the unknowable, which he at first described as an "unthinkable abstraction," with some shreds of sentiment, and to what this led, he proceeds thus:—"In other words, the unknowable is the Creator, subject to this, that we cannot assert or deny that He, She, or It is Person or Being, or can feel, think, or act, or do anything else that we can either know or imagine, or is such that we can ascribe to Him, Her, or It anything whatever within the realm of consciousness." Three principal ideas are essentials in the theistic cosmogony—a self-existent, conscious, Creator. Agnosticism virtually yields the first by admitting that it is impossible to avoid the idea of self-existence somewhere, and it also concedes the third when it introduces an Energy from which all things proceed. Our task, therefore, must be to find out whether the second may not be just as positively affirmed. On this the agnostic cosmogony must stand or fall.

### 3. PROBABILITIES OF MIND IN THE CREATIVE POWER.

The universe does not contain only matter and mind, as is sometimes rather crudely stated, but matter and interspaces, with force, motion, and life. All these have to be accounted for. They exist and are correlated. They form together a most elaborate and complicated, yet perfect, system of machinery, working together in all its parts. We are asked to believe that it was constructed by, or evolved from, a power that did not know what it was doing, or what was going on. A Creator there must have been, but a Creator that was unconscious of creating. Among the many incredible, unbelievable, inconceivable things that are set before us, this seems one to which these words are strictly applicable.

In his "Religion without God, and God without Religion," the Rev. W. Arthur suggests three different alternatives from those



named by Mr. Spencer. Inasmuch as self-existence must be assumed somewhere, which is assuming eternal existence somewhere, he says we may suppose—

1. An eternal Nothing which originated both mind and matter.
2. An eternal Matter which originated mind.
3. An eternal Mind which originated matter.

As he justly remarks, we must dismiss the first at once as inconceivable, because to think of nothing as having a power of origination, or, indeed, any power at all, is a self-contradiction. Out of nothing nothing comes, for the simple but all-sufficing reason that in nothing nothing is. We are thus limited to the question, which of the two things—mind and matter—is most likely to be capable of producing the other?

The agnostic evasion of this question is by regarding both of these things as practically identical, though phenomenally incapable of being identified. It speaks of them as “modes of operation,” “proximate activities,” and seeks to disguise their essential difference by phrases of similar vague significance. Such attempts are justly to be described as metaphysical treason. They are arraigned and condemned by a dictum of Mr. Spencer’s own:—“Rational philosophy cannot ignore those broad distinctions which the general sense of mankind has established.” Among such broad distinctions so established is the undeniable fact that so far as this world is concerned, and the mind and matter with which we are in direct contact, the former is every way the superior. Mr. Arthur suggests a series of contrasts which may be quoted at length, as it would be difficult to state them in fewer or better words:—“Mind knows and is not known by matter; matter knows not and is known by mind. Mind thinks, and is not thought about by matter; matter does not think, and is thought about by mind. Mind observes, and is

not observed by matter ; matter does not observe, but is observed by mind. Mind is both its own object and its own subject ; matter is neither its own object nor its own subject. Mind investigates itself and matter ; matter neither investigates itself nor mind. Mind asks questions and answers them ; matter neither asks nor answers. Mind frames sciences both of itself and matter ; matter frames none of either. Mind experiments upon matter ; matter does not experiment even on itself. Mind originates movement in matter, when at rest, and stays movement in it when in motion ; matter does not move itself when at rest, nor yet stop itself when moving. Mind designs to change the forms, the properties, and the employments of matter, and does it—it designs to bring forth new forms of matter unknown to Nature, and does it ; matter neither designs nor does the things whether for itself or for mind. Mind is led by the prospect of either pain or pleasure, to act and to make bodies move ; matter is never led by any prospect of pain or pleasure, and as it has been said, never moves till moved, and never stops till stopped. In one word, human mind can do a thousand things with matter, although it is incapable of producing it, or yet of annihilating it—incapable even of changing the nature of one of its elementary bodies, or their mode of combining with others.”

Although in the last sentence there is a limitation to the power of mind in dealing with matter, it must not be forgotten that it is the human mind that is spoken of. Now, as we know that matter throughout the universe closely resembles matter here, it is at least probable that there is also mind throughout the universe that closely resembles mind here. All the analogies point in this direction, and teach that as mind here is superior to matter, so it is everywhere. In this limited sphere it is capable of originating both motion and force, but matter cannot do either ; it is therefore altogether improbable that in the larger

sphere the capabilities are reversed. All the means we have to guide us indicate that what accounts for a part of the elements that have to be accounted for is likelier to account for the whole than that which cannot account for any at all. Both matter and mind here are finite. The finite mind, though it can do much with matter, stops short at the point of production, elementary change, and annihilation. But it is not impossible to conceive that an infinite mind is without such limitations, and therefore capable of originating all that is, whereas the conception that such a capability is inherent in matter is contrary both to reason and analogy.

#### 4. PROOFS OF CONSCIOUS INTELLIGENCE IN CREATION.

Moreover, one thing we do clearly know about mind is that it has different degrees and gradations. In its lowest forms its capabilities are both few and narrow. There is, perhaps, sensation and nothing more. Yet even there it uses matter for its purposes, and is not used. From this point it is possible to follow its development stage by stage through its manifestations in the form of instinct to that of an intelligence that explores the universe searching for its great First Cause. Is there any reason to believe that in the intellect of a philosopher or the devotion of a saint mind has reached its culmination, its terminal point? Parallel with this question, and partly suggested by it, there arises another consideration. There is, undoubtedly, both good and evil in the universe—whence do they originate? There is mental good in pleasure and mental rightness in that which causes it; mental evil in pain, and mental error in whatever entails suffering. Mind of the lowest type is capable of thus producing and experiencing good and evil. Moral evil is moral wrong, and caused by transgression of moral laws, moral



good being righteousness. Matter, whether organic or inorganic, by itself is incapable of either. Whether simple or complex, in motion or at rest, it is beneath and outside this region, with which it has nothing to do. Regarding mind, however, we are led by this aspect of its capabilities from lower to higher, and again to higher still, till we find it capable of exquisite pleasure, as well as intense pain, of glorious excellence, as well as corresponding infamy. Again the question rises—Is this the climax and close of its possibilities? With such intellectual and moral facts before us the conclusion is strongly fortified that there is a still loftier mind and higher intelligence, otherwise each thinking and moral being in this world may say—"That which is best and greatest in the universe is lower and less than I am."

Hitherto with slow and careful steps we have followed a path which leads to the definite conclusion that the self-existent Creator must be intelligent, but, in their reluctance to abandon their last foothold, some agnostics, while admitting intelligence as an attribute of the Creator, profess to believe that it may, nevertheless, be unconscious. This branch of the subject has, therefore, now to be examined. To most minds it would appear certain that where there are evidences of adaptation there is proof of consciousness. Of such evidences the world is full. The most thorough evolutionist is familiar with numbers of them, but it is only necessary to refer to one or two. The geologic structure of the earth reveals the fact that during immense pre-historic periods the globe was being prepared for the habitation of man. The coal measures show that immense forests grew which could have been of little service to man had he appeared in that age, but which were adapted for his wants when he arrived by being stored up as fuel. Closely allied with this is the evidence from zoology. Colossal fauna inhabited this earth at a period when it is probable man might have found it practicable, but for them, to live; but the two races could not have existed together. The

monsters of that period became extinct, and not until the world by that and other means was adapted for man's dwelling was he placed upon it. One more illustration must suffice. The adaptation of two distinct kinds of organism is sometimes so close that each is dependent on the other. Take the case of bees and flowers, the habits of which render them mutually inter-dependent. When from any cause, such as unfavourable weather, there are no blossoms, the bees perish, and when from accident or any other cause there are no bees in the orchard, the blossoms do not become fertile. Now, while the adaptation of a clan or genus to its own wants is remarkable enough, its adaptation to those of another kingdom surely indicates not only intelligence, but intelligence consciously exercised towards a specific end.

It may be, and indeed sometimes is, objected that the intelligence that adapts is not always conscious of the adaptation in which it is engaged. Sir John Lubbock, and other patient investigators in the field of natural science that he has made his special study, has familiarized us all with the wonderful play of the instinctive faculty. There is the instinct of recognition in a colony of ants, and there is the instinct of providing for the preservation of the species that is common to almost all insects, inducing them to adopt methods of adaptation the results of which they never see or know. One insect adroitly paralyzes another, and then imprisons it to serve as food for the larvæ, the egg to produce which is not yet deposited—a purpose it could not serve were it either killed or left in a state of consciousness. The pre-adaptation thus shown is paralleled in innumerable instances, and is manifestly unconscious. Hence the question is urged, with some degree of pertinency, whether equally unconscious pre-adaptation may not be sufficient for the evidences of design and arrangement in the universe.

To this question there is an obvious primary answer—that what covers a part of the ground is not therefore to be accepted

as sufficient to cover the whole. Next, there is the certainty that there is conscious as well as unconscious adaptation in this world, which suggests its possibility in all worlds. Added to this is the certain superiority of conscious and intelligent action, which is shown by the constant care displayed in husbanding and making the most of will-power. Much of education and discipline is devoted to acquiring facility in mechanical or automatic action without immediate volition, because of the preciousness of the force, which otherwise would be much more extensively drawn upon. Could unconscious intelligence produce that which is conscious, and therewith a sense of its value? In other words, is intelligence the offspring of instinct? The idea is not only absurd, but inconceivable.

But the argument is not only negative. Unconscious adaptation does not account for the facts that are observed. Sir John Lubbock has commented on the strict limitations of instinct. An ant will travel a difficult track, but not trust itself to a drop of half an inch, to get the coveted piece of sugar. A wasp, as shown by another observer, will repair the broken edge of the cell-wall it is building; but, if a perforation is made, and all the honey is allowed to escape, it lets it remain, puts in the usual quantity, deposits the egg, and seals up the cell, without regard to the utter worthlessness of all the work. This may be instinct, but it is not intelligence. Still further, while the adaptation of an organism to its own environment may be explained by the laws of natural selection, that is not all that is to be accounted for. A bee goes from flower to flower till it has gathered a sufficient load. This is easily explained by that law, but whence comes the instinct that teaches it to limit its harvesting on each journey to one kind of flower? The colour-sense is insufficient, for roses, petunias, and stocks of the same hue bloom close together, yet the bee makes no promiscuous visits. This habit is an adaptation to the environment of what must be to it another



world, to the increase of its own labour and the advantage of another realm. Natural selection might teach the bee the way to gather honey, and accident makes its necessity useful to the flowers ; but neither of these things could originate a principle of undeviating choice which, while it makes no difference to itself, is so advantageous to them. There is here a power clearly shown behind instinct, implanting it, directing and controlling it, to which conscious pre-adaptation cannot with any show of reason be denied.

Development and natural selection are relied upon as furnishing a sufficient explanation of most of the adaptations in nature, but they signally fail in two points besides those that have been commented upon. One of these is the sterility of hybrids. This remarkable puzzle to naturalists has never been accounted for by natural law. It bears the most distinct evidence of a definite purpose—that of preventing the intermingling of species. Its absence would have involved the most dire confusion. Its existence proves a design, if anything can prove it, and the interference of an active, conscious, personal intelligence with the laws of reproduction for a clearly intelligible purpose. The other is the limitation of the reproductive power in the ascending scale of organisms. Bearing in mind the fecundity of the lower orders, such as insects and fishes, and the natural desire of each species to care most of all for its own preservation, the fact that the power of rapid multiplication is in an inverse ratio to that of upward development is one of Nature's paradoxes. The wisdom of both these arrangements is apparent ; but Nature does not pretend to be wise. Such an attribute can only be predicated of a superior intelligence consciously exercising its own functions. Were they without other support, these two examples of extensive, persistent, and beneficial interference with natural law might be held sufficient to prove creative foresight and providential government.

The objection that is based on the hidden mysteries of nature and hardships of life is easily disposed of. The statement that an infinitely wise, powerful, and good Creator would have made a better world proceeds on what is only a partial view of the case. We must first of all be informed of His objects before we pass our judgment on the suitability of the methods adopted for their attainment. Had He only the physical comfort of man in view, He might have done differently than if there were moral ends to be answered. Again, if He desired that man should be stimulated to effort, and the reward be proportioned thereto rather than be connected with the results alone, the plan must perforce be modified. These are among the considerations which should for ever preclude the finite mind from assuming either the right or the power to condemn as imperfect the works of the Infinite. Let it further be remembered that the hardships of life, with scarcely any exception, can be traced to the violation of some physical or moral law, and the entire difficulty vanishes away.

##### 5. FAILURE OF THE AGNOSTIC COSMOGONY.

Our inquiry has thus led us to the positive conclusion that, so far as this world is concerned, there are ample evidences of a living, personal, active, conscious intelligence, that foresaw, originated, presides over, directs, interferes with, and controls. An intricate lock is given us to open; other keys are tried without success, but this fits the wards, and the door flies open. Nature is no longer an inexplicable mystery for which we cannot account, God having been discovered to be its explanation. The firm ground thus reached gives the true standpoint from which the cosmos may be surveyed, and it is at once found that, while the view is wider, its main features are similar. This world is not an isolated sphere, but linked with others into one vast system,

and that with systems vaster still. Matter here is correlated with matter there, governed by the same laws and swayed by the same forces. The operations of mind which are visible there are only more distinctly visible here, where the means and opportunity of observation are more perfect and better. Everywhere the tokens of its supremacy are clearly discernible—in design, construction, correlation, and adaptation. Whether applied to the infinitely little or the infinitely great, the agnostic cosmogony utterly breaks down, for it cannot account for the characteristics of either, while the theistic cosmogony stands strong in its explanation of both. Let matter be disintegrated to its ultimate particle, and it yet bears the impress which induced Sir John Herschel to describe an atom as “a manufactured article.” Leaving the microscope for the telescope, and by its aid penetrating the interstellar spaces, the evidences of wisdom in design and power in execution are so convincing as to justify Napoleon’s autocratic verdict—“You may talk as you please, gentlemen, but who made all that?” Agnosticism declares that rational philosophy cannot ignore what is endorsed by the general sense of mankind, and that general sense in all ages has endorsed the sentiment crystallized by the poet Young in the line, “An undevout astronomer is mad.” Out of its own mouth issues its own condemnation.

While the agnostic affirmation that all things proceed from an energy proves utterly insufficient as a working doctrine, its objections to the genesis of the universe as held by theism and revealed in the Bible are found to be untenable when subjected to fair examination. This has been shown at every point of our inquiry. It is the one theory that corresponds with all the facts and covers all the ground. “In the beginning God created”—that is the authoritative announcement of the origin of all things, and that “He upholdeth all things by the word of His power” is its rational corollary, explaining how they are



sustained. This is the biblical cosmogony—creation by command, a universe subject to law, in all its parts displaying the operations of a conscious, intelligent, and beneficent mind. It is reasonable and credible, it commends itself to the intellect as probable and sufficient, and it stirs the heart with an impulse of grateful emotion; for the Creator thus presented is a being of love. Thank God for the God of the Bible!

Standing in the blessed light of this revelation and cheered by its reviving warmth, the depressing obscurity and chill discouragement of agnostic negations totally disappear. We have at last an explanation of all things, simple enough for our conception, sublime enough for our imagination, grand enough to be true, and we feel that it is true. If it were only a ray of light piercing the darkness, solving a few of the mysteries around us and leaving the greater part untouched, we should be thankful for it; but as, applying it to problem after problem, we find that it meets the case, our confidence grows stronger and stronger, and forms a satisfactory basis for faith as to things we do not yet fully understand.

Doubtful speculation thus gives place to assured conviction. When Robinson Crusoe saw the imprint of a naked foot on his island beach, he *knew* that a human being had made it, and that he was no longer alone in his fancied solitude. Look where we will we see the finger-prints of an almighty hand all over the universe, and we know,—we *know*,—that our minds, our moral and spiritual natures, are not alone in the universe. He saw the sign with dread, for he feared the presence of an enemy; but we behold the mighty tokens with delight, for they assure us of the presence of an infinitely gracious and powerful Friend. To this conclusion we come by a pathway every step of which is solid ground. Of the possibilities suggested at the outset all have failed but one, and that has been confirmed beyond the possibility of overthrow. In the words of William

Arthur, "As the supposition of self-existing finite things sinks from under us, leaving us resting on the basis of a self-existing Infinite Being, so does the supposition of a self-created universe sink from under us, leaving us resting on the rock of an Almighty Creator." Amid the crumbling ruins of the agnostic cosmogony we plant the standard of victory won by that of the Bible ; and this is what is inscribed upon it, "Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear."

## Part Fourth.

### *AGNOSTICISM AND THE BIBLE.*

#### 1. SCOPE OF THE INQUIRY.

WERE it necessary to adduce, or even to refer to, all the available evidence that the Bible is the Word of God, this discussion would be expanded beyond all reasonable limits ; yet no statement of the moral and spiritual aspects of agnosticism can be considered complete that does not include this branch of the subject. Much of that evidence is not necessary, even if it could be held admissible here. In theological handbooks, systems of theology, and similar works, it is customary to proceed, when dealing with the Bible, upon the assumption that there is an intelligent Creator ; but in this case the argument would be seriously weakened were that assumption taken for granted. What we have to do, therefore, is, without asking any concession, to simply take the Bible in our hands, examine its contents, study its characteristics, see what it has to say for itself, ascertain as far as we can the nature and extent of its influence in the world, and thus allow it to lead us to definite conclusions. Concurrently with this investigation we shall probably see what is involved in the question and its moral bearing. There are two considerations which may reconcile both writer and readers to this course. These are—first, that the book itself is its own ablest advocate ; and, second, that works on the Christian evidences are both abundant and conclusive. Whoever desires to pursue the inquiry into the claims of the Bible beyond the limits of this discussion will have no difficulty in doing so, for no



subject has engaged more devout erudition, and the Bible is the commonest book in the land.

The crucial point of the whole question appears to be the agnostic definition of what is knowable as that which can be proved by the evidence of the senses or by mathematical demonstration. If this definition be accepted as trustworthy and adopted as a guide, there is, of course, a speedy end to the whole business. There cannot, in the nature of things, be any such evidence or demonstration. No man living heard the voice that the prophets say they heard, was contemporary with the events that are recorded in the narratives of the historians, or saw the miracles that the evangelists say they witnessed. Not only so, there is no such proof that any of the ostensible writers ever lived, nor that, if they did, they ever wrote what is ascribed to them. No manuscript known or declared to be in their handwriting is known to be in existence, and, therefore, there is not even so much tangible evidence of their work as such a document might afford.

But if this method of settling the matter is to be acted upon it will be only fair and reasonable to apply it elsewhere, and we shall then have set out on such a devastating progress through the realms of literature as no Vandal or other barbarian was ever guilty of. Our greatest literary treasures are those which derive their priceless value from their antiquity—linking the present with the hoary past. Must we sacrifice them all? Such a principle would make history impossible and the accumulated riches of past experience only heaps of rubbish, for each generation must destroy, or at least set aside, the records of those that preceded it. The Bible is the only popular and authoritative account of events possessing such interest for mankind as the creation of man, the deluge, the migrations of Abraham and other patriarchs, the exodus of the Hebrew race from Egypt, the rise, progress, and downfall of the Jewish theocracy; the life and

work of Jesus Christ, and the origin and spread of Christianity during the first century of the Christian era. The word "popular" is used advisedly, for some of these occurrences are referred to, with more or less distinctness, in Egyptian, Assyrian, and other ancient records; but to them, as a rule, only the learned have direct access. The question is whether, in the dictum of agnosticism, there is sufficient reason for impoverishing the world by rejecting these records. If there is, then, on the same ground, the whole of the voluminous histories which now enrich our literature and grace our libraries—much as they may be valued for their interest and instructiveness—the whole of them, from Herodotus to Froude, must be rejected also.

Before such an act of literary sacrilege and intellectual murder is perpetrated it will be well to pause awhile and make quite sure—if we can be sure of anything—that it is really justifiable. We will keep the other books in the meanwhile, at all events, as literary curiosities, even if we deny to them any other valuable quality. Their retention will at least be harmless; but with the Bible the case is different. It is not like any other book, and refuses to come under any classification that can be devised. Assuredly it is least of all to be placed with those that are neutral in moral tone and tendency. It is either most nourishing food or deadliest poison. It will not be silent. You cannot ignore it. It is either a blight or a blessing, the best or the worst of all books of the world. It is alive! Its influence is inexpressible. Harmlessness? Uselessness? These are not at all the terms to apply to it. You may put other books on the shelf and postpone their consideration "till a rainy day;" but this volume will not so be set aside. Its influence is wider and deeper, and its demand for investigation louder than that of any other. It professes to show men the way of salvation, and if it fails to do that it is the grossest of delusions.

## 2. THE BIBLE MUST BE DEALT WITH AS A WHOLE.

Such being the case, it ought to receive the most careful scrutiny, for hasty action is perilous ; and it is noteworthy that so far from shrinking from this it invites it. Opening the Bible the first thing that strikes the inquirer is that it consists of two volumes, the one very much larger than the other, and each being a compilation of writings by many different authors. Turning to the larger portion—the Old Testament—it is found that there is neither uniformity of style, nor method of treatment, nor artistic arrangement. The various pieces are put together almost anyhow—some of them, it is true, with an apparent attempt at chronological order, but others without anything of the kind. Just here and there there is some slight indication of editing, but not much to speak of, and everywhere there is a degree of abruptness and want of literary finish about the introductions and conclusions that cannot escape attention. It has neither prologue nor epilogue, preface nor supplement, index nor table of contents. Then, as to the diversity of its contents, the trouble is greater to say what it does not contain than to specify what it does. There are scientific allusions that are crude and elementary, perhaps technically incorrect, and others that reveal a prevision positively startling. Here are genealogical tables, dry and unreadable, and there poetic imagery which the loftiest genius has been proud to imitate. In one place we have minute details of divine worship, and in another the majestic roll of psalms, which fall on the ear like rhythmic billows of melodious thunder. Chapters of history are devoted not to depicting the glories of the nation, but to exposing its wickedness and tracing the steps of its degradation. There are biographical sketches in a few swift strokes, like etchings by the hand of a master, and full-length portraits that are as unflattering as a painting by Hogarth. Besides these there are prophecies reaching far into the still



distant future, and lamentations over the past ; proverbs that are the embodiment of practical wisdom ; a moral law, given under the most impressive circumstances, and innumerable promises to encourage obedience. Yet the catalogue is not complete. To describe its contents with fulness of detail would require a volume of itself.

Turning now to the second and smaller part—the new Testament—it opens with four independent accounts of the history and teaching of the personage whom we discover to be conspicuous throughout the volume—Jesus of Nazareth. Then follows a succinct account of the early church, giving in fullest detail the labours of the missionary apostle. There are a number of letters written by different hands, and the whole is closed by a book glowing with vivid anticipations that are often clothed in mysterious language. Much, but not all, of what has been said about the Old Testament might be repeated, as to diversity of styles and lack of artistic finish, but there is more unity, for the central figure is never out of sight. This fact, being duly considered, gives a kind of clue to the right understanding of the whole, and while following it the reader may be surprised to find that it forms the connecting link with the older portion. The two parts were written in different languages, and there appears to have been a gap of several centuries between the last writer of the one and the first writer of the other, but the Christ unites them in one, and it is found by the student that the union is real. Between Malachi and Matthew there is no hiatus in what, for want of a better term, may be styled the plan of the volume, and from Genesis to Revelation there is no real solution of continuity.

Just here it may be permissible to remark that this continuous stream of what is at least claimed as inspiration, running through such intervals of time without altering its character, uniting such distant periods, and all the while consistent with itself, is a

feature with which those who deny its very existence have yet to deal. The book is so utterly *sui generis* that this peculiarity of it has received perhaps less attention than it justly demands, but it cannot be ignored. In no other case that can be named in the history of literature has it been possible to gather together tracts written in different lands and languages, several centuries apart, and bind them up in the same volume, not only without awkwardness or confusion, but with a consistency as though a common authorship pervaded the whole. The differences of style are like those of handwriting, modes of thought, and habits of expression; but there is uniformity of purpose and unity of sentiment, as though behind the separate writers there was one presiding genius all the time. To attribute this to accident or coincidence is to believe in a miracle wrought by chance.

Returning, however, to our examination of the Bible, it is obvious that owing to its structural peculiarity it must be treated as a whole. What is true of the Old Testament applies equally to the New, and *vice versa*. There cannot be one rule for the historical narratives, another for the prophetic utterances, a third for the moral precepts, and a fourth for the poetry. They are so plaited and woven together that no such discrimination is applicable. Bishop Colenso may say that the Pentateuch is unhistorical, and Matthew Arnold that there are two Isaiahs—one of Jerusalem and one of Babylon; one critic may deride the Mosaic cosmogony as fictitious, and another object to the imprecatory psalms. Destructive criticism of this kind has done its worst, but after all the fact remains that the book is a unit, one and indivisible. Errors of copyists may be eliminated, and such possible interpolations as extracts from the book of Jasher, but when all is done that microscopic and jealous scrutiny can suggest, nothing material is altered. The trustworthiness or untrustworthiness of the entire volume is in question, for it is impossible to take one part and reject the other. There are psalms

in the historical books, and history in the psalms. The destruction of Sennacherib is recorded in Isaiah as well as in the books of Kings and Chronicles. There is hardly a personal allusion to David in the books of Samuel that does not find an echo in the songs of the royal psalmist. From all this it comes that we cannot pronounce a few of these writings to be of supernatural origin and the rest only the handiwork of men. There is nowhere to draw the line. Prose and poetry, history and prophecy, ethical disquisitions and personal biographies, sanitary regulations and moral laws, miracle and song, promise and threatening, instruction and command, they are all so inextricably interwoven that separation is destruction.

We may have wondered that the contents of the Bible were so "huddled together," as Dr. Parker calls it, but is there not here an explanation? Without anticipating the verdict, for which, indeed, we are not ready, does it not seem as if the plan, or want of plan, in the book was purposely chosen to preclude the possibility of its being dealt with piece-meal? An editor or author of this century would never allow himself to issue such an unsymmetrical publication. His reputation would suffer too much by it. He would classify his subjects, group them in appropriate parts, giving each its title, and taking care that they were in logical and chronological order. As a probable result, half the leaves would remain uncut, and those, perhaps, the most important. The work of the critics would be facilitated, each would reject the portion which seemed to him least authoritative, declaring that instead of impairing the value of what remained, it was thereby increased, and the net result of their joint labours may easily be imagined. However the book came into being, that contingency has been effectually guarded against, and in such a way as, even by itself, to almost compel the conclusion that it was foreseen. If this has nothing to do with inspiration, it indicates a prescience both rare and wonderful.



### 3. THE POSITION OF THE BIBLE WITH REGARD TO MORALS.

These considerations apply with especial force when the moral aspect and effects of the Bible are in question. Moral topics pervade it from one end to the other. Moral teaching runs through its history, poetry, biography, and prophecy. It is both direct and indirect, special and incidental. Instruction of this kind is conveyed by the lives of the personages that appear on its stage, both principal and subordinate; by the rise and decadence of the nations with which it is concerned; by the sanitary arrangements and domestic legislation of a race, and the ritual prescribed for their worship; as well as by the promulgation of a moral law to rule the world. Such lessons are crystallized in axioms and elaborated in discourses; they are the theme of songs and the avowed purpose of miracles. They permeate every part, Leviticus as well as the Book of Proverbs, and Judges as well as the Sermon on the Mount. Back of the whole there is always the voice of authority: "Thou shalt" or "Thou shalt not," with "Thus saith the Lord," answering to "Verily I say unto you," in distinct and solemn affirmation. These things in combination have given the Bible its unique position of undeniable supremacy in the literature of the world, and its unparalleled influence over the life and thought of mankind. Mr. Ruskin, writing on Easter Sunday of 1886, says:—"It is the grandest group of writings existent in the rational world, put into the grandest language of the rational world, in the first strength of the Christian faith, by an entirely wise and kind saint, St. Jerome; translated afterwards with beauty and felicity into every language of the Christian world, and the guide, since so translated, of all the acts of that world which have been noble, fortunate, and happy!" Sir John Lubbock acknowledged that it does hold such a position and wield such an influence by placing it first in his list of the hundred best books

for people to read, and many both competent and unprejudiced judges have admitted that he was right in so placing it. Were it only an antique, a literary gem, a fragment of history, a collection of ancient writings, with here and there a priceless poem, its place would be in the libraries of the learned and among the treasures of bibliopoles, but not, as now, the daily reading of millions, their comfort, instruction, and guide. Its literary excellences are many, and its historic value great; but it is by its moral power that it maintains its vitality and exercises its sway.

In any comprehensive survey of the Bible the candid student must be impressed by the revelation it makes of God. As this particular point is studied it is probable that the sentiment will be one of wonder, which rises higher and higher till it becomes almost bewildering. For the conception of God to be derived from the pages of the Bible, illuminated by their own light, is the most marvellous that has ever entered into the mind of man. At the very outset, in the first line, He is introduced as the Creator of all things, and as the majestic account rolls on there is a suggestion of almightiness in effortless action which transcends description. There is no straining after effect in the language, no gorgeous word painting, and no overwhelming display to lay hold of the imagination. Simplicity was never more simple, and yet grandeur was never more sublime than in the brief sentence, "And God said 'Let there be light,' and there was light." Turn the page, and the anthropomorphism that is met with when God is seen "walking in the garden in the cool of the day," and conversing with the creatures He has placed therein, forms a contrast utterly startling. Yet this is typical of all that follows. In the Bible revelation of God such contrasts are constant, and their seeming contradictions form one of its greatest marvels. As it moves on there are added to the ideas of self-existence without limited duration, and power

that cannot be circumscribed, those of omniscient wisdom and omnipresent energy, with perfection of truth and justice and infinite love. Before the august majesty of the Supreme Being thus revealed, humanity instinctively bows down in deepest adoration, and yet mingling with the sentiment thus inspired there is one of absolute trust. For the Great Creator is not represented as remote and unapproachable, but as coming into direct contact with every human life. Strange seeming contradictions! The heaven of heavens cannot contain Him, yet He dwells in the contrite heart! Almighty in power, He can be resisted by a human will. Maker of the universe, His purposes may be frustrated by the perversity of man. Spiritual, yet material; He is the eternal and the invisible—yet He listens, speaks, rejoices, and is grieved. Guiding, governing, and sustaining all the worlds, the most minute details are yet under His providential care. In the fulness of time He is incarnated—a marvellous conception; but how much more marvellous that the Incarnate God should be put to death, and most of all that, dying, He should save the world. With all that is extraordinary here it is distinctly visible that there is not an atom of real self-contradiction in this revelation of God. Not one ray of glory is obscured by the Divine nearness to humanity, and that nearness is not rendered less real by the splendour of the Divine appearing. To present such extremes without confusion or unnaturalness is a feat that stands alone. The Supreme Spirit of the universe is brought into the most direct personal contact and closest personal relations with all the races of mankind, and yet the conception is not stained by the slightest blemish or coarseness. Considered solely in the light of an intellectual exploit this is utterly unparalleled. God the Creator, and yet the Friend; the Judge, and yet the Saviour; glorious in Holiness, yet tender in sympathy; hating sin, yet loving the sinner; inflexible, yet easy to be entreated. Such is the God of the Bible, a God absolutely



and incomparably perfect in every respect, and yet who requires and has made it possible for men to resemble Him ; making the resemblance at the same time the object of their noblest ambition and the culmination of their being. The very audacity of such a representation would have deterred human intelligence alone from attempting it. Its sublimity, its reconciliation of seeming impossibilities, its harmony with everything else of which we have any knowledge, all unite in stamping upon it divine authority, and render absurd and incredible any other way of accounting for it than that in the Bible God has revealed Himself.

The biblical representations of human life are in strict accordance with the facts that are within our own consciousness. Human life in its moral aspect is a tragedy in three acts. There is first the plunge into evil, second the struggle with that evil, and then the end reached by the final permanence of character either in death to sin or death by sin. Everyone who knows himself or his fellows has experience of a fatal fall. He knows that he is not what he ought to be, or what he might be. He feels that his moral nature has sustained a shock, an injury, whether he lays the blame on it, or on himself, or elsewhere. Against a tendency he deplores in his most serious moments, and a future course he dislikes to look at, he struggles with varying degrees of intensity and persistency. He feels that he is not left to himself. Both good and bad impulses are at work upon him. Impulses of both kinds sway his conduct. Sometimes he cries out in his distress, "What must I do to be saved?" and at others relinquishes the contest in weariness and despair. Of one thing he feels certain, that if he is to be made better in himself, and to learn how to live a worthier life, some power outside himself must do the work, and give him strength to win the victory. There are a great many who boldly profess that they have triumphed, and so far as observation of their lives can be trusted it justifies their

claims, and it is noteworthy that they with absolute unanimity ascribe the conquest to a supernatural agency working on them with the concurrence of their own will. Perhaps they speak of the Spirit of God, or of a power not their own that makes for righteousness ; but that matters comparatively little. The important point is that they have received saving help in their own moral consciousness which they recognize to be from above. Death is the final scene and the greatest mystery of human life. Usually unwelcome, and shrunk from with the greatest dread, in many cases it loses its harsher aspect, and is shorn of its terrors by the confident expectation of a life to come. How consistently the Bible treats of all this, and accounts for what is otherwise so totally unaccountable, every reader of the Bible is well aware. It gives a reasonable explanation of the experiment of evil, of the consequences thereby entailed, of the source and character of the conflicting agencies in the long struggle, and the manner in which victory is won or defeat sustained. Thus the most intricate problems of human life that have ever confronted the thoughtful are clearly solved, and an answer to the most searching question of hearts wrung with anguish at the sight of abounding evil are answered. The hope of humanity is made manifest, and the possibility of its salvation declared. Nowhere else in the wide range of literature is there to be found what is so comprehensive in its scope, so consistent with the facts as they are, or so applicable to the wants of the world. In this respect also its supernaturalism is to be plainly seen.

The strict fidelity of the Bible to human nature is one of the characteristics that must not be forgotten. It is rigidly honest. Without the slightest effort to secure popularity, it describes people as they are, and as they were. Its saints are shown with all their imperfections and faults, and its sinners with whatever redeeming qualities they had. It neither traduces nor flatters. There are no caricatures of human frailty, nor pictures of impos-

sible sanctity. Human biographers, from the dawn of letters till Mr. Froude set a different example, have been in the habit of glorifying the characters they meant to be admired, and adding darker shades to those whose conduct they desired to condemn. Why should the writers of the Bible alone have been so severely, unscrupulously, and, as some still think, so unwisely just? Nor is this all. No other book in the world treats as does this one of indelicate subjects. Some of its pages are unsuitable for public reading, and good people are puzzled, if not scandalized, thereby. They need not be. As the book of humanity and for humanity it had to touch the depths as well as the heights, the repulsive as well as the attractive. Such things exist, and to have omitted all mention of them would have been an element of incompleteness. Merely human authors, especially if seeking world-wide acceptance for the book, would not have dared to introduce so much that is indelicate, or to have spoken so plainly. Its life-like portraiture of human nature is one of the things that stamp it as of higher than human origin.

With all this intense humanity, it comes like a voice from another world. In the earth, it is not of the earth; moving among what is mournful in its vileness, and dealing with things that are shameful, it is never compromised. It echoes our doubts and fears, our cravings and longings, our aspirations and hopes, but as from an exalted sphere. It probes human weakness that it may show how strength can be gained, and exposes immorality that the path of purer life may be revealed. Base appetites and bad propensities are spoken of quite plainly, but it is that a radical remedy may be shown. Dealing with evil, it has neither delight in it nor excuse for it, but only abhorrence and pity. It is not only a perfect mirror of life as it is, but an equally perfect portraiture of what it can become. Its remedies are boldly announced to be commensurate with the disease, and the only remedies that will touch the case. Thus it claims exclusiveness,



both in character and authority, and to be the one and only light that illuminates the darkness on which it shines.

#### 4. THE AGNOSTIC REJECTION OF THE BIBLE A MORAL DISASTER.

Mere toleration of such a book is impossible. In itself it is utterly intolerant of all antagonists. Its proclamation is that acceptance of it in a practical sense will ensure salvation, and the mere neglect of its teachings perdition. With calm assurance it avows utter hostility to all rivals, and predicts their irretrievable overthrow. Such claims as it makes are either the height of arrogance, or else they are simply just. There is no other alternative. Accordingly, it is not to be lightly waived aside. The book itself is a fact which the most ultra agnostic must admit. Its position in the world is undeniable. Account for it how we may, and deal with it how we please, the thing itself is a stern, uncompromising reality. The extent of its influence was only hinted at in the remark of a high authority, that it is the secret of England's greatness. It pervades literature, sustains laws, suggests reforms, moulds character, and governs conduct more than any other single thing that is at work. It is, and it is gigantic. Either it is gloriously true or a colossal fraud, the hugest imposture that ever deceived the world or the brightest light that ever revealed the world's impostures and shams. In nothing is it neutral, and neutrality is the one impossibility to thinking men concerning it.

Something or other has to be done with it, and that must depend on what we believe about it. It is sheer waste of time to walk on the knife edge of neo-conviction. Every attempt to account for the facts of life, or to regulate its course without reference to it, must end in failure. The repetition of the agnostic formula that the soundness of its claims are neither

affirmed nor denied is useless. Not only does it look like a cowardly shirking of a vital question, it asserts what cannot be maintained. Non-affirmation is practical denial. Only one of two conclusions is possible—either that “all Scripture is given by inspiration of God,” or else that the entire volume is an audacious and ruinous imposition. To say that its claims are not proven, that the evidence is insufficient, and that what is true about it is not known, is actual rejection. Any other interpretation of such phrases is only childish playing with words. Belief about it one way or the other is compulsory, and must be operative. A choice has to be made and acted upon, and that is the really important matter. It must proceed from conviction, but whether that conviction is based upon absolute certainty or firm belief, is of much less consequence. A man goes on a journey; he has chosen his road; before doing so he was convinced that it was the right one. Whether his convictions resulted from absolute certainty, having travelled by that road before, or from the testimony of others who said they had been along it, does not matter much. The one important fact is, he goes. Agnosticism in this matter is a mere theoretical refuge for unbelief that shuns avowal. It is a cloud castle, constructed of words and phrases that envelop it in obscurity, and are dissipated by practical common sense into thin air. If, driven from this resort, there be any attempt to justify the attitude assumed by asserting the incredibility of the Bible in any of its aspects, the ground is shifted, and the agnostic is confronted by another incredibility—that such a book, preaching truth almost on every page, can itself be false. Of the two this requires by far the larger amount of credulity, and there the case may rest.

Hitherto, for a reason that was stated at the outset, I have made little use of the arguments that are usually most relied upon by writers on systematic divinity to prove the inspiration of the Bible. There has not been even an attempt to define what is

inspiration, or to discriminate between it and revelation. The book itself has been our guide, and its character formed the ground of our conclusion. But we have now arrived at a point when these evidences of its genuineness and authenticity may be at least referred to. The Bible, having independently established its own claim to credence, may be allowed to bear witness. It reveals a God who is capable of revealing Himself. There is, hence, strong presumptive proof that He would do so, and further, that He would do so in the manner that is thus disclosed. Such a disclosure was not only probable, as well as possible, but necessary, if man was ever to know anything of his Maker, and to derive benefit from that knowledge. Grouped around this primary consideration there are the evidences that He did so reveal Himself in the Bible that are to be gathered from external sources, from the concurrent testimony of history verifying the truth of its contents, the unimpeachable veracity of its writers, the institutions that exist in its attestation, and many others. Though only brief mention is made of what thus confirms the conclusion already arrived at, this mass of evidence is not to be regarded as of little value. Its solidity and conclusiveness has resisted all attempts against it, and will continue to do so to the end of the world, but this reference to its character and impregnability must suffice, for nothing more is really required.

The moral consequences of rejecting the Bible as a revelation from God are seen, in the light of the examination that has been made, to be both vast and various. It may be possible to discern some kind of a God in nature, mighty in power, wise in contriving, infinite in duration, but it is not the God of the Bible. There is a power in man not himself, the operations of which we can trace, but so far as we can discover its likeness, with the dim light of reason, it is not the God of the Bible either. Let that revelation of God be discarded and there is no God of Holiness and no God of Love, the bad man's terror and the good man's



confidence. Subordinate to, but consequent on this, it follows that human life is an enigma without a solution, a web without a pattern, a chaos without the faintest possibility of order, and its issue the blackness of darkness for ever. Hence there is no moral guidance or authority, restraint from vice or incentive to virtue ; neither instruction as to what is right, comfort in sorrow, or hope in dying. Let in the flood of light which the Bible sheds, and all this is changed. There is meaning and purpose everywhere—a beneficent providence, wise laws, an effective authority, compensation for suffering, and a reward for righteousness. The moral and the spiritual in man finds there that which meets its requirements and fosters its development. The Bible is the hope of humanity as well as the revelation of its God, and the negation of the one is also the negation of the other.

The question why there is so much mystery in the Bible may be sufficiently answered by asking others. Why is there so much mystery in human life ? and why so much in the material universe ? The objection that there are things hard to be understood is like objecting to the arrangements of the solar system. If light is good, why need we spend so much time in darkness ? and if moonlight is a pleasant substitute for sunlight, why is there none in half the nights of the year ? Some scientists have suggested improvements in these physical arrangements ; but their plans, if carried out, would only result in clumsy dislocation. The man who reads his Bible with a willing mind and receptive heart is the only one qualified to reply to such objectors. He alone has thoroughly tested it, and thereby acquired competency to pronounce the verdict. To him it is life and light, strength and comfort, a guide and counsellor. From its pages he derives not only instruction but moral support ; for, by taking heed thereto, he cleanses his way. This is the final plea for its inspiration, to which agnosticism has no answer : It makes men better and holier by its teachings—raises them both individually and

collectively in all that constitutes true greatness, showing a uniformity of action and blessedness of results with which nothing else can compare.

## Part Fifth.

### *AGNOSTICISM AND HUMANITY.*

#### CHAPTER I.—THE INDIVIDUAL MAN.

##### 1. WHAT PERSONALITY INCLUDES.

IF there is no personality in God, there can be no personality in man, for the one involves the other. Personality must include reality of existence, of capabilities, of functions, and the actual possession of certain faculties, which implies independence in their exercise. What cannot be employed cannot rightly be said to be possessed. If there is no personality in that from which all things proceed, there cannot be any in the things which proceed from it; for it cannot endow them with what it has not in itself. Agnosticism teaches that the origin of men and all things is a stream of energy, infinite and eternal. An individual man is like a bubble on that stream, appearing perhaps to have an individual existence, but which is entirely a delusion. Humanity, on this showing, resembles not a little the bubbles which appear and disappear on a rushing river. They are of great diversity in some respects, appear and disappear in quick succession, move hither and thither, singly and in groups, are gone in an instant, and leave no trace behind. Though they seem to have a sort of limited personality, it is only seeming. They separate and coalesce, hurry or linger, swayed by forces of current and eddy with which they cannot in the slightest degree interfere, and are governed by impulses of which they have no knowledge whatever.

This agnostic theory of human life not only robs man of his personality, but is totally at variance with his consciousness.



He knows that, in his complex nature, there is a region where desire is generated. His animal nature has its cravings, and they are so strong as to insist on their gratification. He has the power to yield to them, to deny them, or to hold them in abeyance. There is a part of his nature—call it what you please—that discusses their propriety, and whether their demands shall be conceded or not. In this discussion certain faculties take part which test the question by reference to principles outside the man himself, and introduce ideas of right or wrong. Finally, the power previously referred to, and which we call will, settles the matter as the executive authority, and thereupon action is taken. Thus there is not only involuntary desire and voluntary action, but between the two intelligent perception and consideration, moral sentiments and emotions, and an independent choice, which may be wise or foolish, right or wrong, and on which the responsibilities of the action depend. This conscious possession of will, and its exercise in making choice, is the distinct evidence of personality in man.

With all its reluctance to make positive affirmations, agnosticism is compelled to abandon mere negations here and to assert that human free-will does not exist. Having set out by denying it to that which originates all things, it is constrained to deny it to those who are thus originated. Hence it is driven into an extremely awkward position, from which it seeks extrication by raising a cloud of dust to obscure the controversy. In order that the doctrine of free-will may be disproved it is misstated. "That everyone is at liberty to do what he desires to do (supposing there are no external hindrances) all admit, though people of confused ideas commonly suppose this to be the thing denied. But that everyone is at liberty to desire or not to desire, which is the real proposition involved in the doctrine of free-will, is negatived as much by the analysis of consciousness as by the contents of the preceding chapter." These are Mr. Spencer's

own words, in his "Principles of Psychology." The real "people of confused ideas" are those who confuse desire with volition. It has been shown in the analysis of consciousness, very briefly given in a preceding paragraph, that there is considerable difference between the two, and that the one is antecedent to the other, as cause is to effect. Liberty to desire or not to desire is by no means the proposition involved in the doctrine of free-will, but the liberty to gratify or refuse that desire, which is quite another thing. Hunger, thirst, and weariness produce desires which, in their origin, are independent of volition; but we are quite at liberty to choose whether we shall eat, drink, and rest or not. It is this liberty which constitutes man a free agent, and the advocates of free agency do not state it otherwise.

There is one sentence in the above quotation which seems unintentionally to concede all that is asked for—"That everyone is at liberty to do what he desires to do all admit." Then the final action is free, and if so, it appears to follow as a logical necessity that the resolution to do it must be free also. It is not only in the deed, but in the plan and purpose which precede it, that its quality resides. There must be determination before execution, and if there is liberty at that stage of the process the doctrine of necessity falls to pieces, while that of self-determination is established.

Constituted as we are, it is inevitable that involuntary desires must sometimes conflict with each other. This is seen in those that are most simple and universal. The desire for food and that for rest are not unfrequently in collision. A man is faint with hunger, and yet so overpowered with drowsiness that he does not want to rouse himself to procure and partake of necessary food. The same thing is manifested in a great variety of ways, and brings into operation constantly the act of choice. In things that are more complex and involve more important issues the faculties of intelligence have to be brought into play and reason

has to do its work. The intellectual nature is called upon, and asserts itself to be an entity capable of free exercise within its own sphere. To describe it as Dr. Bain does in the opening sentence of his work on "The Senses and the Intellect" is to give an entirely erroneous idea. The learned doctor speaks of "the operations and appearances that constitute mind," as if anything could consist of its own operations, or be made up of its own appearances! Yet to such shifts as this agnosticism is reduced in its endeavour to account for phenomena the existence of which cannot be denied. Things are not what they ought to be, but are only seeming. Everything is illusory, and there is nothing real. There is no motive, but only a motive power; no intelligence, but only a series of appearances; no will, but a sequence of operations. What is all this but a kind of intellectual jugglery?

The inutility of these theories in practice is almost self-evident, as also is their inapplicability to the state of things that exists. Motive power may do for the bodies of men, but it is altogether inoperative as regards the men themselves. For no man will confess that the physical part of him is all there is. He acknowledges that you may fetter his limbs, but defies you to manacle his thought. By superior force you may sway him this way or that, bury him in a dungeon, or transport him to another land, but that will never touch whatever it is that governs himself. If you want to alter his desires, and to change the character of his wishes, you must appeal to his intelligence so as to convince his judgment, or to his moral sense, thereby to influence his conscience. You must supply him with motives if you are to gain his consent to your purposes and win the concurrence of his will, for motive power is totally ineffectual to accomplish anything of the kind.



## 2. ITS CONNECTION WITH RESPONSIBILITY.

Moral responsibility is inseparably connected with this question of human personality. It could not be attached to a being who is divested of power to choose and freedom to determine. If man were a mere molecule in a mass, and his seeming acts of preference no more the result of his will than is the bending of a tree on the outskirts of a forest towards the light, his deviations from rectitude would be no more blameworthy than is the unsymmetrical character of the tree in question. It would be difficult to exaggerate the deep and hopeless degradation into which any human being must feel himself to be plunged if he accepts these dicta and allows them to lead him on to their logical consequences. He must desire and he can act, but if there is nothing between or besides these he is a meaner creature than any of the beasts of the field; his apparent choices are only shams, he is urged and swayed by forces which he can neither understand, resist, nor control. Stripped of mind and will by the doctrine that everything is illusive, he has no personality left that is worthy of the name. The means by which he might expect to rise in the scale of being are gone, and, indeed, the terms higher and lower have lost their significance, for there is no moral standard left.

This is a dismal condition, if only there be any true perception of how deplorable it is; for with the loss of moral responsibility everything must suffer. There can be no inspiration to duty without a sense of obligation, and no conscientiousness without a conscience. To an agnostic the latter term has no proper significance, although the fact may be denied. Religion teaches that it is a faculty implanted by the Creator, but philosophy seeks to discover its source in evolution, and reduces it to the habit of obedience to the will of the many; thus it disappears as a myth, for it is thus represented as merely selfishness in the mass over-

ruling selfishness in the individual. Without this guide there can be no effective discrimination between various desires, and no restraint on what tends to evil. Yet further, the only adequate interpreter of that word is silenced, and the true distinction between evil and good destroyed. In every direction the nature of man is dwarfed and crippled by these dreary negations, for all that is most hopeful in it is stultified and crushed.

Let us come out from these mists of speculative philosophy into the clearer light of our own consciousness, and compare it with that given by the Scriptures. Here we find concurrent testimony that man has not only an animal nature, but also intellectual powers and an immortal soul. What he is as thus represented is something altogether worthier of being in the world. Though he has strong desires and fiery passions, these very powers are capable of being refined and utilized under the control and guidance of his nobler part. He has a power of perception by which he appreciates his present position, with its advantages and difficulties, and learns how to make the most of the one and the least of the other. The range of his intellect is such that he can trust its guidance beyond the limits of sensation. The fact that he is a free being invests him with conscious dignity and gives him a serious sense of responsibility which does much to make his life worth the living. His conscience quickens his ambition to be himself worthier, for it sets before him a moral standard and invites him to strive after its attainment. In the exercise of his reason he finds keen delight, and the cultivation of his moral nature enables him to anticipate a better and brighter life than that which he is living now.

### 3. ITS PROMISE OF IMMORTALITY.

With all this there comes to him an assurance that what he prizes most allies him to a more perfect existence than his own,

and thus there is a constant drawing upwards. He hears, he believes, he *feels*, that he came from God, and that he is designed to return to God. So strong is this inward conviction, and so powerfully is it reinforced by statements professedly inspired, which find an echo in his heart corroborating their truth, that at times he contemns its denials as folly, and denounces the author of such denials as a fool. Thus the prospects before him enlarge and brighten. The superior nature with which he is allied is the embodiment of every excellence, and he is not shut off from it, but linked with it in a vital union. As he discerns that every act of virtue is a step upward, and every vicious self-indulgence a step downward, he is prompted strongly to cultivate whatever is manly, perceiving at the same time that it is God-like. His body is kept under subjection, his passions checked, and his selfishness controlled. Hence the relation in which he stands to his Creator, and the affinities growing therefrom furnish the strongest of all inducements to make the best of himself that is possible, and supply at the same time the most effective means for doing so.

Nor is this all. Both life and immortality are brought to light by the Gospel, and they are facts to the consciousness of all who have not by agnostic or some similar agency confused and bewildered themselves. Addison's well-known soliloquy is the utterance of the human heart at all times when left to itself—

“ It must be so . . . . .  
Else whence this pleasing hope, this fond desire,  
This longing after immortality?

. . . . .  
'Tis the Divinity that stirs within us—  
'Tis Heaven itself that points out an hereafter,  
And intimates eternity to man.”

No stronger proof could be desired that this is rational than is furnished by the positivist philosophers. Denying a true



immortality they have yet had to invent one. It is a mere sham and a hollow subterfuge. When fairly examined it is nothing but a cheat and a mockery, but that they have had to import it into their system sufficiently proves that it could not be done without. But what a delusion it is! The permanence of an excellent example, the survival of good deeds, the resurrection of principles of action in the lives of future generations, the inspiration of an historical character, the reproduction of "generous ardour," the memory that shall "breathe pure love" and wreath faces that are yet unborn with "the smiles that have no bitterness." Is this a real immortality? Is it true to say, as the gifted authoress of some of these phrases has permitted herself to do, "This is life to come?" It may be allowable to call it posthumous and imperishable influence, but to call it "life" is a lie. The whole thing is inflated bombast—a balloon blown skilfully, and to its full dimensions, and painted in choice and variegated colours, but one prick of the lancet of common sense causes it to collapse in an instant. An American humourist asks, "What's the world to a man when his wife is a widow?" Call that question vulgar and commonplace if you like—it is good enough for its purpose, and does its work effectually. Its homespun logic tears the glittering gossamer of a fabricated immortality to tatters, and reveals the naked fact that if death does end all, so far as our own personality is concerned, there is no use in trying to cover it up by such artificial consolations.

But the serious question will present itself whether it is honest thus to gloss over the hideous doctrine of annihilation, which in reality is taught. These suggestions of the value of the present life to the future world are open to the charge of being mere disguises, and poor ones at the best. For if personal non-existence be a fact, it is a horrible one. The tenacity with which we cling to life proves it. One of the foremost English statesmen is reported by Harriet Martineau as having said, quite seriously, "I

had rather be damned than annihilated." To some people this may seem shocking, but it only puts plainly an alternative which most of them would rather not face at all, while it expresses a preference which would be theirs were they forced to make the choice. It comes, therefore, to this, that what positivists decorate with pretty phrases, and agnostics, with less dishonesty, keep as much as possible out of sight, is a doctrine from which human nature recoils with instinctive repulsion, and a doom more dreadful than priestcraft has ventured to pronounce.

The love of life is the strongest, most enduring, and most universal of human passions, and the dread of death outrivals any other human fear. The readiness to die which the infirm, the afflicted, the distressed, and the aged sometimes profess, does not weaken, far less neutralize, the force of this statement. They may welcome death, but it is not because they are tired of life itself, and only because they desire relief which does not seem possible in any other way. Restore to the paralyzed the use of his limbs, remove the cancer or other painful ailment which the doctors have pronounced incurable, release the burdened heart from its load of care, rejuvenate the octogenarian, and then see whether any one of the moribund group will not spring with eagerness at the renewed prospect of living. This is how the question ought to be tested, and it proves that metaphorical immortality affords no consolation to the dying.

The truth of the matter is that, while Christianity proclaims an eternity of happiness for one class and of misery for the other, humanity instinctively accepts it as corresponding with its own sense of what ought to be. Agnosticism, in opposition to both, merely drops a curtain which is painted with the blackness of darkness. Dwelling on the darker aspect of orthodox teaching, it endeavours to paint something on that curtain that shall appear more attractive, but its efforts are an utter failure. Between the lines written small, "No reward," and in larger

characters. "No punishment," there is that which cannot be covered up, "No hope." Apart from the demoralizing effect of this on the world, by its withdrawal of encouragement to self-denying virtue and of restraint from selfish vice, it offers that which humanity abhors. Denying both heaven and hell, its prospect is worse than either. From the horror of darkness revealed by the gulf of nothingness, where it is fairly disclosed, humanity revolts, and what is especially remarkable, revolts with an intensity proportioned to the vigour of its physical vitality, the energy of its mental powers, the height of its intellectual culture, and the fulness of its moral growth.

Contrast the two representations thus made of man as a solitary individual. Agnosticism begins with him as a bubble on the stream, or perhaps as a polyp on a coral reef. It divests him of any true personality, free agency, or moral responsibility, makes his life the sport of circumstances, and his end a return to the elements whence he was evolved. Christianity says he came from God, is made in His image, is capable of knowing, loving, and more closely resembling his Creator. It treats him as free and offers him a worthy life, with ample rewards here and eternal felicity hereafter. It engages him in noble service, assures him that while performing it he shall reap the result in his own ennobled character, and that if he fails there is a Saviour provided for his restoration. It teaches him that he is no waif of the ocean, but a child of a heavenly Father, comforts him living, and cheers him as he approaches the end, by unveiling the brightness of a life to which this is but the prelude, and for which it is the preparation.



## CHAPTER II.—THE MUTUAL OBLIGATIONS OF HUMANITY.

## 1. WHAT IS REQUIRED.

Perhaps the most conspicuous failure of agnosticism as a working system is its utter inability to meet the wants of the world. It is fair to ask what kind of world this would be were the principles of agnostics universally accepted and acted upon. Destructive criticism is easy, but if it is not prepared to take the full responsibility of what it does, it is cowardly. Let it be imagined that nothing is to be regarded as known but what is proved by the evidence of the senses or by mathematical demonstration; that the idea that what is credible may be believed is once for all and totally set aside; and that in consequence of this dogma all faith in the unseen world and the supernatural is entirely swept away. An immense gulf now separates the known from the unknown, into which tumble all religious beliefs, all authority derived from an invisible God, all moral laws that have their sanction outside the statute-books of the land, all ideas of a spiritual life and a future state, and with them all faith, all hope, and all worship. Into this vast sepulchre would go very much more that is closely connected with, and involved in, what has been thus specified: but the inventory of things to be abandoned need not be extended. A clean sweep being thus made of hopes and fears, beliefs and practices, traditions of the past and anticipations of the future—when the work was done, what kind of a world would ours be to live in?

It is difficult enough sometimes as it is. The struggle for existence and the principle of the survival of the fittest press with no little severity. Peopled as it is by multitudes who differ very widely from each other in all their characteristics, whose race-affinities, ideas, and manner of life have little or nothing in

common, there is frequent collision. Their interests clash, and there are elements of discord everywhere. In physical development and in mental culture they vary immensely, and in inventive genius, mechanical skill, and social refinement. So also in the condition of their lives, and the habits which those conditions engender. As the result of this some are wealthy, some poor, some are weak and some strong, some have all that heart can wish and others are steeped to their lips in poverty ; in the one case there is no limit to happiness but the capacity for enjoyment, and in the other nothing that is worthy of the name from the cradle to the grave. It is evident in any such general survey that whatever initiates the divergencies so plainly visible also tends to increase them. The same causes go on continually, but with augmented momentum and accelerated velocity. Hence arises one of the problems of modern society. Economists confess themselves startled, if not puzzled, by the manifest tendency of the times for the rich to grow richer and the poor poorer. Modern civilization, with all its boasted superiority over that of any former time, does not equalize conditions, but, instead of that, works the other way. National wealth increases, but so does national poverty. There is more luxury, and, at the same time, more actual want. The few prosper, but it is at the expense of the many. The explanation has already been given, and the fact accounted for, but as a fact, its lesson has still to be learnt. The lesson enforced by these wide divergencies of character, capability, and condition, with their natural tendencies and ceaseless play of conflicting interests, is just this : that without the mutual obligations of humanity being recognized and acted upon, the difficulties of life must inevitably become more difficult, and the world become in the end utterly intolerable.

Such would be an agnostic world, and that it is not now either in existence or immediate prospect is due to the operation of causes that it does not and cannot provide, but the necessity of

which is clearly demonstrable. Three things may be specified: (1) a scheme of order, (2) a basis of right, and (3) an ultimate appeal.

What is wanted by this heterogeneous mass we call humanity, the units of which, like waves of the sea, incessantly dash against each other, is the establishment of some scheme of order which shall give to each its place and ensure the harmonious co-operation of the whole. Without it there is nothing possible but interminable discord, leading to vast catastrophes, incessant confusion, and final ruin. Its necessity is seen in every association of human beings, whether it be a family, a household consisting of persons who have no tie of consanguinity, a tribe of savages, or a community which consists of a number of smaller communities, such as a parish, a municipality, or an empire. Beyond that it is needless to go, but what is thus felt to be essential in local groupings and natural relationships is equally necessary for the race as a whole.

Inasmuch as the desires of a multitude of free beings must of necessity sometimes trespass upon each other, and their interests cannot in the nature of things be always identical, some standard of right must be set up and some basis of conduct be definitely agreed upon. Without it, duty will be a word that possesses neither definition nor significance. In its absence such words as rectitude and morality would be meaningless. Nor is it only a question of language. Such a standard is necessary to prevent every man from doing that which is right in his own eyes, considering solely his own interests, and being guided alone by the dictates of selfishness. Discard it, and the strong may oppress the weak, the clever take advantage of the simple, the wise make the ignorant their dupes and victims, and the wealthy grind the faces of the poor. Either might or right must govern, no third candidate for supremacy being possible. If the former, then, as its encroachments will be stoutly resisted, incessant strife must



result, and the end made certain by the weakest going to the wall. The latter is, therefore, necessary for the world's stability as well as its protection.

The ultimate appeal on questions of right or wrong must be to an authority above humanity, that is not blinded by its passions, tainted by its faults, swayed by its prejudices, or biassed by its selfishness. How incompetent human nature is for the exercise of such authority is easily shown. Witness the cruel wrong done to the weaker vessel by that which happens to be physically the stronger. The red Indian thinks it to be right that the man should loll in dignified indolence while the squaw carries the papoose, hoes the corn, and does the drudgery of the encampment; and the same perversion of view is to be found in much higher civilization. The slave-holder still maintains it to be right that he should deal with the bodies and souls of other men and women who have come under his power as so many chattels, and the principle on which he acts is of wide diffusion. But it is not worth while multiplying illustrations. All history, and the entire science of political economy, emphasize the same fundamental truth that human enactments and human authority will not suffice for the final appeal. They are vitiated by faults and weaknesses inherent in humanity itself, which preclude the possibility of its holding the balance even. To maintain the standard of right and enforce its application, a Supreme Being—inviolable in truth and incorruptible in justice—is absolutely required.

## 2. HOW THE DEMAND IS MET.

Requiring thus a scheme of order, the world cannot do without the principle of universal brotherhood; as a basis of conduct it must have the moral law, and because of its demand for a supreme authority and an ultimate appeal, humanity needs God.

There is no principle that can be named, which, in any sense, compares with that of human brotherhood for its effect in reducing social dislocations, establishing harmony, and promoting peace. It is the one bond that has in it the possibility of becoming universal, and that at the same time, without rendering itself inoperative through its encouragement of Utopian ideas, provides for the welfare of the whole. Recognizing that inequalities exist and are likely to continue, it is a perpetual protest against trading on these inequalities to the injury of those who seem to suffer from them. By the suggestions of relationship which it conveys, those who are highest in the social scale are reminded of their duty and incited to its performance, while those who are lower are saved from discouragement. The tie which it effects between the several classes is productive of practical results, multiform and innumerable. The obligations that it indicates are mutual, and therefore all the more likely to be discharged. Its tendency is directly opposed to the class prejudices which work so much damage and the hostility that is so apt to be shown between those that have and those that have not. By the development of sympathy, brotherly kindness, and mutual helpfulness which it must produce: and its inculcation of the doctrines of liberty, equality, and fraternity in their best sense: it is calculated to make life brighter, hearts lighter, to mitigate the sorrows that redress the wrongs of the world. It lies at the root of the fellow feeling which Shakespeare says makes us wondrous kind. Even its nomenclature is found to be useful, or else why do preachers address their congregations as brethren? Every public speaker knows the value of it, and shows that he knows it. When desiring to carry his hearers with him he addresses them as fellow-countrymen, fellow-citizens, and last of all as "brothers."

Positivist writers from Comte onward have perceived the vast importance of this principle and tried to weave it into their

schemes, but they, equally with agnostics, have ignored its one central necessity. Failing in this point, the fantastic worship of Humanity, even though the word is spelt with a capital letter, becomes a mere ephemeral absurdity. Agnosticism is clearer-sighted, and refuses to be drawn into such an untenable position. By the denial of Divine Fatherhood human brotherhood is rendered impossible. There can be no brotherhood without sonship, and no sonship without paternity. Though this has been stated previously it has to be restated here and its practical consequences indicated. It is not enough to say that all mankind are the descendants of a common ancestor, and so related by ties of blood, for that, if it proves anything at all, proves a great deal too much. According to the Darwinian theory, which is of course accepted by agnosticism as much as anything else, all vertebrates have a common origin, and in that sense they all belong to the same family. Therefore, if the idea of a common descent is all we have to go upon, and natural science our only guide, we must begin by tracing back our pedigree. Adopting this line of procedure we shall find it difficult to know exactly where to draw the line. There is no sufficient reason that we can see why we should stop at the genus *homo* and refuse to take in the class *mammalia*. We might go still further back, but this is far enough to show where this doctrine is leading us. If human brotherhood is to be established on physiological grounds it will lead us into strange paradoxes. There is a wider interval between the Caucasian and the Negro races, considered in this light, than between the latter and their anthropoid neighbours. Similarly, the gap between the monkey and the horse or the ox is no wider than those that have been named. There is something repulsive in this line of argument, but it is forced upon us by the attempt to prove that human relationships are only physiological. If so it is only a question of degrees, and depends on propinquity. Having a perfect right to kill cattle for food, and to shut up



monkeys in cages for amusement, there cannot on that showing be any reason why Negroes may not be enslaved and Mongolians treated with the contempt which high-bred Caucasians commonly bestow upon them.

The one antidote to all this is the doctrine that God "hath made of one blood all nations of men to dwell on all the face of the earth." Human brotherhood does not depend on physiological deductions, but on the relation of each individual to his Maker. Our pedigree has not to be laboriously investigated, for each of us may look up and say "Our Father." We are His offspring as much as were the generations before the flood, and as directly as was the first man whom He taught to call Him by that familiar yet comprehensive name. Let this be perceived and it will at once be clear that the principle is freed from the ridiculous paradoxes with which positivism has encumbered it, and forms a vital bond of union embracing all mankind, defying all the disintegrating influence agnosticism is calculated to exert. The idea of a common ancestor is displaced by the idea of a common progenitor. All degrees of relationship are done away with, for there is now no distant cousinship but universal fraternity. It is established securely and firmly on the direct relationship to his Creator which is one of the intuitions of humanity, and finds expression in the words, "In Him we live and move and have our being."

The dignity and value which by this aspect of the case human life is shown to possess must not pass without notice. It has been said that Providence cares only for quality and nothing at all for quantity, and that thus there is a constant waste of life, the many being sacrificed in the interests of the few. The analogies of nature are called in to support this theory, and it is pointed out that millions of minnows perish that a salmon may live. According to this the *élite* of the race may look down upon all the rest as inferior, and the weaker may be extirpated for the

stronger to survive. Professor Drummond italicizes the statement, "*Quantity decreases as quality increases.*" He goes on to say : "The gravitation of the whole system of nature towards quality is surely a phenomenon of commanding interest, and if among the more recent relations of nature there is one thing more significant for religion than another it is the majestic spectacle of the rise of kingdoms towards scarcer yet nobler forms, and simpler yet diviner ends." The tendency of all this is to claim moral ascendancy and intellectual supremacy for the few, while all the rest are relegated to a sphere of complete subordination. Carrying out these principles to their logical conclusion, only those who are worth caring for are the minority at or near the apex of life, while the vast throng that forms its lower strata are to be their purveyors and instruments. Combine agnosticism with the law of evolution and this will be the product which, if applied, is cold and cruel enough to redden the earth with blood and deluge it with tears. Let the life of human beings be held so cheaply and there is an excuse for the horrors of the slave trade, the atrocities of war, and the wholesale slaughter of a human hecatomb to make a Roman holiday. On the other hand, affix the honour of a divine paternity and a human brotherhood to each child of man and he becomes precious. He has rights that must not be ignored, gifts that ought not to be squandered, and a claim to our sympathy and care that it is impossible to disregard. Admitting that quality is more important than quantity, the aim should be to raise those that are low and not to trample them down still lower that others may rise. The poet laureate sings of


"One God, one element,  
And one far-off divine event,  
To which the whole creation moves."

But it does not move in that way by wholesale destruction under a law almost equivalent to suicide. That would be a strange process indeed. Its motion is rather to be accomplished by what

he has prophesied elsewhere—the fusion of humanity by the principle of human brotherhood, which procures its universal uplifting and the federation of the world.

By its theoretical abrogation of the moral law agnosticism has done what it can to overthrow the only sufficient guarantees of order that society possesses. As social order cannot be maintained without social law, moral order is dependent on moral law. The world needs it as a standard of right and a test of conduct. Such a law must be comprehensive in its scope and general in its principles. To formulate statutes for every circumstance of mutual intercourse would be totally impossible, but it is not difficult to define the rules which are necessary to indicate the mutual obligations of humanity. Such a code is essential that these obligations may be ascertained and discharged. It is especially required by the weak and ignorant to protect them from the rapacity and tyranny of the wise and strong, but it is also needed by the latter to guide them in the use of their superior power. To all classes it must form the standard of merit and demerit. Righteousness transcends every other quality that a human being can have, and only thereby can his degree of excellence be measured.

The statement that perception of what is morally right can be ascertained by observance of the laws of nature is false on the very face of it. Natural religion, as it is called, does not teach moral duties. If it be said that true wisdom and virtue consists in learning these laws, and then in observing them, the reply is that there may be much knowledge and yet little wisdom obtained by the study, and that there is no virtue in such conduct at all. At the most, obedience to natural law is but common sense, and is neither moral nor religious. The forces of nature threaten to destroy, or, at least, to injure, those who stand in their way, and there is no virtue in avoiding them. By such observance of these forces and their laws it is possible to carry on commercial





enterprises, to promote personal health, to check the spread of an epidemic ; but there is no morality in the lines and equipment of a steamship, in a morning bath, or the use of disinfectants. Yet further, there are aspects of natural law which are directly opposed to morality and are utterly subversive of the idea of mutual obligation. In the vegetable world the parasite makes nothing of the right to live which may be supposed to inhere in the tree which it selects for its support, but goes on to strangle out its life ; and the weeds that find congenial soil rob the plants among which they find themselves of all their sustenance. It is worse in the animal kingdom. From the top to the bottom of it there is never-ending war : the strong tear the weak in pieces and the cunning lie in wait to deceive. There is pillage and slaughter everywhere, and strength, swiftness, and skill are the marks of superiority. It is certain that we cannot go to nature for moral instruction.

There is a remarkable statement in M. Renan's autobiography, which, coming from such a source, ought to settle for good and all the question of deriving a code of morals from nature. About the correctness of his life there is nothing to be said. He was educated for the priesthood, and in after life felt that that fact imposed upon him the necessity of propriety in conduct as a matter of good taste. Nevertheless, as a philosopher he calmly writes, "Nature cares nothing for chastity," and suggests that "*Les frivoles ont peut-etre raison*," which may be translated "The gay have perhaps the best reason." A lurid light is thrown by this remark on French society and manners. They have worshipped nature, and this is to what they are coming. Who is there among the prophets of agnosticism that will dare to say in English and to the English-speaking people, "Go thou and do likewise." Plato tells us that by dissoluteness we feed the many-headed beast that is within us and starve the man, and Paley that this vice has a greater tendency than any other to render the beast

thoroughly corrupt. Taught by these venerated sages, we still regard that as a virtue for which M. Renan assures us that nature cares nothing, and, therefore, for a basis of ethics, to nature we will not go. So far as agnosticism points in that direction, it is a guide to the sensuality which has already humbled France in the dust, and is eating like a canker into its very heart. Both the theory and its results are pregnant with emphatic and solemn warning.

Utilitarianism is suggested by some writers on ethics as forming a basis for moral law, and because this suggestion receives some measure of support from agnostics, its claims must be briefly examined. In his "Data of Ethics" Mr. Spencer places morals in the category of things evolved by infallible processes. Accordingly, immorality is the result of a similar evolution, and out of the same fountain proceed both sweet waters and bitter. It is assumed by utilitarians that the greatest good of the greatest number is the one object to be secured, and, further, that in practice this will constitute a basis for moral conduct. The tremendous conclusions to which these principles would lead are not often fairly faced by the disciples of Bentham, for those who adopt them and their like have a knack of shutting their eyes at a certain point. For one thing, in any race struggle the superior combatant might justify on this plea a war of total extermination. Multiply the amount of happiness into the number that enjoy it and you may prove that the murder of a tribe of Australasian blacks to make room for a squatter's family is a praiseworthy act; for the capacity of the latter is so very much larger than that of the original nomads who wandered over the land, though they are fewer in number. On that principle Anglo-Saxons had better give up trying to convert and civilize the inferior races to whom they send missionaries, and content themselves with the simple process of burying them out of sight, so as to obtain room for their own swarming populations. Though this is horrible it is strictly logical. And it is also quite true that on the same

principle the breach of every commandment in the Decalogue may be justified. In particular, there can be no such crime as theft, for every thief will plead that he only relieved the subject of his depredations of some of his superfluities. Neither can there be any moral offence in impurity, provided it be not accompanied by violence. It is difficult, indeed, to say what could be regarded as crime under such a dispensation. The revolution would be so complete that there would be no criminals, but only heretics, who were responsible for their erroneous views rather than their malpractices. From such a standard of morals it is appropriate to say, "Good Lord, deliver us!"

The favourite explanation by agnostics of the moral sense that is in the world is also that which is chiefly relied upon for moral guidance in the present and progress in the future. It is attempted to be shown that in the distant past such virtues as unselfishness, self-devotion, and self-denial, for the good of the tribe, gave that tribe ascendancy. The tribe that found that by the exercise of these virtues it prevailed over its competitors in the struggle for existence, carefully cherished them, and hence a sort of tribal conscience overpowered the selfish instincts, and thus in the course of ages conscience itself became a kind of instinct or habit, leading the individual to suppress those of his own desires that were hostile to the general interest. Then comes the question, what is the general interest? This can only be what is agreed to by common consent, or failing that, what is held in the opinion of the majority to be for the general welfare. Now, as unanimous agreement in such a heterogeneous mass is practically out of the question, it follows that the basis of morals must be the will of the majority, that morality must consist in obedience to that will, and conscience be nothing more than the habit of such obedience.

Such an ethical system as this is vulnerable at all points, and must prove a failure. To begin with, there is not, and there never



can be, any ethical agreement on questions of duty. Most people acknowledge that they are under strong obligations to provide for the welfare of their families, but there are some who also recognize duties to the community in which they live, and no one can define the exact duty of patriotism. The contradictions of moralists in such elementary matters as these are flagrant and fundamental. The agnostic code, whether Comtist or Benthamist, rests on premises that are at least questionable, and hence cannot command universal assent. It is further obvious that the minority will never surrender their independent capacity of judgment or freedom of action to any majority, however disproportionately large. Indeed, there are many natures which will resent such arbitrary treatment all the more strongly as they feel themselves to be physically powerless, and be thereby provoked to an Ishmaelitic line of conduct. Then it must not be forgotten that there are practical questions of conduct on which serious doubts exist, and some of them are among the very corner-stones of society. How, for instance, by such a system, can the vexed question of the permanence of the marriage tie be satisfactorily disposed of, or the relations between landowners and the proletariat? Yet once more, there is neither guarantee nor prospect that under such a system social order will be maintained or social rights respected, for while those at the bottom of the scale will rebel in angry impotence, those at the top will revolt in proud disdain. The one writhes under a coercion which the other scorns with contempt. By different roads each arrives at the same conclusion—"I will please myself and do what I think to be right, let others say of me what they like, and do what they will." Thus rent and riven the fabric must fall to pieces, like every structure that rests on the shifting sands of human opinion, authority, and desire.

This examination has led us step by step to the position that the mutual obligations of humanity require for their due apprecia-

tion and their proper discharge, not only a tangible bond of relationship, and a moral law to define what is duty, but also a moral law-giver, that the law may have adequate sanction and be of practical effect. Thus the very sense of mutual obligation which prevails everywhere and is constantly at work is an evidence of a living God. This consciousness is a recognition of duty that is perceived with more or less distinctness to be the subject of a code emanating from a supreme law-giver, and to whose authority everyone must submit. As both morality and immorality imply compliance with or deviation from a moral standard—in other words a moral law—and as there can be no law without a law-giver, it follows that there can be no morality without God.

If Nature is to be the god, and Humanity its prophet, then God must be a machine, without authority and without intelligible utterance, and the prophet has neither mission nor credentials. For nature is nothing more than has just been described, however it may be personified and idealized, and Humanity has no self-saving function to exercise, or evidence of appointment to present. And if Utilitarianism is the god, then all that is best in human nature will be crushed under the gory wheels of its ponderous car.

On either supposition the ordinary estimate for human conduct must be revised, and the terminology in common use be materially modified. One important change must be made by losing altogether the little word "sin," and therewith the idea that it embodies. Scarcely any thing could show more forcibly the moral tendency of agnosticism than this apparently slight and yet tremendously important change. According to its system of ethics, nothing is sin that does not inflict injury on others than the sinner, and such actions are called by another name. Hence a distinction is made between sin and crime, which is fatal to the true idea of sinfulness, and is fraught with wholesale injury to morality. The interests of mankind being the sole standard of right or wrong, anything

that does not traverse those interests is innocent. The agnostic obliteration of "sin," therefore, practically prepares the way for self-abandonment to evil.

### 3. THE IMMORAL TENDENCY OF AGNOSTICISM.

From this starting point several roads branch off, and the only difficulty in following them is to determine the order in which they shall be explored. It will be seen, for instance, that an entirely false standard is introduced. Wrong-doing is no longer to be regarded as censurable or reprehensible in itself, if indeed it can be considered in itself at all, for that which affixes its value is its consequence. There is no crime, however atrocious, that may not be excused on such a plea as this. The horrors of the Reign of Terror, the lurid fires of the Commune, and the bloody massacre of St. Bartholemew, were admitted evils, but the perpetrators of such tragedies have their justification in the doctrine that it is allowable to do evil that good may come, and they reckoned that in those cases such would be the final result. It is a return to the old pernicious doctrine that the end justifies the means, which has armed the assassin, filled the dungeons of the Inquisition, been the plea for religious persecution in all ages, and the excuse for the foulest cruelty the world has ever seen. The agnostic method of resting morality on consequences is to root out the true idea of morality from the conscience of mankind.

On the same principle, vice, however vicious, is no longer immoral unless it entails injurious consequences on some other person than the one who indulges in it, or on society at large. Covetousness is, therefore, no longer sinful, provided that it does not lead to dishonest practices, and it may even prove in the long run to be a virtue, by the distribution of the miser's hoarded wealth among the needy who share in the fruits of his self-denying acquisitiveness after he is gone. Drunkenness is innocent if the



man who indulges his besotted appetite has no descendants to inherit his depraved nature, and he does it secretly and alone. Even if he be guilty of it in public the evil is not in the sin, for it is only himself he is ruining, but in the example, which may perhaps lead exactly the opposite way. Ingratitude, again, and meanness, are removed from the category of sins altogether, and the same may be said of a host of other moral actions.

By the same rule, whatever injury is inflicted on another by his own consent is no sin at all. From the Christian standpoint duelling, when the result is fatal, is murder, and even when it is not is equally criminal in the intention. This stamps it as wicked, and ensures its prohibition by the law of the land; but if all parties concerned are agreed, society having no right to interfere with their personal rights, they may maim or kill each other with a perfectly clear conscience. Adultery also, if there be no open scandal, and no child born to bear the brand of its parents' dishonour, is not sinful according to agnostic principles, for it inflicts no injury on society, and is only a violation of an artificial law.

Moreover, on the principle we are considering, many of the fundamental rules that govern social action must be entirely inverted. Wayland, in his "Elements of Moral Science," states that the quality of a moral action is to be judged of by the intention, and this is not only an accepted rule in Christian ethics, but a doctrine of jurisprudence. By agnostic teaching it must be abandoned, for it has nothing whatever to do with intention. If a human being has no proper will of his own, then he can no longer be held responsible in this way, and with that in view the estimate of actions by consequences is the only consistent course. It follows that what has hitherto been regarded as virtuous must be classified as a vice, and *vice versa*. The suggestion has already been made that on this principle avarice may be set down as a virtue, for by it the needy may be relieved

and the community benefited. Conversely, charity, finding expression in deeds of benevolence, instead of covering, may be held responsible for a multitude of sins. It is notorious that in some cases it encourages idle habits, is not always judicious in its operations, and thus sometimes works injuriously, so for these reasons it must be denounced as positively criminal. An agnostic burglar, again, may hug himself in the comfortable conviction that he is an exceedingly useful member of society. In the prosecution of his business he is obliged to cultivate very carefully the qualities of industry, watchfulness, and skill, which so far, by developing the latent resources of his nature, help him on the road to perfection. Society has a prejudice against him, but what of that? Its inventive genius is quickened to devise patent alarms, intricate locks, and other appliances, which is another good thing; and besides that the police, the watchman, and many other industrious people are partly indebted to him for their means of gaining a livelihood. After all, what harm does he do? It does not pay him to prey on the poor, and the wealthy suffer no real harm by the loss of their plate, jewellery, and loose cash. On the whole he cannot see that he has any more reason to be penitent than the highly-educated gentlemen of the learned professions who, like himself, have their *clientele* among the well-to-do, and some of whom, indeed, he occasionally has to employ in his service.

Though his style of reasoning borders on the grotesque, it has a very sad and serious background, for it is the simple truth that in the agnostic system such words as "holiness" and "wickedness" have no place. It is true the words are to be found there, and so are many others that could not well be done without. Their omission would have left a grim and ugly vacancy, and so the lifeless presentment has been allowed to remain, but it is lifeless for all that. Just as the retention of the term immortality serves to hide the dismal gulf of annihilation which lies behind it, so the

word holiness may act as a shield for the ugly fact that in the agnostic world there is neither moral purity nor that by which it can be produced. In order to do that there must not only be the certainty that crime is punishable, but such an abhorrence of it as will lead to earnest efforts to be freed from the thing itself. The one way to secure such a salutary horror is to see it in the light of heaven as well as earth. When a man compares himself with other men, he finds that which may rather induce self-complacency than otherwise, and it is only when he stands in the presence of God that he abhors himself and repents in dust and ashes.

Just so long as such partial and imperfect definitions of sin pass current as that it consists in a preference of self to the welfare of mankind, there will be an altogether imperfect view of its real character. Pretty phrases, such as egoism and altruism, are well enough in the pages of a philosophical treatise, but we must have something with a keener edge to deal with the conditions of actual life. The euphemisms that are so much in vogue leave the distinctions between folly and sin, and between error and wickedness, in gross and most injurious obscurity. It is necessary to clear the atmosphere of this philosophic fog. Sin is not a moral blunder and a possible evil, but evil itself, and that altogether apart from its consequences. Folly may in certain possible cases be virtuous, as when a man perils his life to save that of a dog. It may be foolish, but we should think the less of him if he coolly refused to run the risk. So also an error may be magnanimous, but sin is a thing which cannot be compared with these. It is a wilful transgression of a known moral law, and whatever be its consequences, it stains the nature of him who commits it, and the act being unalterable, there is no power beneath the sky that can eradicate or efface the stain.

Agnosticism acts like a moral paralysis, by rendering a true conception of the infinite evil of sin impossible. Its philosophic



calculation that every action affects the whole of society in an ever-widening circle and during an endless succession of years does not meet the case, for it merely introduces an infinite series of infinitesimals. Let the immediate effect of a sinful action be represented by an unit, its secondary influence half as great, that which it produces on a third circle the half of that, and so on perpetually. At that rate, though it may never end it will shade off very soon into imperceptibility. This is shown by the common arithmetical series,  $1 + \frac{1}{2} + \frac{1}{4} + \frac{1}{8}$ , &c., which may be continued to all eternity, and yet the sum total will never be double the original number. Compare with this representation of the infinite consequences of sin that which is involved in the declaration that it is the ruin of an immortal soul, and the contrast is both vivid and startling. Cardinal Newman was right in estimating a mortal sin as a greater shock to the universe than the destruction of a world.

We have seen that agnosticism tends to destroy abhorrence of sin, and it also removes the dread of it. Measuring it by its consequences is the sure way to minimize its evil character, and the comparison is certain to be made between its immediate and possible results. If there be prospect of clear gain in the present it will outweigh all the remote contingencies that may ensue. It is not in the consequences of sin but in its inherent atrocity that its dreadfulness lies. Only when it is seen to be an offence against God so serious as to be punishable by everlasting perdition will there be an efficient fear of it to deter from its commission. Thus the causes of both remorse and repentance are affected. Criminals, as a rule, think far less of the harm they have done to individual men or to society by their misdeeds, even when they are brought to genuine sorrow for their crimes, than they do of their wickedness in the sight of God. In all these aspects the agnostic conception of sin, and its bearing on the mutual obligations of humanity, is shown to be subversive of

what ought to be maintained with the most anxious care, destructive of true morality, and demoralizing in an appalling degree.

#### 4. HISTORICAL PROOFS.

The fact that agnostics preach and practise morality does not weaken the force of the conclusions now arrived at. No doubt many of them are better than their creed. That they are is not, and can hardly be claimed as, its result. The most that can be said by candid apologists for it is that it does not directly inculcate the opposite. If morality is preached at all it is on different grounds. They are under a kind of necessity to teach moral doctrines, for any relaxation in this respect would be fatal. Were they to join the leprous throng that makes immoral teaching a principal part of its stock-in-trade, their influence would vanish like a mist. The tendency of agnosticism in that direction is either denied or concealed, but of the very best of agnostics it may be truthfully said that they are good in spite of their theories, and not because of them. Moreover, while it is true that many of those who publicly profess these principles have a reputation that is unimpeachable, there are conspicuous exceptions. *De mortuis nil nisi bonum* is a good rule, and must control the pen, but in this connection it is impossible not to mention that the ablest woman of the generation who belonged to that side lived in open violation of one of the most sacred social laws, and has given her friends no end of trouble in offering apologies. For one who thus publicly acts on the principles of agnosticism how many hundreds are there who do so in private and try to find in them their excuse.

Competent judges believe that already these pernicious causes are secretly undermining some of the most valuable ramparts of social order, and permeating the public mind to a dangerous degree, but under the most favourable circumstances it will take

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a long time for their influence to be measured. It is not as though the sphere to which they seek admission were unoccupied. The present generation has been educated in Christian principles, at least to some extent, is surrounded by Christian institutions, has a literature that is saturated with theological thought, and uses a vocabulary which is thus invested with a peculiar significance. These are immensely difficult things to deal with. Agnostics have even to borrow some of their terms from the camp they want to destroy, that they may make their ideas intelligible, and even then they only achieve a partial success. A child of four years old can be taught to fear and love God, the reason for doing right, and the doctrines of heaven and hell with greater ease than a youth of sixteen can learn of Nature and Humanity. At the impressionable age there are the examples of the good and the memories of ancestral belief to mould character, and they make the task of reorganizing later life on a different basis exceedingly difficult. In order to see what agnosticism will do for mankind, it will be necessary for an entire generation to be brought up in entire ignorance of Christianity. Thank God, the experiment is not likely to be tried. Its banefulness is now counteracted by hereditary instinct, established customs, proved and salutary regulations. In spite of them all it contrives somewhat to relax social bonds, and introduces an element that does not "make for righteousness;" and if it does these things in the green tree, what shall be done in the dry?

But it may be said that the experiment has been tried more than once, and that its repetition is unnecessary. Agnosticism is no new thing in the world, and ignoring God has invariably been followed by similar results. Without claiming any prophetic inspiration for the prophet Hosea, we may accept his graphic picture as a truthful historical vignette, drawn in characters of fire. "No truth, nor mercy, nor *knowledge of God*



in the land" forms its bold, dark outline. The sketch is filled in with just a few strokes, which show the effect of this moral condition on the people—"By swearing, and lying, and killing, and stealing, and committing adultery, they break out, and blood toucheth blood." Such were the fruits of agnosticism two millenniums and a half ago. Let us look at another picture. The pupil of Gamaliel was competent to describe the condition of society in his time and to trace its characteristics to the right source, whatever may be said about his Christology, and this is his representation: "As they did not like to retain God in their knowledge (choosing agnosticism rather than such theology as they had) God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient, being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness, full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity, whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, despiteful, proud boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, without understanding, covenant-breakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful." Coming to still later times the hideous orgies of the French revolution show what may be expected whenever agnosticism gains the upper hand, and no further comment on the result of such experiment is needed than the statement of Robespierre that if there were no God it would be necessary to invent Him.

##### 5. AGNOSTICISM AND THE FAMILY.

What need have we of further witnesses? The logical and inevitable consequence of agnostic morality must be the destruction of family life. How much this means to humanity everyone who has studied social science at all will readily understand. The family is, so to speak, the nucleus of the nation, and on the preservation of family life the whole fabric of society depends. It not only provides for the welfare of the future generations by

bringing them up within its influence, but prevents humanity from degenerating into a herd. Its maintenance is of vital importance, but depends absolutely on the sanctity of the marriage tie. Agnosticism directly tends to weaken that bond by withdrawing from it the only sanction that is really solemn and permanently binding. Let marriage be regarded as a matter in which only the contracting parties are concerned, and it will follow that the freedom which led them into it will enable them to terminate it at will. Even if it be regarded as a civil contract which has to be recognized and ratified by the State, but nothing more, the case will only be slightly altered. Each will feel that society has no coercive right, and possibly chafe at the idea of such a right being asserted. The one thing and the only thing that can make it permanent is embodied in the formula, "Those whom God hath joined together, let no man part asunder."

This is not mere theory, for its practical working may be seen in various directions. With the spread of scepticism the undervaluing of the marriage obligation seems usually to coincide. In France it is notorious, and in America its growth is one of the features of the time. English society is naturally conservative, and so far as the new ideas on these subjects have extended they are superficial rather than deep, but coincidently with the acceptance of agnosticism there is a marked leaning in the same direction. It cannot be otherwise, for if the divine sanction of marriage is discarded as a myth that of society will be treated as even less worthy of respect. Utilitarian theories will be brushed aside like a filmy web before the strong rush of passion, and the practical result will be free divorce.

Before the awful gulf which this prospect opens before us one may well recoil. It means nothing less than the social degradation, moral ruin, and material misery of women. Thereupon must necessarily follow rapid and profound social deterioration, for which there is no arrest till it has reached social barbarism,

and with domestic revolution national enfeeblement and disorganization. In the case of women it is unquestionable that under an agnostic system in early life they would in the majority of instances prefer a terminable partnership. They could thereby make a better bargain, secure higher consideration, avoid the risks they perceive, and with the hopefulness of youth discount the less attractive possibilities of the then remote future. Up to the age of say thirty or forty their lot might appear favourable, but what would it be afterwards? Their freedom and the separation of their existence would be a horrible curse. The imagination shudders at the thoughts of the crowds of repudiated women who would fill our cities, worn with toil and anxiety till they had lost their power to charm, and with life stretching out before them as a dreary wilderness. The one preventative to this woeful condition is the religious aspect of marriage, under which there is a union of lives for joy or sorrow, weal or woe, till death do them part.

Though at the first sight the case of men does not seem so bad, were such a system to prevail it will be found on examination to be little, if any, better. While ownership of property continues, and the man has the greater capacity for acquiring it, he will, of course, be apparently master of the situation. It will be his to offer the woman a home, and in the majority of cases he will be able to dictate the terms and the duration of the alliance. Yet the very possession of this power must work his demoralization. It is infinitely better that he should sue for favours and woo affection than be in a position either to demand or purchase. The one checks his tendency to domineer, while the other encourages it; the one subdues and refines, while the other coarsens and brutalizes.

There are still other aspects of this question that can only be glanced at. Were free divorce practicable children would not be born, for it would impose a check stronger than any suggested



by Dr. Malthus. How this would affect the national strength may easily be gathered. The guarantee of a permanent home being done away with, the home itself, as such, would cease to be an institution. Therewith must disappear the strongest inducements there are to such home-like virtues as industry, frugality, and thrift, to be replaced by voluptuous idleness and prodigality. In the same way the elevating influences of social intercourse, and all that constitutes and promotes social refinement, must be at an end. Ruin, complete and irretrievable, must thus be entailed on any people where family life is abandoned and the home no longer exists. Rude men, with nothing to work for, degraded women with nothing to live for, and a diminishing population losing all that raises them above the level of the beasts, are the products of agnosticism when applied to the mutual obligations of men and women in their most sacred relationship.

#### 6. AGNOSTICISM THE PARENT OF SOCIAL ANARCHY.

Practical morality deals principally with political rights and the right to property, in addition to what is included under the head of family life. Religion recognizes the right of every man to the privileges of citizenship and to the undisturbed use of the fruit of his honest industry. Agnosticism acknowledges those rights also, but with a difference, and out of that difference comes socialism. Withdrawing from public view the ground of social duty, it widens the gulf between the various classes of the community and exacerbates class feeling. Having selfishness for its mainspring, it diminishes the possibility of the rich and the poor dwelling in harmony to their mutual benefit, and tends to wither the kindness of the one while it hardens the heart of the other. From the first it takes away the sense that property and political influence are to be regarded as talents held in trust for the

benefit of the whole, and the strongest inducements to humane and liberal conduct, and from the second all that can sustain self-respect. All idea of providential endowment or deprivation being gone, the obligation of trusteeship must go on the one side and the duty of contentment on the other. Yet further, by abolishing all prospect of providential compensation, endurance of hardships becomes more difficult, and the circumstances that seem to require it only provoke exasperation. Materials are thus provided for an explosion which, under pretence of redressing the wrongs of society, will shatter it to pieces, scatter political rights to the winds, and with them all rights to property of every kind and degree.

In the history of the French revolution both lines of causation are plainly visible, and their progress to the final catastrophe can be readily traced. The practical agnosticism of that day made a breach between the *noblesse* and the *canaille*, which it went on widening till it became an impassable chasm. On one side of it there was tyranny, oppression, pride, scorn, neglect of duty, and high-handed outrage. On the other there grew up hatred, envy, impatience, and finally revenge. Then came the climax, convulsing society to its foundations, reddening the skies with flame and the earth with blood. Out of French agnosticism came, as a monstrous birth, the revolution.

Working together with the principles that have been named, and to the same disastrous end, is the low value which agnosticism sets on human life, the contempt it generates for the interests of society, and the despairing views it gives of the future. All these are interlaced, and their general effect must be to encourage the disaffected and discontented anywhere to take the law into their own hands. Earnest and serious men, professing godliness, have taken up arms in defence of their rights and to depose a tyrant, but they have strictly limited themselves to their object. On one such occasion they caused the head of a

king to fall on the scaffold ; but, though Cromwell signed the death-warrant of Charles I., he would have been no party to throwing Orsini bombs into a crowded street, careless as to how many innocent people were massacred in the attempt to kill the guilty one, however strongly he might have held that regicide was justifiable. Religion teaches patience under adversity, and that there is a Supreme Judge who will bring good out of evil, plead the cause of the oppressed, and restore to the defrauded that of which they have been despoiled ; but agnosticism is a gospel of despair, and therefore of terror. There being no righteous judge, and no hereafter of compensation, why should men, with hearts to resolve and hands to do, sit still and suffer ? Down with all oppressions, be the consequences what they may ! Impatience goads to madness, and thus agnosticism becomes a gospel of dynamite, producing socialistic outrage here, nihilism there, and threatening anarchy everywhere. Its chief exponents shrink and recoil from this ethical, logical, and practical application of their work, but they cannot on that account be allowed to escape from this responsibility. Those who preach doctrines of despair must be held accountable for the desperation to which such doctrines lead.

The conclusion of the whole matter is that the only safeguard for humanity against itself, and its only guarantee that the obligations of man to his fellow-man will be duly appreciated and discharged, is in God. Without God there can be no basis for moral conduct, seeing that He alone is competent to lay it down. Nature is dumb or misleading, and this is no real impeachment of it, for nothing can be expected to guide or govern that which in its essence is higher than itself. Humanity has no sufficient authority ; for, being defective in itself, it cannot produce that which is perfect. In some of its aspects it is so contemptible that its utterances can never command respect. God is needed, all-wise, all-just, all-merciful, to define the limits



of duty, and there is nothing else in the universe that can take His place. He is needed that the voice of the human conscience may be of practical utility. It is an echo, a reflex, an interpreter of something, somewhere. If of the consentient voice of humanity, then it is a thing to be treated with scant regard, for if we pay little attention to the higher authority we may pay still less to the lower. If of God, then its discriminating faculty is to be carefully cultivated and its directions closely followed, for conscientiousness is the path of rectitude and safety. Finally, God is required to assure the issues of moral conduct. Left to ourselves we cannot be at all sure that what we think right will in the end turn out either wisely or well, but under His guidance we have only to obey, and leave the responsibility with Him. In a limited view of life it is seen that the righteous perish and the wicked prosper. This brief and partial survey has often furnished occasion for mockery at goodness, and even caused believers in God prolonged doubt and perplexity. So far as this world is concerned, devotion to duty, self-sacrifice for the good of others, and uprightness of moral character, frequently seem to go unrewarded. Agnosticism affords no well-grounded assurance that it will be otherwise. It has no basis for faith, or inspiration for courage, or promise for hope to lean upon. The only view it affords of the future is a suggestion of impenetrable mystery, and its only expectation of moral consequences is that, so far as we are concerned, they will terminate at death; being afterwards among innumerable agencies, diverse and conflicting, the results of which are beyond conjecture.

#### CONCLUSION.

The order in which the several branches of the subject have been discussed has seemed to the writer logical and natural. The keystone of Christian theism is belief in a living and personal

God, and denial that such a belief is rational is the pivot on which the agnostic controversy turns. Hence it appeared necessary to show, in the first place, the failure of agnosticism either to displace or replace the God of Christians, and the moral disaster attendant on the attempt. This theme affording the widest scope, and having been discussed at considerable length, it was practicable to deal with the works and the revelation of God more briefly. Next to the Creator there comes into view His creation. The radical error of agnosticism having been found in the denial of conscious intelligence, first probabilities and then proofs were adduced that such intelligence does exist, that the agnostic explanation of the cosmos utterly fails, and that the key to the mysteries of the universe is God. From the manifestation of the Supreme Cause in nature to His disclosure of Himself in authentic records the transition is not difficult. The Bible is in our hands and has to be accounted for. It has been shown that only two alternatives are possible. The Bible being a unit and indivisible, it must be accepted altogether or rejected altogether, and mere neutrality towards it is impossible. Agnosticism fails to destroy or weaken its claims, and as of the volume of nature so of this volume, its only explanation is God. The divine revelation links man with his Maker, for it is to him that the revelation comes. Thus the series is complete: God, the universe, the Bible, humanity. On the final topic the interest and importance of the whole subject culminates, for when practically considered the moral and spiritual aspect of agnosticism is chiefly that which relates to the individual interests and social obligations of mankind.

The two aspects in which humanity may be regarded seemed to require separate treatment, and in reference to both it has been seen that agnosticism has no place in man. Considered individually, agnosticism has neither personality, responsibility, nor immortality for him, but only moral and spiritual degradation.

Considered as a whole, it is found that while among mankind there are moral relations at every point, agnosticism has no plan for their adjustment. It cannot supply the demands of the race, opposes a cold negation to all its highest hopes, and instead of being a bond of union is an explosive force, threatening disintegration and ruin. Its efforts to make a deity of duty are a total failure; it has no moral authority to govern, moral law to direct, or moral principle to guide. Its advocates in their calm retreat—rendered quiet and secure by the very principles they assail—may pursue their researches into abstract ideas and indulge in visions of a possible future to their hearts' content, but the hardworking multitude has neither leisure nor taste for such occupations. The agnostic oracles may speak with mystery and vagueness about "an infinite energy," "proximate activities," "permanent possibilities of phenomena," "harmony with environment," "translating sensations," and "immortality in example," but these are caviare to the general. When all is done the air is full of nothing but surmises and attenuated ideas, dimly guessed at rather than grasped. Agnosticism has neither instruction nor guidance to give moral beings for the present, nor promise or prospect for the future. It can neither tell us what to hope for nor what to do, and we are glad to get from under its obscurity and away from its uncertainties to where there is brighter light and more definite teaching.

This the Bible affords us in reference to all the subjects we have reviewed, and clear and strong above the whisperings of philosophic speculation resounds the voice of the Eternal in the brief yet all-embracing requirement which defines the relation man is to occupy towards his Maker: "THOU SHALT LOVE THE LORD THY GOD WITH ALL THINE HEART." Recognizing that there is in him a capability to love his Creator, and calling upon him for the exercise of that capability, it assures him of personal nobleness,



and shows him how he may become nobler still. As love depends on reciprocity for strength and continuance, there is in the command a revelation that God is love. Thus God discovers Himself to those who seek Him, not dazzling with splendour but winning by grace. Awed and yet encouraged, exalted yet humbled by the vision thus obtained and the affinity so declared, he who responds to the command with willingness finds the heavenward impulse grow stronger and stronger, till it dominates his whole being, and he rises in the God-like greatness which intercourse with his Maker must inspire.

Yet another utterance from the same voice of authority falls on the listening ear. In its scope it is enduring as the ages and wide as the world. "THOU SHALT LOVE THY NEIGHBOUR AS THYSELF." On this broad and comprehensive basis for universal and real brotherhood rises the structure of the moral law to guide man in all his relations and transactions with his fellow-man ; consistent, ample, flawless in every detail, it teaches him all he requires to know, is a bond to unite, a shield to protect, and a lamp to guide. It is the foundation of the mutual obligations of humanity, defining their limits, and indicating in what spirit they should be discharged. Keeping this commandment is the one infallible guarantee that rights shall be respected, order kept, duty done, happiness promoted, and the progress of the race assured.

Hearing, heeding, obeying, and rejoicing in these twin commands, humanity finds a solution of its problems, a meaning in its existence, and a reality in its hopes. With gladness and the rest of perfect safety it receives all the assurance it requires that moral conduct shall have ample reward in the words which were spoken by its one perfect example : "*If ye keep My commandments ye shall abide in My love.*" Then the agnostic cloud which darkens heaven and casts its shadow on the earth vanishes in the bright radiance of an eternal glory. Abiding in the infinite love of an

infinite Creator—love above, beneath, behind, before ; a temple, a citadel, a home—there is nothing further to be desired. “He that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God,” and this is the apotheosis of humanity, its crowning honour and exceeding great reward.

# AGNOSTICISM

CONSIDERED FROM A MORAL AND SPIRITUAL  
POINT OF VIEW.

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BY JAMES MILNE.

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## *INTRODUCTION.*

It would be wrong to describe the Agnosticism of the present day as a new phase in the history of thought. The devout, earnest spirits of every age have, in a very true sense, been agnostic: ever ready to acknowledge the limited nature of human knowledge, and confess that a full knowledge of the Almighty was infinitely beyond the feeble comprehension of man. But there is a very striking difference between this devout Agnosticism of religion, and that which is the outcome of a great deal of our modern thought. The latter may be described as an Agnosticism with a strong material bias, and its growth may, to a great extent, be traced as coincident with the development of modern science. The brilliant discoveries in physical science that have marked the present century have created a strong reaction against all metaphysical and theological conceptions of the universe and of man. Here, it is urged, we are on solid ground. Science deals with the known and knowable; it builds



its foundations on the solid earth, and rears an enduring fabric, while the theories of philosophy are but cloud-woven visions of the imagination, to be dissipated and formed anew by the next wind of prevalent opinion. The theological doctrines respecting man, his nature, origin, and relation to God, it is argued, cannot be proved, whilst his relation to the physical world, to nature, can be positively known.

The spirit of all true, earnest thought is that of inquiry. The search for unity amid all the diversity of the phenomena of the world—harmony amid the apparent discord—belongs, as a necessity, to human thought, which cannot rest till it has found some law, principle, or cause in virtue of which all the phenomena, not merely of the material, but also of the moral and spiritual world, can be explained. The theory of evolution, so brilliantly expounded by Darwin, has been applied by thinkers like Herbert Spencer not merely to the material world, but also to the moral, intellectual, and religious spheres. Hitherto religious thinkers, who profess the Christian faith, have found in a righteous, personal God, Creator of the universe, Source of our being, and Ruler of our destiny, that unity of cause which is sufficient to explain the great problem of the universe. Agnostics of the modern school assert, not that this explanation is false, but that it is unverifiable. Atheism, in the strict sense of the term, finds but little favour amongst this class of thinkers. They do not deny the existence of God, of some power which manifests itself in the events of nature, some reality underlying the external phenomena, but they say that such a power is utterly and for ever inscrutable, that human intelligence is confined to the relative by the very necessity of its nature, and that our ultimate religious ideas, when strictly analyzed, are found to be self-contradictory. Such is the position of Herbert Spencer,\* who, with the assertion that the "absolute cannot in any manner or

\* "First Principles," p. 98.

degree be known in the strictest sense of knowing," combines the further statement that "its positive existence is a necessary datum of consciousness."

Tending in the same direction of this modern Agnosticism is the fact that both religious and philosophical ideas have in the past been closely connected with what are now proved to have been mistaken conceptions respecting the structure, the laws, and origin of the material universe. The physical theories of past times have, to a large extent, been exploded, hence, very naturally, but very illogically, it is inferred that the system of religion or philosophy that was accidentally connected with these theories is also destroyed. Both theologians and scientists have erred in this respect. The theologians are to blame, in so far as they have looked so often with suspicion on scientific research, and shown intolerance towards those who propounded some new theory supposed to be hostile to the Christian faith. The scientists are to blame in that they have supposed Christian theology to be proved absurd when they have shown that some religious writer of the past was mistaken as to the extent of the created universe, the form of the earth, or the method of creation. Even such a writer as George Henry Lewes, wittingly or unwittingly, shows this confusion of thought in supposing that theology is destroyed because our ideas as to the method of creation are changed. In his "History of Philosophy"\* he makes this extraordinary statement:—"When theology was supreme there was unity in doctrine and unity in life. All men accepted the theological explanation of the world and society. But, in proportion as knowledge advanced, this explanation was discovered to be incessantly in contradiction with experience. If, therefore, we are to select the theological mode of thought as our guide, and the theological explanation of the cosmos and society as our doctrine, we must ignore all experience, sweep away all science,

\* Vol. ii., p. 693.

and appeal to the Pope or to the Archbishop of Canterbury for answers to the questions in astronomy, physics, chemistry, biology, and sociology which our passing needs or speculative curiosity may force on us. Is Europe prepared for this?" The manifest absurdity of this passage is clear to all, save to a Positivist determined to overlook everything save what pertains to physical science. Theology professes to be a science—the highest attainable by the human mind—but it has never professed to be a science of physics, or chemistry, or astronomy. Nor has science, with all its discoveries, with all that it has done for man, ever really contradicted, far less overthrown, one fact of theology. There is an infinite beyond the reach of physical science, a world beyond the reach of telescopes; and even within the limited circle of its ken there is an infinite which it can never penetrate by the help of its dissections, its microscopic examinations, its exact analysis. "When we have exhausted the realm of physics," says Tyndall, "a mighty mystery still looms beyond us"—a mystery he confesses that, in his opinion, science will never solve. What physical science cannot explain, theology attempts to deal with. Its conclusions may be false, but will never be disproved by the discoveries of physical science. The spheres of the two are distinct, and, as Martineau says, "it is not less futile to imagine atheistical encroachment from physical knowledge than to be afraid that the tangent should cut a slice out of the circle."\* The error of the thinkers of past times with respect to matters of chemistry, astronomy, geology, and the other physical sciences no more proves their conceptions of God to be false than it proves their political government to be an error, or their ideas about virtue and morality to be a delusion.

Modern thought of the agnostic kind is both strong in denial and strong in positive assertion, and as one or other of these aspects is brought prominently forward, men rank themselves as

\* "Nineteenth Century," Sept., 1884.



Spencer  
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Agnostics or Positivists. These terms apply not to different methods of thought, but to different aspects of the same thought. In the present essay it will be necessary to deal with both of these aspects as essentially agnostic. Positivists such as Frederick Harrison object to the term, but their objection does not refer to their fundamental ideas, but rather to the fact that they wish to lay the emphasis of their belief on its positive, and not on its agnostic side. "I admit," says the writer mentioned, "that philosophy points to an unknown and unknowable reality behind phenomena." Both classes agree in being agnostic in their relation to theology and ontology: both agree in seeking a basis for morality different to that of the Christian religion. They differ in their views as to the nature and purpose of religion, and as to the substitute offered in place of the personal God of the Christian. Two courses are here open to an agnostic: either to follow Mr. Spencer and his school, and make religion consist in a recognition of the Unknowable, or with Comte and his followers to substitute humanity for God. There are thus two religions, that of the Unknowable and that of Humanity, with which we shall have to deal. The question given in the subject of the essay divides itself naturally into two parts—agnosticism and morality, agnosticism and religion, or agnosticism considered from a moral and spiritual point of view.

## Part First.

### AGNOSTICISM AND MORALITY.

#### CHAPTER I.

##### THE UTILITARIAN THEORY OF MORALS.

THOSE who deny the possibility of man ever attaining a true knowledge of the infinite are compelled to reject that system of morality which is based on man's relation to God, and to seek some positive basis for morality in harmony with their own principles. Atheism and agnosticism, however different in their theoretical beliefs, are here at one with reference to morality. The position commonly assumed by agnostics, and generally by those who reject Christianity, is that known as Utilitarianism or Hedonism. The intuitionist school maintain that we are compelled by the very necessity of our nature to regard some actions as right and others wrong. On the other hand it is maintained by utilitarians that there is no such radical and essential distinction between actions—that in themselves all actions are indifferent, and that the moral distinctions we make are derived from observation of the consequences of actions, or their tendency to produce pain or pleasure. This theory is thus defined by J. S. Mill :—"The creed which accepts as the foundation of morals utility, or the greatest happiness principle, holds that actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness, wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness. By happiness is intended pleasure and the absence of pain, by unhappiness pain and the privation of pleasure." This is the theory stated in its simplest, though amongst different writers it

undergoes various modifications, which will be noticed in the progress of discussion. In our times it has received considerable support from the advocates of the evolution hypothesis, with its theory of man's descent from lower organisms. We shall consider first the utilitarian theory in itself, and next, as it is connected with the evolution doctrine of man's development.

The first obvious objection to a theory of conduct which estimates the moral worth of actions by their consequences alone, and interprets virtue by enlightened self-interest, is that it is in direct opposition to the common language and sentiments of mankind. The general test of such doctrines as these must be an appeal to the consciousness of a man when acting. "Do I or do I not seek my own pleasure when I decide on one course of action as *right* and reject another as wrong? Is personal pleasure the real motive of my heart when I seek to discharge my duty to my fellows? And when I imagine myself to be sacrificing my own prospects, wealth, and pleasure for the benefit of others, am I under an illusion?" There can be little doubt but that in nearly every case—except that of those who have a theory to maintain and instinctively seek to harmonize every fact with it—the answer would be that the rightness of an action was not identical with its pleasurable-ness, that self-sacrifice was not the same as enlightened self-interest. "Most persons," says Martineau, "would be affected with some surprise and amusement on being told that in their friendships, their family affections, their public spirit, their admiration for noble character, their religious trust, they had a single eye to their own interests, and were only using their fellows, their children, their country, their heroes, and their God as instruments of their personal pleasure. The writers of this school accordingly find their ingenuity severely taxed to deduce states of mind which have an aspect so disinterested from the one invariable principle of self-seeking; and the history of their psychology affords examples of



expository contortion of natural processes numerous enough to stock the largest museum of pathological curiosities."\*

The merit or moral worth of an action, or course of life, is directly proportioned to its disinterestedness. The heroic life, showing itself oblivious of personal loss or suffering, is that which is approved by men of every age and nation, and held up for the admiration and imitation of all posterity. On the other hand there would be a general feeling of contempt for a man who, when called upon by friendship, family, country, or faith to sacrifice personal interest, hesitated, to consider the remote consequences with reference to his own ultimate benefit. The men held in honour by their country are not those who have been faithful to her only when she had honours to confer or wealth to bestow, but those who with heroic self-abnegation sacrificed their all on her behalf, who have endured imprisonment and suffered exile and death itself rather than betray her sacred trust, though by so doing they might have gained wealth and worldly honour. Lecky, in his trenchant criticism of the Hedonistic system of morality, eloquently says, in reference to this :—"In all its stages, and in all its assertions, this theory is in direct opposition to common language and to common sentiments. In all nations and in all ages the ideas of interest and utility on the one hand, and virtue on the other, have been regarded by the multitude as perfectly distinct, and all languages recognize the distinction. The terms honour, justice, rectitude, or virtue, and their equivalents in every language, present to the mind ideas essentially and broadly differing from the terms prudence, sagacity, or interest. The two lines of conduct may coincide, but they are never confused, and we have no difficulty in imagining them antagonistic. When we say a man is governed by a high sense of honour, or by strong moral feeling, we do not mean he is prudently pursuing his own interests or the interests

\* "Types of Ethical Theory," vol. ii.

of society. A selfish act may be innocent, but cannot be virtuous, and to ascribe all good deeds to selfish motives is not the distortion but the negation of virtue. No man could consciously make this—which, according to the selfish theory, is the only rational and, indeed, possible motive of action—the deliberate object of all his undertakings without his character becoming despicable and degraded.”\*

Pleasure or utility is too wide and general a term wherewith to estimate the moral worth of conduct. Arguments are continually being used against those who maintain that our perception of moral distinctions is intuitive, on the supposition that they deny the connection between virtue and happiness. Herbert Spencer says:—“Conduciveness to happiness is the ultimate test of perfection in a man’s nature. To be fully convinced of this it needs but to observe how the proposition looks when inverted.” The intuitionist school do not deny that pleasure attends the pursuit of virtue, and that every good action is accompanied by a certain mental satisfaction; what they deny is that the motive of a good man is personal happiness, and that rightness of conduct is to be estimated by consequences alone. It may be true that all right actions are pleasurable actions; but it is *not* true that all pleasure-giving actions are virtuous. Hence pleasure is not the criterion, or final test, by which we estimate the rightness of conduct. The same thing has to be said if, instead of pleasure, we substitute utility; for there are many useful actions that we would refrain from doing as in themselves obviously wrong. Utilitarians, realizing the force of this objection, have found it necessary, in working out their theory, to assign some limit to this principle. Bain finds the limit in external authority brought to bear on a man by public opinion in its approval or disapproval, its rewards and punishments, and regards morality as “utility made compulsory.” This,

\* Lecky, “European Morals,” p. 34.

as Professor Calderwood says, is a change from a stronger to a weaker position. If only *some* utility lies at the basis of morality then utility itself is not the final test of morality. If the authority enforced by public opinion and the laws of society determines that some actions are right and others wrong, we still want the ground on which such a decision is given. External authority, however great, however strong its pressure, will only be acknowledged and obeyed by rational men as it is able to give a reason for its dictates, and if this authority bases itself on some standard—other than utility—by which some useful actions are judged right and others wrong, then this standard of appeal, and not utility, is the criterion. A similar objection may be urged against the distinction which J. S. Mill, one of the ablest exponents of utilitarianism, makes in the quality of pleasures, regarding some as “higher” and others as “lower” in kind. Here, again, there is the same unconscious appeal to some higher standard of appeal than utility or pleasure—nay, an appeal to a standard of judgment by which utility and pleasure are themselves judged and estimated as “higher” and “lower” in the scale of moral worth. Thus both J. S. Mill and Bain, in seeking to harmonize actual experience with the principles of their theory, unconsciously destroy its very basis and bear witness to the moral distinctions which are deep-rooted in the very centre of human nature.

As happiness or utility is too wide and general a term for estimating the rightness of conduct, so pain is too general a term for estimating its wrongness. “To scratch your finger on a thorn bush,” says Calderwood, “to submit to the humiliation of confessing that you have done wrong, and refuse help to a friend in suffering, are all painful actions; but they are not on that account wrong actions. In all these cases the end of the action is something else than the pain experienced. The pain is only the attendant upon the action, as in opposite cases pleasure is an



attendant." Further, though it may be said that all wrong actions cause pain, yet the pain arising from wrong-doing is different, not only in degree, but also in kind, from pain arising from other causes. No man of common moral worth can be guilty of wrong-doing without attendant shame and humiliation and acute mental suffering. The remorse which haunts the mind of a man guilty of crime is altogether different to his feeling with reference to physical suffering which has been caused by ignorance, or which has come to him in the discharge of what he believed to be his duty. In the latter case, however great the personal loss, however keen the suffering endured, there is no self-reproach, but resignation; in the former case there is bitter self-reproach, feelings of remorse and shame, which are experienced even should the man's crime be undiscovered, and he escape the condemnation of his fellows and the penalty of suffering due for his sin. The falseness of estimating wrongness of conduct by this utilitarian standard may be still further shown by consideration of the fact that whilst a man would be judged as doing right in suffering pain as a means to greater good, he would be condemned if he did wrong to attain the same end. The man who endures suffering for some greater personal good in the future, or who sacrifices his wealth and personal interests on behalf of some noble purpose by which others are benefited, is not only justified, but judged worthy of highest honour; whilst, on the other hand, the man who does wrong for his own benefit, or employs evil means in pursuit of any purpose, however noble, is at once condemned. It is proverbial in the common language of all civilized people that the end does not justify the means—that it is wrong to do evil that good may follow. Why this striking distinction if wrong-doing and pain-causing are synonymous?

Since the time of Bentham it has been the aim of the ablest exponents of utilitarianism to show that their theory is not one of selfishness, but one in harmony with the truest benevolence.

In proof of this they rely on the altruistic impulses of human nature, the tendency to identify self with others, individual happiness and success with the happiness and success of society. We shall have to deal at length with this question when we come to the consideration of the religion of humanity; suffice it here to reiterate and emphasize the contention of Calderwood that utilitarianism can only claim to be a theory of benevolence by sacrificing logical consistency. "If happiness is to be regarded as the end of life and action, it can only be the happiness of that life of which it is the end." Certainly the Hedonist may seek the well-being and happiness of others, but, if true to his principles, only so far as his own happiness is identified with theirs, and this is not benevolence, but essentially selfishness. Cicero here hits the nail on the head when he says that "to sacrifice pleasure with a view of obtaining any form or modification of pleasure in return no more answers to our idea of virtue than to lend money at interest answers to our idea of charity." There is a strongly defined limit to the so-called altruism and pretended self-sacrifice of the genuine Hedonist, and that is where the pleasure to be gained by seeking the welfare of others is less than the pain to be endured by deserting their interest and seeking personal happiness. Suppose any case where the interest of the individual and the society to which he belongs come into conflict—and such a case is the testing point of any theory of benevolence—whose interests is the Hedonist bound to seek, his own or those of others? As a matter of fact, carried away by the enthusiasm of benevolence, and guided by the nobler instincts of his nature, he might rise superior to his theory, and choose the well-being of others in preference to his own; but if true to the fundamental principle of his theory, which makes personal happiness the sole end of action, he would prefer his own welfare and safety, in the case supposed, to that of others.

But it may be urged that the pleasure of self-sacrifice for others

is in itself superior to any happiness that might arise from self-seeking. That this is the simple truth no moralist of the intuitionist school will deny, but it must be pointed out that the pleasure attendant on the pursuit of virtue and practice of benevolence is only gained on the very condition that it is not the object sought, whereas utilitarianism makes the pleasure itself the supreme end of action. Benevolence loses its worth when practised, not for the weal of others, but for the reflex pleasure attending the act. "Who," asks Martineau, "was ever known to make himself a philanthropist in order to add to his enjoyment? or a martyr to truth in order to taste the pleasures of heroism? Whatever comes from such incentives can only be a miserable counterfeit, a histrionic sham, of any sincere and whole-hearted excellence; you cannot give yourself away while you are casting side glances at what you mean to reserve for your own private advantage."\* The same writer finely puts the whole question when he says:—"The condition of the egoistic Hedonist, being what he is, is that he always pursues his own greatest pleasure, while the condition of obtaining the greatest pleasure is that he does *not* pursue it. His very characteristic, therefore, is suicidal, and precludes him from ever consummating the growth of disinterestedness, through the working of the Hartleyan law (*i.e.*, the identification of self with others). He is under a very common illusion that, because pleasure exists only as it is felt, the more he attends to it the more he will have of it, consciousness being intensified by concentration; whereas what is thereby increased is nothing but the intellectual cognition of it, which, instead of intensifying the feeling, immediately arrests its growth and crystallizes it into an object of thought."

\* "Types of Ethical Theory," vol. ii., p. 318.



## CHAPTER II.

## AGNOSTIC MORALITY AND THE THEORY OF EVOLUTION.

We have endeavoured to summarize the most obvious and forcible objections that have been made against utilitarianism as an adequate scheme of morality. In recent times the agnostics of the scientific school claim to have found a strong support and proof of their theory of morals in the Darwinian hypothesis of evolution, as it has been applied to the social and intellectual development of mankind. Our positive system of morality, say they, is not based on a supposition—is not dependent for its sanction on our relation to a hypothetical being, whom we cannot know—but is based on the facts of nature, on the very conditions of social life, and has its sanction in the known relations between a man and his fellows. Religious beliefs and theological dogmas are regarded as extraneous elements of morality, and when they are removed there will be left a true scientific basis of morality about which all men will agree. It will be necessary to give our most careful attention to this form of utilitarianism, as combined with and expounded by the theory of evolution, since this is the position assumed by our greatest living agnostic writers. Herbert Spencer, in his "Data of Ethics," Leslie Stephen, in "Science of Ethics," and Professor Bain, in his "Emotions and Will," have, each in his own way, worked out an exhaustive scheme of morality on the principles of evolution, and their method has been followed by numerous agnostic writers and thinkers eager to discover a substitute for the religious and theological system which they have rejected.

The theory of evolution may be defined as an endeavour to trace from lifeless matter the origin of all that lives and moves on the earth. Darwin himself hardly went so far, but postulated, at least provisionally, some form or forms of life, from which all the succeeding organisms were evolved.\* Many

\* "Origin of Species."

of his followers, however, less guarded and more daring in the development of his principles, have sought in matter itself "the promise and potency of all terrestrial life." The spontaneous generation of life from germless matter, it is candidly acknowledged, is as yet unproved; but it is hoped that, by-and-by, this will be shown to be a scientific fact, and that "one day it will be the triumph of scientific investigation to find in sensation, feeling, volition, in all the phenomena of mind, that which is only a function of material organization, and, therefore, only a new manifestation of the universal, all-dominating agency of mechanical force."\* The process of creation is regarded as a gradual and progressive internal growth, instead of, as formerly, a series of successive creations by some external power. The world, with its teeming and wondrous forms of plant and animal life, almost infinitely diversified into different species and genera, from the lowest—almost imperceptible—forms of life to man himself, is looked upon as a great whole, through which the same laws are working, and which has been evolved from the one germ. The boundaries, once regarded as so distinct, between the various forms of life are now regarded as dim and uncertain; the various species of organized life merge their differences into the common form from which they have come; the difference between species, widened in some directions, becomes the difference of genera, and thus, from the main stem of the tree of life, there stretch forth great arms, which branch out into innumerable twigs and sprays, whose blossom and fruit is man. There is no break in the order of continuity: all nature is linked together in the great chain of life. The first faint forms of life are hardly distinguishable from the surrounding lifeless matter. Plant life merges so gently into animal life that certain organisms placed by some naturalists in the vegetable kingdom are classed by others in the animal kingdom, and it is customary amongst

\* Caird, "Philosophy of Religion."

modern scientific writers to trace in the life of flowers and plants habits and distinctive adaptations similar to those which are found in the life of animals. The instincts of animals so resemble the reasoning powers of man that there are many who deny that he is endowed with powers different in kind to the brutes, and who assert that instinct is only a lower form of reason, or reason highly developed instinct. In the evolution of life the first organisms are homogeneous in their character, not having separate organs for the discharge of the different functions of life. There is, however, a gradual differentiation of parts, so that separate parts of the animal organism become specially adapted for particular functions, such as motion, digestion, reproduction. Thus, in the course of ages, there arise various organisms, ever tending towards greater differentiation of parts, greater complexity of structure. The motive power which directs this progressive growth and evolution is the instinctive struggle after greater fulness and intensity of life. Among the tentative efforts towards this end, only the happy hits succeed, and these, by repetition, fix themselves, mould the organism in that direction. In the great struggle for life amongst the various animals only the fittest survive.

The law of evolution, however, does not end here. Not content with its application to the physical life of the universe, its most prominent advocates have applied their principles to derive the origin of man himself from the lowest forms of life, and have interpreted the social, intellectual, moral, and religious development of the race on the same principles. The same progressive development, the same differentiation of parts, the same advance from what Spencer calls "indefinite homogeneity" to "definite heterogeneity" which was traced in the history of the lower forms of life, is now to be traced in the history of man. In the simplest forms of sensation we have the origin of intelligence—mind, with its various well-defined faculties. From the "homo-



geneous " savage state, in which every man's hand was against his fellows, there gradually emerged little social unions—combinations of men banded together for mutual defence against a common foe. These unions, being at first of a military character, were most precarious, the different elements being mechanically combined instead of chemically fused, forced together by external pressure instead of being drawn together by mutual affinity and love. Gradually, however, when the benefits of union were realized, men were constrained to live together in times of peace as well as of war, for mutual support as well as for mutual defence, and in these primitive societies we have the origin of our great civilizations. The same differentiation of parts that was traced in the individual organism now takes place in society, which is itself an organism, a unity, made up of different parts which are subordinated to a common end. There is division of labour, and the man who formerly discharged the various functions of labour for himself, being his own carpenter, tailor, weaver, &c., now, in the interests of society, devotes himself to a particular line of work. Thus, the social organism is developed, with its head and limbs, its government, labour, science, art, literature, each with their complex divisions and separate functions. Further, in these primitive unions of men we discover the origin of moral law and conscience. Morality is, in fine, simply an expression of the habits which the past generations of men found best adapted to secure the social and individual welfare of the race. What we regard as fundamental moral axioms or intuitions are but the beaten tracks or highways which our ancestors have found it convenient and to their best interest to pursue. The way at first was uncertain; numbers perished in the search for the best path towards health and happiness; and now that it has been discovered and marked out by the best and wisest of past times, we should be foolish to leave it in search of another and shorter way. In this transmission of moral habits and rules,

emphasis is laid upon that law in virtue of which a repetition of certain actions and certain thoughts moulds the physical structure in a particular direction, or affects the susceptibility of the brain. There is the closest connection between the mind and the body, and, along with the external development of society, there proceeds, *pari passu*, a corresponding internal development in the mind of the individual. Actions which at first are difficult tend, by repetition, to become easy and natural, and though at first only done by a violent effort of will, they may at last become reflex, involuntary, performed at the suggestion of some external stimulus, without passing into consciousness. Just as the brooks that flow down the mountain side groove out for themselves, through the soil and rocks, channels in which their waters may flow, so habitual actions similarly leave their tracks in the physical structure where the currents of nervous energy naturally run. Thus, the habits which have been approved by society, and have tended to the best happiness of the individual—the organizations thus moulded along these moral grooves—are transmitted from parents to children, who, in their turn, hand them down, still more fixed in character and tendencies, to far-distant posterity. Thus, the inward experiences, the moral life of the past, have been transmitted to the present. Thus, what we call moral intuitions, moral truths, which come to us spontaneously, are nothing more than the inherited moral tendencies of our ancestors, the mental discernment and approval of the course of life regarded by them as the highest and best. Thus, as Spencer says, "experiences of utility, organized and consolidated during all past generations of the human race, have been producing nervous modifications, which, by transmission and accumulation, have become in us certain faculties of moral intuition, certain emotions responding to right and wrong conduct, which have no apparent basis in the individual experience of utility."

The position of utilitarianism, as based on evolution, certainly appears stronger and more difficult to deal with than the older forms of the theory. These latter found their proofs in the conscious experience of the individual, and everyone could test them for himself, whereas the theory, as presented in this new form, carries its proofs into the dim vistas of the past. Speaking generally, with reference to evolution, if it be taken merely as a *modal* theory of creation, giving the process or order of development, there is but little in it, as Darwin himself has frankly admitted, which the most orthodox Christian may hesitate to accept. Indeed, regarded as a *modal*, as distinct from a *causal*, theory of the origin and development of created life, the proofs of it are, to a certain extent, generally admitted. The wondrous record of creation written by the Creator on the rocks, and interpreted by modern geology, is not a "series of successive stories, but a continuous epic." Traces of the organic life of the past, in all its wondrous variety and beauty, show gradual advance from the simplest forms of life, as found in the earlier formations, to the higher and more complex forms, as found in the later formations. The history of the human race shows the same progressive development or evolution of the higher and more complex from the lower and simpler. Our great civilizations, with their unity, composed of so many and so diverse elements, their intricate social adjustments, their different methods of life, their culture, science, poetry, and art, their mechanical inventions to facilitate labour, can be traced back to the simple and rude shepherd or barbarous life of long past ages. The England of to-day, in her unity and greatness, with her wide empire on which the sun never sets, is an evolution from that period when, among rude tribes struggling for supremacy, the divisions were so great and the quarrels so numerous as to be compared by a writer to the obscure fighting of kites and crows. Science itself shows in a striking way an example of this evolution. The time



has long past when one could seek to combine in himself a knowledge of all the details of physical science, which is now divided into so many branches that the man who would attain eminence here must devote the energies and thought of a lifetime to the pursuit of some special line of study in even a single branch of science. Even in the sphere of religion there need be slight hesitation in regarding revelation as a process of evolution—a continuous, progressive unfolding of divine truth to the human mind; an evolution which may be traced in Scripture, which is the record of the unfolding of the divine purpose in history, of divine revelation, gradually increasing in fulness and intensity from the dim dawn of prophecy, rising on the darkness of the world's night, to the full noonday splendour of Christianity, when life and immortality were brought to light in the gospel.

All this may be frankly admitted and welcomed as giving to us a true conception of the creative process, but when the theory is used by scientists as a causal theory, to dispense with the intelligent, creative, omnipresent power which is postulated by religion, it completely breaks down. Admitting, for the argument's sake, that science had traced every link in the great chain of life from the simplest protoplasm to man, the question must still arise, Whence did the first organism come? What is the power that has been working out this grand development? Evolution, so far from being able to dispense with the intelligent Creator of religion, necessitates such a Cause, both in the beginning and in every step of its progressive advance. Evolution deals only with phenomena as related in time and space, has nothing to say of the Power of which these phenomena are manifestations, of the Cause which originated life and carries on the wondrous process of its development in the myriad organisms of nature. Had nature, as now spread before our eyes, always existed in the same forms, what is called "an infinite regress of finite causes" might take the place of an intelligent first cause

as an explanation of the universe in its origin and order, but the fact that evolution requires a beginning, and that in the process of growth new elements are ever being evolved, requires us to seek a sufficient cause, an ever-living and working power, a spirit brooding over the water and bringing out of the first chaos the order and beauty of created life. "Force our evolutionist," says Professor Fairbairn, "to come face to face with a universe void of life, with matter inorganic, dead, and to explain whence and why life came, and he must either be silent or say by spontaneous generation—which is but a speciously disguised confession of ignorance—or by transcendental creation. Till he has got his primordial germ and the conditions favourable to its growth—that is, till he has had a caused and created universe—he has nothing to say, his theory has no place. He must have a premiss which involved his conclusion before he can evolve it, and by no logical process will it be possible to prove that a conclusion so stupendous as a rational universe was based on a premiss without rational contents."\*

In the endeavour to compass within the limits of his theory all the mental and moral, as well as physical phenomena, the evolutionist finds anything but an easy task, and consciously breaks down again and again in the attempt. Despite failure, however, he tenaciously holds to the assertion that mind is a property of matter, that "thought is as much a function of matter as motion is," and that by-and-by "we shall arrive at a mechanical equivalent of consciousness, just as we have arrived at a mechanical equivalent of heat."† There are several hitches in the hypothesis of evolution which very essentially modify the application of the theory, and show clearly its insufficiency as an explanation of the origin of the life of the world. Spontaneous generation, so urgently needed to explain the origin of organized life from inorganic lifeless matter, without any intervening

\* "Discussions in Religion," p. 59.

† Huxley.

creative power, is candidly acknowledged by our greatest living exponents of evolution to be an unproved hypothesis. Professor Huxley affirms that the doctrine of biogenesis, or life from life, is "victorious along the whole line at the present day." And Professor Tyndall, in words equally emphatic, says:—"I affirm that no shred of trustworthy experimental testimony exists to prove that life in our day has ever appeared independently of antecedent life." So that the bridge between lifeless, germless matter and life has not been made, and evolution would be false to the first principles of inductive science if used to assert, contrary to the results of the nicest experimental research, the identity of life with the chemical force of inorganic nature. A second difficulty faces the evolutionist and arrests his victorious march when he comes to the phenomena of consciousness and has to show their identity with the molecular changes of the brain. "How it is," says Huxley, "that anything so remarkable as a state of consciousness comes about as the result of irritating nervous tissue is just as unaccountable as the appearance of the Djin when Aladdin rubbed his lamp in the story." Similarly, Dr. Tyndall declares "the passage from the physics of the brain to the corresponding facts of consciousness to be unthinkable. The mechanical philosopher will never place a state of consciousness and a group of molecules in the position of mover and moved. Observation proves them to interact; but in passing from one to the other we meet a blank which the logic of deduction is unable to fill." Why, then, in the face of these obvious difficulties, does the physicist still persist in seeking the key to the explanation of the ordered and living universe in its lowest factor, mechanical force? His error arises from one of the simplest logical fallacies, the confusion of priority in time with sufficiency of cause. Even should we grant that there is no gap in the chain of life from its lowest form to the highest, that the whole process of evolution is like the gradual unfolding of



blossom and leaf and stem from the seed, the question has still to be asked, In this process of development is there no new element evolved—nothing in any of the higher forms that cannot be found in the lower organisms? The fallacy of the evolutionist in regarding his theory as a solution of the universe, and seeking the cause of its ordered life in homogeneous matter controlled by mechanical forces, seems to our mind the same as that of a man who would assert that the cause of the daylight or dawn was to be found in the preceding darkness. The full noonday may be said to be evolved from the dawn, the dawn from the darkness. There is no break in the order or continuity; it is, in the words of evolution, progress from indefinite homogeneity (the darkness) to definite heterogeneity (the splendours of day). In the early dawn the uncertain mountain shapes loom through the haze, but as day advances the mists rise from the valleys, the darkness melts into day, and reveals to the enraptured sight nature in all its loveliness—mountains with their outlines clear against the sky, woods with their varied green sheltering cottage homesteads, streams sparkling in sunlight wending their way to the ocean, fields waving with yellow corn, till the eye loses itself in the blue distance. It would be absurd to seek the cause of all this beauty and splendour in the darkness which preceded it, yet this very absurdity, it seems to us, is committed when evolution is regarded as a causal theory, and the origin of nature's wondrous and teeming life is sought in the mechanical force whose workings are found previous to organized, self-conscious life. Evolution deals only with phenomena, which are themselves only manifestations of the living power working in nature, who, as the sun shining on nature gives it beauty and splendour, fills the whole universe with light and life, bringing from the darkness and confusion of chaos the beauty and harmony of the ordered universe. There is no break in the order—each higher stage in the process of development is but a higher revelation of

the living power in nature ; and when we come to man, in his self-conscious freedom or personality, we have the highest and fullest revelation of the cause at work in nature.

With reference to the question of moral development, even should we grant the claim of the agnostics, and admit that, at a particular time in the evolution of the race, as in the history of the individual, moral distinctions first begin to be realized, we are just as far off as ever from any identification of morality with utility or pleasure. We have already seen that there are conclusive objections against such identification, and that in the minds of men the spheres of duty and pleasure are not commensurate, and, however far back we go into the distant past, it is impossible to regard two principles as identical, when, in consciousness, they reveal themselves as essentially distinct. Martineau very cleverly says that "to assert that conscience is but the inherited calculus of the agreeable and serviceable, is no better than for one who had been colour-blind to insist that the red which he has gained is nothing but his familiar green under some queer mask." Evolution traces the development of the different senses ; how the ear was gradually formed for hearing, the eye for sight ; but it cannot assert that the distinctions perceived by the different senses are not real distinctions, however faintly they were at first perceived ; it cannot prove that waves of light are identical with waves of sound ; that red rays are identical with green, blue with yellow. The untutored ear of the savage may be unable to distinguish the wide range of notes which are familiar to the trained musician, but it does not follow that these notes thus distinguished are the same. So, though it may be quite true that in the dawn of civilization moral distinctions were but dimly recognized, that in no way proves that goodness and rightness were not always distinct from pleasurable. An appeal to consciousness asserts this distinction, and on this broad fact we rest, resolutely opposing every

attempt of the evolutionist to make us lose it by taking us into the dim twilight of the past, where all differences of form and colour lose themselves in a common haze. Repeating the words of the writer already quoted, let us ask, "Why not leave this distinction to its proper place, as a new differentiation of voluntary activity? Why pretend, against all fact, that it is homogeneous with self-interest, instead of accepting it as the key to a moral order of cognition and system of relations, supplementing the previous sentient and intellectual and affectional experience?" The failure of Agnostics in seeking a proof of their moral theory in the doctrine of evolution will be still further seen when we consider in detail their explanation of conscience and moral obligation. A consideration of these two questions—a knowledge of moral distinctions, the authority commanding moral obedience—lies at the basis of any criticism of any scheme of morality whose success or failure lies in the answer it gives to them.

### CHAPTER III.

#### AGNOSTIC MORALITY AND CONSCIENCE.

From a theistic point of view conscience has been popularly described as the voice of God within us, by which, in a picturesque way, is described the truth that it reveals to us at once the moral law and our obligation to obey it. One of the best modern writers of the intuitionist school has defined conscience as "that power of mind by which moral law is discovered to each individual for the guidance of his conduct. It is the reason, as that discovers to us absolute moral truth—having the authority of sovereign moral law. It is an essential requisite for the direction of an intelligent free-will agent, and affords the basis for moral obligation and responsibility in human life." It is thus supreme



in its authority over all the other powers of the mind. From its dictates there can be no appeal to any higher standard of law or tribunal of judgment. Each power of the body and mind, affections, desires, &c., has its own particular end; these are dependent on intelligence for their direction, and intelligence is dependent on moral law as given by conscience. Butler's definition, as given in his sermons on Human Nature, is on the same lines:—"That principle by which we survey and either approve or disapprove our own heart, temper, and actions is not only to be considered as what, in its turn, is to have some influence, which may be said of every passion, of the lowest appetites; but likewise as being superior, as from its very nature claiming superiority over all others, in so much that you cannot form a notion of this faculty, conscience, without taking in judgment, direction, superintendency." There are other definitions slightly different to these, but these two may stand as giving, in a fairly representative way, the religious view of conscience as contrasted with that of present-day agnosticism. The religious view may be regarded as laying emphasis on three points in the conception of conscience—that it is a distinct faculty, revealing to us sovereign moral law; that it is essential to human nature, not being resolvable into anything lower; that it is supreme in its authority over all other powers of the body and mind, and over the life and conduct of every man.

What is conscience to the Agnostics? One of them, in a parody of the popular theistic phrase, describes it as the voice of our Father—man. It is, as the same writer says, "the tribal self," the voice of the community asserting itself in the individual consciousness and commanding obedience to its dictates. It is an evolution from the life-history of the past ages. In the great struggle for existence, unselfishness, self-denial for the well-being of the tribe, gave certain peoples supremacy over others. Natural selection preserved the conscientious races, those in whom the

tribal conscience overpowered the selfish instincts, and thus, each generation improving on the preceding, the habit strengthening by inheritance, conscience has come to be what it is—an instinct, whose natural direction, whose very reason to be, is the welfare of the species through the suppression of all individual desires hostile to the general interest.

Leslie Stephen, who has laboriously constructed a whole system of ethics on agnostic principles, says that "conscience is the utterance of the public spirit of the race, ordering us to obey the primary conditions of its welfare, and it acts none the less forcibly though we may not understand the force of its authority or the end at which it is aiming."\* Professor Bain, whose whole system of philosophy is an attempt to derive from the simple facts of sensation our intellectual and moral faculties, finds the basis of conscience in external authority. He thus summarizes his position:—"I have given it as my deliberate opinion that authority or punishment is the commencement of the state of mind recognized under the various names, conscience, the moral sense, the sentiment of obligation. Everyone, not of himself disposed to follow the rules prescribed by the community, is subjected to some infliction of pain, to supply the absence of other motives, the infliction increasing in severity until obedience is attained. It is the familiarity with this *régime* of compulsion, and of suffering constantly increasing, that plants in the infant or youthful mind the first germ of the sense of obligation. From this other elements come in. The habit of obedience being formed, the child gradually learns to know the meaning and use of the prohibitions forced upon it, and to approve of the end intended by them. A feeling of goodwill is contracted for those whom the law forbids us to injure. Our tender feelings, our sympathies, our sentiments of the fair, the equal, the consistent, if liberally developed and well

\*"Data of Ethics."

directed, impels us, as it were, of our own accord to respect those interests of our fellow-beings that are protected by the enactments of society. The conscience, which was at first derived and implanted, is now independent or self-sustaining."

In these representations there is, doubtless, a considerable amount of truth, which deserves our grateful recognition, and we owe much to the writers mentioned for the systematic and careful way in which they have sought to show the moral development of the race and individuals. But emphatically again do we assert the fallacy of their fundamental position, in regarding priority in point of time as a warrant of sufficient cause in the realm of pure phenomena. Before you can trace the development of any faculty you must have the faculty to begin with, in some form, and unless the two principles—the pleasure-giving and the right—can be shown to be identical in consciousness, so that the one can be resolved into the other, spoken of in terms of the other, it is quite impossible to prove their identity, however far back we go into the distant past. Association of ideas, the external authority brought to bear on a man by public opinion, by the rewards and punishments of society, careful training and education, can, as someone has said, no more give the moral sense to a man than they could give the sense of sight to a man who had been born blind. Bain traces in a very striking and illustrative way the growth of obedience from early childhood, but he fails to show how external authority can give those clear distinctions between right and wrong which are perceived, irrespective of what society may say. He hardly recognizes that in the early years of childhood there are strong conceptions of moral right, and that the child will resent injustice and wrong, however strong the external pressure which is brought to bear, and that if these native moral impulses are checked the whole nature is dwarfed and twisted. Once, however, conscience or the moral sense is



given, there is room for the widest development, and just as mathematical truth in all the wealth of its applications has been so wonderfully developed from a few simple axioms, so the simple intuitions of the moral sense are developed in their wide application to all the practical life of mankind. There is development of moral truth as the fulness of its meaning is more clearly recognized, as its application to the varied life of society in all its details is better understood, as its principles are unfolded and enforced in wise precepts, in familiar household proverbs, handed on and increased from generation to generation. In this respect we think that Calderwood is mistaken in his contention that conscience cannot grow. If he means merely to assert that conscience has not been derived from anything else, the position may be gladly admitted, but if, when conscience as a special faculty is given, he denies that there can be any development of it, he might as well assert that there could be no growth of the physical and intellectual powers, that our memory could not be vastly improved, and that our intellectual discernment and grasp could not be increased by education and exercise. The moral sense, not merely the moral life, clearer perception of moral distinctions, as well as greater power to work them out in daily life, will grow with the other powers as the life is increased in its fulness and intensity. The moral life will become more organized, more fixed and certain in its working, as the individual is brought from the narrow sphere of self into wider and closer relations with his fellows, as in living sympathy he becomes identified with their interest and welfare, as in communion with the God whom he worships and adores as the source of his being and of all moral perfection he gradually rises above the power of selfish impulses to a nobler, more self-sacrificing, Christ-like life.

Irrespective of these considerations, the agnostic theory of conscience is inconsistent in itself, and will hardly stand the test

of its own principles. "That still, small voice," says Frances Cobbe, "to which we were wont to hearken reverently, what is it to Agnostics but the echo of the rude cheers and hisses wherewith our fathers greeted the acts which they thought useful or the reverse—those barbarous forefathers who howled for joy round the wicker cages wherein the Druids burned their captives, and yelled under every scaffold of the martyrs of truth and liberty? That solid ground of transcendental knowledge, which we imagined the deepest thinker of the world had sounded for us and proved firm as a rock, what is it (to them) but the shifting sand-heaps of our ancestral impressions—nay, rather let us say the mental kitchen-midden of generations of savages?" Conscience is traced to barbarous ancestors, whose habits we find to be just the reverse of what are recognized as being morally right—a past state of society little above the life of the brutes, in which murder, theft, adultery, and gross sensuality prevail in the most degraded forms. Should we not be nearer the truth in saying that conscience, so far from being an expression of the habits of the early stages of social life, contradicts these habits in nearly every detail? Are not the habits, the instincts, the animal passions which we have inherited from a lower state of society to be suppressed rather than encouraged and stimulated? Is not moral life a continual struggle between a lower self, governed by lower passions seeking satisfaction, and a better self, guided by an *ideal life that has never been realized*? It is no sufficient answer to this to say that conscience has grown, and that in its later forms there are necessarily found elements that were absent in its earlier stages. Conscience is always *above* men—not merely those who have sunk below the general estimate of society, which, by the way, is at its best a comparatively low estimate—but above the best and noblest of our race, men who are ever ready to confess how far short they have come of its requirements, how again and again they have violated its

dictates. Nay, the better a man is the more ready is he to acknowledge how far removed is his actual life from that ideal life recognized by the moral sense. It is only the proud Pharisees who congratulate themselves on their attainments, on having carried out to the letter every requirement of religion, while sainted Pauls and holy Isaiahs, contrasting their actual life with the vision of divine holiness, cry out :—" I am less than the least of all saints ; I am the chief of sinners ;" " Woe is me ; I am undone, for I am a man of unclean lips."

Conscience, say Agnostics, points to the past ; nay, we reply, it points to the future. It is, say they, an expression of the habits which have proved useful to society ; nay, we reply, it is an *ideal standard* which society has never reached. Its authority is external, say they, its sanction the approbation of society ; nay, we reply, it is inherent in the very constitution of our nature, its authority is dependent on our relation to God himself, its sanction above and often contradicting the requirements of society. Were conscience, as interpreted by the evolutionists, an inheritance from some golden age of the past, when men walked the earth as saints, living in unity as brothers and carrying out in their practical life the golden rule of Christ, one could understand its strength and authority and respect its dictates, but as the inheritance of ages more corrupt than our own it is impossible to conceive of its domineering influence over the life of those living in the higher and more complex civilized life of modern times. Moral law, as it presents itself to the minds of the best men, is a something as yet unattained, a loftier, sunnier height of purity, stretching far above us into the blue heaven. An inheritance be it, not from barbarous habits of men a little above the brutes, but from a righteous God, our Creator, our home, a vision of eternal beauty given to lead us onward through the tangled thickets and wildernesses of our earthly life, a guiding star from the heaven above shining through the darkness below.



## CHAPTER IV.

## AGNOSTIC MORALITY AND MORAL OBLIGATION.

Those who have rejected the theistic basis of morality and assert the impossibility of our attaining to a true knowledge of the infinite, are continually declaring that their religious and philosophical position does not make them value the less the claims of duty. The contents of the moral law, they maintain, will always remain the same whatever may be our theories about its nature and origin. The facts of morality will remain unaltered, whatever our explanation of these facts. Professor Tyndall claims that, though he has rejected the religion of his earlier years, there is no spiritual experience such as he then knew, no resolve of duty, no work of mercy, no act of self-renouncement, no solemnity of thought, no joy in the life and aspects of nature, that are not still his. Admitting that this is so, that the voice of conscience gives the same directions whether regarded as the voice of God or of society, as essential in human nature or as an instinct acquired from ancestral habits of thinking and acting ; admitting that, as a general rule, the same virtues are approved by Agnostics and by Christians, let us ask, what is the obligation to perform these actions and cultivate those virtues that are approved by conscience? What strength of authority does conscience, as thus interpreted, carry with it? Is there an absolute obligation on all personal agents to direct their life in accordance with its dictates, or is the obligation a hypothetical one? Should there be any who deny its authority, are we to judge them responsible and condemn them because of their disobedience? Is it universal, binding on all men alike in every stage of civilization, in every condition of society? Does it rest on our relation to society, public opinion, or on our relation to a power and being to whom both we and society are responsible?

The absolute, unconditional authority of the moral law, demanding obedience from all personal agents, has generally been recognized by moralists of past times. The Christian thinker finds the basis of moral obligation in man's relation to God, the source of his being and ruler of his destiny, moral law being the expression of the will of a righteous God, and, therefore, binding on all rational, free creatures. In man's consciousness of good and evil there is involved a sense of obligation, and being under obligation implies responsibility to some higher power or being, to whom we shall have to render account of our actions. Moral law is something above man, though expressing itself in his consciousness. It speaks of an ideal life, which it is his duty to attain; it is a standard by which his every thought, word, or action must be estimated. That law brings him into the presence of God. The obligation laid upon him is not merely to outward obedience, but to inward purity of heart and mind. The all-seeing eye of God, who looketh not on the outward appearance, but on the heart, is ever upon him, searching the depths of his being, and the hypocrisy which hides an evil life behind a fair exterior is only an aggravation of evil doing. The smooth, varnished Pharisee, with broad phylacteries, and outward law-observing life, yet with a cold, proud heart, where all generous human affections have been crushed and all noble impulses have decayed, is a greater sinner than the repentant publican, with his passionate cry for mercy; or the despised Magdalene, who, too penitent to ask forgiveness, washes the Saviour's feet with tears, and is received by the compassion of Divine love. The consequences of disobedience to the moral law are not limited to this narrow sphere of existence. Earth is merely the battle-field where eternal destinies are at stake.

It is an instructive contrast when we compare this religious conception of moral obligation with the feeble, uncertain substitutes Agnosticism has to offer. Nowhere does the moral

grandeur of Christian religion stand more clearly revealed by contrast with the weakness and hollowness of the whole Agnostic system than in the attempt of the latter to deal with the question of duty, or moral obligation. Unable to fall back on an authority beyond and superior to man, it is driven to the most miserable evasions and subterfuges to preserve, at least, the appearance of duty in its scheme of morality, or in some cases to reckless, extravagant denial of the existence of such a thing as moral obligation. Agnostic morality is like a heathen cosmogony, suspended in mid-air without support ; it is like a ghastly eye socket without the eye ; it is like a gilded air bubble, glittering with rainbow hues of the sentiment with which they seek to colour it, only to burst when brought into contact with the stern realities of our earnest life. There is nothing left for an Agnostic who seeks to deal with the question of duty but to deny its existence altogether, to explain it away, or to base it on the external authority of society, as able to reward or punish. Bentham accepts the first of these alternatives, and very bluntly, with the reckless boldness of one who, feeling the inherent weakness of his case, seeks to supply lack of argument by audacious assertion, declares that "the talisman of arrogance, indolence, and ignorance is to be found in a single word, an authoritative imposture. It is the word ought or ought not, as the circumstances may be. If the use of the word be admissable, it *ought* to be banished from the vocabulary." Another writer, equally extravagant, equally determined to maintain a theory in defiance of simple truth, says :—"It is in fact very idle to talk about duties. The word itself has in it something disagreeable and repulsive, and talk about it as we may, the word will not become a rule of conduct. A man, a moralist, gets into an elbow-chair and puts forth pompous declarations about *duty* and *duties*. Why is he not listened to? Because every man is thinking about *interests*. It is a part of his nature to think



about interests, and with these the well-judging moralist will find it for his interest to begin." A theorist must be hard pressed to resort to such style of argument to maintain his position. It is an attempt to hide the weakness of his cause by throwing mud in the eyes of observers. Conscious that the sun of duty is shining in mid-heaven, and that men are walking by its light, yet anxious to deny its existence, he seeks to do so by blinding men's eyes.

Bentham contradicts himself, as Calderwood points out, a very few pages further on in the same book from which the reckless statement quoted is taken. He there declares that "every pleasure is *prima facie* good, and *ought* to be pursued; every pain *prima facie* evil, and *ought* to be avoided." This is another evidence of what a modern writer has pointed out, that these moralists have *felt* in one language and *theorized* in another. The simple moral intuitions of their own nature are, throughout their writings, asserting themselves in spite of their theories. Their intellectual beliefs are only a veneer, covering a solid foundation of Christian training and mode of thinking.

Darwin, in his account of obligation, seems to have missed the point and force of the whole question, or, at least, in his attempt to harmonize duty with his theory of evolution he has reduced it to the smallest dimensions. "The imperious word ought," he says, "seems merely to imply the consciousness of the existence of a persistent instinct, either innate or partly acquired, serving him as a guide, though liable to be disobeyed. We hardly use the word ought in a metaphorical sense when we say hounds ought to hunt, pointers to point, and retrievers to retrieve their game. If they fail thus to act, they fail in their duty and act wrongly."\* Surely this is a considerable extension of the word and confusion of two different conceptions Ought,

\* "Descent of Man," p. 92.

with reference to an animal guided by its instincts and judged irresponsible for acting under the guidance of those instincts, is a very different thing from ought with reference to a personal agent, endowed with consciousness and self-direction, able to understand the reason of his action and guide his life intelligently to some high end. "Man, in accordance with the theory of evolution, is simply a bundle of instincts, more or less persistent, some transient, some intermittent, some permanent, so as to be liable to conflict." If this be so, it is still undecided in a case where there is a collision of instincts, each seeking satisfaction, whether there is obligation to obey one instinct rather than another. If, in this conflict, the decision is made by a question of greater persistence, or by one instinct having more mechanical power than another, morality, in the sense understood by men, is rendered impossible. Man, thus understood, is the helpless instrument controlled by mechanical forces; conduct is simply the product of blind instincts struggling for supremacy. Surely there are as many base persistent instincts innate, which, instead of, as Darwin says, serving man as a guide, are to be suppressed, if we would order our lives in accordance with the moral law. Darwin himself, perhaps unconsciously, shows this by his own admission:—"The wish for another man's property is, perhaps, as persistent a desire as any that can be named." Rather a strange guide of action! If it be argued that only some persistent instincts are to be obeyed, then we must seek some other ground of obligation than "persistency of instinct."

Surely this melancholy reduction of moral law, in its sublime grandeur, to an animal instinct, is enough to make even the most hardened evolutionist pause and consider whether, in his eagerness, he has not missed his way in seeking to traverse the realm of morals with no other guide than his uncertain theory. Can such theorists rest content in seeking to reduce the discussion of morals to a question of dynamics, in regarding truth, benevolence,

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self-sacrifice, mercy, and love as products of mechanical force or nervous sensation, in bringing what has been regarded as the highest and noblest in man to what is the lowest part of his nature? They might, at least, wait till they have produced life from lifeless matter, till they have shown the identity of conscious freedom and intelligence with molecular changes, before carrying their theory to such unwarranted lengths. Let them first prove the premises before drawing conclusions from them with respect to moral obligation. The whole position they assume is in direct contradiction to the simplest facts of consciousness. Man feels himself to be not a mere bundle of instincts, but a self-conscious being, endowed with freedom of choice and action, the master of the instincts which prompt him, not their servant—able to suppress them, or use them in harmony with the moral law, for the attainment of some high end. "The mere flashing upon us of opposite impulses on the right hand and the left, determining us like cattle with two drivers, flourishing a stick on each side of the road, would involve no sense of obligation, and be compatible with no self-judgment. We evidently feel the solicitations which visit us to be mere phenomena, brought before a personality that is more than a phenomena: a free, judicial ego, able to deal with the problem offered, and decide between the claimants that have entered our court."\*

Professor Bain seeks the ground of moral obligation in external authority, restricting obligation to "the class of actions enforced by punishment. When a man does his duty he escapes punishment; to assert anything more is to obliterate the radical distinction between duty and merit."† W. K. Clifford, whose conception of conscience has already been referred to, fully admits that "the sense of duty is inherent in the very constitution of our nature," and also that "the promptings of a wider self than that of the individual is inherent in a sense of duty. The

\* Martineau.

† "Emotions and Will," pp. 254-292.



prompting of a self other than our own is the very essence of duty." This other and wider self, before whom we are brought face to face in conscience is not God, however, but the society external to us, whose authority is asserting itself in our consciousness. This reference of duty to our relation to society alone is the only positive basis of obligation open to an Agnostic. Expounded in various ways by different writers, obligation, on agnostic principles, can only be referred back to society—obligation to order our life in accordance with its requirements, to obey its laws, to perform the actions it approves and rewards, to avoid the actions it disapproves and condemns. This view of duty, however rational it seems when looked at superficially, proves, when closely examined, to be an altogether inadequate, colourless conception. As we have already seen, we not only require to know the fact that society approves some actions and condemns others, but also to know the ground of such decision, the "why" and the "wherefore" these actions are regarded as right and those as wrong. Man is not a helpless instrument, to be used by some external power—a piece of mechanism, blindly carrying out the wishes of the society external to him. He must understand the reason of the demand made upon him before he will obey it; the obligation must be a rational obligation before he will acknowledge it. It is not an answer to this to say that society commands certain actions because they are useful, and forbids others because dangerous to the general weal. This is merely a re-statement of the question, a reiteration of the difficulty, not a solution of it. What we wish to know is just *why* society should select some actions as more useful than others. Society simply implies a mass of individuals, and its opinions, its conscience, its moral authority, so far from being regarded as superior, will be estimated by rational men as inferior to those of the best individuals of the race. So far is man from regarding his duty as "restricted to that class of

actions enforced by punishment," that in his simple discharge of it, as revealed by conscience, he is ready to run directly in the teeth of public opinion ; in simple loyalty to truth, and obedience to felt right, he is ready to suffer all the punishments of society—to go to prison, to suffer exile, and, if need be, death itself. To seek to base moral obligation on social authority is to seek the sandiest foundation that could have been selected. The glory of the hero and the martyr in every age is that, in defiance of external pressure, triumphant over temporal loss, they followed the path pointed out by the inner witness for truth. Their names are now revered ; their memories, surrounded by a halo of glory, are enshrined in the sanctuary of the heart's affection ; the story of their life idealized in romance, poetry, and art. But how were they esteemed by the age in which they lived, how rewarded for the heroism of their life ? " Which of the prophets," asked the proto-martyr Stephen of his persecutors, " have your fathers not slain ? " " Ye build," said Christ to the scribes and Pharisees, " the tombs of the prophets, and garnish the sepulchres of the righteous prophets, whom your fathers have slain." It is the same story, oft repeated, in every nation and in every age, that our best, our noblest men have suffered the most ignominious persecution, have endured the vilest shame and calumny, and too often death itself, for the very men they sought to benefit ; while the selfish worldling, restricting his " duty to that class of actions enforced by punishment," and having no regard to any higher standard than the opinion of society, went through life in luxuriant ease and prosperity. True that posterity reverses such decisions, but only because the truth for which the hero struggled and the martyr died has proved stronger than public opinion—has moulded society, instead of being dependent on society for its authority. A basis of moral obligation cannot be found in the authority of social opinion, which is as variable as the unstable water, crying to-day,

"Hosannah! Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Highest," and to-morrow, "Away with Him! Crucify Him!" We must deny it altogether or seek it in our relation to a righteous God.

Secondly, this conception of obligation, as understood by Bain, destroys the better part of morality. If duty is restricted to that class of actions enforced by punishment, then all true virtue is at once flung out of the sphere of duty. All that external authority can demand, all that its punishments can enforce, is external conformity with its requirements. It can have nothing to do with a man's thoughts, feelings, desires. In this view, duty consists in refraining from deeds punishable by society, obligation having no reference to positive virtues, nobility of thought and feeling, reverence for truth, benevolence, mercy, purity. These, according to Bain, would be meritorious actions, but not obligatory—works of supererogation, but not strictly demanded. It is a position worthy of the sophistry of the most unprincipled Jesuit. It is a miserable contrast with that standard of duty unfolded in the sermon on the Mount. Surely duty is far more important with reference to the inner springs of action, the prompting motives, the cherished desires, than to the mere manifestation of these in outward action. The guilt of man's actions, as Christ has shown—and from His standard the world will never return to the low agnostic level—lies not with the outward deed, but the inward state of heart. The murderer is not merely he who strikes the blow, but he who cherishes hatred and enmity with his brother. On the other hand, duty is not fulfilled by external conformity with the demands of law, and by avoiding the punishments of society, but by earnest endeavour to inward purity, the checking of base passions, the cherishing of generous impulses, high aspirations after a nobler life, and complete surrender of self to the recognized will of God. And this is not,



as Bain says, confusing merit and duty. Duty is fulfilled only by seeking to attain the highest virtue—has reference primarily to a man's inner life. Merit is attained only by the fulfilment of duty—is estimated in direct proportion to its fulfilment.

Morality, if anything more than a name, has to do mostly with the secret life, which is hidden from all the world. It is not dependent on the will of society, but asserts itself in the conscience, irrespective of the changing opinions of society, and often in defiance of its authority. This moral grandeur of the moral law is manifested in such a scene as that of Luther, at Worms, where a miner's son, strong in God's might, takes his stand, resolute, unmoved, against the mightiest power in Europe. Asked to recant, he declares:—"Unless I am convinced by Scripture and reason, I neither can nor dare retract anything, for my conscience is a captive to God's word, and it is neither safe nor right to go against conscience. Here I take my stand; I can do no other, so help me, God." The external authority opposed to the reformer was mighty enough then, but he recognized a still mightier authority asserting itself in his own conscience, a moral power more commanding than the assembled Catholic power of Europe. "The one self-approving hour," in the words of one of the world's master-minds, "far outweighs whole worlds of stupid starers and of loud huzzas." Society, instead of being the final court of appeal, is itself judged by the individual conscience; instead of being the framer of the moral law, it but too often contradicts by its opinion and by its enactments the very simplest moral convictions of good men. The attempt, therefore, of Agnostics to find a positive ground of obligation may be described as a complete failure. The only foundation of morals on which they can build proves as unstable as the shifting sand. There is no alternative left to us if we would still hold to the absolute character, the universal authority of the moral law, recognizing its relation to our inward far more than to our outward life, than

to seek its basis in God himself. "Oh Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps."\* "The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple." "Two things," says Kant, in oft-quoted but ever-powerful words, "fill me with awe—the starry heavens above me and the moral law within me." There it rests in silent grandeur, immovable, unchangeable, amid the troubled passions and changing opinions of mankind, shining like the starry heavens above the storm-wracked clouds and billowy ocean of human life, to guide through the wilderness of waters and warn against dangerous rocks, where many a goodly vessel has been shivered to pieces.

## CHAPTER V.

### AGNOSTICISM AND THE WORSHIP OF HUMANITY.

The positivist philosophy, which is chiefly associated with the name of Aug. Comte, claims to be the third and highest stage of thought that the human mind has reached, after passing through the theological and metaphysical stages. The first period of human thought, according to this philosophy, is that of theology, when men seek for the causes of the phenomena of nature in spirits or gods akin to themselves. The second period is the metaphysical, when impersonal entities and abstractions of thought take the place of the gods of the first period. The third and highest period is that of Positivism, when enquiry is limited to the natural and knowable conditions under which phenomena occur. This system of philosophy, professing to recognize the limits of human thought, rejects any search after final causes, and deals merely with the laws of phenomena, their relations in time

\* Jeremiah x. 23.

and space. Similarly, with reference to religion, Comte rejected any form of faith in a god above nature and man. As other religions had been theological, so he claimed that his should be sociological, having as its supreme object of worship all-embracing humanity, which he terms the *Grand Etre*. This, according to him, is the most perfect object of worship, and in humanity woman stands pre-eminent, because there rule in her those qualities which he regards as the highest. The cultus of this new religion consists in the grateful remembrance of the heroes of humanity, who, in one sphere or other, have contributed to its advance, and, in contemplation of the grand possibilities before the race in the future. Comte drew up a complete calendar, inscribed with the names of the new saints of the positivist religion, the months being named after the principal heroes of humanity, and the Sundays after heroes of the second rank. It is noticeable, says Pfeleiderer, that neither the name Jesus nor that of any of the Protestant theologians and reformers is to be found in this pantheon of new saints, while the most obscure names of the Roman world are elevated to stars of the first magnitude. In our own country this system of philosophy and religion has rallied round it an enthusiastic band of disciples, among whom Mr. Fred. Harrison seems to be the chief living apostle. The language of this writer in particular, instinct with moral power, and coloured by strong emotion, falls with a startling contrast to the dry, colourless, abstract terms of so much of our present scientific speculation. It is claimed by the Positivists that humanity, as an object of worship, is sufficient to satisfy all our best religious instincts. The worth of religion, its necessity, as having its roots in an ideal requirement of our nature, is acknowledged, as well as its value as a source of personal satisfaction and elevated feeling, but the positivists claim that these ends may be attained without overstepping the boundaries of our earthly life and seeking a supernatural object



of worship. They claim that the idealizing of our earthly life, the cultivation of a higher conception of its possibilities, is in a position to give a poetry and, in the best sense, a religion, which, with support from education, will be better capable of elevating the feelings and ennobling the conduct than any faith whatever in an invisible power. John Stuart Mill asserts that there is a radical inferiority in the best supernatural religions to the religion of humanity, since through their promise of reward and threatening of punishment they strengthen the selfish interest, and thereby prove one of the most serious hindrances to moral culture, whose greatest task is in the weakening of the selfish and strengthening of the unselfish elements in our nature—(rather a strange principle, remarks Pfeiderer, very forcibly, to be found in a writer who more distinctly than any other since the time of Epicurus has made utility, the selfish interest of the individual, the principle of all morality). Superiority for this new religion is still further claimed, on the ground that it is combined with the certainties of science, resting for its basis on known laws, ascertained facts. "The essence of religion," says Fred. Harrison, while combating the position of Herbert Spencer and that of the theologians, "is not to answer a question, but to govern men and unite them, by giving them common beliefs and duties. Theologies tried to do this, and long did it, by resting on certain answers to certain questions. The progress of thought has upset one answer after another, and now the final verdict of philosophy is that all answers are unmeaning, and that no rational answer can be given. It follows, then, that questions and answers, both but the accidents of religion, must be given up. A base of belief and duty must be looked for elsewhere, and when this has been found, then, again, religion will succeed in governing and uniting men. Where is this to be found? Since the realm of cause has failed to give us foothold, we must fall back on the realm of law—social, moral, and mental

law, and not merely physical. The religion of law or science is Positivism. The religion of man in the twenty or thirty centuries of theology was reverence for the assumed authors or controllers of nature. But that assumption having broken up, religion does not break up with it. On the contrary, it enters on a far greater and more potent career, inasmuch as the natural emotions of the human heart are now combined with the certainty of scientific knowledge.\* Positivism thus seeks to satisfy both the scientific and religious requirements of the human mind without the help of the supernatural. Resting on the solid foundation of science, regarding the universe as governed by unerring laws, it yet seeks to satisfy man's highest ideals and wants by looking away to the vast possibilities of humanity in the future. The race is one, embracing all races and peoples; the great men, the saints of every age and nation belong to us, and while we contemplate their greatness, admire their worth, and revere their memory, we should be willing to devote ourselves, our powers of body and mind, to advance the race to still higher attainments. Nor is this too ideal a conception, say the Positivists—to guide the actual life of men—when we consider to what sacrifice the love of the fatherland has led in time past. When each man realizes himself as an integral part of the race, when united to it by the ties of affection, he will be ready to sacrifice his own interest for the common weal.

The beauty of this conception of an ideal humanity, to be realized in the future, must be admitted, as well as the moral earnestness displayed by many positivist writers. But the enthusiasm of humanity, the faith in its moral and intellectual progress, never grew out of agnostic principles. The virtues and ideals which are cherished by the Positivists are the borrowed product of the Christian religion, the outcome of a belief in the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man, of faith in a

\*“Nineteenth Century,” March, 1884.

divine order and Providence working in history towards some glorious destiny for the race. The enthusiasm of humanity is peculiar to Christianity, and was unknown to any religion before the time of Christ. On positive principles, the unity of the race, the brotherhood of man, is based on common descent from brute ancestors, and it is very questionable, if positive thinkers had been left to develop *ab initio* from their own principles the morality and the religion they have appropriated, whether they ever would have risen to such glowing representations as are to be found in their speech and writings. They speak of progressive humanity and of the grand destiny before the race. Yet they reject the faith in God, in the moral power, which alone makes its realization possible. They have plucked the fairest flowers of the Christian faith, and forgetful of the soil in which they grew, heedless of the genial air, the kindly rains, and refreshing dews that nourished their growth, have endeavoured to transplant them to the desert of Agnosticism, where, in an uncongenial clime, they are destined to wither and die. This borrowing of Christian phraseology and ideas by the Positivists is not merely a charge made by Christians, but is tacitly acknowledged by the borrowers, who assert their right to cull the best out of any religion and make it their own, a claim which might be acknowledged provided what is borrowed can be shown to be essentially akin to the new religion of humanity, and not merely an artificial adaptation. Professor Huxley, who at least has no Christian prejudice, puts the matter very strongly when he says of Positivism :—"From its founder downwards, stricken with metaphysical incompetence, and equally incapable of appreciating the true spirit of scientific method, it is now essaying to cover the nakedness of its philosophical materialism with the rags of a spiritualistic phraseology, out of which the sense has long departed." "It is not worth while to have broken away, not without pain and grief, from beliefs which, true or false, embody



great and fruitful conceptions, to fall back into the arms of a half-breed between science and theology, endowed, like most half-breeds, with the faults of both parents and the virtues of neither."\* It is, indeed, an artificial compromise between science and religion. Generally speaking the men and women who have accepted it as their creed have been trained under Christian influences; but having in after life rejected the faith of their earlier years, they still have instincts, moral feelings and ideas, seeking satisfaction. Rejecting the personal God, in whom they believed, they manufacture a substitute in humanity. The yearnings after immortality they seek to satisfy by conception of a Paradise on earth, an ideal kingdom of heaven on earth without the Righteous King, without the God who will dwell with men, wiping all tears from their eyes.

The weakness of the positivist religion lies in its being artificial. It has no inherent motive power to inspire the life of men generally, to mould their character and direct their actions. The conception of an idealized humanity may be beautiful to a man of high intellectual attainments, who, capable of wide generalizations and abstractions, can realize his kinship with the great minds of the past, and can form some definite conception of the possibilities before the race, but to the great mass of mankind, who, struggling with the simple wants of everyday life, have neither leisure nor inclination for intellectual culture, humanity is almost a meaningless term. They neither grasp the conception, nor, if they did, is it probable that they would give humanity much reverence or gratitude. "Rather than worship such a God," says Justice Stephen, very bluntly, "I would sooner worship the ugliest Hindoo idol." Morality and religion, if they are to be of any real worth, must be able to command men. They must not merely give directions as to what is right, but be able to give men power to do the right; to restrain

\*"Nineteenth Century," vol. ii., p. 340.

their passions, elevate their feelings, and give new and better affections which will gradually expel the selfish and evil tendencies of their nature. The positivist religion is only a poetic conception, beautiful to the imagination, flinging a certain colouring over the life of men of cold temperament, but destitute of living power to control and guide men in the storms of life, to lift the fallen and save the lost. Contrasted with the religion of Christ it is as a dead compared with the living body. There may be the same cunningly-wrought mechanism in the dead framework as in the animated structure that throbs with the fullness and intensity of life. There is the wonderful eye, to see; the mouth, as it once spoke so eloquently; the brain, once teeming with grand thoughts; the hands that once toiled, the feet once so swift: but it is dead! Deck it out with the most gorgeous raiment, adorn it with costliest gems, scent it with the most fragrant odours, but it will be nothing more than the corpse over which the last words will be spoken as laid in its final resting-place—"Dust to dust, ashes to ashes." That is positive religion without the living Christ; that is morality without the living God. It is a dead framework, whose want of life it is endeavoured to hide by the artificial adornment of poetry and borrowed enthusiasm.

It is impossible that men will worship, revere, and pray to a god whom they know to be only a creature of their own imagination. In this respect the worship of ideal humanity is worse than heathen idolatry. The ugliest idol which savage people worship represents, at least, some reality, some living power not themselves, able to influence their life, but the god of the positivists is consciously an ideal, representing not an actual person or fact, but a possibility. Let them have credit for the testimony they have given to the worth of the nobler moral qualities, but the self-sacrifice which they seek to attain is irrational on their fundamental principles. The appeal to the patriot's love of his fatherland, and the sacrifice he is willing to

make for its welfare, is altogether illusive. The fatherland represents a tangible reality to the patriot ; on its welfare depends the security and sanctity of his home, the safety of wife and children, of father and brothers, and when he gives up his own life in its behalf, he has the hope that thereby others will be benefited ; but the ideal humanity of the future, for which we are asked to toil, and on whose behalf we are asked to deny ourselves, is, on agnostic principles, a vague, shadowy dream. Self-sacrifice may be possible under Agnosticism, but only in spite of it, because the moral feelings, whose root is deeper in the nature, are stronger than the intellectual beliefs. The advantage which the martyr for truth and liberty foregoes is something real ; the thirty or more years of wealth, comfort, and ease which he sacrifices on behalf of his country, or for the sacred cause of righteousness, represent something positive, but if he has no conviction of a righteous ruler of the universe, who can bring about the final triumph of goodness, he has no guarantee that his sacrifice will secure any real benefit to posterity. If truth and goodness are of more importance than worldly ease and prosperity, if death itself is to be preferred before falsehood and wrong-doing, there must be some security for faith, some trust that there is a righteous governor of the universe to whom we are responsible. But there is no such security on agnostic principles. The universe is at the mercy of incalculable mechanical forces, through whose action anything may result. The destiny of the world and of man without God is a matter of chance, and it is no more certain that the ideal paradise of the positivists will be realized on earth than that the barbarism from which we are said to have emerged will not again overwhelm our boasted civilization. One of the ablest of modern Agnostics has endeavoured to prove, on scientific grounds, that at some period in the future the earth will be uninhabitable, being either too hot or too cold to sustain human life, so that our very tenure of this world, which is said to be our



all, is limited, and certain annihilation awaits both the individual and the race. Is it likely that, with such gloomy prospects, men will live nobly? There can be no courage or heroism without faith and hope, no stimulus to high endeavour where the universe is conceived as being guided by mechanical forces, no hope that will smile through tears, that can look through the darkness of suffering and see the dawn of deliverance when we realize that we are at the mercy of inflexible power carrying us blindly to our fate.

This leads us to ask, What would be the effect on morality if agnostic principles were generally accepted? The Agnostics of the present day are strong in their assertions that they lead as blameless lives as Christians do—that their beliefs do not make them less faithful husbands, less affectionate fathers, less faithful in all life's duties. There is considerable difficulty in estimating this claim, considering the late period in which Agnosticism arises. The greater part of the moral habits and convictions of the race have already been formed under strong religious influences, and Positivists and Agnostics are thus saved the trouble of building up a system of morality *ab initio* from their own principles. It is impossible fully to estimate the vast influence that the Christian religion has had on the moral conceptions of our time. It is woven into the very warp and woof of our best modern civilizations. The precepts and language of the Bible are familiar words of our daily life. For long centuries men have been living in the light of religion, and have sought to guide their life by its principles. Just as the sky is suffused with reflected light when the sun is setting, so religion may still shed its reflected light on those who have rejected the faith of their earlier years, and who are yet influenced by the religious growth of centuries, and by the living faith of those around them. To estimate the effect of Agnosticism on morality we require several generations of Agnostics. On the face of it, it is impossible to believe that so

radical a change in the beliefs of men as would be brought about by Agnosticism would not effect a radical change in their practical life. It is unreasonable to believe that men who believe that this little life of sixty or seventy years is their all, who regard their life as but the product of so many chemical elements combined in a certain way, will live as nobly as men who believe in immortality and realize the eternal influence of their every action, and their responsibility to an all-righteous God. The difference between Agnosticism and the Christian faith is too great for us not to believe in the change for the worse that it would effect amongst men. The God of the Christian is a living reality, a personal being, Creator, Father, to whom he is united by the strongest ties of reverence, gratitude, and love ; the deity of the Agnostics is an invention, having no real existence, incapable of influencing their life. To the Christian, conscience is the very voice of God, which he must obey ; to the Agnostic conscience is but the utterance of past habits of the race, the provisional arrangements of society. Heaven, to the Christian, is a living hope, shining over his pathway on earth and ennobling all life's interests ; the heaven of the Positivists, an ideal humanity of the future, is a dream, with no certainty of being realized on their principles. The Christian believes that his life is guided by an ever-present God, a watchful providence, directing his every step and providing for his every need, governing the universe and guiding it through all its changes to some glorious destiny ; the Agnostic has to think of man as at the mercy of blind mechanical forces, wafted on the illimitable ocean of existence, with no assurance of being carried to some blessed haven of safety, but with the certainty of being dashed to pieces against the iron-bound rocks of fate. "Though the decay of religion," says Dr. Martineau, "may leave the institutes of morality intact, it drains off their inward power. The devout faith of men expresses and measures the intensity of their moral nature, and it cannot be

lost without a remission of enthusiasm, and, under this low pressure, the successful re-entrance of importunate desires and clamorous passions which had been driven back. To believe in an ever-living and perfect mind, supreme over the universe, is to invest moral distinctions with immensity and eternity, and lift them from the provincial stage of human society to the imperishable theatre of all being. When thus planted in the very substance of things, they justify and support the ideal estimates of the conscience; they deepen every guilty shame; they guarantee every righteous hope, and they help the will with a divine casting-vote in every balance of temptation."



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## Part Second.

### *AGNOSTICISM AND FAITH.*

#### CHAPTER I.

##### PRESENT POSITION OF THE CHRISTIAN FAITH.

ALONG with the wonderful development of physical science in modern times there has been amongst a certain extreme class of scientific thinkers a strong reaction against all metaphysical and theological speculation. Theology has been vigorously assailed by many of the prominent leaders in the scientific world, who, carried away by the enthusiasm of new and far-reaching discoveries, rashly seek in their theories a substitute for religion, and proclaim as mere superstition the faith that has moulded the very life of the past. Yet, on close examination, it is difficult to see where there can be a real and essential antagonism between true science and true religion—how true science has ever contradicted or can possibly contradict one essential principle of the Christian faith and doctrine. Physical science deals with one set of phenomena, and, as already seen, misses its way when by the help of its principles it seeks a solution of the moral and intellectual life of man. Theology, too, claims to be a science, as truly as the science of geology or physiology, and deals with facts, phenomena of the highest kind, seeking their explanation in a personal God. The two sciences may coincide, each may supply something that is lacking in the other, but they cannot contradict, save so far as the physicist or the theologian leaves his own sphere, and falsely applies the principles of his own domain of truth to explain facts which belong to the sphere of his

neighbour. The relationship between physical science and theology is not, as often asserted, that of fact to theory, reality to imagination, but of one science to another. The existence of God, His character and attributes, the position of man in the world, his relation to God, his origin and destiny, are in no way affected by any discovery in the realm of physical nature, and cannot possibly be affected by any such discovery. So far from having solved the mystery of the universe, there is found among all the best writers of the scientific school the most candid, even pathetic, acknowledgment of the mystery surrounding our life. The light that science has thrown over the physical world makes the boundaries of surrounding darkness more distinctly realized. The circle of light, so much increased by modern discoveries, has the greater circumference of surrounding darkness. There is an infinite region beyond the reach of science, a realm of truth and knowledge, never to be penetrated by its advocates, who are determined to know nothing but material laws and force. When science has climbed the lofty summits of her ambition, and the realm of her discoveries lies with all its wealth in ordered beauty and light at her feet, there still stretches far beyond the unexplored infinite—still she is baffled by the inscrutable power behind the phenomena of nature.

With reference to the respective accounts of the created universe given by science and the Christian religion, the contradiction so much insisted on is only apparent, and will be removed as soon as the respective spheres of physics and theology are properly defined. Admitting for the sake of argument the truth of the evolution hypothesis, so far as the method of creation is concerned, there is nothing in it to contradict one essential religious doctrine. Science here deals with the method, order, process of creation. Religion seeks to rise above the created universe to its first cause—seeks the origin of all things and all

beings in a personal God. In tracing the development of the various organisms of past life, the evolution theory fails to give us more than the external conditions in which they were evolved, the period of their manifestation. But priority in point of time is not sufficiency of cause, and if in the higher organisms and in man there are found elements whose presence cannot be traced in the earliest forms of life, it does not follow that these new elements, which reveal themselves as essentially distinct, are to be reduced into the lower elements of earlier organisms. The moral and intellectual life of man cannot be reduced into the mechanical force resident in primordial atoms and molecules. Behind all the phenomena of nature there is the living Power, ever revealing itself in higher manifestations, bringing from the wild disorder of chaos the wondrous cosmos, moulding and directing the various forms of life, from the lowest to their crown and completion in man, who is not only created, but in virtue of divine-given powers can rise to conscious fellowship with the Author of his life. Science deals with the phenomena of the universe, their relationship, their affinities; it traces the unity that runs through all the diversity, the harmony that rules amid the apparent discord. Religion seeks to rise from nature to nature's God—from the phenomena to the living Power of which they are manifestations, and finds the best solution of the world's ordered life, of duty, of the intellectual and spiritual life of man, in a personal Creator. Before science can claim to set itself in opposition to theology and dispense with the Christian God it must show how it can deal with the facts that theology treats of, and find a substitute for the personal First Cause of religious faith. The attempt to find this substitute in matter has proved fallacious. "Materialism," says Leslie Stephen, "in the proper sense of the word, has died because it is too absurd a doctrine even for philosophers. Modern men of science have abandoned it as completely as metaphysicians. If human know-



ledge be merely relative, and we are restrained by the law of our nature from penetrating to the absolute essences of things, it comes to much the same thing whether we call everything matter or everything spirit; for in each case we can only assert that everything is some unknowable  $x$  or  $y$ . Materialism, in its really degrading shape, as meaning the method of explaining the laws of mind by pure mechanics, and falling into confusion between the senses and the intellect, is not only an extinct doctrine, but is utterly irrelevant to Darwinism in any shape." The term matter is itself borrowed from metaphysics, which so many modern scientists treat with contempt. It is one of the greatest abstractions formed by the human mind. They who imagine that they find a sufficient explanation of the universe in matter are seeking a transcendental basis for science as truly as the Christian who believes in a personal First Cause. "The whole process of evolution," says Tyndall, "is the manifestation of a Power absolutely inscrutable to the intellect of man." As little in our days as in the days of Job can man by searching find out this Power." If this be so, then science has been false to its own principles in seeking to oppose the Christian faith, whose aim is not to deny the facts of science but to find their explanation in a personal Creator. The Christian faith of to-day, therefore, remains in exactly the same position as though there had not been one of our modern scientific discoveries, and cannot be shaken by any method of thought which confines itself to the realm of phenomena.

All science is based on the supposition of the *rationality* of nature: it must assume that as a premise before it can advance a single step. In one sense science deals only with the phenomena of nature; but in another, and as true a sense, it transcends phenomena at every step of its progress. The phenomena could not be known as such save in contrast to some noumenal reality transcending them. Without mind to interpret them, to trace

their relations, their sequences, their affinities and repulsions—to resolve them into groups, to understand the laws which regulate them—the phenomena would be meaningless, incoherent, a chaos without order or harmony. The simplest fact in nature, the most isolated phenomenon, is not known in itself, apart from mind, but in its relation to mind, as it exists in the medium of mind. Two things make science possible—the reason in man and the reason in nature, manifested in all its phenomena, which are only symbols to be interpreted by the intelligence of man. The laws of nature are rational laws, not the product of human mind, but rather discovered by the mind as working through all the varied life of the world. Were the universe not rational, there could be no science, no true knowledge. Unconsciously, therefore, science is based on a religious foundation, and bears emphatic testimony to the religious conception of a Divine power working in nature.

While religion has lost nothing, and can possibly lose nothing by science, it may, on the contrary, be shown to have gained considerably. Our conceptions of the wisdom, greatness, and power of the Creator have been increased by our conceptions of the greatness of the universe, our insight into its wondrous order and varied forms of life, and our knowledge of the vast reaches of the geological ages. The world, as now spread before our eyes in its beauty and infinite variety, has been traced back by science to the chaos from which it sprang at the command of creative Omnipotence. The universe has been shown not to be confused, but the most wondrous harmony, governed from the centre to its farthest circumference by the same Divine power which fashions the dewdrop as well as forms a world, which reveals its presence in the beauty of the wayside flower as in the glory of sunset or the splendours of the starry midnight. If the Hebrew Psalmist, awed by the wonder of the earth stretching in beauty around him, and the glory of the sky above him, could

exclaim, "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament showeth his handiwork," surely in no less devout language can the astronomer speak, who realizes the vastness of space, where every star is the centre of a wondrous system of worlds, each full of a life and beauty and grandeur of its own—where suns and systems immeasurably distant from each other are closely linked by the same harmonious laws, and as they roll onwards in their majesty make the fabled music of the spheres a great reality. We, who know the marvellous, almost infinitely varied forms of life in plant, insect, and bird life—who in the most minute organism, that requires the strongest power of the microscope to detect, can trace the adaptation of means to an end—we can say with greater, clearer vision, in language of the sacred writer, "O Lord! how manifold are Thy works; in wisdom hast Thou made them all; the earth is full of Thy riches." The unity of nature, a unity which runs through its widest realms, suggests the unity of its Author.

The true spirit of science must ever be like that displayed by Newton, who compares himself to a child walking on the seashore, picking up a few pebbles, or shells, or stray pieces of seaweed, but with the unexplored ocean stretching infinite beyond him. The last position of science, when carried to its ultimate issue, is the position from which religion starts, the acknowledgment of an unknown Power behind the phenomena of the world. It may seem strange to find any point of resemblance between writers apparently so antagonistic as modern scientists and the earliest of sacred writers—between an age proud of its scientific knowledge and an age regarded by many scientists as one of superstition, of blind acceptance of narrow conceptions and false beliefs—yet closer investigation will show that the acknowledgment of an inscrutable Power manifesting itself in the phenomena of nature is the conception of God familiar to Hebrew writers. It is the conception of God, known



as Jehovah, which, whether taken to mean He who is, or He who causes to be, speaks of a Cause behind all the phenomena of nature, a Power which remains the same amid the incessant change. It is this conception which runs throughout the majestic pathos of the XC. Psalm, which, while acknowledging the mystery of the Power in the universe, finds in it an object worthy of reverence and trust. It is a religious Agnosticism, whose tendency is upward, whose yearnings are to know God; whilst the tendency of so much of our modern Agnosticism is downwards, materialistic, an endeavour to deny a personal God. "Lord, Thou hast been our dwelling-place in all generations. Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever Thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, Thou art God." "Thy way is in the sea, Thy path through the great waters; Thy footsteps are not known." Religion, willing to recognize the mystery of the world, is not content with ignorance, but yearns to rise more and more to a true knowledge of God. The question between us and Agnostics is—Can God be known?

## CHAPTER II.

### CAN GOD BE KNOWN?

Granted that the spheres of science and religion lie so distinct from each other that recognized truths in the one sphere cannot contradict acknowledged facts in the other, the question, of course, still remains open: Was the theist ever right in maintaining that a knowledge of God is possible? Or, admitting that theoretically there is no *à priori* objection to the possibility of knowing God, it may still be asked, as a question of fact, Has God ever revealed himself to man?—has man ever attained a true knowledge of God? Do not the many and different

religions that have appeared in different parts of the world and different ages of the world's history, each commanding numerous followers, yet each differing from the others so essentially in the conception of the god or the gods ruling in the universe—do not these religions themselves prove that there can be no true knowledge of the infinite? Herbert Spencer, the ablest and the most avowed of modern Agnostics, following on the lines of Sir W. Hamilton and Mansell, has by the most elaborate arguments endeavoured to prove that the Power which the universe manifests to us is totally and for ever inscrutable by us. He seeks to establish this position by a double proof—first, because our ultimate religious and scientific ideas are, when rigorously analyzed, absolutely unthinkable, every attempt to formulate them giving rise to alternative impossibilities of thought; and second, because all knowledge is relative, thought being from its very nature imprisoned in the finite, and conditioned. There are three verbally intelligible hypotheses of the origin of the universe possible: self-existence, self-creation, creation by external agency—each of which, Spencer seeks to show, is unthinkable, inconceivable. The same difficulties meet us when, from the origin of the universe, we turn to its nature. We are compelled to regard the impressions made on our senses as effects of some cause. Call it matter or spirit, we must suppose some cause, and are carried back to the supposition of a first cause. This first cause, Spencer shows, must be thought of as infinite and absolute. But these three terms are contradictory, as shown by the argument of Mansell, which Spencer quotes in full:—

“These three conceptions—the cause, the absolute, the infinite—all equally indispensable, do they not imply contradiction to each other, when viewed in conjunction, as attributes of one and the same being? A cause cannot, as such, be absolute; the absolute cannot, as such, be a cause. The cause,

as such, exists only in relation to its effect : the cause is a cause of the effect ; the effect is an effect of the cause. On the other hand, the conception of the absolute implies a possible existence out of all relation. We attempt to escape from this apparent contradiction by introducing the idea of succession of time. The absolute exists first by itself, and afterwards becomes a cause. But here we are checked by the third conception of the infinite. How can the infinite become that which it was not from the first ? If causation is a possible mode of existence, that which exists without causing is not infinite, that which becomes a cause has passed beyond its former limits. Creation, at any particular moment of time, being thus inconceivable, the philosopher is thus reduced to the alternative of pantheism, which pronounces the effect to be mere appearance, and merges all real existence in the cause.\*

Further, thought itself can only deal with the relative and finite. To think is to discriminate, to distinguish one object from another, one quality from another, body from space, light from darkness, species from species. We can only know one thing as distinguished from something else, and thus all our knowledge is of the finite, consisting of limits marked out. But the infinite cannot thus be limited, and, therefore, cannot be known by us. "A consciousness of the infinite necessarily involves a self-contradiction : for it implies the recognition by limitation and difference of that which can only be given as unlimited and indifferent." Or, if we take the other term, the absolute, the same incompetency will be seen to apply to it. "Thought is possible only as the relation of the thing thought to the thinker, and an object of thought can only be known, or enter into consciousness, in relation to the thinking subject. All human knowledge is, therefore, necessarily relative. Things-in-themselves, or the absolute, or God as He is in Him-

\* Mansell, "Limits of Religious Thought," p. 47.



self, we can never know. The conception of the absolute thus implies, at the same time, the presence and absence of the relation by which thought is constituted."

Mr. Spencer,\* however, assures us that the same law of thought which denies us knowledge of what the absolute is, assures us of the existence of the absolute. Were it otherwise, there could be no relative, relation being known only in contrast with absolute. "Every one of the arguments by which the relativity of our knowledge is demonstrated distinctly postulates the positive existence of something beyond the relative. To say that we cannot know the absolute is, by implication, to affirm that there is an absolute. In the very denial of our power to learn what the absolute is, there lies hidden the assumption that it is; and the making of this assumption proves that the absolute has been present to the mind, not as a nothing, but as a something. Similarly with every step in the reasoning by which his doctrine is upheld. The noumenon, everywhere named as the antithesis of the phenomenon, is throughout necessarily thought of as an actuality. It is rigorously impossible to conceive that our knowledge is knowledge of appearances only, without, at the same time, conceiving of a reality of which they are appearances, for appearance without reality is unthinkable." "Thus, the consciousness," says Spencer, "of an inscrutable power manifested to us through all phenomena has been growing ever clearer, and must eventually be freed from its imperfections. The certainty, on the one hand, such a power exists, while on the other hand its nature transcends intuition and is beyond imagination, is the certainty towards which intelligence has from the first been progressing. To this conclusion science inevitably arrives, as it reaches its confines, while to this conclusion religion is irresistibly driven by criticism. And, satisfying, as it does, the demand of the most

\* "First Principles," p. 88.

rigorous logic at the same time that it gives the religious sentiment the widest possible sphere of action, it is the conclusion we are bound to accept without reserve or qualification."\*

These two positions of Spencer—that human knowledge is necessarily confined to the relative, and that we must assume *that* the absolute exists, whilst denying all knowledge of *what* the absolute is—though both are necessary to his system of philosophy, are inconsistent and irreconcilable. If it be asserted that human thought is, by its very nature, confined to the relative and finite, then it is illogical to assert in the same breath that we can know that the absolute exists. This is to bring into relation what is conceived of us existing out of all relation—to define, or bring within the limits of thought, what is conceived of us having no limits. If, on the other hand, we admit, with Spencer, knowledge of the existence of the absolute, then, by implication, we admit some knowledge of what the absolute is. It has come into consciousness in some way, and must be thought of, not as a blank, a nonentity, but as invested with some positive attribute or quality, otherwise it would be unthinkable. The true conclusion from Spencer's theory of nescience would have been the non-existence of the absolute. A thing, or being, can have no existence, no reality for us save as it enters into our thought: what exists out of all relation to thought, can, for us, have no reality, no existence. The very assertion, so emphatic on the part of Agnostics, of the impossibility of knowing the absolute, presupposes a certain knowledge of the absolute. "It might be possible," says Caird, "for another and higher intelligence, an observer of human nature, to pronounce that man's knowledge is purely relative—that there is a region of realities from which human thought is shut out; but it is not possible for one and the same consciousness to be purely relative and conscious of its relativity." If in

\* Spencer, "First Principles," p. 109.

total ignorance of the absolute, we should be also unconscious of our ignorance. Before we can predicate existence, or non-existence of the absolute, before we can talk about it, or reason about it, we must have a conception of what the absolute is : the very discussion presupposes what is denied.

The confusion and contradiction that surrounds the whole question has arisen greatly from misconception of the terms used in the discussion. The terms infinite and absolute are merely logical abstractions, negations, without meaning, till applied to some positive thing or being. They represent abstraction carried to its furthest possible limit, where the symbol of thought becomes the negation of its object. The unreality of the whole argument is proved from this—to think it is to disprove it. The thought which creates the absolute annuls it, can only reason about it by asserting the relativity the name was coined to deny. "The theory," says Caird, "rests on a false abstraction. It first creates and conjures up a fictitious entity, and then charges consciousness with imbecility because of its inability to think that fiction. The theorist begins by conceiving of an absolute reality, unconditioned, unqualified, existing in and for itself independently of any mind to know it : and then he proceeds to conceive of that object thus presumed to be outside of thought, as causing or awakening certain impressions or ideas in the knowing subject. The latter—the reality, as it is, in or for the subjective consciousness—is, therefore, something different from the former, the thought of the thing from the thing in itself. It has lost its absoluteness by descending into thought ; it has become coloured or conditioned by the consciousness that contemplates it." Absolute and relative, infinite and finite, are correlative terms ; it is as impossible to conceive of the absolute and infinite apart from the relative and finite as to conceive of the latter apart from the former terms. Both are equally real to thought, being abstractions created by thought : the one cannot be conceived of



without the other any more than we can think of a half without a whole, parent without child, a centre without a circumference. "And it is," says the writer already quoted,\* "no inability or limitation of finite intelligence which makes this feat impossible, but simply its inability to give independent reality to an abstraction. The endeavour to conceive of an absolute being existing apart by itself, and having no relation to thought, is the quest after a chimera. The words 'objectivity,' 'object,' carry with them as their inseparable correlatives, 'subjectivity,' 'subject,' and to ask us to conceive of an object which is out of relation to a subject is to ask us to conceive of that which is given only in relation as existing out of relation—of that which has no meaning save in and for consciousness as existing outside of consciousness."

This doctrine of the relativity of all knowledge, thus explained, is in no way out of harmony with the knowledge of God demanded by religion. The inability to give reality to, or bring within consciousness, this metaphysical abstraction does not affect the religious conception of God. A God existing out of all relation, having no qualities nor attributes—nothing by which we may know Him—is a barren negation. The inability to form a conception of such a being is no loss to religion; the power to form such a conception would be no gain. "Privation of such knowledge," says Martineau,† "we suffer not in our capacity of ignorant creatures, but in our capacity of intellectual beings, intelligence itself consisting in not having cognition of such sort; so that, if we had it, we should cease to understand, and pass out of the category of thinking beings altogether." The God sought after by the human mind and heart is not a being *out of*, but *in* relation—related to the world and created universe; related to man, able to help him in his weakness, to

\* Caird, "Philosophy of Religion."

† "Essays: Science, Nescience, and Faith."

guide him in his search after truth, to gratify all the yearnings of his spirit. We may gladly leave the dreary discussion of the absolute and infinite to metaphysics, and religion will in no way suffer. Let us admit frankly that the absolute of the Agnostics cannot be known, because it is a fiction created by the mind, and we shall be more than content to think of God, not as nonentity, a being with no attributes, but a God of all fullness, the all-perfect, the all-holy, commanding our devoutest reverence, awakening in us noblest aspirations, and kindling in us the purest love. We may still speak of Him as infinite, but infinite fullness, infinite holiness, righteousness and love, expressing itself in the heart and mind of man, as the heavens mirror themselves in the tiniest dewdrop. To use an old distinction, though we cannot comprehend God, we can apprehend Him, know *what* He is—though we cannot know *all* that He is. There are heights that will never be attained, depths that will never be fathomed, unexplored oceans stretching around that will never be traversed, but our knowledge of God is none the less real because finite—a circle of light ever widening, a sunny isle of beauty in the midst of the infinite ocean of mystery.

There is a seeming modesty in the acknowledgment by Agnostics of the inscrutable mystery of the universe, and a seeming reverence in the declaration that "all phenomena are manifestations of a power which is unknowable;" but in another light this seeming modesty and reverence changes into narrow dogmatism and presumption. The very emphasis that is laid on nescience often changes its character into positive assertion, so that there is denied not merely the knowability of God, but also His existence. In the case of many professed Agnostics an intelligent creator of the world is denied only that a materialistic substitute may be put in his place. The so-called Agnosticism becomes in practice, very often, the most dogmatic atheism. While metaphysics are abused when they are used by thinkers to find

reason and intelligence in the ultimate cause, they are used by scientists themselves to assert a materialistic basis for all things and beings. Herbert Spencer, who so emphatically declares that "the power manifested to us through all phenomena is inscrutable;" that "we are not permitted to know—nay, we are not even permitted to conceive—that reality which is behind the veil of appearance," is compelled, in working out his system of philosophy, to break through the limits he at first marks out, so that the power he declares to be unknowable emerges at last well defined in the most materialistic terms. Agnostics themselves realize this inconsistency in Spencer. Fred. Harrison thus criticises the position of Spencer:—"The unknowable was at first spoken of as an 'unthinkable abstraction,' and so, undoubtedly, it is. But it finally emerges as the ultimate reality, the ultimate cause, the all-being, the absolute power, the unknown cause, the inscrutable existence, the infinite and eternal energy from which all things proceed, the 'creative power,' 'the infinite and eternal energy by which all things are created and sustained.' It is 'to stand in substantially the same relation towards our general conception of things as does the creative power asserted by theology.' 'It stands towards the universe and towards ourselves in the same relation as an anthropomorphic creator was supposed to stand, bears a like relation with it, not only to human thought, but to human feeling.'" "The unknowable, so qualified and explained," says Mr. Harrison, very justly, "offends against all the canons of criticism so admirably set forth in 'First Principles.' The unknowable is not unknowable if we know that 'it creates and sustains all things. If his unknowable be the creative power and ultimate cause it simply renews all the mystifications of the old theologies. If his unknowable be unknowable, then it is idle to talk of infinite and eternal energy, sole reality, all-being and creative power." Why thus *name* what is declared to be



unknown and unknowable? Why thus bring into relation what is conceived of as existing out of all relation? Why define it as the ultimate cause when arguments the most elaborate have been piled one upon the other to prove that it cannot be thought of as a cause? If the absolute must have a name, surely it is irrational to define it in terms that exclude the highest element in nature—reason, or intelligence.

Looked at in another light, the arrogance of most of our modern Agnosticism will be more clearly manifest. "Every relative disability," says Dr. Martineau, "may be read in two ways. A disqualification in the nature of thought from knowing  $x$  is from the other side a disqualification in the nature of  $x$  from being known. Apply this to the first cause. It is a being that may exist out of knowledge, but is precluded from entering within the sphere of knowledge. We are told in one breath that this being must be in every sense 'perfect, complete, total, including in itself all power, and transcending all law;' and in another that this perfect and omnipotent one is totally and for ever incapable of revealing any one of an infinite store of attributes. Need we point out the contradictions of this position. If you abide by it, you deny the absolute and infinite in the very act of affirming it, for in debarring the first cause from self-revelation you impose a limit on its nature. It is matter, indeed, of natural wonder that men, who in standing before the first cause, professedly feel themselves in face of the impenetrable abyss of *all* possibilities, should take on themselves to expel that *one* possibility, that the supreme reality should be capable of self-revelation. Among the indeterminate cases comprised in their inscrutable abyss they cannot help including this—that the mysterious being may be conscious mind. Let them *deny* this, and their profession of impartial darkness becomes an empty affectation; they so far exchange their attitude of suspense for one of dogmatism. Let them admit it,

and how with the possibility of God can they combine an impossibility of revelation? May it be that, perchance, all minds live in presence of the Supreme Mind, source of their own nature and of the nature that surrounds them, yet that He cannot communicate with them and let them know the affinities between the human and the Divine? Is there a possibility of kindred, yet a necessity of nescience? Who is this Uncreated, that can come forth into the field of existence and fill it all, yet by no crevice can find entrance into the field of thought?—that can fling the universal order and beauty into light and space, yet not tell His idea to a single soul?—that can bid the universe into being, yet not say ‘Lo, it is I?’ Viewed in this light there is, therefore, no *à priori* objection to the possibility of revelation, and the theoretical question, “Can God be known?” is resolved into a question of fact, “Is God known?”

### CHAPTER III.

#### THE NECESSITY OF RELIGION.

We have described modern Agnosticism as being strongly materialistic in its aims and tendencies, emphatic in its denial that the ultimate reality can be spoken of as a personal first cause, though continually speaking of that reality underlying all phenomena in the most strongly materialistic terms. It is a one-sided Agnosticism, not being receptive of truth, from whatever source it comes, but having the strongest prejudices against the theologian and metaphysician in favour of the scientist. Most of those who now deny the possibility of knowing the ultimate cause imagine they can find a sufficient scientific explanation of all the phenomena of nature in matter, with its laws and forces. Matter, it is urged by them, with its laws and forces, is in the region of the known. God, with the attributes ascribed to Him by the theologians, is in the region of the

unknowable. Professor Tyndall, in his famous Belfast address, says :—"By a necessity engendered and justified by science, I cross the boundary of experimental evidence, and discern in that matter, which we, in our ignorance of its latent powers, and notwithstanding our professed reverence for its Creator, have hitherto covered with opprobrium, the promise and potency of all terrestrial life." Is this explanation of the universe a sufficient one? Is this limited materialism, which, though asserting that the absolute can never be known, yet declares that matter can be known, more rational and trustworthy than the theistic position of the Christian faith?

Materialism proves itself an inadequate solution of the mystery of life in the very position from which it starts. It may be defined as an attempt to find the cause of the highest in nature in its lowest elements. It seeks to reduce the intellectual and moral life of man—reason, faith, truth, love—to the level of molecular force; to show, as Huxley has put it frankly, that "thought is as much a function of matter as motion is," and "that we shall arrive at a mechanical equivalent of consciousness as we arrive at a mechanical equivalent of heat." This position seems strangely illogical. The highest in nature, and not the lowest—man, with conscious freedom and intelligence, not the atoms and molecules of physics—must best reveal the nature of the cause. There can be nothing in the effect that was not potentially in the cause. The reason in man must also be in the cause; and if we are to find the cause of everything in matter we must make matter a present of mind to begin with, which is just what some of the most thorough-going scientists, such as Haeckel, have done. By so doing we, however, spiritualize matter instead of materializing mind—give to matter the attributes which have been ascribed to the Deity—and thus the difference between the scientist and the theologian becomes, in a great measure, difference in name. "To find unity,



system, connection, continuity in all things," says Caird, "is, indeed, the true and proper aim of science. But it is vain that we attempt to realize it by seeking the explanation of a highly complicated system in its lowest and meagrest factor. The true explanation is to be found rather by reversing the process—by seeking the key to the beginning in the end, not to the end in the beginning. It may still be true that in 'matter we have the promise and the potency of all terrestrial life,' but it is in the sense in which it is also true that in the first prelude note we have the promise and potency of the whole symphony, in the first faint touch impressed on the canvas by the hand of genius the promise and potency of the magnificent work of art."

Materialism, as an explanation of all nature's phenomena, is not more scientific than theology. Such an explanation in terms of matter is no more reasonable or comprehensible than an explanation in terms relating to a personal creator. Matter is an *inference* from certain facts given to us in sensation. It is not perceived by the senses, either singly or collectively. All that we are conscious of is certain sensations, certain impressions produced on the senses by an unknowable something which we call matter. We may reason as to its ultimate constitution, as to its elements and properties, and accept hypothetically what is in most accordance with the facts; but all that we know as fact is that we are conscious of certain sensations produced by something supposed to be external to us. Its real nature can never be known; it might be capable of producing a hundred other sensations in addition to those of which human beings are capable. Thus the matter on which the scientific Agnostic seeks to build proves as unknowable as he asserts the personal God of the Christian to be.

It is impossible to get away from thought in seeking a solution of the universe. The terms with which the materialist deals are

not really materialistic terms, in the proper sense of the word, as excluding mind ; they are terms created by mind. It is impossible for us to get away from thought to matter, as it exists in itself apart from mind—as impossible for us as to “stand on our own shoulders, or leap off our own shadow.” Matter is a term created by thought, and the simplest phenomenon with which science deals is not fact *minus* thought, but a phenomenon existing in the medium of thought. “Just as a man,” says the writer just quoted, “fancies he sees the outside world as it is, apart from his own mind, so the empiricist or materialist, while supposing himself to be dealing with hard material facts and experiences, is found employing such abstractions as *force, law, matter*, as if they were on the same level with sensuous things, and treating them, in his investigations and reasonings, as real entities immediately given, apart from the activity of thought, to which they truly belong. Or, again, contemning all that is supersensible, he is continually using, and cannot advance a single step without using—though often in a haphazard and uncritical manner—such categories as ‘unity,’ ‘multiplicity,’ ‘identity,’ ‘difference,’ ‘cause,’ ‘effect,’ ‘substance,’ ‘properties,’ &c., which are pure metaphysical terms, unconsciously adopted, without warrant or justification from that realm of ideas which he ignores or denies. The empiricist, in short, is, and cannot help being, an unconscious metaphysician, the materialist an unconscious spiritualist.” “All materialistic explanations involve the vicious circle ; that matter which is the object of thought is that which produces thought. To make thought a function of matter is thus simply to make thought a function of itself.”

It is, therefore, more correct to say that science begins with thought, instead of saying that it begins with matter and force. Reason or intelligence is the most certain fact in nature for us. Science is the interpretation of nature by mind ; it is the world, not as it exists in itself, but as mirrored in mind, that is dealt

with. The phenomena are only so many symbols, created by reason and to be interpreted by reason. Science is not a system of knowledge which can be made or unmade at pleasure—not an artificial combination of phenomena capable of re-arrangement, but a rational unity running through all nature, and discovered, not created, by the mind. All science must begin with the assumption of the uniformity of nature, the rationality of its laws. One modern writer uses a very quaint and powerful illustration of this truth from the arrow-headed characters of Assyrian writing. For long these seemed meaningless, and men gazed on them with a sort of helpless wonder, till, by a series of happy discoveries, they were shown to be significant signs. But one thing was necessary to success—that the signs represent thought, be symbols of reason and rational speech. Had they not been so, they could never have been made intelligible to us, made to speak to living minds of minds that once lived, and of what they believed and did. One may say that it was reason immanent in the language that made it rational to us; that unless thought had made it, thought could never have understood, interpreted, and translated it. “So the universe is rational to our reason by virtue of the immanent and absolute reason it articulates.” The phenomena of nature, like the written symbols, are only to be interpreted on the supposition of the rational unity underlying them. Man placed in the midst of the mysterious world is compelled, by the very necessity of his nature, to seek to understand the various phenomena presented to him, to combine them into harmonious unity, a systematized whole in which every detail has its appropriate place. Similarly, the combinations of the true artist, the harmonies of colour, of sound, of form, which he is said to create, are not artificial, but natural echoes of the harmony that speaks through nature to him who has eyes to see and ears to hear and an open, receptive heart and mind.



It is impossible for the human mind to rest in materialism or in acknowledged ignorance as to the inscrutable power manifested to us through the phenomena of nature. The one leaves the highest and most essential elements in nature and in human knowledge unexplained, the other is a confession of failure and defeat, which will never form a permanent resting-place for the inquiring mind. The search for the cause underlying the phenomena, for the unchangeable reality amid the restless changes of the universe, is due to a very necessity of thought, as shown by the thinkers of all times and of all lands, who have endeavoured to find the cause, principle, or deity which has created and sustains the world. Even those who reject the Christian conception of a personal God, an Eternal Father, and who assert that the ultimate reality is unknowable, are not content to remain in their ignorance, but are compelled to seek a more or less inadequate substitute for the God they reject. The Materialists seek in "matter the promise and potency of all terrestrial life;" the Agnostics, like Spencer, find the goal of religion in the acknowledgment of the unknowable, which, however, emerges from thought pretty well defined; and the Positivists seeking a known deity of some kind, find it in an idealized humanity, and render to it the worship and homage which Christians have rendered to God. There is a certain infinitude in the mind which, once kindled into life, refuses to acknowledge any limits to its knowledge, any barriers to its progressive march after truth. It is the natural inquiry of the mind of man, Whence have I come? Whither am I going? Are these affections kindled on earth—these aspirations after truth and holiness, these thoughts that pierce the night like stars, brought into being only to perish in the night like sparks flying upwards? Or is there another sphere of life beyond, where the broken ties of earth will be reunited, where instincts, and aspirations, and powers, undeveloped and unfulfilled here, will

receive their highest satisfaction? Am I a child of an Eternal Father, whose nature is love, in whom I may rest ; or am I a helpless waif, at the play of incalculable mechanical forces, working blindly, like a plank tossed hither and thither at the mercy of the ocean waves? Questions like these, rising naturally in thought, are not to be suppressed by force, but will rise while man has thought and being. Thought refuses to be limited to phenomena, refuses to be imprisoned within the temporal and spatial conditions of human life. When man has examined every nook and cranny of the world in which he lives, when the mind within him has triumphed over the space that separates him from the most distant star, when thought reels with the vastness of its conceptions, even then it cannot rest, but must still onwards, with its cry, More light, more light ! The thought that thus refuses to be limited by space triumphs also over time. Man lives not merely in the present, but looking backwards into the past, lives again with the generations that have passed away, and looking forward into the distant ages that are to be, lives with generations that are yet unborn. The very position of man in the world shows him to be not merely a creature of time, but a very son of God. He is not merely part of the world he lives in, but is able to understand it, to use its laws and forces for the accomplishment of rational ends. He binds the very lightning with chains and makes it his messenger, the winds and the waves obey him, and waft his ships across the sea ; his steamers, like shuttles on a great ocean loom, weave a web of intercourse between the whole world ; his bridges span the rivers and the ocean arms ; his network of railways is spread over nearly the whole habitable globe ; he penetrates the depths of the earth, and the very rocks and stones tell him their wondrous history of the bygone ages. "Thou hast crowned man," says the Psalmist truly, "with glory and honour, and made him to have dominion over the works of Thy hands !"

Besides this intellectual nature of man, which enables him to transcend the phenomena of nature, and leads him to search after God, the author of his being and ruler of his destiny, there are moral and spiritual needs which make God and religion necessary to man. He is conscious of moral obligation, which makes him realize his responsibility to some higher being; conscious of needs that are not to be met with truth respecting chemistry and physics, which to the higher and nobler part of human nature are as chaff to the man who hungers and thirsts for the bread and water of life. There are natural instincts in man compelling him to seek after lofty ideals, compelling him to worship. "All peoples," says Hegel, "know that the religious consciousness is that wherein they possess the truth: and religion they have ever regarded as their true dignity and the Sabbath of their life." Here alone can the yearnings of the human heart find rest, and the searchings of the intellect find satisfaction. The man without God is like an orphan without a home in the world, a helpless wanderer without guidance through a boundless realm of mystery, without a sun to shine on his pathway, and gladden his sight with visions of beauty beyond, with impenetrable darkness around, which is unillumined by a single ray of hope. To the man with strong religious faith, the universe is full of light and beauty. Wherever, as a pilgrim, he may travel, though it be over the roughest road, it is through a Father's world; wherever he may look he sees tokens of the presence and power of God: visions of a sunnier land beyond ever lead him onwards; hopes of the eternal home give courage to the fainting heart, and strength to the weary feet: "underneath are the everlasting arms."



## CHAPTER IV.

## THE RELIGION OF THE UNKNOWNABLE.

"Unlike the ordinary consciousness," says Mr. Spencer, "the religious consciousness is concerned with that which lies beyond the sphere of sense. A brute thinks only of things which can be touched, seen, heard, tasted, &c., and the like is true of the untaught child, the deaf mute, and the lowest savage. But the developing man has thoughts about existence which he regards as usually intangible, inaudible, invisible, and yet which he regards as operative upon him." "Those who think that science is dissipating religious beliefs and sentiments seem unaware that whatever of mystery is taken from the old interpretation is added to the new." "We are obliged to regard every phenomenon as a manifestation of some power by which we are acted upon; though omnipresence is unthinkable, yet, as experience discloses no bounds to the diffusion of phenomena, we are unable to think of limits to the presence of this power; while the criticisms of science teach us that this power is incomprehensible. And this consciousness of an incomprehensible power, called omnipresent from inability to assign its limits, is just that consciousness on which religion dwells."\* The acknowledgment of this mysterious power Mr. Spencer finds to be the root element of all true religion; the development of religious faith gradually frees it from the accretions that have gathered round it, and leaves us more and more in the presence of the inscrutable mystery. The essential business of religion is to keep alive the consciousness of a mystery that cannot be fathomed. Actual "religion has been more or less irreligious, and continues to be partially irreligious even now," in "professing to have some knowledge of that which transcends knowledge."† When religion has attained to the conception of

\* "First Principles," p. 99.

† "First Principles," p. 101.

an infinite and absolute power, of which we can say nothing but that it is, and is unknowable, it has reached its highest stage of development. Here science and religion find a basis of agreement; both stand in the presence of the inscrutable mystery: to this common faith will all the differences of the special forms of religion ultimately be elevated.

There is, undoubtedly, the recognition of mystery comprised as an essential element in every form of religious faith and worship. The God, or gods, worshipped by man have, even in the rudest fetichism, always been regarded as far above man. A God who could be exhaustively conceived in the fulness of His nature and the manifestation of His power by a finite intelligence would be no God; but it is just as true that a religion which recognizes nothing but mystery would be no religion. Superficially, the emotions which are called forth by the mysterious and inscrutable have a certain resemblance to religious emotions. Religious worship begins with the confession that God is not as we are. Realizing the nothingness and vanity of earthly things, seeking for rest amid the restless flux of earthly life, for the unchangeable reality beneath all the changing phenomena, religious worship speaks of God as that which we are not, as in-finite, ab-solute. But besides this prostration of spirit in the presence of the infinite and absolute, besides humility and awe in the presence of omnipotence, there is also in religion trust or faith in the power that is worshipped, and in the highest stages of faith free and joyous love, the spontaneous surrender of the whole man to a Being, no longer unknown and unknowable, but known to contain in infinite fullness all that is best and noblest in man—a Being who, though infinitely exalted above us, is yet felt to be akin to us. The religion which has moulded the very life of the past, which has been the consolation of man in sorrow, his hope in darkness and suffering, his strength in weakness, has not been blind awe

before mystery, but sublimest trust and faith in a God realized as known. An unknowable power, of which we can speak only in negative terms, of which we can predicate nothing, think nothing, believe nothing, hope nothing, can command from rational men no reverence, can call forth no trust, can awaken no love, can evoke no sympathy between worshipper and the worshipped. Recognition of such an inscrutable mystery, instead of being an advance to a higher stage of religion, is a retrogression to the position of the rudest fetichism, the most unreasoning superstition of a barbarous age. The blind grovelling awe and wonder before something mysterious is infinitely below the level of that reverence which is intelligent admiration and worship of an excellence and goodness and holiness known and recognized. The mystery in whose presence we stand is felt not to be all darkness, but to contain only that which is better and holier and more righteous than we are. The worship is not blind submission to an unknown power, but willing surrender in love to a Being infinite in love and holiness. We might as well ask a man to admire the beauty of absolute darkness as worship the absolutely unknowable. Agnosticism dwells in the midnight darkness of unfathomable negations; religion, from a lofty summit, gazes over a realm of beauty bathed in the splendour of divine light, bounded apparently by darkness—but the boundaries are only the limits of human sight, which is able to grasp but a little of the excellence and beauty of Him who is infinite, not only in power, but also in goodness and truth. "God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all." Human intelligence, whether it travel along the paths of science or religion, comes at last not to an absolute who is unknowable, but to God, the source of all truth, the fountain of all excellence, the giver of all grace. The vision is baffled not by the darkness, but by the splendour and beauty that surround Him.

Practically this religion of the unknowable, so warmly advo-



cated by Mr. Spencer as the highest stage of all forms of faith, becomes the negation of all religion. Religion has ever been cherished by man as touching him in every detail of his life. It lies at the basis of all the social and political life and organization of the past. Man's every duty has had some relation or other to his religious faith, and the commonplace of his life has been coloured and exalted by religious emotion. Now, at one fell swoop, God is flung by the Agnostics out of all relation to human life and thought, and religion changed from intelligent worship and fulfilment of duty into a theoretical acknowledgment of an inscrutable something of which we can say nothing. Certainly Mr. Spencer strongly asserts the reality of this inscrutable power, and declares that "our lives, alike physical and mental, in common with all the activities, organic and inorganic, amidst which we live, are but the workings of this power." \* But the relations of man to this power are purely passive, incapable of being conceived under any form of thought save a negation. In his reply to Mr. Harrison he strongly contends that "the Agnosticism set forth in 'First Principles,' along with its denials, utters an everlasting 'yes ;'" but the everlasting yes is only the affirmation of a negative, and is thus equivalent to an everlasting no. The inscrutable mystery of the Agnostics may create stupid wonder—if anyone should be pleased to regard that as the highest element in religious worship—but it will influence no life for good, it will touch no heart, it will bend no knee in devout reverence, it will give no hope to man struggling with difficulties, it will lead no man from the degradation of a sinful life to purity and truth ; instead of such a religion being life-giving and light-giving, it will only add to the perplexities of our already mysterious life ; it will but darken the gloom which already shrouds our path, and bring the sublime trust in infinite goodness and love manifested by our holiest and most heroic men to desolation and despair.

\* See Spencer's "Astide," "Nineteenth Century," July, 1884.

It is rather strange that while Spencer should refuse us permission to ascribe to the "unknowable cause of things such human attributes as 'emotion,' 'will,' or 'intelligence,' he should so unhesitatingly speak of this cause in other positive terms, as 'force,' 'ultimate energy,' and 'power.'" This bears out what we have already noticed, that the Agnosticism of Mr. Spencer and his followers is inconsistent and strongly biassed in the direction of materialism. Allowing him the right thus to speak of the ultimate cause, the positive terms he uses are just as destructive to true religious thought and feeling as his negative terms prove themselves to be. Power or energy, however great, will evoke no true religious emotion within us. It would be as reasonable for us to worship the sun, or a huge mountain, or a mighty river, as to worship a power or energy, even though it be conceived of as infinitely great. We cannot admire or esteem a man simply because he is, physically, of vast strength; no more can we bow down in reverence before merely infinite power. Strength may be used on the side of evil as well as on the side of goodness; energy may work our woe as well as our weal. Before, therefore, we can reverence the unknowable of the Agnostics they must tell us in what direction is their absolute power working. Is it merely blind and fatal force carrying man helplessly along, or is it an intelligent power working out man's good? The being that is to command our reverence must be not only physically great but also morally perfect; must have not only the physical attributes of omnipotence and omnipresence, but the incomparably higher qualities of goodness, truth, righteousness and love; must be spoken of not in terms derived from chemistry and physics, but in terms that denote the highest moral excellence which we can conceive.

By no one has this religion of the unknowable been more vigorously assailed than by another Agnostic, of a different school, Frederick Harrison, the leading apostle of the Positivists

of the present day. An avowed Agnostic, so far as his Ontology is concerned, he yet sees the important part that religion has played in man's history, and recognizes the truth that the foundations of religion must be in the known and knowable. It is not an altogether satisfactory argument to seek contradictions in the position assumed by our opponents, but it is a striking and instructive fact that the worship of the unknowable has been criticised by an Agnostic in the very manner in which we as Christians would assail it, and shows that the religious position of Agnostics may be as wide as the poles asunder. He says\* :—  
“The points which the unknowable has in common with the object of any religion are slight and superficial. As the universal substratum it has some analogy with other superhuman objects of worship. But force, gravitation, atom, undulation, and other abstract notions have much the same kind of analogy, but nobody ever dreamed of a religion of gravitation, or the worship of molecules. . . . Try it by all the recognized tests of religion. Religion is not made up of wonder and a vague sense of immensity, unsatisfied yearning after infinity. Wonder has its place in religion, and so has mystery, but it is a subordinate place. The roots and fibres of religion are to be found in love, awe, sympathy, gratitude, consciousness of inferiority and of dependence, community of will, acceptance of control, manifestation of purpose, reverence for majesty, goodness, creative energy, and life. Where these things are not religion is not.” “What is religion for? Why do we want it? And what do we expect it to do for us? If it can give us no sure ground for our minds to rest on, nothing to purify the heart, to exalt the sense of sympathy, to deepen our sense of beauty, to strengthen our resolves, to chasten us into resignation, and to kindle a spirit of self-sacrifice, what is the good of it? The unknowable, *ex hypothesi*, can do none of

\* “Nineteenth Century,” March, 1884.



these things. The hallowed name of religion has meant in a thousand languages man's deepest convictions, his surest hopes, the most sacred yearnings of his heart, that which can bind in brotherhood generations of men, comfort the fatherless and the widow, uphold the martyr at the stake and the hero in his long battle. Why retain this magnificent word, rich with the associations of all that is great, pure, and lovely in human nature, if it is to be henceforth limited to an idea, that can only be expressed by the formula  $x$ , and which, by the hypothesis, can have nothing to do with either knowledge, belief, sympathy, hope, life, duty, or happiness? It is not religion, this. It is a logician's artifice to escape from an awkward dilemma."\* G. H. Lewes wrote, ten years ago:—"Deeply as we may feel the mystery of the universe and the limitations of our faculties, the foundations of a creed can only rest in the known and the knowable. With that I believe every school of thought but that of a few dreamy mystics have agreed. Every religious teacher, movement, or body has equally started from that. For myself, I feel that I stand alongside of the religious spirits of every time and of every church in claiming for religion some intelligible object of reverence, and the field of feeling and conduct, as well as that of awe. Every notice of my criticism of Mr. Spencer which has fallen under my eye adopted my view of the hollowness of the unknowable as a basis of religion. So say Agnostics, Materialists, Sceptics, Christians, Catholics, Theists, and Positivists. All with one consent disclaim making a religion of the unknowable."

\* F. Harrison, "Nineteenth Century," September, 1884.

## CHAPTER V.

## FROM THE UNKNOWN TO THE KNOWN.

Our discussion might very fitly end here, after having criticised in detail the relation of Agnosticism to morality and religion, but our argument would be incomplete did we rest only in the negative position we have reached, without indicating the direction in which one may advance from Agnosticism to faith, from an unknowable power to the personal God of the Christian religion. We have seen that, on Agnostic principles, there can be no certain foundation for morality, no supreme authority which makes obedience to the moral law an unquestioned obligation on all men, in all circumstances; that the theory of morals which makes the right identical with the pleasurable destroys the most essential elements of morality; that the attempt to find the origin of morality by means of evolution breaks down at the most critical points, and is unable to account satisfactorily for conscience and moral obligation; that, in practice, Agnosticism would lead the race backwards, flinging, as it does, a dark shadow over the intellect, depriving man of guidance, of his strongest stimulus to high endeavour, and leaving him to grope his way in darkness and uncertainty. Further, we have endeavoured to show that the position of the Christian faith remains unaltered and unalterable by all the assaults that have been made upon it by scientists and Agnostics; that the Agnosticism of the present day simply leaves the essentials of the Christian religion untouched; that, in many respects, religion has gained from modern science in vaster, clearer conceptions of the Creator and the creative process; that there is no *à priori* objection to the possibility of knowing God; that, while religion is a necessity of man's nature, the religion that substitutes humanity for a personal God, and

the religion that puts an unknowable power in place of a God revealed and known, both fail to meet the requirements of man's mind and heart. Where, then, shall we find the religion that will satisfy man's deepest needs, that will be not merely a theoretical acknowledgment of an unknowable power, but a living influence to develop his character, mould his life, strengthen him against temptation, guide him in perplexity, and ever lead him onwards to nobler ends? How shall we reach a life-giving knowledge of God, whom we may approach with confiding trust, gratitude, and love, at the same time that we confess, with humble reverence and awe, how far He transcends in power, wisdom, and holiness, the limits of finite intelligence? It would be beyond the limits of our present inquiry to enter minutely into a discussion of the nature, purpose, and scope of revelation, but we may point out generally how we may advance out of agnosticism to living faith in a God revealed. There are, at least, three distinct spheres in which we can look for a revelation of the infinite. We may go with the scientist and ask what has nature to teach us of her author, in her manifestations of power, in her grandeur and ever-changing beauty, in her teeming wealth of wondrous life and marvellously constructed organisms. Or we may take our starting point from man, as occupying the highest position in nature, and, therefore, giving to us the best interpretation of its cause, and seek to find in his nature, his powers of mind, his moral and spiritual perceptions, some explanation of our relation to the Creator. These are, so far, purely natural methods of search, but the knowledge and truth thus obtained constitute none the less revelation. All knowledge of God—nay, all knowledge of whatever kind—may very fitly be described as revelation, scattered rays of light from Him who is the source of all truth, and who reveals Himself in different ways to the human intelligence. Or, again, we may take the special revelation of Christianity, and seek in Jesus



Christ the fullest and most perfect revelation, which is able to meet man's deepest needs, to give rest and peace to the cravings of his heart and the searchings of his mind: "The Word was made flesh, and dwelt amongst us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth."

*a.* GOD REVEALED IN NATURE.

The earliest conceptions of the Deity are those which conceive of Him in living relation to the external world of nature, in its manifestations of resistless power, as seen in the sweeping storm and whirlwind, the rolling thunder, the earthquake; its varied changes of the seasons, of night and day; its splendours and beauty, seen in the glories of sunset and sunrise, the splendour of the starry heavens, the majesty and mystery of the sea; all of which have made man conscious of the presence of a power, beyond and above him, yet in contact with him, and which, under various forms and metaphors, he seeks to embody or to picture. Consequently we find in the earliest religions worship of natural objects, such as awe-inspiring mountains, the moon that walks in beauty and the sun that shines in strength, rivers whose fertile flow brings verdure to the fields and blessing to the thousands of dwellers on their banks. Rude these early conceptions may be, as we find them in barbarous peoples, but in the very rudest and earliest forms of religion it is a god (or gods) present as a living power in nature that is worshipped with wonder and fear. The relation of God to nature in the earliest conceptions was not that of an artificer to a machine he had made, though this has been asserted by some of our prominent scientists. They did not separate God from his work, nor in the first instance did they form any idea as to creation. The search after the origin of the universe did not begin till a later age, when scientific inquiry began. The

"machine" conception of the universe, which regards the world as a piece of cunningly constructed mechanism, owes its origin, not to religion, but to the crude science of comparatively recent times. Certainly there are passages of Scripture that seem to warrant opponents in ascribing such grossly anthropomorphic conceptions to Hebrew writers, such as—"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth;" "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament sheweth His handiwork;" "In them hath He set a tabernacle for the sun." Reading such passages of Scripture, where human actions are ascribed to God, in the light of our Saxon matter-of-fact ideas, and the scientific exactness which characterizes the present age, it is very easy to assert that the Jews were grossly anthropomorphic in their conceptions. Read literally and rigidly as scientific definitions they would certainly mislead us; but let us bear in mind that the Hebrew writers were not scientists in our modern sense of the word, and that they sought to express their ideas in the glowing, picturesque language of Oriental metaphor. God, as a workman, making the universe like a self-regulated machine, was very far from their thoughts. Certainly they regarded God as pre-eminent above nature, but God as a spirit, a living power, ever present, ever working in nature, was their prevailing conception of His relation to the world, and is expressed again and again throughout every book of the Old Testament, in varying form and metaphor. The story of creation begins with the words, "The Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters." The pious Hebrew saw God in everything and everything in God. Whether he looked at the splendour of the starry heavens stretched above him, or the grandeur of the earth spreading around him, everywhere, in all things, he saw tokens of the greatness and presence of the Eternal. The most common events in nature's life spoke to him of God's nearness. "He maketh the clouds His chariot: He walketh upon the wings of the wind;"

"He sendeth the springs into the valleys which run among the hills ;" "He causeth the grass to grow for the cattle, and herb for the service of man ;" "The young lions roar after their prey, and seek their meat from God ;" "O, Lord, how manifold are Thy works : in wisdom hast Thou made them all." And while thus recognizing the presence of the Almighty in the lowliest as in the grandest sphere of created life, he was very far from overweening, presumptuous speech of the power he recognized as so far removed from him. "Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever Thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, Thou art God ;" "A thousand years in Thy sight are but as yesterday, when it is past, and as a watch in the night ;" "Thy way is in the sea, and Thy path in the great waters, and Thy footsteps are not known."

Is our modern science, with its improved methods of investigation, its far-reaching discoveries, its accumulated wealth of knowledge, won from so many fields of nature, able to dispense with this old religious conception of a God immanent in nature, and revealing Himself in all its manifestations? "When we have exhausted physics," says Dr. Tyndall, "and reached its very rim, a mighty mystery still looms before us. We have made no step towards its solution. And thus it will ever loom." "In fact," he says, in another place, "the whole process of evolution is the manifestation of a power absolutely inscrutable to the intellect of man. As little in our days as in the days of Job can man by searching find out this power." Herbert Spencer says :—"The consciousness of an inscrutable power manifested to us through all phenomena has been growing ever clearer, and must eventually be freed from its imperfections. The certainty that on the one hand such a power exists, while, on the other hand, its nature transcends intuition and is beyond imagination, is the certainty towards which intelligence has from the first been progressing. To this conclusion science



inevitably arrives as it reaches its confines, while to this conclusion religion is irresistibly driven by criticism." Science, brought face to face with nature in its smallest detail and widest extent, is thus compelled to agree with the old religious conception of the Psalmist, that there is a living power behind nature and working in nature, and confirms that religion of nature which forces itself on all thoughtful minds in presence of the grandeur and beauty of earth and sky and sea. The theory of evolution, however far it may be true, is certainly nearer to the old religious conception of the relation of the world to its Creator than was the conception of the deists who separated God from the world and thought of nature as a machine, once made, and now working irrespective of control. Evolution thinks of the process of creation as a growth of nature, as ever advancing, ever unfolding in more wondrous organisms, directed by an energy and power which science declares to be unknown. This is perhaps, all that could have been expected from modern science, which resolutely keeps its eyes on the physical world and refuses to have any dealings with metaphysics and theology. Let us, then, start from this position, common to Agnostics, to scientists, to religious thinkers and philosophers, that there is some power and energy, known or unknown, at work in nature, and manifested to us through all its phenomena.

b. GOD REVEALED IN CONSCIENCE AND THE MORAL LAW.

Nature, with her face of beauty, seems, at times, to hide a cruel heart. The life among her creatures has been, in the evolution and history of the past, a fierce struggle for existence, in which the stronger prey upon the weaker, under the impulse of cruel, merciless instincts. Were man left to find out the character of the first cause from nature alone, his mind would be filled with perplexity as he contemplated the varying light and shadow on the face of creation, the apparent cruelty that is

mingled with so much wondrous beauty, the inflexible power that carries all before it with resistless might. Physical science, in its dealing with the phenomena of nature, while it speaks emphatically of a power of which these phenomena are manifestations, and while it traces the unity of that power throughout the universe, has to fall back on Agnosticism, declaring that the ultimate cause is unknown and unknowable in its real nature and character. This, as we have said, is about all that could be expected from a science which devotes itself exclusively to the investigation of the material phenomena of nature, the world external to man. But man has to deal not only with material phenomena; he has also to deal with himself in his capacities of thought, consciousness, his responsibility involved in the feeling of moral obligation, his sense of sin and endeavours after righteousness. Baffled, as he often is, by the problems that nature suggests, whence the desire in him, unquenchable through repeated failures, after a better and nobler life, whence the consciousness within him that, though evil prevail and the wicked prosper, yet it is his duty to pursue the right at the risk of the loss of material comforts, of imprisonment, exile, and death itself—whence the admiration shown even by the most degraded men in their heart of hearts for heroic actions and a noble life? The consciousness of having done wrong is essentially different to the feeling of physical pain, of loss consequent on ignorance; wilful violation of duty is felt to be a contradiction of the moral law at work in the universe. As the stars in their courses fought against Sisera, so the guilty man feels that the might of all the universe is arrayed against him. To what conclusion do facts such as these lead us with reference to the power manifested to us through the phenomena of nature? Do they not reveal to us that this power is ruling, not only in the material world, but the world of mind; that it is not merely a material power, but a moral power; as Matthew Arnold puts it

in his now famous phrase—a “power not ourselves that makes for righteousness.” Just as truly as the ultimate cause reveals itself in budding leaf and unfolding flower, so it shows itself in the moral nature of man. Nature, in her manifestations, gives to us the knowledge of a power at work ; the moral law within us and the collective history of the race reveal to us the direction in which this power is working. The world of morals, as we have already seen, is distinct from that of physics ; moral truths are not translatable into material facts ; and just as, on the one hand, man is conscious that in nature there is working an inscrutable power, so, on the other hand, in his consciousness of moral obligation, he is brought into contact with that power as it makes for or works in the direction of righteousness. Man has to interpret the universe as external to him ; he has to interpret himself as the highest created being in nature, with powers the most developed. By the same necessity of thought that compels him to infer an inscrutable power from the forces and laws of the material world is he compelled to regard this power as a moral power from the facts of his moral nature. What is felt to be the highest in man—what is acknowledged to be such by thinkers in every school—must be ascribed to the cause of all things and beings as truly as the lowest factor in nature. We say, therefore, that it is a fair inference, from the conscience in each individual, and from the history of the race, which shows that righteousness alone exalts a nation, that there is a moral Governor of the universe revealing His presence in each individual and asserting His authority in the government of the nations.

Lecky, in a very striking and noble passage in his “History of European Morals,”\* has very finely put the whole question. After speaking of the cruelty that seems to be in nature, he asks—“What shall we say to these things? If induction alone were our guide, if we possessed absolutely no knowledge of some

\* Pp. 54-5.



things being in their own nature good and others in their own nature evil, how could we rise from this spectacle of nature to the conception of an all-perfect Author? Even if we could discover a predominance of benevolence in the creation, we should still regard the mingled attributes of nature as a reflex of the mingled attributes of its Contriver. Our knowledge of the Supreme Excellence—our best evidence even of the existence of the Creator—is derived, not from the material universe, but from our own moral nature. It is not of reason, but of faith. In other words, it springs from the instinctive, or moral nature, which is as truly a part of our being as is our reason, which teaches us what reason could never teach—the supreme and transcendent excellence of moral good, which, rising dissatisfied above this world of sense, proves itself by the very intensity of its aspiration to be adapted for another sphere, and which constitutes at once the evidence of a Divine element within us and the augury of the future that is before us. These things belong rather to the sphere of feeling than of reasoning. Those who are most deeply persuaded of their truth will probably feel that they are unable to express adequately the intensity of their conviction, but they may point to the recorded experience of the best and greatest men, in all ages, to the incapacity of terrestrial things to satisfy our nature, to the manifest tendency, both in individuals and nations, of a pure and heroic life to kindle, and of a selfish and corrupt life to cloud, these aspirations, to the historical fact that no philosophy and no scepticism have been able permanently to suppress them. The lines of our moral nature tend upwards. In it we have the common root of religion and of ethics, for the same consciousness that tells us that, even when it is in fact the weakest element of our constitution, it is by right supreme, commanding and authoritative, teaches us also that it is Divine. The reality of this moral nature is the one great question of natural theology, for it involves that connection

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between our own and a higher nature, without which the existence of a First Cause were a mere question of archæology, and religion but an exercise of the imagination."

C. GOD REVEALED IN JESUS CHRIST.

"God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath, in these last days, spoken unto us by His Son." All other revelations of God are but star-like gleams shining through the darkness of the night compared with the full noonday splendour of the Christian revelation. Since Christ has taught us to say of God, "Our Father who art in heaven," we no longer can think of Him merely as an inscrutable power or an impersonal stream of tendency that makes for righteousness. God, in nature, is revealed as power; in conscience, as righteous; in Jesus Christ God appears not only as righteous, but merciful, delighting not in the death of the sinner but rather that he would return and live. The barriers which separate man from God, barriers arising from our ignorance, and barriers created by our sinfulness, are taken away by Christ, and God is brought near to man, and man brought near to God, in Him who is at once divine and human, son of God and son of man, revealing infinite excellence in idealized humanity, showing us what God is, and what redeemed man may become. The world, to the Christian, is full of light, when he realizes that the laws and forces of nature are not blindly working out inflexible results, but are guided and controlled by infinite love. What a contrast to the inscrutable power in nature spoken of by the scientists and Agnostics is the revelation of a loving God in nature given to us by Christ! The Almighty power working in the universe, is working, not against us, but for us; its greatness is a ground, not for fear, but highest trust. "Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns:

yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they toil not, neither do they spin: and yet I say unto you that even Solomon, in all his glory, was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to-day is, and to-morrow is cast into the oven, shall He not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith." "Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered." Man, in the light of the Christian revelation, is not a creature born to perish in a day, built up of molecules and atoms, and resolved again at death into the same elements, but a son of God, a sharer in the life of God, with a noble origin and glorious destiny. He has sinned, but God appears in Christ reconciling the world to Himself. His life is darkened by sorrow, but God, who makes the wrath of man to praise Him, makes man's sorrow tend to eternal well-being: the light affliction, which is but for a moment, works out a far more exceeding weight of glory. The Christian religion gives not only the highest conceptions of God, which are able to supply man's deepest spiritual needs, but also the highest ideal of moral perfection, realized in the life of Christ. He is the Saviour and Redeemer of men, the sent of God to deliver them not only from the punishment due for sin, but from its power and guilt, to free them from the fetters of evil passions, to be a living power within them, purifying their whole nature, inspiring their life, and moulding them into likeness to Himself. It is not enough that men should know the contents of morality. Moral teaching of the very highest and purest character the world has ever had; but it is moral power that men need, and this moral power the Christian religion alone has been able to give. It brings men into living contact with the Saviour, love to whom will change the whole character and life. The Christian faith has



proved itself in very truth, during nearly two centuries, to be the very power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth, making the drunkard into the sober man, the slave of vice into the holy saint, the selfish into the self-denying, speaking of hope and joy to the sorrowing and bereaved; shedding the light of heaven into homes darkened by shame and misery; quickening holy and beneficent influences to relieve suffering in every form and redress the wrongs of the poor and oppressed; leading lovely woman, wearing the holy symbol of the cross, to go with ministering angel hands into the battle-field, to relieve the wounded and assuage the pain of the dying; giving strength and courage in their life-long struggle to those heroic reformers who, strong in the faith of Christ, have fought and won the battles of social, political, and religious progress, and been foremost in the van of all true progress. To take Christ away from the history of the last eighteen centuries, is to take the sun from the noonday and leave the world in night. It is said of Columbus that in his earlier life, as he walked by the shores of the Atlantic, he was struck with the beauty and strange character of the driftwood and fruits washed in by the tide, and was wont to reason: "This pine-cone, so beautiful in its symmetry, so wondrously carved, never grew on any of the trees on this continent. This piece of driftwood is different to the trees found along these shores. Beyond that unexplored ocean there must be another land, where these have grown, and from whence they have come." Believing thus, he launched his ship, which carried him in triumph across unknown seas, and made him, in spite of the alarm and threatening mutiny of more timid seamen, the discoverer of a grand new world. So there come to us, washed on the shores of this our earthly existence, driftwood and fruits from another land beyond, bearing on them the marks of their Divine origin, and leading the mind and heart to God and heaven. The accumulated experience of the past

Christian ages—of martyrs who counted it their highest honour to suffer with Christ, of saints whose lives were ennobled by their faith—proves the sphere spoken of by Agnostics as unknown and unknowable to be a rich sunny land, full of wealth and beauty, where “God dwells with men, wiping away all tears from their eyes.” “This is life eternal, to know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent.”







